



October 23,2002

Letter to Dr Warren, Members of
the Panel

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**SUBMISSION TO
STUDY GROUP ON HOURS OF WORK**
by The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers'
Association

Dr. Warren, Members of the Panel:

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association on a topic which we feel is long overdue for the type of analysis which you are providing through this study. From the start, when we were invited to participate, we have been active in promoting your existence, in promoting the need to make local educator views known to you, and in promoting your schedule of province-wide visits. As well, we have informed our membership of changes in your schedule or location, as they became known to us. We have invited teachers and school administrators to share their submissions to the Panel, by forwarding a copy to the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. And, I am glad to be able to say that we received quite a number of responses. While we believe many teacher interest groups presented before you at your hearings, many, many more took the private opportunity of a fax or e-mail to share with you individual thoughts on this important subject. It is the Association's wish that each and every one of these submissions will help you develop guidelines and recommendations which will improve the quality of education in this province. It is also our wish to see adequate resources allotted so professional and support staffs in our schools can have the tools to provide the superior learning environment our children need to prepare for the future.



**SUBMISSION TO
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Secretarial Allocations

The NLTA has seen a need to address the issue of allocation of hours of secretarial time to schools, going back some years. At our 1999 Biennial Convention, a resolution was presented from one of our branches which addressed allocation of principal, vice-principal and secretarial time to schools. While the minimum administrative time was seen to be a half-time allocation, the minimum secretarial time allocation was seen to be a full-time position. Out of discussion on that resolution our policy now has a statement : "ALL SCHOOLS SHALL HAVE A MINIMUM OF ONE FULL-TIME SECRETARIAL POSITION."

From the submissions we have received from around the province, this appears to be a need reflected in the field. From submissions we have seen many administrators have referenced the downloading of responsibilities unto the school level. With the creation of larger school boards with fewer resources at the board level, school administrators are expected to do more and more. Site-based management places a greater need for support resources upon school administrators. There are larger numbers of reports, inter-agency correspondence, faxes, e-mails and meetings which consume an administrator 's time. Yet, with declining enrollments, schools are seeing decreases in the allocation of both administrator and secretarial time. This cannot continue. Doing more and more with less and less can only continue for so long. And that point has certainly arrived.

If we look at some of the increased demands, we will see that the technology of the school office has increased. Computerized attendance, computerized accounting, computerized word processing, computerized e-mail, computerized reporting of substitutes, and the list goes on, are all intended to simplify office routine. But, we all know from our own experiences that it has changed the way we work, but it has not decreased our work. In fact, in many ways our volume of work has increased. Schools are experiencing the same. With the integration of special needs children, the demands on the system have increased. Whether it is typing reports, attending meetings, answering phone concerns related to a special need of a child or providing time to help a child phone home or take a medication, school offices are busy places. Principals cannot find enough time to do all these tasks unaided. Secretaries provide some of this relief. Increasingly, school administrators are spending more time in classrooms teaching.

Increasingly, our small schools are dropping below the minimum enrollments to avail of a vice-principal. Consequently, if there is not enough secretarial time in the school, the office must go unattended for significant periods of time. School security becomes an issue. People can come and go without anyone knowing. People visiting on business have no one to contact or they have to interrupt the teaching principal. Important and often emergency messages to the school cannot get through because there is no one to answer the phone. Most schools now have answering machines, but that does not solve this problem. A public building needs support services, such as those of a receptionist. However, like no other public building, schools are expected to function without one for major periods of the day.

With increased costs of running a school, fundraising is a major activity in most regions of our province. Schools must have such if they are to provide for many of the basic materials, supplies and activities. This requires much time planning, organizing and running. Support from a secretary is an integral part of having fundraising activities run smoothly without placing impossible demands on the teaching and administrative staff of the school.

No matter how small the school, principals are expected to be curriculum leaders; planning programs, setting direction, implementing policy, and doing the myriad of activities required for a school to run effectively and efficiently. In the absence of support services, the list becomes much larger and the expertise of the professional educator is inefficiently consumed doing that which could easily be done by someone with a different skill set ... a secretary. What are these duties? They include: banking, canteen cash control, selling books and other supplies, requesting and responding to requests related to cumulative records, ordering supplies, greeting visitors, responding to phone messages, updating WINschool or other computerized administrative packages, filling out substitute and payroll forms, accounting, word processing, filing, photocopying, responding to individual parent, teacher and student needs, giving care to the injured and sick and generally supervising the office area. Having a secretary to perform these duties frees the principal to do the duties of a professional educational leader.

Because schools are such busy places, having the highest concentration of individuals of any facility in most communities in this province, and because these individuals are generally too young to be fully responsible for themselves, there must be someone available at all times to provide assistance through the central office of the school. The secretary is the logical person to assign to cover this area on a constant basis, and from an economic perspective, it provides excellent service for the cost involved.

Aside from the daily coverage of the office, a concern which has been raised by many schools is the practice of not replacing absent support staff for a minimum number of days. If secretarial services are seen to be as necessary as we believe them to be, it is difficult to cope without them when secretaries are sick or absent for other reasons. Therefore, there should be a pool of substitute secretaries who can and will be called in to replace those absent for even a day.

