

Introduction

The Minister of Finance has engaged the NLTA (and other public sector unions) in consultations regarding the Province’s current fiscal circumstances, specifically an anticipated \$2B provincial deficit for the coming year. In response to Minister Bennett’s request for engagement, the NLTA has established an Ad-Hoc Committee on the Province’s “Fiscal Reality” which is in the process of gathering input from teachers on how to address the financial challenges faced by the Province for the purpose of the NLTA providing a report to the Minister of Finance. In the interim, the NLTA is providing this pre-budget education submission for consideration in preparation of Budget 2016.

In a meeting with the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development, Minister Kirby suggested that in light of the fiscal challenges facing the Province, the NLTA might want to reconsider the format of its annual

pre-budget submission with a view to focussing on core resources necessary in the K-12 education sector, and further suggested that our submission consider any areas of waste or inefficiencies in education expenditure. The NLTA has considered the perspectives of the Minister of Finance and Minister of Education and this submission reflects the Ministers’ input by focusing on key principles and core resources for K-12 education.

A key principle is that **expenditure on education is an investment in the Province’s future and the lives of its children, not an expense to be cut.** Government recognized this in the Throne Speech by stating in one of its five-point plan – “Government will: Invest in Our Future Through Education”.

A second key principle is that **the classroom, and support for the classroom, must be the core focus of education spending.** It is these two statements on which this submission is premised.

The K-12 Classroom

The classroom is the primary site of formal student learning and must be properly supported.

Research from many sources (Marzano, Goodland, Fullan, Wright, etc.) has shown that professional teachers in classrooms are the most important factor for student success. “...teachers are the most important factor contributing to student achievement. Although curricula, reduced class size, district funding, family and community involvement all contribute to school improvement and student achievement, the most influential factor is the teacher.” (*Educational Research* newsletter) Clearly, the sufficient allocation of classroom teachers is core to student success.

The *Report of the Teacher Allocation Commission 2007* is the most recent commission on allocation of teachers in NL. After reviewing the research the Commission concluded that class size has a significant impact on the overall achievement of students in general and that there is “compelling evidence to support lower class size ... this is particularly true of students at risk, students from lower socio-economic status or students from ethnic minorities.” The Commission also recognized the rural nature of the Province and the necessity of small schools which have multi-graded classrooms and require unique allocations.

Recommendation 1

The NLTA recommends that Government maintain/re-establish class size caps that were originally put in place in 2008 following the Teacher Allocation Commission Report, specifically:

Grade Level	Maximum Class Size
Kindergarten	20
Grades 1 - 3	25
Grades 4 - 6	25
Grades 7 - 9	27

Allocations for Multi-Grade Classes	
Maximum Class Size	
K with any one other	15
K with any two others	12
K with any 3 others (e.g. K-3)	10
Any two primary	15
Three or more primary	15
Any two primary/elementary (e.g. 3-4)	15
Three or more primary/elementary	15
Any two elementary/intermediate	15
Three or more elementary/intermediate	15

Research has also shown that class composition has a profound impact on teaching effectiveness and learning, the more diverse the classroom the more supports are required to achieve the same outcomes as in a homogenous class. The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), in its 2015 TALIS Report, stated that “Classrooms are considered to be challenging if more than 10% of students in the class are low achievers or more than 10% of students have behaviour problems.” The Province of NL has adopted a model of inclusive education which creates diverse classrooms. The upcoming Premier’s Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes will include consideration of inclusive education and student mental health and wellness. As referenced in the Throne Speech, required support will be provided for children with diverse needs. While awaiting the results of the Task Force, the inclusive classroom requires additional human resources, including special needs teachers, to assist the classroom teacher meet the differentiated needs of individual students.

The annual teacher allocation review by the school districts identifies the number of special needs teachers – instructional resource teachers (IRTs), and categorical teachers for pervasive needs – required to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities that have been identified by schools in the spring of each year.

Recommendation 2

The NLTA recommends the continuation of the process of an annual school review to determine the number of special needs teachers required to support the identified needs of students in inclusive classrooms and that the allocation of support teachers to schools reflect this review.

The current “needs based” process allocates teachers and student supports for the coming school year based on “student needs” identified by schools in the spring of each year as described above. Further student exceptionalities are identified when the school year begins and when new students with exceptional needs enter a school. **Instead of allocating the required additional supports, the current system redeploys the existing supports, thereby removing supports from students already assessed as requiring help.** Effectively, this process removes supports from students who have been identified as needing supports, and undermines the functionality of the inclusive classroom. This method of prioritizing needs based upon available resources runs counter to the Supreme Court of Canada decision in Moore v. British Columbia which made clear that a special needs student is not to be compared to another special needs student, but to all students who have access to a meaningful education mandated by legislation. Our point is that in the absence of the availability of additional support for the inclusive classroom beyond that which is currently provided, neither the needs of those with, or without special needs, are able to be adequately met.

