



**Pre-Budget
Public Consultations**

**Brief Presented to
the Minister of Finance and
President of Treasury Board
March 2015**



Introduction

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to Government as part of the pre-budget consultation process for the 2015 Provincial Budget. The NLTA represents approximately 6,000 teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador and is dedicated to educational leadership and service for the betterment of the education system and the students of the province. We have been providing input to Government through this venue for nearly two decades, attempting to bring a focus to critical areas in K-12 education which requires greater attention and additional resources. In our more recent pre-budget submissions, we have identified and targeted specific priority areas and we will continue to do so in this submission. However prior to making specific recommendations on these priorities we must first make some comments of a broader nature.

Government expenditure on education is an investment that provides growth, good health and future prosperity. Child poverty and mental health are two fundamental concerns identified by teachers that require greater attention. Education, in general, and investment specifically are proven to help reduce child poverty and improve mental health, and our submission to the pre-budget consultations highlights these areas.

We recognize that the current low price of oil significantly reduces the Province's revenue, and that Government may be tempted to react with deficit cutting measures. We ask Government not to take a short term approach that treats education as an expense to be controlled or cut, rather to take a long term approach by continuing to invest in education.

Recognizing the current fiscal pressures on Government, we have limited our specific monetary requests to key areas:

Child Poverty and Mental Health

Teacher Allocations

Technology Integration

Child Poverty and Mental Health

Research is clear. Education is key to combatting increases in the cost of health care, social services, crime, and in ensuring the economic prosperity of society.

There is a direct correlation between quality education and health. The better educated the parents, the healthier the child. Better educated people lose fewer days at work due to ill health. Each additional year of K-12 education better equips individuals to make good choices with respect to their health and other important life decisions.

Children of more educated parents generally perform better in school. On the other hand, children of less-educated parents often cost more to educate as they are more likely to need special interventions. Higher education levels, particularly graduating from high school, consistently lower the probability of incarceration, of criminal arrests, and of individuals admitting to having committed crimes. Children's likelihood of committing crime decreases as their parents' education increases.

According to Stats Canada, 18.9% of children live in poverty in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is time to end child poverty. The future of this province and this country depends on the well-being of our children. There is no more urgent or important issue than making sure that all children have what they need to succeed and flourish. Poverty should be viewed as an economic concern as well as a moral one. Poverty actually costs more to society than implementation of policies that aim to eradicate poverty. Studies have proven that it costs less to invest in social programs aimed to prevent poverty than the costs of treating the symptoms of poverty such as urgent health care, mental health concerns, shelter and the criminal justice system. It has been estimated that poverty costs Canada \$72 to \$86 billion per year. This included potential loss of tax revenue due to the exclusion of low-income people from the labour market.

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 provision for students including: 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. Oftentimes stigma and discrimination pose a major barrier to the provision of mental health services for students.

Most teachers have not received any professional development in the area of student mental health. Some of the priority areas are in recognizing and understanding mental health issues in children and strategies for working with children with behaviour problems. Schools are in serious need of resources especially qualified human resources such as social workers, guidance counselors, nurses, psychologists and psychiatrists. In general, teachers support the need to continue and broaden the important conversation about child and youth mental illness and mental health in order to raise awareness, and reduce and ultimately eliminate harmful stigma.

- 1. The NLTA recommends that more assistance be provided to schools by mental health professionals whose areas of expertise would complement that of teachers.***
- 2. The NLTA recommends an increased financial commitment by Government to eradicate child poverty.***

Teacher Allocations

Allocating sufficient numbers of teachers is critical to student success. The smaller the class size, the more opportunity there is for teachers to provide the necessary attention to the diverse needs of students. It is essential that class size caps established by Government in K-9 classes be maintained.

There are a number of critical areas of the current Teacher Allocation model that need further attention.

Allocation for Inclusive Model of Education

Government has recognized a problem with inadequate human resourcing for proper implementation of the inclusive model of education. A committee has been established for the purpose of conducting a review of the Inclusive Schools Initiative. The inclusive classroom requires additional human resources to assist the classroom teacher meet the differentiated needs of individual students. In the absence of special needs teachers, the classroom teacher must prioritize to meet the greatest need, perhaps the child with a medical concern, or an autistic child exhibiting a behavior that requires a teacher's exclusive attention. In the absence of support, neither the needs of those with or without special needs are able to be adequately met. Teachers, parents and students, become frustrated with the inability to meet expectations.

