

# The Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes

# Now is the Time

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The Next Chapter in Education  
in Newfoundland and Labrador

July 21, 2017

The Honourable Dwight Ball  
Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador  
The Office of the Premier  
Confederation Building, East Block  
P. O. Box 8700  
St. John's, NL  
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Dear Premier Ball,

As members of the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes, we are pleased to provide you with our report, *Now is the Time*.

The report is a reflection of the knowledge gained from jurisdictional reviews, current research, and a review of good practices. The comments from educators, students, parents and the public have had significant impact on the report and its recommendations. It has been a privilege to undertake this work and we are grateful to you for the opportunity.

It is our hope that this report will provide the basis for improving educational outcomes and will inform the next chapter in education in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Respectfully submitted,

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# THE PREMIER'S TASK FORCE ON IMPROVING EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

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**2017**



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We extend sincere appreciation to Charlotte Strong. Charlotte's passion for learning was a constant reminder of the importance of striving to improve educational outcomes for every child in this province. We will each say that having the opportunity to work with her will remain a highlight of our careers.



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## Introduction

On November 8, 2016, the Honourable Dwight Ball, Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador, announced that Dr. Alice Collins (Chair), Dr. Marian Fushell, Dr. David Philpott, and Dr. Margaret Wakeham (members) had been appointed to a task force to conduct a review of the K-12 education system in NL. The Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes was asked:

1. to consider priority areas, including early learning, mathematics, reading/literacy, inclusive education, student mental health and wellness, multicultural education, co-operative education, Indigenous education, and teacher education and professional development;
2. to consult broadly; and
3. to submit a final report with recommendations to inform an Education Action Plan.

## Focus on Improvement

Newfoundland and Labrador has a history of dynamic education reform. Numerous consultations, reports and recommendations have provided the blueprint for the improvements the province has experienced since the 1960s. *The Royal Commission on Education and Youth*, 1967 and 1968, brought the province's education system into the modern, post-confederation era. Twenty-five years later, another Royal Commission, *Our Children, Our Future*, 1992, undertook a comprehensive review and its recommendations led to fundamental changes in governance, notably the creation of a non-denominational system. *The Ministerial Panel on Delivery of Education in the Classroom*, 2000, undertook a further comprehensive review. In subsequent years there have been reviews of specific topics such as special education, mathematics, literacy, teacher professional development and teacher certification. The mandate of the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes included issues which have arisen as concerns for students, parents, educators and the general public. During the consultation process four main areas of concern surfaced: inclusion; student mental health and wellness; mathematics; and reading.

## Methodology

The task force took a number of measures to communicate to students, parents, teachers, organizations and the general public to encourage participation in the consultation process.

- The task force set up a website that contained information about its mandate and the means by which those interested could express their views.
- In the days prior to the on-site consultation sessions, public service announcements were distributed for broadcast in local areas.
- The Francophone and English School districts sent information messages to educators and parents on behalf of the task force.
- The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA) encouraged teachers to attend sessions and complete the teacher survey.
- Principals of schools which hosted the on-site consultation sessions communicated with students, teachers and parents in their area.

- The government's Office of Public Engagement provided support for the on-site consultation sessions for parents and the public.
- The chair of the task force engaged in media interviews in February, 2017, to inform the public of the task force mandate and the information gathering process.

Specifically, to obtain the information it needed, the task force:

- **consulted with key stakeholders**, including the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association; the Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils; Newfoundland and Labrador English School District; (NLES)D; Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial (CSFP) de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador; NLES and CSFP trustees; the Newfoundland and Labrador Association of School System Administrators; representatives of Indigenous groups; College of the North Atlantic officials; Memorial University officials including the Provost and members of the Faculty of Science, the Department of Mathematics, and the Faculty of Education; and representatives of relevant government departments.
- **met with** students, teachers, parents and the public in Happy Valley - Goose Bay, Corner Brook, Rocky Harbour, Stephenville, Gander, Marystow, Clarenville, Bay Roberts, St. John's, and Conception Bay South.
- **provided opportunities for input**, including written submissions from interested individuals or groups; parent, educator and student surveys; an online comments forum; and email and telephone access. The task force accepted written submissions, surveys, comments, and feedback in other forms from January 1 to March 20, 2017.
- **held on-line sessions**, via the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI), with parents, students and teachers in eight locations on the coast of Labrador and five locations in rural/remote Newfoundland communities.
- **considered the following**: jurisdictional reviews, in particular reports from Canadian provinces; education reports from the province of NL (1967-present); scholarly research; current provincial initiatives; legislation, regulations, and policy frameworks; and findings from recent provincial on-site consultations relevant to the mandate of the task force, including Senior High School Graduation Requirements.
- **relied upon data** from the following sources to inform analysis: the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District; the Centre for Institutional Analysis and Planning at Memorial University; the College of the North Atlantic; the Newfoundland and Labrador Centre for Health Information; the provincial government departments of Education and Early Childhood Development; Health and Community Services; Justice and Public Safety; Children, Seniors and Social Development; Finance; Advanced Education, Skills and Labour; and the Intergovernmental and Indigenous Affairs Secretariat.

## **Demographic Context**

The task force undertook its work at a time of significant demographic change. Statistics Canada estimates that on July 1, 2016, the population of the province was about 530,000, almost 30,000 lower than 20 years earlier. Projections by the provincial Department of Finance suggest that by 2036, the population will decrease by almost another 24,000 to 506,000. The 2016 census indicates that 45% of the province's population resides in relatively small communities with populations of fewer than 5,000 people. Migration to urban centres creates challenges for both those who wish to remain in communities that are becoming increasingly smaller and larger communities experiencing increased demand.

Changing demographics present challenges for education. Between 1996 and 2016, the number of school-aged individuals (5 to 19 years) in the province declined from 125,000 to 80,000, with declines more pronounced in rural areas. Over the next 20 years this number is projected to decline further to 68,000. This change is also reflected in student enrolments which declined from 106,000 students in 1996/97 to 66,000 students in 2016/17, a difference of 40,000 students. In rural areas, there are concerns about viability of small schools; availability of programs, particularly at the high school level; extended busing distances; and availability of specialist services. In urban centres, there are increasingly diverse school populations, with higher numbers of immigrants and refugees and a corresponding need for programs and services.

The consolidation of the four English school boards into one in 2013 created opportunities for consistency in policies and delivery of services, but also created new challenges associated with the loss of local decision making.

## **The Need for Change**

The NL education system has expanded and progressed since the first post-confederation reforms. The teaching profession is exceptionally well qualified, school buildings reflect modern standards, governance has been streamlined, and student achievement and graduation rates have improved considerably.

However, too many students in NL are under achieving, struggling with reading and basic mathematical functions, and are not taking the more academically demanding high school courses they need for success at the post-secondary level; too many students are graduating from high school without sufficient knowledge of career opportunities, post-secondary study options, and fundamental life skills; too many students are dropping out of school and have no realistic way back in; too many students with mental health needs and academic challenges are not receiving the support and the education they deserve. All of these issues are especially pronounced for many Indigenous students and for immigrant students.

Some of the solutions are clear and they have been for a long time. *Special Matters* (reading and special education), *Toward an Achieving Society* (math and science) and *Supporting Learning* (professional development) are amongst the many reports informed by public consultations, reputable research, jurisdictional reviews and teacher feedback which addressed issues included

in the task force mandate. These reports included substantial recommendations for change, many of which have not been implemented. Improving educational outcomes requires that action be taken on these long-standing issues.

There is a climate for educational reform in NL. The remarkable work of teachers and other educational leaders, the aspirations of students, the support of parents, caregivers and the general public provide the conditions necessary for success.

Now is the time to improve educational outcomes and to begin the next chapter in education in Newfoundland and Labrador.

## Chapter 1

# Inclusive Education

The current practice of placing all students, including those with special needs, in the same classroom has given rise to concerns about the quality of the educational experience for all students. Students, teachers, parents, educational stakeholder groups and members of the public raised this issue in consultation sessions and submissions to the task force. The message was clear: inclusion, as a model of delivering supports to students with exceptionalities, is not working.

In the last thirty years there has been a shift from a completely segregated approach, prevalent prior to the 1980s, to an internationally embraced model of inclusive education where all children, regardless of religion, culture, gender or ability, can attend the neighbourhood school. *Inclusive education* refers broadly to the climate of social acceptance while *special education* has traditionally referenced an equitable provision of supports to children with an identified exceptionality. Although the concepts refer to different things, the Department of Education launched an inclusive education initiative in 2009 to replace the special education model. Eight years, and considerable resources, were spent phasing in the approach before reaching province-wide implementation in 2017. While inclusiveness and diversity are accepted social norms, how best to deliver supports to students with exceptionalities remains a contentious issue.

The research on the benefits and challenges of inclusion is robust and diverse, and offers a range of findings. There is agreement that teachers require education in how to individualize curriculum; as well, there is acknowledgment of the benefits for all students of participating in diverse social environments. The research differs when discussing how and where best to deliver intensive, individualized supports for the diversity of needs in schools. A definitive articulation of the balance between full and partial inclusion remains elusive. While much of the support for inclusion has emerged from advocacy groups, much of the criticism of the model is also advocacy-based. The Canadian Association for Community Living has long been an advocate for full inclusion; other groups, such as the Learning Disability Association of Canada and provincial autism associations, which represent significantly larger groups of students, have a different perspective.

Amidst this debate, the Supreme Court of Canada has twice ruled in favour of individualized and specialized supports for students with exceptionalities in landmark cases that have cautioned against a fully inclusive model of education. In *Eaton vs. Brant County School* (1997)<sup>1</sup> the court ruled in favour of a severely disabled child being placed in a separate classroom to ensure her needs were met. More recently, in *Moore vs. British Columbia* (2012)<sup>2</sup> the court ruled that refusing a student access to a specialized reading program in an alternative setting violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The ruling confirmed the legitimacy of special education: "...it is not the service, but the means by which those students get meaningful access to the general education ... discrimination was made out based on the insufficiently intensive remediation provided by the District for Jeffrey's learning disability in order for him to get access to the education he was entitled to."<sup>3</sup> Within a philosophy of inclusive education there is a place for

individualized programs for individualized needs, and while the regular classroom and curriculum might be appropriate for most children, it is not appropriate for all.

## Canadian Context

Every province and territory in Canada embraces the language of inclusive schools. This language extends to the entire school culture and speaks to shared values of diversity and the creation of learning communities that are accepting, welcoming and safe. Within that paradigm, each region has a model outlining the delivery of accommodations and supports to students with identified learning needs. Newfoundland and Labrador typifies the national landscape with similar support services, modes of delivery, assessment criteria and categories of support.

The provinces and territories are recognizing the importance of ensuring that the curriculum reflects the principles of *Universal Design for Learning*<sup>4</sup>, a model of curriculum development that is endorsed globally. The concept is borrowed from architecture where the original design of a building ensures access for all citizens. If the building is designed to be inclusive there is no need to add wheelchair ramps or widen doorways as afterthoughts. The needs of a diverse population are considered at the initial design stage. In education, this concept is being applied to new curriculum development to provide flexible access for students of all abilities and to ensure that curriculum goals such as social/emotional learning are reinforced across subjects.

To further the goal of Universal Design, education ministries are creating partnerships among their divisions of student support services, evaluation and curriculum development in an effort to create a curriculum that provides teachers with materials that all students can access. British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are moving in this direction. Some jurisdictions, in addition to following Universal Design, are making a specific effort toward becoming more pre-emptive by building in strong foundational academic and social/emotional skills to better prepare students to meet future academic success. Provinces such as British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario are going as far as rebuilding the primary curriculum around three pillars: literacy, numeracy and wellness, aiming to reduce the number of academic outcomes, streamline an overloaded curriculum, and avoid repetition of goals to prepare students for better educational outcomes in later grades.

Along with curriculum changes, all regions are using *Response to Intervention*,<sup>5</sup> a model of delivering services that is reflective of the traditional cascade model, where most students are in the regular class and on the regular curriculum (Tier One), some students require additional supports for some concepts (Tier Two) and a few students receive an alternative curriculum (Tier Three). Where the use of this model differs from existing program delivery models is in the intensity of Tier Two supports, which can be delivered by the classroom teacher or a specialist teacher, in individual or small group, either in or outside the regular class. There is a focus on strengthening the skill set of the classroom teacher through sustained professional learning and on clarifying the roles of specialist teachers. There is considerable variance across the country on when students are taken out of the classroom, what the specific learning goals are, and how long pull-out (individual or small-group instruction delivered in a separate environment) continues. Removing a child for specialized service is aimed at providing sufficient intensity of specialized instruction and/or delivery of pre-requisite skills required for participation in the regular

curriculum. The provinces and territories are providing professional learning in this three-tiered model and are increasingly moving toward it in both curriculum design and program delivery.

Students with more complex needs such as, but not limited to, autism and intellectual/developmental disability need a carefully planned combination of partial-inclusion and partial-specialized programming on an individual basis. No province expects 100% of these students to be in the regular classroom 100% of the time. In fact, none even suggests that a formula could possibly exist to pre-determine time allocations. Some provinces have urban populations large enough to offer completely separate schools for students with issues such as learning disabilities, autism, giftedness, and intellectual disability. While controversial in an era of inclusion, specialized schools are well subscribed and embraced by many families.

While all regions use student assistants to help with daily living skills and safety needs, the category of 'educational assistants' is a growing phenomenon in Canada. Educational assistants help classroom teachers with curriculum delivery, either individually or in small groups. These paraprofessionals are assigned to the classroom teacher, move among classes and subjects, and are primarily focused on the primary and elementary grades. Educational assistants are required to have some post-secondary education. Exact job titles, pay scales and specific duties may vary.

## NL Context

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) defines inclusive education<sup>6</sup> as a philosophy that promotes:

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

These tenets apply to all members of the school community regardless of economic status, gender, racial or religious background, sexual orientation, academic ability or any other facet of diversity. This ideology applies to the holistic culture of the school, and in 2017 contemporary classrooms in NL, like others in Canada, are increasingly diverse.

Guided by this philosophy NL provides a Service Delivery Model for Students with Exceptionalities that articulates how individualized supports and accommodations are to be delivered to students with identified needs. The model reflects accepted international practices for identification, assessment, program planning and collaboration amongst members of program planning teams, as documented in individual education plans (IEPs). NL also provides The Model for the Coordination of Services to Children and Youth that serves to guide interagency planning

for children who also require support from agencies other than education. A series of other documents inform program planning teams on practices such as pre-referral, functional behavioural assessment and behavioural management plans, transition planning, and comprehensive assessment. The duties of each professional are also defined.

The NL *Schools Act* (1997) outlines the right of access for all students under 21 years, including mandatory attendance of students less than 16 years of age, regardless of complexity of need. Sections provide information on record-keeping, the rights of parents, the limits for student suspension, and the provision of informed consent, all consistent with accepted national and international practices. The Act states that the Minister of Education may “issue policy directives with respect to special education”<sup>7</sup> and that the district must “ensure policies and guidelines issued by the Minister relating to special education for students are followed in schools under its jurisdiction”.<sup>8</sup> However the Special Education Policy (1996) remains in draft form. Inclusion was phased in without a policy to implement it.

Students who qualify for individual education plans must have an identified exceptionality ascertained through a comprehensive assessment as outlined by EECD. Recent changes in how NL categorizes each exceptionality, as well as updates in diagnostic criteria as described in The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders V,<sup>9</sup> do not allow for comparison of current rates to those of previous years. Nonetheless, there has been an increase in the number of students with Autism Spectrum Disorder along with a reconceptualization of diagnostic criteria. There has also been an increase in the number of students with specific learning disabilities as diagnostic criteria became less restrictive. Finally, those with speech/language disorders continue to present as a large group of students with exceptionalities. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the population of students requiring individualized supports.

**Table 1.1**  
**Number of Students with Exceptionalities (by Type) 2016/17<sup>10</sup>**

Exceptionality	Frequency	Increase since 2006 <sup>11</sup>
Acquired Brain Injury	57	
Developmental Delay	2203	
Giftedness	56	
Hearing Loss	280	
Intellectual Disability	898	
Medical Condition	417	
Mental Illness/Mental Health	1 460	
Neurodevelopmental Disorder – Autism	1 253	
Neurodevelopmental Disorder – ADHD	2 886	
Neurodevelopmental Disorder – Other	759	
Physical Disability	194	
Specific Learning Disorder	8 901	+ 5 896
Speech & Language Disorder	3 408	+ 1 191
Vision Loss	86	
<b>Total Exceptionalities (Students may have more than one)</b>	<b>22 858</b>	
<b>Total students with an exceptionality</b>	<b>14 710</b>	<b>+ 2 368</b>

In 2017, 22% of students in NL were documented as having at least one exceptionality, a slight increase from 20% in 2006. Interestingly, many students with speech and language delays, as well as mild learning disabilities, could have avoided requiring educational accommodations if there had been early identification and intervention, and many others would have been able to fully benefit from their time in school had there been early intervention. While some would need ongoing support, the intensity could have been minimized. ‘Behavioural problem’ is not a distinct category of exceptionality although symptoms can be secondary to a number of conditions.<sup>12</sup> Only 56 students (.08%) are identified as being gifted despite research claims that approximately 10% of students are gifted. In 2007, the review of ISSP/Pathways stated: “Given the provincial emphasis on entrepreneurship, economic development, and leadership, it is disconcerting to find that one of our most valuable resources is being ignored”.<sup>13</sup> Ten years later this issue remains unaddressed. The adoption of *Universal Design for Learning* would ensure there is at least some provision for gifted students.