Recommendation 3

The NLTA recommends that Government budget for 150 additional teaching units to be ‘available’ to be deployed by the Department of Education as required to address needs identified and associated with the implementation of the inclusive model of education that arise during the school year.

Educational psychologists and guidance counsellors are required to do assessments and to provide necessary supports for students. Mental health problems among children and youth have become a major issue facing public schools – attention deficit disorders, learning disabilities, stress, anxiety disorders, depression, and delays in assessment. Premier Ball has recognized an inadequate allocation of these specialists in the school system and publicly committed to an improved allocation.

Recommendation 4

The NLTA recommends that Government allocate educational psychologists and guidance counsellors at a level recommended by the NL Counsellors and Psychologists Association in a presentation to Premier Ball – Educational Psychologists at 1:1000 students and Guidance Counsellors at 1:250 students.

Specialist teachers – music, physical education, fine arts, French, skilled trades/technology and literacy and numeracy – are all necessary to satisfy the required curriculum and to support the classroom. The Teacher Allocation Commission provided recommendations in that regard.

Recommendation 5

The NLTA recommends that Government allocate specialist teachers as follows:

- *That the elementary level specialists be allocated at 1 per 125 students*
- *That the Grade 7–Level III specialists be allocated at 1 per 150 students*
- *That learning resource specialists in K-Level III be allocated at 1 per 500 students*

Given the current refugee crisis and Government’s commitment to accepting significant numbers of refugees, the demand for English as a Second Language (ESL) services has increased, and will dramatically increase further. Many of these students come from very difficult circumstances and have often experienced much trauma. The ESL teachers’ attempt to meet needs that go well beyond the teaching of English.

Recommendation 6

The NLTA recommends that Government allocate 0.5 ESL teachers per 10 ESL students enrolled, and budget for additional ESL teachers based on an anticipated enrolment, such teachers to be allocated as the need requires.

Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) are required to meet the needs of individual students identified throughout the school system as requiring such services.

Recommendation 7

The NLTA recommends that Government allocate sufficient SLPs such that the caseload in the education system corresponds to the national standards recommended by the Canadian Association of Speech Language Pathologists.

Much research exists demonstrating the significant link between school administration and student learning (Leithwood). The role and responsibilities of school administrators has significantly expanded in recent years and this was further exacerbated when school boards were amalgamated to form one English school district, resulting in increased administrative demands and decreased supports for schools from school districts. According to OECD’s 2015 TALIS Report, “on average, principals spend 41% of their time managing human and material resources, planning, reporting, and adhering to regulations” and “nearly 2/3’s of principals’ time, on average, is spent on administrative and leadership tasks and on curriculum and teacher related tasks and meetings.” Little time is then left for school administrators to support the K-12 classrooms and fulfill teaching leadership responsibilities or parental contact and student support. Further, administrators in small schools in NL also have teaching responsibilities in addition to administrative responsibilities. Yet, Budget 2015 cut administrative time. In anticipation of further potential cuts to supports at the school district and department level, it is imperative that adequate administrative time and support be provided to classrooms and schools.

Recommendation 8

The NLTA recommends that Government reverse previous cuts to administrative time and allocate administrators as follows:

Allocation of administrative time to school (principals and assistant principals)	
No. of Pupils	Admin FTE
1 - 49	0.5 units
50 - 174	1.0 units
175 - 249	1.25 units
250 - 399	1.50 units
400 - 549	1.75 units
550 - 699	2.00 units
700 - 849	2.50 units
850 +	3.00 units

The NLTA has listened to Government speak about the need to concentrate scarce resources on core education functions and we have done exactly that in our recommendations – focus on the classroom and required supports for the classroom. All the above recommendations are directly related to enabling adequate instruction and support for students in the classroom to enable improved educational outcomes, a goal of Government reiterated in the Throne Speech.

The NLTA would be remiss if we did not mention non-NLTA supports which are critical to the classroom and the school. The Government must allocate sufficient student assistants to meet the non-teaching related needs of students with special needs. Utilizing teachers for toileting, portering, scribing, and supervising, which regularly occurs in the absence of sufficient student assistant time, is an inefficient use of resources. Schools secretaries and maintenance staff are also essential to an efficient operation of a school. Far too much time of school administrators is spent on answering phones, photocopying, paperwork, filing, and school maintenance, in the absence of sufficient support personnel. Today’s school is dependent upon technology – in the classroom as an educational tool; for school attendance; reporting to parents, the district, and the Department. Yet, the allocation of computer technicians is woefully inadequate to keep the required technology functioning in schools. Significant inefficiencies exist when school technologies are “down” while awaiting for days, weeks, and sometimes months, for tech support. According to a recent CTF national survey, teachers recommended ongoing technical support as necessary to ensure that instruction can proceed smoothly. The NLTA believes that savings and efficiencies can be achieved by providing increased technical support to schools.