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

School Administration Time

Budget 2013 reduced the allocation for school administration time. This reduction occurred simultaneously with the amalgamation of school districts and corresponding decreases in administrative supports for schools. The result is the initiatives which require administrative leadership and intervention, such as anti-bullying, safe and caring schools policies, educational leadership, are not being adequately implemented.

- 4. The NLTA recommends the allocation of administrative units be returned to the 2012 level.*

French Immersion

The Teacher Allocation Model makes no separate provision for schools that offer a French Immersion stream. This means that the total number of students at a grade level in a school is considered when the maximum class sizes are applied to determine the number of teaching units to be allocated for the grade. That is, the French Immersion and English streams are not considered separately. This approach is totally impractical and creates immediate problems. A simple example illustrates the problem. A school with 100 Grade 5s – 35 French Immersion and 65 English stream students – is currently allocated four teachers based in a ratio of 1:25. This means either two classes of 17 and 18 for French Immersion and two classes of 32 and 33 for English stream classes or one class of 35 for French Immersion and three classes of 22, 22 and 21 for English stream classes – neither scenario being acceptable. French Immersion and English streams should receive separate allocations. Based on our simple example, five teachers would be allocated to this school instead of four.

- 5. The NLTA recommends French Immersion and English streams receive separate allocations.*

Very Small Rural Schools

Many of our very small rural schools are still struggling to provide a full educational program necessary for equitable educational opportunities for students. Government needs to provide additional funding for improved allocations of teachers to small rural schools.

- 6. The NLTA recommends that small rural schools receive additional allocations as identified by need of the school to meet the program requirements.*

Integration of Education Technology in the Classroom

Government has put significant resources into technology in the classroom and making technology available to students. It is important to have a plan for integration of technology into teaching and learning so that adequate funding is available for the following:

- To enable research in on-line and e-learning effectiveness and the impact on conditions of professional practice.
 - To provide support, resources and time for teacher professional development related to the infusion of technology into pedagogy and curriculum.
 - To provide sufficient funds to school districts to address the total cost of ownership for technology, including maintenance, provision of technology support and training, software acquisition, infrastructure, subscriptions, upgrading, security, and ongoing professional development.
 - To provide high speed internet access for the classrooms of every school in Newfoundland and Labrador.
 - To increase the per pupil funding formula for the purchase of assistive technology for special needs students.
 - To provide onsite teacher supervision of students during distributed learning and e-learning environment.
7. ***The NLTA recommends that Government establish a committee to oversee integration of technology in the classroom and that the committee involve teachers in the ongoing review, approval and evaluation of the educational suitability of technology for education.***

Conclusion

Addressing the issues outlined in this brief requires that, in Budget 2015, Government commit to treating education as an investment, not an expense. Taking this long-term approach will address many of our concerns. We have identified areas that require immediate attention if we are to continue making progress in our education system. The NLTA urges government to make the required investment and implement the following recommendations to demonstrate the commitment to education to the people of the province.

Recommendations:

- 1. The NLTA recommends that more assistance be provided to schools by mental health professionals whose areas of expertise would complement that of teachers.*
- 2. The NLTA recommends an increased financial commitment by Government to eradicate child poverty.*
- 3. The NLTA recommends government budget 150 teaching units to be available to be deployed by the Department of Education as required to address needs identified and associated with the implementation of the inclusive model of education that arise during the school year.*
- 4. The NLTA recommends the allocation of administrative units be returned to the 2012 level.*
- 5. The NLTA recommends French Immersion and English streams receive separate allocations.*
- 6. The NLTA recommends that small rural schools receive additional allocations as identified by need of the school to meet the program requirements.*
- 7. The NLTA recommends that Government establish a committee to oversee integration of technology in the classroom and that the committee involve teachers in the ongoing review, approval and evaluation of the educational suitability of technology for education.*