

2016

Graduation Requirements Review Public Consultations: 'What We Heard'



Education and Early Childhood Development

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1.0 Introduction

The current high school graduation requirements were implemented in September 2004, replacing requirements that had been in effect since 1998. It was in June 2007 when the first students graduated under the current requirements, and since then significant social and economic changes have occurred in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is important to ensure that high school graduation requirements allow students to realize their potential to become socially and economically engaged with their communities in a positive manner. The intention of this review of high school graduation requirements is to help ensure that graduation requirements enable students in this province to be well-positioned to succeed locally, nationally, and internationally.

In the fall of 2015, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) held consultations with education stakeholders to gather opinions and ideas on high school graduation requirements in our province. More specifically, the objectives of these consultations were to determine stakeholders' views on:

- students' needs with respect to high school graduation;
- the current high school graduation requirements; and
- the purpose/value of the distinction between academic and general graduation status.

The purpose of this report is to disseminate 'what we heard' during these public consultations.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Stakeholders

To assist with designing the methodology for these consultations, staff in the Evaluation and Research division of EECD (referred to as 'the researchers' throughout this report) utilized a process called stakeholder mapping to identify the key stakeholders. This process maps stakeholders based on their level of influence and level of interest with respect to the topic. For key stakeholders – those who were mapped as "important or essential to involve" – focus groups were selected as the most appropriate method for gathering information because they allow for an in-depth discussion. A total of 54 focus groups were held between August 2015 and November 2015 with the following key stakeholders:

- High school students;
- Parents of high school students;
- School staff;
- Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLES)¹;
- EECD staff;
- School board trustees;
- Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA);
- School Administrators' Council (SAC);
- Other provincial government departments²;
- Premier's Youth Advisory Committee; and
- Post-secondary institutions³.

For students, parents, and school staff, focus groups were held in fourteen schools (refer to Table 1) across the province. Schools were selected to ensure a good overall mix based on region, rural/urban location, and school configuration. One student group, one parent group, and one staff group were held at each school. In addition, three focus group sessions were hosted online - one with students completing courses via the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI), one with parents of CDLI students, and one with CDLI staff. Student, parent and staff groups will be referred to as 'school-based groups' throughout this report, while all other groups who participated will be referred to collectively as 'stakeholder groups'.

¹ Two focus groups were held with the NLES.

² This was one focus group with representation from Women's Policy Office, Office of Public Engagement, Labrador and Aboriginal Affairs Office, Health and Community Services, and Advanced Education and Skills.

³ This was one focus group with representation from Memorial University of Newfoundland, Marine Institute, and College of the North Atlantic.

Table 1. Locations of School-Based Focus Groups

Location	School	Configuration	Number of Students
St. John's	Holy Heart High School	10-12	982
Torbay	Holy Trinity High School	7-12	725
Mount Pearl	O'Donel High	10-12	639
Ferryland	Baltimore School	K-12	226
Bay Roberts	Ascension Collegiate	10-12	638
Clarenville	Clarenville High School	10-12	337
Marystown	Marystown Central High	10-12	403
Twillingate	J.M. Olds Collegiate	7-12	137
Grand Falls-Windsor	Exploits Valley High	10-12	518
Corner Brook	Corner Brook Regional High	10-12	861
Mainland	École Sainte-Anne	K-12	88
St. Anthony	White Hills Academy	K-12	408
Labrador City	Menihek High School	8-12	617
Happy Valley-Goose Bay	Mealy Mountain Collegiate	8-12	466
Online	CDLI (Various schools)	10-12	917

To open the consultation process to any other stakeholder group or individual interested in providing their opinions and ideas, a survey was available for completion online or via mail/email (See Appendix A).

2.2 Focus Groups

2.2.1 Participant Recruitment

Each stakeholder received a letter informing them of the purpose of the consultation and other pertinent information such as number of participants and date. In the case of student, parent, and staff focus groups, an initial letter was sent to the administrator of the selected schools (see Appendix B). For all school-based groups and for other stakeholder organizations where possible, researchers attempted to recruit 8 to 10 participants for all groups; however the actual group sizes varied from 2-10 participants.

The goal of the recruitment process for school-based groups was to have random selection (by the researchers) and a demographically diverse group of participants. School administrators aided in the recruitment process. For the student groups, the researchers randomly selected individuals using PowerSchool® (school information database) and sent invitation letters to administrators to distribute to those selected. For each school a second set of students was randomly selected, however in this case the parents of those students were selected for the parent focus group. School administrators were asked to inform these parents of the focus group using a Synervoice® message (electronic voice

telephone message)⁴. Powerschool® and school websites were used to select staff participants and these individuals were emailed directly by the researchers (see Appendix C for all group invitations).

The selected individuals who were interested in participating in the focus groups were asked to contact EECD via a toll-free number to confirm their eligibility for the focus groups, determined using a brief screening questionnaire (see Appendix D). Participant eligibility was based solely on the goal to have a diverse group of participants from various backgrounds, and answers to the recruitment questionnaires were used entirely for this purpose and kept confidential. To guide the recruitment process, the EECD staff member who administered the recruitment questionnaires had specification sheets which showed the optimal mix of demographics in each group (see Appendix E). Specifications for student groups included grade, gender, general/academic programming, socio-economic status (SES), Aboriginal status, identified exceptionalities, and extra-curricular interests. For parents, specifications included gender, age, child's grade, child with an exceptionality, child who previously graduated, level of education, employment status, language, and Aboriginal status. School staff specifications were based on gender, age, years of service, teaching responsibilities, child in school, and Aboriginal status.

The researchers selected replacement individuals for those who were not interested or not available. In some instances where recruitment was more challenging, administrators helped with identifying replacement individuals, and in some of these cases, screening questionnaires were not completed. It is important to note that while the recruitment process was designed to have an optimal mix of participants, that mix was not always attained. In an effort to continue with the focus groups as planned and thus collect as many opinions as possible, a decision was made to proceed with sessions that did not have the optimal number and/or mix of participants.

Individuals who were confirmed for a focus group were provided with a two-page information package in advance of their session (refer to Appendix F). This package contained the current high school graduation requirements for this province and an inter-jurisdictional comparison of the graduation requirements across Canada.

2.2.2 Focus Group Administration

A moderator and a note taker, both from EECD, were present for each focus group session.⁵ A discussion guide was used by the moderator to ensure that all relevant topics were discussed (see Appendix G). Due to the fluid and conversational nature of focus group discussions, this guide was not used as a script, but rather a tool to help the moderator stay on track and probe for further information where necessary. During the session, each participant received a workbook containing the same information which was disseminated in the pre-group information package and space for making notes (see Appendix H). These were not collected at the end of the session.

⁴ Although a brief script for the Synervoice® message was provided by EECD, school administrators may have used alternate or supplementary methods of inviting parents.

⁵ There were three different moderators, responsible for 29, 20 and 6 groups respectively. There were six note takers, two of which also acted as moderators during other sessions.

Focus group sessions were videotaped to aid with the analysis and reporting process (e.g., retrieve quotes, deal with ambiguous or incomplete notes). All participants signed a videotaping consent form to agree to the videotaping of the focus group and the safe and considerate handling of the data with respect to confidentiality (see Appendix I).

2.3 Online Survey

As previously mentioned, a survey was developed to allow any interested organization or individual to provide their opinions. The survey instrument was adapted from the focus group questions, and was available for completion online and via email/mail (paper-based version). EECĐ promoted the survey via Twitter, its website, and word of mouth.

There were 80 respondents to the survey in total, although not all respondents completed every section of the survey (see Table 2 for the demographic breakdown of respondents). All surveys were included in the analysis, regardless of whether respondents completed the survey in full. This is because a response to one question was not necessarily linked to other questions, and data from incomplete surveys were still deemed valuable.

Table 2. Breakdown of Online Survey Respondent Categories

	N	% (N=53)
Current or former senior or junior high school students	5	9.43
Parents of current or former senior or junior high school students	27	50.94
K-12 education staff	26	49.05
Members of organizations interested in this topic	7	13.21
Members of the general public interested in this topic	6	11.32

Note. Totals may not add to 100% as participants could select multiple responses to this question. This question was not mandatory and some participants chose not to respond (N=27).

2.4 Data Analysis

2.4.1 Coding

After the completion of all focus groups, the raw notes recorded by the note taker were reviewed by a different member of the research team and, when necessary, the video recordings were viewed for clarity or additional information. From the raw notes, the researcher developed a more concise set of notes to be used for coding purposes. These summary notes were organized by participant group (i.e., student, parent, staff, and stakeholder), school (or organization), and section of the discussion. A coding scheme was created for each section of the discussion and each unit of information was grouped into one of the thematic categories.

2.4.2 Visual Representation of Data

A word cloud was used in this report to visually depict the results of the discussion on knowledge and skills for high school students. Word clouds transform lists of words into a “cloud-like” image, giving greater prominence to common words and less prominence to those that are not as common. In other words, the items mentioned more frequently appear larger in the visual than those that are mentioned less often. In order to create a word cloud with our data, the summary notes were subjected to minor changes to clean up the list (e.g., combining “resume writing” and “writing resumes” into one common phrase), but no major coding occurred. The information was then entered into online software (www.wordle.net), which created a word cloud visual using our list. To depict topics, subject areas, and experiences discussed by participants, radial diagrams were created for each popular theme, using a colour scheme to display popularity of topics across groups.

3.0 Results

The results in this report are divided into four main sections, which are reflective of the main topics discussed during the focus groups. The first section summarizes what participants said about students' needs with respect to graduation, the second focuses on current graduation requirements, the third covers the interjurisdictional comparison, and the final section deals with the academic vs. general distinction in graduation.

There were a low number of respondents to the online survey in each of the demographic categories (e.g., student, parent, educator, etc.) therefore, no quantitative analysis was performed. Rather, the results are described qualitatively and incorporated into each section following discussion of the focus group results.

3.1 Students' Needs

In the first part of the focus group discussion, participants were asked for their opinions about the knowledge and skills that all students should leave high school with to become socially and economically engaged adults. Participants were given several minutes to think about this question, and then were asked to share their thoughts with the group. As the discussion unfolded, the note taker grouped the knowledge and skills mentioned by participants into general themes.

Next, participants were asked to reflect on the topics, subject areas, and experiences necessary at a high school level to support the development of the knowledge and skills identified in the previous exercise. Where possible, the themes were displayed (on a screen or on large paper) so participants could easily refer to them for this discussion. Rather than discussing experiences relating to each of the previously discussed themes one-by-one, experiences were instead discussed in more of a general fashion. Often, additional knowledge and skills were mentioned at this point in the discussion. Furthermore, in some cases, topics, subject areas and experiences were noted in the previous discussion around knowledge and skills. Also, although certain skills and knowledge emerged as more prominent than others, this did not necessarily impact how the discussion around experiences progressed.

In the case of the online survey, participants were given a table containing two columns, the first for recording relevant knowledge and skills, and the second for listing topics, subject areas, and experiences corresponding with the adjacent knowledge and skills. This method did not stop participants from adding to their lists of important knowledge and skills once they began listing experiences.

When asked to identify knowledge and skills students should be equipped with when they leave high school, participants offered an abundance of responses. Across all 54 groups, the topic that came up the most during this discussion was financial knowledge and skills, followed closely by communication. Life skills, technology, time management, critical thinking and respect were also commonly mentioned (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. Knowledge/Skills Overall Word Cloud

The skills and knowledge mentioned by participants were grouped into thematic categories using the coding process described above (see Section 3.2.1). For the remainder of the students' needs section, the results will be presented separately for each type of group (i.e., student, parent, staff, stakeholder).

3.1.1 Student Groups

Knowledge and Skills

The most dominant theme that emerged from the discussion of knowledge and skills in the student focus groups was financial knowledge and skills, which was talked about at least once in all 15 groups. Within this category, student groups spoke most about the importance of budgeting skills and knowledge of how to do taxes, and also often mentioned banking, paying bills and how to save money. Personal skills and knowledge were also popular among students, coming up in 14 groups. There were a wide range of topics mentioned within this category, but most notable and widely discussed were time management skills, independence, respect, and responsibility. Literacy and communication-related skills and knowledge were discussed in 13 student groups, with students primarily focusing on oral communication skills such as public speaking, as well as reading and writing skills. For a list of all thematic categories and the number of student groups in which they were mentioned, see Table 3.

Table 3. Popularity of Thematic Categories across Student Groups

Thematic Category	Number of Groups
Financial	15
Personal Skills	14
Literacy and Communication	13
Career	11
Collaboration/Interpersonal	11
Life Skills	11
Citizenship/Social Studies	9
Health	6
Mathematics	5
Technology	5
Academic Skills	3
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	3

Similar to students in the focus groups, current and former students who responded to the online survey also mentioned knowledge and skills related to finance (with an emphasis on budgeting) and personal skills (e.g., emotional intelligence, time management) as being important to have before leaving high school. Some other knowledge and skills mentioned were awareness of other cultures, health education, knowledge of politics and current events, and effective study skills.

Experiences

When student groups were asked what topics, subject areas, and/or experiences they thought students should be exposed to in high school to support the development of the knowledge and skills mentioned in the previous section, the most prominent theme by far was career. Career-related experiences were discussed by 13 out of 15 student groups, and in most of those groups they were discussed at length. A majority of groups mentioned that the Career Development course could be beneficial in terms of obtaining useful skills and knowledge, but also noted that the course as it currently stands needs to be updated or changed. A number of groups noted that the course should focus more on specific career paths. For some of the most common suggestions mentioned by student groups, see Figure 2.



Figure 2. Student Career Experiences Radial⁶

⁶ Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.

Financial experiences emerged as another common theme among students, coming up in the discussions of 11 groups. For suggestions related to this theme, see Figure 3.

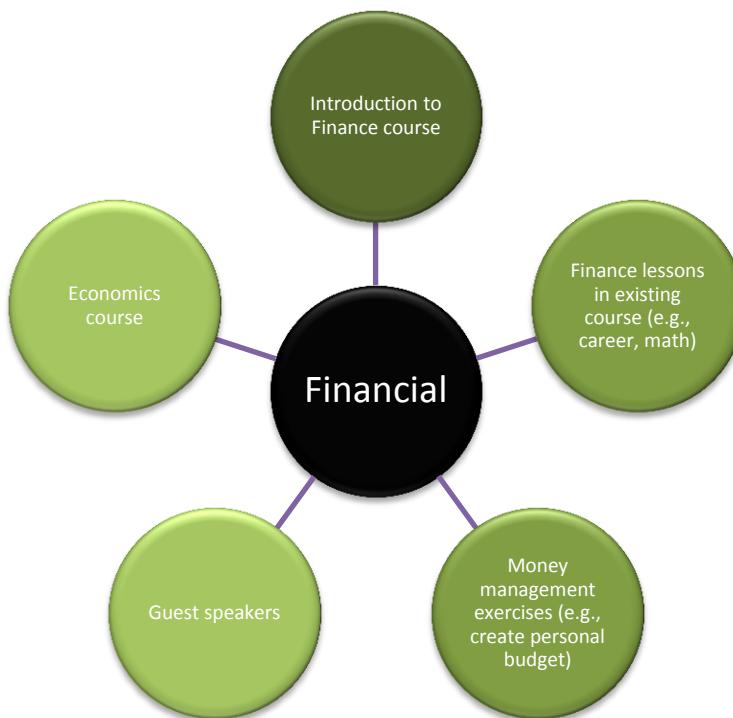


Figure 3. Student Financial Experiences Radial⁷

Eleven student groups discussed experiences relating to communication. Much of this discussion focused on ways to enhance public speaking and presentation skills, and suggestions included taking turns reading in front of the class, having a school-wide speak-off, and forming a debate club. Multiple groups also brought up Theatre Arts or Drama courses as a method of fostering communication skills.