In responding to these exceptional needs, EECD allocates various resources to the school districts. Table 1.2 provides an overview of those resources and how they have changed in recent years.

**Table 1.2**  
**Teacher and Specialist Allocation, Student Assistant Expenditures**  
**2010/11 – 2016/17**

Year	Total Student Population	Teachers	IRT	Identified need	Student Assistant budget	SLP	Ed. Psych	Guidance
2010	69 665	3 528	807.65	109	\$14 438 000	45	43	139.33
2011	68 729	3 468	818.10	161	\$15 332 400	45	43	137.46
2012	67 933	3 425	811.45	183.25	\$15 098 800	45	43	135.83
2013	67 604	3 407	803.83	123	\$15 098 800	45	43	134.52
2014	67 436	3 385	806.56	147	\$16 100 800	45	43	134.16
2015	67 293	3 370	807.06	164.98	\$17 362 800	45	43	134.36
2016	66 800	3 110	802.69	294.82	\$22 163 300	45	43	133.04
	<b>-2 865</b> <b>-4.11%</b>	<b>-418</b> <b>-11.8%</b>	<b>-4.96</b> <b>-.62%</b>	<b>+185.82</b> <b>+170.48%</b>		-	-	<b>(-6.29)</b>

The student population of the previous year is used to calculate teacher allocation for the upcoming year. Instructional Resource Teachers (IRTs) are calculated on a ratio 7:1000. “Identified Need” teachers are allocated to reflect regional differences such as the unique needs of small schools, allow special programs to continue, and accommodate students with highly specialized needs. The IRT allocation includes six Safe and Caring School itinerants, 11 Inclusive School itinerants, nine itinerants for blind/visually impaired students and 18 itinerants for deaf/hard of hearing students. In 2011 and 2012, the number of IRTs rose slightly to accommodate the closure of the School for the Deaf. In 2016, the number of “Identified Need” teachers and the budget for student assistants increased to reflect the implementation of full-day kindergarten.

In 2016/17, compared to 2010/11, there were 2,865 fewer students in the school system overall, but there were 180.86 extra IRT and “Identified Need” teachers, and the budget for student

assistants nearly doubled. The increased allocation and expenditure reflect the increased number of students requiring support.

## **NL Response to the Needs of Exceptional Learners**

In responding to the needs of exceptional learners, the use of assistive technology and alternate format materials has been revolutionary. There have been dramatic improvements in how supports are delivered and the levels of independence for students dealing with hearing and vision loss, communication challenges, mobility issues and learning disabilities.

EECD has made significant investments to promote the use of assistive technology and it maintains a library of curriculum materials in alternate formats. Each school is encouraged to appoint a teacher advisor for assistive technology and alternate format materials to help promote access to the material in their school. Digital texts, audible books, digital readers, voice-activated software, laptops and portable devices are available to students who need them, but schools are slow to apply for them despite significant efforts to simplify and expedite the process. As of May 2017, 30% of schools in NL do not have an advisor for assistive technology and 108 schools do not have any students accessing the materials. Only 27% of students identified with a Specific Learning Disability are accessing the material. Teachers report low comfort levels with support technology and require professional learning on incorporating it into student support plans. A full-time librarian for assistive technology and alternate format materials at EECD would provide leadership in ensuring greater use of the material in schools.

The province is a member of the *Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority* (APSEA), a shared agency of the Atlantic provinces that is primarily responsible for providing services to students with significant vision and hearing loss. It provides technology, support and professional development for all the itinerant specialists in the region, although deaf/hard of hearing itinerants in NL do not participate in the APSEA professional development due to cost of travel. APSEA extended its mandate in 2015 to include professional learning for Autism Spectrum Disorder, through an online course titled "*ASD and Behavioural Interventions*". By June 2017, over 900 educators in NL (teachers, student assistants, counsellors, administrators) had completed the program. Discussions are underway to develop a second online program dealing with behavioural issues.

Information on students' individual needs and evolving progress is essential to effective program planning and delivery. Data that are current inform decisions, determine programs and ensure a shared understanding of the child by all those involved in their care. At present, student information is stored in four electronic systems, while individualized plans are paper filed. *PowerSchool* is the central web-based data system that is now complemented by *Review 360*, which records data on student behaviour. A *Referral Tracking System* is used to monitor comprehensive assessments and a *Student Support Services Database* collects more information, mostly related to requests for student assistants. Information cannot be shared among these systems and all are completely separate from paper files. Student information is kept at the school, at the district, and also at EECD. As a result, data entry is repetitive, complex, unwieldy, and time-consuming, and does little to inform programs.

## Consultations and Submissions

Parents and educators alike were unanimous in voicing concern that all students, not just those with exceptionalities, are being under-served with the current model of inclusive education. It was a central theme in the submission of each stakeholder group and every public consultation. No one spoke in support of the model, and the phrase “Inclusion is a wonderful concept but....” was used at every consultation as people attempted to differentiate a philosophy of embracing diversity from a model of delivering supports to students with identified exceptionalities. There was unanimous agreement that schools should be welcoming, safe and secure facilities for all students. However, an equally clear agreement emerged that this does not equate with one placement for all students, all of the time. Numerous presenters spoke to an apprehension of appearing ‘anti-diversity’ when they speak against inclusion, but the present model is untenable for students and teachers alike.

Concerns for inclusion were almost exclusive to the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLES). The Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial de Terra-Neuve-et-Labrador (CSFP) expressed significantly less concern, except for their challenge in hiring Francophone teachers with a background in special education. Consequently, the concerns expressed here are almost exclusive to the NLES.

The following submission provides a vivid description of the challenges faced by far too many students and families and it typifies what parents expressed to the task force. It is printed here in its entirety, exactly as written, with only the names of the student and the school removed to protect privacy.

My daughter, now 9 years old in grade 4, attends ----. I feel that the education system has let her down since she entered K and each year thereafter has been the same. Each year I have attempted to get her extra help within the school system and have gotten nowhere. She was a late talker and I had been bringing her to speech language pathology since she was around 2 ½ yrs old. Upon entering K a full assessment from speech language and child developmental psychology with suggested recommendations for --- was

**“There are a whole lot of kids in my son’s class who need special help from their teacher. My son is 8 and he’s doing fine but Ben needs his teacher too.”**

**Parent**

**“Inclusive education is NOT working - not in our current system. The students who are included are actually excluded in their classrooms. They feel excluded because their peers complete their work faster. They feel excluded because they can’t keep up. They feel excluded because they can’t comprehend the curriculum because it is not at their level. They are more stigmatized than ever before.”**

**Educator**

faxed to the school. K started and I waited to hear from the speech personnel within the school and never heard anything. I asked the vice principal one day and was told it may take a couple months for all the children to settle in and files to be gone through. I waited a couple more weeks and approached her K teacher to inquire and she told me she didn't know anything about it and nothing was in her school file. I later delivered a second copy of the paperwork to the school myself. Eventually spoke with the speech personnel at school. She has met with --- and concluded she would not receive any extra help at school. I was told "there was other children worse than her." A phrase I would hear often in the next 5 years.

Grade 1 came and the first report card late November. Teacher tells me ---- has some reading issues as well with language, she will send for a referral to the school to get her extra help. Christmas holidays end and snow storms delay school a couple more weeks from opening. Her teacher is gone on early maternity leave. ---- spends next 4-5 months with a substitute teacher who will not recognize these issues.

Grade 2 teacher consistently expresses to me that ---- needs to listen to instructions more and practice reading more. These concerns are present but are not reported on report cards. I've made meetings with the principle and am assured that ---- is doing well in school. They let her go outside the classroom for extra reading time  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour once a week in a group of 6-8 other students at the same time. Divided between them this is 7.5-10 minutes once a week. This only lasted for about a month and I am told she has greatly improved and doesn't require it any longer. I feel like that was just to make me happy!

Grade 3 first report card late November. Teacher expresses great concern for --- with attention, grades, comprehension and other areas. All these concerns are also being recognized at home. Listening skills, anxiety, grades, etc. He said he will send a referral for extra help. I start having meetings with the guidance counsellor regularly and I feel finally like someone is working with us and not against each other. Months pass and soon end of school year is closing in. We do a Connors report and have now enlisted a pediatrician to diagnose her with ADD and high anxiety. June comes and the guidance counsellor assured me not to worry that she will be at the new school and everything will work out. She also starts her medication over summer holidays.

Grade 4 arrives and the guidance counsellor is not the same lady, she has taken a different position within the school board. Towards the end of September I meet with her teacher. She has no idea of the previous year and is a little stunned with my concerns, saying she wouldn't have pointed -- out for ADD. Of course not, now she's sitting in a classroom medicated and trying her best. When asked about --- receiving extra help I am told she has about 3-4 other kids in her classroom bouncing off the walls causing disturbance. A small repeat of previous years "there are worse kids than her."

So what does that mean exactly. Grade 3 I am "encouraged" to medicate her. Now she is on meds her mind is working slower and more efficient. This is when extra help to improve understanding of the curriculum would be greatly beneficial to her. Now she's "too quiet" while other kids are causing themselves to get the teachers attention.

Should I stop her meds so she can cause a fuss in class to get the help?

We are now 3/4 way through grade 4 and she severely struggles in mathematics. I have been told by her teacher last week that I will have to continue practice with --- over the whole summer holidays in her math so she doesn't lose grasp of the bit she has learned this year.

Her teacher sent home a note just prior to Christmas that “--- needs extra practice at home” for math. While I make breakfast and supper and also when riding in car or any random time I am quizzing --- about her math. Every second weekend while I work, her grandfather practices math at their house. I also pay a private tutor for her twice a week. How much more as a parent can I do in the little amount of waking hours throughout the school week I have with her?

I think its time the school system provides more available help to my daughter, and all those other children struggling.

A child sent into the school system with medical professional recommendations cannot receive extra help. A child who is recognized by her teachers to need evaluation / extra help receives little to nil. A child whose parent has made numerous meetings with principal/ teachers / guidance counsellors to request and express concerns received little to nil. A parent who feels their child is suffering her way through grades, getting lost in the system pushed ahead to the next year while little is absorbed in the current year ... feels frustrated!

## **Issues Related to Inclusion**

Submissions and comments at the in-person consultation sessions reflected concerns raised in previous reports on education in NL, challenges being addressed in other jurisdictions, and observations of current practice. These issues are presented here organized under main themes, each of which should be prominent in an action plan to improve educational outcomes. Although additional resources are warranted, resources alone will not fix a broken system.

### **Accessible Curriculum**

Curriculum is developed separately from special education and does not incorporate the concept of *Universal Design for Learning*. There are limited applications of *Differentiated Instruction* strategies in new curriculum. Undergraduate and graduate education degree programs at Memorial do not prepare educators in *Universal Design for Learning*, *Response to Intervention* or *Differentiated Instruction*. Moreover, professional learning on new curriculum seldom includes IRTs, even though they have to implement and/or adapt it. For curriculum to be accessible to all students it needs to be designed appropriately, ensuring that the strategies and supports for students with exceptionalities are included. This would reduce the need for formal assessment or diagnosis as good teaching and evaluation strategies are embedded in a curriculum that is developed using *Universal Design for Learning*. An accessible curriculum in the primary grades will set the stage for improved educational outcomes later, especially in literacy, numeracy and self-regulation.

### **Responding Appropriately to Behaviour**

Student behaviour, though not a category of special education, depletes significant resources, with little impact. Many young children enter the school system with poor self-regulation – lacking the ability to interact appropriately, follow directions, plan their actions, understand consequence, and

**“IRTs are becoming behavioural management specialists and we can’t get to the students who really need us.”**

**IRT**

control their emotional and behavioural responses.<sup>14</sup> The primary curriculum does not have learning outcomes to address this issue. Poor self-regulation can be manifested as behavioural problems which, by Grade 7, begins to have an impact on social and emotional functioning. Teachers report being unprepared, either in their initial teacher education programs or because of insufficient professional development, to respond to these behaviours and mental health concerns. Teachers are adamant that they cannot and should not deal with mental health issues.

Given a lack of content in initial teacher education programs, absence of appropriate curriculum and a dearth of professional learning for addressing behavioural matters, it is understandable that responding to behaviours was such a dominant theme for educators in NL.

New Brunswick has a sustained and focused professional learning approach for teachers in promoting positive behavioural supports, with online learning and summer institutes. It is a priority in annual professional learning for teachers with at least one full day devoted exclusively to it. This professional development is led by the education ministry and is supported by the districts to ensure consistency across the province.

### **Proactive Special Education**

There is no formal early identification system for students who are struggling. The needed information exists, but the mechanisms to develop a system are missing. Children are typically identified after they have fallen a couple of grade levels behind and they then require intensive supports. Parents are often told that their children cannot have a comprehensive assessment until Grade 4 even though the research on, and practice of, assessment recommends much earlier identification to inform early intervention. Students with specific learning disorders are given little help and fall further and further behind. Parents describe the ‘constant fight’, for supports for their children year after year. As a result, special education remains a reactive approach with services deployed after a student falls behind, whereas a proactive approach could have prevented that from happening. In combination, the absence of early identification and intervention, inadequate and inaccessible curriculum, and inadequate support to teachers to address complex behavioural management are major impediments

to an effective model of service delivery. Substantial improvement in the educational outcomes for students with special needs requires attention and resources.

### **Confusion Regarding Roles and Instructional Environment**

IRTs are school-based and work with students with identified exceptionalities. One IRT stated that she transferred to the regular classroom because she was 'tired of feeling like a pylon in the back of someone else's classroom'. Guidance counsellors talked about how much of their time was consumed with special education even though most do not have an educational background in the area. Other educators talked about crowded classrooms with student assistants and IRTs having no designated space to work with students.

Teachers reported that the communication to them was that the current model of inclusion does not allow for small group or pull-out service, and that all students have to be in the regular classroom all of the time. Teachers have heard that message for eight years.

Teachers and parents raised concerns for students with milder educational issues requiring minimal, but critical, support. In the absence of specialized instruction, these children who could be supported and move forward are largely left on their own in classrooms because of the demands on a single teacher to manage major behavioural issues. IRTs' effectiveness is impeded by having to provide instructional support in an environment where another teacher is teaching material beyond the ability of the student with special needs. Consequently, the environment in the classroom is not conducive to learning. This applies to students at all levels of the ability continuum, from the highly gifted to the severely delayed. The consequence is that a private industry of tutoring has emerged in the absence of supports at the school level.

A well articulated special education policy would clarify the importance of small group instruction and establish effective individualized supports in the most appropriate environment. Leadership is required to communicate a clear and consistent message to educators and parents alike. Likewise, professional learning on the model of

**"My son has to wait until he becomes severe before he can get the help to make him mild/moderate again."**

**Parent**

**"Students who could thrive if given just some support are being left behind because there is no one there to help them."**

**Teacher**

**“I remember so well when the new policy was implemented. I remember the dreaded “People From The Board” coming out and laying down the law. Taking a kid out was a punishable offense. Now we have a whole batch of kids who might have learned to read and didn’t. And frustrated, demoralized teachers.”**

**Teacher**

**“Many families are paying thousands of dollars each year to access private services to meet their child’s needs. While this places enormous financial burden on some families, it leaves other families unable to do so, and therefore, their child receiving an inequitable education merely based on ability to pay.”**

**Stakeholder Group**

student support services and a special education policy should be led by EECD to ensure consistent implementation across the province.

### **Child Health Services**

The task force identified the necessity of having a seamless model of delivering health services to students in a timely manner. At present, information and services are shared, and at times duplicated, between EECD and the Department of Health and Community Services (HCS). HCS, often relying on testing information forwarded from the school, identifies most exceptionalities. Students wait for initial psycho-educational assessments in the school and can then be referred to the health system for diagnosis and/or follow-up, often having to wait as long as 18 additional months. Other students are receiving initial psycho-educational assessments in the health system by psychologists who then refer back to their counterparts in education with recommendations for follow-up.

Health practitioners stated that information from schools is often incomplete and that students are being referred for the wrong supports. Educators reported that at times the recommendations from health providers cannot be implemented in school. Concern surfaced about a breakdown in speech/language services, where students begin receiving year-round support in the health system but are discharged from the health authority at kindergarten. They then have to wait to be seen by the school’s speech therapist, with different criteria for service, a service which is briefer in duration and ends in June. Many schools referred to the comprehensive service provided by community nursing. This service is not replicated in metro St. John’s where nurses’ caseloads preclude them from routinely being in schools. The task force heard that occupational therapists can provide a valuable service in the schools while some professionals report being unable to access many schools, especially in the metro St. John’s area. Concern was raised for the capacity of speech/language and occupational therapists to respond to rising needs, especially given the increase in the number of students with autism.

The current dual, and often conflicting, model of providing supports to students is not working and too many children are without appropriate services while too many parents

and educators are waiting for supports which may not be delivered in timely fashion. Families and educators depend on strong and effective relationships between the regional health authorities and schools to ensure timely and appropriate provision of supports to students with special needs and their families.