Another concern centers around the week immediately before school opens in September and immediately after school closes in June. These are extremely busy times for school administrators and secretarial support is a necessity during these times. At present, many boards have not formally budgeted to deal with this concern. This must be addressed.

It is not our intent to restate everything presented to you in your visits around the province. We simply wish to stress that, as an Association, NLTA supports your efforts and the concerns of our members in solving the problem of inadequate secretarial supports in our schools.

Therefore we suggest:

1. Every school shall have a minimum of one full-time secretarial position.
2. Secretaries shall be replaced from the first day of an absence.
3. Secretarial time shall be provided immediately before the opening and after the closing of the school year.



SUBMISSION TO STUDY GROUP ON HOURS OF WORK by The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association

Maintenance/Janitorial Allocations

If we are to provide a quality education to the children of this province, we must certainly maintain the best physical environment in our school buildings. In any organization, all the parts must function properly if the overall organization is to be successful. That is no different for schools. Like most support services, janitorial services are transparent or unnoticed until something goes wrong. Then the whole school can come to a grinding halt in a short time. Maintaining the resources to maintain a clean, healthy and safe school environment is essential. In the submissions we have reviewed, a number of themes have surfaced. The first is that schools are in many regions becoming community centers for sports and recreation, computer access, library resources and public meetings. This adds a demand on the facility and the caretakers. It takes more time to now keep schools in good repair and in a clean condition. With the closing of some schools, the ones remaining open have larger numbers of students and staff placing greater demands on the physical plant. However, the janitorial allocation often has not increased to reflect this. With children being bussed greater distances, most schools now have to provide eating facilities at lunch time. However, frequently there is no cafeteria and these children eat in classrooms, multi-purpose rooms and corridors. This adds greatly to the mess that a caretaker has to clean up. Usually changes in bussing and lunch hours bring no additional hours to the allocations of janitorial staff.

Most public buildings have paved parking lots which keep down the amount of mud and dirt tracked inside. Many of our schools have gravel parking lots and this makes the task of keeping things clean a difficult one. Older buildings with carpets, dirty heating systems and multi-level construction can be more time consuming to maintain than modern facilities. However, we believe a square footage formula for determining janitorial time ignores these conditions. The age of the students, the student activities at different grade levels and the inclusion of children with special needs can all add to the task of a janitor.

Concern has also surfaced regarding Boards laying-off their janitors during the summer, when the general cleaning can be done unhampered by the regular routine of students and teachers. It is suggested that these workers be employed year round and that Boards have the major cleaning such as stripping and polishing of floors, cleaning of light fixtures, windows, walls and doors, cleaning of ventilation systems, and the like done during this time. Summer is also a good time to do grounds maintenance, whether it is cutting grass to beautify the school in the community or whether it is to repair and replace playground equipment so things are safe for the children's return in September.

Another important observation that has been reported in the submissions to this panel, and reported elsewhere, is that there is an increase in the

incidents of children with asthma and allergies. Many schools now have to have large numbers of medications on hand to deal with student emergencies. Inhalers and epi-pens are in common use and some attribute the air quality and dust levels of schools as causes of these medical outbreaks. Whether this is true or not, some of the public are extra critical of the physical conditions of schools. Therefore we must strive to provide as clean an environment as possible. Limited allocation of resources makes this difficult.

As with secretarial support, it has been noted that janitors are not always replaced during their first days of absence. This causes regular daily cleaning to go undone resulting in a backlog of work when the absent worker returns or is eventually replaced, and it may take days to get things back to a regular routine. It would seem most appropriate to have replacement workers available to take on the job of an absent janitor starting on day one of the absence.

Based upon these observations the NLTA suggests:

1. Re-examine the formula for allocating janitorial time to reflect the increased use of the facility, the condition of the building and the nature of the students.
2. Maintain janitorial staff during the summer months to do major cleaning projects.
3. Replace absent janitors for all days of absence.



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Technical Support

While not stated as part of your terms of reference, we have had many educators bring to our attention the need for technical support in our schools. With the increased reliance on computers and other electronic devices, there is constant need for someone to service the demands of trouble shooting and keeping things on-line. In many schools a teacher is designated as network administrator and if time is allotted to that person to carry out that function, it decreases the amount of in-class time that school has for student contacts. If no time is assigned, the workload of the assigned teacher is increased. This is unacceptable.

If you can find it within your jurisdiction to make a recommendation, we suggest:

1. Provide a technical support person to each school system on a ratio basis of technical equipment to technicians.

Conclusion

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association endorses the efforts of your panel. We believe that the support of secretarial, janitorial and technical services is vital to the efficient running of our schools and we believe that the teaching and administrative staff depend upon this group of workers to allow teachers to teach and principals to administer. It is a common theme that more hours are needed in many of our schools if we are to provide the services our public deserves.

We wish you success in your deliberations and we look forward to the implementation of your recommendations.