



# Submission to Pre-Budget Consultations

January 2005

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## **Introduction**

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association agrees with Premier Danny Williams on his statement in the 2003 Election Bluebook:

*Schools represent our highest aspirations, and a highly educated population is the key to a bright and successful Newfoundland and Labrador.*

We also agree with his response to a question during the election campaign about the need to maintain a high level of social services such as increasing funding to education. He stated:

*We regard education not only as an essential social program, but also as the most important investment any government can make in building a prosperous and sustainable economy. We are committed to protecting funding for education and to re-invest savings from student population decline to cap class sizes and increase classroom and school based supports for high quality teaching and learning.*

He further stated in his election statement:

*Schools represent our highest aspirations, and a highly educated population is the key to a bright and successful future for Newfoundland and Labrador. Whenever I visit schools in the province, the character of our young people and the quality and energy of our teachers always inspire me. I am motivated to improve both their physical learning environments and their educational opportunities. It is our responsibility to provide for them every chance to learn and succeed and we will achieve this by providing safe and caring schools, and a top quality education that will allow them to compete provincially, nationally and internationally. In the real world, a superior education is the most valuable gift you can give to a child, and my government is committed to fostering a spirit of life long learning in Newfoundland and Labrador.*

It is our position that education is an investment in the future of Newfoundland and Labrador and must remain a priority area. The teachers and students of this province hold Premier Williams to his commitment. We ask Government to provide the means and maintain funding for quality education as the 2005 budget is developed.

## **Government's Fiscal Policy**

In previous submissions to government's pre-budget consultations, we have often made reference to the effect of government's fiscal policy on the ability of the K to 12 education system to deliver necessary educational programs and opportunities to our children. While we recognize that the level of government spending on social programs and services is related to its fiscal capacity, we have also challenged policies when, in our view, they too closely adhere to the quest for balanced budgets at the expense of necessary social programs. Throughout the 1990s, the education system in this province has been severely downsized as part of a government emphasis on downsizing public sector operations and restraining growth in program spending and public sector compensation. The return to this emphasis in the 2004 provincial budget has left us with major concerns for the ability of our schools and school districts to maintain the necessary level of educational services.

We believe that, before any decisions are made on education spending in the 2005 budget, government must closely examine the effect that this fiscal approach has had, and will have, on public services in general, and on education in particular. We have witnessed a major decline in the share of government's gross expenditures allocated to education. The "rationalization" of the school system (including the elimination of denominational education and a severe reduction in the number of school districts), the decline in the number of students and the closure of nearly one-half of our province's schools accounts for some of this decline. However, the quest for prudent fiscal management is now starting to have a serious impact on the ability of our schools to offer the necessary educational services. Allowing education to slip as an area of government spending priority is unfortunately occurring at a time when the demands on our system, in spite of the decline in student population, are increasing. We have spoken and written frequently about these concerns. Expectations for increased accountability, increased attention to individual student needs and increased modification of curricula to meet such needs, are among the increased demands. Now is not the time to allow education to be lessened in its status as a priority service for government. We wish to make the statement clearly to government: There is no "fat" left to be trimmed from the system. Further cuts (in finances, resources or personnel) will be cutting deeply into the flesh of the system; into its ability to deliver on its mandate.

Government has indicated its desire to "grow our economy and provide new job opportunities". This was the first stated goal in its 2003 election platform. While the province is indeed rich in resources, a well-educated and well-trained population is the first prerequisite to economic growth. Reducing support for education is short-sighted as it will reduce the ability of our citizens to be part of the engine of economic growth and to participate meaningfully in any economic recovery. Government must continue to invest in education, even at the expense of delaying a balancing of the books for a few more years. To take a cost-cutting approach might realize some short-term gains from the fiscal management perspective, but it will result in a stunting of our ability to realize maximum economic growth. We would urge government to make every effort to ensure that its approach to the 2005 budget does not emphasize fiscal management at the price of leaving our education system on life-support for the next several years.