The western region provides a model of collaboration, focusing on the needs of children. The Western Child Services Committee is a formal relationship between HCS and the regional education district with routine, scheduled meetings to discuss priorities and concerns. Advisory committees ensure ongoing communication and collaboration. Recently the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development joined the committee. A committee member stressed the importance of attending these meetings, stating that nothing was more important in his schedule, that the relationship and access that it provides for both HCS and the NLESID are critical.

### **Educational Assistants**

Student assistants have defined roles that are commensurate with their training. The deployment of student assistants allows for much transfer from school to school and the protocol for hiring replacements is problematic. Schools would benefit from a protocol allowing them to call in replacement assistants who are familiar with their school and the needs of the students, similar to the practice for calling substitute teachers. Doubling the budget for student assistants has not addressed the issues. Assigning student assistants to schools rather than to individual students and changing the substitute call requirements would do much to improve the program.

Two previous studies on NL's educational system (*ISSP/Pathways* report in 2007 and *Supporting Learning* in 2000)<sup>15</sup> recommended that the province introduce instructional assistants. It was not surprising that the same need was raised with this task force. Adding a second level of student assistants, with some post-secondary education, for instructional support would provide needed flexibility. Instructional assistants would support the classroom teacher with individualized/small group teaching, a diverse group of students to meet the curriculum goals. They would also help deliver programming to students

**“A specific Educational-Medical partnership is necessary in order to effectively and efficiently provide support for children who have moderate to severe behavioural, neurological, cognitive, and mental health needs.”**

**Educator**

**“Ideally, student assistant substitutes would have a family of schools where they are regular substitutes, as is the case for substitute teachers. This would allow schools to call in people who are familiar with the students thereby providing better consistency of care to students and a safer environment for all individuals involved.”**

**School Administrator**

with severe developmental needs and this would allow the most specialized teachers to work with larger groups of students.

### **The Pretense of Inclusion: Partial School Days**

Many students are receiving partial school placement while many more are routinely sent home for behavioural reasons, especially in the metro St. John's area. Partial day programming has become regularized despite a monitoring program by NLES. A pediatrician stated that she had 11 students on partial days in one school alone. One principal said there is an official list of students on a partial day and an unofficial list. A parent said that they get called at least every second day to take the child home.

An articulated special education policy would ensure that effective individualized programs are available and partial day assignments would be unnecessary. The irony is that within a philosophy of inclusion, exclusion from school has become an acceptable practice. No child should be excluded from an inclusive school. Special education exists to prevent this and there is a fundamental responsibility to develop appropriate programs to ensure every student has a placement in a school.

### **Complex Needs**

A significant number of students on partial days have complex needs. No criteria have been developed to define what is meant by complex needs, which would result in more intensive and coordinated service. Many students have autism and/or significant mental health challenges and require strong interagency teams where professionals in health and education support them and their families. Government's *The Way Forward* document references the need to develop client-focused interventions to support individuals with complex needs.<sup>16</sup> The Premier's mandate letter to the Minister of Health and Community Services requested a provincial autism strategy. Such a strategy needs to link early supports such as ABA or JASPER<sup>17</sup> programs with the school and reflect naturalistic, developmental and behavioural interventions.<sup>18</sup> Existing services could be foundational to creating more comprehensive models of support. For example, *The Model for the Coordination of Services to Children and Youth*, with its *Individual Support Services Plan (ISSP)* component, continues to exist and remains an ideal model

to follow. An agreed upon protocol among the four core youth servicing departments can address issues and principles of coordinated support to students and schools.

Another existing model that can help address complex needs is EECD's guide to transition planning which is seldom used to transition children into school or move between grades. For young children with autism, this approach should be mandatory for linking the child care/early learning sector with kindergarten, especially as both sectors are now a part of the same government department.

While students with autism are a group requiring a complex needs model they are not the only group. Students who have experienced developmental trauma also struggle, in large part because no one at the school has had any training in how to identify or respond to their needs. Another group is students with significant hearing loss for whom cochlear implants are not working. Students dealing with addictions and those in early recovery would also benefit from a complex needs model, as would those under Child Protection Services. Collectively, these marginalized students consume significant resources but have poor outcomes because systems of care are not working to their benefit. The entire school population is affected, not only the students requiring services.

### **Systemic issues**

The task force process revealed that there are system-wide issues that are having an impact on educational outcomes for students with special needs.

- Special education at administrative levels is not well integrated into the education system as a whole. In EECD those with special education expertise are not always involved in department-wide policy development, curriculum development and renewal at the earliest stages and during evaluation design. At the districts, special education representation at senior decision making levels is needed to ensure provision of appropriate support and distribution of

**“Partial day programming cannot continue indefinitely. Our son missed Grades 2-4 and now he’s missed the majority of Grade 7. Despite teaching him basic education skills at home, segregating him from his peers and not providing the educational programming he so rightfully deserves, is wrong. He is lonely and withdrawn.”**

**Parent**

resources. Without full integration, special education becomes ancillary with educational consequences.

- School principals reported that they have become consumed with administrative tasks which prevent them from providing instructional support to teachers. Reduction in supports such as secretarial time and increased data entry requirements are examples of impediments to their providing instructional leadership.
- EECĐ, the school districts and schools all have different systems for collecting, analyzing and reporting information about students' participation, health, and academic performance. Removing systemic barriers and improving collaboration would enable educators at each level of the education system to have access to the information they need to respond to trends and emerging student needs.
- Students with special needs often receive services from professionals outside the school system. Better communication and improved protocols between health and education administrators and professionals could facilitate improved arrangements for service for students.
- Ineffective communication is a barrier to optimum service. Over time, there has been a breakdown at points of intersection in the education system and between the education system and other systems such as health. Clear policies, consistent directives, concise understandings, and accurate and current information drive an efficient system. Effective communication could be included in strategic plans of both the department and the districts.

## **Towards Improvement**

Despite the volume of concern that emerged for inclusion, all is not broken. Post-secondary schools are experiencing increases in the number of students with identified learning needs enrolling in and completing programs.<sup>19</sup> An increasing number of students with exceptionalities are moving through the NL school system with the marks, the skills and, more significantly, the confidence to pursue post-secondary studies. Parents are demanding more services because they have a stronger understanding of their children's needs and increased awareness of their rights. There is indeed reason to be proud of the gains that have been made, but that does not diminish the need for renewed efforts to improve.

Many of the challenges that are currently taxing special education resources are not about students with exceptionalities. No amount of change to the model of support services will improve outcomes unless those underlying issues are addressed. The absence of a curriculum which is accessible to all students, coupled with a lack of foundational literacy, numeracy skills and self-regulation skills, reinforced across all primary subjects, results in children falling behind early in their school careers. Limited use of assistive technology and alternate format materials that would promote greater independence in students is a concern. Ineffective approaches to addressing behaviour ransom the instructional environment for all. The concern for this model of inclusion is symptomatic of larger issues.

Every class in the province has a range of abilities and students with a variety of learning strengths and needs. Classrooms are diverse. The current model of student support services provides for

placement in a learning environment best suited to the needs of each student. This could be the regular classroom, small group, individual instruction, and/or full- or part-days in a separate room. Adoption of the inclusion philosophy in 2009 has been interpreted to mean that the only suitable placement for all students is the regular classroom. This interpretation has served neither students nor teachers well.

Teachers with special education expertise are currently required, for the most part, to provide support to struggling students in the regular class while the regular teacher is instructing other students. In some cases and at some times there is more than one specialist in the classroom providing support, and often there are student assistants as well. This arrangement creates a challenging teaching and learning environment for both teachers and students. For teachers, it is difficult to conduct whole class instruction when there are other voices in the same space. For students, there is an impeded opportunity for specialist support to address underlying skill deficits in any systematic way, and they too are subject to the distraction of more than one lesson being taught.

Inclusion in the educational experience means being included in opportunities to learn, included in being able to benefit fully from the educational experience. Students whose needs are ill suited to being addressed in the regular classroom are in fact being excluded from the education to which they have a legal entitlement. Further, classroom environments with several adults teaching different things to different students exclude many others from learning opportunities. Inclusion in the school environment as a whole should not necessarily mean full-time placement in the regular classroom.

The special education model promotes assessment of needs, development of an individual education plan, and placement in an environment where needs can be best met, either full-time or part-time. The model relies on a seamless child health model which fluidly and efficiently responds to the needs of children. While services exist in both education and health, referrals between the two are problematic and result in a fragmented, fractured approach. Unifying all youth servicing professionals within one department, with one year-round model of support that focuses on children would result in tangible improvement for families and have a significant impact on schools. Such a move is reflective of *The Way Forward* document which calls for expanding primary health care teams by creating partnerships with the regional health authorities.<sup>20</sup> It would also enhance communication and transfer of knowledge. The Western Child Services Committee offers an example of the value of dialogue and mutual respect, and serves as an example of the importance of prioritizing collaboration and communication.

Accurate information, appropriate resources, qualified instructional assistants, early identification, timely intervention, shared communication and strong collaboration are attributes of an effective model of student support services. Sustainable professional development and appropriate courses and experiences in initial teacher education programs will further strengthen efforts at improvement.



## **Inclusive Education Recommendations**

1. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, within one year of the release of this report, rescind the 1996 Special Education Policy (draft) and develop a new “Student Support Services Policy” that articulates how to implement a model of student support services, independent of a philosophy of inclusion. This new policy would effectively address each of the main themes identified in this chapter and have a particular focus on:
  - a) effectively using small group instruction, both in and out of the regular classroom
  - b) establishing appropriate, individual programs that ensure all children are in school for a full day and prevent children from being sent home
  - c) defining complex needs with an interdepartmental commitment to reactivate the Individual Student Support Program (ISSP) model for students receiving services from more than one government department
  - d) transitioning all students with special needs between the early years programs and kindergarten and between each grade level
  - e) partnering effectively with early years/child care programs and creating an early identification and intervention system for children with special needs
  - f) including ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure student needs are being met
  - g) providing department-led professional learning on a new special education policy to ensure consistency.
2. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development adopt the principle of *Universal Design for Learning* for all curriculum renewal.
3. The program development consultants for student support services at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development be fully involved in all curriculum renewal.
4. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development create opportunities to reinforce self-regulation and social/emotional learning outcomes in the curriculum across content areas.
5. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development adopt New Brunswick’s model of department-led professional learning on responding to student behaviour with at least one full day devoted exclusively to it annually, supported by ongoing web-based learning opportunities.
6. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a new model of student assistants which would:
  - a) allow flexibility and suitability in calling replacement assistants based on their familiarity with the students; and
  - b) assign student assistants to the school and not to individual students.
7. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a model and a plan to introduce a second level of student assistants as ‘instructional assistants’ with levels of post-secondary education appropriate to the role.

8. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development conduct a comprehensive research and jurisdictional review on the primary curriculum to identify opportunities to reinforce literacy, numeracy and self-regulation across all subject areas.
9. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial de Terra-Neuve-et-Labrador work with the four regional health authorities to establish regional committees, similar to the Western Child Services Committee, which include persons with decision-making authority, meet on a quarterly basis, and establish working sub-committees where necessary.
10. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Health and Community Services, within one year of the release of this report, develop a provincial child health services model, situated within one government department, to ensure seamless service delivery to schools, continuity of care, and year round access for children and families, and to include: community nursing, speech/language pathology, psychology, occupational therapy and social work.
11. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Health and Community Services review the capacity of social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists and community nurses to ensure adequate service to students and families in the new proposed model.
12. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development purchase the *Special Education Case Management System* which would work with *PowerSchool* and *Review 360* to replace all other data systems related to student support services, with EECD and the school districts having equal access to all information compiled.
13. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Health and Community Services work with the Newfoundland Centre for Health Information and the Office of Information and Privacy Commission to develop an early identification data repository by applying a child development perspective to existing data being collected in Electronic Health and Medical Records, NL Pharmacy Network, and the Client Referral Management System, which can then be linked with electronic records at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
14. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial de Terra-Neuve-et-Labrador and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development ensure that an individual qualified in special education is included in senior leadership teams.
15. The Faculty of Education at Memorial University include two courses on exceptionailities and modules on responding to student behaviour in initial teacher education programs.
16. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development hire a full time librarian to manage the technology library and collaborate with the school districts to ensure that a

school-based person, from every school, be given appropriate professional learning to optimize the use of alternate format materials and assistive technology in their school.

### **Inclusive Education Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Eaton v. Brant County Board of Education – 1997 1 S.C.R 241(Eaton)

<sup>2</sup> Moore v British Columbia (Education) – 2012 SCC61-2012-11-09 Appeals

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.udlcenter.org/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.rti4success.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/inclusion.html>

<sup>7</sup> *Schools Act* (1997a). Section 117.b(v)

<sup>8</sup> *Schools Act* (1997b). Section 75.d.

<sup>9</sup> American Psychiatric Association (2013)

<sup>10</sup> As of May 1, 2017

<sup>11</sup> Comparison to previous years is difficult due to changing diagnostic criteria and data collecting methods. Data from *Focusing on Students: Report of the ISSP/Pathways Commission, 2007* is used where possible.

<sup>12</sup> Disruptive behaviour can have many origins and does not imply a disability unless it is caused by frustration resulting from inadequate supports for their identified learning need.

<sup>13</sup> Government of NL (2007a) p. 69

<sup>14</sup> Butler et al. (2017)

<sup>15</sup> Government of NL (2000a)

<sup>16</sup> Government of NL (2017a) p. 49

<sup>17</sup> *Applied Behaviour Analysis and Joint Attention, Symbolic Play, Engagement, and Regulation*

<sup>18</sup> Schreibman et al. (2015)

<sup>19</sup> Philpott & Chaulk (2013)

<sup>20</sup> Government of NL (2017a) p. 50



## Chapter 2

# Student Mental Health and Wellness

Health and well-being are foundational to human growth and development. Healthy students have better educational outcomes and a well educated population has better health outcomes.

Student mental health and wellness was among the top three issues raised in submissions to the task force and during consultation sessions. It was the only topic identified by every group of students. In many ways, it overlapped with inclusion, in both origin of issues as well as what is needed to realize improvements. The challenge in responding to student mental health issues is not unique to Newfoundland and Labrador, or even Canada. A 2016 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study on student mental health and wellness concluded:

*As with improving student performance, there is no single combination of policies and practices that will nurture the well-being of all students, everywhere; and every country has room for improvement, even the top performers. But it is fair to say that unless they are given the support they need to blossom in their life as students, adolescents are unlikely to enjoy well-being as adults.<sup>1</sup>*

Students, parents, teachers, and the public expressed concern. Students noted that mental health challenges impede their ability to focus on school work. Parents spoke of the time and energy they exert to obtain help for their children. Teachers, who are working with a full curriculum and a wide range of student abilities, stated that they do not have the background to respond appropriately to students' mental health needs. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLES) has developed and implemented a number of initiatives and some professional development programs but acknowledged that more is needed. Waiting lists for medical supports are long and while children await service, various levels of the education and health systems are not always able to be responsive to their needs. While children remain on waiting lists, their issues, which may have a behavioural manifestation, can be detrimental not only to individual students with mental health needs but also to teachers and other students in the classroom.

Research in student mental health and well-being is robust with evidence-based themes directing schools in responding holistically to emergent needs.<sup>2</sup> The benefits of health promotion in schools extend beyond physically healthy students. Higher academic performance, stronger engagement and attendance, cognitive growth, sustainable peer relationships, reduced problematic behaviour and stronger sense of identity are all correlated with health promotion in schools.<sup>3</sup> Research directs a shift from a problem-focused model of removing risk factors, identifying deficits and delivering prescriptive interventions toward a focus on acceptance and understanding of student mental health needs from a positive mental health perspective. Promoting greater understanding and acceptance of student mental health within a strength-based approach that builds connectedness with the social environment the school offers and promotes mental fitness and self-efficacy is increasingly evident in support delivery. Social and emotional learning objectives<sup>4</sup> are being infused into health

curriculum and reinforced across subjects in school-wide approaches to strengthen skills in students while promoting a positive health climate in the school.

## **Canadian Context**

Across Canada, the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health<sup>5</sup> informs schools in developing, implementing, evaluating and supporting school-wide comprehensive approaches to fostering student mental health and well-being. Established in 2005 and endorsed by the World Health Organization, the consortium is a partnership of federal, provincial (except Quebec), and territorial governments to promote health and well-being of children and youth in school settings. The Consortium developed a Comprehensive School Health Framework with a planned, focused and integrated approach that serves as a guide for each jurisdiction to develop its own programs aligned with Consortium principles. The framework includes four basic components — social and physical environment, teaching and learning, policy, and partnerships/services, and includes an ongoing evaluation component to monitor outcomes. It builds capacity to incorporate well-being as an essential aspect of student achievement and unifies other school-based initiatives, including healthy eating guidelines, physical activity policies, tobacco cessation guidelines, anti-bullying projects, LGBTQ programs, and trauma-informed practices.<sup>6</sup> Provincial/territorial Departments of Education and Health, each of which signs the annual agreement to be members of the Consortium, jointly support the Framework. The Framework offers evidence-based tools such as a *Positive Mental Health Toolkit* and a *Youth Engagement Toolkit*<sup>7</sup> to assist with evaluating and responding to student health needs. A *Healthy School Planner*<sup>8</sup> and data from the *Health Behaviour in School Aged Children*<sup>9</sup> study by the Public Health Agency of Canada guide schools in identifying priority areas. Such research amplifies the opinions of students in identifying their own mental health needs.

