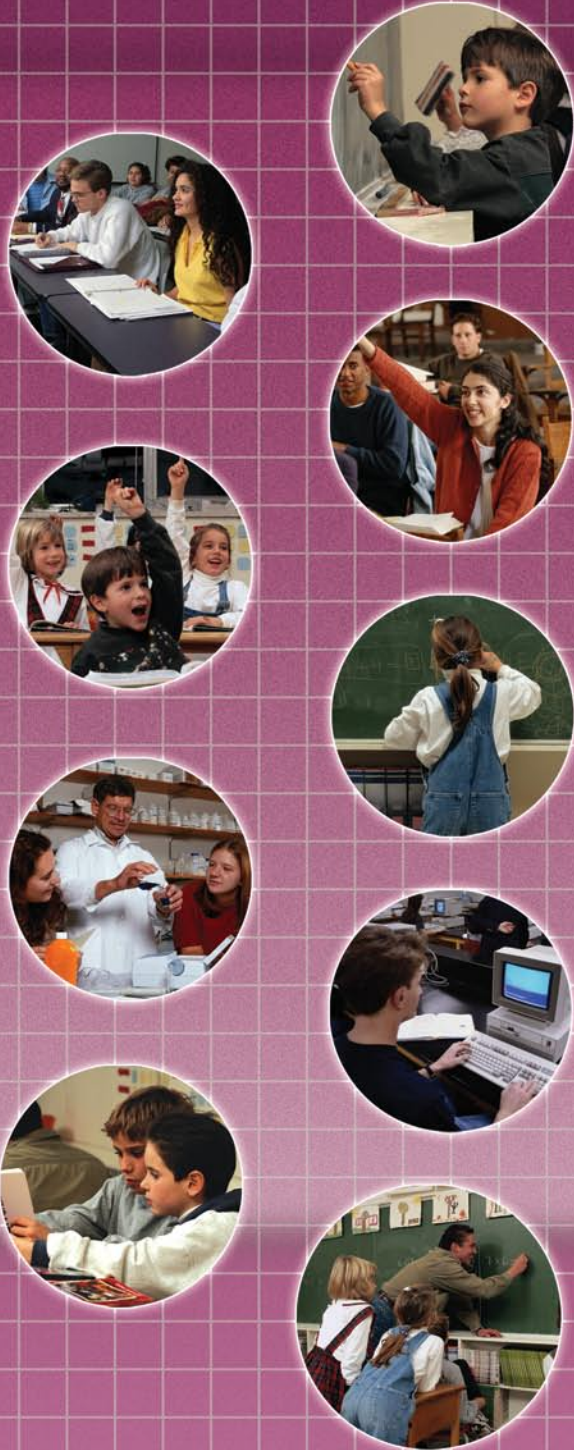




Pre-Budget Public Consultation

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

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Introduction

The 2006 Provincial Budget contained some very positive news on many critical areas for the K-12 education system in this province. The retention of teaching positions, the additional funds for staffing resources, the reviews of the ISSP/Pathways model and the teacher allocation model, the allocation of funds for laboratory safety equipment and teacher training, course development and the purchase of new equipment such as that for physical education programs, the allocation of funds to develop a series of high school Newfoundland and Labrador history courses, the establishment of a *Futures in Skilled Trades and Technology Program* and the *Healthy Schools* initiative, were all positive news for education in this province.

It is clear from these initiatives and the funding announced in the 2006 Budget that government is well informed of the issues affecting education in this province. Our teachers and parents have been heard and it is encouraging to see this reinvestment in education. It is clear that education is a priority for Premier Williams and his government.

The NLTA urges government to continue this positive approach for our children's education. In previous budget submissions we have discussed and offered recommendations on the importance of education for economic growth in this province, education resources, education as an investment, and government's fiscal policies. We will not reiterate the points we have made on the same topics here. We believe your government understands fully the critical importance of education in the economic growth and wellbeing of our province, and the need for increased resources for our K-12 system.

However, we also believe that it is critical to maintain and further improve on the initiatives of the 2006 Budget, and we will use this brief to highlight what we feel are the most important areas that need government's fiscal attention. Further improvements are necessary in the learning and working conditions in our province's classrooms, particularly in the areas of teacher allocations, the ISSPs/Pathways model for student support services, the substitute teacher budget and discretionary leave, the need for technological support, increased school instructional and operational grants, and issues around student supervision.

Teacher Allocations

In the last two 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 NLTA strongly believes there is a need to change the way in which teaching units are allocated in this province. Even though many individuals, groups, and organizations have expressed their concerns about the current “top-down” model approach, based mainly on the number of students enrolled in a school or district, we must be willing to accept the fact that this model is not meeting the needs of the individual students and teachers in the classroom.