### **Education as an Investment**

The value of education for economic success has been clearly documented. It has been an integral part of many government reports and studies throughout the past several decades. The link between higher levels of education and better employment prospects, and between higher levels of education and higher incomes, has been demonstrated over and over. The greater one's education, the better the chances of finding meaningful work at a decent level of income. These links are even more significant in a province where unemployment levels are high and where job prospects in areas of employment requiring lower levels of training are often seasonal at best. Education is the key to economic growth.

The following table demonstrates the link between educational attainment and employment, using data generated by Statistics Canada.

#### **Percentage employed by level of educational attainment**

Less than Grade 9	22.4%
Some secondary education	45.6%
High school graduate	65.7%

Some post-secondary	63.6%
Post-secondary certificate or diploma (includes trades certificate)	73.5%
University degree	76.2%

Source: Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Survey, 2004*

Statistics Canada data from previous years demonstrates a similar significant link between educational attainment and level of income. Those statistics show that the average annual income for an individual with a university degree is nearly 2.5 times that for an individual with less than Grade 9. Further, individuals with "secondary and some post-secondary" education have an average income more than one-third higher than those with less than Grade 9. [Statistics Canada, *Income Distributions by Size in Canada, 1997.*]

The 2003 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) measures skills that are generally outcomes of the educational process. The 2003 PISA report states that "*the skills and knowledge that individuals bring to their jobs, to further studies, and to our society, play an important role in determining our economic success and our overall quality of life.*" The report goes on to say that elementary and secondary education systems play a central role in laying a solid base upon which subsequent knowledge and skills can be developed. Students leaving secondary education without a strong foundation may experience difficulty accessing the postsecondary education system and the labour market and they may benefit less when learning opportunities are presented later in life. "*Without the tools needed to be effective learners throughout their lives, these individuals, with limited skills, risk economic and social marginalization.*" [Measuring up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study, 2004, p.10]

These 2003 results measure the skills and knowledge that individuals bring to their post-secondary studies, to their jobs and to society. They tell us that students in Newfoundland and Labrador have shown advances in educational standing, both nationally and internationally. This improvement is a testament to the dedication and hard work of educators throughout the province who have produced the results which instill confidence in our education system. But there are still many areas for improvement. One area of concern is the apparent propensity to model the school system after the business model where decisions are based primarily on budgets. Assessment appears to be an end rather than a means to instructional improvement. Funding models appear to be based on the need to make the budget fit. The more appropriate philosophy must be to carefully monitor the educational needs within the system, and then provide mechanisms to respond to those needs. In recent national public opinion polls, the public has repeatedly expressed support for the public school system and are in favour of increasing levels of government funding for class size reduction, improving the curriculum and services for students with special needs. [2004 CTF National Issues in Education Poll]

While education cannot cure all our economic difficulties there is much to be said for the belief that a better education will bring significant economic benefits to this province. Government should be very aware that more education brings large rewards for individuals in terms of employment prospects. Labour force participation rates rise with educational attainment. Better-educated populations are a common factor behind economic growth.

### **Education and Social Well-Being**

Investment in education has also been linked to improved literacy levels and to overall health. The importance of literacy is accepted by all, and past

governments have identified the need to increase literacy levels in the province, a priority identified in the Strategic Literacy Plan.

Level of education is also a widely used measure of socio-economic status that has been associated with overall health, all-cause mortality, myocardial infarction, and sudden cardiac death. On average, people with less education have shorter life expectancies and are sick more often. The less schooling, the higher the odds of developing heart attack, stomach ulcers, diabetes, kidney disease, bronchitis, and tuberculosis, according to recent data. Statistics Canada reports that people with more than 12 years of education are less likely to have high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, or to be overweight. Canada's 1993-94 population health survey found twice as many university graduates as people with grade school education rate their health as "excellent" (36 per cent compared to 18 per cent). In a study published December 2002 by Excerpta Medica, Inc. in The American Journal of Medicine, several conclusions were drawn. Poor educational level has been linked with a heightened cardiovascular response to stress. It has been hypothesized that low educational level may lead to chronic psycho-social and behavioral stress, which may trigger other illnesses.

