

Pre-Budget Public Consultations



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

January 2011

Introduction

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 2011.

The 2010 Provincial Budget maintained spending levels from the previous year for the K-12 education system. The continued investment in education was positive news, in particular the implementation of the grade 6 and 9 class size maximums, the increase in student assistant hours, and the investment in new and upgraded school facilities.

There are several areas, however, that need further action by Government and that need to be addressed in the 2011 Provincial Budget. These include student support services/inclusion, teacher allocations, discretionary leave and substitute teacher days, and student supervision. This brief will focus on these four areas.

Student Support Services/Inclusion

The Department of Education has adopted an inclusionary model of Special Services delivery. As a result, significant changes are occurring in special education which has a direct impact on teachers, students, and our classrooms. The NLTA has actively sought opportunities to provide input and be consulted on changes within special services prior to decisions being made and implementation occurring. The inclusion model is being implemented in a phased in manner through “pilot” schools. The first phase (2009-10) involved 30 schools. By the end of the 2010-11 school year, 65 schools will have undergone initial training and moved into implementation.

The implementation of the inclusion model and the provision of necessary services to special needs students are, without exception, the areas in which we receive the greatest number of concerns from teachers. The NLTA is fully supportive of the philosophy of inclusion but the necessary supports and resources must be provided for successful inclusion in the regular classroom. If the philosophy of inclusive education is to work as it should, additional teacher resources are required to support special needs children. Unsolicited input from teachers (special education teachers and regular classroom teachers alike) tells of insufficient numbers of teachers and student assistants to meet the needs of these children. Further, inclusion is no longer only within the realm of the Special Education teacher but is a whole school initiative. It involves all teachers and requires additional resources where every teacher is provided with training and the necessary resources. Readiness to deal with the issues surrounding inclusion requires training and professional development. The Department faces significant challenges in providing adequate professional development and inservice on inclusion, adequate time for collaboration between instructional support, pervasive needs, and classroom teachers.

Government must commit to allocating more teaching units and more student assistants in this area and to providing additional funding for the necessary professional development for teachers.

We urge Government to provide additional teachers, student assistants, training and professional development for the delivery of student support services.

Teacher Allocations

While the issue of teacher allocations has received attention in recent years with the introduction of the new Teacher Allocation Model, there are several areas that require additional resources. It is widely known that allocating sufficient numbers of teachers is critical to ensuring student success and smaller class sizes allow teachers to give necessary attention to the needs of those students who are most in need of additional support. In our view the following are critical areas that need further attention in order to be adequately addressed.

- **Allocations for Special Needs/Inclusion**

As stated in the previous section, the area of special needs and inclusion continues to be the most critical area where concerns are expressed by teachers over their ability to provide the necessary services with the current level of resources and supports. This is a key part of the Teacher Allocation Model which is in need of increased funding.

- **Application of the “needs-based” portion of the model**

The “needs based” portion of the Teacher Allocation Model, as recommended by the Teacher Allocation Commission and accepted by Government, has not been fully implemented. Such units are necessary as needs for additional teaching units in schools are frequently identified outside of the “numbers driven” or “formula driven” parts of the model. This element of the model, as recommended by the Commission, is a critical piece of the process that ensures flexibility to address needs not met by a purely “formula driven” allocation process. Government must budget and make available a “contingency” allocation to the Department of Education in order to address the “needs based” portion of the Teacher Allocation Model.

- **Very small rural schools**

Many of our very small rural schools are still struggling to provide a full educational program necessary for equitable educational opportunities for students. Government needs to provide additional funding for improved allocations of teachers to small rural schools. We commend Government for the approach taken to staffing these schools; however, the allocations provided are, quite simply, insufficient to allow them to offer an equitable program with a reasonable workload for teachers and administrators.

- **Improved class size maximums for Kindergarten**

The current class size maximums for Kindergarten is 20 per session or 40 students per teacher. Considering the unique needs of Kindergarten students, the detailed student assessment and reporting required, parent teacher interviews and such initiatives as the KinderStart program, these numbers are unreasonably high and compromise the education of students at this critical entry to formal education. The class size maximums for Kindergarten must be reduced.

- **Improved specialist allocations**

The NLTA recognizes that the inclusion of primary and elementary students in the allocation of specialist teachers to districts has been beneficial and we commend Government on lowering the junior high ratio of students to specialist teachers. However, the new allocations, while a major improvement, are still insufficient to meet the needs, especially in the primary and elementary grades. The formula for the allocation of specialist teachers must be improved.

- **Allocation model for high school grades**

No class size maximums have been established for grades 10-12. Teachers are allocated on the basis of the total number of students in the school. The nature of course selection by high school students and

the necessity to offer a broad curriculum results in an inequity in class size between large mainstream classes such as English, Social Studies and Academic Mathematics and more specialized courses such as Physics, Chemistry and Advanced Mathematics. The inequity is further exacerbated by the inclusionary and homogenous nature of the mainstream classes which contain high needs students. The result is large classes with many high needs students in classes such as English, Social Studies, etc. To meet the educational needs of these students, maximum class sizes must be established for these classes and additional teaching units allocated.

