

# Pre-Budget Public Consultations

Brief Presented to  
the Minister of Finance and  
President of Treasury Board  
February 2017



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Introduction</b> . . . . .	1
<b>Inclusive Education</b> . . . . .	2
Introduction . . . . .	2
Definition . . . . .	2
Concerns . . . . .	3
Parent and Community Perspective. . . . .	8
Teaching and Learning International Surveys (TALIS) . . . . .	11
Supreme Court of Canada: Jeffrey Moore (Case 2012) . . . . .	12
Teacher-Student Safety . . . . .	13
<b>Professional Development/Professional Learning</b> . . . . .	14
Introduction . . . . .	14
Defining Professional Development . . . . .	14
<b>Leadership</b> . . . . .	21
Various Types of Leadership . . . . .	21
<b>Learning/Teaching Environment</b> . . . . .	26
Introduction . . . . .	26
Concerns . . . . .	26
Class Composition . . . . .	33
<b>Appendix A: Recommendations</b> . . . . .	47

# Introduction

The working conditions for teachers are the learning conditions for students; this is reality. School is a shared experience. The context in which teachers carry out their professional roles and responsibilities, providing instruction, striving to create safe and caring environments in which students can learn, grow, and benefit from access to positive role models, relationships and opportunities is the same situation and set of circumstances in which students spend six or more hours a day each school year. We must remember that close to 50% of a student's waking hours, not counting co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, are spent in the classroom.

This actuality should be the foundation for all decisions that have an impact on the K-12 public school system in Newfoundland and Labrador. If we truly want schools to be inclusive, safe and caring, accountable, accessible, engaging and stimulating places for learning to occur – as we should – but are unwilling to take into account the conditions and resources the professionals charged with this important responsibility need to “make it so,” then we might as well just acknowledge the fiction of this rhetoric.

Teaching has always been a “high-energy” vocation. Because teachers work with children and are responsible for their safety, supervision and constant attention are essential – there is no slow time. While school buildings have changed little in appearance over the years, the realities and demands of the teaching profession have evolved significantly. Technological requirements, classroom dynamics and diversity, the service delivery model for teaching students with special needs, the philosophy of student assessment, the volume of required administrative documentation and the accessibility of services and supports from other community/public services and agencies have all changed.

Teachers today are expected to be experts in the use of technology for presentation, organization, reporting on student progress and record keeping. They are expected to be prepared to teach in a manner that is appropriate for and accommodates every individual student's learning abilities. Today's classrooms often include a wide spectrum of needs and abilities, and incidents of physical aggression and violence by students have become a significant concern. The class size “cap” model for allocating teaching units, introduced in 2008 (prior to the implementation of the Inclusive Education Initiative and full-day Kindergarten) has been eroded by subsequent provincial budgets without any substantive review, other than financial. Combined grades have been introduced in schools where student numbers do not warrant multi-grade/age classes. Government has provided direction on certain aspects of student assessments, and work on a new policy for the NLESD is ongoing; however, the value and respect placed on teachers' professional judgment and autonomy has been seriously weakened.

The impact of all of these factors is felt by students and teachers alike. Efforts to improve student outcomes will not be effective if developed in isolation from and without consideration of the context in which they would have to be undertaken. Improving working conditions for teachers cannot help but have a positive impact on the learning environment for students.

This province is at serious risk of violating the human rights of students with exceptionalities in light of the 2012 Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Moore v British Columbia (Education)*. While it may be acceptable in a public policy debate to consider delaying investment in roads and buildings, or reducing services to the adult population, it should not be acceptable to delay investment in children or reduce their access to a quality public education.

# Inclusive Education

## Introduction

Inclusive education should be considered as a philosophy for guiding everything in education. It should consider the diversity of every learner and help guide decision making regarding educational policies, deployment of staff, allocation of resources, curriculum development, learning materials, instructional methodology and physical environment. As such, it should inform our decision making in all these areas.

Students come to our schools with various experiences, abilities, family situations, interests, learning styles, cultural backgrounds, etc. Students need to feel that they belong, are valued and can contribute. Fundamentally, all children deserve to be educated in inclusive and supportive environments, with their peers – wherever possible – regardless of their physical or intellectual capabilities, race, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other characteristic.

The Inclusive Education Model should not, in any way, inhibit or prevent any student from access to the supports needed to be successful.

*Today's concept of inclusive education lacks the supports needed to facilitate successful inclusion, no different than its lack of vision for student success. Implementing an inclusive model without adequately resourcing it demonstrates just how disconnected this Government is to the needs of both students and teachers.*  
(Liberal Party Election Statement, October 2015)

## Definition

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) defines inclusive education as a philosophy that promotes:

- the right of all students to attend school with their peers and to receive appropriate and quality programming;
- a continuum of supports and services in the most appropriate setting (large group, small group, individualized) respecting the dignity of the child;
- a welcoming school culture where all members of the school community feel they belong, realize their potential and contribute to the life of the school;
- an atmosphere which respects and values the participation of all members of the school community;
- a school community which celebrates diversity; and
- a safe and caring school environment.

The EECD launched the Inclusive Education Initiative in 2009 with 30 schools. The final phase of implementation of the initiative is expected to be completed by June of 2017. While the implementation of the Inclusive Education Initiative was labelled as a pilot, no comprehensive report was produced regarding the findings of the pilot.

# Concerns

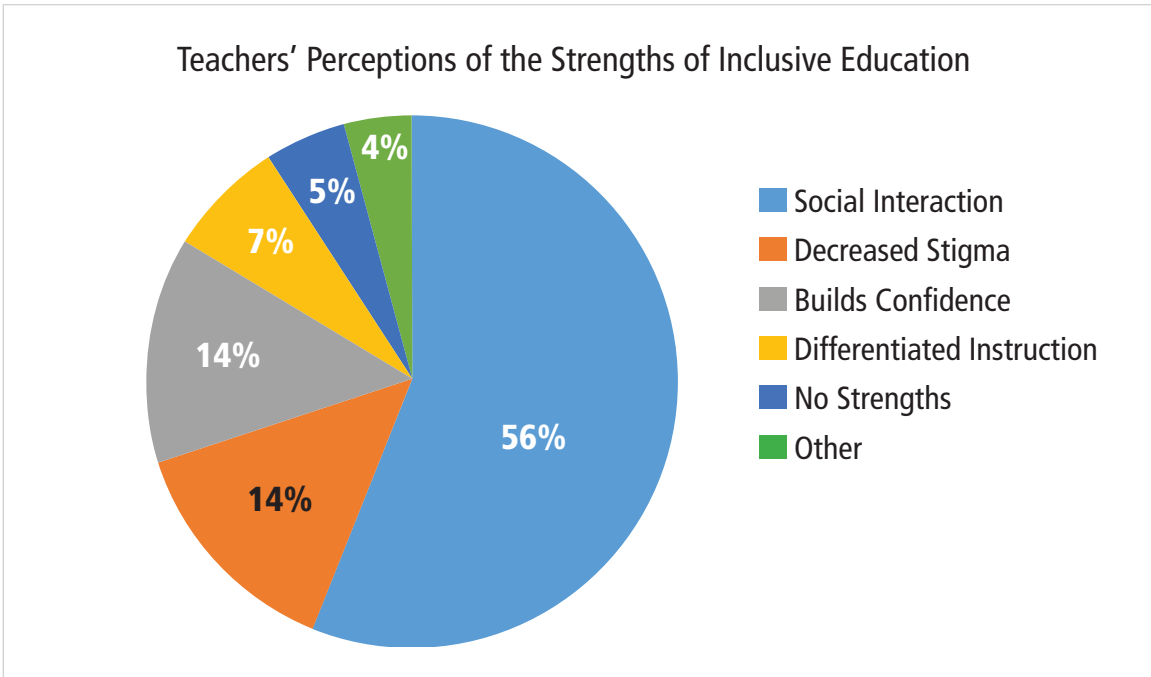
## Teachers' Perspective

### A) Inclusive Education Survey

A joint NLTA/EECD survey of the Inclusive Education Initiative was constructed and sent to teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador during the period of January 6-20, 2016. The purpose of the survey was to gauge knowledge of the Inclusive Education Initiative, the practical application of the initiative and to give respondents the opportunity to identify the strengths, challenges and make recommendations for improvement.

#### Strengths:

- Respondents indicated that there were three primary strengths of the initiative:
  - the opportunity for greater social interaction and enhanced confidence;
  - skills to socialize with a diverse group of people regardless of ability;
  - students with exceptionalities are included in the classroom resulting in their improved self-esteem and confidence building.
- The attempt to build capacity and implementation of a variety of teaching practices such as differentiated instruction and co-teaching.

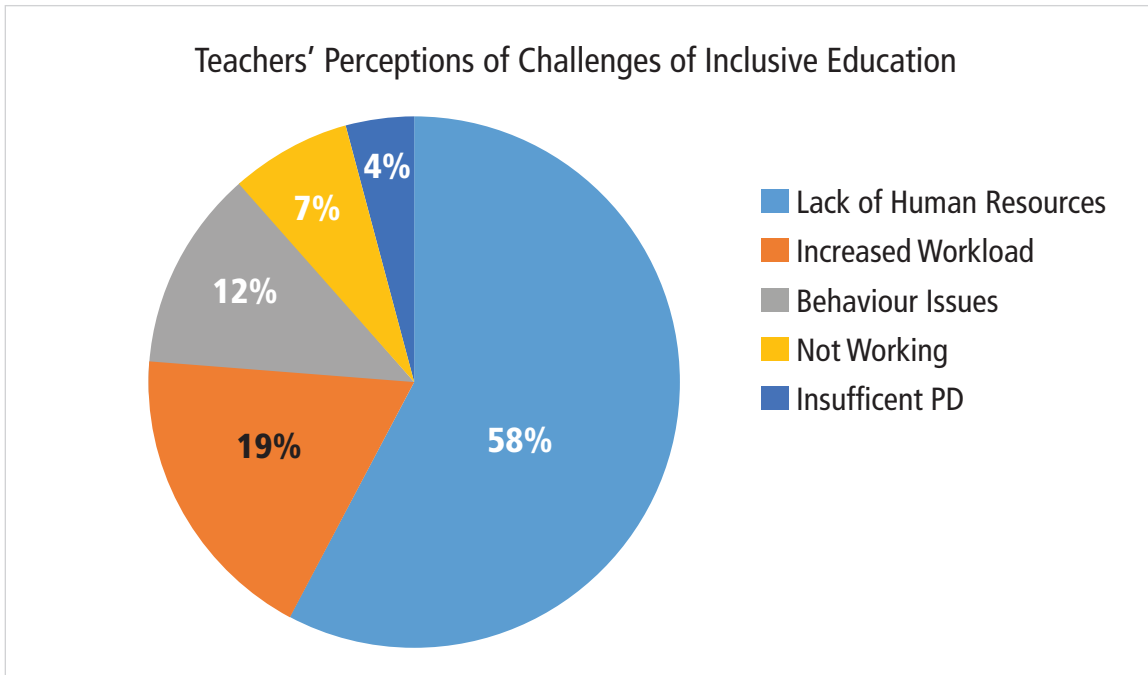


Inclusive Education Survey 2016

#### Challenges:

Respondents identified a number of challenges with the current delivery of inclusive education:

- The primary challenge of the initiative is its resourcing. A resource was identified as both a human resource (classroom teachers, instructional resource teachers, school counsellors and student assistants) and technological resources (alternate format materials and assistive technology);
- Increased workload and difficulty with completing daily work;
- Increased behavioural problems in the classroom;
- The overall implementation of the Inclusive Education Model and limited professional learning for the initiative.

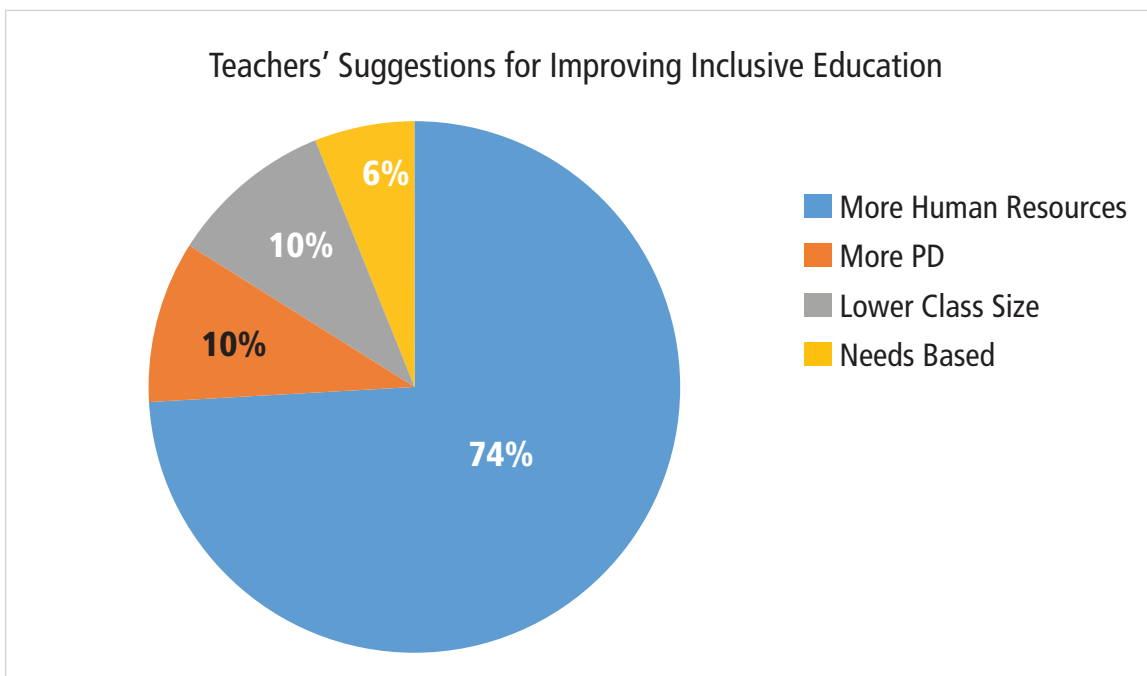


Inclusive Education Survey 2016

### Suggestions:

As part of the Inclusive Education Initiative Survey, teachers were given the opportunity to make suggestions on how to improve the model:

- Increase the resourcing associated with the Inclusive Education Initiative, including increases in allocations for instructional resource teachers (IRTs), school counsellors, District supports and student assistants;
- Increase professional learning for teachers and administrators;
- Lower class sizes; and
- Utilize a truly needs-based model rather than budget based.