Interestingly, in this section of the focus group there was a common theme running through all student discussions concerning a hands-on, experiential, and applied approach to teaching and learning. From finance lessons that apply to situations and tasks students will face in the future, to job site visits that provide a sense of what the work force is really like, many suggestions offered by students encouraged practical learning that applies knowledge to real-life situations and prepares students for what they will undoubtedly face in their lives after high school.

Among student respondents of the online survey, citizenship and social studies-related experiences were mentioned most frequently. Respondents mostly noted courses in politics, history, ethics, and world culture in relation to this thematic category. Experiences relating to health were also frequently

⁷ Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.

mentioned, and included healthy eating, sexual education, and participation in team sports. One student suggested a more structured physical education program in school, while another endorsed a more personalized approach to the physical education requirement. Online student respondents also mentioned experiences that currently exist in high school, including music, art, and drama programs, and also suggested instruction in subjects that are non-traditional in high school like psychology and philosophy. While critical thinking was not a widely mentioned theme in general, several respondents saw critical analysis of academic articles as being important. A number of respondents also mentioned self-reflection as an important experience in the development of essential knowledge and skills.

3.1.2 Parent Groups

Knowledge and Skills

The most dominant theme for parents, like students, was financial knowledge and skills, discussed in all 15 groups. Some of the mentions related to this theme were budgeting, banking, and knowledge of the value of money. Another prominent theme that emerged with parents was literacy and communication, and the 14 groups that mentioned this theme mostly focused on overall oral and written communication skills. Personal skills and knowledge were also mentioned in 14 parent groups, with some of the most common topics being time management, leadership and respect. See Table 4 for a list of all thematic categories mentioned by parents.

Table 4. Popularity of Thematic Categories across Parent Groups

Thematic Category	Number of Groups
Financial	15
Literacy and Communication	14
Personal Skills	14
Collaboration/Interpersonal	13
Career	12
Citizenship/Social Studies	11
Life Skills	10
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	8
Technology	8
Academic Skills	7
Mathematics/Numeracy	6
Health	3
Other	3

Literacy and communication was the most prominent theme among parents who responded to the online survey. They commonly mentioned writing and oral communication, and several respondents noted that it is critical for students to have the ability to read and comprehend a wide range of documents and materials. Other themes that stood out were personal skills (e.g., punctuality,

accountability, independence), financial skills (e.g., money management, knowledge of cost of living, paying taxes), and mathematics/numeracy skills, especially basic operations and mental mathematics. A number of parent respondents also emphasized the need for students to understand the consequences of their actions and the reality of failure, as well as the importance of independent problem solving.

Experiences

Like student groups, career emerged as the dominant theme for parents in terms of experiences and was mentioned by 11 groups. The most common topic mentioned was the importance of a career education course, and how the current course could be improved. Experiences related to this theme included visits to job sites, guest speakers in lieu of job fairs to increase student engagement, and awareness of the wide range of career opportunities out there and the requirements/education necessary to obtain those positions. These and further comments categorized under this theme can be found in Figure 4.



Figure 4. Parent Career Experiences Radial⁸

⁸ Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.

Another prominent theme that emerged from this discussion was communication. Similar to the student discussions, the majority of experiences mentioned by parents in this category related to oral presentations and public speaking. One participant noted that not everyone is comfortable with public speaking but still viewed it as a valuable experience, suggesting that presentations could happen in two separate groups, one composed of students who are comfortable with public speaking and one including those who are not. A few groups (3) also emphasized that students should be taught to communicate without using technology, and that cell phones should be banned in schools. See Figure 5 for more examples of topics related to communication.



Figure 5. Parent Communication Experiences Radial⁹

⁹ Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.

Nine parent groups discussed financial experiences that could help in the development of critical knowledge and skills. Many groups suggested the inclusion of a finance-related course in the curriculum, some examples being courses in personal finance, business education, economics or accounting. Others, in contrast, suggested that financial lessons be integrated into existing courses. See Figure 6 for financial experiences commonly identified by parent groups.

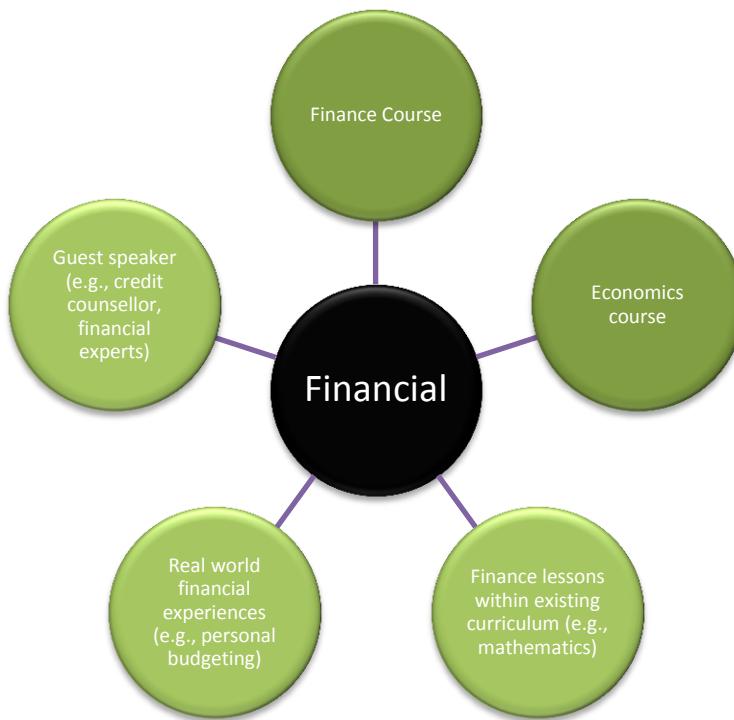


Figure 6. Parent Financial Experiences Radial¹⁰

¹⁰ Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.

Citizenship/social studies emerged as a dominant theme for parents as well, with related topics being discussed in nine parent groups. The suggestions were similar across groups and can be seen in Figure 7.

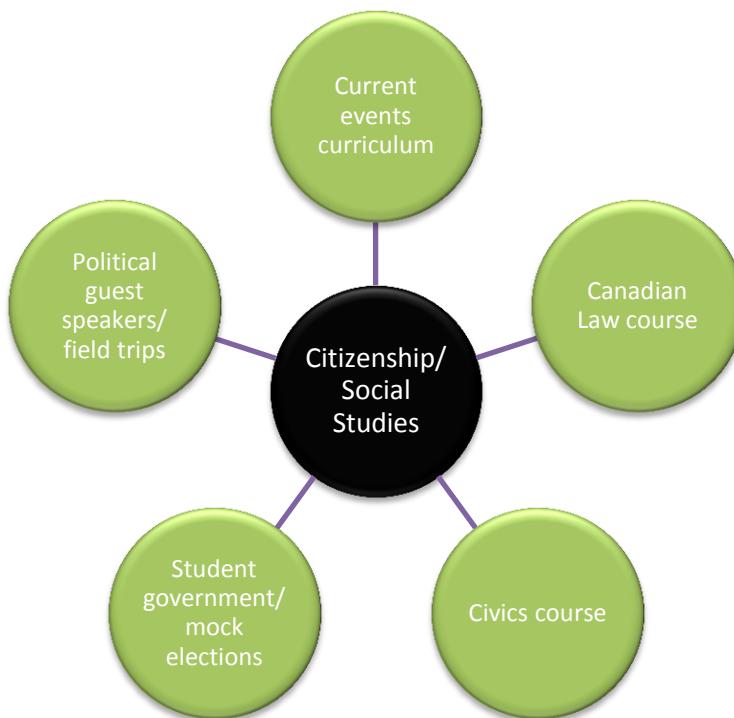


Figure 7. Parent Citizenship/Social Studies Experiences Radial¹¹

Like student groups, there was an overall focus for parents during this discussion on the application of knowledge and instruction outside the traditional classroom setting. Many groups noted the importance of relevant, real-world lessons in mathematics, finance, career and other subjects, as opposed to simply memorizing information and developing “book knowledge”. They also discussed the value of practicing important skills, so that students are prepared to use them later in life.

Parents who responded to the online survey question about important experiences most frequently mentioned those relating to literacy and communication. Some suggestions included presentations/public speaking in English Language Arts, experience with writing essays and reports, and improved resource centers in schools to foster interest in reading. Also commonly mentioned were experiences relating to academic courses, with an emphasis on mathematics, including suggestions of requiring students to do basic operations without using a calculator, and rote memorization of basic mathematics facts. Financial experiences similar to those mentioned by focus group participants were frequent on the online survey as well (e.g., balancing a budget, banking). Other comments commonly made by parent respondents included the implementation of stricter disciplinary procedures at schools,

¹¹ Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.

such as greater penalties for late work and tardiness, and the necessity of practice and review for developing skills and gaining useful knowledge.

3.1.3 Staff Groups

Knowledge and Skills

For staff participants, there were four themes that were discussed in all 15 focus groups. Citizenship/social studies was one of those themes, with some common mentions being global awareness, civics, knowledge of the government, and current events. Another of these themes was literacy and communication, including oral and written communication, spelling, grammar and reading. Financial skills and knowledge were also mentioned by all staff groups, who mentioned topics similar to those discussed by the two previous groups, but particularly focused on learning the mathematics skills necessary to understand financial matters (i.e., consumer math). Finally, personal skills were brought up in all staff groups, with some popular mentions being accountability, adaptability, time management, and responsibility.

Table 5. Popularity of Thematic Categories across Staff Groups

Thematic Category	Number of Groups
Citizenship/Social Studies	15
Literacy and Communication	15
Financial	15
Personal Skills	15
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	14
Health	14
Collaboration/Interpersonal	13
Mathematics/Numeracy	13
Technology	12
Career	10
Life Skills	7
Academic Skills	6
Other	5

Like parent respondents to the online survey, individuals currently or formerly working in K-12 education who responded to the online survey most frequently mentioned knowledge and skills related to literacy and communication. Many staff respondents focused on skills they thought to be critical to post-secondary success, including effective writing, critical reading skills, and oral communication. Personal skills were also commonly mentioned, with an emphasis on strong work ethic, independence, and motivation. Staff also often mentioned scientific and mathematical literacy, as well as the knowledge of consequences faced by those who do not perform adequately or adhere to deadlines.

Experiences

When staff groups were asked about what they would like to see at a high school level to support the development of the knowledge and skills they had previously identified as important, the discussion often centered on considerations and challenges involved with providing these experiences for students. The most common topic of discussion was the need for more experiential learning and hands-on experience in schools. Another common mention, related to the previous topic, was that there needs to be more alignment of curriculum with the real world, an issue which was brought up in the other school-based participant groups as well. One participant said that in all aspects of curriculum we should be asking, "how does this tie to the real world?" Another noted that it is critical for students to make connections between what they are learning and real life, in order to see the relevance of their education and how it will help them in the future. For considerations and challenges noted by staff, see Figure 8.

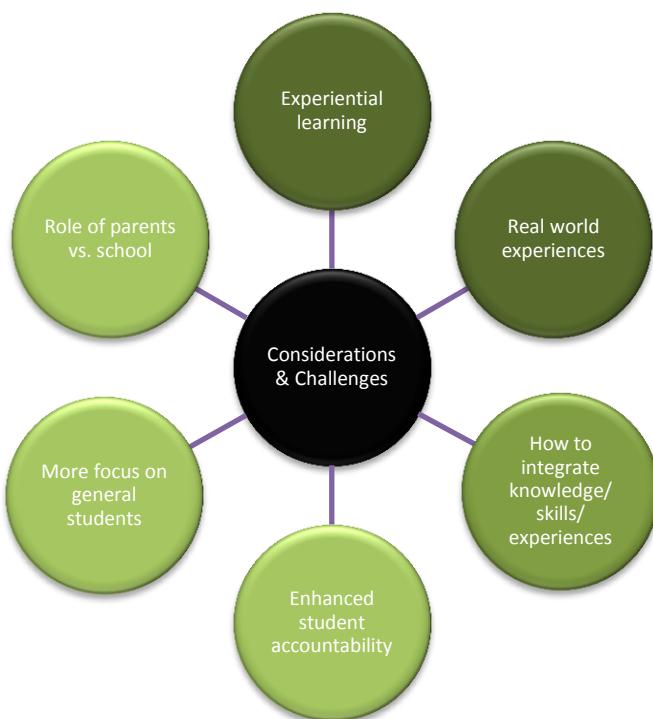


Figure 8. Staff Considerations/Challenges Radial¹²

¹² Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.

In addition to the general comments, considerations and concerns, six themes emerged from staff discussions of experiences, with each theme mentioned in ten out of 15 sessions. One of these was career-related experiences. Almost all of these groups expressed that the current Career Development course needs to change to better foster important career skills. A number of these groups (4) suggested that the course be offered in a different grade, with some suggesting that it be offered as early as junior high and others preferring it to be in the last year of high school. Some groups expressed that relevant experiences related to the present-day reality of careers and the current job market are necessary, and one participant in particular noted the importance of "bridging the gap" between the K-12 school system, post-secondary, and industry through community partnerships. Similar to parent groups, some staff groups felt that there should be an individualized focus in career education, which could help students understand how their interests and skills can help them choose and secure a career. For some of the mentioned experiences pertaining to career see Figure 9.



Figure 9. Staff Career Experiences Radial¹³

Ten staff groups also brought up experiences relating to health, with a number of those groups focusing a lot of discussion on increasing the physical education requirement, or at least finding some other way to incorporate physical activity into the school day (e.g., intermural sports). See Figure 10 for health topics mentioned by staff groups.

¹³ Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.



Figure 10. Staff Health Experiences Radial¹⁴

Although career and health generated the most discussion, there were four other themes mentioned by ten staff groups. One of these was citizenship/social studies, and the topics that were brought up were, for the most part, similar to what was said by student and parent groups, including curriculum relating to local studies, current events, and politics. Staff members also noted community involvement and student groups (e.g., clubs, student government) as important experiences for students. Two other themes were literacy and mathematics skills, however the topics discussed in these categories were almost exclusively related to reading, writing and grammar, and applied mathematics (e.g., business, consumer) respectively. The final theme was media/technology, with discussion mostly focused on the increased use of technology in general, with some mention of the introduction of a computer science course in schools, as well as learning to be social media literate.

Comparable to parent respondents, current and former K-12 education employees who responded to the online survey noted communication and literacy experiences most often, with many respondents simply emphasizing the importance of English Language Arts in fostering literacy and communication skills. Quite a few staff respondents also noted the importance, in general, of having required social studies courses, and some mentioned specific subject areas such as NL studies, government, and current events as being important. Like parent and student respondents, staff also commonly mentioned

¹⁴ Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.

experiences of a more academic nature, including the ability to do mental mathematics and a well-rounded education in science. There were also a number of responses from staff relating to the implementation of stricter deadlines and more severe penalties for bad behavior, similar to what parent respondents suggested. For example, several staff members suggested the removal of the current "no zero" policy, to teach students responsibility and accountability.

3.1.4 Stakeholder Groups

Knowledge and Skills

Two dominant themes emerged for stakeholders, which were discussed in all nine groups. The first was literacy and communication, and included discussion of such topics as reading, writing, language, and self-advocacy, but mostly centered on the skills of literacy and communication in general. The other dominant theme for stakeholders was personal skills, which most often included mentions of responsibility, independence and self-directed learning, resilience, and respect. Some other popular themes for stakeholders were critical thinking/problem solving, financial knowledge and skills, health, and citizenship/social studies, which were each discussed in eight groups. See Table 6 for a comprehensive list of thematic categories discussed by stakeholders.