There is a growing political will across Canada to adopt a ‘health in all policies’ approach to supporting positive health outcomes and addressing social determinants of health. School-wide approaches generally focus on having social/emotional learning outcomes embedded in the curriculum, professional development for educators, coordinated policies and programs, and healthy learning environments.

British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario have created external entities to guide and evaluate school health initiatives. BC’s Directorate of Agencies for School Health (DASH) was established to work with community stakeholders in implementing and evaluating school health. Alberta’s model, *Ever Active Schools*, is designed to help create healthy school communities through grants to individual schools, use of the *Healthy School Planner*, and infusion of social/emotional learning across the curriculum. The Ontario Physical Education and Health Association (OPHEA) supports schools in implementing a comprehensive health framework. Saskatchewan’s *Upstream Agency* fosters public discourse on the social determinants of health. New Brunswick’s provincial wellness strategy extends beyond a school-wide approach and reaches out to include the full community. Manitoba’s *Healthy Child* initiative is housed in a secretariat of cabinet that coordinates health policies and programs in all government departments with a mandate for health promotion beginning in the early years. The Northwest Territories and Nunavut also use the Joint Consortium framework to ensure inclusion of social/emotional learning across a revamped

curriculum, and have added Indigenous values and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Nova Scotia provides grants to each school and partners with Dalhousie University to evaluate the effectiveness of school health initiatives.

## **NL Context**

Contextualizing the frequency of student mental health issues is a difficult task. Students visiting family doctors' offices for mental health concerns may be recorded as a general visit. Likewise, school counsellors do not officially track the number of students coming to see them with mental health concerns. The Public Health Agency of Canada, in partnership with the Joint Consortium on Comprehensive School Health and the World Health Organization, completes the *Health Behaviour in School Aged Children* study every four years, yielding a wealth of data on student mental health and lifestyle that allows trends/changes to be identified. As a member of the Joint Consortium, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) receives the results of these studies, but the department has not released the data from the last two.

The information that is available on mental health is often not comparable to previous years due to changes in record keeping practices. The Canadian Mental Health Association reports that one in five Canadians will experience a mental health issue in their lifetime. The Newfoundland Centre for Health Information provides some context for student mental health and wellness in this province from data contained in electronic medical records, the regional health authorities and the provincial pharmacy network. These data indicate that the physical and mental health of individuals who are less than 21 years of age is a growing concern. Childhood diabetes and obesity are on the increase and children engage in less physical activity and consume fewer fruits and vegetables compared to data in previous studies. The prevalence of mood and anxiety disorders in this age group has increased as well and dispensed prescriptions for anxiety/depression and ADHD have also risen.<sup>10</sup>

## **Provincial Programs and Initiatives Supporting Student Health**

NL has been a member of the Joint Consortium on School Health since it first launched in 2005 but development and implementation of a comprehensive, collaborative approach has been a challenge. In 2004, the year before the Consortium was initiated, government had launched, as part of a larger provincial wellness plan, *Healthy Students Healthy Schools* as an interdepartmental initiative supported by the Departments of Education and Health and the then Department of Child, Youth and Family Services. However, a series of departmental reorganizations, restructuring and personnel changes fractured the initiative, despite some efforts to remain committed. Five *School Health Promotion Liaison* consultants are currently employed by the Department of Health and Community Services (HCS) to partner with the schools in promoting and supporting school health initiatives. The *Healthy School Planner* is being used in some schools with a commitment from government to expand its usage in the years ahead.

The *Towards Recovery* (2017) report of the All Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions spoke directly to a comprehensive school health framework and recommended that government:

Develop and implement a comprehensive school health and wellness framework that includes evidence-based mental health promotion, prevention and integrated, early intervention programs in schools, which:

- focus on social and emotional learning;
- are embedded in curriculum at every grade;
- help students identify, understand and deal effectively with stress and anxiety; and,
- include content on diversity, social inclusion, social determinants of health and stigma reduction.<sup>11</sup>

At present, four departments of government deliver programs in support of student and child health: EECB, HCS, Children, Seniors and Social Development, and Justice and Public Safety.

### **Department of Health and Community Services**

HCS offers an array of supports to children and youth with mental health issues. These range from Direct Home Services and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) for young children to various medical services located in sites operated by the regional health authorities. Most services have lengthy waiting lists and are limited in what they provide.

HCS currently supports three digital programs accessible province-wide. *Strongest Families* teaches skills through an online program for children and youth ages 3 to 17 who are experiencing mild to moderate mental health and behavioural problems. *Bridge the gAPP* connects people to self-help information and local supports through a searchable service directory. The *BreathingRoom™* program is an eight-module, online self-management program that assists people between the ages of 13 and 24 to manage stress, depression and anxiety. These online services help reduce stigma, improve access, and offer early-stage intervention to improve the health and well-being of children, youth and families. Data collected by the department indicate that between June 2015 and May 2017 slightly over one thousand families were referred to the *Strongest Families* program with 89% reporting successful outcomes with no follow-up required. Over 600 youth have used the *BreathingRoom* program since 2016. *Bridge the gAPP* has been downloaded by over 4,500 youth and 2,300 adults. Almost 21,000 youth-specific web pages have been viewed. Collectively, these programs provide immediate support to families before issues escalate. More importantly, they teach effective skills that can be used to deal with issues that may arise in the future. *Towards Recovery* (2017) also spoke to the importance of e-mental health services: “Utilize e-mental health and technology-based interventions with a special focus on promoting wellness and early intervention for mild to moderate mental health problems.”<sup>12</sup>

### **Department of Justice and Public Safety**

Community Youth Corrections programs operated by the Department of Justice and Public Safety provide a variety of services to young people involved in youth justice, many of whom have mental health issues. Since the Youth Criminal Justice Act was revised in 2003 to implement a greater focus on youth rehabilitation there has been a steady decline in youth crime. In June 2016 there were 145 males and 40 females involved in various youth justice programs, down from 245 and

75 respectively in 2013. The vast majority of these youth are involved in either supervised or unsupervised probation programs. Likewise, enrolment at the Newfoundland and Labrador Youth Centre in Whitbourne for youth who are sentenced to closed custody has steadily fallen from a daily average of 22.52 youth in 2005/6 to 7.3 in 2015/16. Corrections officers and social workers report that securing housing, school placement and accessing mental health services remain the biggest challenges in stabilizing and rehabilitating youth.

### **Other Initiatives in EECD**

Health is a mandated component of the school curriculum at primary, elementary and intermediate levels. EECD has an ongoing process of continuously revising the primary and elementary curricula and is currently focusing on the primary grades. The intermediate curriculum was developed in the early 1990s, and recommends 5% of the instructional day be allocated to health. High school health courses are optional, as part of a group of four credits in physical education or “other required courses”. Of these Healthy Living 1200 has the highest enrolments.

Health emerged as an issue in the 2016 consultations on high school graduation requirements. Participants felt that a greater focus on topics such as personal wellness, drug/alcohol awareness, stress management, mental health curriculum, and physical activity is required. A number of the recommendations in the *Towards Recovery* report also called for drug/alcohol awareness and a greater focus on embedding social/emotional learning and mental health curriculum across content areas. The report also called for ongoing mental health and addictions professional learning for youth-servicing professionals.<sup>13</sup>

Two schools are participating in a three-year, externally funded, pilot program, *Socially and Emotionally Aware Kids* (SEAK) in partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association and in collaboration with the other Atlantic provinces, all of whom seek to strengthen social/emotional learning in the curriculum. The SEAK project uses an American model called *PATHS* (Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies). While any packaged program that provides professional development for educators on a shared, school-wide model will have benefits, the cost of *PATHS* raises questions of sustainability.

*Active Schools* is a program aimed at increasing physical activity for children and youth in some participating schools in the province. Its objective is to promote and provide an additional 80-100 minutes of physical activity per cycle for K – 6 students. School Sports NL also operates a *Participation Nation*, an after-school physical activity program, designed to complement the physical education curriculum. However, busing schedules restrict access to after-school programs for many students.

School district consolidation in 2013 led to the development of unified healthy eating, physical activity and smoke-free policies. However, only the smoke-free policy has been consistently implemented province-wide. Government provides some support to the Kids Eat Smart Foundation for school breakfast and snack programs in approximately 90% of schools in NL and 26 community centres across the province. Government also provides funding to the School Lunch Association, which offers a lunchtime meal program in schools in the eastern Avalon region.

**While many consider abuse and violence to be solely physical, people are often unaware of the many forms of violence including: physical, sexual, emotional, psychological, spiritual, cultural, verbal, financial and neglect. This lack of understanding contributes to continued violence in our communities. Our education system should educate youth about healthy relationships.**

**Women's Policy Office**

A *Safe and Caring School* policy provides direction to schools on fostering mental health and wellness. The policy encourages early intervention and prevention by promoting safe, caring and inclusive practices through social/emotional learning, positive behaviour supports, codes of conduct, bullying intervention, non-violent crisis intervention, digital citizenship, and LGBTQ awareness.

## **Consultations and Submissions**

A number of issues were raised repeatedly:

- there has been a noticeable increase in mental health issues amongst students in the past 10 years;
- health is not a priority subject, and is often dropped to accommodate other activities;
- waiting lists for mental health services are long;
- teachers reported that they need professional learning in student mental health;
- students want education on gender sensitivities, respectful relationships, the meaning of consent, internet and online safety, violence and abuse; and
- there is little opportunity for physical activity, especially outdoors, during the school day.

One educator captured points raised by many:

Over the past several years, there has been a noticeable increase in mental health issues in our youth and this includes our youngest students in kindergarten to Grade 6. From managing emotions when confronting conflict to developing coping strategies when experiencing anxiety, some of our youngest students are facing struggles that require interventions in the form of direct mental health education, counselling and individualized plans. Though being reactive to their needs can be viewed as positive, a strategic, supportive approach to mental health issues in the early grades would be a more preventive approach.

## **Building a Better Mental Health System**

There are many professionals who deliver support services to students with mental health issues. Both the health and education departments outline the specific roles and job descriptions for the services professionals provide in the respective departments. However, students are not getting

support in a timely manner for various reasons: school based services are inadequate, district-based services are poorly defined and utilized, communication between departments is poor, and there are pronounced inefficiencies in the process of referring to health those students whose needs are beyond what a school can reasonably address. Both parents and educators search for supports while students remain on waiting lists.

### **School-based Mental Health Services**

School-based mental health services consist primarily of school-based guidance counsellors and district-based educational psychologists. Despite teachers and parents reporting that services have been reduced, the allocation of both counsellors and educational psychologists has remained stable despite declining student enrolment (Table 2.1). However, there has been an increase in the number of students requiring mental health support.

**Table 2.1**  
**Specialist Allocation to School Districts, 2010 - 2016**

Year	Student population	Educational Psychologists	Guidance Counsellors
2010	69 665	43	139.33
2011	68 729	43	137.46
2012	67 933	43	135.83
2013	67 604	43	134.52
2014	67 436	43	134.16
2015	67 293	43	134.36
2016	66 800	43	133.04
	(-2865)	-	(-6.29)

### **Guidance Counsellors**

School guidance counsellors are assigned to schools to develop a comprehensive school guidance program “which outlines the implementation of interventions that promote the holistic development of the student”.<sup>14</sup> Their duties are broad and include roles such as personal counselling, career development, comprehensive assessment, and crisis intervention. Guidance counsellors reported that they are often involved with other duties which preclude their ability to provide immediate response to mental health needs or to promote classroom-based mental health programs as part of a comprehensive school health approach. Results from a “use of time” survey completed for the task force confirmed this. Counsellors indicated that responding to crises and carrying out special education tasks such as comprehensive assessments, writing reports, documenting students, and attending meetings take up a significant part of their work day. The 2007 report *Focusing on Students*<sup>15</sup> raised concern for the amount of time guidance counsellors spend on special education related issues, given that it is not an area in which counsellors would have expertise.

**“Many counsellors are torn between meeting the mental health needs of their students and completing administrative duties, such as acting as department head for service delivery. There is often a ‘putting out fires’ approach leaving little to no time for preventative, proactive work to occur.”**

Counsellor

The task force heard repeatedly that more guidance counsellors were needed to ensure immediate in-school support for students with mental health needs. In many parts of NL guidance counsellors are shared among schools, so that they are not in any one school every day. More guidance counsellor time would be available for counselling if the work which prevents them from responding to mental health needs were reassigned to other personnel with more appropriate qualifications, such as IRTs.

#### ***Educational psychologists***

Educational psychologists are assigned to the school districts. Their duties include conducting comprehensive assessments, supporting schools in responding to student behaviour and mental health issues, and crisis intervention.<sup>16</sup> They are also required to develop, with each school, an annual comprehensive work plan outlining how they can best support that school in responding to its needs. *Guidelines for Comprehensive Assessment*<sup>17</sup> describes assessment as being a team process that could involve a number of qualified professionals such as the classroom teacher, IRT, counsellor, speech pathologist and/or the educational psychologist. The guidelines stipulate that there be a lead assessor, that psychologists should lead 25 assessments a year, and that guidance counsellors lead 15. Task force survey results indicate educational psychologists spend most of their time completing assessments, writing reports and consulting with teachers. When asked how they feel their professional time should be spent they reported the same three priority areas.

When a student requires support beyond what a guidance counsellor can provide there is a problem in making a referral. The job description of educational psychologists does not include providing direct counselling to students. The school's only option is to refer the child to the regional health authority, knowing that the waiting lists are long. The family is left with having to decide either to accept that wait time or to seek private help which, for many families, is not affordable or available in their area.

#### **Health-based Services**

Health-based services provide support to school-aged children through a broader team of professionals including community nurses, psychiatrists, psychologists and social

workers, but lengthy waiting lists result in services not being available when they are most needed. Waiting lists are also a problem for another reason: health personnel report that quite often students are not referred for the correct service and they lose time waiting for a service poorly matched to their needs.

### **Community Nurses**

Community nurses were identified as being an ‘invaluable resource to schools’, providing an immediate support and serving as a navigator for appropriate services in health care. They can also provide classroom-based health promotion programs and support a comprehensive school health program. However, their support for schools is limited, particularly in larger centers where their time is consumed with adult services.

### **Psychologists**

HCS employs approximately 72 clinical psychologists (adult and child services), who have the same professional background and certification as educational psychologists. They work in various divisions within the regional health authorities and provide a broad array of services including assessment, and direct individual, group and family counselling.

### **Social Workers**

HSC also employs a number of social workers within each regional health team who provide direct, group and family counselling. There were suggestions that schools should have their own social workers, and a submission by the NL Association of Social Workers suggested that social workers could and should perform duties in schools such as “assessment, screening, and intervention; counselling and therapy for individuals, families and groups; education and support for school staff and parents; referrals and linkages with community agencies; and mental health promotion”. There is overlap between these suggested duties for social workers and the current duties of school counsellors.

## **Towards a System That Works**

Whatever the roles of professionals, the problem for children and their families is that the current system encourages one professional to refer a student to another, knowing that service is not going to be accessible in a timely enough manner to be helpful. There is no evidence to suggest that the province needs to replicate a second mental health system inside education that parallels a system of care already in place within the regional health authorities. The task force heard many calls for an increase in the allocation of guidance counsellors to respond to mental health needs and behavioural issues. However, to make a difference to the level of service, the duties of counsellors would need to become more focused on student mental health and less on assessment and special education.

Creating a provincial child health services model that is seamless, responsive and timely, as suggested in *Chapter 1, Inclusion* would include social workers, community nurses and psychologists. This model would be consistent with New Brunswick’s *Integrated Service Delivery Teams*<sup>18</sup> as well as *The Way Forward*<sup>19</sup> document that calls for expanding primary health care teams. It is also consistent with the *Towards Recovery*<sup>20</sup> report which calls for creating

**“...teachers need to go back to being teachers. They cannot continue to face the problems that are in schools. We need to find the means to have the right people in our schools. The school environment has changed over the years to be more inclusive and with it there needs to be the right supportive staff in place.”**

**School council chairperson letter**

interdisciplinary teams reporting to the regional health authority and a stepped-care approach<sup>21</sup> through which services are provided in a sequence of supports beginning with health information and cascading up to medical intervention.

## **School Attendance and School Dropout**

The *Core Indicators of Health*<sup>22</sup> model identifies school attendance as a strong indicator of mental health and well-being. Poor school attendance is also a predictor of poor achievement. *PowerSchool* software, which is now used in all schools, includes electronic recording and tracking of attendance.

*The Schools Act (1997)* includes mandatory recording of attendance. Data from *PowerSchool* indicate noticeable inconsistencies that limit the EECD's ability to conduct a comprehensive analysis. Many of these inconsistencies could be easily addressed. Only two-thirds of attendance is recorded and the default setting is “present”, meaning that unless students are marked as being “absent” they are assumed to be present, and reports of attendance can be misleading. Further, the software was designed to record period attendance, which is appropriate for junior and senior high school levels but not primary and elementary grades where attendance would more appropriately be recorded by morning and afternoon session.

Poor attendance is a predictor for school dropout. School dropout is not tracked before high school. In the last seven years 8,822 students (an average of 1,260 per year) have dropped out of high school alone (Table 2.1). Each one of these students will face significant challenges in becoming economically self-sufficient given the correlation between educational attainment and poverty.