Inclusive Education Survey 2016

## **B) Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador**

During the Fall of 2015, the NLTA, the Faculty of Education (MUN) and the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC) formed the Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Panel travelled the province listening to presentations from teachers, parents and community groups. The Panel also received online and written submissions, and a final report based upon the submissions was written by Dr. Bruce Sheppard, Professor, Faculty of Education, Memorial University, and Dr. Kirk Anderson, Dean, Faculty of Education, Memorial University. Some examples of the comments made by teachers, and included in the report, are as follows:

*I know of several other IRTs who are struggling with similar issues, and anxiety and stress is growing among our school community. The inclusive model and delivery of accommodations and services to students needs to be student-centered and teachers' ability to follow through with...inclusive practices need to be considered. Many of our students are falling through the cracks and not getting their needs met as IRTs and classroom teachers are strapped with being able to meet everyone's needs at the same time.*

*In a class with students on regular, modified and alternate programming, no matter how much planning a teacher does, it is IMPOSSIBLE for the needs of all of these students to be met adequately.*

*If I were a lawyer and went to court day after day and never won a case, what would your advice to me be? You'd tell me, "I'm in the wrong profession!" And that's how I feel...here! I keep killing myself trying to help these kids, but I can't get them enough to teach them anything! How sad is that! I've also had parents that I know... tell me they are putting their kids in [French] Immersion because they hear too many negative comments about needs in the regular classroom, and they know there won't be as many in French! This is terrible!...There are a lot of stressors in my job; however, the biggest...is the level of stress within the school with parents and teachers because of the lack of resources to support inclusion and special education.*

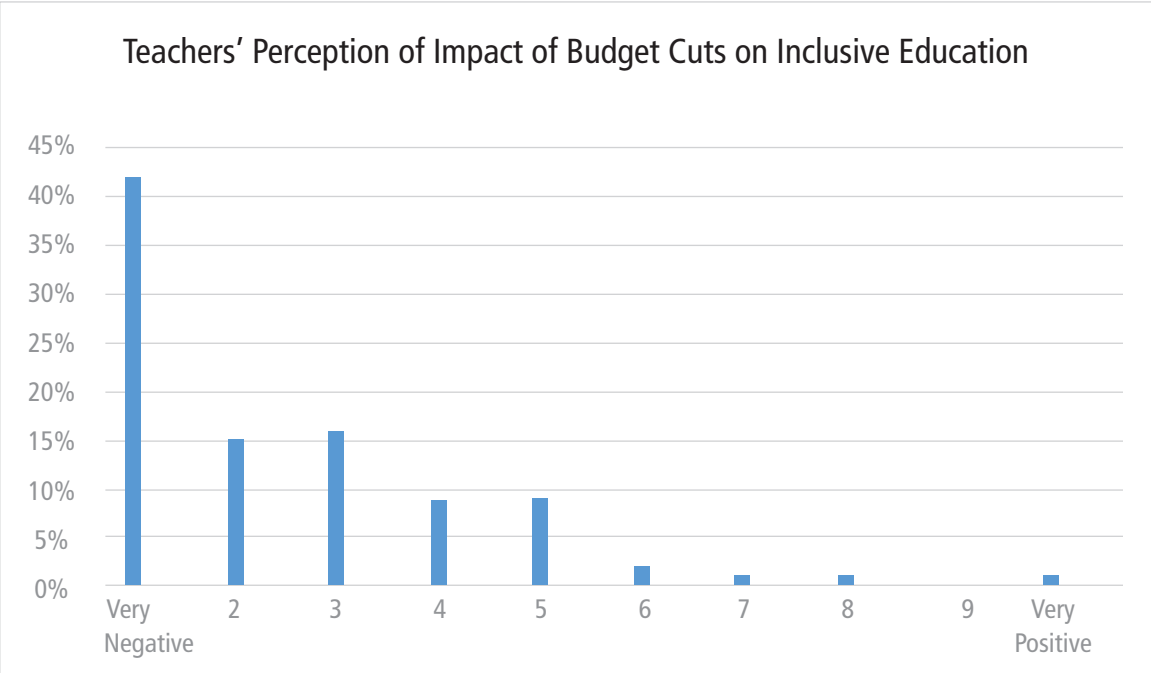
*There are many wonderful things happening in our schools, but inclusion is not one of them. Children with very high needs are being left in the classroom and allowed to disrupt the education of all the other students in the class. The idea of inclusion would be wonderful if the required [number of] teachers and supports were in place.*

## **C) NLTA Membership Survey**

In May 2016, the NLTA commissioned MQO Research to conduct a survey of teachers regarding the 2016 Provincial Budget which saw class sizes increased, grades combined and the implementation of full-day Kindergarten. Interestingly, 74% of teachers surveyed indicated that they felt these budget cuts would have a negative impact on the Inclusive Education Model and 66% felt that the cuts would negatively impact their ability to do their job as it related to inclusive education.

The NLTA also commissioned MQO Research to conduct a follow-up survey of teachers in November 2016 to gauge practitioners' reaction to the realities of the impacts of 2016 budget cuts to the education system. Ninety-six percent of respondents reported either a somewhat or significant negative impact on the education system. Ninety-two percent of respondents indicated that their day-to-day work had been somewhat or significantly impacted by the budget cuts to education. Interestingly, no respondents reported a positive impact of the Budget on their day-to-day work.

When asked to rate the impact of budgetary cuts on the Inclusive Education Initiative, using a scale of 1-10 with 1 being very negative and 10 being very positive, teachers responded overwhelmingly that the impact had been negative.



MQO Teacher Survey, November 2016

Over 1100 teachers took the time to provide additional comments to MQO Research regarding the concerns with inclusive education in the classroom. The following are some samples of teacher comments:

*Inclusion is only meaningful if it is meaningful to the individual child; just because it looks good on paper does not make it a meaningful experience for that child.*

*My students are not receiving any IRT support. Students are being exposed to disruptions caused by students who are just frustrated because they are not getting individual support and pull-out.*

*Students are complaining that they are not receiving the IRT support they are supposed to get or need.*

*The minimal increase in SA and IRT allocation for the needs we have is a crime to the children we are supposed to be servicing; we DO NOT have enough. Students who require one-on-one support are not getting it. Students are being piggy-backed off each other because of a lack of SA and/or IRT HUMAN resources.*

*Learning environment after learning environment in our school is being sabotaged (constant shouting out, rolling around on the floor, taping chairs to chairs, kicking, biting, etc.) by children who are under resourced in their programming needs; the others do not deserve such a learning environment, nor do the teachers.*

*There are so many overwhelming medically-driven, emotional, behavioural and psychological needs in my students that trying to address the needs of students with*



*academic needs in reading, writing and math is nearly impossible to even begin to meet these needs.*

*Two pervasive needs students I have are now in a class of 28. Noise greatly affects these children with high sensitivities. But they are left there. Students are being covered by IRT teachers because there is not enough student assistant time. Because of this, during recess and lunch time, students with high needs are being taken out of their classrooms and put in a vacant sensory room or classroom together to be supervised. These students are being excluded from their peers during a time where they should be socializing. Specifically, a Grade 4 student is being taken to Kindergarten during break times because there are not enough student assistants/ time to cover each student off in their own classroom.*

*Kindergarten students with no diagnoses are screaming, throwing chairs, hitting, slamming doors, running, punching and kicking teachers and students, spitting, breaking school property, destroying items in the classroom for other four- and five-year-olds to witness.*

*A student in my class with high needs and low-level functioning is in the regular classroom all day without much extra intervention. He interrupts and distracts the other students. I find it extremely difficult to teach all students to the best of my ability because I am constantly redirecting his behaviour.*

*A student who does fine in math but needs just a little help often does not get the help s/he needs. My time is spent running between my student with autism, my three students with ADHD and my two students with diagnosed learning disabilities... It breaks my heart that I don't always get a chance to answer their questions.*

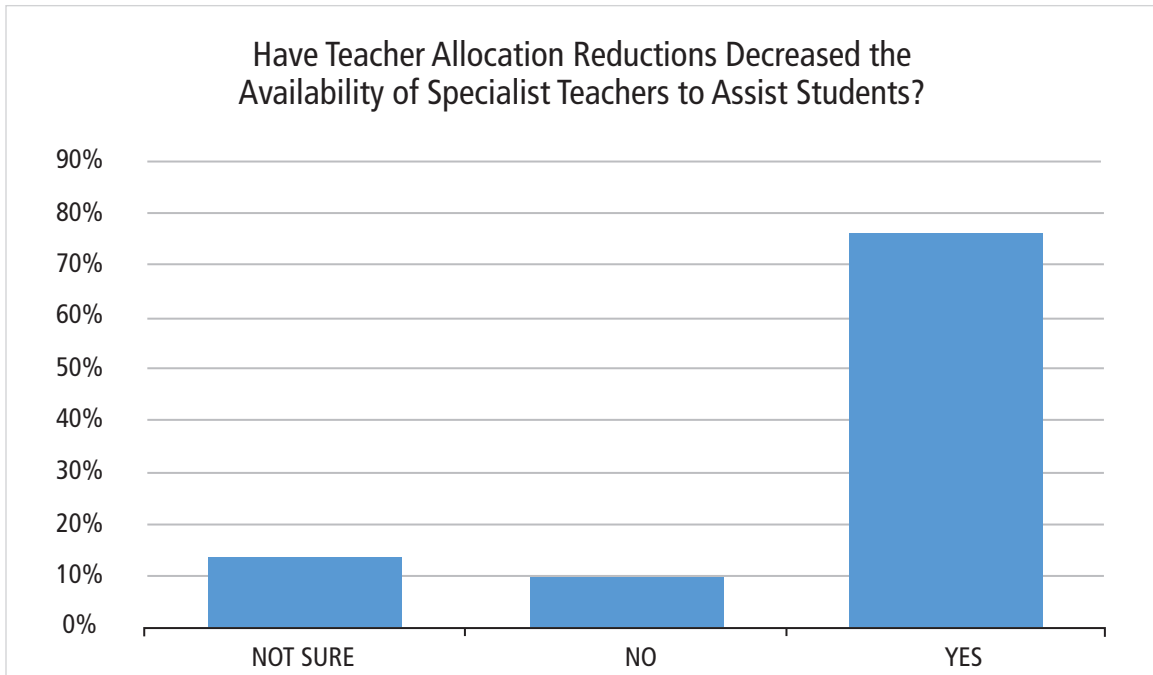
*Adding more students with more needs to an already increased class size means less students with or without recognized exceptionalities get less individual attention.*

*As an instructional resource teacher, I am extremely pressured and discouraged by the lack of resources to help my students. As a classroom teacher, I cannot give my students what they need due to the amount of issues in my classes.*

*You cannot be inclusive if you do not have support for the students with needs.*

#### **D) Impact of Cuts to Allocations Survey**

In January 2016, the NLTA surveyed teachers to specifically gauge the impact allocation cuts in the 2015 Provincial Budget had on programming at the school level. When asked how the reductions in teacher allocations affected the availability of specialist teachers to assist students and teachers, 76% of respondents indicated that the time available to assist students had decreased.



NLTA Impact of Cuts to Allocations Survey, January 2016

## Parent and Community Perspective

### A) Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador

The Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador also heard from parents, community groups and organizations. Some of the comments reported by the Panel from parents include:

*Inclusive policies are important and progressive as long as supports are in place to do so. However, cutting teacher supports while upholding inclusive policies does not work. Everyone loses in this situation!*

*Every single autism expert will tell you that consistency, predictability and scheduling are the three most important aspects in ensuring that a child on the spectrum is able to function. Maintaining [the same student assistant]... is not a preference; it is a NEED! The student assistant that is assigned to a child in the school can change daily. A student can be under the care of several student assistants within the same day, without notice. This, quite simply, is not good enough!*

*While instructional resource teachers and student assistants are assigned to schools to assist those students with exceptionalities, the reality is that the needs are far greater than the allocations provided ... as statistics show about one in five students is experiencing mental health challenges.*

*Insufficient time allocations for student assistants and IRTs, limited consultation between parents and teachers and limited collaboration between health and education result in inconsistency in approaches and inefficient use of time and resources for both departments.*

*Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province in Canada without occupational therapists in schools. With the cases of diagnosed autism on the rise in our province, this should not be the case considering the role that occupational therapists play*

*in the life of a child with autism, especially if that child, like many children with autism, has sensory issues.*

Twenty-one community groups and agencies raised concerns regarding the Inclusive Education Initiative as it is currently structured. Those agencies included, the Autism Society, the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association – Newfoundland Chapter (CHHA-NL), the Ability Employment Organization, the Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador (LDANL) and Thrive-Community Youth Network.

The Autism Society noted in its submission:

*Our delivery model is not based on need; instead, it's based on budgets that are too low... Working together with government, we must create a "provincial strategy," an action plan with urgency, and dedicate resources to implementing real solutions that help improve student and family lives and give an opportunity for learning, happiness, enjoyment, strong, lasting relationships, meaningful employment and careers. This has to be a provincial priority. The inclusive classroom is a wonderful concept—not so much in practice. It's not working for many students.*

The Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador stressed the importance of the 2012 Supreme Court ruling (Moore v. British Columbia 2012) that:

*Adequate special education [in the public education system] ... is not a dispensable luxury. For those with severe learning disabilities, it is the ramp that provides access to the statutory commitment to education made to all children.*

This theme was further echoed by the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA-NL) which indicated that its staff and volunteers interact often with teachers and specialists and have gained an appreciation for the current school system, the challenges it has, what is and is not working and what could be better for all students, not just those with hearing loss. CHHA-NL reported:

*It needs to be emphasized that all students, and in particular those with disabilities, are entitled to fully participate in, and to receive the best possible education regardless of school attended, and therefore, should have whatever resources are needed to be successful. However, it appears that such isn't always the case, despite the claims of some education officials and politicians to the contrary.*

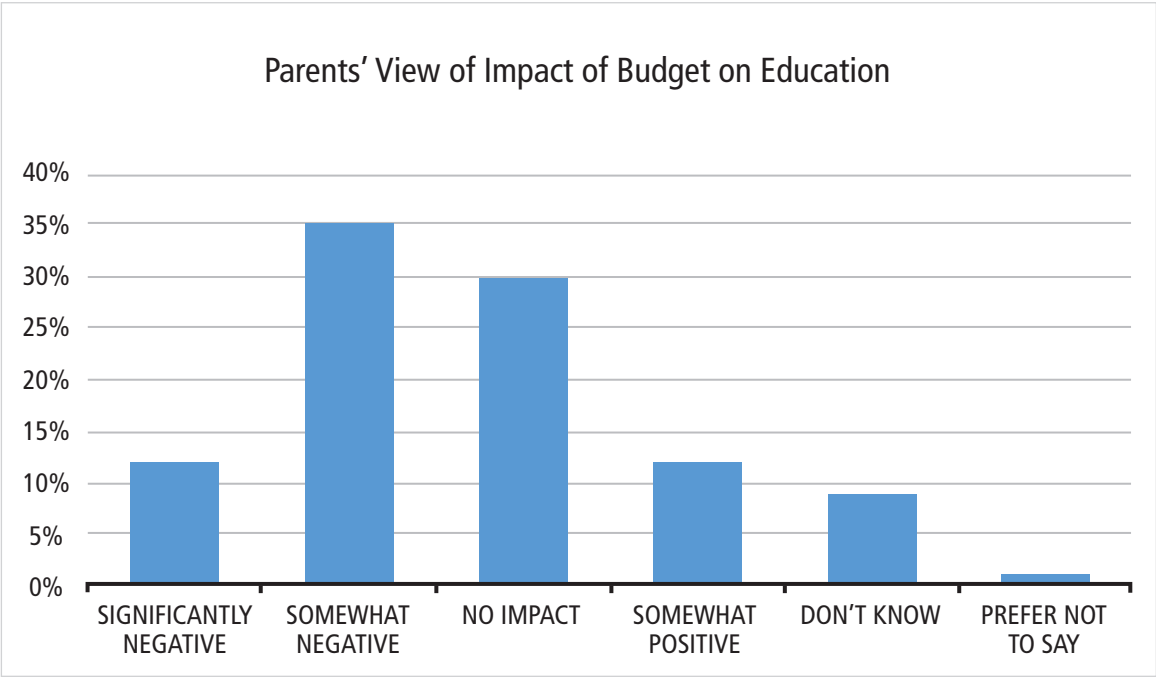
The Thrive-Community Youth Network noted in its submission to the Panel that:

*Newfoundland and Labrador is one of the few jurisdictions in Canada that lacks an alternative school for youth who are not finding success in our mainstream public schools.*

## **B) NLTA Public Opinion Surveys**

As was indicated above, the NLTA commissioned in 2016 a MQO Research project. This project also included a survey of the general public regarding the 2016 Provincial Budget which saw class sizes increased, grades combined and the implementation of full-day Kindergarten. Sixty-seven percent of respondents and 78% of parents surveyed felt that the 2016 Provincial Budget would result in a reduction of supports for the Inclusive Education Initiative. Seventy-five percent of parents surveyed also felt that the reductions in supports announced in the Provincial Budget would have a significantly negative impact on education.