Table 6. Popularity of Thematic Categories across Stakeholder Groups¹⁵

Thematic Category	Number of Groups
Literacy and Communication	9
Personal Skills	9
Citizenship/Social Studies	8
Critical Thinking/Problem Solving	8
Financial	8
Health	8
Academic Skills	7
Collaboration/Interpersonal	7
Mathematics/Numeracy	7
Career	6
Technology	6
Other	2
Life Skills	1

Stakeholders who responded to the online survey, like parent and staff respondents, most frequently cited literacy and communication as important skills for students to have before they leave high school. However, they also commonly identified technology, which did not appear as a prominent theme for other surveyed groups. Most of the mentions relating to technology were basic computer skills (e.g., typing, use of software and programs).

¹⁵ All groups excluding school-based groups (i.e., student, parent, staff).

Experiences

When examining high school experiences that foster the development of essential knowledge and skills for students, the discussion with all nine stakeholder groups overwhelmingly focused on considerations and challenges that should be investigated in relation to integrating these experiences into high school. A majority of groups (8) mentioned that more choice is needed for students, with one participant noting that forcing students to do what they hate is ineffective. Some groups went on to suggest streaming as a way for students to have fewer restrictions and be free to pursue their interests. Like all previous groups, several (4) stakeholder groups emphasized the importance of aligning the curriculum with the real world so that students can obtain valuable experiences and will be adequately prepared for the future. Several groups specifically mentioned the importance of experiential learning outside the classroom, through experiences such as community involvement, field trips, and guest speakers. One group, however, noted that while practical learning is important, core knowledge is as well, and there must be a balance between the two. Stakeholders also commonly noted that curriculum should be more multi-disciplinary, and should involve cross-curricular learning whenever possible to strengthen learning outcomes and support the acquisition of critical knowledge and skills. For the most common considerations and concerns mentioned by stakeholder groups, see Figure 11.

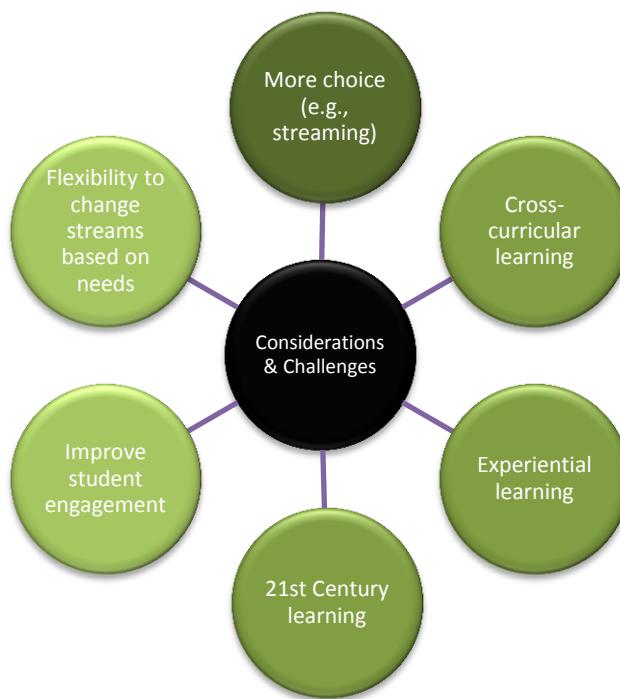


Figure 11. Stakeholder Considerations/Challenges Radial¹⁶

¹⁶ Suggestions depicted by the radial are arranged from most frequently discussed to least frequently discussed across groups, starting at the top and moving clockwise. Suggestions are shaded based on popularity, with the darkest shade depicting the suggestion(s) that were mentioned by the most groups, and so on.

A majority of stakeholder groups (five out of nine) discussed health, and mainly focused on upgrading the Physical Education program to include curriculum about mental health, addictions, nutrition, and/or overall wellness. Media and technology was also mentioned by five stakeholder groups, specifically the importance of media literacy and safety, the inclusion of more technology-based research and problem solving into the curriculum, and allowing students to bring electronic devices into the classroom for educational purposes. Although not a prominent topic of discussion, five stakeholder groups also mentioned literacy at least once.

The most common category of responses for stakeholders who completed the online survey was literacy and communication, like parent and staff survey respondents. Stakeholders mentioned research papers, in-class debates, and analysis of literature when noting experiences related to this theme. Citizenship and social studies also came up often among stakeholder respondents, some popular mentions including heritage fairs and suggestions for the inclusion of curriculum related to ethics, social justice, and law.

3.1.5. Other Survey Respondents

Among the few general public and other respondents to the online survey, most responses to the knowledge and skills question were related to literacy and communication, which is consistent with all other respondent groups. This group often noted career knowledge and skills as being important as well (e.g., job search skills, work ethic).

When asked about experiences, literacy was the dominant theme among online survey respondents from the general public, similar to most other groups. Examples of literacy experiences mentioned were opportunities for reading and access to literature, proofreading and editing, and public speaking. Although career experiences were also frequently mentioned, the majority of the comments were offered by one participant. Some of these included meeting with people in the work force, job shadowing, and insight into the real-world job market.

3.1.6 Students' Needs Summary

Across all participant categories – students, parents, staff, and stakeholders - knowledge and skills in finance, literacy and communication, and personal skills (e.g., time management, respect, responsibility) were identified as essential for students to have when they leave high school. Other themes that were mentioned by all types of participants include citizenship/social studies, critical thinking/problem solving, life skills (e.g., cooking, cleaning, first aid), collaboration/interpersonal, and health. However, there were some differences across the participant categories. For example, life skills were mentioned more often in student and parent groups, whereas health and critical thinking/problem solving were mentioned more often in staff and stakeholder groups.

When discussing experiences that could foster the development of important knowledge and skills, participants in all categories emphasized the importance of experiential learning and making

connections to the real world. In addition, all school-based group types discussed career education, with a particular focus on making the existing course more meaningful for students. Students and parents also frequently mentioned financial experiences, while staff talked more about experiences within the health, citizenship/social studies, and literacy categories. A large part of the discussion about experiences in the staff and stakeholder groups consisted of considerations and challenges related to adding new content or courses to the high school program. Some of these comments were general suggestions or cautions, such as bringing course material up to date and adopting a more multi-disciplinary approach, while others regarded barriers to students obtaining critical knowledge and skills or having valuable experiences in school, including the lack of choice in high school requirements.

Overall, participants spent more time discussing practical and real-world relevant skills, knowledge and experiences than they did core academics. While many groups acknowledged the importance of subject areas such as Math, Science, and Language Arts, the discussion centered on 'practical' knowledge and skills that participants felt all students should have when they leave high school.

3.2 Current High School Graduation Requirements

Focus group participants were next asked to share their views and opinions about the current high school graduation requirements in Newfoundland and Labrador. During this part of the discussion, participants noted their first impressions of the requirements, their likes and dislikes, and how the requirements could be improved.

When participants were asked what first comes to mind when they look at the current graduation requirements, the most common response was that they do not offer enough choice to students. This opinion was shared by all or the vast majority of participants in most focus groups (48 out of 54). Many participants cited the wide range of mandatory courses as the reason for this lack of choice (as it leads to less flexibility in course selection), and some advocated for more electives and electives from broader course areas in order to create more choice.

"It's difficult for them to fit a little bit of everything in -- if they're looking at academics, there's no room for some of the other things that probably aren't as academic but more applicable to their life skills and experiences. There's not as much choice then for some of the extra things that they might need." -

Parent

Of the five groups where a majority of participants felt there was enough choice, two were student groups and three were parent groups, all of which came from larger schools. The discussion around student choice identified a number of factors that may impact amount of choice, including school size, French immersion program, and semesterization. Overall, smaller schools seem to be less able to offer all elective options, further restricting student choice. French immersion students were also commonly

noted as having less choice due to restrictions on what courses they can take while fulfilling their program requirements.

"It's basically, they tell you what courses they're offering and they tell you these are the ones that you're taking." – Student

"He's already got his History credits but he's taking extra History this year because there's nothing else for him to take—he had to take it just to fill out his time slot." – Parent

"Yes, [students in French immersion] come out with another language, but we miss a lot of other things – it's like a trade-off." – Student

On the other hand, Holy Heart High School students were one of only two groups of students who felt they had 'just the right amount' of choice, but acknowledged that their amount of choice is impacted by the two-semester schedule implemented by their school as part of the Semesterization Pilot.¹⁷

While most participants felt that there was not enough choice in the current graduation requirements, in a few groups (9 out of 54) the topic of student choice generated some debate about how much choice is appropriate. One caution expressed by several groups was that choices made early in high school could close post-secondary doors in the future. Another concern mentioned by a few participants was that without a wide breadth of mandatory courses, students might not attain some of the essential skills and knowledge identified in the previous discussion.

"I think at the age of 15 not every student knows as clearly what they want to do in life to make that major—that big of a decision [in terms of course selections]." – Parent

Several stakeholder participants also cautioned that too much choice may encourage students to choose courses that are easy rather than those that are challenging or beneficial, and one participant noted that this pattern is seen in students who come to Memorial University from other provinces with more

¹⁷ The Semesterization Pilot is a three year pilot program coordinated by the DEECD and NLES. The pilot involves the implementation of a two-semester schedule for high school students, and is ongoing at Holy Heart High School and Heritage Collegiate. The semesterized schedule allows for students to obtain a maximum of 48 credits over three years, compared to 42 with the usual full-year schedule. However, the number of instructional hours per two-credit course with Holy Heart's semesterized schedule is approximately 100, less than the recommended 110 hours.

flexible requirements. Some participants noted that as a result of having well-rounded mandatory courses, students are taking courses that they might not choose on their own, and this can be a positive experience. For example, one parent noted a specific instance where her son, an aspiring physician, was forced to take a drama course for his fine arts requirement. The student ended up really enjoying the course and has since become heavily involved in theatre in his spare time.

In contrast, participants in a few staff and stakeholder groups mentioned that they thought students should be able to pursue a more subject-focused high school path (e.g., if a student wants to pursue a career in science they should be able to focus on science courses); this was often referred to as 'streaming'. Furthermore, some participants pointed out that students are more likely to be engaged if they have more choice to do what they enjoy, and that higher engagement can lead to better student outcomes.

"I also see the value in being well-rounded but I feel like we should get this well-roundedness out of the way before they enter high school. All of the fundamental learning skills in math, science, and English should be done by grade 9 so when you get to grade 10—I think there should still be options for those that don't know what they want to do, but for those who do know what they want to do, we need to have more focused streams."—Stakeholder

"The more choice we offer, I think some of the other issues we see in education, [like] apathy and the attendance issue, would probably go down – if children are engaged, they're going to come to school." - Stakeholder

Other suggestions for improving flexibility and choice for students were related to the structure of the K-12 system, including a switch to a 9-12 high school system, improved alignment between junior and senior high school programs, and semesterization. One stakeholder suggested the implementation of a schedule with a 16-day cycle, and 16 credits per year, in order to increase choice without lessening the current minimum requirements.

"Maybe there's a way for the credit system to be adjusted without the courses being adjusted. With the credit system at [Holy] Heart they're doing 8 courses per year, 4 per term. So, they're graduating with 3 more courses than our students are graduating with."—Staff

Another topic mentioned in relation to the current graduation requirements was the 'Other Required Credits' category, with participants in almost half of the groups expressing their dislike of the requirement and the opinion that it is not beneficial to students. Suggestions were made to either allow more options under that category or remove it altogether (allowing for more credits under the 'Any Subject Area' category). Participants in several groups noted that the graduation requirements in general and the way they are presented are confusing for students, and that they often feel overwhelmed at the prospect of ensuring that their schedule will fit all the requirements and they will be able to graduate.

Many groups identified mathematics, English Language Arts, and science as being good core subjects and liked the way they were included in the current requirements. However, some participants felt that there should not be a discrepancy in the number of credits required for mathematics and English Language Arts courses. Furthermore, it was often noted that many students completed six mathematics credits rather than the required four anyway (due to the pre-requisite nature of the courses and the requirements for academic graduation), and some participants felt that this should be reflected more clearly in the graduation requirements.

Of the various subject areas reflected in the current graduation requirements, physical education and career education generated the most discussion. In both cases, differing viewpoints were expressed, and it was evident that people felt passionately about the topic. Most of the participants who supported physical education as a graduation requirement argued that it is critical for our students' health, and many agreed that the requirement should absolutely be mandatory and perhaps even increased. In contrast, some of the participants who were against the requirement felt that the move to make physical education mandatory has not had an impact on the health issues in the province and is not fulfilling its purpose, and therefore it should not be required for all students. Others who were against the requirement noted the anxiety and stress caused for some students by being forced to participate in sports and other physical activities. Some felt that physical education should be optional so that it would not interfere with students' schedules should they want to pursue subjects viewed as more academically rigorous. One student recounted their story of having to return to high school for a fourth year to complete their physical education requirement after failing it the first time, despite maintaining a high average in all other courses. Another argument made was that some students are highly active outside school, especially those involved in organized sports, and these students should not be forced to take physical education if they would rather complete a course in another area. A few participants mentioned that while a mandatory physical education requirement may be good in theory, there are practical challenges associated with providing physical education courses to every high school student. These include a lack of physical space, and scheduling and staffing considerations. Three student participants from the same school noted that while they have access to a fitness room, students who would prefer to use fitness equipment rather than participate in gym activities cannot do so, because the facility is located across the school from the gym. They explained that unless their entire class wants to go to the fitness room, no one is able to, because they only have one gym teacher and supervision is an issue in that case.

"[Physical education] should be an opportunity to become more comfortable with how you feel about your body ... I find I'm comfortable in my gym class because I'm with my peers, and I don't feel like we're over-competitive or anything like that, and it's more of an environment where we're having fun while being active." - Student

"We have a crisis level problem in our province with obesity, and we've had [the physical education] required credit in our system for years and years, so here's the question, did it make it better?" - Stakeholder

"When I came here ... we were probably offering close to what we're offering now [6 phys ed courses, 5 healthy living courses] and what that meant for me in the gym was, we were out there with 70 kids ... we only have one gym, one facility, but we have all these courses now because we have so many students who require them and some kids who want to take it optionally, and for me to run a phys ed program in a gym with 70 students and two teachers was very challenging." - Staff

Participants also commented on the content of the physical education curriculum, with some of these participants feeling that it should be less sports-focused and more about health and personal wellness. In fact, it was suggested in a stakeholder group that a more general health category, one that encompasses all aspects of health, could replace the category of physical education. It was acknowledged in several groups that a Healthy Living course is offered as an alternative to physical education, however some negative comments were made about the course, including that the course material is not stimulating enough, that there is a lack of nutrition education, that the curriculum is seen as "fluff", and that there is insufficient coverage of mental health in the current curriculum.

"I think phys ed is too often de-valued into simple sports and not valued for what it is. You can have the best brain in the world, but if you haven't got a vessel to carry it, who cares? Physical education is way more than just [sports] ... it should be a personal wellness course ... " - Staff

"I think the name physical education is so out of date, it needs to be changed, [it] has such a negative connotation for the parents, who are sharing the message that it's ok to stay out of gym ... and I think until you remove that label, which we see in other sectors of society around mental health that we need to change, it will always be gym or phys ed, and will not have any core role." - Stakeholder

"Now we're on to the mental health, there's so much suicide, depression, I think it would be great if we had more to help those teenagers who need the extra push, who need to vent, in order to refocus, deal with some personal issues." - Staff

Another prominent topic in this discussion was career education. In this case, the debate wasn't over whether or not all students should have to do Career Development, as most participants believed there was value in a course related to career education. Rather, there were mixed opinions about whether the course as it currently stands is of value to students. Participants in several groups supported the current course, saying that career education is beneficial for preparing students for the workforce and improving their communication skills, with some even suggesting an increase in the amount of career courses offered. A few participants also thought that the course does a good job of determining students' career interests, and helping them decide on the career they wish to pursue. In contrast, others believed that the current course is not sufficient and needs to be revamped or removed altogether. Participants often noted that the course is too general and needs to focus more on what is needed to pursue certain careers, and others noted the lack of interview training and actual workplace experience (e.g., job shadowing, internships). Some comments were also made about the course not being taken seriously, with one staff participant noting that students do not care about the course, and as a result, they put in minimal effort. A parent participant from the same school commented that the curriculum is lacking valuable content and is full of "filler material", while a student from that school called the course "slack" and said that the activities they do in the course are not valuable experiences. Another student participant (from a different school) mentioned that the course is different depending on the teacher responsible, because all teachers treat the content differently and some take it more seriously than others, while a staff participant suggested that the weaknesses with Career Development are due to a lack of support for career teachers.