**Table 2.1**  
**Number of High School Dropouts, 2009/10 – 2015/16**

Year	Males	Females	Total
2009/2010	840	565	1 405
2010/2011	804	591	1 395
2011/2012	829	592	1 421
2012/2013	732	531	1 263
2013/2014	603	505	1 108
2014/2015	688	555	1 243
2015/2016	542	445	987
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 038</b>	<b>3 784</b>	<b>8 822</b>
<b>Yearly average</b>	<b>719.71</b>	<b>540.57</b>	<b>1 260.29</b>

Table 2.2 shows that another 4,491 students are potential dropouts as they have very low attendance, and given inconsistent and poor attendance-keeping practices it is likely that these numbers are an underestimate.

**Table 2.2**  
**Students Missing More Than 20% of Classes**  
**2016/2017 Academic Year**

Grade Level	Percentage	Number of Students
K-6	3.4%	1 194
7-9	8.3%	1 257
High School	13%	2 040
<b>Total</b>	<b>6.8%</b>	<b>4 491</b>

The cost of early school leavers has been estimated at \$16,000 per leaver per annum.<sup>23</sup> This dated and conservative estimate places the annual cost of school dropouts in this province as being more than \$20 million dollars and the translation of that across a life span is enormous.<sup>24</sup>

Community groups such as Choices for Youth and Thrive, as well as the Federation of School Councils, the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, and the Office of the Child and Youth Advocate (OCYA) all raised concerns about absenteeism. They also noted the absence of an avenue for an early school leaver to return to the high school system, unless they left during high school and need to recover a number of credits. Most school leavers will have to wait until they are 19 years of age and gain admission to Adult Basic Education (ABE) programs. In NL approximately 2,000 students are enrolled annually in ABE, which cost \$9.9 million in 2016-17.

There are many reasons why students are not attending school and several groups of vulnerable students were identified as being at particular risk for dropout and mental health issues. Students living in public housing, Indigenous students, children dealing with developmental trauma and children in care were specifically cited as having poor attendance. A 2017 report of Canada's

**The Office of the Child/Youth Advocate's (OCYA) experience with the issue of child youth absenteeism is that it has not been satisfactorily addressed between the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development and the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District. The school frequently refers the matter to the department to determine if a protection matter exists. The department refers the matter back to the school if the child is not deemed to be in need of protective intervention as per the current definition.**

**Office of the Child and Youth Advocate**

House of Commons,<sup>25</sup> confirms that these groups of vulnerable children are at increased risk of mental health issues and require particular attention and intervention. Early identification systems, which would include attendance monitoring, could result in early alerts and direct interventions for these children and youth. *The Way Forward* document addresses early identification and “increased educational support to disengaged and at-risk students and youth”<sup>26</sup>

Children in care are a particular concern as they quite often have complex needs and they have poor educational outcomes. Approximately 1000 children in this province are living under Child Protection Services, a number which has steadily increased despite a shrinking population of children in NL. Over one-third of these children are Indigenous and over one-half are under 9 years of age. Fourteen per cent are living in staffed group homes. Data indicate that historically 77% of this group of children will not graduate from high school.<sup>27</sup> A report in 2017 by Choices for Youth identified that 22% of those experiencing homelessness in St. John's were between the ages of 16 and 24, and 70% of these youth had previously received Child Protection Services.<sup>28</sup>

Vulnerable populations such as children in care, those dealing with addictions, refugee children and those experiencing early trauma require more sensitivity to their challenges. A number of youth-serving agencies and professionals spoke of the need to provide professional learning for educators on trauma-informed practice<sup>29</sup> and recovery-focused schools<sup>30</sup> to ensure appropriate approaches to meeting the needs of ‘at risk’ students and keeping them in school.

Whatever the reason that students are out of school, absenteeism is an issue. Minor hockey was cited as an activity taking students out of school from January to April for weekend tournaments that begin on Friday mornings, resulting in some players attending school 3.5 days a week. Students who are routinely absent for extra-curricular reasons are most likely not at risk for dropping out of school. But the data suggest that a culture has arisen where it is acceptable to routinely miss school

time. Disengaging from school is a process and seldom an event. Missing instructional time is correlated with falling behind academically. Students do not drop out of school, they slide out and little is being done to prevent it. The pattern of poor student attendance reflects students' lack of connectedness with the school system. The Comprehensive School Health Framework views school attendance from each of its four pillars. That perspective would ask: How can the *social and physical environment* of the school encourage greater engagement by youth? How can *teaching and learning* ensure that teachers recognize absenteeism and deliver curriculum to address it? What *policies* are in place to identify and respond to absenteeism? What *partnerships and services* are needed to encourage greater attendance? It would also monitor and evaluate attendance initiatives and the effectiveness of interventions.

**The Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women is concerned about the high levels of absenteeism in the public schools of Newfoundland and Labrador .... These children are at high risk of exclusion from society at large... It is important to understand the characteristics of chronically absent students before proposing concrete interventions. Only upon finding reasons behind absenteeism is it possible to propose solutions and interventions.**

**Provincial Advisory Council**

## **Towards Improvement**

Contemporary discourse is replete with concerns for rising mental health issues and decreased physical health among school-aged children. Educators, parents and students all raised concerns about how mental health issues are having a negative impact on the school system and many stated that well-being is foundational to improving educational outcomes.

Mental health is a societal issue but children are experiencing challenges in their classrooms daily. They require supports through the structure of the school such as access to guidance counsellors who are available to focus on mental health needs, social-emotional learning curriculum, and comprehensive school health programs. They also need access to a stepped-care model of community mental health services. To be most effective, these school-based supports and proactive measures should connect seamlessly with health services. The Comprehensive School Health Framework offers both a structure to address these concerns and procedures to evaluate and monitor progress, informed by reliable data from surveys such as the *Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children*.

A provincial child health services model is needed with roles clarified, services streamlined, and policies and practice unified to guarantee timely response to need. Reducing fragmentation and sending more mental health services into schools ensures greater access for children and youth. Children in care require close monitoring and support in their school program, knowing the challenges they face. Students dealing with addictions or those with self-harm ideation cannot be left on lengthy waiting lists.

In supporting change, both service and leadership will have to be centralized. Too many initiatives, including interdepartmental efforts, though well intentioned and carefully planned, have failed to result in improved services to children. Centralized leadership for student health offers an assurance of change that will have a direct impact on the lives of children and families.

Central to responding effectively is the engagement of youth themselves. Support has to be seen by them as being pragmatic and accessible, meeting them where they are and giving them viable paths to well-being and access to a full education. Schools need to become healthy environments where children and youth want to be and where they feel their presence is valued and noticed. Early school leavers must have a return to school option. Their voice must be amplified and heard, and their needs monitored and evaluated. The education and health systems need to reflect the thinking that all children and young people in this province are valued and deserve the best possible comprehensive continuous care in order to be physically, emotionally and mentally healthy. A submission by a youth captures this:

And to the ones that are in my meetings referring to me as though they know me and my best interests... you don't. Just because you have my files in your hand doesn't mean you know my story, you just know the chapter you walked in on.

## **Student Mental Health and Wellness Recommendations**

17. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, and the Department of Health and Community Services implement and support, province-wide, the Comprehensive School Health Framework of the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health.
18. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development release the findings of the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children* study to support schools in responding to student mental health needs.
19. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador establish a secretariat within Executive Council for a period of five years with evaluation to occur after three years. The roles of the Secretariat will include:
  - a) implementation of the Comprehensive School Health Framework;
  - b) development of a year-round provincial child health services model within one department;
  - c) promoting ‘health in all policies and practices in our schools’ among all youth serving departments;
  - d) renewing a commitment to the Model of Coordination for Services to Children and Youth for children with complex needs; and
  - e) monitoring the recommendations relevant to schools in the *Towards Recovery* report.
20. The Department of Health and Community Services conduct and conclude within one year of the release of this report a thorough review of the waiting lists for all child/youth related mental health services at each Regional Health Authority, and the Child Development waiting list at the Janeway Child Health Centre.
21. The new provincial model of child health services outlined in Recommendation 10 include clear guidelines for appropriate and efficient referrals of students within a stepped-care system of mental health services.
22. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development make it possible for guidance counsellors to deliver school-based, proactive mental health services by
  - a) revising the *Guidelines for Comprehensive Assessment* to decrease the number of assessments guidance counsellors must conduct;
  - b) reducing guidance counsellors’ involvement in special education management; and
  - c) limiting guidance counsellors’ role with testing to cognitive ability instruments only.
23. The Faculty of Education at Memorial University include comprehensive school health in all teacher education programs.

24. The early identification system outlined in Recommendation 13 include markers for attendance, mental health and addictions, as well as early signs of youth homelessness.
25. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development collaboratively develop a model to monitor the progress of children in care that will enable provision of timely and effective intervention and supports.
26. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial develop professional development for teachers on student mental health and addictions including trauma-informed practice and recovery-focused schools.
27. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development embed specific learning outcomes for student mental health and addictions in all curriculum as it is renewed, including and reinforcing it across all subject areas.
28. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial implement province-wide healthy eating and physical activity policies.
29. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in partnership with both school districts, ensure accurate recording of school attendance and develop a dropout prevention program for every school in the province, engaging the voice of youth.
30. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in partnership with both school districts, develop a viable program for early school leavers to return to school.

## **Student Mental Health and Wellness Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2017)

<sup>2</sup> See: Basch (2011); Beaudoin (2011); Felder-Puig et al. (2012); Greenberg et al. (2003); Murray et al. (2007); Stewart-Brown (2006)

<sup>3</sup> Freeman et al. (2016)

<sup>4</sup> Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (2015)

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.jcsh-cces.ca/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://traumasensitiveschools.org>

<sup>7</sup> <http://wmaproducts.com/JCSH/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://healthyschoolplanner.uwaterloo.ca>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/publications/science-research-sciences-recherches/health-behaviour-children-canada-2015-comportements-sante-jeunes/index-eng.php#z>

<sup>10</sup> Mood/anxiety disorders in children increased from 1.52% of the child population in 2000 to 3.75% in 2017. Of all prescriptions dispensed for children in 2009 to 2017, anxiety/depression medications rose from .11% to .38%. ADHD medications rose from .12% to .49%

<sup>11</sup> Government of NL (2017b)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Recommendation 11

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Recommendations 1, 2, 7, 27, 41 & 42

<sup>14</sup> See: Standards of Practice for Guidance Counsellor. Retrieved from:  
[www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/](http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/)

<sup>15</sup> Government of NL (2007)

<sup>16</sup> See: Standards of Practice for Educational Psychologists. Retrieved from:  
[www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/](http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices/)

<sup>17</sup> See: Guidelines for Comprehensive Assessment:  
<http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/k12/studentsupportservices>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www2.gnb.ca/content/gnb/en/departments/education/isd.html>

<sup>19</sup> Government of NL (2017a) p. 49

<sup>20</sup> Government of NL (2017b) Recommendation 3

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. Recommendation 14

<sup>22</sup> Freeman et al. (2016)

<sup>23</sup> <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.510.4857&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

<sup>24</sup> World Bank (2008)

<sup>25</sup> Canada House of Commons (2017) p. 54.

<sup>26</sup> Government of NL (2017a). Recommendations 2.64 and 2.68

<sup>27</sup> Data provided by The Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development

<sup>28</sup> *Everyone Counts* (2016): <http://bit.ly/2qTQWY>

<sup>29</sup> Government of BC (2013) & Ko et al. (2008)

<sup>30</sup> See: Finch et al. (2014) & Government of NL (2017b) Recommendation 24



## Chapter 3 Mathematics

Newfoundland and Labrador has a long-standing problem with mathematics achievement. For many years student performance on national and international assessments in mathematics has been lower than that of other Canadian students. Both Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic expressed concern that students are not well prepared for post-secondary mathematics; there is poor understanding of basic pre-requisite skills such as mathematical operations, and fractions and decimals; and there is an over-dependence on calculators. In 1989, the Government of NL established a task force to investigate K – 12 mathematics and science in response to the claim that students were not prepared for university-level courses. Almost 30 years later, a task force is again reviewing mathematics outcomes in NL.

### 1989 Mathematics/Science Task Force

The current task force heard many of the same issues that the 1989 task force identified, for example: low performance compared with other jurisdictions, parents' inability to help their children, lack of preparation for post-secondary, issues in teacher education and teacher preparedness, and lack of student effort. At that time, Robert Crocker, the Task Force Chair, concluded, based on the evidence that large numbers of students were not meeting the demands of rigorous academic programs, that there existed a "crisis of low expectations".<sup>1</sup>

Recommendations from *Towards an Achieving Society, Report of the Task Force on Mathematics and Science (1989)* included:

- Students planning to attend post-secondary should do advanced mathematics in high school.
- The Department of Education use the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) standards as the basis for curriculum development, have direct accountability for curriculum implementation and allocate at least one class period per day for mathematics in Grades K – 9.
- Schools build flexibility into school schedules and student programs to accommodate different learning needs, tailor homework to students' needs and have a mathematics teacher leader in each school.
- The Faculty of Education provide more courses in mathematics education for primary/elementary teachers, and for intermediate/secondary teachers who do not have a mathematics background.

Since the release of the 1989 report, student participation in advanced mathematics has increased and, as stated by Memorial University's Department of Mathematics and Statistics, the advanced mathematics curriculum prepares students well for first year university mathematics courses. However, the academic mathematics courses, the choice for most students, fall short of preparing students for post-secondary study in the university or college system. Other initiatives that have occurred as a result of the recommendations are: the development of curriculum during the 1990s using the NCTM standards; extended time for the Grade 10 academic mathematics course (Math

1300); increased time allocations in K – 9 mathematics; a mathematics provincial assessment with its first administration in 1993; and a required course in mathematics pedagogy in the Memorial University primary/elementary teacher education program. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) took further action, including the development and implementation of a course focusing on basic mathematical skills (Math 3103) and a diagnostic assessment for Grade 9 students to identify their learning needs prior to high school. Recommendations related to curriculum implementation, mathematics lead teachers in each school and other requirements for teacher education were not implemented.

### **Excellence in Mathematics Strategy**

In response to concerns raised by parents and the public,<sup>2</sup> Government announced an *Excellence in Mathematics Strategy* in 2007, a comprehensive plan aimed at improving student learning in mathematics. Components included: a review of the curriculum, an increase in professional learning and resources for teachers, support for parents such as activities to do at home, and a promotional campaign. EECD commissioned independent consultants to undertake the curriculum review.<sup>3</sup> This review completed an analysis of the strengths and challenges of the NL mathematics curriculum through a literature review, a comparative analysis of curriculum in other Canadian and select international jurisdictions, a teacher survey, and focus group discussions with stakeholders. Based on the results, EECD adopted the *Western and Northern Canadian Protocol Common Curriculum Framework (WNCP)* used in British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Yukon, and Northwest Territories, and authorized the teacher and student resources used under the WNCP. The curriculum documents advocate a problem-solving and inquiry-based approach. Additionally, EECD introduced 25 numeracy support teachers (NSTs) in 2008 to provide professional learning to teachers at the classroom level. Their mandate changed in 2010 to include literacy as well as numeracy. Only three numeracy support teachers and 11 literacy/numeracy teachers remained in the system as of 2016/17.

### **Student Achievement**

There are a number of assessments that identify how NL students are performing in mathematics. They are international, national, provincial and school-based. Examining the consistencies and inconsistencies of these results offers direction to improving educational outcomes.

### **Programme of International Student Achievement (PISA)**

PISA, a programme of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), defines mathematics as an individual's capacity to formulate a contextualized problem into a mathematical form; use concepts, facts, procedures, and reasoning to solve problems; and interpret mathematics in a variety of contexts. The content areas are consistent with the outcomes found in provincial curricula and other assessments.<sup>4</sup>

Canada's performance in PISA, while it declined from 2003 to 2012, is strong with only a few countries doing better. Students in Quebec consistently performed above the Canadian average and students in Alberta and British Columbia at the Canadian average. A summary of the results for students in NL is presented below.

- For all administrations, NL was below the Canadian average.
- Performance from 2003 to 2015 steadily decreased.

- In 2012, the analysis indicated that students in NL achieved lower than the OECD average in some areas and in formulating a problem into a mathematical form.
- In 2012, 21% of NL students achieved below the acceptable level, substantially more than the 12.5% in 2003. By comparison, in 2012 fewer than 15% of Canadian students performed below the acceptable level.
- In 2012, 9.4% of NL students performed at high levels of achievement. This compares with 14.1% in 2003.
- In 2012, a computer-based assessment which allowed comparisons between different formats was administered. The performance of students in NL was stronger on the computer-based assessment but still below the Canadian average.

Student performance on school examinations in 2015 is similar to the 2015 PISA results with 14% of Grade 10 students failing the academic course. Two trends moving in the wrong direction are that fewer students are achieving at high levels and an increasing number are below the acceptable level. Since these are Grade 10 students, further analyses in the intermediate years and the specific areas in mathematics where the results declined are required. Using the assessment information from PISA to identify areas in need of improvement is not being done.

### **Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP)**

The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) is an assessment of the skills and knowledge of Grade 8 students. It measures performance in three areas – reading, mathematics and science, and has been administered every three years since 2007. The mathematics assessment aligns with provincial curricula and assesses numbers and operations, geometry and measurement, patterns and relationships, and data management and probability, as well as mathematical processes such as problem solving and reasoning.

