



**Pre-Budget
Public Consultations**

**Brief Presented to
Honourable Tom Marshall
Minister of Finance and
President of Treasury Board
February 2012**



Introduction

The last Provincial Budget was very much status quo for primary, elementary and secondary education in this province. None of the priorities which were identified by the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association in our pre-budget brief were addressed in any meaningful way. As we reviewed our other pre-budget submissions over the past several years we note that the same key issues have been raised. However, provincial budgets over that time period have not provided the resources necessary to adequately address these important areas.

The NLTA, therefore, finds itself in the unenviable position of repeating its call for additional funding to address these areas and of reiterating a number of the points made in these previous submissions. That alone should serve to emphasize the point that for our members, the K-12 teachers of this province, these are critical issues for education, for teachers and for students. The areas we have continued to emphasize in this brief are:

- student support services/inclusion
- teacher allocations
- teacher leaves and the provision of substitute teacher days
- student supervision, and
- human resources support for technology.

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 2012 and urge you to give serious consideration to the issues raised herein.

Student Support Services/Inclusion

The NLTA is supportive of the philosophy of inclusion. But, as is noted on the Department of Education Inclusive School Culture website, www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/inclusion.html, *“In an inclusive school culture diversity is embraced, learning supports are available and properly utilized, and flexible learning experiences focus on the individual student. There is an innovative and creative environment and a collaborative approach is taken”*. The NLTA too is adamant that the necessary supports and resources must be provided to help ensure the successful implementation of the inclusion philosophy.

Since the Department of Education adopted an inclusionary philosophy of Special Services delivery, the NLTA has been hearing from teachers in the field regarding the implementation of this new philosophy. Significant changes are occurring in programs and services for students with special needs which have 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 implementation of the inclusion philosophy and the provision of necessary services to special needs students are, without exception, the areas in which we receive the greatest number of expressions of concern from teachers. In focus group meetings held with teachers in the spring and fall of 2011 there was an overwhelming consensus that more human resources are needed for the inclusion philosophy to be properly implemented. Concerns continue to be expressed that the implementation of the inclusion philosophy might result in cuts to teacher allocations and there is a strong message from teachers, both in the phase-in schools and those in the non-phase-in schools, that the NLTA should represent these concerns to Government and advocate for the necessary resources and professional development to make the model work.

Further, within the new model, inclusion is no longer within the realm of the Special Education teacher only, but 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 NLTA appreciates that the Department of Education faces significant challenges in providing effective professional development and in-service on inclusion, adequate time for collaboration between the different groups of teachers (i.e., instructional support, pervasive needs, and classroom). However, as is highlighted on the Department of Education Inclusive School Culture website, these are some of the essential factors that are necessary if inclusion is to work in schools. The Department of Education website clearly states:

What makes inclusion work in schools?

- *an understanding of, and commitment to, inclusion*
- *a welcoming and safe school environment*
- *a strong administration team*
- *a focus on teaching all children*
- *involvement from families and outside agencies*
- *professional development for teachers and other school personnel*
- *common planning time for teachers*
- *effective instructional and assessment strategies to meet student needs*
- *appropriate accommodations and support systems in place*
- *opportunities for relationship and team building*
- *a commitment to continuous improvement and growth*

(cont'd. on page 4)

The NLTA appreciates the Department of Education's work to date in developing and communicating its ongoing plan to provide in-service/professional development to educators related to all issues pertinent to inclusion. However, the NLTA feels strongly that it is essential that educators receive this training before they are required to implement the inclusion philosophy. In addition, the NLTA believes that to ensure that the inclusion philosophy is successfully implemented in the schools of Newfoundland and Labrador, all the components listed on the Government's website under the heading, *What makes inclusion work in schools?*, must be addressed and honored.

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

Teacher Allocations

We recognize that the new teacher allocation model introduced in 2008 has had a generally positive impact on the learning environment for students by establishing class maximums in K-9 classrooms. However, based on member input and our own analysis, we will identify here that there are still remaining aspects concerning the allocation of teachers in this province that require further attention. We strongly advocate for continued Government attention to the areas identified as still being of concern to students, parents and teachers and we are asking for further improvements to the Teacher Allocation Model.