MQO Research also conducted a follow-up survey of parents in November 2016 to gauge parental reaction to the realities of the impacts of 2016 budget cuts to the education system. Fifty-seven percent of parents with students in the public education system reported either a somewhat or significantly negative impact on the education system. Forty-seven percent of those surveyed indicated that their own children had been somewhat or significantly impacted by the 2016 Budget.



MQO Survey Results, November 2016

Some examples of the comments provided by parents to MQO Research are:

*There are too many students in each class, and this affects the overall usability of the teacher's ability to teach and provide one-on-one attention to the children who are in need of extra help.*

*Students who are struggling with particular subjects are being left behind.*

*Children with increased needs but not "diagnosed" are falling through the cracks more than ever! Supports not in place to support inclusion as it should be implemented, ends up segregating children with needs even more than before! I would like a headcount on the number of children with reduced days, parents agreeing to this without being fully informed of their rights to say NO and children being sent home on a daily basis because supports are not in schools.*

*My son has more students in his class; he struggles with ADHD, and his grades have dropped because of all the distractions and less teacher help.*

*I agree with the Inclusive Education Initiative, but most schools do not have enough teacher assistants.*

*Personally not impacted but hear heartbreaking stories daily of families being called to come collect their child from school because of behaviour issues. The specialized support not present, not criticizing teachers, but they are not trained and have no support.*

*Some students who have disabilities can be disruptive to the whole class and sometimes are excused for misbehaving.*

*Kids with needs are taking away teaching resources of others in class as they are not supported by the right people. Teachers are expected to do the job of occupational therapists and speech therapists with kids with autism, and they don't know where to start. Inclusion is not currently working.*

*Significant negative impact on students in the classroom with those requiring additional attention due to the time required from the teaching unit to deal with learning and behavioural issues of students with special needs.*

*There are students in classrooms who should not be there because they cannot handle it, and they are in regular classroom setting all day, oftentimes with no support other than their classroom teacher. My son constantly complains about the treatment he and others in class receive from an autistic boy in his class. There is no one in the class to help this child adapt!*

*Inclusion does not work for all students; lack of resources, properly trained staff to deal with many different needs can impact a student with major negative consequences. Teachers need to be able to teach to the child's needs, and in my opinion the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development needs to broaden their resources and methods.*

## **Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS)**

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the classroom environment does impact teacher effectiveness. In 2013, the OECD conducted the *Teaching and Learning International Survey* (TALIS). This international survey of teachers, including teachers in Canada, identified class composition as an important variable that impacts teacher effectiveness.

The OECD found:

*Certain classroom characteristics can make a teacher's work more challenging. Teaching classes in which a large proportion of students have different achievement levels, special needs or behavioural problems can affect a teacher's self-efficacy and job satisfaction, especially if the teacher is not properly prepared or supported.*

According to the research model used by the OECD, a classroom was considered to be challenging if: **“more than 10% of students in class are low achievers or more than 10% of students have behaviour problems.”**

These findings are significant if one accepts that, as professionals, teachers are in the best position to determine their own effectiveness. Teachers reporting how class composition, without adequate supports, impacts their effectiveness are providing valuable insight into the negative impact a poorly resourced Inclusive Education Model is affecting their ability to support student learning. These findings of the OECD further confirm the data provided by teachers in the 2016 Inclusive Education Initiative Survey and the findings of the Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador.

What makes this information all the more alarming is that, not only is the quality of education being negatively impacted by an inadequately funded Inclusive Education Model, but evidence is now found that links a stressful classroom environment to teacher and student stress.



Dr. Eva Oberle and Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl at the University of British Columbia found a link between the cortisol levels of over 400 elementary students and the incidence of teacher burnout and exhaustion. According to the report:

*As expected, we found that after adjusting for differences in cortisol levels due to age, gender, and time of awaking, higher morning cortisol levels in students could be significantly predicted from higher burnout levels in classroom teachers. In fact, before considering the predictive role of teacher burnout in the present sample, we found an initial 10% of variability in morning cortisol levels between classrooms. Thus, morning cortisol levels not only significantly differed among individual students, but could also be predicted from the particular classroom where lessons took place. The significant differences in cortisol levels due to the classroom setting provided strong rationale for identifying classroom-indicators to predict students' cortisol levels. We found that classroom-specific variability was significantly reduced by more than 50% from 10% to 4.6% when considering the role of teacher burnout in relation to students' morning cortisol levels. This finding is new and important. It extends the field of school-based experiences and cortisol activity as an indicator of stress regulation in students and links teachers' stressful occupational experiences to students' biological stress levels.*

*(Stress contagion in the classroom? The link between classroom teacher burnout and morning cortisol in elementary school students, April 2016)*

One of the causes for the stressful classroom environment noted by the study was classroom environments where there are inadequate supports for teachers.

When one considers the increase in teachers receiving long-term disability for mental/emotional diagnosis and the increasing incidence of student mental health issues, it would appear that the underfunded Inclusive Education Model is not only negatively impacting the quality of student education, it might also be negatively impacting the health of teachers and students.

## **Supreme Court of Canada: Jeffrey Moore (Case 2012)**

Jeffrey Moore was a student of the North Vancouver School District. He was diagnosed with a severe learning disability and required intensive remediation to learn to read. For the first couple of years of his education, he did indeed receive a range of supports. However, due to funding cuts by the Province, Jeffrey was advised by school officials that the intensive remediation he required could not be provided by the school. Jeffrey's parents elected to enroll their son, at their own expense, in private school where the remedial supports could be offered. The Moore family filed a complaint with the Human Rights Commission arguing that Jeffrey had a right to educational accommodations. The case eventually found its way to the Supreme Court of Canada.

On November 9, 2012, the Supreme Court of Canada handed down a landmark decision on disability rights. According to the Court, students with disabilities are entitled to receive the accommodation measures they need to access and benefit from the service of public education. The Court went on to further explain that adequate special education is not "a dispensable luxury," but a "ramp that provides access to the statutory commitment to education made to all children in British Columbia."

The key question put before the Court was whether accommodations are special education or general education? According to the Court, they are general education. Special education is the means by which

students like Jeffrey get meaningful access to general education available to all students. Students with learning disabilities need to be accommodated so that they can benefit from educational services. It is not an extra service, but rather what is required for some students to benefit equally from the education system. The Court went on to indicate that the accommodations must be adequate to ensure meaningful access.

Currently in this province, the accommodations for students with special needs are addressed through what is called the “needs-based” model. Many parents and even experienced educators are confused by this description, since it implies that as needs arise, services will be provided. This, however, is not the case; what the “needs-based” model expects is that as new needs arise in a school, the allocations of supports to the school be re-deployed on a “needs basis.” This means that as new needs arise in a school, a review of how supports are deployed is conducted and a decision is made to re-deploy supports to address the greatest needs. As this is a zero sum budget exercise, it means that some students who were identified as needing supports lose them so that other students whose needs are assessed as being greater receive the supports.

It is important to note that the Supreme Court categorically stated in the Moore case that it was inappropriate to only compare the needs of special needs students with other special needs students. In such a scenario Government would be free to cut programs for all persons with disabilities without being held accountable and “risks perpetuating the very disadvantage and exclusion from mainstream society the [human rights] Act is intended to remedy.”

When one considers Government’s current “needs-based” model for addressing the needs of students with exceptionalities in light of the Jeffrey Moore case and the Supreme Court ruling, it seems the Provincial Government is not living up to its human rights obligation to provide to students the required accommodations they need to fully participate in the public education system, leaving the NLTA to question how many Jeffrey Moores we have in this province.

## **Teacher-Student Safety**

In December 2015, in light of a number of incidents in which teachers were placed on Worker’s Compensation and long-term disability as a result of violence they experienced in the classroom by students, the NLTA began tracking these incidents. The disclosure to the NLTA by teachers of these incidents is voluntary, and it is felt that at this time incidents are underreported. In just over one year the NLTA has received 56 reports of violence against teachers by students.

The apparent increase in school violence obviously raises concerns about student and teacher safety and what measures are needed to ensure the learning environment is safe for everyone. It also raises concerns about what children are witnessing in school. The majority of incidents reported by teachers are occurring in the primary/elementary setting.

# Professional Development/ Professional Learning

## Introduction

In the early 90s, respected educational scholars such as Michael Fullan and Thomas Guskey started to offer growing evidence of the link between professional development and improvement in student learning. In 2000, the following statement was made by the Atlantic Canada Ministries of Education and Teacher Organizations: “The continual renewal of knowledge and expertise is central to the concept of professionalism.”

In this section of our submission we will address *professional learning* and its importance in a healthy education system which achieves its maximum potential. That achievement, of course, is measured ultimately by the degree to which students succeed. In this segment of the document we will link effective professional development/professional learning to student learning and make recommendations based on research and proven practice which we feel could improve the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## Defining Professional Learning

Over time the definition of professional learning has evolved. As part of that evolution, it is notable that currently, the phrase “professional development” is being replaced by “professional learning.” However, terminology aside, there are key ideas about the concept which have been consistent over many decades.

In our own region, in the late 90s, the teacher organizations of the Atlantic Provinces partnered with the Ministries of Education and after several meetings accepted the following definition that *professional development is the continual renewal of personal knowledge and expertise that leads to improved professional competence in support of student learning*. This definition was supported by a set of belief statements which spoke to the underlying philosophy, the structures and resources necessary, all founded on the basic principle that healthy organizations purposefully provide for self-renewal.

This particular definition was not revolutionary and articulated what all stakeholders felt to be fundamentally true, but it was significant because of the partnership and the process from which it evolved: a collaboration which went beyond boundaries and jurisdictional mandates.

This definition and set of beliefs became part of the recommendations to the Ministerial Panel’s Report on Educational Delivery in the Classroom, (2000) titled *Supporting Learning*. It was the genesis for a recommendation of the Professional Development Alliance (PDA), established in 2002, arguably the most effective model the province has ever had for the design and delivery of professional development. This will be further discussed later in this section and forms the basis of one of our key recommendations.

As stated earlier, definitions evolve as systems evolve. The amalgamation of school districts, the evolution of technology, the implementation of the School Development Model, and most recently, *Learning to Succeed*, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s vision for professional learning, all have impacted the way we define and the way we experience professional learning. System change inevitably brings revisionist thinking; however, there are some widely-accepted concepts that we believe will stand the test of time.

Learning Forward, one of the world’s foremost leaders in professional learning, just last year conducted a study titled *The State of Educators’ Professional Learning in Canada* (2016). The study began with an



extensive review of the research literature that resulted in the identification of three key components and ten features of effective professional learning (see Table 1).

### THE STATE OF EDUCATORS’ PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN CANADA

**Table 1:**  
Features of Professional Learning and Key Findings from *The State of Educators’ Professional Learning in Canada* study

Key Components and Features of Effective Professional Learning Identified in Review of Research Literature		Key Findings from Study of Educators’ Professional Learning in Canada
<b>Quality Content</b>	Evidence-informed	Evidence, inquiry, and professional judgement are informing professional learning policies and practices
	Subject-specific and pedagogical content knowledge	The priority area identified by teachers for developing their knowledge and practices is how to support diverse learners’ needs
	A focus on student outcomes	A focus on a broad range of students’ and professionals’ learning outcomes is important
	A balance of teacher voice and system coherence	The appropriate balance of system-directed and self-directed professional development for teachers is complex and contested
<b>Learning Design and Implementation</b>	Active and variable learning	There is no “one-size-fits-all” approach to professional learning; teachers are engaging in multiple opportunities for professional learning and inquiry with differentiation for their professional needs
	Collaborative learning experiences	Collaborative learning experiences are highly valued and prevalent within and across schools and wider professional networks
	Job-embedded learning	Teachers value professional learning that is relevant and practical for their work; “job-embedded” should not mean school-based exclusively as opportunities to engage with external colleagues and learning opportunities matter also
<b>Support and Sustainability</b>	Ongoing in duration	Time for sustained, cumulative professional learning integrated within educators’ work lives requires attention
	Resources	Inequitable variations in access to funding for teachers’ self-selected professional development are problematic
	Supportive and engaged leadership	System and school leaders have important roles in supporting professional learning for teachers and for themselves

You can find many elements of this model in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s own definition offered in the document, *Learning to Succeed –Vision for Professional Learning*. In this document it clearly states that “Teacher professional learning in Newfoundland has moved from a one-size-fits-all” model to one where teacher learning is guided by three principles which state that professional learning:

- occurs in collaborative reflective communities where:
  - a shared vision, mission and goals create high expectations for all;
  - collective responsibility is developed through collaboration and feedback;
  - individual responsibility is developed through data analysis, inquiry and reflection.
- is guided by student and teacher learning needs where:
  - data is examined to determine areas of need for students and teachers;
  - authentic learning experiences are designed to address needs;
  - new strategies are used and reflected upon to determine impact on student learning.
- is designed to foster change in practice where:
  - a differentiated learning experience is available to teachers through application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation;
  - a variety of settings offer authentic opportunities for active engagement and collaborative learning;
  - sustained learning and reflection is the norm.

Rather than try to create a new definition, we submit that core elements of all of these must be present for effective professional learning. We will add to this definition a discussion on *the learners*, those for whom the professional learning is intended, *what* is to be learned and *the modes of delivery*, i.e., how these learners will experience their learning.

## **Context**

Statistics for 2015-16 reported that at that time we had 262 schools, 5,314 teachers and 66,800 students. That would not have changed significantly for this year. We have two school districts – the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) and the Conseil scolaire francophone provincial (CSFP), one Faculty of Education at Memorial University, one teacher organization – the NLTA, and one Ministry of Government with responsibility for education. All of these agencies are mentioned because they all have a role in professional learning in the province – as teachers, district staff, members of the NLTA team, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development personnel or members of the Faculty of Education – one could be the learner, the designer or the facilitator of the professional learning experience.

## **The Context of Professional Learning: What, How and for Whom**

In this submission, when we reference professional learning, the learners to whom we refer primarily are teachers, but also include professional personnel at school districts, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the NLTA. We also recognize that students in the Faculty of Education engage in professional learning through the internship component of their program.

## **Learning Designs**

Cognitive psychologists, neuroscientists and educators have long studied how learning occurs. Their theories, research and models of human learning, particularly adult learning, shape the underlying framework and assumptions used to plan and design professional learning. While multiple designs exist, many have common features: active engagement, modeling, reflection, metacognition, application, feedback, ongoing support and formative and summative assessment that support change in knowledge, skills, dispositions and practice (statement adapted from Learning Forward: Learning Designs).

In this province, *how* professional learning has occurred in the past and into the present has taken various forms. Aside from an individual's personal initiative, learning which has been initiated and supported to some extent by the system includes such things as stand-alone or "series" inservice and workshop sessions (such as those offered by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for new curriculum), conferences (by provincial, national or international groups), institutes (such as the leadership development institutes offered by the NLESD), study groups, job-alike problem-solving cohorts (such as Leadership at Work), grade or subject level groups meeting (special interest councils, for example) and professional learning communities (some school based, others in district or other personnel groups). There are also various ways in which this learning can occur – in person, through mediating technologies or some combination of both.

