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# Pre-Budget Public Consultations



**Brief Presented to  
Honourable Tom Marshall  
Minister of Finance and  
President of Treasury Board  
January 2008**



## Introduction

Recent reports in the media and comments by Premier Williams and Finance Minister Tom Marshall on oil revenues, a projected surplus, and the economic growth of the province for this year are indeed encouraging news. We are encouraged by Premier Williams' comments in a recent issue of *The Telegram* where he is quoted as saying that he wants to "...lure people to the province with competitive taxes, health and education systems as good or better than anywhere else in the country...". These announcements have raised expectations among the public service and the general public and a renewed optimism for the future. And as the Premier suggests and as was quoted again in *The Telegram*, "...people in the province are feeling good, too. There's been a renewed sense of pride and confidence during the past four years...".

In recent years the Williams' Government has recognized the need for investment and progress within the education system. The 2007 Provincial Budget announced improvements in funding for textbooks, new and renovated school buildings, technology support specialists, computer software, laboratory safety equipment, physical education equipment, funding for aboriginal student issues, and curriculum enhancements. Previous to the 2007 Budget, the Minister of Education announced that two commissions would be appointed to review Teacher Allocations and the ISSP/Pathways Model. We are pleased that one of these Commissions has finalized its report and anxiously await the report of the Teacher Allocation Commission. We are hopeful that it will include recommendations that will point the way for significant improvements in the allocation of teachers.

While per pupil spending in the province has increased in recent years, we are still well behind the national average. There is still much work to be done in order to bring this province on par with the rest of Canada. The NLTA believes it is critical that Government maintains and further improves the initiatives from recent years in order to be able to provide the highest quality education to the children and students of this province. This brief to the pre-budget consultations outlines some vital areas within education that need Government's fiscal attention. Further improvements are necessary in the learning and working conditions in our province's classrooms, particularly in the area of teacher allocations, ISSP/Pathways, discretionary leave and substitute teacher days, teacher salaries, supervision of students, and professional development for teachers.

The NLTA appreciates the opportunity to present a submission and to be a part of the pre-budget consultation process. We wish you much success as you prepare Budget 2008.

## Teacher Allocations

In November of 2006 the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association submitted its brief to the Teacher Allocation Commission titled *Teaching and Learning: The Essence of Education*. This submission contained a number of specific recommendations aimed at improving the teacher allocation process to more adequately meet the needs of our children and young people.

The NLTA strongly believes there is a need to change the way in which teaching units are allocated in this province. Many individuals, groups, and organizations have expressed their concerns about the current “top-down” model approach, based mainly on the number of students enrolled in a school or district. We must be willing to accept the fact that this model is not meeting the needs of the individual students and teachers in the classroom.

The time has arrived when we must take a different approach and begin the teacher allocation process where it is most effective and important; that is, in determining and addressing the needs of each individual child enrolled in the system. If we are committed to improving the essence of education in this province – the teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom – we must be willing to accept a new approach that begins where the needs of each individual child is assessed and the resources (both human and physical) are allocated to ensure that these needs are met.

We need more teachers in the system to help address class composition by lowering class size, having more resource teachers to work with special needs children, more guidance counselors, more teachers offering specialized hands-on programs (Physical Education, Music, Fine Arts, Home Economics, and Vocational Programs), and more teachers to look after alternative learning sites to help address severe discipline problems. The overwhelming workloads of teachers and the learning conditions for students can only be positively impacted by the addition of teachers to the system. Increasing the number of teachers in our schools, based on an assessment of the educational needs in each school, is the fundamental core of improving the teaching/learning conditions in our classrooms.

We are hopeful that the final report of the Commission will include recommendations that will point the way to significant improvements, and we urge Government to respond positively to such recommendations by allocating the necessary fiscal resources to action them.

## ISSP/Pathways

In December 2006 the NLTA submitted its brief to the Commission to Review ISSPs/Pathways titled *Supporting Services, Supporting Learning*. This brief contained recommendations on the delivery of these services, including the allocation of teaching units for special education services. Similar issues were addressed in the NLTA's submission to the 2007 provincial budget.

The Commission's report was released in December 2007 and contained recommendations to create an environment of support for teachers and students and to help ease the burden of teachers' workload. The Commission Report made 75 recommendations of which the Minister of Education has said she is prepared to action and implement seventy. The NLTA supports the vast majority of these recommendations and is committed to work with Government to see those recommendations actioned sooner rather than later and to resolve the concerns it has on the recommendations it presently cannot support. We recognize that the acceptance of these recommendations is step one. The implementation process is still a major part of the success of the Commission. The NLTA will continue to work with all other stakeholders to ensure that the concerns raised in the ISSP/Pathways Commission Report are addressed and the Commission's recommendations become a reality for the children of our schools, for the teachers who teach them and for the society which has a responsibility to ensure that our future generation has the tools it needs to become tomorrow's leaders.