The time has arrived when we must take a different approach and begin the teacher allocation process where it is most effective and important, that is, in determining and addressing the needs of each individual child enrolled in the system. If we are committed to improving the essence of education in this province – the teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom – we must be willing to accept a new approach that begins where the needs of each individual child is assessed and the resources (both human and physical) are allocated to ensure that these needs are met.

We need more teachers in the system to help address class composition by lowering class size, having more resource teachers to work with special needs children, more guidance counselors, more teachers offering specialized hands-on programs (Physical Education, Music, Fine Arts, Home Economics, and Vocational Programs), and more teachers to look after alternative learning sites to help address severe discipline problems. The overwhelming workloads of teachers and the learning conditions for students can only be positively impacted by the addition of teachers to the system.

Increasing the number of teachers in our schools, based on an assessment of the educational needs in each school, is the fundamental core of improving the teaching/learning conditions in our classrooms. Our brief to the Teacher Allocation Commission entitled *Teaching and Learning: The Essence of Education* contains a number of specific recommendations aimed at improving the teacher allocation process to more adequately meet the needs of our children and young people. We are hopeful that the final report of the Commission will include recommendations that will point the way to significant improvements, and we urge your government to respond positively to such recommendations by allocating the necessary fiscal resources to action them.

ISSP/Pathways

Recognizing that all children have the right to be educated in the most suitable setting, a wide variety of placement options are essential ranging from inclusion to alternate placements, and adequate supports must be provided to achieve this goal. It is a consistent theme among teachers that too much time and too many resources are consumed by the documentation required in the present delivery model of special services.

Teachers believe the administrative functions of the delivery of special services consume a significant portion of the teachers' and the schools' resources and should be re-examined to allow the valuable resource of a teacher's time to be directed as much as possible to the delivery of services to children. Our brief to the Commission to Review ISSPs/ Pathways, *Supporting Services, Supporting Learning*, contains recommendations on the delivery of these services, specifically in the allocation of teaching units.

A new allocation of remedial teachers must be introduced, above and beyond the current allocation, to provide specialized intervention to the many students who require additional supports beyond those which can be provided by the classroom teacher. The allocation of teaching units should consider the unique circumstances of each school and should be based upon class size limitations recognizing the significance of class composition. Meeting the diverse needs in a school has become extremely challenging and must be a primary concern.

Clearly, the range of personnel required to meet such needs is great. An effective team is necessary to ensure that no child is denied the level of care he/she needs. The NLTA has heard consistently that, in addition to classroom teachers, we must have essential supports from guidance counselors, educational psychologists, itinerant teachers, special education teachers, and student assistants.

As we strive to meet the needs of students on various Pathways, the ISSP process has truly become a major school-wide initiative impacting on every teacher in the school. Such a focus warrants the introduction of a position within each school whereby an individual is available to coordinate the implementation of Pathways, provide specialized expertise to colleagues, and advice on matters concerning programming, assessment, and documentation.

The NLTA supports the philosophy of inclusion whenever possible, provided it is supported with adequate resources and offers an environment that best suits the needs of the child. The teachers of this province have chosen their profession because of their commitment to the children placed in their care. They are committed to providing quality learning environments and experiences to children of varying abilities. However, to achieve this, there must be recognition of the significant resources necessary to provide this individualized level of service. There must be recognition that teachers have been trying for almost a decade to implement a delivery model that is under-resourced. The Pathways model cannot be properly implemented without major changes and a significant increase in resources.

Substitute Teacher Budget and Discretionary Leave

A substantial human resource issue arises from the provision of substitute teacher days and the overall substitute teacher budget. Even though the total substitute teacher budget has remained relatively constant over the last number of years, there has been a significant shift in the emphasis and criteria on which substitute teachers are provided at both the school and district level; i.e., there has been a major reduction in the granting of teacher leave requests for board discretionary leave.

Each year, fewer and fewer leaves are available to teachers for family leave, individual teacher professional development leave, extra-curricular/school (student) related leave, and other Board discretionary leave as outlined in the teachers' collective agreement. The denial of such leaves as family leave on the basis that "there's not enough to go around" is very common.