The NLTA supported the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's School Development process when it was first introduced in 2004 and assisted with its implementation. Part of that model, consistent with the PD Alliance that preceded it, was a recognition that while the teacher was at the center of the model and should have some autonomy for his/her own learning, there were also school-based and systems needs which had to be considered.

We fully agree that the "system" needs to learn. For example, when programs are first implemented, decisions on how to go forward should be based on the learning of those individuals conducting

the pilot experiment and those charged with oversight of the pilot. An example of this might be the phase in of the Inclusion Model. Was there a plan in place to monitor what happened in classrooms and schools from all points of view – administration, resourcing, etc.? Was there a plan for those who would advise decision makers to become fully versed in what the model should look like so that they could properly evaluate its first implementation efforts and make appropriate recommendations for improvements or adjustments going forward? The “system’s” learning in this case would clearly direct some of the individual learning plans of Department of Education and Early Childhood Development personnel and pilot teachers.

To illustrate “school-based needs,” a most obvious example is the large investment of the Districts, funded by Government, to equip schools with TeamBoards or SMARTBoards. Equipment is useless unless it is used. Therefore, for the school to take full advantage of this new resource for the students’ benefit, teachers needed to be trained in its use. Teacher learning goals were driven, in this case, by the school’s need.

Finally, we come to the teacher needs. The teacher needs must take into account the overall intent to positively impact student achievement and must also consider the school and district needs. In the PD Alliance and later the School Development models, the teacher then writes his/her personal Professional Growth Plan identifying areas where he/she could fill gaps in knowledge, skills or dispositions which would result in better instruction.

## **Challenges**

While we start with definitions, and agreed-upon statements of practice, perhaps the greatest challenge facing all of us is moving from the concept to its practical application. In this section of the report we will enumerate a number of challenges which cause us to fall short of the vision whether that is the vision of the Professional Development Alliance, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development’s *Learning to Succeed* or Learning Forward’s *Standards of Professional Learning*.

### ***Jurisdictional Roles***

While we might all support the basic principle that ultimately what we do is in support of student learning, the various groups mentioned above each see our role as distinct and sometimes even competing. The Faculty of Education in its pre-service programs is concerned with professional learning in the context of internship and mentoring of its students by practicing teachers. The Curriculum Division of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is concerned primarily with ensuring that teachers know and can effectively teach the curriculum. District personnel are concerned with all of that and a myriad of other things which they may see as necessary for not only the academic outcomes of students, but the efficient and safe operation of schools. (Hence, the expectation for teachers to learn about Occupational Health and Safety as well as the implementation of a new curriculum.) As for the NLTA, in support of teachers, the organization tries to stay abreast of emerging needs such as the new research on how the brain learns or dealing with social media while at the same time maintaining professional ethics and personal protection of our members.

Getting all of these groups to come together and recognize the legitimacy of each mandate, the contribution each can make to the good of the whole and establish priorities, is no mean feat – but with great challenge comes great opportunity. Economic realities cannot be ignored. Rather than each of us retreating and making a case for our own piece of a shrinking pie, is it not time to put our ingredients on the counter and try to create a new recipe?

### ***Mindsets and Frameworks***

By a straight forward per capita comparison to most educational jurisdictions, in Canada and elsewhere, we are small. The easy conclusion is that with these few numbers it should be easy to: educate professionals on new philosophies; equip people with new skills; train those who need it on new technologies; or teach individuals new methods of instruction. However, there are other factors which come into play – one could argue that the advantage of small numbers is more than offset by the disadvantage of our large geography. This creates issues of equity of access; it compromises the learning experience for some, and it isolates all of us to some degree.

### **The question becomes, how do we do best by our students whether they are in St. Lunaire or St. John's?**

We do best by ensuring that our teachers and other professional staff, whether they work in classrooms, office or conference rooms and whether they be in Plate Cove or Portugal Cove, all have access to quality professional learning as defined earlier. These are not new realities. It has always been this way. We need to find new ways of looking at old problems. We have one of the most educated workforces in Canada; we come from a culture of creativity. What we are missing is the true spirit of collaboration.

### ***System, School and Teacher Needs***

We agree with Learning Forward's statement that the purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the knowledge, skills, practices and dispositions they need to help students perform at higher levels. We also note their focus on the importance of educators taking an active role in their continuous development.

There was reference earlier to a model based on system, school and teacher needs. We still believe that this is a good basis for determining professional learning needs. However, we have learned from experience to add provisos to protect teacher autonomy which has been eroded over time in favour of system and school needs. School Development Plans are driven by system (School Districts) priorities and that plan drives the Teacher Professional Growth Plan.

So, let us take for example a scenario where the District priorities are literacy and numeracy, and the school plan is to raise test scores in math. In this case, there is little or no support for the teacher who writes in his/her personal Professional Growth Plan that s/he wishes to mediate some of the issues s/he is facing with students and parents by doing some learning in the area of conflict resolution. It is only when all other needs are met that the teacher gets to determine what s/he has identified as a learning goal. Too often there are no longer resources (release time or financial support) or even the acceptance of this as a legitimate learning goal.

This is not in any way meant to downplay the goals established by the District or the school, but we have had teachers who have graduate degrees in a subject area, sat on committees to help design courses or been involved in pilots and who are still required to attend the introductory inservice for the course. We need to recognize the professional judgement of teachers to, at the very least, have a say in their own professional learning. We are encouraged by the fact that there seems to be a growing understanding of this concern, and we hope to eventually reach a point where it is accepted that teachers can assess their own learning needs. Ultimately, the goal would be to customize professional learning to teacher needs.

### ***Compromise***

Each of the various educational groups mentioned has, over time, taken initiatives which in some ways should be applauded and in other ways can be questioned – mainly for the lack of consultation and

coordination with other groups. One such example was the large investment in the notion of Professional Learning Communities or PLCs. To argue against professional learning communities would seem ludicrous, and done properly there would be little to critique.

By definition, “Professional Learning within communities requires continuous improvement, promotes collective responsibility and supports alignment of individual, team, school and school system goals. Learning communities convene regularly and frequently *during the workday* to engage in collaborative professional learning to strengthen their practice and increase student results. Learning community members are accountable to one another to achieve the shared goals of the school and school system and work in transparent, authentic settings that support their improvement.”

The problem is that this initiative, like many others, was brought in without adequate resources, and some of the foundational components were so compromised that in many (perhaps even most) cases, PLCs failed. To “convene regularly” some staffs were told they had to meet after school on a given day each week; there was little or no time given during the workday, and the settings were anything but authentically supportive of learning.

The regrettable lesson learned is that while the idea was laudable, it was not thoroughly analyzed to budget the time and money it would cost to train leaders and to then allow for the PLC groups to work effectively in their workplace environments. Or, maybe such an analysis was completed and it was found that it could not be done as it was meant to be – but with changes here, compromises there and tweaking somewhere else, then we could try to *make it work*. We are not promoting a packaged one-size-fits-all approach, and we support that things need to be adapted to fit context; however, when the fundamentals are missing, it is better to not do something rather than to do it so poorly that a good idea (like PLCs) goes bad.

### **Resources**

Effective professional learning requires human, fiscal, material, technological and time resources. It goes without saying that the availability and allocation (or the lack of availability and allocation) of resources for professional learning affects its quality and the impact it can have. In the 2016 provincial budget funding for discretionary professional learning for teachers was cut by 22%.

Time allocated for professional learning is a significant investment. We recognize that following the models above, the “time” for learning can be any time! If we honour the importance of metacognition and reflection, then the time spent in class is critical time for teacher learning. If we look at bringing cohorts of teachers together, then they are likely out of the school environment and there are multitudes of examples of people voluntarily meeting in learning environments outside the school day and the school year.

However, we must also make time for teacher learning during the school day and during the school year. In *Professional Learning in the Learning Profession*, Linda Darling-Hammond and colleagues document what is happening in many countries in Asia and Europe where “one of the key structural supports for teachers engaging in professional learning is the allocation of time in the work day and week to participate in such activities.” And, we contend, that time cannot all be spent on data analysis to see where the learning needs may be – but also on time to learn.

In this province, while there are articles in the collective agreement which provide for school closures or district professional learning days, we do not seem to have fully explored the options for using these days and are still mired in the complexities and challenges of geography and finances. There are also issues of trust and professionalism. It is time, once and for all, to start to accept the things we cannot change – but also to change the things we can! We believe that if there was a will to do so we could design a better



Professional Learning Plan, even within the current context. We need to expand the opportunities for learning. The provision of substitute days so that individual teachers can avail of learning opportunities outside the “close-out” model needs to be reconsidered.

Technology is another resource which we are fortunate to be able to access here in this province, with the promise of greater equity of access on the horizon. It allows us to avail of just-in-time learning resources produced in a local (NL) context and, further, to be able to participate in local or global communities or networks and expand opportunities for job-embedded professional learning. However, we cannot assume that this can replace the need for other types of learning.

Not to be overlooked and implicit in all of the above, is the financing of professional learning initiatives. With economic challenges and the need for reductions in spending, professional learning is an easy target. However, as pointed out by those who compare education systems and their performance, “in high-performing countries, professional learning is valued so highly as a key intervention to improve schools that reducing it is *not* an option.” (OECD 2011) In fact, top-performing businesses frequently increase training and development in challenging times. It could, therefore, be argued that in lean times, professional learning is *especially* important to prepare teachers for the changes they will experience, maintain and increase student achievement, develop flexibility to detect and adapt to new economic conditions and opportunities and sustain employee morale, retention, commitment and expertise.

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves in *Bringing the Profession Back In* (2016) wrote:

*Professional learning and development are the essence of the idea and strategy of professional capital — that is, if you want a return, you have to make an investment. If you want good return on investment in teachers and teaching, you have to attract, select, and develop teachers with high levels of human capital in terms of knowledge, skill, and talent; you have to deliberately improve these qualities over time through the decisional capital of structured experience and feedback that continuously supports and challenges all educators as professionals; and you have to move this knowledge around or circulate it through the social capital of shared commitment to and engagement in all students' success. Data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2013) show that high-performing systems such as Canada invest in all three aspects of the professional capital of their educators.*

### **Politics**

The final challenge is one which may go beyond professional learning and eats at the very core of educational (and other) services which are basic human rights of the citizens of this province. It is the challenge of politics. We are encouraged that the current Premier has seen fit to focus on education, and he appears to be committed to improving the system. We attribute to him all the good intentions we hope to be his motivating force. However, we have seen good intentions, investments of time and expertise, plans and strategies, all swept aside with a change of government or even a change of Minister within government. We believe that if we could get beyond this challenge and commit to doing the right thing for education and have collaborative structures that provide the opportunity for educational stakeholders such as the NLTA, the school districts, MUN, the Department of Education and others a seat at a common table dedicated to discussing and presenting possibilities for the education system, the province would be well served.

### **Conclusion**

*The most powerful strategy school systems have at their disposal to improve teacher effectiveness is professional development.* (Stephanie Hirsh, Executive Director, Learning Forward)

# Leadership

Leadership in education comes in many types and forms. While there are the obvious examples of school administration with senior executives at the District level, there are many other examples of leadership that occur in the education system at different levels. There is a valid argument to be made that a classroom teacher who has been in the profession for two years could be as much of a “leader” as the 25-year veteran who has served half his/her career as the principal of a larger junior high school. This section of the NLTA submission will look at the various positions of leadership in the K-12 education system in Newfoundland and Labrador and examine the impact that many of the recent initiatives in education have had on these positions.

## Definition

*Leaders throughout the pre-K-12 education community recognize effective professional learning as a key strategy for supporting significant school and school system improvements to increase results for all students. Whether they lead from classrooms, schools, school systems, technical assistance agencies, professional associations, universities, or public agencies, leaders develop their own and others’ capacity to learn and lead professional learning, advocate for it, provide support systems, and distribute leadership and responsibility for its effectiveness and results.*

*Leaders clearly articulate the critical link between increased student learning and educator professional learning. As supporters of professional learning, they apply understanding of organizational and human changes to design needed conditions, resources, and other supports for learning and change.*

(From Learning Forward, <https://learningforward.org/standards/leadership>)

Groups of leaders that should be considered include, but are not limited to:

- School administrators (principals and assistant principals);
- School curriculum leaders (department heads, lead teachers, special education teachers, school counsellors, teacher librarians, classroom teachers, itinerants);
- District level leaders (program specialists, district-based itinerants, Senior Education Officers, senior executive);
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development;
- Other stakeholders – individuals and groups (parents, school board trustees, school councils, student leaders).

## Various Types of Leadership and Some of the Significances of Each School Administration

*An effective principal is not all that is required for an effective school, but it is very difficult to have a good school without a good principal.* (Southern Regional Education Board – *Challenge to Lead Series*, 2004)

School principals and assistant principals in Newfoundland and Labrador are considered the instructional leaders in their schools. Their statutory obligations go well beyond that of instructional leadership. The *Schools Act* outlines the following duties of school principals:

*A principal of a school shall, subject to the direction of the board,*

*(a) provide instructional leadership in the school;*

*(b) ensure that the instruction provided by the teachers employed in the school is consistent with the courses of study and education programs prescribed or approved under this Act;*

- (c) ensure that the evaluation and grading of students is conducted in accordance with generally accepted standards in education;
- (d) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of programs offered in the school;
- (e) manage the school;
- (e.1) promote a safe and caring learning environment;
- (f) maintain order and discipline in the school and on the school grounds and at those other activities that are determined by the principal, with the teachers of the school, to be school activities;
- (g) promote co-operation between the school and the communities that it serves;
- (h) provide for the placement of students in courses of study and education programs prescribed or approved under this Act;
- (i) provide for the promotion and advancement of students;
- (j) evaluate or provide for the evaluation of teachers employed in the school;
- (k) annually provide a report with respect to the school;
- (l) ensure a student record is established and maintained for each student in the school;
- (m) where the school is a French first language school, promote cultural identity and French language in the school; and
- (n) carry out other duties assigned by the board.

Clearly school principals, and by extension assistant principals, have many responsibilities in addition to that of instructional leadership.

In this province, the amount of administrative time “allocated” to a particular school depends solely on the student population in that school irrespective of grade level configuration. The following table illustrates the reduction in administrative units allocated to schools in Newfoundland and Labrador between 2008-09 and 2016-17.

<b>Administrative Allocation</b>			
<b>Student Population</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>Student Population Adjusted Ranges</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
1-25	0.5 unit	26-74	<b>0 unit</b>
26-74	0.5 unit		.5 unit
75-149	1.0 unit	75-174	1.0 unit
150-249	1.25 units	175-399	<b>1.25 units</b>
250-399	1.5 units		1.25 units
400-549	1.75 units	550-849	<b>1.5 units</b>
550-699	2.0 units		2.0 units
700-849	2.25 units	850+	<b>2.0 units</b>
850+	3.0 units		<b>2.5 units</b>



Another interesting statistic related to school principals in Newfoundland and Labrador is the rate of turnover that occurs at the school level. Between 2013-14, the same year that the four English school districts amalgamated, and 2016-17, of the 250+ school principals that were in place at the beginning of the amalgamation, only 144 (59%) still maintained the same position in the same school. While some of these changes can be attributed to retirement and others to transfers to other schools and other positions of leadership in the District or elsewhere, the fact remains that for those 100+ schools and staffs, the “instructional leader” has changed. A quick scan of leadership at the District level reveals the same sort of change in personnel. Changes in these positions at such a rapid rate beg the question, “What succession planning has occurred to help individual schools and the District cope with such change?”

