



The Newfoundland and Labrador
Teachers' Association



Brief Presented to
Honourable Loyola Sullivan
Minister of Finance and
President of Treasury Board

Pre-Budget Public Consultation

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INTRODUCTION

Education is an investment in the future of Newfoundland and Labrador. It must be made a priority area. The teachers, parents and students of this province ask government to provide the means to maintain funding for quality education as the 2006 provincial budget is developed.

We would urge government to make every effort to ensure that its approach to the 2006 budget does not result in any further reductions of educational services to our students.

It is clear that funding of education is of major importance to social well-being. The question has to be asked why more attention is not being paid to these overall long-term effects for the economy and for society in general.

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.

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

All of this means a greater commitment of government to maintaining and increasing the resources allocated for education in the 2006 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.

SPENDING PRIORITIES

The teachers of Newfoundland and Labrador 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, it is our view that the quest for balanced budgets should not be at the expense of necessary social programs.

Throughout the last decade, 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 and 2005 provincial budgets has left teachers and parents with major concerns for the ability of our schools and school districts to maintain the necessary level of educational services. There has been a major decline in the share of government's gross expenditures allocated to education.

We believe that, before any decisions are made on education spending in the 2006 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.

Allowing education to slip as an area of government spending priority is unfortunately occurring at a time when the demands on the education system, in spite of the decline in student population, are increasing. We have spoken and written frequently about these concerns and will reiterate them throughout this document. 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.

In the recent 2005-06 Mid Year Update, Loyola Sullivan, Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board, outlined a positive change in the province's fiscal position. He stated that the province is recording a surplus and improved revenues. Government must, therefore, take advantage of this improved financial situation and invest in

education and the young people of this province. 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 2006 budget does not result in any further reductions of educational services to our students.

EDUCATION IS THE KEY TO ECONOMIC GROWTH

Government has indicated its desire to “grow our economy and provide new job opportunities.” In fact, according to Economic Review 2005, Newfoundland and Labrador is expected to lead the country in growth next year. This growth is expected to continue into 2007. Our province is indeed rich in resources and a well-educated and well-trained population are the prerequisites to continued 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. In fact, in recent national public opinion polls, the public has repeatedly expressed support for the public school system and is 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]

The value of education for economic success has been clearly documented. 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.

The following table demonstrates the link between educational attainment and employment.

Unemployment Rates by Level of Education 25 years of age and over (2004 annual averages)	
0 - 8 years	27.0%
Some high school	22.3%
High school graduate	17.7%
Some post-secondary	16.0%
Post-secondary certificate or diploma	12.2%
Bachelor’s degree	6.3%

Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Historical Review, 2004

There is also a significant correlation between higher levels of education and higher incomes. Data from the 2001 Census shows that more highly educated Canadians have significantly greater average earnings in the previous years. The data from Newfoundland and Labrador is as follows:

Average Employment Income by Level of Educational Attainment in 2000 for Full-Time Workers, 15 Years of Age and Over	
Highest Level of Schooling	Average Annual Income in NL
Less than high school graduation certificate	\$26,986
High school graduation certificate and/or some post-secondary	\$32,111
Trades certificate or diploma	\$34,786
College certificate or diploma	\$37,199
University certificate, diploma or degree	\$54,115

Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census

A higher level of education is clearly of major benefit to the individual’s level of income, and to the provincial tax base.

While education cannot cure all our economic difficulties, a better educated workforce 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.

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.

Level of education is also a widely used measure of socio-economic status that has been associated with overall health, such as lower incidences of all-cause mortality, myocardial infarction, and sudden cardiac death. On average, people with less education have shorter life expectancies and are sick more often.

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 why more attention is not being paid to these overall long-term effects for the economy and for society in general.**

TEACHER ALLOCATIONS

In the last three decades we have seen the number of teachers employed in this province steadily decline. 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. 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 common to find a significant proportion of a school's student population needing such additional resources.

We cannot sustain the system or maintain successful student performance unless we commit more human resources to the system. To remove any more teachers from our schools will create even more difficulties.

It is not prudent policy to save money by reducing the teacher work force. Nor can we continue to rely on outdated student-teacher allocation formulas, even though these have been revised 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 smaller 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, if not impossible, task confronting 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 also have devastating results.

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

TEACHER STRESS AND WORKLOAD

In May 2005, a thesis by Dr. Lynda Younghusband titled, “*High School Teachers’ Perceptions of Their Working Environment in Newfoundland: A Grounded Study*,” explored the experiences of high school teachers’ work environment, particularly their experiences of stress. The results of this study provide new insight into the serious problem of teacher stress in the province and the repercussions on the personal and professional lives of teachers. The areas of concern as noted by teachers include workload, class size, student behavior problems, inadequate administrative support, lack of professional training, lack of resources, teaching outside the area of specialization, time pressures and evaluation apprehension. Dr. Younghusband states:

Overloaded and bombarded with massive changes and unrealistic time demands, these teachers were feeling overwhelmed, helpless and powerless, exhausted and disillusioned. There was never enough time in their work day to accomplish everything that was expected of them. Their personal lives were eroded by the increasing demands of the job, which impacted their well-being, forcing many of them to re-consider their desire to continue teaching.

She concludes:

Effective teachers constitute a valuable resource, one that needs to be supported and treasured . . . Surely no teacher should leave their workplace in a worse state of health than when they arrived.

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 in-depth report, provide a wealth of data and analysis to support what teachers and the NLTA have known from experience for years and that has been recently substantiated by Dr. Younghusband; 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 and Dr. Younghusband's study of stress related to the work environment have now identified in a scientific fashion the key factors which have contributed significantly to the intensification of work and the increase in teacher workload and teacher stress.

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 results of these studies demonstrate the negative implications of excessive workload for both teachers and students. It must never be forgotten that the working conditions for teachers are the learning conditions for students. Overcrowded classrooms, integration of special needs students without necessary supports or reductions in class size, shortages of learning resources and material, and insufficient teacher professional development opportunities all impact negatively on our children and young people. It is crucial that these issues receive attention so that these negative implications can be counteracted.

You may well ask why the information from these two studies 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. To address any of these issues in a meaningful fashion will require additional teachers and other personnel, improved professional

development opportunities, 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 2006 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.

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.

The NLTA recognizes that the education sector is competing for 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. 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 resources. However, a glaring inefficiency exists within the education sector, and that involves the use of teacher time. According to the 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 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. Resources must be provided through the budget for external supervision of students.

Additional resources must also be provided for support personnel, in particular, secretarial support and technical support. Studies have referenced 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 its educational programs and place our students on a level playing field with other students in Canada, improved educational resourcing must become a priority for this government.

CONCLUSION

It is our position that education is an investment in the future of Newfoundland and Labrador and must remain a priority area. We agree with Premier Williams' statement during the 2003 election campaign:

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 size and increase classroom and school-based supports for high quality teaching and learning.

We ask that Premier Williams follow through with this commitment and that this government provide the necessary funding for quality education as the 2006 budget is developed.