PCAP results are similar to those of PISA. For each administration of PCAP, mathematics achievement in NL was significantly below the Canadian mean score. The distribution of the performance levels from the 2010 administration, the most recent year in which mathematics was the major domain, shows a similar pattern to PISA with more students doing worse and fewer performing at high levels. (12% of NL students below the acceptable standard, compared with 9% for Canada and 37% of NL students above the acceptable standard compared with 47% for Canada.) There were significant positive changes in mathematics overall from 2010 to 2013.<sup>5</sup>

### **Provincial and School Assessments**

In NL, all students are required to take mathematics each year from kindergarten to Grade 9. In Grade 10, students may select courses in one of two streams: academic mathematics (1201) and applied mathematics (1202); and in Grades 11 and 12, students may select from one of three streams: advanced mathematics (2200, 3200), academic mathematics (2201, 3201) and applied mathematics (2202, 3202). A calculus course (3208) is also available to Grade 12 advanced mathematics students. In Grades 3, 6, and 9 students write a provincial assessment based on the curriculum outcomes.

For 2015/16, a comparison of the Grade 9 results on the school-based assessments and the provincial assessment identifies a difference in performance. The average mark on the provincial

assessment was 64%. For the same cohort of students, almost 50% of them received at least 80% as their final mark in Grade 9 and just over 10% received 50% or less. These differences indicate that the difficulty level of the questions on school-based tests is lower than on the provincial assessment questions, leading to higher marks and giving students a false impression of how well prepared they are for Grade 10 academic mathematics (Math 1201). A review of the participation rates shows that just over 80% of the students enrol in Math 1201 with about 30% of that number enrolling in advanced mathematics (Math 2200) in Grade 11. However, many of these students struggle. In 2015/16, 12.5% of the students failed the course in June with 70% of those who failed receiving a mark of 40% or below. The Grade 9 provincial assessment provides a reliable measure of students' mathematics achievement, but the results are not used for improvement.

Participation in and the average mark on public examinations for the mathematics courses has remained relatively constant in recent years. With the new courses which were introduced in September 2013 there was a small shift in performance with slightly lower marks in the advanced course (Math 3200) and slightly higher marks in the academic course (Math 3201). These courses are notably different from the previous ones such that no inferences on student achievement over time can be made. The enrolments and public exam average marks are presented in Table 3.1.

**Table 3.1**  
**Participation and Performance on Mathematics Public Examination Courses**

Year	Advanced Math 3200		Academic Math 3201	
	Enrolment (%)	Public Exam Average Mark	Enrolment (%)	Public Exam Average Mark
2011 – 2012	25	76	53	59
2012 – 2013	22	78	60	58
2013 – 2014	22	75	56	60
2014 – 2015	23	73	58	63
2015 – 2016	24	73	54	64

As noted earlier in this chapter, participation in advanced mathematics courses increased following the 1989 Mathematics/Science Task Force. For the public exam course (Math 3201) enrolment increased from approximately 11% in the mid-1980s to almost 20% in 1989/1990. However, as shown in Table 3.1, participation since that time has not changed much.

### **First Year University**

Approximately one-third of graduates in NL enter Memorial University directly from high school. Since 2014 when the first group to graduate with the WNCP mathematics went to MUN, almost 65% of these students completed a course in mathematics at MUN. The overall enrolment for the calculus courses (Math 1000, Math 1001) has not changed with the new WNCP curriculum, but more students enter Math 1001 directly having passed a placement test administered by the Mathematics Department at MUN. However, the average mark for Math 1001 has declined since 2013. For Math 1000, the average mark has remained the same but the mark distribution has changed. More students are receiving 'B' and fewer are achieving 'A'.

Students who complete the academic mathematics course (Math 3201) enrol in Math 1090, a pre-calculus course. The enrolment in this course has remained the same despite the change in the high school academic courses. However, there has been a decrease in student performance with a lower average mark, lower pass rate and fewer students receiving 'A'. While Memorial University accepts academic and advanced mathematics courses for admission, students who do the academic courses do not perform well in first-year university mathematics.

**"Students are expected to solve problems and think critically before they know the basics."**

**Parent**

### **First Year College**

The mathematics requirements for admission to the College of the North Atlantic vary. For some programs, applied mathematics satisfies the requirement, and for others, a minimum of 50% or 60% in academic or advanced mathematics is required. While many students meet the entrance requirements for their program of choice, they do not know enough mathematics to achieve success in their college mathematics courses. Feedback from the college regarding what mathematics students need for the different programs indicates that students have weak basic numeracy skills, are weak in areas typically studied in junior high such as fractions and solving equations, and are overly dependent on calculators. Many instructors expressed concern that topics required for their first-year mathematics courses, such as trigonometry and quadratics, have been deemphasized in the academic mathematics course (Math 3201) and other topics such as set theory which are not relevant to their courses have been added. The instructors state that, for many programs, the content in the advanced mathematics courses better prepares students for their first-year college mathematics.

### **Consultations and Submissions**

Parents, teachers, students, key stakeholders and the general public had much to say about mathematics. The surveys and public consultations indicated that the primary/elementary curriculum lacks specificity related to strategies and mathematics facts, and that the reading requirements, textbooks and time available for practice are problematic. There are problems with the transition from

**“Nothing settles in. Better to be taught one [strategy], and learn it well through repetition.”**

**Student**

Grade 9 to 10, and communication about course selections is also wanting. The issues are presented under the six following themes.

### **Mathematics Strategies**

Teachers and parents expressed concern and frustration about the teaching and learning of multiple strategies in math. Teachers have received confusing messages in various ways including the curriculum guides, professional development sessions, teacher resource manuals and examples on provincial assessments. Many teachers said that teaching all the strategies is unnecessary, leaves no time for student practice and causes confusion for many students. Parents also do not understand the rationale for the focus on multiple strategies and trying to help their children creates anxiety and frustration. As one parent noted, “The ‘how’ seems to be more important than getting the answer.” It was the number one concern for parents who responded to the task force survey. The inability of parents to help their students has prompted many parents of K – 6 students to hire private tutors. Students said that learning many different ways to solve a problem is neither helpful nor necessary and is a waste of time.

### **Reading and Writing in Mathematics**

The second issue raised was the extensive focus on language use. In the mathematics curriculum, students are required to read the problem and write a paragraph to explain their answers. The textbooks are wordy and questions on provincial assessments require students to write explanations for their answers. For students who struggle with reading, mathematics has become a problem. Some parents reported that children who were good at mathematics or needed a little help now struggle because they have to write out and explain everything. Students with poor reading and writing skills have a problem with the high school applied mathematics courses, the courses designed for students with weaker mathematics skills.

### **Mathematics Skills**

Both parents and teachers are of the view that students need to know their basic mathematics facts. At present there is no expectation that students know their addition and multiplication facts or be proficient with mathematical rules and procedures. These skills are de-emphasized while

others, such as estimation, are over-emphasized. The textbooks have little practice material and their use is limited.

### **Other Curriculum Issues**

Teachers and professionals at the NL English School District (NLES) said that the curriculum has too many outcomes, the organization across the grades is fragmented, and the guides themselves are voluminous. There is an overemphasis on concept development and problem solving, and the time for in-depth work with any topic is limited. Some topics are not fully completed or simply get omitted. As one teacher said, “There’s a new lesson every two days in a problem solving context.” Student understanding of mathematical concepts and the ability to reason, create and solve problems are important, but students also need to know procedures and skills.

### **Consequences of Course Selection**

Teachers, students and parents identified issues with the high school mathematics courses and course selection. The academic mathematics course content is not well aligned with required content for university level pre-calculus courses, communication on its purpose has been weak, and more clarity on mathematics requirements for post-secondary programs and careers is needed. Students noted the gap in what is expected in the academic and advanced courses and complained that they are not getting the support to continue with the advanced courses. Students said they do the academic courses with the understanding that it does prepare them for university mathematics. They also said that doing the academic courses usually results in a higher mark which increases their likelihood of receiving a scholarship.

The advice given to students on what high school mathematics courses to select in any one year is based on their marks rather than pre-requisites for post-secondary programs. Some students are told that they cannot do the academic or advanced mathematics, regardless of their own preference. As one student said “If you get a low mark in Grade 11 Advanced then you are put in Academic 12.” This has serious consequences for students as it can mean being denied admission to their post-secondary program of choice.

The selection of mathematics courses also has an impact on students’ graduation status. There are many high school students who do all the courses required for an academic graduation status and perform well but they struggle with mathematics. Students who fail academic mathematics or do the applied mathematics course do not receive academic graduation status; they receive a general diploma which limits access to certain post-secondary programs. In recent years, almost 20% of the students who graduated with a general diploma met the criteria for academic graduation status in every subject except mathematics.

### **The Grade 9 Problem**

Teachers recognize that mathematics achievement is a problem and identified a number of issues: sequencing of topics in junior high, differentiating the Grade 9 curriculum for mathematically able students and students who have difficulty with mathematics, and a dependence on the use of calculators. Many students said that mathematics in Grade 9 is too easy and they did not feel

challenged. It has become acceptable to work towards the minimum requirements in junior high. However, students said that when they reach Grade 10, there is a steep learning curve.

## **Notable Approaches to Success in Mathematics**

In addition to student performance data, PISA provides information on factors related to achievement such as teaching and learning strategies and teacher education. Analyses of this information are used in many areas to improve mathematics education. Likewise, NL should use the lessons from PISA and other jurisdictions to inform policy and set future direction.

### **PISA 2012**

The data from PISA confirm many things that are already evident to educators.<sup>6</sup>

- Adequate learning time in mathematics lessons, homework and a positive school climate result in higher student performance.
- A combination of teacher-directed and student-centred instructional strategies is most effective.
- The best learning approach is a combination of three strategies – memorization, student control over their own learning, and elaboration, such as making connections.
- The student-teacher ratio does not have a strong impact on mathematics performance.

### **Alberta**

The current NL curriculum, based on the WNCP, was adapted from the Alberta curriculum. The Alberta Department of Education has heard many of the mathematics curriculum concerns raised in NL. To address some of these concerns, the Alberta Department of Education developed online parent resources including information about mathematics facts and algorithms; made clarifications to the curriculum about standard algorithms, choice of strategies and learning facts; established a committee with university mathematics professors to consider options for better preparing students from the academic stream for university mathematics courses; and has developed a bursary program for K – 6 teachers, offering \$2,000/year for any teacher who takes an approved course designed to improve pedagogy or mathematics content specific to K – 12. The 1989 NL Mathematics/Science Task Force made a similar recommendation but it was never acted upon.

### **Other Effective Systems**

Singapore, Finland and Quebec have consistently ranked among the top performing jurisdictions in PISA. The mathematics content and processes as well as the emphasis on problem-solving in the Singapore, Finland and Quebec curricula are similar to the NL curriculum. Two differences between these jurisdictions and NL are: requirements for mathematics content and pedagogy in teacher education programs; and the focus on both student mastery of foundational skills/traditional mathematics drills and problem-solving.<sup>7</sup>

## **Issues Related to Mathematics Achievement of NL Students**

Analyses of student achievement data, the information gathered from consultations, meetings and surveys and a review of other educational systems have provided a clear picture of the issues

contributing to persistent low mathematics performance among NL students. They are: a provincial assessment program that no longer meets its objectives, limited and ineffective use of available assessment information to improve student achievement, insufficient teacher education in mathematics content and pedagogy, inadequate teacher professional development, curriculum matters such as lack of clarity and expectations, and poor communication. Each of these is summarized below.

### **Assessment**

There are three issues with the current provincial mathematics assessments. First, while they assess content areas which are similar to those on both PCAP and PISA, they do not assess the outcomes in the same way as PCAP and PISA. Second, almost all questions on the provincial mathematics assessments require students to show understanding of routine mathematical problems rather than demonstrate higher-order thinking. Third, the NL assessment program no longer meets its intended objectives: to identify problem areas, to improve student learning, to improve teaching effectiveness and to chart student progress over time.<sup>8</sup> The provincial assessments need to be revised to be better aligned with national and international assessments, and to have comparable standards.

Performance in mathematics in NL has not improved over time, even though poor performance has been identified many times with many different indicators. There has been an emphasis on collecting and reporting achievement information using international, national, provincial, and school assessments. The important question is how all of this assessment information has been used to improve student achievement. In recent years, the results have been reported to schools and school districts so that schools have the information for their school development plans. The results are available online but the process to obtain them is cumbersome. EECĐ collects and reports assessment information but provides little assistance with interpreting the results and planning for improvement; it is left to the schools to interpret and use the information and to report results to parents. While school level reporting has a purpose, it will not lead to systemic change.

### **Teacher Education**

Primary and elementary teachers are, for the most part, generalists with one or two university level mathematics courses and one mathematics education course as part of their teacher education program. Based on their experiences with primary and elementary teacher candidates, professors from both Memorial University's Mathematics Department and the Faculty of Education expressed concern about candidates' lack of mathematical foundational skills, difficulty with some mathematics content and their apprehension about teaching mathematics. The Mathematics Department and the Faculty have agreed changes need to occur. Measures include increased alignment of university courses with mathematics content in Grades 1 – 6, increasing the number of courses in mathematics pedagogy and developing a course specific to the teaching of mathematics in intermediate.

The teacher education program for the preparation of intermediate and high school teachers (Grades 7 – 12) at Memorial University is a post-degree program and a number of students in this program have a major or minor in mathematics. For the past five years, about 20% of these teacher candidates have either a major or minor in mathematics (Math 1000, 1090, 1050, 1051).<sup>9</sup>

Additionally, the qualifications and assignments of teachers for the 2016/17 school year point to the need to increase capacity in mathematics pedagogy and content at these levels.<sup>10</sup> In Grades 7 – 9, 45% of mathematics teachers have at least a minor in mathematics, and in senior high, 58% have a major or minor in mathematics. Almost 20% of intermediate and high school teachers who have a major or minor in mathematics are not teaching mathematics.

### **Professional Development**

Many teachers in K – 6 and some in 7 – 9 reported that they are not comfortable teaching mathematics. Studies investigating the relationship between teachers' mathematical knowledge and student achievement have determined that understanding mathematics content matters.<sup>11</sup> To teach the current NL mathematics program using an inquiry-based approach, teachers require both mathematics content and methods of teaching mathematics.

Since the 2013 school board consolidation, the NLES has identified literacy as a priority, resulting in a de-emphasis in teacher professional development in mathematics. Professional development for the new mathematics curriculum has been completed but teachers identified a number of issues: it occurred for some teachers late in the school year; teachers do not always have paper copies of the guides in timely fashion and have to use the online PDF version; and, the online materials are difficult to access due to password requirements.

Some ongoing professional learning in mathematics has occurred but primary/elementary program specialists who are responsible for planning and delivering professional development across all subject areas have limited time for any one subject area. Their administration support for professional development, such as photocopying, and to complete paperwork, including requisitions, purchase orders, and teacher leave forms, is either not available or is insufficient. At the school level, numeracy support teachers (NSTs) and literacy/numeracy teachers (LNTs) are available only to selected schools, which are not necessarily the schools with the greatest need.

In 2010, EECD's Literacy Numeracy Teachers (LNTs) replaced most of the numeracy support teachers that had been allocated as part of the *Excellence in Mathematics Strategy*. This shifted the priority for teacher professional development from numeracy to literacy. The goal of the LNT program was to help primary and elementary teachers increase their understanding about literacy and numeracy skills across the curriculum and to improve student achievement through direct support in the classroom. Evidence from reports that participating schools submit to EECD and an internal evaluation completed in 2014 indicates that literacy has been emphasized. The internal evaluation of its first three years of implementation, 2010 – 2013, in 55 schools and with 216 teachers, shows that in its second year of implementation (2011 – 2012), 52% of participating teachers and LNTs worked on mathematics, and in the following year, this was reduced to 30%.<sup>12</sup>

The research literature on effective peer coaching describes the characteristics of successful programs.<sup>13</sup> The LNT model did have in place some of these elements but lacked others such as appropriate qualifications of the coaches. The academic qualifications of the teachers who held these positions in 2016/2017 were varied with only 15% having at least a minor in mathematics and almost 40% being intermediate/high school teachers. Additionally, 15% were new teachers despite the requirement for teaching experience.

In summary, teacher education and professional development require increased measures. New teachers require increased qualifications in mathematics content and pedagogy. Professional development has shifted focus from a combination of literacy and numeracy in K – 6 to literacy at the expense of numeracy. The move from NSTs to LNTs has reduced the focus and support for mathematics.

### **Curriculum Matters**

While the mathematics curriculum is solid, a number of curriculum-related issues need to be addressed:

- There are too many outcomes.
- The curriculum does not adhere to the principles of *Universal Design for Learning*.
- The guides are too large, an issue that extends across all subject areas.
- The quality of the textbooks is unsatisfactory, especially with reference to student accessibility.
- There is confusion about what to teach in K – 9.
- There is an imbalance between inquiry-based teaching and direct instruction.
- Time for student practice is insufficient.
- The junior high years do not prepare students for high school, and do not have sufficient supports for those struggling nor sufficient extension activities for others.
- Course selection for high school students can have a negative impact on graduation status and access to post-secondary programs.

Teachers need clarification on strategies, clear statements of curriculum outcomes and student expectations for the end of each grade, and accurate information on course selections. A reduction in the amount of required reading and writing and a review of materials in junior high are also needed.