- **French Immersion**

The Teacher Allocation Model makes no separate provision for schools that offer a French Immersion stream. This means that, at each grade level in a school, the total number of students is considered when the maximum class sizes are applied to determine the number of teaching units to be allocated for that grade. That is, the French Immersion and English streams are not considered separately. This creates great inequities in class sizes in those schools. These inequities are sometimes addressed through the “needs-based” portion of the model, but often go unaddressed. However, these numbers of French Immersion students are predictable and the allocation model should be adjusted to apply the class size maximums separately for the two streams.

We urge Government to allocate greater fiscal resources for teaching services in order to provide additional teaching units to address those critical areas which still need attention.

Discretionary Leave and Substitute Teacher Days

There is serious under-funding of the substitute teacher budget for discretionary leave, which causes major difficulties for teachers and school districts. This issue was a major part of our 2010 pre-budget brief, and was expounded upon in detail in that document. However, it did not receive attention in Government's 2010 budget and we are bringing it forward again with the hope that additional funding will be provided for the provision of substitute teachers so that school districts will be given the wherewithal to address the pressing needs in two key areas: family leave and professional development leave.

Family Leave

In the allocation of discretionary leave days to schools, substitute days for family leave are placed in the same category as all other discretionary leave days for teachers. The result is a competition at the school and district level between family leave and other types of valid and required leaves. It is common in schools throughout the province to be allocated only 1-2 days per teacher for all discretionary leave for the entire year, including family leave. The pooling of family leave days with these other categories of necessary discretionary leaves creates a shortage of family leave days, which is very problematic. The NLTA is requesting that Government allocate a number of leave days specifically for the purpose of family leave and that the allocation for the total substitute teacher budget be increased appropriately to provide those leave days.

Inadequate funding for substitute teacher days necessary to grant such leaves is creating stressful situations in the lives of teachers who, in order to attend to necessary family responsibilities, must choose between lying to the employer by utilizing their own sick leave or ignoring their family responsibilities. As the previous Minister of Finance would be well aware, the issue of family leave days was one of the very last items on the table when the teachers' 2008-12 provincial contract was settled. It continues to be a major source of frustration for our members. A solution to this problem away from the negotiating table is to have a sufficient number of leave days allocated so that school districts can provide such leave to teachers when circumstances warrant.

We strongly recommend that Government allocate additional funds for the substitute teacher budget to allow the Department of Education to allocate a number of leave days specifically for the purpose of family leave separate from other discretionary leave.

Professional Development Leave

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. 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 is 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. The demands on teachers are ever-changing and continuous professional learning is not discretionary. It should be expected and supported.

The shortage of substitute days (referenced earlier in the section on family leave) is a major constraint on teacher professional development. Leave for professional development must be removed from the general discretionary leave 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 professional development must also have its place. We need to re-affirm the value of professional development and provide teachers with opportunities for same.

We recommend that Government allocate additional funds for the substitute teacher budget to allow the Department of Education to specifically allocate leave days for the purpose of professional development.

Student Supervision

Student Supervision is currently performed by teachers. This duty, especially during lunch hour, when added to the daily preparation, teaching, assessments and reporting responsibilities of teachers is an unnecessary demand on teachers' time and a drain of energy for teachers. The result is that teachers "on duty" do not obtain adequate time to eat their lunch, to regenerate or re-group for the afternoon session or to attend to other important demands of teaching. Research is definitive that productivity is enhanced when workers take a scheduled break in their work day. Teachers, like other government employees, should be entitled to have a reasonable period free from duty to eat lunch. Student supervision in this context is a poor use of professional time. Providing teachers with adequate time free from supervision duty during lunch is in the best interest of students. For these reasons, the NLTA has been advocating for the use of external paid supervision during lunch time.

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.

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, out of necessity, 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.

Several years ago, a Working Group on Supervision was established with representation from the Department of Education, the Newfoundland and Labrador School Boards Association and the NLTA. Specifically, the NLTA has requested through that Working Group that the Department of Education and the Newfoundland and Labrador School Boards Association consider a pilot involving external paid supervision during lunch time in a limited number of schools to determine the cost/benefit and practicalities of external paid supervision.

The NLTA is recommending that \$300,000 be allocated to fund a pilot during the upcoming 2011-12 school year to determine the feasibility and advisability of external paid supervision during lunch time.

Conclusion

Addressing the issues outlined in this brief will mean a greater commitment by Government to maintaining and increasing the resources allocated for education in the 2011 Budget. We feel that these are very critical areas that need attention if we are to continue making progress in our education system. The NLTA urges Government to make this further commitment to education and to demonstrate it in real terms when the budget is presented to the people of the province.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. We urge Government to provide additional teachers, student assistants, training and professional development for the delivery of student support services.
2. We urge Government to allocate greater fiscal resources for teaching services in order to provide additional teaching units to address those critical areas which still need attention.
3. We strongly recommend that Government allocate additional funds for the substitute teacher budget to allow the Department of Education to allocate a number of leave days specifically for the purpose of family leave separate from other discretionary leave.
4. We recommend that Government allocate additional funds for the substitute teacher budget to allow the Department of Education to specifically allocate leave days for the purpose of professional development.
5. The NLTA is recommending that \$300,000 be allocated to fund a pilot during the upcoming 2011-12 school year to determine the feasibility and advisability of external paid supervision during lunch time.



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