It is widely known that allocating sufficient numbers of teachers is critical to ensuring student success and that 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 of the Teacher Allocation Model 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 of concern expressed by teachers who question 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. If the philosophy of inclusive education is to work as it should, additional teacher resources are required to support special needs children. Input from teachers (instructional resource teachers and regular classroom teachers alike) tells, without exception, of insufficient human resources (numbers of teachers and student assistants) to meet the needs of these children.

- **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. It should be noted that 25% of the province's schools have fewer than 100 students, while nearly half of them have a student population of less than 200. Government needs to provide additional funding for improved allocations of teachers to small rural schools. We commend Government for the approach taken to staffing the very smallest schools; however, the allocations provided are, quite simply, insufficient to allow those schools to offer an equitable program with a reasonable workload for teachers and administrators.

- **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. While it is being used to provide some additional teaching units to address particular needs, more teaching units are needed to better address such needs. 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.

- **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 create an unreasonably high workload for Kindergarten teachers and compromise the education of students at this critical entry to formal education. The class size maximums for Kindergarten must be reduced.

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- **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 have commended 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 yet been applied to 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 more often include students with greater needs. The result is large classes with many high needs students in courses such as English, Social Studies, etc. In order to meet the educational needs of these students, maximum class sizes must be established for these classes and additional teaching units allocated. With class size maximums being applied from Kindergarten through grade 9 as of 2010-11, it is now time to reassess the allocation process for high schools. The Commission made a number of recommendations for high schools which must be implemented.

- **French Immersion**

The Teacher Allocation Model makes no separate provision for schools that offer a French Immersion stream. This means that the total number of students at a grade level in a school is considered when the maximum class sizes are applied to determine the number of teaching units to be allocated for the grade. That is, the French Immersion and English streams are not considered separately. This can create 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 from year to year and the allocation model should be adjusted to apply the class size maximums separately for the two streams. The Teacher Allocation Commission recommended that the provincial class size maximums apply to English, French Immersion, and Intensive Core French classes for teacher staffing purposes. We believe that process should be followed.

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.

Teacher Leaves and Substitute Teacher Days

In order to replace teachers who are granted leaves to attend to necessary professional development and family leave, substitute teachers are required. These leaves are granted at the discretion of the school board and are severely limited by the number of substitute teacher days allocated to the school boards in the Provincial Budget. The substitute teacher budget for these two types of leave (family leaves and professional development) is, and has been, inadequate to address the needs of the districts and teachers, and should be significantly increased.

The Provincial Budget has not distinguished between the various types of discretionary leaves which are being allocated under the substitute teacher budget. The lumping of funding for all such teacher leaves in this manner is problematic for teachers, the districts, and the Department of Education. Substitute days should be allocated and identified in the Provincial Budget in separate categories for: family leave; professional development; and other leaves.

FAMILY LEAVE

Family leave is primarily required by teachers to attend to the temporary care of their sick children, medical and dental appointments for their children, needs related to the birth of their children, and family emergencies. Lumping family leaves in the same category as all other discretionary leave days for teachers results in a competition at the school and district level between family leave and other types of valid and required leaves, and creates a shortage of family leave days being allocated to teachers. 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. Coupled with inadequate funding and no separate allocation available, teachers must then choose between lying to the employer by utilizing their own sick leave or ignoring their family responsibilities. The result is that Government is unable to accurately track sick leave usage or determine how much family leave is required or being utilized. More importantly, teachers feel demoralized, stressed, and disrespected by the lack of sensitivity to their family needs and responsibilities.

Family leaves have been identified by the NLTA as a priority in successive budget submissions and rounds of collective bargaining. 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.