### **Communications**

A number of identified issues such as the number of strategies and mastery of mathematical facts in K – 6 could have been prevented with more effective communication. One issue that is particularly problematic as it has implications for students beyond the school years is the poor communication related to high school course selections. EECĐ states that the academic courses are intended to prepare students for post-secondary non-calculus programs, and its information booklet on high school course selections, *On Course Handbook*<sup>14</sup> for Grade 9 students, contains misleading information. That the patterns of student participation in the high school academic courses and MUN's pre-calculus course (Math 1090) have not changed in recent years suggests that there is a perception in the school system that the academic courses are sufficient preparation for any university mathematics program, including calculus. But this is not the case. If the academic courses are to be preparation for Math 1090, the courses need to include more algebra and trigonometry.

Students need accurate information and clear advice on the mathematics requirements for university and college programs that require mathematics. Many high school graduates lack the

required mathematics content and need further preparatory courses. Schools should be knowledgeable about the different mathematics courses and the links to post-secondary program requirements, and students need to understand the consequences of their course selections. The issue related to students choosing academic mathematics to increase the likelihood of receiving a scholarship also has to be examined. The message that should be communicated to students is that success in advanced mathematics, whatever the mark, guarantees entrance into all programs at Memorial University and the College of the North Atlantic, and prepares them for success in post-secondary mathematics courses.

## **Towards Improvement**

The goal of mathematics curriculum, instruction and assessment must be student achievement that is comparable to the highest achieving jurisdictions. Accomplishing this requires a sound curriculum with well-articulated outcomes and expectations, highly skilled teachers, and an assessment program that adheres to national and international assessment standards.

### **Assessment for Improvement**

PISA and PCAP results are the benchmarks used to compare the performance of students across jurisdictions. An assessment framework which reflects PISA and PCAP will provide a sound basis for a meaningful approach to improving mathematics outcomes.

Over the past decades, the investment of time and resources in collecting achievement information through assessments has been extensive. Yet the efforts to use the wealth of available information to improve student achievement have been minimal. While there may be examples of successful practice at an individual school level,<sup>15</sup> system-wide efforts have been random and not sustained. There is an opportunity now for the EECD's Performance Measurement Framework to provide the structure for a comprehensive approach to the use of assessment information for improved student achievement. EECD has expertise in data analysis and program evaluation, but such an undertaking would also require expertise in interpreting the analysis of the results and working with schools to use the information for improving achievement and determining appropriate interventions. Collaboration across divisions within EECD and with the school districts on the development and implementation of action plans to ensure appropriate use of assessment information will be required.

### **Teacher Education and Professional Development**

PISA reveals that high performance systems engage teachers with substantial backgrounds in mathematics content and pedagogy. Primary/elementary teacher programs at Memorial University would be strengthened by incorporating well-established professional teaching standards for mathematics teaching such as those in the United States or Australia.<sup>16</sup>

Meaningful and sustained professional development increases teaching effectiveness and student outcomes. Providing multiple professional development experiences, such as summer institutes, online courses, and embedded professional development in classrooms with a lead teacher or through peer observation will allow districts, schools and teachers to make appropriate choices. The Mathematics Department and the Faculty of Education have begun work on possible options,

and other universities may have others. In NL, there are some primary/elementary teachers with mathematics qualifications. During its consultations, the task force heard from some of these talented and creative teachers; they have a deep understanding of mathematics and could qualify as program specialists or lead teachers.

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

The curriculum and the problem-solving, inquiry-based approach is sound. It is similar to that of other jurisdictions which have good outcomes as measured by national and international assessments. Research evidence supports the instructional methods and the learning strategies currently in use. The NL curriculum can move student achievement toward excellence.

Improving outcomes will require addressing identified issues, listed below.

- Allow teacher flexibility in determining choice and number of strategies, including use of the traditional algorithm.
- Protect sufficient time for practice of new concepts and repetition of fundamental skills within the curriculum.
- Increase instructional time for mathematics.
- Reinforce the balance of mastery of facts and inquiry learning.
- Provide clear expectations on student learning for the end of each grade level.
- Phase out the current textbooks which are weighted heavily on reading and writing.
- Provide materials with varied uses including teaching and home use.
- Promote formative assessment during classroom instruction.
- Streamline the guides and identify overlapping outcomes.

At the junior high level, in-depth treatment of topics to better prepare all students for high school and to prepare more students for advanced mathematics courses is needed. For students who struggle, differentiated time and interventions to address their needs will be beneficial. Students at the intermediate level who do well in mathematics deserve to be challenged. Using the principles of *Universal Design for Learning* in renewing the curriculum would address the needs of students across the learning spectrum. At the high school level, an increase in advanced mathematics participation, clarity on the purpose and content of the different high school courses, and removal of the general graduation status for students who complete academic courses in all subjects except mathematics is needed.



## Recommendations for Mathematics

31. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development discontinue its current provincial assessment program for mathematics and language arts.
32. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop an assessment framework similar in scope and structure to those of PISA and PCAP.
  - a) This framework will include a strategy for the use of assessment information to improve achievement.
  - b) New assessments for each of the identified areas should be based on the framework.
  - c) The first assessments based on the framework should have a 2019 start date.
33. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development employ a full time consultant to be the lead on the strategy on the use of assessment information.
34. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Faculty of Education develop standards of practice for the teaching of mathematics in Newfoundland and Labrador.
35. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the school districts provide professional development opportunities to enable teachers of mathematics to meet the standards of practice for the teaching of mathematics.
36. The Faculty of Education ensure that the mathematics methodology courses allow teacher education candidates to meet the standards of practice for the teaching of mathematics.
37. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development introduce a bursary program to encourage teacher participation in university level courses in mathematics content and pedagogy required for Grades K – 6.
38. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development eliminate the current numeracy support teacher and literacy/numeracy teacher positions.
39. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development allocate six permanent K – 6 mathematics program specialists with qualifications in mathematics, mathematics education and where possible have qualifications in primary/elementary education.
  - a) These program specialists should be deployed as follows: one for Labrador, one for Central, one for Western, two for Eastern, and one for Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial.
  - b) Develop a protocol to ensure that the roles and responsibilities for K – 6 mathematics program specialists are sustained over time.

40. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development make the following adjustments to the mathematics K – 9 curriculum:
  - a) Develop clear curriculum outcome statements on the strategies that students must be able to use.
  - b) Provide teachers flexibility in determining the choice and number of strategies, including use of the traditional algorithm.
  - c) Set clear expectations for mathematics learning including addition and multiplication facts for the end of each grade level.
  - d) Adjust the balance between mathematical foundations and concept development.
  - e) Reduce the requirements for reading and writing in the mathematics curriculum.
  - f) Phase out and eliminate the mathematics textbooks and provide appropriate resources as needed.
  - g) Establish the instructional time for mathematics at 60 minutes per day (20%).
41. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development undertake the following initiatives for Grades 7 – 12 mathematics:
  - a) Work with the school districts to develop strategies that will increase participation in advanced mathematics in high school, setting targets for each of the next five years.
  - b) Work with the school districts to develop strategies that will increase students' readiness for high school mathematics during the intermediate grades.
  - c) Review the intermediate curriculum and develop materials, as needed, to better engage able students and to support students who experience difficulty.
  - d) Reduce the requirements for reading and writing in the mathematics curriculum, especially in the applied courses.
  - e) Develop a modern communication strategy that will actively engage students and provide accurate messaging about the different high school mathematics courses.

## **Mathematics Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Government of NL (1989) p. 46

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.assembly.nl.ca/business/hansard/ga45session4/07-06-11.htm#1493> (June, 2011)

<sup>3</sup> Government of NL (2007b)

<sup>4</sup> Brochu et al. (2013)

<sup>5</sup> O'Grady & Houme (2014)

<sup>6</sup> Organization for Economic Co-operation Development (2016)

<sup>7</sup> See: Singapore Ministry of Education (2006a), Finnish National Agency for Education (2014a)

<sup>8</sup> Government of NL (2014)

<sup>9</sup> Data provided by Memorial University of NL (CIAP)

<sup>10</sup> Based on information obtained from EEC

<sup>11</sup> See: Hill & Ball (2008); Thames & Ball (2010); Shulman (1986); Hill, Rowan & Ball (2005)

<sup>12</sup> Smith & Johnson (2014)

<sup>13</sup> See: Bruce & Ross (2014); Campbell & Malkus (2011); Campbell & Malkus (2013)

<sup>14</sup> Government of NL (2017e)

<sup>15</sup> It is beyond the scope of this review to evaluate the effectiveness of the provincial school development model

<sup>16</sup> See: National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (2010); Victorian Institute of Teaching (n.d.)



## Chapter 4

# Reading

According to teachers, parents and students, there is an issue with reading in Newfoundland and Labrador. Their opinions are supported by international and pan-Canadian assessments which indicate that the reading achievement of NL students is lower than students in other Canadian provinces. Without intervention and support, too many students are disadvantaged in their educational experience because their reading levels are not where they should be at each grade level.

Reading is not a new issue and it is not a special education issue. Other government reports<sup>1</sup> have stated that high numbers of children were reading below grade level. The reports have indicated that many of the students with low reading levels do not have a specific learning disability; that poor reading performance is not limited to the primary and elementary grades; that many students at junior and senior high struggle with the reading demands across all subjects; and, reading intervention support is lacking. Each of these reports made recommendations to address the problem but many of them were not implemented or the implementation was not sustained.

In its 1998 budget, the NL government committed to addressing the issue of early literacy, particularly in the area of remedial reading.<sup>2</sup> In the following years, Government developed a literacy plan with targeted early literacy intervention, *Words to Live By* (2000).<sup>3</sup> There is no evidence to indicate that the actions proposed in the literacy plan were completed. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's (EECD) most recent literacy plan, *Learning for a Lifetime*,<sup>4</sup> does not identify early literacy intervention as a priority. EECD did develop a separate plan to address early literacy intervention, *Working Together for Student Achievement*<sup>5</sup> but the plan was not implemented beyond the pilot phase. It has been left to schools and the school districts to address the problem of how to support students who struggle with reading.

### Canadian and International Contexts

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) has recognized for many years that reading is an issue in Canada and identified it as a priority area in its 2005 Literacy Action Plan.<sup>6</sup> Canadian ministries of education have developed frameworks and approaches to support students who struggle with reading. Nova Scotia (NS), Alberta (AB), British Columbia (BC), Saskatchewan (SK), Ontario (ON) and New Brunswick (NB) have provincial plans for the provision of reading support and intervention for students experiencing difficulties.<sup>7</sup> The goal of their frameworks is that through interventions, children will learn to read and move forward with their schooling. In these provinces, children who are having difficulties are identified at the end

**“It is imperative that this province seriously address the problem of reading, firstly by focusing on improvements to the curriculum and instruction in the regular class, and secondly, by developing effective intervention approaches for children who have difficulty learning to read.”**

**Canning, *Special Matters*, 1996**

of kindergarten or beginning Grade 1 and interventions are immediately implemented. The common elements of these programs are: collaboration between the classroom teacher and reading specialists for planning and instructional delivery; clear expectations for reading at the end of each grade level; varying intensity based on the learning needs of the child; a focus on phonics/decoding, comprehension and fluency; opportunities to learn in small groups or individually on a daily basis, located either inside or outside the regular classroom; and, monitoring of progress.

Manitoba has a grant program available to school divisions to support early literacy intervention programs for the lowest achieving students in Grade 1. Divisions may use either *Reading Recovery* or any program that has research evidence to show its effectiveness.<sup>8</sup>

Many provinces have also developed programs for older students who struggle with reading. ON has its Student Success Program for Grades 7 – 12, and NB is focusing on building capacity with teachers to screen and support students who struggle with reading. The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) developed a cross-curricular reading tool to support students struggling with reading in the intermediate years. This tool has been implemented since 2007 and is used in NS and PEI. While NL includes this reading tool on its list of authorized resources for Literacy 1204 and it is referenced in the literacy plan, it has not yet been distributed to schools.

Like NL, many provinces have reviewed their education system in recent years. BC has redesigned its curriculum around literacy and numeracy which are to be included in all subject areas. In SK, the Deputy Minister of Education, the school division directors and representatives from First Nations and Métis formed a leadership team and are setting the direction for education in the province. The team identified reading as a priority area, and their framework, *Saskatchewan Reads*,<sup>9</sup> is implemented in every school with K – 3 classes. In the Atlantic Provinces, NS and NB are in the initial stages of implementing education plans based on recent reviews. Both have identified literacy and numeracy as priorities, and in NS the plan envisions an integrated approach in language arts and mathematics across subject areas for the primary years.<sup>10</sup> As identified in this report in

*Chapter 1, Inclusive Education*, these provinces have adopted the principles of *Universal Design for Learning* as the basis for their curriculum renewal.

In response to low achievement levels, ON established the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat in 2004. The Secretariat engages experienced educators to work with schools and school districts to build capacity and implement strategies with focused intervention targeting middle- and lower-performing schools. Funding and targeted support are provided to school districts based on local needs. For the lower-performing schools, the Secretariat educators spend one-half of their time working directly with classroom teachers, literacy leaders and school-based teams. Other initiatives of the Secretariat include analyzing student work for the purpose of enabling students to reach the provincial standards, and providing funding for tutors to work with students in Grades JK – 6 to reinforce previously taught concepts and skills.<sup>11</sup>

At the international level, two countries that consistently perform at or near the top in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are Finland and Singapore. Singapore has a focus on language learning. Its language program advocates explicit instruction and has an intensive focus on language foundational skills such as phonological awareness. The curriculum outcomes describe not only what to teach but also set expectations for each grade level and provide teachers with a rationale for these expectations.<sup>12</sup> Singapore is also committed to teacher professional development and high qualifications for teaching.

In Finland, where a new national curriculum was implemented in 2016/17, local education authorities and the schools develop their own curricula within the national framework. Similar to BC, the new Finnish curriculum places an emphasis on common competencies across all subjects. These competencies cover a range of skills including self-care, cultural interaction and building a sustainable future. Teachers in Finland teach the national curriculum but have autonomy in decisions related to pedagogy and in selecting textbooks and materials. The curriculum content for language arts instruction has both comprehension and foundational skills such as grammar, spelling, word analysis, and vocabulary development.<sup>13</sup>

There are lessons to be learned from high achieving countries. Improvement in reading achievement can be realized by focusing on three key areas: teachers, the curriculum, and assessment. Teacher qualifications are important, and teachers need to be supported with ongoing professional development. There needs to be attention paid to the curriculum so that there is a balance of teaching foundational skills and an approach which enables students to make personal and critical connections to written text. Assessment is critical, but it will make a difference only if the results are analyzed and there is support for addressing the issues identified.

## **Student Achievement on Reading Assessments in NL**

There are a number of assessments that identify how NL students are performing in reading and writing. They are international, national, provincial and school-based. Examining the consistencies and inconsistencies of these results offers direction to improving educational outcomes.

### **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)**

The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is an initiative of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The assessment focuses on reading, mathematics and science and is administered to 15-year-olds every three years. For each administration, one of the domains is studied in greater detail. Reading was the main focus in 2000 and 2009. For PISA, reading is defined as "...understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts..."<sup>14</sup>

Performance in reading remained stable across the different administrations of the PISA assessments with girls performing significantly better than boys in all countries and in all Canadian provinces. Students in all provinces performed above the international average. However, for all administrations,<sup>15</sup> students in NL performed significantly below the Canadian average.<sup>16</sup>

### **Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS)**

The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is an international reading assessment carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA). It is administered every five years to Grade 4 students and assesses how well students can demonstrate literal comprehension.

In this assessment, Canadian students overall performed significantly better in reading fiction than in informational reading, and students in NL performed at the Canadian average. This assessment indicates NL students understand reading materials at the literal level and can describe what is happening in a story. NL had the largest gap in reading between girls and boys. While female Grade 4 students in this province performed at the Canadian average, male students performed significantly lower.

Some factors positively related to reading achievement identified by this study include: use of children's books as a basis for instruction; school-wide emphasis on academic success; safe and orderly schools; discipline in the classroom and school; and low incidences of bullying. Prerequisite knowledge and skills that students bring to the classroom, something over 85% of teachers in NL reported as an issue, also affect reading achievement.<sup>17</sup>

### **Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP)**

The Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) is an initiative of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC). The assessment focuses on reading, mathematics and science and has been administered to Grade 8 students every three years since 2007. For each administration of the test, one area is examined in greater detail than the other two. Reading was the main focus in 2007. The reading assessment measures comprehension, interpretation and making connections.<sup>18</sup>

For each assessment (2007, 2010, 2013), reading achievement in NL was significantly below the Canadian average with 19% of students achieving below the acceptable level of performance compared with 12% of Canadian students overall. Again girls outperformed boys in this province and in Canada. Nonetheless, boys' performance in NL has improved since 2007.<sup>19</sup>

## Provincial and School Assessments

EECD develops and administers assessments at various grade levels and in different subject areas annually. There is a reading assessment in Grades 1 and 2. Curriculum-based assessments in English language arts and mathematics are administered at the end of Grades 3, 6 and 9 on a two-year rotating schedule. Public examinations for select high school courses in English, mathematics, social studies and sciences are administered each year as part of students' graduation requirements.