It is not just that education improves people's "health literacy" -- the ability to access services and information (such as how to avoid heart disease, etc.) to keep themselves and their families healthy. Nor is it just that education improves chances for employment, higher status jobs, and stable incomes. Education enhances the ability to manage life and cope with change, thereby boosting self-esteem. Studies in various countries show that the immune system can be impaired if a person feels a lack of control over major stressors.

It is clear that a better educated population has the capability to earn more income, reducing poverty and health concerns. It is equally clear that funding of education is of major importance to social well-being. The question has to be asked then, as to why there is such competition for this funding.

### **Resourcing**

It is the expectation of people of this province that Newfoundland and Labrador students be prepared, through their educational programming, for the challenges of the 21st century. To achieve these expectations the necessary human, material and fiscal resources must be provided.

Appropriate levels of resourcing will only occur when government sets specific priorities. For example over the last decade, health care resourcing became a particular priority for government. In 2003-04 this province spent the second highest per capita amount on health care in Canada according to a report by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI). However, per pupil expenditure by the province falls significantly below the national average (2nd last). Educational resourcing must become a priority for this government.

The NLTA recognizes that the education sector is competing for scarce public resources. In turn, it must be recognized by government when making budgetary decisions that an inclusionary model for students has been adopted which has transferred demands and fiscal responsibilities from other public sectors such as health and social services to the education sector. Examples of such transfer of responsibilities and services which now place demands on the education budget include increased use of school personnel and resources for student assessment previously conducted by health personnel, and increased numbers of student assistants, educational psychologists, speech language pathologists and itinerant special needs teachers to deliver services previously budgeted under health and social services. While the inclusionary model has provided educational access and opportunities for children to attend school and/or participate in educational activities with their peers, the corresponding increase in resources to meet their needs and demands has not been provided to the education sector.

The geography of Newfoundland and Labrador provides a particular challenge to providing an equitable education for rural students compared to urban students. Small and necessarily existing schools must receive separate and specific resourcing if these schools are to provide educational opportunities for students in our rural communities comparable to their urban counterparts.

Scarcity of resources should dictate an efficient use of these scarce resources. However, glaring inefficiencies exist within the education sector, in particular with the use of teacher time. According to a workload study conducted by Dr. David Dibbon in 2004, teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador spend an average of 3.85 hours per week on supervision of students. This is almost four hours per week not available for teachers to spend on teacher specific activities such as student tutorials, preparation, parental contact, etc. Resources must be provided through the budget for external supervision of students.

Additional resources must be provided for support personnel, in particular secretarial support and technical support. The Williams/Sparkes Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom references the necessity for expanded services in the area of secretarial and technical support for schools. The use of teacher/administrator time to perform secretarial functions and maintenance and repair of computer hardware and systems is widespread and is illustrative of further inefficient use of teacher time. The provision of adequate support personnel must be addressed through the budgetary process.

If Newfoundland and Labrador is going to successfully implement our educational programs and place our students on a level playing field with other students in Canada, educational resourcing must become a priority for this government.

### **Teacher Allocations**

The allocation of teaching units to our school districts is a major cause of concern for the NLTA. We have seen the number of teachers employed in this province steadily decline in the last three decades. This has been directly related to the decline in student population. While, at first glance, there may appear to be a logical direct connection between student numbers and teacher allocations, that connection is not always well-founded and is affected by a variety of other factors.