"[Career Development] is the biggest waste of money the Department of Education has ever achieved ... I could teach the whole thing in 8 weeks." – Staff

"Career Development is good ... it helps you know where to get started, and how to do an interview and stuff like that, and helps you get an idea of what you want to do, too." - Student

"Career in itself had a really good genesis, it was designed to fulfill a really good niche, you know, but the distinction between the implementation and where it is now is very different, there are very few teachers wanting to teach it, the children do not engage in it ... I don't know if it needs a redesign, or if it needs to be pulled, but it's not effective in its current format." - Stakeholder

"The challenge is engagement. Now, there's nothing wrong with the career development course, but in my experience, a lot of students don't care about the course, or don't buy into the course ... it's a great course, as long as we can engage them." - Staff

The most heavily debated issue regarding career education was the community contribution requirement, and overall there were more participants speaking against it than for it. Some participants noted that forcing students to volunteer goes against the fundamental principles of volunteerism and may even deter students from volunteering in the future. Others mentioned that some students have work and extra-curricular commitments which are already placing significant demands on their time outside of school. Another concern, which was most often mentioned in relation to rural areas, was the difficulty for some students to secure volunteer placements, because of limited opportunities, transportation issues, or rules against using volunteer hours to help a family member. There was also some talk regarding the way in which students obtain their volunteer hours, with at least one group from each participant type noting that some students 'cheat' their way into getting hours and do not actually complete them. Some staff participants noted that a burden is placed on schools to place students and organize hours; however it was felt that this should be the responsibility of the students and parents. Participants who liked the requirement noted the valuable communication and social skills that can be gained by getting involved in the community, with one student participant going further to state that without the requirement, many students would not volunteer on their own and thus would miss out on this valuable opportunity. In a few groups, some participants noted that they liked the idea of career hours, but recommended that the number of hours be reduced to make the requirement more feasible and enjoyable for students.

“[It’s a] noble intent, the whole notion of community service, who can argue with that? The problem is in the logistics of it and the implementation of it ... I was in a high school in a rural area, a graduating class of 60 or so, in the community if we each do 30 hours, it’s a bit of a challenge ... well intended, but is it achieving what was intended, and could it be achieved in a different way?”

- Stakeholder

“The 30 hour community service contribution, that’s wonderful, that really teaches some of [the students] the importance of giving time to their community ... I even say it wouldn’t hurt to push it up, to maybe 35 hours. Some of them really get something out of this, it’s a really authentic learning experience, it’s genuine, it’s real.” - Staff

“The 30 hours of mandated volunteer time is slavery, and I am shocked because it goes against the absolute principles of volunteerism. If you mandate it you actually destroy the essence of volunteering ... that you would want to give of yourself without anything in return, is one of the most beautiful aspects of our culture, and you’re ruining it.” - Stakeholder

The Fine Arts category was mentioned by most groups (43); however it did not generate as much discussion as physical education or career. Again, there were mixed opinions on whether or not it should be a requirement. Participants who liked the requirement noted the variety of fine arts courses was a positive aspect of the graduation requirements, and also liked that all students get the opportunity to experience these courses even if they do not fall within their area of interest. One staff participant said that fine arts courses are valuable experiences for every student in that they teach unique communication skills and forms of self-expression. Those who disagreed with the requirement mainly argued that fine arts courses are not beneficial in high school for those who do not plan to pursue fine arts as a career, and many of these participants suggested moving it to an optional/elective category.

Social studies was mentioned in several groups (17) and in most cases, participants expressed that they liked the category and thought it should be mandatory. A few groups suggested that the social studies courses be updated to contain more current curriculum, and others called for the inclusion of civics, politics, social sciences and/or local studies along with the geography and history that make up the current curriculum.

There were a few other topics that were mentioned by multiple groups during the discussion of current graduation requirements. A number of groups (16) mentioned problems associated with Science 1206, with the most prominent topic of discussion being that the course restricts students who want to complete three Level III sciences (i.e., Biology, Chemistry, Physics) but cannot do so due to lack of room in their schedules. Some participants mentioned that the Science 1206 curriculum overlaps with material taught at the intermediate level, and others noted overlap with Level II science courses in high school. Conversely, a few participants also said that the course does not have enough connections to the rest of the high school science curriculum. Several groups (14) noted the lack of a life skills course in the requirements, and some suggested that if there is not a full course dedicated to the topic, there should at least be some life skills content included in another course (e.g., career). A few groups (9) also suggested that the current requirements are suited primarily for students intending to pursue the academic stream, with some participants noting that general students are not receiving an education that meets their unique needs.

3.3 Inter-jurisdictional Comparison

Participants were asked to refer to the inter-jurisdictional comparison in their workbook for this part of the discussion. It should be noted that this topic was not included in the online survey.

When participants were asked about what stood out to them about the inter-jurisdictional comparison, the most common response was that Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest percentage of mandatory credits in the country. Like in the previous discussion, the lack of choice was viewed by most participants in all groups as a weakness and some participants expressed the opinion that, in this regard, the rest of the country could not be wrong. Also similar to previous discussions, some participants cautioned that 'too much' choice may not prepare students for life outside of high school.

"Are our students twice as good as students coming out of New Brunswick? I don't think so."—Stakeholder

Another common observation (mentioned in 27 groups) was that not all provinces require community service hours. The volunteer hours continued to be a topic of debate with some participants viewing them as a strength of the Newfoundland and Labrador requirements in comparison to other provinces, and others preferring to follow the example of the majority of the other provinces and have it removed.

In several groups (12), all of which were from school-based cohorts except one, it was noted that some provinces seem to have a heavier focus on a particular subject area (e.g., Saskatchewan requiring 10 credits in English). This was viewed as negative in that it does not allow students to obtain a variety of important skills from other subject areas. This observation highlighted the value of having a more well-rounded approach to graduation requirements, and some participants emphasized that our requirements are doing a decent job in this respect. However, participants noted that it is difficult, yet

necessary, to find a balance between well-rounded requirements and requirements that offer sufficient choice.

Some participants noted the variation in the total number of required credits between provinces. The number of credits required in some provinces, particularly Ontario and Manitoba which require a total of 60 credits in comparison to Newfoundland and Labrador's 36, raised some questions from participants and made many wonder whether this offered greater flexibility and choice. In some cases the moderator had to explain that the total number of credits was impacted by the number of grades in the high school system (e.g., 9-12 in Ontario) and the type of schedule used (i.e., two-semester schedule is prevalent in other provinces). In a few groups there was some debate about which provinces we should look to for inspiration, or whether that should be done at all considering the unique challenges and culture surrounding Newfoundland and Labrador education.

"We know what is best for our kids in terms of requirements." - Staff

At least one group from each participant category commented that the discrepancy between provinces in terms of credits can often become an issue when students move to a new province and have to transfer their credits to a new school. One stakeholder said that the process is "a nightmare" and a student noted that sometimes transfer students have to "go back a grade" and end up graduating later than expected in order to fulfill all of our province's requirements.

Optional language arts also emerged as a topic of conversation in this comparison. A few groups felt that it should be removed as a requirement, but most participants who mentioned this topic simply noted that Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province to have this category in its requirements.

While mentioned in only a few groups, the following are some things that participants liked about the requirements in other provinces:

- the Civics requirement in Ontario (11 groups);
- French requirement in Ontario (3);
- the Technology requirement in Nova Scotia (2); and
- the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) requirements¹⁸ (3)

The same suggestions that were brought up during the current requirements discussion were reinforced here. Several participants felt that exploring a 9-12 system or semesterization (or both) would be viable options for increasing choice. Some noted that removing Optional Language Arts, Fine Arts, and/or Other Required Credits would provide students with more electives. A majority of groups felt it important to maintain a "streamlined core" and that opening up choice beyond this would be to the

¹⁸ Ontario administers the OSSLT to Grade 10 students. Successful completion of this assessment is required for graduation.

benefit of the student. The vast majority of groups, after comparing the Newfoundland and Labrador requirements to those in other provinces, felt that the current requirements needed to change. The inter-jurisdictional chart, for the most part, affirmed opinions about the current requirements being too restrictive. It was often the case that a participant who, during the initial discussion, liked the current requirements and thought there was enough choice, changed their mind after seeing how Newfoundland and Labrador's requirements compared to the rest of the country.

"I'd like my children to have choices earlier, than, you know, before they have to worry about paying bills and all the things that come later in life, so when you look at these numbers, it sways me a little more on the other side." –

Parent

3.4 Academic vs. General Distinction

The final topic presented to focus group participants involved the distinction between graduating with an academic or general status. During this discussion participants were asked what they believed the purpose of the distinction to be, whether the distinction impacts students, and whether they thought the distinction should remain. Please note that accomplishing the minimum graduation requirements (upon which this consultation process was based) results in general status; a separate set of requirements outline what is needed to attain academic status.

The vast majority of participants believed that the academic requirements aligned with Memorial University (MUN) entrance requirements or university entrance requirements in general (although MUN was most commonly mentioned). Some participants viewed it more generally, stating that the distinction determined what path students could pursue after high school. When the moderator explained to participants that the academic are not in exact alignment with Memorial University's entrance requirements, and that different universities have different entrance requirements, many failed to see the purpose of the distinction. Some participants noted that the distinction gave recognition to those who worked hard for their academic status. However, when this was mentioned, another participant usually pointed out that some students in the general program work very hard to achieve general graduation, and in some cases, may work harder than their academic peers.

When discussing whether or not the distinction in graduation impacts students, negative impacts were mentioned by more groups (44) than were positive impacts (19). The negative impacts often centered on the self-esteem and motivation of general students. In terms of labels, a majority of groups brought up that many people still refer to general students as "basic" students, further perpetuating the negative stigma and impacting the self-esteem of those students. Student groups more often talked about the social implications of taking general courses, in that those students were looked down upon by their academic peers, although this sentiment was not shared by all. Many staff groups questioned how this distinction aligned with new inclusion policies, and stressed that (in terms of programming)

general students' needs are not being met. Parent groups were the only ones to mention that the status distinction puts a lot of stress on academic students struggling to keep their status, especially for students who fall on the cusp between academic and general in terms of ability. Many people also referred to the fact that language such as "dropping down" was used to denote a student moving from an academic program to a general program, implying that a general program is subordinate to the academic program.

"We're always talking about inclusionary practices and being socially just, and that is the path we are taking, but yet we're going to label in the biggest way possible by basically saying, 'you're smart or you're not so smart'." - Staff

"Our current system isn't based on the bell curve; it is geared toward the higher end student. General students are sent the message that their program is a 'dead end'. The academic program is given a lot of attention, and the general program is an afterthought." - Staff

In most groups (36), participants acknowledged that the academic and general distinction does not fit all students. Participants talked about cases where students were capable of academic courses in some areas but not all. They noted that these students are unlikely to remain in academic courses even in the areas in which they are capable, for two reasons. One reason is they would graduate with a general status even if they completed general programming in only one area. Some noted that this provides little incentive for these particular students to continue with any academic courses. The other reason is that, in some cases, it is not possible for students to take academic and general courses in the same term because of conflicts in the schedule between academic and general programming. Some participants expressed frustration with the distinction as they recollected stories of not doing well themselves in an area that they did not need for their post-secondary programs.

"Math is not my strong suit, whatsoever, I'm more into English and Geo and stuff like that, but the thing is, if you take general math, then you're put in all general, and then you're graduating with a general diploma, and I mean, if it was offered, I would take general math and academic everything else ... personally I want to do social work, but because my marks in math are not what they should be, it's putting me at a disadvantage." - Student

"To me it's such an injustice to him because he started off in the basic program and instead of saying to him, 'Well you're able to do sciences, so we'll let you do the academic sciences but you're probably going to have to do the basic math', instead he had to do basic everything." - Parent

A few positive impacts on students were mentioned across groups, and the comments that were made echoed the ideas about the purpose of the distinction. School-based groups appreciated that the distinction might act as a motivator to students, and stakeholder groups felt that the distinctions were useful in helping students take the program that they needed to accomplish their post-secondary goals.

It should be noted that when participants were asked for their opinion on whether or not the distinction (i.e., distinct graduation requirements for academic status) should be removed, there was some misunderstanding in that participants interpreted the question to be about programming despite the moderator's best attempts to clarify. Participants responded to the question by expressing concerns or possible implications for students. Stakeholders were often concerned that by removing the distinction, the high school standards would be lowered, creating a less rigorous program. School-based groups were more concerned that if the distinction were to be removed, students would have to exert extra caution when selecting courses to ensure they were taking the courses they needed to pursue their post-secondary goals. Some parent and staff groups were also concerned that removing the distinction would result in losing the Honours status, as they felt that this was a good way to reward students for their achievement.

However, a majority of groups expressed a desire to see the statuses removed. They felt it was best for students to simply take courses according to their abilities, keeping in mind their career goals, and to let post-secondary institutions and employers judge their eligibility based on courses taken. Some noted that increased guidance would be necessary to support students in making course selections if the academic requirements for graduation no longer existed. There was at least one group in each school-based category that unanimously agreed that it should stay.

Throughout the discussion, several suggestions were made by participants as an alternative to removing the distinction between general and academic graduation. Several groups suggested that perhaps eligibility for the academic distinction could be calculated based on a percentage of academic courses completed, to mitigate the negative impacts on students who only need to take one general course. Another suggestion was the introduction of a third status to create more flexibility in the requirements. Some groups felt that the academic status was too hard while the general status was too easy for some students and this would also be addressed with an intermediary status. One staff group was especially passionate about this idea; however, it was mentioned by several other groups and cohorts as well. Additionally, stakeholder groups suggested that offering students more choice would increase their motivation to work harder in courses that are challenging to them, and that they would, in effect, 'stream' themselves. Many groups felt that it was still important to recognize very high achievers (with

honors distinction or some other similar concept). One student group suggested that students should have the ability to move up and down based on their performance in a course (i.e., if they excel in a general course they should be allowed to try it in academic next time). A staff and stakeholder group both suggested the idea of "streaming" earlier (i.e., in junior high school) or offering more choice in junior high so that students could better select their high school programming to suit their career goals. Stakeholder groups also mentioned the possibility of creating vocational tracks rather than having status distinctions; they stated that this would be based on the projected job market and would help meet economy demands in the future. The majority of groups mentioned the need for increased guidance for students to help in appropriate course selection based on individual goals.

Interestingly, participants who responded to the online survey most often felt that the distinction should remain (except the general public group). This result should be interpreted with caution however, considering that the online respondents had no moderator to clarify the nature of the question as was the case in the focus groups.

4.0 Summary

In terms of the knowledge and skills all students should have upon completion of high school, focus group participants most often mentioned those related to finance such as budgeting, taxes, banking, credit, and loans. Also commonly mentioned were personal skills (e.g., responsibility, time management, independence) and literacy and communication. When discussing topics, subject areas, and experiences necessary to foster essential knowledge and skills, themes varied among the different types of groups, but an overarching theme of experiential learning and real-life experience emerged across all participant types. Much of the conversation focused on creating a more practical and applied experience for students in high school, in order to not only equip them with critical skills and knowledge, but also teach them how they can be used in the real world.

