September 15, 2020

The Honourable Tom Osborne
Minister of Education

Dear Minister Osborne:

Congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Education. As you advance activities in the interests of the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, I am confident that you will enable a high quality educational system in the province throughout the life span, from early learning and K-12 through to post-secondary education. Your department is vital to ensuring that all people in our province have a bright start and continued opportunities for learning.

This year has been marked by economic and social turmoil not only in Newfoundland and Labrador but around the world. But with great challenges come great opportunities. Through focused efforts I know that we will overcome these challenges and emerge as a stronger, more caring, more compassionate, and more diverse province. Future generations will judge us not based on the size of the challenges we faced but on how we have solidified the financial, social, and economic foundation of our province. Our Government has a responsibility to respond swiftly, decisively, and effectively. The time for action is now.

The economic status quo is no longer acceptable. We need to move away from the well-worn economic cycles of boom and bust and foster an economy that is diversified and sustainable. We need to reinvigorate our economy to harness the great potential that lies in our technology sector, our world-class arts sector, and every other sector from oil and gas to tourism, from fisheries and aquaculture to forestry and agrifoods. I know that the people of our province work hard in these and other sectors and the Government must work equally as hard for the people.

Our work to create a robust, stable economy will provide a firm foundation to ensure the delivery of vital social and other services to residents of the province. Our Government must always be mindful of the needs of the most vulnerable in our society and must ensure that quality social services are available and accessible to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. To ensure our Government is meeting this need, a Gender-Based Plus Analysis must be integrated into all policies and proposals.
The business of government must also advance from the status quo. We need to reimagine how government works so that it works for the people. This change is long overdue and it will be transformational.

In particular, I am tasking you to work with your colleagues in Cabinet, with all members of the House of Assembly, and with your departmental officials to advance the following priorities.

Please work with stakeholders toward the development of a $25-per-day child care program for families in the province that will reduce barriers for parents, and in particular women, from entering or remaining in the workforce. Increase access to affordable, quality child care and enhance early learning opportunities for children throughout the province, through initiatives such as the Child Care Services Subsidy Program, the Voluntary Operating Grant Program, and income enhancement to qualified Early Childhood Educators. Collaborating with stakeholders, please continue to develop a plan toward the implementation of Junior Kindergarten.

Working with school districts, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers Association, parents, and others, I expect you to ensure effective delivery of educational services for the school year and the continued teaching of curriculum outcomes despite the COVID-19 public health emergency all the while protecting the health and safety of students, teachers, and others who form part of the education system, and their families. You will also oversee the deployment of information technology to teachers and to junior high and high school students to support digital learning to help ensure they can continue to teach and learn at times they are not or cannot be in school.

I ask you to continue with the implementation of the Education Action Plan to improve educational outcomes. This will include reviewing bus routes and the service delivery model for deaf and hard of hearing students and supporting, through the Safe and Caring Schools Policy and guidelines for 2SGLBTQIA+, inclusive practices, professional learning, open dialogue, resource development, and student-led activities.

Working with your colleagues, the Minister of Immigration, Skills and Labour and the Minister of Industry, Energy and Technology, please develop targeted approaches for ensuring the provincial workforce supports the creation of an ecosystem that can attract and retain firms in the technology sector, including through enhanced coding opportunities in the K-12 education system.

You will collaborate with educational institutions in support of the continued delivery of post-secondary education through the COVID-19 public health emergency. This will include supporting an accessible and affordable public post-secondary education system. Work in partnership with industry, post-secondary institutions and your Cabinet colleagues to establish economic development hubs in the aquaculture, tourism, mining, technology and aerospace sectors that will serve as strategic hubs for priority skills training.

Together with the federal government, as well as leaders at Memorial University and College of the North Atlantic, I ask you to improve public post-secondary infrastructure.
I also ask you to continue implementing the Province’s new Adult Literacy Plan, and provide the best public library services possible to provide access to reading material, internet, and related programs to children, you, and adults in the province.

I trust that you will be collaborative, honest, respectful, and transparent in your role as a minister. I also expect that you will hold yourself to the highest standards of ethical conduct and act at all times with integrity. Individually and collectively, we have a responsibility to seek out the best advice and the best ideas and to implement actions only in the interests of the people of our great province. We must be guided by evidence and research and take into account diverse perspectives as we make our decisions.

We cannot change our past but we can shape our future that our province and its people deserve.

Yours truly,

DR. ANDREW FUREY
Premier