We know that education expenditure is an investment which brings economic benefits with a substantial net

return on investment. We are buoyed by the commitment in the Throne Speech that Government will “invest in our future through education”, and we look forward to this commitment being met in Budget 2016.

The Minister of Finance and Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development have asked the NLTA to provide input on how Government can be more innovative or efficient to provide quality services. The remainder of this pre-budget submission will focus on structures outside the schools in the K-12 education sector.

The School Districts

We recommend that the focus of school district budgeting and expenditure be on the classroom, and supports for the classroom. Any analysis of school board expenditures should be on how best to provide the supports necessary for the classroom and school to operate effectively. The NLTA is not in a position to have intricate knowledge of school district operations that would enable us to make specific cost savings recommendations. We do understand that an analysis of school district structures and operations is underway. It is our recommendation that in analysing school district expenditures that any cost savings to be achieved do not occur in areas which provide necessary support for the classroom and schools. In particular, adequate professional development is required and program specialists are necessary to provide curricular leadership and support in both distinct grade/curriculum disciplines and district-wide program implementation, and these areas should be priorities.

Again, while the NLTA is not in a position to make specific cost-cutting recommendations, we can make some general suggestions for areas which Government may wish to consider or explore as areas for potential cost savings – the structure and

number of school districts in the Province; the cost/benefit analysis and feasibility of rental space in Atlantic Place for NLESD headquarters, compared to renovation and use of an unused/vacant school(s); an exploration of student bussing operations, i.e. consideration of centralized pick up sites in urban areas, potential for double runs; expanding the use of public transport, expanding the radius for bus transportation.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

We recommend that the focus of Department of Education budgeting and expenditure be on the classroom, and supports for the classroom. Any analysis of Department expenditures should be on how best to provide the supports necessary for the classroom and school to operate effectively. The NLTA is not in a position to have intricate knowledge of Department operations that would enable us to make specific cost savings recommendations. We do understand that an analysis of Department structures and operations is underway. It is our recommendation that in analysing Department expenditures that any cost savings to be achieved do not occur in areas which provide necessary support for the classroom and schools. In particular, adequate curricular development and in-servicing is required and program consultants are necessary to provide curricular leadership and support and these areas should be priorities.

Again, while the NLTA is not in a position to make specific cost-cutting recommendations, we can make some general suggestions for areas which Government may wish to consider or explore as areas for potential cost savings. Criterion Reference Testing (CRTs), Public Examinations, and other standardized testing for purposes of ranking are not essential or core to the functioning of the classroom or student achievement, and there is likely considerable cost saving potential in either temporarily suspending such testing, performing less frequently, or testing samples rather than whole populations. Reducing/eliminating the requirement that teachers use expensive medical services as part of the District's attendance system could have significant savings in both sick leave usage (travel time for rural teachers to get medical notes) and the Health Care budget. An analysis of the use of photocopiers to create individual sets of resources compared to more mass produced curriculum resources should be conducted.

Revenue Generation

The Minister of Finance has requested input on how Government might raise revenue. The main purpose of any Government is to provide essential services to its citizens –

education, health, and safety of citizens being key. Taxation is the primary source of revenue for Government and the price we pay for living in a democratic society. The citizens of the province demand quality education, health care, and other essential services. Taxation is the means of citizens paying for these services. We can and will have the education system we are willing to pay for, and that should be a system that will have long-term benefits for society and the Province.

It is important to note that during the last decade, in times of rising provincial revenue, there have been significant tax reductions (approximately \$4B). In times of deficit and required revenue generation, it is necessary for government to increase taxation to levels comparable to our provincial neighbors.

The NLTA suggests Government consider raising revenue through increases to levels comparable to other Atlantic Provinces in:

- HST
- Personal Income Tax
- Corporate Tax

Further, that Government consider the introduction of a scaled tax on gasoline that is inversely tied to the price of oil – as oil prices (and oil revenue) increase, gas tax decreases; as oil prices decrease (oil revenue decreases), gas tax increases.

The NLTA further suggests that Government consider introducing carbon taxing which will achieve the double benefit of increased revenues in the short term and reduction of green house gases in the long term.

Conclusion

Government has requested the NLTA to engage in conversation regarding the fiscal future of the Province and to focus our pre-budget 2016 education submission on core resources necessary for student success. The NLTA has done that in this submission by focusing its recommendations on the classroom and supports for the classroom. We have included some preliminary commentary on revenue generation and made general suggestions for consideration on areas of potential cost savings in this submission. The NLTA Ad-Hoc Committee on the Province's Fiscal Reality will continue to gather input from its members and hope to have a report for presentation to Government prior to an anticipated Mini-Budget in the fall of 2016.

NLTA President James Dinn would welcome the opportunity to present this submission to you directly, and to engage in further discussions as we attempt to serve the best interests of the children of the Province.



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