While there are many measures of job satisfaction, one such measure would be in an individual’s response to the question, “Given your current professional circumstance and knowing what you know today, would you still have decided on a career as a school administrator?” In the *School Administrators’ Survey, 2014*, conducted by the NLTA, the following results came from this very question:

**School Administrators’ Survey 2014**

<b>Given your current professional circumstance and knowing what you know today, would you still have decided on a career as a school administrator?</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Yes	47.6%	197
No	24.9%	103
Don’t know	26.8%	111
N/A	0.7%	3
Comments	87	
<b><i>answered question</i></b>		<b>414</b>

Given that less than half of those surveyed answered “yes” to this question could lead one to conclude that the level of satisfaction or contentedness amongst current administrators is tenuous at best and certainly concerning.

Principals’ perceptions of their workload have also become a prevalent issue with today’s administrators as is indicated in the response to the question below:

**School Administrators’ Survey 2014**

<b>My work responsibilities over time have:</b>		
<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
Increased	92.9%	380
Decreased	0.7%	3
Remained the same	3.9%	16
Don’t know	0.2%	1
N/A	2.2%	9
Comments	54	
<b><i>answered question</i></b>		<b>409</b>

Of particular note for many current administrators is the ever-increasing demand in the area of student support services. Many administrators are expected to “sign off” on student programming while often having little to no formal education or training in the area of special education. They are expected to attend a multitude of meetings with teams focused on the educational programming of individual students and are often left with the task of coordinating much of the paper work (e.g. Annual General Return, etc.) that requires an extensive knowledge of the special needs, amongst other items, that exist in their school. In schools with populations in excess of 300-400 students, this is indeed a daunting task in and of itself.

### **Department Heads/Lead Teachers, School Counsellors**

While there exists no department head structure at the K-6 level, schools at the 7-12 levels do have paid department head positions where numbers allow (determined by Department of Education and Early Childhood Development formulae). In light of reductions in administrative time for school principals and assistant principals, these other leaders in the school play an important role in scheduling, planning and collaboration. Schools that are fortunate enough to have the services of department heads are certainly at an advantage as compared to those that do not.

One of the areas where official department head status has not been implemented, regardless of a school’s population, is in the area of student support services. Despite an ever-increasing percentage of students being identified as having defined exceptionalities and being placed in inclusive classrooms, there is no formal leadership position to oversee the services provided to students. It is telling that in the absence of such a recognized position in most schools, teachers have assumed informal student support services leadership roles and that the educational system benefits from these positions.

Unfortunately, these volunteers derive no contractual benefit or extra time to do the work necessary for inclusive schools to properly function. In 2007, prior to the implementation of the Inclusive Education Initiative, the ISSP/Pathways Commission recommended the creation of a department head position in special education at each school level. This recommendation was never adopted by Government and with the advent of the Inclusive Education Model, is needed more than ever.

School counsellors also play a vital role in providing leadership at the school level. They are responsible for providing front-line support for students experiencing mental health issues, promoting inclusive school practices, career counselling, administering assessments to identify students with learning disabilities and exceptionalities, consulting with teachers and parents regarding behaviour problems, along with usually being the lead on school-wide cessation programs. With the growing awareness of mental health challenges and other such individual student issues that exist in today’s schools, these individuals often find themselves with high levels of intense one-on-one work. In 2007, the Teacher Allocation Commission recommended that school counsellors be allocated on a student ratio of 1:333. The current allocation provides 1:500 students. With the implementation of the Inclusive Education Model, the need for this deficit in supports for schools to be redressed has never been greater.

### **Program Specialists**

The positions of program specialists provide valuable support to schools and teachers when it comes to delivering programs at the school level. There are many examples in Newfoundland and Labrador, in rural Newfoundland in particular, where teachers are hired to teach a specific subject area in which they have been trained, but in addition and due to allocations have to teach other subjects in which they have a lack of knowledge or expertise. Program specialists and itinerants are crucial to those teachers who find themselves in this situation as these teachers often have no one on their own staff

to depend on for curriculum support, and void of District support, would be left to their own devices to figure things out. It is not uncommon, for example, for a teacher to be hired to teach mathematics, but also then be given the responsibility of teaching in four or five other curriculum areas (e.g., English language arts, social studies, science, art and music) in which they have received no formal post-secondary education. When faced with this dilemma, teachers depend upon program specialists at the district level for support.

According to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Educational Statistics, in the 2002-03 school year there were 60 program specialists working in 11 school districts. By the 2014-15 school year the number of program specialists had decreased to 33 working in two provincial districts. One might have expected that as school district offices were closed, attention would have been given to ensure the services to schools did not decrease. This is certainly not the case with availability of program specialists and when one considers the research by Dricoll, Halcoussis and Syorny (*Economics of Education Review* 2003) on the negative impact school board amalgamation has on student performance, it should not be a surprise.

### **Other Stakeholders/Leaders**

Parent groups, school board trustees, student leaders and NLTA Special Interest Councils all play a role when it comes to leadership in NL schools. The motivation for many of the individuals in these groups can vary from the reality that they may have a child in the system themselves to the fact that they simply have an interest in the public education system and offer themselves (often in a voluntary manner) to the system. What often lacks with some of these groups is proper training and policy around what exactly their role might be. Whether it be in the form of a volunteer in the local school breakfast program or an individual's position on a school board, it is vital that these individuals (leaders in their own right) be afforded the proper training and information that allows them to best fulfill their role.

### **Conclusion**

There are many quality leaders in the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador. In both school districts in the province, in the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and in the various groups of volunteers that exist throughout the K-12 education system in this province, one will find highly-qualified, caring and hardworking individuals. Part of the reason that much of the work "gets done" is in large part due to these individuals and the effort they afford. The major issue, however, is that in many of these groups, there is a growing tiredness and a sense of frustration; frustration that despite all their time and effort, they continue to be less and less resourced for the ever-increasing work they are expected to do.

Given this trend, it is safe to assume that the recruitment and retention of quality/qualified leaders in the years to come will become more of an issue.

# Learning/Teaching Environment

## Introduction

As previously stated, the working conditions for teachers are the learning conditions for students; this is reality. School is a shared experience. The NLTA hears repeatedly from teachers as changes occur in their work environment that are not conducive to fostering and improving student achievement. Increasing class sizes, inadequate resourcing of inclusive education, rising incidents of student behaviour problems and violence, and mental health issues are having a negative impact on student learning. It seems an obvious premise, something that “goes without saying,” that you cannot expect to improve student outcomes by draining resources away from the very processes and structures that are meant to support student learning.

## Concerns

### Class Size

The 2014 paper, *Does Class Size Matter?*, authored by Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach of the National Education Policy Center of the University of Colorado, states that “common-sense” is validated by research demonstrating that class size does matter and is “an important determinant of student outcomes.” The study found that teachers are able to be more effective with small class sizes and that the resulting benefit to students is not limited to their performance in school, but will continue to be an advantage over their entire lifetime. The author’s recommendations include:

- *Money saved today by increasing class sizes will be offset by more substantial social and educational costs in the future.*
- *The payoff from class-size reduction is greater for low-income and minority children, while any increases in class size will likely be most harmful to these populations.*
- *... While lower class size has a demonstrable cost, it may prove the more cost-effective policy overall.*

David Zyngier, Senior Lecturer in Curriculum and Pedagogy at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia also concluded in 2014 that the research overwhelmingly supports small class sizes. Among the many benefits of small class sizes, Zyngier lists:

- teachers can teach more in-depth;
- teachers can move through material faster;
- classes are managed better – with less time spent on discipline and more on learning;
- students receive more individualized attention, including encouragement and monitoring;
- students are more attentive;
- students wait less to receive their teachers’ attention.

### A) NLTA Public/Parent and Member Surveys

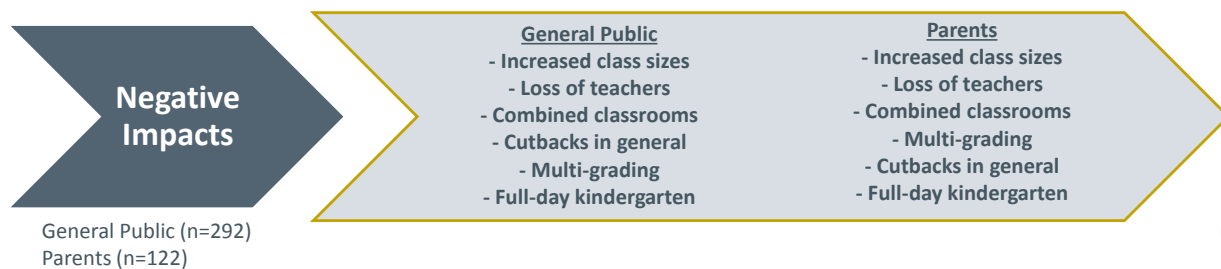
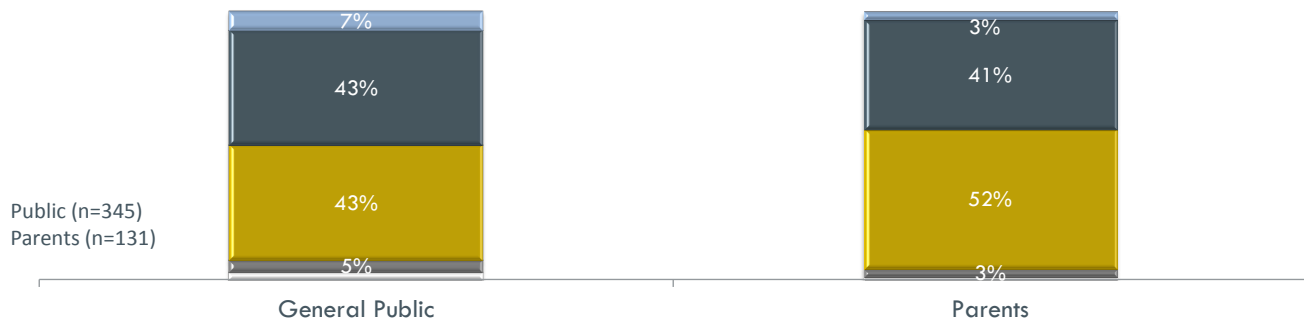
Parents, teachers and the general public in Newfoundland and Labrador are no strangers to these common-sense conclusions. As was previously stated, the NLTA commissioned an independent firm, MQO Research, to conduct surveys of the general public/parents and teachers regarding the 2016 Provincial Budget. Seventy-three percent of the general public, 83% of parents and 95% of teachers surveyed felt that increased class sizes would have a negative impact on the quality of education in the province. Increased class sizes and loss of teaching units were seen as having the most significantly negative impact by the general public and parents.

Both the general public and parents feel the budget will have a negative impact on the overall quality of education delivered in the province. In particular, *increased class sizes* and *loss of teachers* were seen as having the most negative impact on education.

## What impact will the current provincial budget have on the overall quality of education delivered in the province?

SUBSET: Those who are very/somewhat aware of the impact of the budget on the education system

■ Significantly / Somewhat positive ■ Somewhat negative ■ Significantly negative ■ No impact ■ Don't know



6

In the November follow-up survey parents offered comments on the impact of increased class sizes. Below is just a small verbatim sampling of some of the more than 90 comments provided by parents to MQO Research regarding the issue of increased class sizes:

*A larger number of students definitely affects the classroom order and quality of education.*

*Increased class sizes mean the children are not able to get one-on-one help from the teacher if they are struggling to understand the material being taught; therefore, many students will fall behind.*

*Less attention paid to individual students; quality of education is, therefore, compromised – too many students in a classroom to one teacher inevitably decreases quality.*

*Since the increase in class size, certain pupils who are struggling in some subjects have not had enough personal attention to help them. They are going to fall behind at a faster pace, and I think they will suffer a great deal because of this later on in life.*

*Teacher does not have time to give direct attention to all the students who need a little extra support. This was more readily available last year with similar issues. My son often has taken it upon himself to explain things to classmates if he has grasped a concept (for example, with math) that they are still having difficulty understanding.*



*He does this because he knows the teacher doesn't always have time to help everyone, and he likes to help out. This isn't his responsibility and he shouldn't have to feel like he needs to take time away from his other work to help his classmates because no one else is available and they are struggling.*

*With classroom sizes increased, the quality of teaching has to go down as they are not able to give as much one on one when needed.*

*Unable to get certain courses due to less teachers. No one-on-one teaching. Children are being lost without personal instruction.*

Parent concerns were echoed in the MQO Research November 2016 follow-up survey of teachers. Over 1000 teachers took the time to provide additional comments regarding how increased class size is impacting the quality of education for their students, a small sampling of which includes:

- *Unable to provide consistent one-on-one assistance to all students requiring help (too many students to reach each individual who is struggling).*
- *Significant increase in undesired behaviours from students.*
- *Significant decrease in time devoted to teaching prescribed curriculum outcomes due to rise in behaviour issues because of too many children in too close proximity to one another in a classroom.*
- *Decreased ability to address needs of students in an inclusive manner because there are SO many students.*
- *Significant decrease in individualized attention from teacher for learners because of the demands of more students.*
- *Much more time dedicated to off-task behaviour. Less time delivering material.*
- *Overall noisier and more challenging classroom environment. More difficult for students to learn and stay on task (especially students with ADHD, other needs).*
- *Unable to do as many differentiated instruction activities as I would like as group work is far too stressful in large classes.*
- *More difficulty to manage class.*
- *Twenty-seven Kindergarten students with one adult in the room. Time is spent almost exclusively managing bodies and hardly at all spent focused on curriculum and learning. Large class sizes are difficult at any grade level, but particularly difficult in Kindergarten where some children are still four years old. Very stressful on the teacher.*
- *Thirty-six students in a class. I never get to address individual student questions/concerns during class. There's simply no time (or physical space)! This makes students anxious as well. They're preparing for public exams and would like to have a teacher's one-on-one attention but understand the constraints of my class time. In turn, I'm giving up more lunches and after-school time to help students who I didn't get around to help during class.*
- *Almost all of my classes have increased by about 10 people. The difference from last year is stark. There is less time for individual help, students are less likely to contribute to discussion, there is less physical space in the classroom for activities and collaborative activities, the volume during these activities is more difficult to monitor, and computer lab and library booking is more challenging.*
- *Class sizes have dramatically increased in junior and senior high due to the scaling back of staff. We have lost one teacher per year for six years while retaining a stable student population.*

- *Once you pass an optimal number of students in a classroom, then the teacher's role becomes predominantly that of a manager and not an educator.*
- *Too many students in classroom. Physically impossible for me to circulate around and get to all of them. They are not getting the help they need.*

## **B) Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador**

As was noted previously, extensive consultation was conducted by the work of the Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador, and reported by Dr. Bruce Sheppard and Dr. Kirk Anderson.

The Panel report identified class size as a “pervasive concern among teachers throughout the K-12 system.” Some examples of the comments made by teachers and included in the report are as follows:

- *Large class sizes are leaving teachers and students frustrated. Classroom soft caps are causing primary classrooms to have 26-28 students. These large classrooms are making it difficult for many students to develop the foundational skills in literacy and mathematics, and as a result, students are entering elementary without the fundamental skills needed to read and write.*
- *I teach in a school where there are many classes in the 32-35 range and some even higher. There is no way that a class of 35 students can get the same one-on-one attention as that of a class of 28 students. A 25% increase in class size means less individual attention given to students, less explanation and clarification if experiencing difficulty, less opportunity for the teacher to provide feedback and an obvious increase in teacher workload.*
- *In our public education system, class size is a major concern!*
- *Class size! This has to be a priority. Quality of education, teacher stress, safety ... they all revolve around this issue!*
- *Class sizes are just too big! Although we as teachers try our best to accommodate every student in our classroom and meet their needs, it is just impossible. There are not enough hours in a day [or] support to get to each child.*

## **C) The Teacher Allocation Commission and Where We Are Now**

Yet, despite the extensive evidence of the opinions of researchers, the teaching profession, parents and the general public, Government has, since 2008, embarked upon a course of decreasing teacher allocations and increasing class sizes.