We recognize that actioning a number of these recommendations will require additional financial resources for the Department of Education. Now that Government has accepted the majority of the recommendations, it is important that the Department of Education and the School Districts be provided the financial and human resources to ensure the recommendations can be implemented thoroughly and expeditiously.

## Discretionary Leave and Substitute Teacher Days

There is a resounding cry from teachers that there is a serious underfunding of the substitute teacher budget for discretionary leave. Presently teachers, we believe, are the only public sector workers who do not have a guaranteed access to family leave. Teaching is predominantly a female profession, presently with a 70% female, 30% male split. Females still face the major family responsibilities of child rearing and thus have the highest demand for family leave. Combined with this, many teachers face the responsibilities of the sandwich generation, balancing care for children with that of aging parents. While the present collective agreement indicates that a teacher may have up to three discretionary leave days for family leave reasons, a teacher must apply and the school board, then, determines if such leave will be granted. One of the main problems with the current practice arises because all family leave days are lumped together with all other forms of discretionary leave. These include:

- Professional Development Leave (Clauses 18.05)
- Teacher Discretionary Leave (Clause 18.09)
- School Administrative Leave (Clause 18.13)
- Curricular and Extra-curricular Activity Leave (Clause 29.03(b))

Given that there are very few family leave days available, it is not uncommon for teachers to have their leave requests denied. The NLTA believes the reductions imposed in previous budgets should be lifted, those monies reinstated, and additional funds allocated to the budget for substitute teacher days to meet the present demands of the system.

It is a common trend in schools throughout the province to have been granted on average only 1.5 days per teacher for *all* discretionary leave requests, including family leave. As a result, fewer teachers are having their family leave requests granted. The lack of adequate funding to grant such leaves is creating unnecessary stressful situations in the lives of teachers where they have to choose between the sickness of a family member who needs immediate attention or that of coming to work or taking a day away from work without pay.

The NLTA is requesting a review of the funding level of substitute teacher budgets for discretionary leave requests and a substantial increase in the financial commitment to this area of the budget for 2008-09.

# Teacher Salaries

In a recent national survey conducted by the Canadian Teachers' Federation which compared teacher salary scales across Canada, effective September 1, 2007, the entry level salary for teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador (Certificate V - \$42,118) is the lowest in Atlantic Canada and the third lowest of all entry level salaries for teachers anywhere in the country. Further, the maximum salary scale of Certificate V teachers in our province is the lowest paid anywhere in the country (Certificate V - \$55,151). It is evident that if we are going to be successful in persuading individuals to not only enter the teaching profession, but also to remain in this province to teach our children, we must substantially improve the salary scales and benefits of teachers in this province in order to remain competitive with the remainder of Canada and with the larger job market in particular.

In recent rounds of collective bargaining in Alberta and Saskatchewan, teachers saw significant pay increases. In early Fall, the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation (STF) and the Saskatchewan Government agreed to a three-year collective agreement which will provide teachers with annual salary increases of 5%, 4%, and 3.5%. In addition to these increases, the STF and Saskatchewan Government also agreed to increase allowances for principals and vice-principals; improve health plan funding; provide an additional three weeks of Supplementary Unemployment Benefits for new mothers; and permit the purchase of maternity leave and compassionate care leave for pension purposes.

In November, the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA) and the Alberta Government reached a five-year agreement which will provide substantial improvements to teacher benefits. For the 2007-08 school year, the Alberta Government has agreed to a 3% salary increase and a 3.1% pension contribution reduction, plus a lump sum payment of \$1,500 to each full-time teacher. For each of the four remaining years of the contract, salaries will increase by an index known as the Alberta Average Weekly Earnings Index (currently running at 4.6% annually). At that rate the compound effect of these salary increases and the pension contribution reduction will see teachers' salaries in Alberta increase by more than 27% during the next five years. In addition to these monetary improvements, there were many other improvements agreed to by both parties during this round of bargaining.

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador, after decades of being a "have not" province, is on the road to economic prosperity. In April 2007, CBC News reported on Finance Minister Tom Marshall's decision to announce tax cuts by saying: "Newfoundland and Labrador is planning to finish the next fiscal year with a record surplus, projected at \$261 million". In fact, as announced in December 2007, this year's surplus has recently been recalculated to be a staggering \$881.8 million. Since this projection is based on the average price for a barrel of oil at \$75.63, and not the current price of over \$90 per barrel, this figure will likely be substantially higher by the end of the current fiscal year (March 2008). Therefore, as a result of this additional revenue, our province will once again end this fiscal year in the black for the third year in a row!

