

# Education Action Plan Update

JUNE 2021



# Introduction

Implementation of the **Education Action Plan** remains on target despite setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic, with 80 per cent of the actions completed or substantially underway. The plan, launched in July 2018 in response to the recommendations of the **Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes**, is transforming the education system through work on nine focus areas, which included:

1. Inclusive Education;
2. Student Mental Health and Wellness;
3. Mathematics;
4. Reading;
5. Indigenous Education;
6. Early years;
7. Multicultural Education;
8. Career and Cooperative Education; and
9. Teacher Education and Professional Development.

# Investments

Budget 2020 allocated \$22 million, an increase of \$9 million from Budget 2019, to continue implementation of the plan's 82 actions to support better outcomes for students. Since 2018, government has invested a total of \$42 million to support the Education Action Plan. This funding has facilitated the hiring of:

- 104 new school-based reading specialists to support literacy development in the early years;
- 200 teaching and learning assistants to support learning in K-6;
- 39 additional teacher-librarians to support learning across the grades; and
- Eight additional English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers to support newcomers (another four positions will be added for the 2021-22 school year).

To support the implementation of new policies and frameworks, new learning resources and new teaching methodologies, government is investing \$2 million in professional learning for K-12 educators.

Other key parts of government's investments include:

- \$350,000 in reading resources and \$200,000 in school library resources;
- \$40,000 in bursary programs to assist K-6 educators to upgrade their mathematics and reading qualifications;
- \$238,000 to provide experiential learning opportunities for intermediate and high school students in both traditional and emerging career fields, such as various areas of technology, health and wellness, skilled trades, engineering, and aerospace; and
- \$277,000 in a digital student record management system that reduces the time required by educators to document student information, and provides immediate information on a timely basis to inform students' learning plans.

## Implementation

Implementation of the Education Action Plan is continuing in three phases:

- Short-term: 31 recommendations were completed or substantially underway by the end of September 2018;
- Medium-term: an additional 40 recommendations will be completed or substantially underway within years two to four, by the end of September 2021;<sup>1</sup> and
- Long-term: the remaining 11 recommendations will be completed or substantially underway by year five, end of September 2022.

Approximately 80 per cent of the 82 recommendations were either completed or substantially underway by the end of September 2020. The following is a summary of current work within each of the nine focus areas.

<sup>1</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic has delayed implementation work on several medium-term recommendations; however, specific dates outlined in the Education Action Plan are being adjusted ensure these medium-term recommendations are either completed or are substantially underway by end of September 2021.

# 1. Inclusive Education

The Education Action Plan recommended a new Student Support Services Policy that clearly articulates a different approach for the provision of programming and supports to provide a learning environment where responsive teaching is the norm. Implementation of the Education Action Plan to date has resulted result in:

- A new Student Services Policy, Responsive Teaching and Learning (RTL), in all schools with a K-6 student population. Components and supports for the new policy include:
  - Universal Design for Learning;
  - Social and emotional learning / self-regulation; and
  - Instructional Assistants (teaching and learning assistants)
- Enhanced access to assistive technologies;
- Work toward an integrated child health model (community nursing, speech language pathology, psychology, occupational therapy and social work) that provides seamless, year-round services, early diagnoses and timely interventions;
- Mandatory courses in exceptionalities at the Faculty of Education, Memorial University; and
- The development of new recording, tracking, information transfer systems, including a Special Education Case Management System (SECM).

# 2. Student Mental Health and Wellness

The physical, mental, and social well-being of students is essential in order to improve their educational outcomes. The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health, a partnership of provincial and territorial governments working across the health and education sectors, is a resource to support mental health and wellness initiatives. A key component of the Education Action Plan has been to implement the Consortium's Comprehensive School Health Framework. The four pillars of the framework include social and physical environments; teaching and learning; policy; and partnerships and services. Implementation of the action plan to date has resulted in:

- Substantial work with K-6 teachers and administrators around social and emotional learning and the development of a foundational document to guide work on embedding social and emotional learning in curriculum;
- Development and pilot of a new healthy eating policy and work toward a new physical activity policy;

- Work with the school districts to ensure accurate recording of student attendance;
- A series of actions to address chronic absenteeism and student dropout, which is a shared priority with the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate;
- The development of a model to monitor the progress of children in care that will enable provision of timely and effective intervention and supports; and
- Revisions to the provincial Comprehensive Assessment Policy to refocus the work of guidance counsellors and other school and district professionals in their work around testing and wellness supports.

### 3. Mathematics

The Premier’s Task Force made clear that the goal of the mathematics curriculum should be student achievement that is comparable to the highest achieving Canadian jurisdictions. Accomplishing this requires a sound and balanced curriculum with well-articulated outcomes and expectations, highly skilled teachers, and an assessment program that adheres to national and international assessment standards. Implementation of the Education Action Plan to date has resulted in:

- A new **Provincial Mathematics Assessment Framework** with an assessment consultant hired to lead a strategy on the use of assessment information;
- The development of new standards for teaching of mathematics that will be utilized at the Faculty of Education in the preparation of mathematics teachers, and will assist district level mathematics specialists in their work with teachers of mathematics;
- A Mathematics Bursary Program to assist primary and elementary teachers to upgrade their mathematics qualifications; and
- The allocation of six district-level mathematics specialists to support mathematics teachers and provide leadership and oversight on numeracy initiatives.