In May 2007, the Teacher Allocation Commission submitted its final report, *Education and Our Future: A Road Map to Innovation and Excellence*, which made 35 recommendations including:

5. *Teachers be allocated to school boards on the basis of the following class size maximums: kindergarten – 18; grades 1-3 – 20, grades 4-6 – 23; grades 7-12 – 25.*
6. *Where it is necessary to combine two or more grades or courses in one class with one teacher, the maximum class size will be: K-3 – 12 students or less; grades 4-12 – 15 students or less.*
11. *A hard class size cap be used to determine the teacher allocation for mid-size high schools.*
13. *The teacher allocation to school boards provide 11 Student Resource Teachers per 100 students. The qualifications for these teachers would be the same as currently exist for the categorical and non-categorical special education teachers.*

16. *At the elementary level, specialists be allocated on the basis of one per 125 students to support the areas of music, physical education, fine arts, French, and literacy and numeracy.*
17. *Specialists be allocated from Grades 7 to Level III at the rate of one per 175 students to support the areas of music, physical education, fine arts, French, CDLI support, and skilled trades/technology.*
19. *Learning Resources specialists be allocated at a level of one per 500 students from Kindergarten to Level III.*
20. *Guidance counsellors be allocated at a level of one per 333 students for Kindergarten to Level III.*
23. *The current ESL model for teacher allocation be revised to base the allocation upon student enrolments in April of the immediately previous school year and that the base number be adjusted to provide a 0.50 teacher unit for every 15 ESL students registered.*
26. *The following formula be used to allocate administrative time to schools:*

<b>Number of Pupils</b>	<b>Admin FTE</b>
<b>1-74</b>	<b>0.5 unit</b>
<b>75-174</b>	<b>1.0 unit</b>
<b>175-249</b>	<b>1.25 units</b>
<b>250-399</b>	<b>1.5 units</b>
<b>400-549</b>	<b>1.75 units</b>
<b>550-699</b>	<b>2.0 units</b>
<b>700-849</b>	<b>2.5 units</b>
<b>850+</b>	<b>3.0 units</b>

27. *The provincial class size maximums apply to English, French Immersion, and Intensive Core French classes for teacher staffing purposes.*

Subsequently, in March 2008, the Provincial Government introduced a new approach to the allocation of teaching resources. This new model referenced maximum class size numbers for Grades K-9 and was described by the Minister of Education at that time as being focused “on need, not numbers ... on programming and teaching needs and maximum class sizes in the K-9 system.” This new Teacher Allocation Model included increased administrative time for schools of all sizes and prescribed the following class size caps: Kindergarten – 20 students; Grades 1-6 – 25 students; Grades 7-9 – 27 students. The model also decreased class sizes for some multi-grade situations and increased allocations for specialist teachers (music, physical education, French, and literacy and numeracy) and learning resource teachers.



These positive changes, while not reflective of all of the Commission’s recommendations, were welcome and came forward just one school year prior to the launch of the Inclusive Education Initiative at the beginning of the 2009-10 school year. However, despite the clear recognition of the need for increased allocations and the required implementation of inclusion, teacher allocations have seen significant reductions since the new model was introduced in 2008. In particular, Budget 2016 decreased teacher allocations for high school, and class size caps for multi-grade situations were returned to (and in one case now exceed) limits that were in place prior to 2008. Full-day Kindergarten has been implemented with no additional teaching units in the system, maximum class sizes for Grades 4-9 have been increased and combined grades were introduced for Grades 1-6.

There was also a commitment made in 2008 to review other recommendations from the report, including increasing the allocations for school counsellors. Again, despite the added demands on Student Support Services personnel that came with the Inclusive Education Initiative, the formula for allocating guidance counsellors has remained stagnant.

The following tables show a comparison between the Allocation Model introduced as “needs based” in 2008, and the current reality, following reductions to allocations up to 2016 (reductions are in **bold**):

<b>Administrative Allocation</b>			
<b>Student Population</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>Student Population Adjusted Ranges</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
1-25	0.5 unit	26-74	<b>0 unit</b>
26-74	0.5 unit		0.5 unit
75-149	1.0 unit	75-174	1.0 unit
150-249	1.25 units	175-399	1.25 units
250-399	1.5 units		<b>1.25 units</b>
400-549	1.75 units		<b>1.5 units</b>
550-699	2.0 units	550-849	2.0 units
700-849	2.25 units		<b>2.0 units</b>
850+	3.0 units		<b>2.5 units</b>

<b>Grades</b>	<b>Class Size Maximums (Not including soft cap of +2)</b>	
	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2016-17</b>
Kindergarten	20	20
Primary (1-3)	25	25
Elementary (4-6)	25	<b>28</b>
Intermediate (7-9)	27	<b>31</b>
Combined Grades (1-6) 2 grades in 1 class		<b>18</b>

Number of Students per Grade Level	High School Allocation Divisor		
	2008-09		2016-17
≤ 30 students per grade	1 unit/21 students	Combined	1 unit/24 students
30-99 students per grade	1 unit/24 students		<b>1 unit/24 students</b>
≥ 100 per grade	1 unit/28 students		<b>1 unit/29 students</b>

In November 2016, the province’s Auditor General reported to the House of Assembly on a Performance Audit of Department and Crown Agencies:

*Despite being directed by Cabinet to evaluate the Teacher Allocation Model three years after it was implemented in 2008-09, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has not completed the assessment and has not reported back to Cabinet.*

The Teacher Allocation Model in effect at a given time is established through Government policy but is not easily accessible online or otherwise. (Copies have been provided to the NLTA by EECD officials upon request). While the overall reductions have been harmful to the system as a whole, specific aspects of the current allocation model defy common sense. For example, the existing formula results in the following scenarios:

**School A:** High school enrolment of 301. This puts the school in the category of utilizing the “29 divisor,” resulting in an allocation (regular teaching units) of 10.37, which would typically be rounded up to 10.5.

**School B:** High school enrolment of 299. This school (with less than 100 students per grade level) would utilize the “24 divisor,” resulting in an allocation (regular teaching units) of 12.46, which would typically be rounded up to 12.5.

**Note: School A has two more students than School B and ends up with two LESS teachers.**

**School C:** High school enrolment of 75. This school does not fit the “small high school enrolment” category and has less than 100 students per grade. They would have to use the “24 divisor,” resulting in an allocation (regular teaching units) of 3.125, which would typically be rounded down to 3 units.

**School D:** High school enrolment of 74. As per the allocation model, this school would have an allocation of 3.5 teaching units.

**Note: By having one less student, School D actually gains a half unit in comparison to School C. If School C gained one student, the school would lose a half unit.**

Statements made by Government regarding class size caps are sometimes misleading and make no reference to whether the caps are “hard” or “soft” or what the procedure should be when class groupings exceed the cap for their grade level(s). For example, the following appears in a “Questions and Answers” publication on full-day Kindergarten available on the EECD website ([www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/pdf/full\\_day\\_kindergarten.pdf](http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/pdf/full_day_kindergarten.pdf)):

*Q: How many students will be in a Kindergarten classroom?*

*A: There will be a maximum of twenty students with one teacher. In some schools a team teaching model will be required as a temporary measure. In these cases there will be two teachers and a maximum of 28 students in one classroom.*

As of November 2016, the NLTA was aware of five full-day Kindergarten classrooms in the St. John’s area with more than 20 students without an additional teaching unit provided.

During collective bargaining, Government has consistently refused to give any serious consideration to incorporating language regarding teacher allocations and class size limits in the NLTA collective agreements. In contrast to this, Government appears to recognize the importance of class size and is prepared to support and enforce class size caps with respect to early childhood educators (ECE) and other care providers who work in licensed child care centres (a service not paid for by Government but by parents), which are not required to deliver a government prescribed curriculum. The EECD administers and enforces legislated child to ECE/caregiver ratios, which includes school-aged children, pursuant to regulations made under the provincial *Child Care Services Regulations*:

*15. (1) The following ratios of staff to children and child group sizes shall apply with respect to child care centres:*

<i>Age of Child</i>	<i>Staff to Child Ratio</i>	<i>Maximum Group Size</i>
<i>0 to 24 months</i>	<i>1 staff to 3 children</i>	<i>6 children</i>
<i>24 to 36 months</i>	<i>1 staff to 5 children</i>	<i>10 children</i>
<i>36 to 69 months</i>	<i>1 staff to 8 children</i>	<i>16 children</i>
<i>57 to 84 months and entitled to attend school</i>	<i>1 staff to 12 children</i>	<i>24 children</i>
<i>84 to 155 months</i>	<i>1 staff to 15 children</i>	<i>30 children</i>

The legislation provides for the licensing and inspection of child care services and the possible suspension or termination of licenses in cases of non-compliance with the *Act* and/or regulations. No such enforcement measures exist with respect to the Teacher Allocation Model.

**Class Composition**

As discussed above, class size is an important issue that has a significant impact on the learning and teaching environment in schools. However, numbers alone are not the answer. Today’s schools do not separate students into homogeneous groups – difference and diversity within classrooms is the norm and must be considered equally and alongside the number of pupils present.

In *Class Size and Student Diversity – Two Sides of the Same Coin*, the Canadian Teachers’ Federation reported on a 2011 national teacher survey and research review on class size and composition. Their findings included:

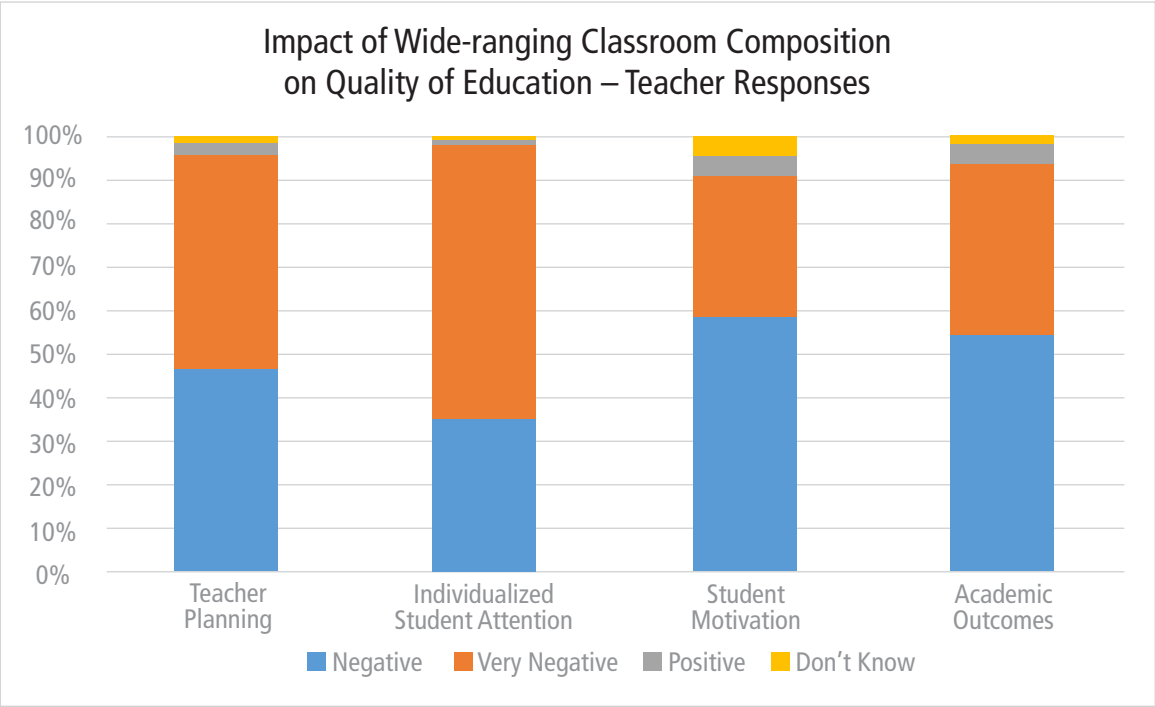
*Class size matters, but so does class composition – in other words, when we talk about class size, we also need to be thinking about the degree of student diversity in those classes. In order to enhance quality and equity in our public schools, they need to be addressed together.*

*Data on average class size can only tell a small part of the story. The degree of student diversity as a proportion of the total class size needs to be taken into account.*

**A) Teachers’ Perspectives**

Teachers’ experiences are in line with the research. As part of the November 2016 survey by MQO Research, teachers were asked about the impact of wide-ranging classroom composition in a number of

areas: teacher planning, individualized student attention, student motivation and academic outcomes. On a scale of 1-10, with 1 = very negative impact and 10 = very positive impact, more than 90% of teachers surveyed indicated that there would be a negative impact in all areas (score between 1-5), with the most significantly negative effect on individualized student attention:



MQO Survey, November 2016

**B) Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland and Labrador**

The Panel on the Status of Public Education in Newfoundland Labrador also identified class composition as a significant concern. Submissions from teachers often spoke of this issue together with class size:

*Teacher allocations based on a number of students in a class versus taking into consideration the issues of the students [do] not do justice to the challenges and needs of the students or the teachers.*

*Children with pervasive needs are often doubled and tripled up in classrooms with one student assistant between them even though each child has [his/her] own unique and specific needs. IRTs have way too many students on their caseloads and cannot possibly provide the individualized instruction that is needed to attain success.*

*We have classrooms approaching 30 students with diverse compositions. Oftentimes, there is a span of students functioning at as much as five different grade levels in one classroom. The IRT and ESL support is limited, and the class may have students that have significant behaviour problems (violent tendencies, oppositional behaviour, childhood mental health issues, social and conduct disorders, unstable home environments, etc.). Little or no attention is being paid to class composition with the focus being on numbers.*

It is, therefore, not surprising that the second of 32 recommendations included in the Panel report was:

*That Government and the School District(s) in cooperation with the NLTA and other stakeholders establish a new class size cap for classes with a composition diversity of greater than 10% in primary, elementary, intermediate and senior high schools.*

### **C) Inclusion**

Many of the issues related to class composition can be traced to the chronic under-resourcing of the Inclusive Education Initiative, which was launched in 2009. As previously noted, inclusion has been implemented in concert with ongoing reductions to teacher allocations and increases in class size. It is not necessary here to restate the challenges of and recommendations regarding inclusion. However, in the November 2016 surveys conducted for NLTA by MQO Research, there were some relevant and poignant comments submitted by parents and teachers in response to the topic of class size that touch specifically on class composition:

#### **Parent comments:**

*Children can't receive the same amount of one on one with the teacher if they need help with something; e.g., a child that has ADHD can't receive the help that they need because one teacher with so many students can't devote their time helping one student.*

*Not enough time for the teacher to give students individual attention. Additional stress for students with anxiety.*

*All of the students are suffering since the teacher cannot get to each student to help when needed. I have spoken to my son's teacher and she has told me that with the amount of students in the class, the kids are not getting the same education studies as they did in previous years.*

*Teacher does not have time to give direct attention to all the students who need a little extra support. This was more readily available last year with similar issues.*

#### **Teacher comments:**

*I was told because of the other needs in the school, the extra help was pulled out of my class and redistributed to an area of higher need. So in my class of 33 (three do not come to my class because it is a core subject and they do not do regular programming because of severe needs), there are four students who have been diagnosed on the autism spectrum, one of whom had a Behaviour Management Plan last year that has not been addressed yet this year. One student is ESL. Three students just got added to the class who are part of the LEARN program and cannot speak English at all. And one student just moved here from a different English-speaking country, but no documentation came with him; he needs to be assessed because he could seriously use some extra help, but nothing has been done for him as of yet.*

*I have one student with autism who, because he is not a behaviour problem, does not get any IRT time. He is very quiet, will sit and will not work unless I prompt him. He is very intelligent but does need repeated instruction due to his challenges and a hearing loss as well. I do not always have time to assist him because I also have two children who have LDs. One can hardly write his name and the other is not much better than that. These students need me to scribe their answers so I can determine*

*what they understand. I try voice to text but one cannot speak clearly enough to use that, and the other one cannot do it independently or refuses to do so.*

*My job has become managing behaviours in the hope that students will be safe and happy and go home each day without physical injury or a sad heart. I celebrate the days when we actually accomplish academic achievement of anything in our room at almost any level. I am mentally, emotionally and physically drained when the day ends due to constantly juggling all of the roles and responsibilities I am now faced with as a teacher. Gone are the days when the only children with needs in your room were the little ones who struggled in reading, writing or math and with a little extra help or remedial service they often come and beef up their weak academic skills. I truly believe we are sacrificing the education of all by putting our most needy and most at-risk students in a room all day with everyone else regardless of academic ability, mental and emotional stability and physical needs. I believe that there should be designated times for integration and inclusion but not full inclusion as we have today as I fear no one is truly learning under these educational learning environments.*

*Our school has been cutback again in terms of the number of IRTs which have been allocated. We also have a number of students who would be considered pervasive needs. As a result, the majority of our IRT time is allocated to approximately two students and the other small amount is spread through the rest of a school of almost 300 students. This makes it next to impossible for an IRT to work with students in the classroom and sometimes even during tests.*

The recent and ongoing experience of a primary teacher in an urban K-6 school is very telling with respect to the issue of class composition. The teacher wrote the following letter to her school principal in early Fall 2016, which was forwarded to the District SEO for her school by the principal:

Dear [REDACTED]

As a dedicated, experienced teacher with some twenty-five years of teaching experience, I feel that I have a professional, as well as moral obligation to outline to you, in writing, my concerns regarding the composition of my current Grade 3 class.