The most common first impression of the current high school graduation requirements was that our students do not have enough choice, with most groups citing the amount of mandatory courses as the reason for this lack of choice. Much of the discussion during this part of the focus groups revolved around certain requirements (e.g., physical education, community contribution hours) and whether or not they should be mandatory. In all of these cases, there were compelling arguments on each side, and while some groups did reach consensus on these issues, many groups remained mixed at the end of the discussion. The inter-jurisdictional comparison further solidified participants' opinions around lack of choice for students in our province and even shifted the opinions of those who, during the previous discussion, thought that our requirements provided sufficient choice. Throughout the discussion, challenges were noted with respect to finding an appropriate balance between well-rounded requirements and sufficient student choice, as well as how to incorporate more topics into the existing high school program. Several suggestions were made which include expanding the high school program (i.e., 9-12), better alignment between junior and senior high, and alternate types of scheduling such as a two-semester school year.

Overall, focus group participants were more likely to identify negative impacts (e.g., stigma) than positive impacts of the distinction between academic and general graduation. Most groups acknowledged that some students do not 'fit' perfectly into one stream, and some participants recounted personal stories of themselves or someone they know in that particular situation. Most participants felt negatively about the fact that if a student does general programming in one area, they receive general status when they graduate. As the discussion developed in most groups, support tended to grow for removal of the academic requirements for graduation, or at least a change in the way it is determined. However, participants cautioned that if the requirements for academic graduation were removed, more guidance would be needed to ensure that students and parents understand the implications of course selection on post-secondary opportunities.

Appendix A – Online Survey

High School Graduation Requirements Survey

Welcome to the High School Graduation Requirements Survey! The purpose of this survey is to obtain your opinions on: students' needs with respect to high school graduation; whether or not the current graduation requirements are meeting students' needs; and the purpose and value of the distinction between academic and general status. In addition to this survey, focus groups are being held across the province with students, parents, school staff, and other education stakeholders. The information gathered from both formats will be presented to the public in a "What We Heard" report, and will be used to inform future decision making related to high school graduation requirements. Please note that this survey is anonymous - you are not required to provide information that can reveal your personal identity. If you are responding on behalf of a professional organization, there is an opportunity to indicate this at the end of the survey. The survey is estimated to take approximately 15 minutes on average, however, timing will vary depending on your responses.

Students' Needs

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development believes it is important to ensure that high school graduation requirements allow students to leave high school well-positioned to become socially and economically engaged with their communities in a positive manner as adults; adults that have the capacity and confidence to adapt, achieve and excel, regardless of the challenges they face.

To be well-positioned to become socially and economically engaged adults, what knowledge and/or skills do you think students should leave high school with?

Please note: The responses you provide here will be used in the next question (which asks for your thoughts on how the knowledge and/or skill you've identified can be fostered in high school). You do not have to fill in all boxes. You may group similar responses (e.g., related skills) into categories if you wish.

Knowledge/Skill:

Knowledge/Skill:

Knowledge/Skill:

Knowledge/Skill:

Knowledge/Skill:

Knowledge/Skill:

Knowledge/Skill:

Knowledge/Skill:

What topics, subject areas, and/or experiences do you think students should be exposed to in high school to support development of:{{ Q1.0 }}?

You do not have to fill in all boxes.

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

What topics, subject areas, and/or experiences do you think students should be exposed to in high school to support development of:{{ Q1.1 }}?

You do not have to fill in all boxes.

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

What topics, subject areas, and/or experiences do you think students should be exposed to in high school to support development of:{{ Q1.2 }}?

You do not have to fill in all boxes.

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

What topics, subject areas, and/or experiences do you think students should be exposed to in high school to support development of:{{ Q1.3 }}?

You do not have to fill in all boxes.

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

What topics, subject areas, and/or experiences do you think students should be exposed to in high school to support development of:{{ Q1.4 }}?

You do not have to fill in all boxes.

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

What topics, subject areas, and/or experiences do you think students should be exposed to in high school to support development of:{{ Q1.5 }}?

You do not have to fill in all boxes.

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

What topics, subject areas, and/or experiences do you think students should be exposed to in high school to support development of:{{ Q1.6 }}?

You do not have to fill in all boxes.

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

What topics, subject areas, and/or experiences do you think students should be exposed to in high school to support development of:{{ Q1.7 }}?

You do not have to fill in all boxes.

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

Topic/Subject Area/Experience:

For each subject area, topic, or experience you've identified, please indicate if you believe it should be required for ALL students OR students should have a choice to complete it or not?

Mandatory Requirement (Required for ALL students)

Choice (Student decides to complete it or not)

Current High School Graduation Requirements

Please review the current high school graduation requirements and answer the questions below.

Category	# of credits	Category	# of credits
Social Studies		Language Arts	
<i>Canada Studies</i>	2	<i>Core</i>	6
<i>World Studies</i>	2	<i>Optional</i>	2
Math	4	Physical Education	2
Science	4	Fine Arts (Art, Music, Theatre)	2
Career Education	2	Elective	6
Other Required	4	TOTAL CREDITS	36

NOTES:

1 CREDIT = 55 HOURS OF INSTRUCTION; 2 CREDITS = 110 HOURS OF INSTRUCTION

Math: 4 credits must be obtained from two different grade levels.

Career Education: This requirement includes a 30-hour community service contribution.

Other Required: Students must complete courses from any two of the categories - Economic Education, French, Religious Education, Technology Education, Family Studies; however, students may use 4 French credits to fulfill this requirement.

20 credits must be at level II or higher, with 9 at level III or higher (4000 level courses are Advanced Placement courses).

Up to 4 of 36 credits may be local courses (developed at local or district level or externally).

Thinking about the knowledge and/or skills you've identified as important for students to have when they leave high school, do you believe that the current graduation requirements are meeting students' needs?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/Unsure

Please explain why you believe the current graduation requirements are meeting students' needs.

Please explain why you believe the current graduation requirements are not meeting students' needs.

Do you think the current high school graduation requirements have too little choice for students, the right amount of choice, or too much choice?

- Too little choice
- Right amount of choice
- Too much choice
- Don't know/Unsure

What, if anything, do you like about the current high school graduation requirements?

(No need to repeat something if you mentioned it in a previous response)

What, if anything, do you dislike about the current high school graduation requirements? And how would you change it?

(No need to repeat something if you mentioned it in a previous response)

Academic and General Distinction in Graduation

Students in this province can graduate with an Academic or General status. Please review the requirements for each and then answer the questions below.

Graduation with ACADEMIC Status*: Students must complete the following courses with a minimum course mark of 50%:

Subject	Course
English	English 3201
Mathematics	Mathematics 3200 or, Mathematics 3201 or, Mathematics 3203 or, Mathematics 3208
Science	Science 1206 and Biology 3201 or, Chemistry 3202 or, Physics 3204 or, Earth Systems 3209
Social Studies	World Geography 3202 or, World History 3201 or, Histoire mondiale 3231 or, French 3201 or, Accelerated French 3203 or, Accelerated French 3203
Electives	Two credits chosen from the subjects above or from additional 3000 or 4000 level courses approved by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for certification purposes.

Graduation with GENERAL Status: A student is awarded general high school graduation status if the student meets the minimum graduation requirements but does not meet the additional requirements for Academic graduation as outlined above.

**Note: Honours status applies to students who complete the requirements for Academic status with an 80% or higher overall average.!*

What do you think is the purpose of the distinction between Academic and General graduation?

Do you think the distinction between Academic and General graduation impacts students? If so, how?

Do you think the province should keep the distinction between Academic and General graduation?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know/Unsure

Why do you think the province should keep the distinction between Academic and General graduation?

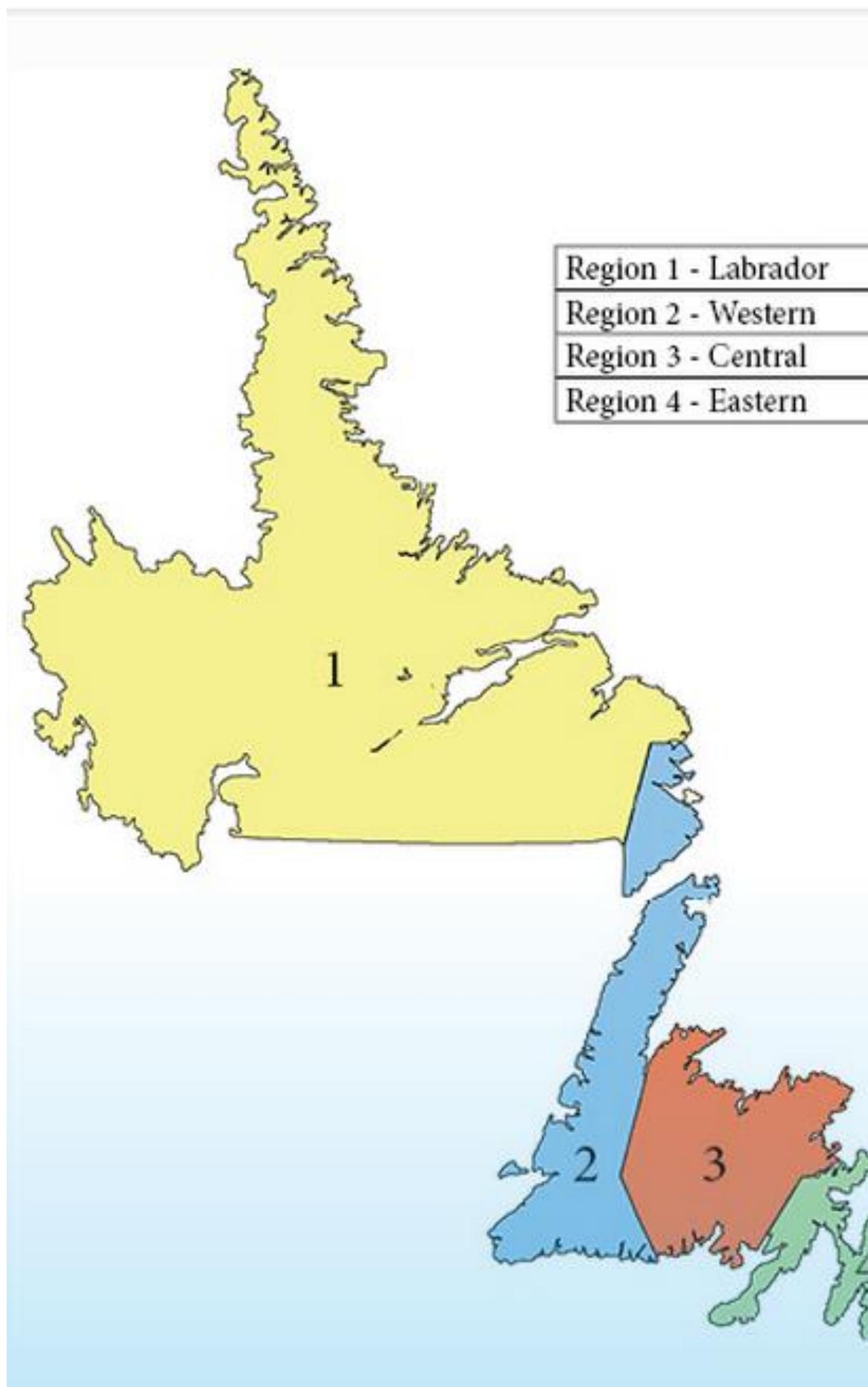
Why do you think the province should remove the distinction between Academic and General graduation?

Demographics

The purpose of these questions is to allow us, for analysis purposes, to group your responses with those of others who share the same characteristics.

Based on the boundaries in the map below, please select your region.

- Region 1 - Labrador
- Region 2 - Western
- Region 3 - Central
- Region 4 - Eastern



Which of the following describes you? Please select all that apply.

- Completed high school under the current graduation requirements (graduated in 2007 or later)
- Current senior high student (Grades 10-12 & returning students)
- Current junior high student (Grades 7-9)
- Parent of a student who graduated under the current requirements (graduated in 2007 or later)
- Parent of a current senior high student (Grades 10-12 and returning students)
- Parent of a current junior high student (Grades 7-9)
- Currently working in K-12 education
- Formerly worked in K-12 education
- Member of the general public who is interested in this topic
- Representative from an organization that is interested in this topic
- Other, please specify... _____

In which general area of K-12 education do you work?

- School - Teaching staff
- School - Support staff
- School - Administration
- District office
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Other, please specify... _____

In which general area of K-12 education did you last work?

- School - Teaching staff
- School - Support staff
- School - Administration
- District office
- Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
- Other, please specify... _____

What is the name of the organization you are representing?

In which age category do you belong?

- Less than 24
- 25-44
- 45-64
- 65 or older

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other, please specify... _____

Appendix B – Letter to School Administrators



Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Office of the Deputy Minister

EXC/15/9/1201

September 21, 2015

Dear Principal:

During September and October, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will be conducting focus groups with students, parents and educators across Newfoundland and Labrador to gather opinions on high school graduation requirements. These focus groups will help to inform possible changes to the current graduation requirements. Your school has been identified as a focus group location.

The purpose of the focus groups is to obtain stakeholders' opinions on:

- students' needs with respect to high school graduation;
- whether or not the current graduation requirements are meeting students' needs;
- the purpose and value of the distinction between academic and general status.

There will be three focus group sessions (one parent session; one student session; one staff session) held at your school, each consisting of 8-12 participants. Our goal is to have participants from various backgrounds represented in each session. As such, the final composition of focus group participants will be determined using a variety of methods including random sampling and phone interviews.

In addition to these focus group sessions, any interested individual, school, or organization can provide their opinions on the above topics by completing our online survey or written submission form, which will be available to the general public during the consultation phase.

A staff member of our Evaluation and Research Division will be in contact in the near future to provide more details on the focus group sessions.

I thank you in advance for hosting sessions in your school.

Sincerely,

Janet Vivian-Walsh

Janet Vivian-Walsh
Deputy Minister

cc: Ms. Patricia Greene

Appendix C – Focus Group Invitation Letters

September 24, 2015

Dear [insert student's first name],

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) is conducting focus groups across Newfoundland and Labrador to gather opinions on high school graduation requirements. These focus groups will help to inform possible changes to the current graduation requirements. You have been randomly selected as a *potential* focus group participant.

A focus group is a demographically diverse group of people assembled to participate in a guided discussion to obtain their opinions on a particular matter. This particular focus group will be a discussion among **8-10 current high school students from your school** and will be moderated by an individual from the DEECD's Evaluation and Research division. The group will be held at your school during regular instructional time on the **morning of [insert date]**, and is anticipated to take approximately 2 hours.

It is our goal to have a mix of students from various backgrounds in each discussion group held across the province. With your permission, we would like to ask you a few demographic questions over the telephone, in order to determine whether you would be eligible for inclusion in our focus group. Participation in the focus group is completely voluntary and you are by no means obligated to participate in the event that you are selected.

If you are interested in determining your eligibility for the discussion group, **please let us know [insert date]** by calling toll-free at **1-844-678-7599** or emailing **edresearch@gov.nl.ca** with the following information:

- Best day & time to call you to ask the demographic questions (it will take approximately 5 minutes); and
- Best phone number(s) at which to reach you.

If we do not hear from you by this date, we will assume you are not interested and will select another student in your place.