### 4. Reading

Reading is a foundational skill developed in primary grades that influences students’ success into the future. Reading ability makes success in other subject areas possible. Students who struggle with reading in the primary grades continue to struggle as they progress through school. An effective approach to reading instruction requires teachers who understand how children learn to read and how to support that learning; specialist support for classroom teachers; careful monitoring of students’ learning; and, school library services to promote student engagement and literacy development throughout the school. Implementation of the Education Action Plan to date has resulted in:



- The development of a new **Provincial Reading Assessment Framework** with an assessment consultant hired to lead a strategy on the use of assessment information;
- A comprehensive approach to early identification and intervention for students who have difficulties with reading, including:
  - An early assessment tool for administration at Grade 1;
  - 104 school-based reading specialists allocated to schools; and
  - Five district-based reading specialists to support primary-elementary teachers, school-based reading specialists, and to provide leadership and oversight on reading initiatives;
- A graduate level specialization program at the Faculty of Education to prepare reading specialists;
- A reading bursary for qualifying teachers from Newfoundland and Labrador to assist them in upgrading their qualifications in reading instruction and interventions;
- 39 additional learning resource teachers / teacher librarians placed in schools, bringing the total number from 65 to 104; and
- An annual allocation of library / learning commons resources to schools through a phased approach.

## 5. Indigenous Education

Indigenous groups form a significant part of the province's population with approximately 100,000 individuals self-identifying as being Indigenous. The Education Action Plan identifies two focus areas within Indigenous education to enhance educational outcomes, which include:

- Improving teaching and learning outcomes for Indigenous students; and
- Enhancing an understanding of Indigenous knowledge, history, experiences, culture, and practices for all teachers and students in the province.

Recommendations for Indigenous education within the Education Action Plan align with the Indigenous Education Plan of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) developed in response to recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The Council's three-year plan encompasses the following four priority areas:

- Mobilizing and disseminating provincial/territorial and international successful practices and proven actions to improve Indigenous education;

- Revitalizing Indigenous languages and strengthening Indigenous culture and identity through education;
- Teaching excellence in Indigenous education; and
- Supporting Indigenous student success and well-being in education.

Implementation of the Education Action Plan to date has resulted in:

- The development of a framework for Indigenous education through an Indigenous Education Advisory Committee, with representation from each of the five provincial Indigenous groups (the framework is informing curriculum work by the individual Indigenous groups and is guiding the infusion of appropriate knowledge and learning experiences in K-12 curriculum);
- A new Indigenous Local Course Policy, providing greater flexibility for Indigenous groups to infuse cultural content into course offerings at high school (three of the five Indigenous groups in the province have developed their own local courses and Memorandums of Understanding are being developed to engage multiple partners to enhance this work); and
- The infusion of appropriate knowledge and learning experiences in teacher education programs at the Faculty of Education for teaching Indigenous students and for teaching all students about Indigenous populations.

## 6. Multicultural Education

Immigration contributes to increased diversity and to social, economic, and cultural growth in Newfoundland and Labrador. The Department of Education is working with the Department of Immigration, Skills and Labour to develop and support programs that treat diversity as a source of growth.

Collectively, government, the school districts and partner agencies are making a sustained effort to ensure schools are welcoming places for newcomers. Implementation of the Education Action Plan to date has resulted in:

- The development of a framework document to enable a broad and meaningful response to the educational needs of newcomers and students of diverse cultural backgrounds as well as address the need for all students to learn more about the many cultures of the world;
- Enhanced services, including:

- An improved pupil-teacher ratio of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, with eight additional units allocated over the past two years and another four to be added for the 2021-22 school year;
- Revisions to the Literacy Enrichment and Academic Readiness for Newcomers (LEARN) program, with the intention to expand the program; and
- The development of new standards for ESL and LEARN teachers.

## 7. Early Years

Children’s experiences in the early years have a substantial impact on their lifelong learning experiences. High quality early learning and child care programs provide developmental opportunities that set children, particularly those who are vulnerable to poor outcomes, on a positive learning pathway. Opportunities to develop language and social skills in a play-based environment provide a foundation for later success in school. Implementation of the Education Action Plan to date has resulted in:

- An expanded Operating Grants Program (OGP) to increase access to affordable, high quality early learning and child care programs (most recently, the OGP was adjusted to allow for \$25-a-day childcare for centers and family care homes that are or have become regulated);
- Incentives and opportunities for early childhood educators to improve their education levels (currently working with College of North Atlantic (CNA) to address demand for upgrading through distance learning);
- The development of a foundational document with an implementation plan for Junior Kindergarten; and
- A jurisdictional review and public consultation completed as part of a revision of the **Schools Act**.