The role of the teacher and the demands placed on the school system have drastically changed in recent years. We have focused on student retention and today nearly 100 percent of the children who begin at Kindergarten attain a school leaving certificate. This combined with initiatives to integrate children with special needs into the regular classroom have changed the nature of teaching and significantly increased the workload of teachers. The Pathways and ISSP processes alone demonstrate the time and supports necessary to keep many children within the school system and it is not uncommon to find a significant proportion of a school's student population needing such additional resources.

We have greatly increased the course offerings in our schools, increased the academic content of these courses and held ourselves and our educational system accountable nationally and internationally. On recent PISA results, Newfoundland and Labrador students significantly improved their performance over the previous test periods. It is worth noting that the Canadian provinces which lead the country on per pupil funding of education generally lead the country in PISA performance. Newfoundland and Labrador performed proportionately better when compared to our level of per pupil funding of education. We would contend that the hard work and dedication of our teachers and students have compensated for the funding shortfall. We are making true gains in performance and now is not the time to reduce our level of resourcing for education.

We cannot sustain the system or maintain successful student performance unless we commit more resources to the system. To remove any more teachers from

our schools will create major difficulties.

To address the issues facing public education in this province we must look at the needs that require budgetary redress. We can no longer save money by reducing the teacher work force nor can we rely on out-dated student-teacher allocation formulas, even though we have tried to revise them in recent years. While we may argue over where we place nationally on our student-teacher ratio, the reality is that the provincial ratio does not translate into the average classroom of this province.

In rural schools, where we want to offer a diverse and challenging program, we have small class sizes. But to offer that program, there must be multi-grading, concurrent course offerings and distance learning. All this places a high demand on a small school staff. Combine that with addressing individual student needs, with limited availability of other professionals, and one sees the difficult task of a rural teacher. A new method of teacher allocation is needed here.

In urban schools, we face overcrowding and extremely large class sizes. Trying to individualize a learning program when facing hundreds of different students per day is equally challenging. Removing any teaching units from these schools would have equally devastating results.

Are there ways of addressing these issues? We believe there are. Education has taken on initiatives previously carried out by other departments, particularly Health and Social Services. Children who were institutionalized or provided with in-home assistance are now in our schools. Early childhood assessments, previously done by Public Health are now done by primary school teachers. We are also offering more healthy living courses and programs. Additional resources should be reallocated to education to reflect these developments.

Teachers must be allowed to fulfill their primary role; to teach. Presently they provide supervision before and after school, at recess and lunch time. One must question whether this is the best use of their valuable time. They must provide physical supports to physically challenged students. Could not these types of services be more efficiently provided by para-professionals, thus allowing teachers to concentrate on the tasks directly related to teaching?

Then there are the clerical tasks that teachers and school administrators perform as part of their daily routine. These include typing, photocopying, answering phones, providing security at school offices, fundraising, banking and other related tasks. While we contend these are not teaching duties, the educational system has come to expect this of teachers. We certainly could address resourcing of teachers, teacher workload issues and unemployment in rural Newfoundland and Labrador if we provided more para-professional supports to our teaching work force in a cost efficient manner.

Government has stated that the savings to be realized by recently revamping school boards will be \$6 M per year. This has translated into board structures which are as much as four times larger, yet the senior administrative and educational support staff has been reduced by almost the same proportion. This is translating into greater demands on the local school and its teachers. There are fewer program specialists to support the curriculum, there is less contact with board personnel, there are larger geographic regions to travel to attend district-sponsored events. All this increases the demands on local teachers' time. Putting the savings from board restructuring back into hiring more teachers and para-professional supports would be a logical response to the demands of our educational system.

Without reservation, we strongly urge government to retain the teacher allocations presently in the school system.

**The Issue of Teacher Workload**

In June 2004, Dr. David Dibbon of Memorial University released "It's About Time!! - A Report on the Impact of Workload on Teachers and Students". This document is the report of the 2003-04 study of teacher workload in this province and it goes a long way towards identifying and quantifying the key workload issues for teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador. Dr. Dibbon's study, and his indepth report, provide a wealth of data and analysis to support what teachers and the NLTA have known from experience for years; the workload demands on teachers have far exceeded any reasonable expectation of what could be accomplished in the time available to meet those demands. Further, there are clearly identified consequences for students and their educational experiences as a result of this teacher workload intensification.