Sincerely,



Ron Smith
Director, Evaluation and Research
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Toll-Free: 1-844-678-7599
edresearch@gov.nl.ca

Parent Focus Group Synervoice® Script

TO BE DELIVERED ONLY TO PARENTS SPECIFIED FOR THE PARENT SESSION

Hello parents and guardians,

I'm calling to inform you that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is conducting focus groups across the province to gather opinions on high school graduation requirements. Your household has been randomly selected for *potential* participation in a *parent* session which is being held at our school with a group of 8-10 parents on [insert date].

If a parent or guardian in your household is interested in participating in this discussion group or would like further information, please contact the Department by [insert date]. If they do not hear from you by this date, they will assume you are not interested and will select another person in your place. You can contact them toll-free by calling 1-844-678-7599 or by emailing edresearch@gov.nl.ca.

So once again, the discussion is about high school graduation requirements, you can find out more by calling 1-844-678-7599 or emailing edresearch@gov.nl.ca, and the deadline to do so is [insert date].

Thank you.

Sample Staff Group Email

Dear [insert first name],

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) is conducting focus groups across Newfoundland and Labrador to gather opinions on high school graduation requirements. These focus groups will help to inform possible changes to the current graduation requirements. You have been randomly selected as a *potential* focus group participant.

A focus group is a demographically diverse group of people assembled to participate in a guided discussion to obtain their opinions on a particular matter. This particular focus group will be a discussion among 8-10 current staff from your school and will be moderated by an individual from the DEECD's Evaluation and Research division. The group will be held at your school, [insert school] during the afternoon of [insert date].

It is our goal to have a mix of staff from various backgrounds in each discussion group held across the province. With your permission, we would like to ask you a few demographic questions over the telephone, in order to determine whether you would be eligible for inclusion in our focus group. Participation in the focus group is completely voluntary and you are by no means obligated to participate in the event that you are selected.

If you are interested in determining your eligibility for the discussion group, please respond to this email by [insert date] with the following information:

- Best day & time to call you to ask the demographic questions (it will take approximately 5 minutes); and
- Best phone number(s) at which to reach you.

If we do not hear from you by this date, we will assume you are not interested and will select another staff member in your place. Even if you are not interested in participating in our upcoming discussion group, you will have an opportunity to express your opinions regarding high school graduation requirements by filling out our online form at [insert web address]. If you prefer a paper copy, you can call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you.

Sincerely,

Ron Smith
Director, Evaluation and Research
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
Toll-Free: 1-844-678-7599
edresearch@gov.nl.ca

Stakeholder Invitation Letter

Dear [insert stakeholder name]:

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development will be consulting with key education stakeholders during the fall of 2015 to gather opinions and ideas on high school graduation requirements in our province. Focus groups begin tomorrow, Oct. 1, 2015, at Clarenville High School and will conclude at Marystow Central High School, Thursday, October 22, 2015.

In addition to these consultations, we will be reaching out to a number of stakeholder groups as well. The [insert stakeholder group] has been identified as a key stakeholder to consult regarding high school graduation requirements. The objective of these consultations is to determine stakeholders' views on:

- students' needs with respect to high school graduation;
- strengths and weaknesses of current high school graduation requirements;
- whether or not graduation requirements need to be changed; and
- the purpose/value of the distinction between academic and general status.

At this time, the department is requesting that you identify 8-10 representatives of your association that who be available for a focus group session on this topic on [insert date and time] at [insert location].

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Georgina Lake at georginalake@gov.nl.ca or (709)729-3034.

Sincerely,

SUSAN SULLIVAN
Minister

cc: Mr. Ed Walsh

Appendix D – Focus Group Participant Screening Questionnaires

Graduation Requirements Review 2015

Student Focus Group

Recruitment Screener

IF YOU ARE CALLING THE STUDENT:

Record student name and school prior to calling

Student Name: _____

1. Please select student's school from the following list:

- 219 Marystown Central High
- 235 Clarenville High School
- 249 Ascension Collegiate
- 953 White Hills Academy
- 477 Mealy Mountain Collegiate
- 010 Menihk High School
- 447 Baltimore School
- 313 O'Donel High School
- 489 Waterford Valley High School
- 107 Ecole Sainte-Anne
- 340 Holy Heart of Mary High School
- 367 Holy Trinity High School
- 201 J.M. Olds Collegiate
- 480 Exploits Valley High School
- 485 Corner Brook Regional High School

Hello, may I please speak with _____. [IF NOT AVAILABLE, ASK FOR A CALLBACK TIME]

Hello, my name is _____. I am calling today from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in response to your message regarding future focus groups that we intend to hold about high school graduation requirements. CONTINUE AT TOP OF PAGE 2 →

IF STUDENT CALLED YOU:

Hello, my name is _____. Before we begin, would you please tell me what school you are currently attending? [OPEN SCHOOL CALL LOG] And may I please have your name? RECORD INFORMATION ABOVE AND THEN CONTINUE AT TOP OF PAGE 2 →

Thank you for your interest. As mentioned in the letter you received, I would like to ask you a few questions to determine whether you are a candidate based on our goal to have a mix of students from various backgrounds in each discussion group.

2. Are you available now to answer a few short questions about yourself to determine your background and interests? It will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

01 Yes **GO TO QUESTIONNAIRE**
02 No **CONTINUE**

3. Is there a better time for me to call you?

01 Yes **Time and date:** _____
02 No **GO TO NOT INTERESTED MESSAGE**

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please note that all information gathered during this phone call will be kept confidential and will only be used to determine your eligibility to participate in the focus group session. Do you have any questions before we begin? [ANSWER QUESTIONS APPROPRIATELY]

4. To begin, would you please tell me your age and gender?

4a. Age [SELECT FROM LIST; DO NOT READ OPTIONS]

01 16
02 17
03 18
04 19
90 Other **GO TO INELIGIBLE MESSAGE**

4b. Gender [SELECT FROM LIST; DO NOT READ OPTIONS]

- 01 Male
- 02 Female
- 03 Transmale
- 04 Transfemale
- 05 Gender independent
- 90 Other

5. What grade are you in right now? [SELECT FROM LIST; DO NOT READ OPTIONS]

- 01 10
- 02 11
- 03 12
- 04 4th year/Return year
- 90 Other **GO TO INELIGIBLE MESSAGE**

6. Are you in academic or general programming? [IF STUDENT IS UNSURE; ASK IF TAKING ACADEMIC OR APPLIED MATH; APPLIED MATH WOULD INDICATE GENERAL STREAM]

- 01 Academic
- 02 General

7. [IF HOLY HEART] Are you in the International Baccalaureate program?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

8. Are you in a French Immersion program?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

9. Do you identify as being Aboriginal?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

10. Were you born in Canada?

- 01 Yes **GO TO Q11**
- 02 No **CONTINUE**

10a. What country were you born in? _____

11. What language do you speak at home most of the time? [DO NOT READ LIST]

01 English
02 French
90 Other: _____

12. Have you ever been diagnosed with an exceptionality, such as a specific learning disorder (learning disability), a speech or language disorder, or physical disability? [THESE ARE JUST EXAMPLES; REFER TO LIST OF BROAD CATEGORIES]

01 Yes
02 No

12a. Have you ever received accommodations or support from an Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT)?

01 Yes
02 No

13. Are you currently involved in any extra-curricular activities? These might include a sport, school club, or school music group among other things.

01 Yes **CONTINUE**
02 No **GO TO INTRO BEFORE Q14**

13b. What are you involved in? [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY; DO NOT READ OPTIONS]

01 Amnesty International
02 Art Club
03 Band/Choir/Orchestra
04 Cheerleading
05 Chess Club
06 Debating Club
07 Drama Club/Film Club
08 French Club
09 Interact (Rotary Club of St. John's)
10 Mathematics Club
11 Meditation Group
12 Peer Counselling
13 Peer Tutoring
14 Pride Alliance

- 15 Public Speaking
- 16 Robotics Team
- 17 S.A.D.D. (Students Against Drinking and Driving)
- 18 School newspaper
- 19 Science Fair
- 20 Social Justice Club
- 21 Sports/Intramural Program
- 22 Student Council
- 23 Yearbook Staff
- 90 Other: _____

Some of the following questions are about your parents, or those persons who are like parents to you - for example, guardians, step-parents, foster parents, etcetera.

If you have more than one set of parents or guardians, please answer the following questions for those parents/guardians you spend the most time with. [IF RESPONDENT INDICATES THAT EQUAL TIME IS SPENT WITH EACH SET OF PARENTS OR GUARDIANS, ASK THEM TO ANSWER CONSISTENTLY FOR THE SET OF THEIR CHOICE]

14. Were/was your parent(s) or guardian(s) born in Canada?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No
- 03 One born in Canada, one born outside of Canada

[IF RESPONDENT PREVIOUSLY INDICATED ONLY ONE PARENT DO NOT PROMPT FOR SECOND; USE GENDER NEUTRAL LANGUAGE/ REFLECT LANGUAGE USED BY RESPONDENT]

15. Which of the following best describes your parent(s) or guardian(s) employment situation?
[READ OPTIONS 01-04]

Parent/Guardian #1

- 01 Employed full time
- 02 Employed part time
- 03 Seasonal worker
- 04 Unemployed
- 90 [DO NOT READ] Other (Specify) _____

Parent/Guardian #2

01 Employed full time
02 Employed part time
03 Seasonal worker
04 Unemployed
90 [DO NOT READ] Other (Specify) _____

IF NO PARENTS OR GUARDIANS ARE EMPLOYED, SKIP TO Q17

16. In what occupations do/does your parent(s) or guardian(s) work?

01 Parent/ Guardian #1: _____

NOC Code								
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
1A	2A	3A	4A	5A	6A	7A	8A	9A
1B	2B	3B	4B	5B	6B	7B	8B	9B
1C	2C	3C	4C	5C	6C	7C	8C	9C
1D	2D	3D	4D	5D	6D	7D	8D	9D

02 Parent/ Guardian #2: _____

NOC Code								
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
1A	2A	3A	4A	5A	6A	7A	8A	9A
1B	2B	3B	4B	5B	6B	7B	8B	9B
1C	2C	3C	4C	5C	6C	7C	8C	9C
1D	2D	3D	4D	5D	6D	7D	8D	9D

17. What is the highest level of education that your parent(s) or guardian(s) has/have completed? [DO NOT READ OPTIONS UNLESS ASKED FOR AN EXAMPLE]

17a. Parent/Guardian #1's education:

- 01 Did not complete high school
- 02 High school/ GED
- 03 College diploma
- 04 Bachelor's degree
- 05 Master's degree
- 06 Advanced graduate work or Doctorate
- 98 Not sure

17b. Parent/Guardian #2's education:

- 01 Did not complete high school
- 02 High school/ GED
- 03 College diploma
- 04 Bachelor's degree
- 05 Master's degree
- 06 Advanced graduate work or Doctorate
- 98 Not sure

18. [DO NOT READ] Is the subject eligible for focus group inclusion?

- 01 Yes **GO TO ELIGIBLE MESSAGE**
- 02 No **GO TO QUOTA FULL MESSAGE**
- 98 Not sure **GO TO NOT SURE IF QUALIFIED MESSAGE**

ELIGIBLE MESSAGE

Thank you for your time, it is very much appreciated. You have been selected as eligible for inclusion in our upcoming focus group.

Although you are eligible to participate in our focus group you are by no means obligated to do so, any participation on your part is voluntary. This focus group will be a discussion among 8-10 current high school students from your school and will be moderated by an individual from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Evaluation and Research division. This group will be held at your school during the morning of [insert date] at [insert time]. Please note that the focus group will be videotaped to help us conduct our analysis and prepare the report, however, names of participants will not be associated with any comments used in the report. All videotapes will be disposed of in a manner that ensures the confidentiality of participants after they are used to inform the report.

19. Are you interested in participating in our upcoming discussion group regarding the current high school graduation requirements?

01 Yes **CONTINUE**
02 No **GO TO NOT INTERESTED MESSAGE**

20a. **[Read only if student called you]** May we have your email address so that we can send you a pre-group information package which is a two-page document outlining the current graduation requirements? [IF NO EMAIL ADDRESS, ASK FOR MAILING ADDRESS]

Participant email/ mailing address: _____

20b. **[Read only if student emailed you]** We will email you a pre-group information package which is a two-page document outlining the current graduation requirements. Is the email that you contacted us from the best email address for us to use?

01 Yes
02 No **New email address:** _____

Do you have any questions? [If yes, answer appropriately; if no, continue]

Thank you again for your time. We will contact you closer to the discussion group date to confirm your participation. In the meantime, please notify us if your availability changes so we can find a student to replace you. You can do this by emailing edresearch@gov.nl.ca or calling 1-844-678-7599. Have a nice day.

QUOTA FULL MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. At this time we already have enough participants that fit your demographic profile so you are not eligible for inclusion in the current focus group. However, you still have an opportunity to express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements. You can fill out our online form via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

INELIGIBLE MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. Currently, we are not including participants from your [age group/grade level] in this focus group. However, you still have an opportunity to express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements. You can fill out our online form via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

NOT INTERESTED MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. Please note that you still have an opportunity to express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements. You can fill out our online form via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

NOT SURE IF QUALIFIED MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. We will review your information in conjunction with that of participants that have already been recruited and we will contact you within one business day if you are eligible for inclusion in our upcoming group. If you are not selected to participate, you can still express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements by filling out our online form. This form can be accessed via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, you can call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

Graduation Requirements Review 2015

Parent Focus Group

Recruitment Screener

IF YOU ARE CALLING THE PARENT:

Hello, may I please speak with _____. [IF NOT AVAILABLE, ASK FOR A CALLBACK TIME]

Hello, my name is _____. I am calling today from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in response to your message regarding future focus groups that we intend to hold about high school graduation requirements.

Before I continue, would you please tell me the name of your child's school (the one from which you received the Synervoice® message about the focus group)

School:

- 219 Marystown Central High
- 235 Clarenville High School
- 249 Ascension Collegiate
- 953 White Hills Academy
- 477 Mealy Mountain Collegiate
- 010 Menihek High School
- 447 Baltimore School
- 313 O'Donel High School
- 489 Waterford Valley High School
- 107 Ecole Sainte-Anne
- 340 Holy Heart of Mary High School
- 367 Holy Trinity High School
- 201 J.M. Olds Collegiate
- 480 Exploits Valley High School
- 485 Corner Brook Regional High School

And what is your child's name? CONFIRM STUDENT NAME IN LOG BEFORE PROCEEDING

Child's name: _____

IF ANOTHER CHILD AT THAT SCHOOL, RECORD NAME: _____

GO TO INTRO 1

IF PARENT CALLED YOU:

Hello, my name is _____. Before we begin, would you please tell me the name of your child's school (the one from which you received the Synervoice® message about the focus group)?
RECORD SCHOOL ON PREVIOUS PAGE

And what is your child's name? CONFIRM STUDENT NAME IN LOG & RECORD NAME ON PREVIOUS PAGE

INTRO 1

Thank you for your interest. Just to remind you, a focus group is a demographically diverse group of people assembled to participate in a guided discussion. These groups are used to obtain a certain group of people's views and opinions on a matter of interest. This particular focus group will be a discussion among 8-10 parents and will be moderated by an individual from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The group will be held at your child's high school during the evening of [insert date] at [insert time].

A1. Are you available at that date and time?

01 Yes **GO TO INTRO 2**
02 No **CONTINUE**

A1a. Is there another parent/guardian in your household that might be interested in attending the discussion group?

01 Yes: Is he/she available to speak with me now?

[If yes] Proceed with new person - provide background and continue

[If no] Is there is a better time for me to call to reach that person? And who should I ask for?: _____

02 No: **GO TO NOT INTERESTED/NOT AVAILABLE MESSAGE**

INTRO 2

It is our goal to have a mix of parents from various backgrounds in each discussion group. With your permission, we would like to ask you a few demographic questions in order to determine whether you would be eligible for inclusion in our focus group. Participation in the focus group is completely voluntary and you are by no means obligated to participate in the event that you are selected.