With the reduction in the availability of substitute days to cover such leaves, many school districts have downloaded their responsibility and have resorted to allocating substitute days to individual schools based on a formula which reflects the number of teachers on each staff. As a result, the denial of such leaves is now being communicated to individual teachers at the school level by the administrator, rather than by the district office personnel. It is common today for teachers to be informed at the beginning of the school year of the total number of substitute days available for all discretionary leaves at the school. In many conversations, teachers are often told, "Don't apply for your discretionary leave because I cannot grant it to you!! I don't have enough days!!" This issue has become very serious and has added tremendous stresses on both the teacher and the education system in general. There are numerous examples of the inadequacy of the number of leave days available. In one school with ten teachers on staff, there is a total of 12.5 leave days available. A primary/elementary school has 1.25 leave days per teacher available for professional development and family leave combined. These situations are placing intolerable stress and pressure on teachers.

To address the issue of substitute teacher allocations Government must substantially increase the substitute teacher budget to all school districts in an attempt to begin to address the many issues regarding the granting of teachers' leave requests for board discretionary leaves.

Technological Support

Today's society is technologically driven. It is reasonable therefore for society to expect our school system to develop technologically skilled graduates. To meet this expectation, in recent years the school system has experienced an increase in the installation of computer and network technology. Many of our schools today have sophisticated computer network systems that require constant monitoring and modifications. These network requirements are often a daily necessity in order to ensure that the use of technology is incorporated across the many curricula and throughout the various grade levels.

Unfortunately, as with most technologies, computers and networks are prone to failure and thus require servicing. For the most part, when such failures occur, there is an expectation that "someone on staff", often the computer/technology teacher, or a teacher on staff with skills in this area, will "fix" the problem. Given that most of the work that is required to maintain the network has simply become an additional, voluntary expectation placed on those teachers, the workload has become unrealistic and unmanageable. The results are often frustrated teachers, frustrated students, frustrated colleagues, and a system that is not working.

These added responsibilities for which no additional time is provided, coupled with an already over-burdened teaching workload, cause undue stress and anxiety for the teacher and the school in general. Furthermore, one must question whether computer and network repair is an appropriate use of the professional teacher's time. It is critical for the Department of Education and the school districts throughout the province to hire a sufficient number of technical support staff to carry out these duties. Further, a teacher network manager/administrator must be allocated to each school where a computer network system has been installed.

School Instructional Grants

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 all 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 resources if these schools are to provide educational opportunities for students in our rural communities comparable to their urban counterparts.

Additional resources must 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, increased instructional grants to the school districts must become a priority for this government.

Supervision of Students

Section 75 (1) (e) of *The Schools Act* (1997) states: “A school board shall insure (sic) adequate supervision of all students enrolled in its schools during the period for which the board is responsible for those students.” Under *The Schools Act*, school authorities have a responsibility to exercise reasonable supervision for students when they are in their care. No one will dispute the duty of care owed to students – that of protecting the student from all foreseeable risks and harm. As a result, teachers spend various amounts of time assigned to supervision duty – patrolling the corridors and school grounds, ensuring that the premises are safe for students.

In the province of Newfoundland and Labrador this formal supervision is one of those duties traditionally assigned to teachers. However, it is not necessary that such direct supervision 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 some 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. The broadest exclusion from student supervision found in a sample of 30 teacher collective agreements is the Greater Victoria School District in British Columbia where article D.7.1 states that “No teacher shall be required to perform supervision duties at noon hour, recess, before or after school.” (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, *Economic and Member Services Bulletin*, 2003)

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. Primary, elementary and junior high teachers generally view themselves as being in a much more disadvantageous situation than high school teachers for at least two reasons: (1) typically, primary and elementary teachers have fewer minutes of preparation time and more minutes of supervision time so that supervision time has a greater impact, and (2) their students are much younger and need a higher level of supervision, requiring more supervision time per teacher.

Teachers acknowledge that 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 sometimes be better used as preparation or reflection time. When not on supervision duty, teachers naturally use this time for preparation, marking, meeting with colleagues, etc. On duty days, the teacher does not become refreshed during recess and lunchtime, but rather becomes more tired and stressed. For some, supervision is an added factor leading to increased numbers of sick days and a decreased quality of work life. In a place that is as turbulent as a school, one can’t help but wonder if there is not another more sensible solution to the supervision responsibility.

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.

Boards must be provided funding and resources through the 2007 Provincial Budget so they are able to hire non-teaching personnel to carry out non-classroom supervision of students.

Conclusion

The increase in workload has become the major issue for teachers in this province. In 2005, a thesis by Dr. Lynda Younghusband entitled *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 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 noted by teachers include workload, class size, student behavior problems, lack of professional training, lack of resources, teaching outside the area of specialization, time pressures and evaluation apprehension.

In 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 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. Addressing the issues identified in this budget submission will mean a greater commitment of government to maintaining and increasing the resources allocated for education in the 2007 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.