Like other employees paid from the public purse, teachers throughout the province have made significant sacrifices over the past 18 years. In fact, since 1990 the cost of living has increased 45% while during the same period of time teachers have seen their salaries increase by 39.7%; a cumulative loss of 5.3%. During the most recent four years, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in NL indicates that the cost of living has increased by 7.8%, while teacher salaries increased by only 6.1%. As has been the trend over the past 18 years, teachers continue to fall further behind. During eight of the past 16 years, teachers have accepted or have been legislated 0% annual increases in their salaries. If we are going to recruit and retain teachers in our province, it is critical that we now reward those who have carried the burden. Alberta, Ontario, and British Columbia are attracting many of our youngest and brightest teachers. If we are to remain a prosperous province, we must break this trend by offering competitive salaries and benefits packages. With the prosperity of this province, the recognition by Government of the sacrifices made by its employees and the cost of living increases that teachers have had to endure, teachers too are expecting a substantial salary increase in the months that lie ahead.

We recognize that the details of upcoming contracts will be worked out in the collective bargaining arena. However, we believe Government needs to make plans to address teacher salaries in its budget process for 2008-09 in order to correct these problems and to meet the expectations of their public sector employees. Teaching salaries in NL have to remain competitive with the rest of the country if we are going to not only attract individuals into the profession, but retain them in our province to teach our children.

## Supervision of Students

Under *The Schools Act*, school authorities have a responsibility to exercise reasonable supervision for students when they are in their care. Section 75 (1) (e) of *The Schools Act* (1997) states: “A school board shall insure (sic) adequate supervision of all students enrolled in its schools during the period for which the board is responsible for those students.” No one will dispute the duty of care owed to students; that of protecting the student from all foreseeable risk and harm.

In our province this formal supervision is one of those duties traditionally assigned to teachers. As a result, teachers spend significant amounts of time on supervision duty; patrolling the corridors and school grounds, ensuring that the premises are safe for students. According to the workload study conducted by Dr. David Dibbon in 2004, teachers in this province spend an average of 3.85 hours per week on supervision of students. This is almost four hours per week not available for each teacher to spend on teacher-specific activities such as student tutorials, class preparation, parental contact, meetings etc. It is an inefficient and ineffective use of a professional person’s time and energy.

However, it is not necessary that such direct supervision, unrelated to classroom instruction, be provided by the teacher if another employee of the school board can be designated the responsibility. This is the case in a number of jurisdictions. In a 2003 study of assigned non-instructional duties, the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF) found that in a number of jurisdictions there are provisions that either set a limit(s) on teachers’ non-instructional assigned supervision duties or exempt teachers entirely from certain types of supervision of students. An exemption of teachers from routine supervision during the students’ lunch break is found, for example, in Nova Scotia’s provincial agreement, most local agreements in British Columbia, and many local agreements in Saskatchewan. The broadest exclusion from student supervision found in a sample of 30 teacher collective agreements is the Greater Victoria School District in British Columbia where article D.7.1 states that “No teacher shall be required to perform supervision duties at noon hour, recess, before or after school.” (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, *Economic and Member Services Bulletin*, August 2003)

Carrying out corridor, playground and bus supervision is probably the aspect of their job that teachers find the most onerous and the least effective use of their professional time. Teachers acknowledge that they prepare and teach differently on days when they have supervision duty. When a teacher has morning supervision, a couple of classes to teach, recess supervision, another class, lunch supervision, two more classes to teach and then perhaps another after school supervision, all without a legitimate break, then the quality of teaching that occurs in the classroom is negatively impacted. From a pedagogical point of view, supervision usurps natural breaks that can be better used in other ways. When not on supervision duty, teachers naturally use this time for preparation, marking, meeting with colleagues, etc. On duty days, the teacher does not become refreshed during recess and lunchtime. Rather, the effect is quite the opposite. For some, supervision is an added factor leading to increased numbers of sick days and a decreased quality of work life. In a place that can be as turbulent as a school, one can’t help but wonder if there is not another more sensible solution to the supervision responsibility. We are firmly of the belief that, if others can do it, so can we.

Over the past year, the NLTA has engaged in discussions with the Department of Education and the School Boards Association on this issue and the Department has agreed to establish a Joint Working Group to explore same. It is the NLTA’s hope that a thorough exploration of the matter and possible alternatives to teacher provided supervision will lead to action that will ease this burden on teachers and permit them to use their professional time in school to better advantage for their students. Depending on the outcome of the Working Group’s deliberations, we foresee the possibility of real progress on this key workload issue. We urge Government to provide funding and resources through the 2008 Provincial Budget to allow school districts to hire non-teaching personnel to carry out non-classroom supervision of students.

# Professional Development for Teachers

What it means to be a professional teacher in 2008 is significantly different from what it was even one generation of teachers ago. Those who retire now have seen, over a thirty year career, an inordinate amount of change and incredible and increasing demands on them as professionals. The beginning teachers of 2008 are entering a much different profession than their predecessors.