A2. Please note that all information gathered during this phone call will be kept confidential and will only be used to determine your eligibility to participate in the focus group session. May I proceed with the questions? It will take approximately 5 minutes to complete?

01 Yes **GO TO QUESTIONNAIRE**
02 No **CONTINUE**

A2a. Is there a better time for me to call you?

01 Yes **Time and date: _____**
02 No **GO TO NOT INTERESTED MESSAGE**

QUESTIONNAIRE

Do you have any questions before we begin? [ANSWER QUESTIONS APPROPRIATELY]

B1. What grade or level is your child in? [DO NOT READ LIST; IF PARENT HAS MORE THAN 1 CHILD IN HIGH SCHOOL AT ABOVE NOTED SCHOOL, RECORD ALL APPLICABLE LEVELS]

01 Grade 10/Level I
02 Grade 11/Level II
03 Grade 12/Level III
04 4th year
90 Other **GO TO INELIGIBLE MESSAGE**

B2. Has this child been diagnosed with an exceptionality, such as a specific learning disorder (learning disability), a speech or language disorder, or physical disability? [THESE ARE JUST EXAMPLES; FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE:

<http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/exceptionalities.html>

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

B2a. Has this child ever received accommodations or support from an Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT)?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

B3. Do you have any older children who finished high school in this province under the current graduation requirements, in other words, finished any year from 2007 to 2015? [THIS INCLUDES NON-GRADUATES]

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

And now just a few questions about yourself...

B4. In which of the following age categories do you belong? [READ LIST]

- 01 Less than 35
- 02 35-44
- 03 45-54
- 04 55 or older

B5. What is your gender? [DO NOT READ OPTIONS]

- 06 Male
- 07 Female
- 08 Transmale
- 09 Transfemale
- 10 Gender independent
- 90 Other: _____

B6. What is the highest level of education that you have obtained? [DO NOT READ OPTIONS UNLESS ASKED FOR AN EXAMPLE]

- 01 Did not complete high school
- 02 High school/ GED
- 03 College Diploma
- 04 Bachelor's degree
- 05 Master's degree
- 06 Advanced graduate work or Doctorate

B7. Which of the following best describes your current employment situation? [READ OPTIONS 01-04]

- 01 Employed full time
- 02 Employed part time
- 03 Seasonal worker
- 04 Unemployed **GO TO QB9**
- 90 [DO NOT READ] Other (Specify) _____

B8. [If employed] What is your current occupation?

02 Occupation: _____

NOC Code								
10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90
1A	2A	3A	4A	5A	6A	7A	8A	9A
1B	2B	3B	4B	5B	6B	7B	8B	9B
1C	2C	3C	4C	5C	6C	7C	8C	9C
1D	2D	3D	4D	5D	6D	7D	8D	9D

B9. Do you identify as being Aboriginal?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

B10. Were you born in Canada?

- 01 Yes **GO TO QB11**
- 02 No **CONTINUE**

B10a. What country were you born in? _____

B11. What language do you speak at home most of the time? [DO NOT READ LIST]

01 English
02 French
90 Other: _____

B12. [DO NOT READ ALOUD] Is the subject eligible for focus group inclusion?

01 Yes **GO TO ELIGIBLE MESSAGE**
02 No **GO TO QUOTA FULL MESSAGE**
98 Not sure **GO TO NOT SURE IF QUALIFIED MESSAGE**

ELIGIBLE MESSAGE

Thank you for your time, it is very much appreciated. You have been selected as eligible for inclusion in our upcoming focus group.

Although you are eligible to participate in our focus group you are by no means obligated to do so, any participation on your part is voluntary. Again, the group will be held at your child's high school during the evening of [insert date] at [insert time]. Please note that the focus group will be videotaped, however, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report. All videotapes will be disposed of in a manner that ensures the confidentiality of participants after they are used to inform the report.

B13. Are you interested in participating in our upcoming discussion group regarding the current high school graduation requirements?

01 Yes **CONTINUE**
02 No **GO TO NOT INTERESTED MESSAGE**

B13a. **[Read if parent called you or you returned parent call]** May we have your email address so that we can send you a pre-group information package that consists of a two-page document outlining the current graduation requirements? [IF NO EMAIL ADDRESS, ASK FOR MAILING ADDRESS]

[DO NOT READ] Participant email/mailing address: _____

B13b. **[Read only if parent emailed you]** We will email you a pre-group information package that consists of a two-page document outlining the current graduation requirements. Is the email that you contacted us from the best email address for us to use?

01 Yes
02 No **New email address:** _____

Do you have any questions? [If yes, answer appropriately; if no, continue]

Thank you again for your time. We will contact you closer to the discussion group date to confirm your participation. In the meantime, please notify us if your availability changes so we can find a parent to replace you. You can do this by emailing edresearch@gov.nl.ca or calling 1-844-678-7599. Have a nice day.

QUOTA FULL MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. At this time we already have enough participants that fit your demographic profile so you are not eligible for inclusion in the current focus group. However, you still have an opportunity to express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements. You can fill out our online form via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

INELIGIBLE MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. Currently, we are not including participants from your child's age group/grade level in this focus group. However, you still have an opportunity to express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements. You can fill out our online form via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

NOT INTERESTED/ NOT AVAILABLE MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. Please note that you still have an opportunity to express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements. You can fill out our online form via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

NOT SURE IF QUALIFIED MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. We will review your information in conjunction with that of participants that have already been recruited and we will contact you within one business day if you are eligible for inclusion in our upcoming group. If you are not selected to participate, you can still express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements by filling out our online form. This form can be accessed via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, you can call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

Graduation Requirements Review 2015

Staff Focus Group

Recruitment Screener

Record staff member's name and school prior to calling

Staff Member Name: _____

1. Please select staff member's school from the following list:

- 219 Marystown Central High
- 235 Clareenville High School
- 249 Ascension Collegiate
- 953 White Hills Academy
- 477 Mealy Mountain Collegiate
- 010 Menihek High School
- 447 Baltimore School
- 313 O'Donel High School
- 489 Waterford Valley High School
- 107 Ecole Sainte-Anne
- 340 Holy Heart of Mary High School
- 367 Holy Trinity High School
- 201 J.M. Olds Collegiate
- 480 Exploits Valley High School
- 485 Corner Brook Regional High School

Hello, may I please speak with _____. [IF NOT AVAILABLE, ASK FOR A CALLBACK TIME]

Hello, my name is _____. I am calling today from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in response to your email regarding future focus groups that we intend to hold about high school graduation requirements. Thank you for your interest. As mentioned in the email you received, I would like to ask you a few questions to determine whether you will be a candidate based on our goal to have a mix of staff from various backgrounds in each discussion group.

2. Are you available now to answer a few short demographic questions to determine your background? It will take approximately 5 minutes to complete.

- 01 Yes **GO TO QUESTIONNAIRE**
- 02 No **CONTINUE**

3. Is there a better time for me to call you?

01 Yes **Time and date:** _____
02 No **GO TO NOT INTERESTED MESSAGE**

QUESTIONNAIRE

Please note that all information gathered during this phone call will be kept confidential and will only be used to determine your eligibility to participate in the focus group session. Do you have any questions before we begin? [ANSWER QUESTIONS APPROPRIATELY]

4. What is your current position at the school? [DO NOT READ LIST; SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]

01 Principal
02 Assistant Principal
03 Classroom Teacher
04 Instructional Resource Teacher (IRT)
05 Learning Resource Teacher (LRT)
06 Guidance Counsellor
90 Other: _____

5. [If Q4 = classroom teacher] What subjects do you currently teach? [DO NOT READ LIST]

01 Drama
02 English
03 English Second Language
04 Fine Arts – Art
05 Fine Arts – Music
06 Guidance
07 International Baccalaureate
08 Mathematics
09 Modern Languages
10 Physical Education
11 Science
12 Social Studies
13 Student Support Services
14 Technology
90 Other: _____

5a. [If Q4 = classroom teacher] Are you currently a department head?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

6. How many years of experience do you have working in the field of education? [READ LIST]

- 01 Less than 5 years
- 02 5-10 years
- 03 10 - Less than 20 years
- 04 20 or more years

7. In which of the following age categories do you belong? [READ LIST]

- 01 18-24
- 02 25-34
- 03 35-44
- 04 45-54
- 05 55-64
- 06 65 or older

8. What is your gender? [DO NOT READ OPTIONS]

- 11 Male
- 12 Female
- 13 Transmale
- 14 Transfemale
- 15 Gender independent
- 90 Other: _____

9. Do you identify as being Aboriginal?

- 01 Yes
- 02 No

10. And my final question, do you have any children who are currently in junior or senior high school? IF YES: Which one...junior, senior, or both? [SELECT ALL THAT APPLY]

- 01 Junior High (Grades 7-9)
- 02 Senior High (Grades 10-12)
- 03 No

11. [DO NOT READ ALOUD] Is the subject eligible for focus group inclusion?

01	Yes	GO TO ELIGIBLE MESSAGE
02	No	GO TO QUOTA FULL MESSAGE
98	Not sure	GO TO NOT SURE IF QUALIFIED MESSAGE

ELIGIBLE MESSAGE

Thank you for your time, it is very much appreciated. You have been selected as eligible for inclusion in our upcoming focus group.

Although you are eligible to participate in our focus group you are by no means obligated to do so, any participation on your part is voluntary. This group will be held at your school on the afternoon of [insert date] at [insert time]. Please note that the focus group will be videotaped, however, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report. All videotapes will be disposed of in a manner that ensures the confidentiality of participants after they are used to inform the report.

12. Are you interested in participating in our upcoming discussion group regarding the current high school graduation requirements?

01	Yes	CONTINUE
02	No	GO TO NOT INTERESTED MESSAGE

13. We will email you a pre-group information package that consists of a two-page document outlining the current graduation requirements. Is the email that you contacted us from the best email address for us to use?

01	Yes	
02	No	New email address: _____

Do you have any questions? [If yes, answer appropriately; if no, continue]

Thank you again for your time. We will email you closer to the discussion group date to confirm your participation. In the meantime, please notify us if your availability changes so we can find a staff member to replace you. You can do this by emailing edresearch@gov.nl.ca or calling 1-844-678-7599. Have a nice day.

QUOTA FULL MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. At this time we already have enough participants that fit your demographic profile so you are not eligible for inclusion in the current focus group. However, you still have an opportunity to express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements. You can fill out our online form via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

NOT INTERESTED MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. Please note that you still have an opportunity to express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements. You can fill out our online form via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

NOT SURE IF QUALIFIED MESSAGE

Thank you for your time. We will review your information in conjunction with that of participants that have already been recruited and we will contact you within one business day if you are eligible for inclusion in our upcoming group. If you are not selected to participate, you can still express your opinions regarding the current high school graduation requirements by filling out our online form. This form can be accessed via a link, which is posted on the main page of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website. If you prefer a paper copy, call 1-844-678-7599 to have one mailed to you. Have a nice day.

Appendix E – Focus Group Participant Specification Sheets

Parents/Guardians	Gender Max 6 of either M or F	Male	Transmale	Female	Transfem.	Gen. Ind.	Other			
		4-6		4-6						
	Grade Max of 5 grade 12	10	11		12	4 th Year				
		2	3		4	1 if possible; if not add to Grade 12				
	Programming	Academic	General		IB (Only applicable @ Holy Heart)	FI (for schools that offer FI)				
		6	4		1	1				
	Aboriginal	Yes		No						
		0-1 except 3-4 @ Mealy Mountain		9-10 6-7 @ Mealy Mountain						
	Birthplace	Canada		Other						
		9-10		0-1						
	Primary Language	English		Other*						
		9-10		0-1						
	Exceptionality	YES**		NO						
		0-1		9-10						
	Interests	Sports	Math/SCI	Music/Art	Service	Committee	Other			
		2	2	2	2	2				
	Birthplace	Canada		Other						
		9-10		0-1						
	Occupation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
	Aim for diversity especially from 0 to D	0								
		A								
		B								
		C								
		D								
	Work Type	Full-Time		Part-Time		Seasonal		Unemployed		
				7-8				2-3 ⁺		
	Education	01 Did not complete high school	02 High school/GED	03 College diploma	04 Bachelor's degree	05 Master's degree	06 Advanced graduate work or doctorate			
		0-1 HH; WVH; HTH; O'Donel; Menihek	5-7 HH; WVH 6-8 All others 7-9 O'Donel; Menihek		3-4 HH & WVH 2-3 HTH 1-2 O'Donel; Ascension; CHS; EVH; CBRH; Menihek; MM; 0-1 All others					
		1-2 CHS; EVH; CBRH; MM								
		2-3 All others								

Student Focus Group Specifications

*Attempt to recruit 1 ESL student for: Waterford Valley High, Holy Heart of Mary High School, O'Donel High School, Exploits Valley High, Corner Brook Regional High, and Menihek High School.

**Look for 1-2 students with an exceptionality for the following schools: Waterford Valley High, Baltimore School, Clarenville High School, J. M. Olds Collegiate, Exploits Valley High, and Menihek High School.

⁺May accept more in rural areas

Child	Grade Max of 5 grade 12	10		11		12		4th Year					
		2		3		4		1 if possible; if not add to Grade 12					
Exceptionality	Yes*			No									
	0-1			9-10									
Older Child	Yes			No									
	9-10			0-1									
Aboriginal	Yes			No									
	0-1 except 3-4 @ Mealy Mountain			9-10 6-7 @ Mealy Mountain									
Age	Less than 35		35-44	45-54	55 or older								
	0-1		2-3	4-6	1								
Gender Max 6 of either M or F	Male	Transmale	Female	Transfem.	Gen. Ind.	Other							
	4-6		4-6										
Education	01 Did not complete high school	02 High school/GED	03 College diploma	04 Bachelor's degree	05 Master's degree	06 Advanced graduate work or doctorate							
	0-1 HH; WVH;HTH; O'Donel; Menihek	5-7 HH; WVH 6-8 All others 7-9 O'Donel; Menihek	3-4 HH & WVH 2-3 HTH 1-2 O'Donel; Ascension; CHS; EVH; CBRH; Menihek; MM; 0-1 All others										
Employment Status	Full-Time		Part-Time		Seasonal		Unemployed						
	7-8						2-3**						
Occupation Aim for diversity especially from 0 to D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9				
	0												
	A												
	B												
	C												
Birthplace	Canada				Other [†]								
	9-10				0-1								
Primary Language	English				Other [†]								
	9-10				0-1								

Parent Focus Group Specifications

*Look for 1-2 students with an exceptionality for the following schools: Waterford Valley High, Baltimore School, Clarenville High School, J. M. Olds Collegiate, Exploits Valley High, and Menihek High School.

**May accept more in rural areas.

[†]Attempt to recruit 1 for: Waterford Valley High, Holy Heart of Mary High School, O'Donel High School, Exploits Valley High, Corner Brook Regional High, and Menihek High School.

Staff Focus Group Specifications

Position	Principal		Asst. Principal		Class. Teach.		IRT		LRT		Guid. Couns.		Other														
	1		6-7				2-3																				
Subject <small>AIM FOR DIVERSITY ACROSS SUBJECT AREAS</small>	DRA.	ENG	ESL	Art	MUS	Guid.	IB	MATH	Mod. Lang.	Phys. Ed	SCI	Soc. Stu.	SSS	Tech	Other												
Dep. Head	Yes								No																		
	1-2								8-9																		
Years of Experience	Less than 5			5-10			10 to less than 20			20+																	
	0-2			2-3			2-4			2-3																	
Age	18-24		25-34		35-44		45-54		55-64		65 or older																
	2-5		2-4				2-3																				
Gender <small>Max 6 either M or F</small>	Male	Transmale		Female		Transfem.		Gen. Ind.		Other																	
		5		5																							
Aboriginal	Yes								No																		
	0-1*								9-10																		
Children in School	Junior High			Senior High			No																				
	0-2						8-10																				

*Attempt to recruit one Aboriginal staff member for Mealy Mountain if applicable.