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.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAVE

New technology and the effective utilization of such technology in the classroom is just one example of the necessity for teachers to continuously participate in professional development. Currently the professional development available to teachers is primarily dictated by the school development 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 need or interest to attend a conference or an institute requires a request for professional development leave which comes from the same allocation of all other discretionary leaves. Colleague is pitted against colleague in the competition for scarce 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. We recognize that those experiences which respond to the needs of the school or the system as a whole are important, but individual, teacher-directed professional development must also have its place. We need to reaffirm the value of professional development and provide teachers with adequate opportunities for such professional development.

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 and that the allocation for the total substitute teacher budget be increased appropriately to provide those leave days.

Student Supervision

Lunchtime student supervision by teachers is a poor use of professional time and a wasteful use of a relatively expensive resource.

It is not necessary that direct supervision of students, unrelated to classroom instruction, be provided exclusively by a teacher. Alternative and more effective use of resources include external paid supervisors or designation of another employee of the school board for supervision responsibility. In a 2008 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.

Supervision duty, especially during lunch hour, results in teachers "on duty" not obtaining 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. When added to the daily preparation, teaching, assessment and reporting responsibilities of teachers, lunchtime supervision of students is an unnecessary demand on teachers' time and a drain of energy for teachers and ultimately has a negative impact on teaching and students. For these reasons, the NLTA has been advocating for the use of external paid supervision during lunch time.

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.

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 to, among other things, consider alternatives to lunchtime supervision by teachers. Concern from the employer and Government often centers around the logistical practicality of external paid supervision. 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.

In the 2011 budget consultation and again this year, the NLTA is recommending and requesting that \$300,000 be allocated to fund a pilot during the upcoming 2012-13 school year to determine the feasibility and advisability of external paid supervision during lunch time.

Human Resources Support for Technology

Government recognizes that today's society is technologically driven and has put considerable resources into technology such as computers, interactive whiteboards, video conferencing units, mobile technology and technology for students with exceptionalities. In recent provincial budgets, Government has allocated funds for a technology integration plan as well as various aspects of technological support.

While additional supports and personnel have been deployed to deal with many of these technological issues, teachers continue to need professional learning in the integration of technology into the classroom. There is an increased expectation that teachers will integrate technology into teaching and learning, and that on-site support and training be available. Furthermore, the question has to be asked as to how to move beyond the one-stop training that often is the model for delivering technology training? It is important to move to a model of professional learning that better prepares teachers for the integration of technologies into teaching and learning and encourages continued exploration and lifelong learning in preparation for new shifts in technology.

It is not enough to show teachers how to 'run' the technology. A more complex and time consuming task is to ensure that teachers are able to use the different technologies to more effectively engage students in the different curricula so that students learn and master the learning outcomes at a higher level. Often, school districts purchase additional equipment for classroom use and do not provide sustained support or learning. As stated by Bourgeois and Hunt, "Many assume that the presence of more computers and an interactive whiteboard will lead to smarter children and better teaching. This couldn't be further from the truth." (www.learningforward.org, vol.32, no.5)

Identifying the pedagogy (i.e., content and strategies) that must be conveyed to teachers via professional learning opportunities is essential if teacher practice is to evolve to permit them to more effectively utilize the myriad of new technologies that are available to them now and in future. To this end, ongoing professional development that is available to teachers on a continuous individual needs basis is preferable instead of the short, one day sessions that have been the norm in the past.

It is critical that the Department of Education and the School Districts throughout the province provide teachers with the necessary inservice/professional development on the integration of technology in the classroom.

We recommend that Government provide increased financial resources to the Department of Education and School Districts for teacher professional development and inservice on the integration of technology into teaching and learning.

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 2012 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. 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.
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 and that the allocation for the total substitute teacher budget be increased appropriately to provide those leave days.
5. In the 2011 budget consultation and again this year, the NLTA is recommending and requesting that \$300,000 be allocated to fund a pilot during the upcoming 2012-13 school year to determine the feasibility and advisability of external paid supervision during lunch time.
6. We recommend that Government provide increased financial resources to the Department of Education and School Districts for teacher professional development and inservice on the integration of technology into teaching and learning.



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