You are aware of the background regarding my class. Nonetheless, let me briefly recap:

- My Grade 3 class is composed of 25 students;
- Last year, in Grade 2, the same group of students were accommodated in two classes of 13 and 15 students each;
- Due to the “class cap” regulation, three additional Grade 3 students are now being accommodated in a Grade 2/3 multi-age classroom;
- Five of my students have a Behavioural Management Plan (BMP) in place. Each student has a tendency to be aggressive and have regular meltdowns;
- Thirteen of the students have prescribed accommodations in place;



- Some students are runners;
- Some Individual Education Plans (IEPs) reference “sensory breaks”; these breaks have been irregular at best;
- The current reading levels (at the beginning of grade three) are:
  - K-1 = 9 students
  - Gr. 2 = 7 students
  - Gr. 3 = 7 students
- Writing: nine students are unable to write;
- Math: eight students are below grade level according to [previous grade] report cards;
- One student is home schooled. So, I will have some responsibility for periodic assessments, providing resources as requested by the parents, etc.;
- One student presents with pervasive needs and is currently on a reduced day. The student may join the class occasionally for short periods of time;
- Supports currently in place:
  - One Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT) is assigned to my classroom for language arts from start of instructional day to recess;
  - A different IRT is assigned to my classroom for math from recess to lunch;
  - I have an IRT for one afternoon in a 7-day cycle to help with a student with pervasive needs. If the child is absent, the IRT may be rescheduled elsewhere;
  - The Student Assistant (SA) is wonderful. But, when the SA is out of the room, it is noticeable;
  - The recent meltdown in my class occurred when the SA was removed from my class to deal with a serious incident in a Kindergarten class;
- There have been concerns voiced during PE and Music classes of misbehaviour as well as during fire drills;
- Only 5-6 students present as average, or better than average, learners.

As a conscientious, responsible teacher, I am very concerned that the quality of learning in my class will be compromised given the documented, as well as exhibited, needs of the students. As I think you will agree, the composition of my class is very challenging. It is my humble, professional opinion that a number of “consistent” supports need to be put in place to help ensure that every student in my [primary grade level] class learns to the best of their ability. These supports include:

- A dedicated IRT assigned to my classroom for the full day, not just the morning as is currently the case;
- A dedicated SA, who will be assigned to my classroom. When the SA must leave the class to accommodate one of [my] students (e.g., a student’s sensory break); or, to take their own scheduled break, that SA must be

replaced by another SA. Under no circumstances should my class be left without the services/assistance of an SA.

- The SA must be available to meet students in the morning and afternoon to help them prepare for class.
- Accommodations outlined in the students' IEPs must be implemented. For example, sensory breaks should be honoured, and an SA must be available to ensure that the student can engage in their sensory break when needed.
- SAs must be assigned to ensure that PE and Music classes are appropriate learning experiences for all students.
- SAs must be assigned to ensure the safety of all children during fire drills and possible emergencies.

██████████, I realize that human resources are at a premium and that there are many needs in our school. Nonetheless, my students deserve the very best education that we can provide to them. Their parents/guardians believe that we will act as professionals and live up to the expectations that they have for us. As a concerned teacher, I feel that it is my responsibility to identify deficiencies that currently exist which are jeopardizing the learning of the students in my class. Unfortunately, I do not have the means to address these concerns; I wish that I could. Hopefully, by bringing these concerns to your attention I will have started the ball rolling to affect the required changes that will help to ensure that the students and I have a very effective and successful school year.

Thank you for your anticipated attention to this very important matter. I look forward to discussing these matters with you as deemed necessary.

Respectfully yours,  
██████████

To date, no additional interventions or supports have been allocated to the school to address the needs of this learning and teaching environment.

## **D) Combined Grades**

Provincial Budget 2016 introduced combined grade classrooms for Grades 1-6. This is to be distinguished from the multi-age/grade classes that have always existed, of necessity, in small, rural schools and for which teachers and administrators implement instructional plans that span several years to ensure that students will cover the curriculum for all grades over a specified number of school years.

Combined grade classrooms were brought about for financial reasons, specifically tied to cost savings for education in provincial budget announcements. Provincial budget documents outline that the introduction of combined grades was expected to result in a cost savings of \$3,590,000 for 2016-17 and an annual savings of \$6,100,000. Combined grade classes are determined on a yearly basis, so the teacher must deliver the entire curriculum for both levels at the same time. No guidelines or advice were provided regarding the selection or distribution of students within these classes. The school districts and teachers were wholly unprepared for this change – there was no notice to stakeholders in advance of the budget and, therefore, no ability to plan or prepare, inform parents and students or



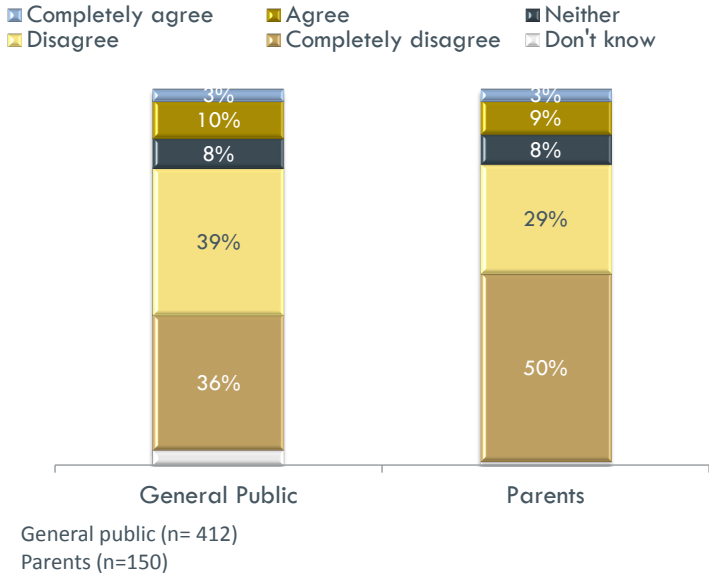
provide professional development for teachers. The majority of schools affected had no prior experience with any form of multi-grading. The current class size cap for combined grade classes is 18 students, but EECD officials have already indicated that this was an interim measure for transition purposes and may change (i.e. increase) in the future.

In June 2016, the results of the NLTA commissioned MQO Research survey showed that the majority of parents and the general public surveyed disagreed with the introduction of combined grades:

The majority of both the general public and parents disagreed with the budget decision to increase the number of multi-grading classrooms. Parents tend to hold stronger views as shown by a higher proportion who *completely disagree*.



**Please indicate the level to which you agree or disagree with the budget decision to increase the number of multi-grading classrooms.**



Reasons why they agree or disagree with multi-grading	General Public	Parents
<b>Top Reasons they Disagree*</b>	(n=294)	(n=118)
Education of children will suffer	57%	65%
Students will not get enough attention	48%	54%
Teachers are not trained for multi-grading	22%	20%
Increased distraction for students	17%	16%
<b>Top Reasons they Agree*</b>	(n=63)	(n=18)**
Past experience / Use was positive	26%	39%
Good exposure / Well rounded students	23%	39%
Positive perception of multi-grading / Does not anticipate negative impacts	17%	6%
Possible positive social aspects	15%	17%
Financial reasons	10%	11%
Necessity / Practical with smaller number of students	7%	11%

\*Top reasons mentioned  
 \*\*Please interpret results with caution due to small sample size. 14

According to the MQO Research November 2016 results, on a scale of 1-10, with 1 = very negative impact and 10 = very positive impact, 71% of parents and teachers surveyed indicated that combined grade classrooms were having a negative impact (score between 1-5 with 30% of parents and 36% of teachers choosing 1 [very negative]) on the quality education in the province. More than 40 parents and over 350 teachers provided additional comments on this issue, a small sampling of which appears below:

**Parent comments:**

*My son is in a 5/6 Grade split. There are only five Grade 6 students in this class; the rest are Grade 5. This in and of itself is isolating, as the students are grouped together by grade to facilitate teaching the different curriculums. This means the Grade 6 students are in a group in the back of the class by themselves. The teacher does not have time to cover the material in class in the same depth as the other Grade*

*6 class does, as she has to cover material for two grades. This means the students are left to cover material on their own a lot.*

*The variety of skill levels also compromises quality. My son is an excellent reader and is being held back because the teacher is unable to challenge him in the way he needs. The kids in class below his reading level set the class precedent.*

*Too many kids and teaching different grades; not enough time for kids to learn properly. Teachers don't have enough time for each kid.*

*Teacher is trying to teach two different groups at a time; less time for students who require extra help.*

**Teacher comments:**

*You are having to address two complete curriculums. Ideally, one grade would be doing tasks and seat work while instruction is ongoing for the other grade. However, certain students need silence in order to properly do work, which they no longer get and several doing seat work are likely to need individual attention, which cannot be given while providing instruction to the other grade. In a worst case, weaker students become completely lost as they are hearing two streams of information. For some, it may become challenging to differentiate what they should and should not attend to.*

*With little training, teachers are having to figure out on their own how to teach two curriculums at once. Along with the need to teach two curriculums, there are such a range of abilities and needs that have made the job overwhelming for teachers.*

*With combined classes, students are not receiving the prescribed instructional hours as the teacher is required to teach one group in the class while the other side is kept busy with busy work and then vice versa.*

*We have two classes affected in this way, one of them being a Grade 1/2 split. Grade 1s who are just getting used to full days with Grade 2s. I didn't think that difference between Grade 1 and 2 students was as great until I am seeing them together every day. Very diverse needs; even dealing with them one grade at a time would be challenging in my opinion but putting them together has NOT been easy.*

*Two sets of outcomes are not always being met. Children are not with enough of their peer group – depending on the class situation. Some children do not want to be in the combined class and, therefore, don't like school. Some students feel left behind. Teachers are overwhelmed and upset. Stress level is very high.*

*Three students that have been multi-graded apart from their peers have not been able to participate in grade-level field trips, concerts, assemblies and other activities with their grade-level peers.*

*Teaching two sciences, Grades 5 and 6 in one class (both dramatically different content) does not allow uninterrupted conversations, activities or demonstrations to occur. Both classes have to sacrifice teacher facilitation time for the other class.*

*It has proved to be quite difficult to teach the outcomes with NO RESOURCES... We did a few days of PD this summer and now we are forgotten about. I eat, sleep and*

*breathe my work...I burn the candle at both ends in the hopes that I am providing my students with the best education possible. They should not suffer because of our budget!*

*I am finding it more than difficult to cover outcomes at a regular pace. I feel as if I'm already significantly behind. I have been teaching since 1985 and combined grades are nothing new to me. The issue is when I did it years ago, we could cover one science one year, for example, and the other one the next. This was because we knew we'd have the same students for more than one year. This year I am expected to cover two science programs, two social studies, etc. It is not possible! The courses do not overlap enough to do both at the same time. Needless to say, I am not having a good year!*

## **E) Violence in Classrooms**

In an article titled *Protecting ourselves at school*, posted on the Education Forum magazine website in May 2016, an Ontario teacher reported workplace violence as the “number one issue” for educational assistants represented by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation. The article describes experiences of extreme physical aggression from students and injuries to employees, lack of training for staff, work situations that require employees to regularly wear personal protective equipment and non-compliance by employers with legislated Occupational Health and Safety requirements. This story has become all too familiar for teachers and student assistants in our province as well.

As was indicated in the Inclusive Education section of this document, the NLTA has provided teachers an opportunity to report, for research purposes, incidents of violence they experience in the workplace. As of December 2016, the Association has received 56 reports submitted by teachers involving incidents of physical aggression by students from Kindergarten to Grade 12. Teachers have sustained injuries and some have missed work as a result, experiencing significant reductions in income from having to access Workers’ Compensation benefits during their absence. Some of the experiences teachers have reported include:

- being punched, kicked and slapped;
- being pinched, scratched and bitten, often breaking the skin and causing bleeding;
- being grabbed and pushed, having their hair pulled;
- being threatened with scissors and stabbed with a pencil;
- having heavy objects (large books, desks, a microwave oven) thrown at them;
- being thrown/pushed against a concrete wall (teacher sustained a concussion);
- injuries while attempting to restrain a violent student;
- verbal and physical threats of harm.