## 8. Career and Co-operative Education

Career education can contribute substantially to students’ self-awareness, self-esteem, and informed decision-making. Experiential learning, such as co-operative education placements and apprenticeships, can provide valuable background for students to make informed educational, career, and employment choices. Experiential learning can support disengaged students, who are at risk of dropping out, by creating enhanced motivation to graduate from high school and pursue post-secondary education. Implementation of the Education Action Plan to date has resulted in:

- Increased collaboration with other Atlantic Canada education partners through the



Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET), and use the Council's **Atlantic Career Development Framework for Education Report** as a foundational document to plan career and co-operative education initiatives from kindergarten through to Grade 12;

- Partnerships with Skills Canada, NL; Brilliant Labs, and CNA to develop and deliver experiential learning opportunities at intermediate and high schools (most recently, government announced a partnership and pilot project that will bring Technology Career Pathway (TCP) programming to selected provincial high schools starting in the 2021-22 school year with the aim of cultivating homegrown talent and the growth of a diverse workforce in the technology and innovation industry); and
- The creation of a new Career Education course for senior high school students that includes knowledge and skills in personal financial management, time management, health and wellness as it relates to careers, as well as opportunities for job shadowing and mentoring.

## 9. Teacher Education and Professional Development

Educators' teaching methods have a substantial impact on student learning. High quality initial teacher education through university degree programs combined with ongoing professional learning can improve educational outcomes for all students. Alignment between teacher preparation and the needs of the school system is critical. Implementation of the Education Action Plan to date has resulted in:

- A jurisdictional review of teacher preparation programs and certification policies across Canada;
- The establishment of a Professional Development Alliance (comprising membership from the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association, the Faculty of Education and the two provincial school districts) with a focus on leadership and teacher mental health and wellness – at both the district level and school level;
- The establishment of a committee, comprised of leaders from the two provincial school districts, the Department of Education, and the Faculty of Education, to work at aligning teacher education programs with the needs of the education system (recent meetings have focused on enhancing enrolments at the faculty to address the need for more teachers in select subject areas and the number of available substitutes overall); and

An ongoing, sustainable combination of system-wide and school-directed professional learning opportunities guided by teacher and student learning needs and designed to foster change in practice.

# Technology

The **Premier’s Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes** did not make specific recommendations regarding technology, other than purchasing a special education module within PowerSchool (Recommendation 12) and hiring a professional to manage distribution and professional learning for teachers in the use of assistive technology assigned to students with exceptionalities (Recommendation 16). However, during the substantial consultations with government departments, the school districts, and more than 20 organizations and associations during the preparation of the Education Action Plan, the need for supportive technology to complement many focus areas was a recurring message.

The subsequent five-year **Education Action Plan** makes clear that “all curriculum areas will be influenced through ongoing curriculum renewal, expansion of supportive technology, and professional learning support for teachers, school district personnel, and Early Childhood Educators.”

As the implementation of the Education Action Plan progresses, focused efforts are being made to:

- Harness available technologies to open up the provincial curriculum to students, anytime, anywhere;
- Expand the available learning resources beyond core textbooks and current modes of instruction;
- Enhance web-based learning opportunities for teacher professional learning both in school and at home; and
- Enhance opportunities for students to develop skills in digital technology and pursue careers in technology.

Technology initiatives to date include:

- Government’s 2020 investment of \$20 million for the purchase of laptops for all teachers, and Chromebooks for all junior high and high school students across the K-12 education system. This investment aims to ensure equal access to education so that every student, regardless of their ability, location or socio-economic status, can continue their learning outside of the classroom, while providing teachers with the tools they need to effectively deliver remote instruction. It also moves the K-12 system toward a true digital learning environment.
- A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) involving CNA, the Department of Education and the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District to develop new pathways, including academic opportunities, to support interested students to more easily transition from high school to Information Technology programs at CNA. Specifically, the Technology

Career Pathway (TCP) program under this MOU will initially introduce a pilot in eight high schools in the Avalon, Central, Western and Labrador regions of NLESD during the 2021-22 school year in Python Programming. Students completing the pilot program will receive a micro-credential from CNA indicating they have completed the Python TCP, as well as course credit at the post-secondary level. The program will also feature an experiential learning placement for at least six weeks at a business in the province's technology and innovation sector.

- The Department of Education's partnerships with Skills Canada, Newfoundland Labrador and Brilliant Labs are providing multiple opportunities for intermediate and high school students to engage in experiential learning within the emerging careers.
- The provision of Zorbit's Math Adventure as a curriculum-aligned, digital game-based learning system, to all schools teaching K-3 mathematics. Math Adventure helps students develop their math skills and understanding of math fundamentals while providing teachers with real-time data on student progress, a feature that helps teachers identify students who are struggling, as well as those who are exceling, allowing teachers to create a customized experience to meet the needs of all students.

Available in alternate formats

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