

Pre-Budget Public Consultations



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

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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 2010.

The 2009 Provincial Budget provided some positive news for education in Newfoundland and Labrador. The reports of the Teacher Allocation Commission and the ISSP/Pathways Commission contained significant recommendations and we are pleased with Government's positive response to many of these recommendations. As the recommendations continue to be actioned over the next few years they will have a significant positive impact on education and in particular, student achievement, school programming, classroom conditions and teacher working conditions.

There are several areas, however, that need further consideration by Government and that need to be addressed in the 2010 Provincial Budget. These include discretionary leave and substitute teacher days, ISSP/Pathways, teacher allocations, and technology resources/supports. Three of these were the major areas of concern in our brief prior to the 2009 budget and we are reiterating a number of the points we made on these issues last year because they have not been adequately addressed. These issues continue to be major areas of concern for teachers. This brief will focus on these four areas.

Discretionary Leave and Substitute Teacher Days

There is serious under-funding of the substitute teacher budget for discretionary leave. This under-funding causes difficulties for teachers and School Districts.

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, which include Professional Development Leave (Clause 18.05), Teacher Discretionary Leave (Clause 18.09), School Administrative Leave (Clause 18.13) and Curricular and Extra-curricular Activity Leave (Clause 29.03(b)). 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 problematic as illustrated below. 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 illustrate the extent of the problem we offer the following commentary and examples.

The current teaching population in this province is predominantly female – approximately 70%. Females still have the major family responsibilities of child rearing and thus have the highest demand for family leave. Combined with this, many teachers are in what could be characterized as the sandwich generation, caught between the demands of caring for children and caring for 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. It is reported to the NLTA on a daily basis that reasonable requests for necessary family leave are refused at the school level due to a lack of substitute days available from the discretionary leave pool. Many teachers do not apply because they know they will not get leave as there are not a sufficient number of leave days available, and these teachers are forced to ignore their family responsibility or resort to inappropriate use of other leave, such as sick leave.

We are aware of teachers denied family leave when no discretionary leave days were available at the school in such real instances as a teacher's child having a tonsillectomy and the teacher needed to accompany the eight-year-old on the day of the operation; when a teacher was needed to take a dependent family member to cancer treatment; and when the children of teachers are home sick. The unacceptable alternative is to leave the child or the dependent alone and unattended.

Routinely family leave is denied when teachers request family leave time to accompany their children to doctor or dentist appointments. The scarcity of physicians in many parts of the province often does not allow the scheduling of appointments outside school hours. The result is that teachers are often encouraged to take a full day of sick leave inappropriately rather than take only the required time as family leave which may often be just a couple of hours or half a day.

KinderStart is a Department of Education program which requires the attendance of a parent at the initial session where pre-Kindergarten students are introduced to the school setting during the school day. Often, teachers who are parents of pre-Kindergarten children are denied leave to attend even the initial session – even though the Department of Education requires a parent to be present. Clearly, the expectation is that other parents are expected to take leave from their jobs while parents who are teachers are denied leave by the employer sponsoring the sessions.

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 and allocate a number of leave days specifically for the purpose of family leave separate from other discretionary leave.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LEAVE

What it means to be a professional teacher in 2010 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 2010 are entering a much different profession than their predecessors.

While all teachers 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 deliver differently and to deliver 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 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. Professional learning and the professional's choice for learning should not be discretionary. It should be expected and supported.

The shortage of substitute days (referenced earlier in the discussion 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 the opportunities for same.

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

Teacher Allocations

We commend Government on the new teacher allocation model and the approach taken by the Department of Education on teacher allocation issues; most recently the improved allocation of specialist teacher for grades 7-9 and the application of the class size maximums at grades 5 and 8. However, there are several areas of the new model which require additional resources in order to be fully implemented. In our view, the most critical of these are:

- **Allocations for Special Needs**

Of all the issues relating to the provision of teaching resources, allocations for special needs is, without exception, the area in which we receive the greatest number of concerns from teachers. The process of allocating teaching units for special education is in a state of transition as the Department of Education moves to a new model. However, 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, without exception, of insufficient numbers of teachers and student assistants to meet the needs of these children. Government must commit to allocating more teaching units in this area.