The increase in workload has become the major issue for teachers in this province. A number of the issues contributing to the overload were identified by us in 2003 in a Brief to the Department of Education and school boards titled "Putting the Teacher Back Into Teaching". That Brief was based on anecdotal information and conversations with teachers in every school in the province in 2001-02 and 2002-03. Dr. Dibbon's workload study, based on results from a random sample of 1,000 teachers throughout the province, has now identified in a scientific fashion the key factors which have contributed significantly to the intensification of work and the increase in teacher workloads. The four main factors identified by Dr. Dibbon are:

1. A lack of time for such things as preparation, assessment and reporting, assigned supervision and attending meetings;
2. Classes that are too large and have too many students with diverse needs;
3. The implementation of new programs without adequate resources; and
4. Scheduling challenges that result in inappropriate and out-of-field teaching.

A key finding of the study is that *"...the average work week for teachers in this province would be 52.32 hours."* This total is made up of time within the fixed instructional day, time outside the instructional day and time on voluntary activities. As Dr. Dibbon notes in the report, *"If we compare the total hours of work per year for the average teacher (2,042 hours) to the number used by Treasury Board to calculate annual salaries for public sector workers (1,820 hours), then it becomes obvious that the average teacher works the equivalent of fifty-two (52), 39.5 hour weeks as compared to the public service where all employees work a standard 35 hours per week, based on a 52 week year"*.

Statistics show that almost one-quarter of those who graduate from programs in elementary-secondary teacher training never enter teaching at all. In addition, research indicates that Canadian schools could be losing 30% of beginning teachers within the first five years of their career. [Canadian Teachers' Federation, *Economic Services Bulletin*, October 2004] Excessive workload is one of the major reasons given by teachers who leave teaching for other careers.

The report also makes note of how students are affected by the impact of some of the key teacher workload issues. For example:

- The lack of assigned time to properly prepare classes leads to higher levels of frustration and stress which can negatively impact on teachers' interaction with their students.
- The lack of preparation time can result in classes that are not planned/prepared as well as they could be.
- The lack of time to properly assess student work in a timely fashion, or to prepare tutorial classes, means that remedial work for students who need extra help is often compromised.

- A lack of time to prepare means that teachers sometimes have to compromise on how they plan a lesson, which might mean that students have to tolerate a more traditional instructional approach rather than a more activity-oriented approach.
- The excessive workload, especially around reporting time, means it takes longer to correct student work and consequently longer to provide students with feedback.

The results of this study demonstrate the negative implications of excessive workload for both teachers and students. It is crucial that these issues receive attention so that these negative implications can be counteracted.

You may well ask why this information is being reiterated in a brief to government that is supposed to provide direction regarding budgetary priorities. The answer should be obvious. Any attempts to respond to the workload concerns, and the further concerns about the implications of those workload issues for our students, will require additional resources for education. The report of the workload study has made a number of conclusions and recommendations to which government should be paying heed: the need for a minimum amount of preparation time for every teacher, the provision of discretionary leave days to be utilized especially during reporting periods, the use of para professionals and/or volunteers to carry out mandatory supervision duties, a reduction in class size (a commitment made by the Progressive Conservative Party during the 2003 election campaign), necessary and appropriate training to accompany the implementation of new programs, and the provision of more time for teacher collaboration, planning and reflection. To address any of these recommendations in a meaningful fashion will require additional teachers and other personnel, leave time and substitute days, and supplementary curricular and teacher resources. All of this means a greater commitment of government to maintaining and increasing the resources allocated for education in the 2005 budget. We are urging government to make that commitment and to demonstrate it in real terms when the budget is presented to the people of the province

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