Some recent examples (up to December 2016) – which resulted in injuries – drawn from the reports submitted to the NLTA by teachers include:

*Student was agitated. Broke down a wooden gate that had been installed in a staff “safe area” within the classroom. Staff (two staff assigned to student at all times) attempted to direct and keep the student from injuring. Staff was pushed against small refrigerator and wooden chairs. One staff ending up sitting on chair. Student then intentionally hit staff on upper back. (Please note this staff is female, 5 feet tall; student is 6 feet and approximately 200 pounds.) ... During this, staff called for CPI Team.*

*A student brought in a DVD from home. When asked to keep it in his locker, he hit me in the face. I caught his hands when he attacked. He was then guided by special education teacher (myself) and student assistant to his calming room, and he bit me on the arm while we walked him into his room.*

*I am an IRT who spends 20% of my day supporting a boy in Grade 2 within his regular classroom as well as some scheduled time in a one-on-one setting. School had just started and the regular classroom teacher was explaining the routine of the day ... The student remained at his desk drawing as he does every day during this time which helps to keep him settled. He proceeded to get up from his seat to show another student his video game drawing. As I walked towards him, he sat back in his seat. I proceeded to walk over by his desk and without warning he stabbed me with his pencil in the stomach and continued to spit, punch and bite me.*

*... Hearing the noise from my classroom, I proceeded to the alternate room to assist in the verbal de-escalation, at which time X began to throw the fidget toys at another teacher and myself. I gave verbal prompts encouraging X to breathe. X began screaming ... stating, "I am going to stab you both with a pencil, right through the heart. This is my weapon." I reminded X of the conversation both his mother and I have been having with him about making threats ... X responded, "OK" in a lower voice and immediately stopped making verbal threats to stab us. X began pacing the room as I positioned myself near the door, well out of X's path. At this point the other teacher removed herself from the room to contact the office and have X's mother called. X charged at me, pushing me into the concrete wall and smacking my head and shoulder against concrete and a plastic folder (which became detached) connected to the wall. My body twisted as the student's weight continued to push me, as my shoulder caught on the plastic folder. Another teacher came to my assistance while I was asking X to "take his hands off me." X ran into the corridor, punching and kicking while the team gave verbal prompts to direct him back into the safe area of the alternate room. At this point, secure school was called. Other staff ... assisted in the situation. X struck assistant principal and guidance counsellor while in the corridor and made many swings at both student assistants. Other teachers worked with X to direct him back to the mat in order to keep him safe. As he repeatedly punched, kicked, threw objects and bit staff (for approximately 30 minutes), personnel tried to block and then had to hold his arms in order to ensure his safety and the safety of staff. This lasted until the parent arrived ... Staff assisted his mother with facilitating a smooth, safe and dignified exit from the building.*

In the last example noted above, the teacher in question sustained physical injuries, including a concussion, bruising and soft tissue damage. She suffered short-term memory loss, impaired vision and loss of balance, requiring the use of a cane to walk for an extended period of time. She missed significant time from work, resulting in financial hardship.

The school districts are ill-equipped to address such issues. In many cases, risk assessments (required by legislation) have not been done, and there are no provisions, policies or training in place specifically intended to address employee safety. To illustrate this point, consider that the NLESD, with over 8,450 employees and more than 260 separate work sites (254 of which are schools) across the entire province, has one Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Manager located in St. John's. In contrast, Eastern Health

has 13,000+ staff (including physicians) and 100+ worksites and employs five management-level staff devoted entirely to Occupational Health and Safety in the workplace – four OHS Co-ordinators and one Regional OHS Manager. They plan to hire an Ergonomics Co-ordinator soon as well as a devoted occupational therapist. The OHS staff have a dedicated administrative support person assigned to them. These numbers do not include other staff who are devoted to disability management.

OHS compliance is one of many responsibilities falling to the NLESD's Human Resources Division. In terms of employees, the NLESD is about 65% the size of Eastern Health but has more than double the number of worksites, which are spread across the entire province, not just the eastern region. Yet, in terms of dedicated OHS staff, the NLESD has only a fraction (less than a quarter) of the supports that are currently in place for Eastern Health, not counting planned new hires. The Conseil scolaire francophone has no dedicated human resources staff, let alone anyone with any particular expertise in OHS matters.

The following real situation, which has been ongoing since early in the current school year, is an unsettling example of the challenges in the K-12 system:

A pregnant teacher in a K-6 school sends a letter to her principal documenting her OHS and general safety concerns, noting the need for a risk assessment in relation to a violent/aggressive student (X) in her class. X is scheduled for a reduced school day but is not attending school at the time of the letter. Despite the documentation of concerns and request for intervention, that same day, the teacher is advised that X's school day will be extended. The next day, another letter is sent to the principal, again detailing safety concerns.

X returns to school with no risk assessment completed. District Programs staff become involved. That same day, there is another violent outburst, necessitating the evacuation of the other students from the class. X stamps on another teacher's feet, then swings around, threatening two other school staff with a coat rack. X is sent home, and discussions about extending his day end. A decision is made to start imposing consequences for X's behaviour. The teacher reiterates her request for a risk assessment and expresses concern for the lack of compliance with legislated OHS for the establishment of procedures, policies and work environment arrangements to minimize the risk of violence and provide for her safety, particularly given X's previous violent behaviour and the fact that she is pregnant.

X returns the next day and again becomes aggressive with the teacher, lunging at her when she imposes consequences for his inappropriate behaviour. Another staff member physically restrains X to prevent him from attacking the teacher from the top of his desk. During this incident, X was blocking the classroom door. X was suspended, following which the parent kept him at home.

A few days later, the principal sends out a Crisis Response Plan. As drafted, the plan seems to require the teacher to stay in the room with X during an aggressive incident. During the two visits to the school that have occurred to this point, District staff had no communication with the teacher.

A few days pass. The teacher again writes to her principal. Among other things, she expresses her concern that District staff will be meeting with the parent



to present a Behaviour Management Plan (BMP) developed without any input from her and that the response protocol as drafted is flawed. She also raises concerns about the physical layout of her classroom. She asks again about the risk assessment and requests a copy.

Training in CPI is provided to staff. A few days later, the teacher again writes her principal, copying District Human Resources staff, advising of her concerns regarding X's response protocol and BMP. She notes that she has not been consulted in relation to these documents. She again asks for a copy of the risk assessment. Later that day, the teacher is told that the risk assessment has been completed, but she is not provided a copy. She is provided with an updated response protocol.

After the Christmas break, X returns to school. X is disruptive in class and leaves the room willingly, but then attacks other staff members with chairs and tries to kick them. He is sent home. A few days later, the child is again sent home for defiance and physical aggression.

Almost six weeks after her initial letter to her principal, the teacher verbally exercises her right to refuse dangerous work and requests a medical accommodation in relation to her pregnancy. That same day, the teacher receives a copy of the risk assessment and is told that she will not have to teach X again. The next day, she reports to work and, as expected, she is not required to teach X. It is confirmed in writing to the District that she has exercised her right to refuse and is seeking medical accommodation, for which medical documentation is provided.

The following day, X is in the teacher's class when she reports to her homeroom. No arrangements have been made to ensure compliance with the teacher's refusal of unsafe work or her medical needs. The child is again sent home for aggressive and disruptive behaviour. Following contact with District Human Resources staff, the teacher is again assured she will not have to teach X again.

The provincial *Safe and Caring Schools Policy* states that “Increased public awareness and concern regarding the societal issues of bullying and **violent behaviour** among youth” [emphasis added] were the catalysts for the external review and resulting report regarding the 2006 version of the policy. This led to the development and implementation in 2013 of the policy currently in place, which states, in part that:

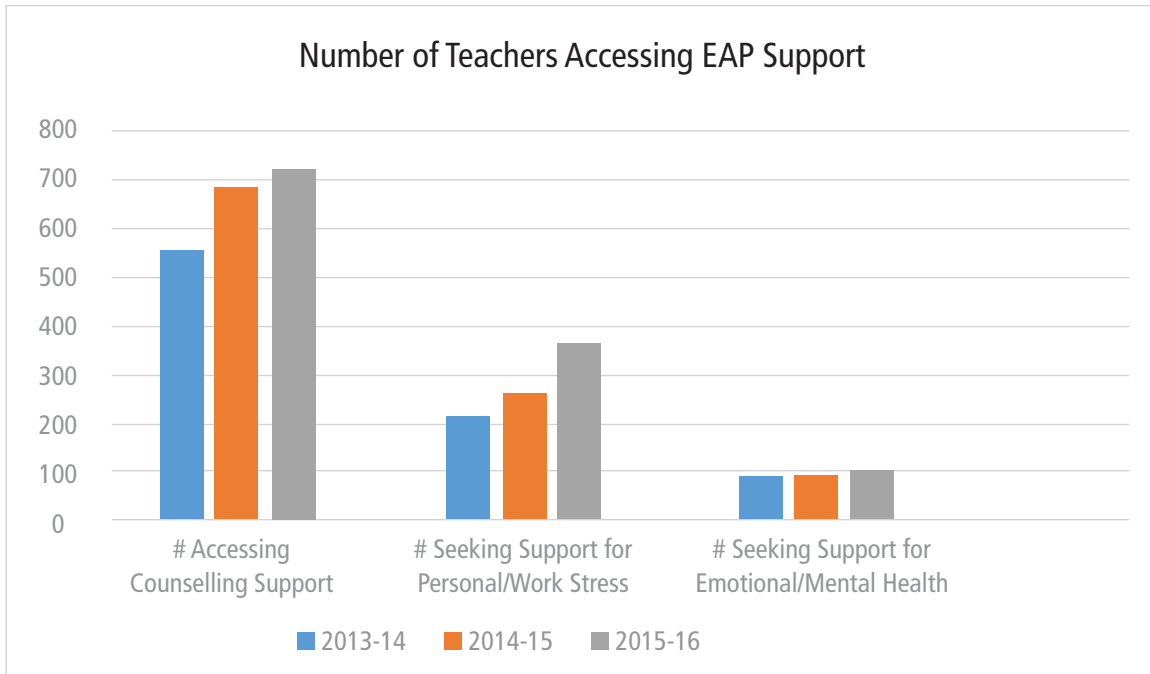
*A safe, caring and inclusive school is a necessary condition for student success.  
Students cannot be expected to reach their potential in an environment where they  
feel insecure, intimidated or excluded.*

Yet, students in this province are regularly witnessing incidents of verbal aggression and physical violence towards teachers, their primary caregivers during school hours. Classroom evacuations and “secure school” protocols have become commonplace. The lack of appropriate interventions, options and supports for students who exhibit violence towards others – either by choice or, more commonly, due to an inability to regulate/control their behaviour – negatively impacts their own learning and creates safety risks, general disruption and unnecessary stress for everyone in the learning and teaching environment.



## F) Impact of Stress and Mental Health Issues

Teacher stress and burnout are on the rise. Over the past three school years, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) statistics indicate an increase in the number of teachers accessing counselling supports – from 7.7% of the total teacher population in 2013-14 to 10% in 2015-16. Teachers’ reasons for contacting EAP are also telling – personal/work stress and emotional/mental health have also increased as a presenting issue over the same period of time. Personal/work stress accounted for 47.1% of EAP cases in 2013-14 and increased to 51% in 2015-16.



More and more, we hear discussions regarding compassion fatigue among teachers. The March 2013 edition of *Education Canada* published an article titled, *Caring without Tiring – Dealing with compassion fatigue burnout in teaching*. The article states that teachers:

*... can be drained by personal overwork or by the response to the demands of an educational system that overworks and under-supports teachers. Students learn when teachers care, but when passionate teachers burn out from compassion fatigue, no one wins. Teacher engagement is diminished, **student learning is compromised**, and school environments suffer. ... [emphasis added]*

*When budgets for educational services and support are cut, teachers are left to do more, with a more vulnerable student population, with fewer resources and less assistance. A lack of Educational Assistants, lack of timely educational testing for students who are struggling academically, and limited budgets for materials (causing teachers to feel compelled to spend out-of-pocket) are examples of stressful impacts of inadequate budgets. Funding cuts to services that support youth and families are also felt in the classroom, since teachers are on the front lines of support. Teachers know that kids who are hungry don't learn well, that students who don't have community activities to connect with feel alienated, that cuts in social services affect families in need. We have empathy – and that is exactly why it is difficult to keep compassion fatigue in check.*

As referenced above, researchers at the University of British Columbia have found a connection between teacher burnout and student stress, based on measuring the level of the hormone cortisol, a biological indicator of stress, in students' saliva. The researchers found elevated cortisol levels for students in classrooms in which teachers experienced more burnout or feelings of emotional exhaustion. Higher cortisol levels have been linked to learning difficulties as well as mental health problems. In an interview with UBC News, the study's lead author, Dr. Eva Oberle, said that the findings suggest,

*... that stress contagion might be taking place in the classroom among students and their teachers. ... Our study is a reminder of the systemic issues facing teachers and educators as classroom sizes increase and supports for teachers are cut.*

The study's co-author, Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, added,

*It is clear from a number of recent research studies that teaching is one of the most stressful professions, and the teachers need adequate resources and support in their jobs in order to battle burnout and alleviate stress in the classroom. If we do not support teachers, we risk collateral damage of students.*

Therefore, it is not surprising that in 2012, the Canadian Teachers' Federation reported in *Understanding Teachers' Perspectives on Student Mental Health – Findings from a National Survey* that teachers are more frequently seeing mental health issues impacting student achievement. The report found that there is an "important link between mental health and well-being and student learning and academic performance" and concluded that:

*Student mental health constitutes another aspect of the complex issue of class composition and student diversity in schools in terms of the challenges teachers face in working to meet a broad and growing range of student needs, including those related to mental health and well-being.*

The key messages from the survey included:

- *Mental health problems among children and youth have become a major issue facing public schools – attention deficit disorders, learning disabilities, stress, anxiety disorders and depression are the most pressing concerns identified by teachers.*
- *Numerous barriers exist to mental health service provision for students including: an insufficient number of school-based mental health professionals; lack of adequate staff training in dealing with children's mental illness; lack of funding for school-based mental health services; an insufficient number of community-based mental health professionals; and a lack of coordinated services between the school and the community.*
- *Most teachers have not received any professional development in the area of student mental health. Among the priority areas for teacher professional development in terms of knowledge and skills training are recognizing and understanding mental health issues in children, and strategies for working with children with externalizing behaviour problems.*
- *Schools are in serious need of more resources. The shortage of mental health resources, especially qualified human resources such as social workers, guidance counselors, nurses, educational assistants, psychologists and psychiatrists, was a recurring theme throughout the responses. Lack of access to resources and services in rural and Northern communities was a particular concern.*

# Appendix A: Recommendations

**Recommendation 1.** That Government develop a plan to increase the number of instructional resource teachers, school counsellors, educational psychologists, speech-language pathologists and student assistants. That such a plan include an allocation formula providing supports for students with special needs and pervasive needs that is truly needs based as opposed to budget based.

**Recommendation 2.** That Government immediately reverse past increases to class size caps and develop a new class size cap for classes with a composition diversity of greater than 10% in primary, elementary, intermediate and senior high schools.

**Recommendation 3.** That Government discontinue the use of soft caps when allocating teachers.

**Recommendation 4.** That Government, within the Inclusive Education framework, develop alternative paths for children with severe needs.

**Recommendation 5.** That Government make available training and support programs for parents of learning disabled and autistic children and others as needed.

**Recommendation 6.** That Government, consistent with the practice in other provinces, include occupational therapists as professional employees in schools and provide an allocation for this service.

**Recommendation 7.** That Government and the School District(s), in cooperation with stakeholders, take the steps necessary to ensure a greater coordination of services between the education, health and justice sectors.

**Recommendation 8.** That Government discontinue the practice of combining grades that was introduced in 2016-17.

**Recommendation 9.** That Government move immediately to provide the School Districts with increased staff positions dedicated to Occupational Health and Safety compliance.

**Recommendation 10.** That there be established an interagency committee, including school boards, Memorial University, the NLTA and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, which would be responsible for investigating areas of collaboration.

**Recommendation 11.** That there be established a working group with broad representation from the various educational stakeholders (the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the school boards, the Faculty of Education and the NLTA) with the purpose to cooperatively identify professional learning needs and work collaboratively to oversee the design and deliver programs to effectively and efficiently meet these needs.

**Recommendation 12.** That teachers be granted professional autonomy with respect to their own professional learning.

**Recommendation 13.** That resources (time and money) be dedicated to professional learning needs as identified by teachers.

**Recommendation 14.** That prior to the implementation of any program (province-wide or regionally) there be a cost analysis, not only for initial implementation but for the intended duration of the project (five years; ten years) and that resources be guaranteed and budgeted for this purpose. This would include the cost of monitoring and evaluating the pilot phase. The project would be suspended if such resources were not available.