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

Allocation of additional teaching units is necessary to fully implement the “needs-based” portion of the Teacher Allocation Model for the 2010-11 school year. Such units are required to provide for identified needs not addressed by the “numbers-driven” parts of the 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 address the concerns expressed by the Teacher Allocation Commission and provide resources for improved allocations of teachers for 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 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 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 through 12. With class size maximums being applied up to Grade 9 as of 2010-11, it is now time to reassess the allocation process for high schools.

- **French Immersion**

The new 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 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. 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.

- **Improved class size maximums for Kindergarten**

The current class size maximums for Kindergarten is 20 per session or 40 students per teacher. Considering the needs of the Kindergarten students as well as necessary student assessment, reporting, 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 should be reduced.

- **Improved class size maximums**

It is indeed commendable that Government will have initiated class size maximums from Kindergarten to grade 9 for the 2010-11 school year; however, every effort must be made to reduce the class size maximums to the levels recommended by the Teacher Allocation Commission.

We urge Government to continue to respond positively to the recommendations of the Teacher Allocation Commission by allocating the necessary fiscal resources to provide additional teaching units to address those critical areas which still need attention.

ISSP/Pathways

The NLTA commends Government for its ongoing efforts towards implementing many of the recommendations of the ISSP/Pathways Commission. The Government is commended for recognizing the workload issues, the volume of paperwork and the roles of teachers, administrators and parents around the challenges of the current model of special education programming. However, as noted previously under Teacher Allocations, 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.

The NLTA continues to support 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. 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 continue to be provided the financial and human resources to ensure that the recommendations can be implemented thoroughly and expeditiously. This means increasing the allocation of teaching units for Special Education and providing additional financing for the necessary human resources at the Department of Education and the School Districts.

We urge Government to provide the financial and human resources to ensure the recommendations of the report of the Commission to Review ISSP/Pathways can be implemented thoroughly and expeditiously.

Technological Resources and Supports

Government has recognized that today's society is technologically driven and has put a lot of money and resources into technology such as computers, Smart Boards, video conferencing units, etc. Government has allocated funds for a technology integration plan as well as various aspects of technological support.

Our school system has experienced an increase in the installation of computer and network technology and many of our schools today have sophisticated computer network systems that require constant monitoring and modifications. While additional supports and personnel have been added to deal with many of these technological issues, teachers continue to need in-servicing in integrating technology into the classroom and need the necessary physical configuration to be able to partake in online training and programs. There is an increased expectation that teachers should make use of the technology and the on-site support and training must be made available.

It is not enough, however, to simply show teachers how to 'run' the technology. The more complex and time-consuming task is to ensure that teachers are using the different technologies to more effectively engage students in the different curricula so that students learn and master the identified outcomes at a higher level.

Identifying the pedagogy (i.e., content and strategies) that needs to 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 24-7 individual needs basis is desirable over the short, one day sessions that have been the norm in the past. Finally, to ensure that teachers are able to take control over their learning, 'time' and technological resources such as computers, web-cams, headsets, etc. need to be available in our schools... and, if possible, in their homes.

It is critical that the Department of Education and the School Districts throughout the province provide teachers with the necessary technical resources and supports for teaching and training.

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 2010 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:

1. We strongly recommend that Government allocate additional funds for the substitute teacher budget and allocate a number of leave days specifically for the purpose of family leave separate from other discretionary leave.
2. We recommend that Government allocate additional funds for the substitute teacher budget and specifically allocate leave days for the purpose of professional development.
3. We urge Government to continue to respond positively to the recommendations of the Teacher Allocation Commission by allocating the necessary fiscal resources to provide additional teaching units to address those critical areas which still need attention.
4. We urge Government to provide the financial and human resources to ensure the recommendations of the report of the Commission to Review ISSP/Pathways can be implemented thoroughly and expeditiously.
5. It is critical that the Department of Education and the School Districts throughout the province provide teachers with the necessary technical resources and supports for teaching and training.