While they have completed the requirements for certification and, in most cases, will pursue formal upgrading, there is, now more than ever, a need for teachers to continuously participate in professional development to keep pace with the increasing challenges of the role. Changes in curriculum and curriculum delivery, changes in policy and its implementation, changes in expectations and calls for increased accountability, all place demands on teachers to do more, to do it differently and to do it continuously to a higher standard of excellence.

Currently the professional development available to teachers is primarily dictated by the school improvement plan, is anchored in the school and system requirements and is delivered in a “one agenda for all” model. For the most part, if it happens within the parameters of the school day, it is in the “school close out” format. An individual teacher’s decision to attend a conference or an institute is only supported as long as it’s on his or her own time. Requests for leave for this form of professional development are presently considered in the same category of leave as all other discretionary leaves – a situation that can pit colleague against colleague in the competition for days, the antithesis of a professional learning community. Professional learning, and the professional’s choice for learning should not be discretionary. It should be expected. It should be supported.

In her most recent news release announcing the government’s actioning of the Commission’s recommendations on special education programming, Minister Burke refers specifically to “increasing training and professional development” for those teachers involved in the delivery of special education programming. Inherent in that statement is a recognition of the importance of such training to ultimately reach the goal of improved teaching and learning. We would like to point out that while this action is being taken by Government in response to a review of a specific area of programming, the same could be said for other program areas and other groupings of teachers. It has long been recognized that a “one size fits all” model of professional development, while it may be the easiest to manage and deliver, does not provide professionals with the opportunities they need to explore areas of specific concern and interest based on their professional context.

Teachers are expected to differentiate learning experiences for students, based on their needs. We submit, therefore, that it is more than reasonable to offer the adult learners in the system the same type of differentiated professional growth opportunities, based on their needs. We support continuous learning and development of students. Should we not also support the continuous development of those who teach them? Schools must be places of learning for students and teachers. You can’t have one without the other.

So, how do we make this happen? Just as the professional teacher does not work in isolation, neither can we, as an organization of professionals, achieve this alone. In fact, it was a collaborative effort some five years ago which drew up the blueprint for what could and should be a professional development plan for this province. At that time Government, through the Department of Education, Memorial University, School Districts and the NLTA formed the PD Alliance and developed a model for professional development that was the envy of the country. It was a model to support student learning through responding to both the personal and professional needs of teachers and the needs of the system. It recognized many forms of professional development; it acknowledged the importance of context, i.e. our educational environment; it validated the fact that the professional teacher could make decisions about his/her own PD needs in the context of educational and system beliefs, policies and guidelines; it assumed that these decisions should be respected. This Alliance model was widely endorsed by the entire educational community but failed when Board restructuring took precedence and there was no funding for implementation. It is still a workable model which respects the system and those who work in it. It requires funding to take it from plan to practice.

In the past three years the NLTA has invested heavily in the restructuring of our Special Interest Councils. Through those councils we are working collaboratively with districts to provide targeted learning opportunities. We are, however, more than challenged by the lack of release time (referenced earlier as discretionary leave). Leave for PD must be removed from this category and a dedicated bank of days (on a per teacher basis) must be allocated for this purpose. Recognizing that those experiences which respond to the needs of the school or the system as a whole are important, individual, teacher-directed PD must also have its place. We need to re-affirm the value of professional development and provide teachers with the opportunities for same.

We urge Government to provide to the Department of Education significantly improved financing to (1) provide a bank of substitute teacher days dedicated to teacher professional development and (2) reactivate efforts to put the PD Alliance model into practice.

# Conclusion

Addressing the issues as outlined in the previous pages will mean a greater commitment by Government to maintaining and increasing the resources allocated for education in the 2008 Budget. The NLTA urges Government to make that commitment and to demonstrate it in real terms when the budget is presented to the people of the province.

## **Recommendations:**

- The NLTA urges Government to respond positively to the recommendations of the Teacher Allocation Commission by allocating the necessary fiscal resources to action them.
- The NLTA urges Government to provide the financial and human resources to ensure the recommendations from the ISSP/Pathways Commission Report can be implemented thoroughly and expeditiously.
- The NLTA urges Government to review the funding levels of substitute teacher budgets for discretionary leave requests and provide a substantial increase in the financial commitment to this area of the Budget.
- The NLTA urges Government to commit to teacher salaries that are competitive with the rest of the country to not only attract individuals into the profession, but to retain them in this province.
- The NLTA urges Government to provide funding and resources to allow school districts to hire non-teaching personnel to carry out non-classroom supervision of students.
- The NLTA urges Government to provide to the Department of Education significantly improved financing to (1) provide a bank of substitute teacher days dedicated to teacher professional development and (2) reactivate efforts to put the PD Alliance model into practice.