Appendix F – Pre-Group Information Package

Current High School Graduation Requirements

Newfoundland and Labrador (Grades 10-12)			
Social Studies		Language Arts	
<i>Canada Studies</i>	2	<i>Core</i>	6
<i>World Studies</i>	2	<i>Optional</i>	2
Math	4	Physical Education	2
Science	4	Fine Arts (Art, Music, Theatre)	2
Career Education	2	Elective	6
Other Required	4	TOTAL CREDITS	36

NOTES:

Math: 4 credits must be obtained from two different grade levels.

Career Education: This requirement includes a 30-hour community service contribution.

Other Required: Students must complete courses from any two of the categories - Economic Education, French, Religious Education, Technology Education, Family Studies; however, students may use 4 French credits to fulfill this requirement.

20 credits must be at level II or higher, with 9 at level III or higher (4000 level courses are Advanced Placement courses).

Up to 4 of 36 credits may be local courses (developed at local or district level or externally).

1 CREDIT = 55 HOURS OF INSTRUCTION; 2 CREDITS = 110 HOURS OF INSTRUCTION

Jurisdiction	NL	N S	N B	PE	Q C	O N	M B	S K	A B	B C	NT	NW T	Y K
High School Program Grades	10-12	10-12	11-12	10-12	9-11	9-12	9-12	10-12	10-12	10-12	10-12	10-12	10-12
Required Community Service Hours	30					40							25
Mandatory	30	26	14	20	13	36	34	30	18	26	23	29	26
Fine Art	2	2	2		1	2		4		2	1	1	2
English (French QC)	6	6	6	8	3	8	8	10	2	6	6	6	6
ESL (QC)					2								
Optional Language	2												
Math	4	4	2	4	2	6	8	4	2	4	4	4	4
Science	4	4	2	4	2	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4
Social Studies			2	4	2		6	4	2	4	4	4	4
Canadian	2	2				4		2					
World	2	2											
Civics						1							
Career Education	2					1			1	2		4	2
Physical Education	2	2				2	8	2	1	4	2	1	4
Math/Science/Tech nology		4											
French Language						2							
Northern Studies													1
Other Required Credits	4				1	6				8		2	4
Electives	6	10	20	20	13	24	26	18	22	14	11	10	14
Total Credits	36	36	34	40	26	60	60	48	40	40	34	39	40
Percent Mandatory Credits	83 %	72 %	41 %	50 %	50 %	60 %	57 %	63 %	45 %	65 %	68 %	74 %	65 %

Notes:

1. Jurisdictional credits are converted to NL equivalency for comparison purposes. For example, five credits in AB are equivalent to two credits in NL. There may be minor inaccuracies in the equivalency credits as a result.
2. Some jurisdictions only use required credits from Grade 11 and Grade 12 for graduation.
3. Ontario administers the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) to Grade 10 students. Successful completion of this assessment is required for graduation.
4. FFL graduation requirements are similar to EFL requirements, for example in NL there is no optional language requirement for FFL students. All FFL students are required to complete two credits in English instead.

Appendix G – Moderator’s Guide



Education and Early Childhood Development

Graduation Requirements Review -

Focus Group Discussion

Moderator's Guide

FINAL

Have participants sign consent for videotaping prior to start of session

Introduction (10 minutes)

- Introduce myself and other Department representatives present
- Thank participants for attending
- Explain general purpose of session:
 - Obtain opinions and views related to high school graduation requirements
 - Conducting these discussion groups across the province with students, parents, school staff, and other education stakeholders
 - Any interested individual or group can provide their opinions via an online or mail-in submission form (provide details to participants at end of group)
 - A report with recommendations will be presented to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's Executive for their use in making decisions on changes to high school graduation requirements
 - We want your opinions – this is a discussion group; no right or wrong answers
 - Feel free to agree or disagree with others in the group; want people to express themselves regardless of their views or opinions
 - Looking for opinions from everyone, so don't hold back if you have a comment or opinion that may be different from others
- Looking for candour and honesty; comments treated in confidence – names will not appear in the report; taping is for report writing purposes only
- Role of the Moderator: may have to interrupt from time to time if discussion gets off track
- Role of others present (co-facilitator, DEECD staff, etc.)
- Please try to speak one at a time and avoid side conversations; speak up so the whole group can hear what you have to say
- If you have a cell phone or other electronic device, please turn it on silent
- Any questions? ACCEPT BRIEF QUESTIONS BUT DO NOT LINGER
- Roundtable introduction/Icebreaker: Please tell us your first name and:
 - STUDENTS: your grade and something you are interested in/hobby
 - PARENTS: something you are interested in/hobby
 - TEACHERS: the subject area or areas you teach and something you are interested in/hobby

Students' Needs (50 mins)

First, I'd like you to consider this statement: It is important to ensure that high school graduation requirements allow students to leave high school well-positioned to become socially and economically engaged with their communities in a positive manner as adults; adults that have the capacity and confidence to adapt, achieve and excel, regardless of the challenges they face.

To be well-positioned to become socially and economically engaged adults, what knowledge and/or skills should students leave high school with?

That's a question that we'd like you to take a few minutes to think about...if you turn to page 1 in your workbook, you'll see a place for you to jot down your thoughts on this. I'll give you a couple mins to do that and then we'll share and discuss.

So, just to be clear, I want you to identify knowledge and/or skills that you think are important for students to have when they leave high school - regardless of the path they take after high school - so that they are well-positioned to become socially and economically engaged adults.

[ALLOW PARTICIPANTS 2 MINS TO THINK AND RECORD THOUGHTS]

Ok, so who would like to share first?

[AS DISCUSSION PROGRESSES, CATEGORIZE THOUGHTS ON KNOWLEDGE/SKILL AREAS INTO COMMON THEMES WHERE POSSIBLE – SHOW VISUAL]

Let's take a look at what we've created...does this capture what you're saying is important for students to have when they leave high school? [MAKE ANY NECESSARY ADJUSTMENTS]

Now I'd like you think about these knowledge/skill areas, and tell me what you think students should be exposed to in high school – what topic, subject areas and/or experiences – to develop these. On page 2 in your workbook please take a few minutes to jot down your thoughts on Topics/Subject Areas/Experiences that you feel are necessary at a high school level to achieve the knowledge and skills discussed earlier.

Ok, so what topics, subject areas and/or experiences are necessary at a high school level to support development of the knowledge/skill areas that you've identified as important for all students to have?

Current High School Graduation Requirements and Link to Students' Needs (40 mins)

We are going to switch gears now, and turn our attention to current high school graduation requirements...which are printed on page 3 in your workbook. [PROVIDE A COUPLE MINS FOR PARTICIPANTS TO REVIEW]

What do you think when you see these graduation requirements? What comes to mind? Your immediate reaction? PROBE: Is there anything about them that stands out to you?

Is there anything that you like about these graduation requirements? Is there anything that you dislike about them?

Within the current graduation requirements, students have choice in terms of what elective courses they take to fulfill the 6 required elective credits, which can come from any subject area. In addition, students are required to complete 4 'other required credits'. Here students can choose courses from disciplines like: economics, French, religious education, skilled trades, and family studies. However, they have to obtain these credits from at least two different disciplines, unless the four credits are in French. Students may also have choice in what courses they complete to fulfil requirements in specific subject areas, for example the requirements for Fine Arts, however the degree of choice would depend on various factors.

Do you think these requirements have the right amount of choice for the student, too little choice, or too much choice? Why do you think that?

SHOW/DESCRIBE VISUAL FROM KNOWLEDGE/SKILLS DISCUSSION

Take a couple of minutes to think about how this visual compares to current graduation requirements.

Did anything stand out to you when you compared the two? What was it? Anything else?

Are there any similarities between our visual and current graduation requirements? What are they?

Are there any differences? Any gaps? What are they?

Do you think changes are necessary to align graduation requirements with the critical knowledge/skill areas we've identified? What changes would you suggest?

Inter-jurisdictional Comparison (10 mins)

Now let's look at the graduation requirements in other provinces and territories in Canada, which you'll find on page 4 in your workbook. Jurisdictions have different credit systems, so to allow for comparison, we converted the credit systems of other provinces to be equivalent to ours.

[PROVIDE A COUPLE MINS FOR PARTICIPANTS TO REVIEW]

What do you think when you see this comparison across jurisdictions? What comes to mind? Your immediate reaction? Probe: Is there anything about this that stands out to you?

Is there anything that you like about the graduation requirements in other jurisdictions? Is there anything that you dislike about them?

What do you think about the amount of time we spend on particular subject areas in comparison to other provinces/territories?

What do you think about the amount of choice our students have in comparison to other provinces/territories? [NOTE: % of total credits that are mandatory]

Does seeing this change or affirm any opinions that you previously expressed here today? Can you elaborate...change or affirm – and what opinion?

Based on this discussion, is there anything we should add or change in our graduation requirements visual?

Academic and General Graduation Status (10 mins)

Students in Newfoundland and Labrador can graduate with an academic or general status. Please refer to page 5 in your workbook for information on the requirements for each.

What do you think is the purpose of these distinctions?

What do you think of these distinctions? Is there anything that you like about these distinctions? Is there anything that you dislike about them?

IF IMPACTS ON STUDENTS NOT MENTIONED, PROBE:

Do the distinctions impact students? How do they impact students? Positive impacts? Negative impacts?

IF IMPACTS ON STUDENTS MENTIONED, PROBE:

Any other impacts on students, either positive or negative?

Do you think we should keep these distinctions? Why? Why not?

PROBE IF NECESSARY:

Is there a benefit to the student to maintain these distinctions in high school graduation requirements?

Thank participants and provide information about the online submission form.

Appendix H – Focus Group Participant Workbook (English)

High School Graduation Requirements -Consultation Workbook-



Education and Early Childhood Development

Students' Needs

It is important to ensure that high school graduation requirements allow students to leave high school well-positioned to become **socially and economically engaged with their communities in a positive manner** as adults; adults that have the **capacity and confidence to adapt, achieve and excel, regardless of the challenges they face**.

To be well-positioned to become socially and economically engaged adults, what knowledge and/or skills should students leave high school with?

(Knowledge/Skill)

(Knowledge/Skill)

(Knowledge/Skill)



(Knowledge/Skill)

(Knowledge/Skill)

(Knowledge/Skill)

What topics, subject areas, and/or experiences are necessary at a high school level to support development of the knowledge/skills you've identified on the previous page?

(Topic/Subject Area/Experience)

(Topic/Subject Area/Experience)

(Topic/Subject Area/Experience)



(Topic/Subject Area/Experience)

(Topic/Subject Area/Experience)

(Topic/Subject Area/Experience)

Current High School Graduation Requirements

Newfoundland and Labrador (Grades 10-12)

Social Studies		Language Arts	
<i>Canada Studies</i>	2	<i>Core</i>	6
<i>World Studies</i>	2	<i>Optional</i>	2
Math	4	Physical Education	2
Science	4	Fine Arts (Art, Music, Theatre)	2
Career Education	2	Elective	6
Other Required	4	TOTAL CREDITS	36

NOTES:

Math: 4 credits must be obtained from two different grade levels.

Career Education: This requirement includes a 30-hour community service contribution.

Other Required: Students must complete courses from any two of the categories - Economic Education, French, Religious Education, Technology Education, Family Studies; however, students may use 4 French credits to fulfill this requirement.

20 credits must be at level II or higher, with 9 at level III or higher (4000 level courses are Advanced Placement courses).

Up to 4 of 36 credits may be local courses (developed at local or district level or externally).

1 CREDIT = 55 HOURS OF INSTRUCTION; 2 CREDITS = 110 HOURS OF INSTRUCTION

Jurisdiction	NL	NS	NB	PE	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	NT	NWT	YK
High School Program Grades	10-12	10-12	11-12	10-12	9-11	9-12	9-12	10-12	10-12	10-12	10-12	10-12	10-12
Required Community Service Hours	30					40						25	
Credits Required for Graduation													
Mandatory	30	26	14	20	13	36	34	30	18	26	23	29	26
Fine Art	2	2	2		1	2		4		2	1	1	2
English (French QC)	6	6	6	8	3	8	8	10	2	6	6	6	6
ESL (QC)					2								
Optional Language	2												
Math	4	4	2	4	2	6	8	4	2	4	4	4	4
Science	4	4	2	4	2	4	4	4	2	4	4	4	4
Social Studies			2	4	2		6	4	2	4	4	4	4
Canadian	2	2				4		2					
World	2	2											
Civics						1							
Career Education	2					1			1	2		4	2
Physical Education	2	2				2	8	2	1	4	2	1	4
Math/Science/Technology		4											
French Language						2							
Northern Studies													1
Other Required Credits	4				1	6			8		2	4	
Electives	6	10	20	20	13	24	26	18	22	14	11	10	14
Total Credits	36	36	34	40	26	60	60	48	40	40	34	39	40
Percent Mandatory Credits	83%	72%	41%	50%	50%	60%	57%	63%	45%	65%	68%	74%	65%

Notes:

1. Jurisdictional credits are converted to NL equivalency for comparison purposes. For example, five credits in AB are equivalent to two credits in NL. There may be minor inaccuracies in the equivalency credits as a result.
2. Some jurisdictions only use required credits from Grade 11 and Grade 12 for graduation.
3. Ontario administers the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) to Grade 10 students. Successful completion of this assessment is required for graduation.
4. FFL graduation requirements are similar to EFL requirements, for example in NL there is no optional language requirement for FFL students. All FFL students are required to complete two credits in English instead.

Academic and General Graduation Status

Students in Newfoundland and Labrador can graduate with an academic or general status.

Graduation with ACADEMIC Status*: Students must complete the following courses with a minimum course mark of 50%:

Subject	Course
English	English 3201
Mathematics	Mathematics 3200 or, Mathematics 3201 or, Mathematics 3203 or, Mathematics 3208
Science	Science 1206 and Biology 3201 or, Chemistry 3202 or, Physics 3204 or, Earth Systems 3209
Social Studies	World Geography 3202 or, World History 3201 or, Histoire mondiale 3231 or, French 3201 or, Accelerated French 3203 or, Accelerated French 3203
Electives	Two credits chosen from the subjects above or from additional 3000 or 4000 level courses approved by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development for certification purposes.

Graduation with GENERAL Status: A student is awarded general high school graduation status if the student meets the minimum graduation requirements but does not meet the additional requirements for Academic graduation as outlined above.

**Note: Honours status applies to students who complete the requirements for Academic status with an 80% or higher overall average.*

Appendix I – Videotaping Consent Form



Education and Early Childhood Development

Focus Group and Videotaping Consent

To whom it may concern,

You have been asked to participate in a focus group held by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. The purpose of the group is to review and provide opinions about the current graduation requirements in Newfoundland and Labrador. The information learned in the focus groups may be used to inform possible changes to the current graduation requirements.

You can choose whether or not to participate in the focus group and stop at any time. Although the focus group will be videotaped, your responses will remain anonymous and no names will be mentioned in the report. All videotapes will be disposed of in a manner that ensures the confidentiality of participants after they are used to inform the report.

There are no right or wrong answers to the focus group questions. We want to hear many different viewpoints and would like to hear from everyone. We hope you can be honest even when your responses may not be in agreement with the rest of the group. In respect for each other, we ask that only one individual speak at a time in the group and that responses made by all participants be kept confidential. I understand this information and agree to participate fully under the conditions stated above:

Signed: _____

Date: _____