**Results from Grade 1 and 2 reading assessments** for 2012 – 2016 show that on average, at the end of Grade 1, 43% of students are reading below the expectation set by EECD; and, at the end of Grade 2, on average, 38% of students are reading below that threshold. The June 2016 results reveal that at least 30% of schools have approximately one-half of the students reading below the provincial expectation. A review of the results over the five-year period shows no change in the proportion of students in Grades 1 and 2 who were reading at an acceptable level.<sup>20</sup>

**Results from Grades 3, 6 and 9 reading assessments** reveal an inconsistent pattern of results. A review of the results for the past five years shows a wide range of student performance. For example, the percentage of Grade 9 students who meet or exceed grade level expectations ranged from 65% to 89%.

**High school examination results show that** almost all students receive high marks in contrast to results of other assessments. High school English enrolment and achievement data indicate:

- Almost all students pass school examinations, with one-half receiving a score 80% or higher in 2016.
- On average over the last five years, approximately 80% of students complete the academic courses and 20% the basic courses.
- The number of students who complete the Grade 10 English courses is substantially lower than the number of students registered for these courses.<sup>21</sup> This is another indicator of the dropout issue in this province as described in *Chapter 2* of this report, *Student Mental Health and Wellness*.

**For the public examination course**, English 3201, the pass rates have been constant over the past three years with almost all students passing the course with an average score of 70% on the examination. This result is consistent with the overall pass rate for graduating students which is usually between 93% and 96%. The calculation for the pass rate is based on the number of Grade 12 students who successfully complete their final year. It does not include the students who dropout or those who may need to do additional courses in the year after their Grade 12 year (Level 4 students). As stated above, the enrolment data for English is one indicator of the number of dropouts each year as are the data presented in *Chapter 2* of this report. The pass rate is misleading, giving the impression that almost all students who enter kindergarten or start high school graduate from the K – 12 system and that student achievement is satisfactory.

**“There is not enough help for those students who are not diagnosed and they slip through the cracks. There would be more success if these students could get the help they need.”**

**Teacher**

**In summary**, the evidence reveals contradictions in reading achievement. Results for Grade 1 and 2 indicate many students are experiencing difficulty with reading. The results for both PCAP (Grade 8) and PISA (Grade 10) show that NL students perform below the Canadian average. On the other hand, the public examinations have high pass rates with 70% average and on school examinations, almost all students pass. A comparison of these results indicates that the standards for reading achievement in NL are lower than the rest of Canada. These discrepancies and the numbers of students who drop out of school each year have to be addressed.

## **Consultations and Submissions**

Parents, teachers, students, key stakeholders and the general public had a great deal to say about reading and literacy. The surveys and public consultations indicated that there is no mechanism to provide extra assistance to students who struggle with reading at any grade level and that students are moving from grade to grade with continued difficulty. The issues are presented under the ten following themes.

### **Reading in Primary Grades**

Primary teachers referenced the importance of addressing literacy needs in the early years and said there are problems with delivering an effective reading program. The classroom teacher does not have time to give the needed support to students who have some difficulty with reading and could catch up with a little help. These students do not require special education support as they do not have an identified exceptionality. The schools do not have reading specialists nor do they have instructional space for small group work for teachers to work with students who need the support. A number of the Instructional Resource Teachers (IRTs) do have qualifications to support students who are struggling with reading but they are assigned to the students who have identified exceptionailities.

The children who experience reading difficulties are not identified in Grade 1. While Grade 1 teachers administer the provincial Grade 1 reading assessment, the results are not used for identification. One-third of the respondents on the teacher survey indicated that the absence of early

identification and intervention was a problem. Students who struggle with reading fall further behind.

### **K – 6 Benchmark Assessment System (BAS)**

Teachers stated that the individual reading assessments done in Grades K – 6 are time consuming to administer within the instructional day and again the data are not used to address identified issues. Teachers spend a lot of time doing assessments, many of which are unnecessary, rather than teaching reading. The district mandates three assessments each year for all students, even those who are reading above grade level. Teachers and some district personnel reported that assessment has become an end in itself rather than a means to identify and address issues.

### **Intervention Programs**

In recognition of the need to provide help to students who have difficulty with reading, schools have implemented various intervention programs, such as *Reading Recovery* and *Barton Reading*. These programs at the school level have met with some success but they have been discontinued as other district initiatives were implemented. NLESĐ is currently piloting an intervention resource, *Levelled Literacy Intervention* (LLI). This program requires small group intensive work on a daily basis. While a number of teachers viewed the resource favourably, they reported not having the time to deliver the program. Many advocated for a reading intervention program that can be delivered outside the regular classroom by a reading specialist. “In a class of 25, it’s hard to focus on 3 or 4 children for LLI; I need an IRT or TA (teaching assistant).” (A teacher)

### **Support for Students Beyond Primary/Elementary**

Intermediate and high school teachers commented on the poor reading skills of their students and the absence of supports to help them. As one teacher said, “The problem grows as the student moves up through the grades.” Students have trouble with comprehension, vocabulary and reading textbooks or other learning materials. Subject area teachers are reading textbooks aloud to high school students. Many students need to have exam questions read aloud and have their responses scribed for them.

### **Foundational Literacy Skills**

Parents and students also spoke about ‘basic skills’ and expressed concern about the lack of attention to spelling, grammar, punctuation and cursive writing. Some students admitted that they cannot write their signature and cannot decipher cursive writing.

### **Lowered Standards**

Teachers and parents said there is less accountability for students and less homework than there used to be, and, in addition to the lack of basic skills, these issues are contributing to poor reading and writing. Expectations and standards of the public examinations and provincial assessments are lower than in the past. Students have to do minimal work to get high marks, and grades no longer have meaning. Parents are unsure of what grades mean anymore. Parents want to know how their children are actually performing and would like to see more emphasis on students “getting it right” rather than unwarranted positive comments.

**“Grammar is not stressed enough in class and assignments but it does matter. We need it in the workplace and for post-secondary.”**

**Student**

### **Role of the Teacher-Librarian**

The diminished role of the teacher-librarian has led to a decrease in the teaching of research and library skills. Since 2000, the teacher-librarian allocation has been 1:1000 and as student enrolments declined, these positions have been cut. In the 2016/17 school year, 65 units were allocated. Most schools do not have access to a teacher-librarian and there are few teachers who have teacher-librarian qualifications. The condition of school libraries varies with a few having very good collections with the support of a teacher-librarian, while others have collections without the librarian service and yet others have few books and no service. A number of submissions including one from the Federation of School Councils expressed concern about this situation.

### **Primary Curriculum**

Teachers reported satisfaction with the reading resources in primary grades, finding them beneficial. The inclusion of digital formats and graphic texts has contributed to an increase in the amount of reading that students are doing. However, teachers are concerned about the negative effects of the ‘overcrowded curriculum’ in the primary grades. Expectations are not clear, and the curriculum guides are sizeable with inefficient organization of the information. To prepare a single lesson, teachers are referred to two or three different sections of the guide.

### **High School Curriculum**

The instructional time for English at the high school level has decreased over the years and the integrated approach for language and literature has not worked as intended. In the current high school program, there is an increased emphasis on listening, speaking, and other ways of representation with less emphasis on reading and writing. There is a sense that balance has been lost and that there are fewer content requirements. Students stated that there is not enough time for English and they suggested that more time is needed for creative writing. Many students said that they love to read and that they believe that reading is important. “You can’t learn without that core.” Approximately one-third of students who completed the survey reported that English classes were not interesting.

### Transitions

Students lack the reading skills to move between grades efficiently. Students felt that junior high did not adequately prepare them for high school. While many students meet the entrance requirements for post-secondary, the colleges (public and private) reported that high school graduates do not have adequate literacy skills for college level course material. They have difficulties with spelling, completing simple forms and more complex literacy tasks such as understanding legal/medical material.

**“I think there should be a LOT more focus on the basics of writing and the writing process. Kids don’t know when to use capital letters, periods, etc. Also, when asked to write an essay their first instinct is to Google the topic and copy and paste the first thing they find.”**

Teacher

### Issues Related to Reading Achievement

The task force findings identified the following as contributing factors to the reading problem in the NL education system:

- lack of early identification and intervention;
- overcrowded curriculum with inefficient curriculum guides;
- lack of clarity in the curriculum about reading instruction;
- lack of focus on ‘basic literacy’;
- reading materials that are uninteresting to students;
- low standards and expectations at intermediate and senior high;
- poor communications to teachers;
- lack of teacher-librarians and school library resources to support the curriculum;
- limited and ineffective use of assessment information to improve student achievement; and
- insufficient supports for teachers to address reading problems.

**“What would help? Remedial reading teachers to work one to one with children who do not have an identified exceptionality but are struggling with reading.”**

Teacher

### Implementing the Reading Curriculum

The problems noted above resulted in an inconsistent approach to teaching reading and writing. It is left to individual teachers to interpret the intent of the curriculum and decide on an instructional approach. While it is teachers’ responsibility to plan and deliver their instruction, it is EECD’s responsibility to ensure that the intent of the curriculum is clear.

Although provincial curriculum is similar to what is prescribed in other high performing provinces and countries, there are notable differences: in NL there is less specificity in the curriculum guides than in those jurisdictions, and there is poor articulation of grade level expectations. An additional issue with the high school curriculum is the reduced content requirement which has lowered standards for student work and changed the structure of the public examination.

### **Intervention Approaches**

Previous reports identified the separate operations of EECD divisions as problematic for addressing reading underachievement, as it was seen as a special education issue. Recently, the divisions of program development and student support services merged. This has the potential to create a major positive change if it is recognized that students who struggle with reading, while needing intervention, do not necessarily have an exceptionality warranting special education support.

EECD developed and piloted an intervention program, *Working Together to Support Student Achievement*, in a small number of schools in 2013. An evaluation of the pilot found that schools where the program was fully implemented saw increased student achievement and decreased referrals to special education, and all divisions in EECD and school district program staff supported this initiative. Yet, the program did not get implemented province-wide.

As identified in *Chapter 3, Mathematics*, the Literacy Numeracy Teacher Model introduced in 2010 experienced only limited success. After seven years of implementation, there is little change in student achievement.

### **The Importance of Libraries and Librarians**

A strategy in EECD's literacy plan is to increase the number of literacy professionals and assess the potential of teacher-librarians to be literacy leaders. Teacher-librarians are well prepared to be school-based literacy leaders. However, in many schools the allocation provides just a few hours per week. Many school libraries also need refurbishment and an overhaul of the library space. An assessment to determine the library needs for each school is required. The Canadian Library Association promotes a balance between print resources and technologies, collaborative projects and quiet reading time, and recognition for the role of the school library in supporting curriculum, project-based learning, information management, and reading for enjoyment.<sup>22</sup> EECD should consider this balance as it revises its curriculum support document, *Extending the Classroom*.<sup>23</sup>

### **Towards Improvement**

To improve reading achievement, a comprehensive approach to identification and intervention and an improved and accessible curriculum are required.

## **A Comprehensive Approach to Early Identification and Intervention**

### **Components of an Effective Model**

A comprehensive approach requires a great deal of commitment and resources, and should be delivered by teachers with appropriate qualifications. This approach will require:<sup>24</sup>

- Early identification and sustained intervention
- Classroom teachers who have knowledge of effective reading methods
- Reading specialists with appropriate expertise to work with children who struggle in reading and to advise classroom teachers
- Opportunities for students who are struggling to have the following additional support:
  - Time for small group and/or individual instruction in addition to language arts classes
  - An appropriate instructional environment
  - Sufficient program intensity
  - Dedicated reading specialist time
  - Monitoring student progress, with program adjustments as warranted
  - A commitment to provide support as long as it is necessary to enable the student to successfully participate in the curriculum
- Opportunities for classroom teachers and the reading specialist to collaborate and plan instruction based on individualized needs
- Curriculum materials that are responsive to children's interests and reflect the diversity of schools and classrooms.

### **Early Literacy Assessment**

For an effective reading program, an early literacy assessment tool that identifies children who are struggling with reading and who will benefit from intervention programs is required. This assessment would replace the current reading assessment for Grades 1 and 2. In *Chapter 3, Mathematics*, a new approach to assessment is recommended. This approach can also apply to reading.

### **Reading Specialist Allocation**

A dedicated allocation is required to create reading specialist positions to work with young students. While the critical years are the primary grades, provision of supports for children in elementary grades at least in the early years of implementing a comprehensive approach to identification and intervention will help ensure that they can progress to their grade level by the end of Grade 6 and be prepared for the intermediate years. One option is to allocate reading specialists to schools with K – 6 classrooms as follows: one unit for each school with more than 200 students in Grades K – 6; one-half unit to schools with between 51 and 200 students in Grades K – 6; and for schools with 50 or fewer students in Grades K – 6, the IRTs would be assigned one 45-minute period daily. Based on the daily 45-minute period, this allocation allows the reading specialist to work with six groups of students each day, with the maximum group size of six students. This support requires approximately 100 teaching units.

### **Reading Specialist Qualifications**

Reading specialists who provide direct intervention to students will require qualifications in all aspects of teaching of reading, including assessment and identification of issues, interventions, child and adolescent development, learning styles, teaching strategies, and curriculum. Memorial University no longer offers a graduate specialization in reading.

### **Regional Support**

District level support for reading specialists is required to provide leadership and coordination to schools. This district support should be at the regional level and be dedicated to supporting schools in delivering effective reading intervention programs not only to students in Grades K – 6 but also to those who struggle in Grades 7 – 12.

### **Suggested Process for Supplying Grades 1-3 with Reading Specialists by 2020**

- Identify teachers in K-6 who have specialization in reading (teaching, identifying problems, providing interventions) and provide professional development to update their research and knowledge (January – June, 2018), with extra days designated for this purpose.
- With a program specialist for reading in each of the five regions and teachers with specialization in reading, provide three days of professional development to all Grades 1-3 teachers, with extra days designated for this purpose. (September 2018 – June 2019).
- EECĐ partner with Memorial University (or if unavailable, issue a call for proposals by December, 2017, from other Canadian universities) to provide a program in reading for Grades 1 – 3 teachers and teacher education students in a primary/elementary program.
- EECĐ and NLESĐ continue professional development for the teaching of reading following implementation of the three year plan.
- Evaluate the effect of the ‘teaching reading’ program in 2020.

### **Collaboration**

Collaboration among the school districts, EECĐ, and the Faculty of Education is essential. As the employer, school districts have the expectation that the Faculty of Education is making the knowledge and experiences needed to teach in NL available to teacher education candidates. EECĐ, as the lead organization on curriculum, needs to assure the school districts that the supports needed for teachers and students will be available for the intended curriculum. School districts are responsible for the continual implementation of curriculum and professional development for teachers.

### **Beyond the Primary and Elementary Years**

The achievement data, including the pass rate at the end of Grade 12, show that most students get high marks in junior high and senior high. However, these marks are not consistent with other measures and many students continue to experience reading difficulties. Reading support is required for students in intermediate and high school grades. Identification of the reasons for students’ reading problems will determine the interventions required. Students can struggle with a range of issues from word recognition to broader comprehension. Collaboration between

content-area teachers and reading specialists will determine if instruction can be integrated into lesson planning.<sup>25</sup> Research studies indicate that professional development also has a positive effect on reading outcomes for secondary students and that small group instructional approaches are effective.<sup>26</sup>

### Improved and Accessible Curriculum

#### Curriculum content

The curriculum is an essential component for student success. The materials that children read, in whatever subject, should reflect the many diverse experiences and backgrounds that the children bring to their schooling. Whether in social studies or math, the arts or science, diverse representations will enable children to connect to the curriculum and will facilitate learning for all.

#### Curriculum Guides

Curriculum guides require improved clarity regarding curriculum outcomes, foundational literacy skills, and curriculum priorities. They should include expectations for each grade level, and greater specificity, and should be clear on what is needed to provide all students with instructional experiences that will enable success in school.

#### School Library Program

The value of a school library program cannot be overestimated.<sup>27</sup> The program supports student success generally by encouraging students to read widely, teaching them to read for learning and enjoyment, helping them to learn how to do research and to use research information, and exposing them to a broad range of literary and informational texts. Teacher-librarians know the curriculum areas and work in collaboration with classroom or content-area teachers to support learning experiences. In a knowledge-building pedagogy, school libraries provide direct supports to student learning. The teacher-librarians teach and provide students with information and research tasks that promote learning how to evaluate and use information to solve problems and build knowledge. Research on the effect of school libraries shows a positive correlation between school libraries and increases in student achievement, as measured by student performance on standardized tests.

**“My kids have had excellent experiences. My kids absolutely love getting books at the school library – it’s something they really look forward to.”**

**Parent**

## **Summary**

Each one of the three strands alone – curriculum, assessment, intervention – is necessary but not sufficient for a comprehensive reading program.

## **Recommendations for Reading**

42. Refer to Recommendations 31 and 32 in *Chapter 3, Mathematics*  
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

- a) discontinue the current provincial reading and writing assessment and the Grade 1 and 2 reading assessment;
- b) include reading in the new assessment framework.

43. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop and implement a comprehensive approach to early identification and intervention by:

- a) building on the work that has already been done in *Working Together for Student Achievement*
- b) allowing schools to continue to implement programs that demonstrate research-evidenced effectiveness such as *Levelled Literacy Intervention*, *Reading Recovery* and *Barton Reading*.

44. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development adopt a proven, research-based early assessment tool to be administered at the start of Grade 1 to identify students who require additional support in learning to read.

45. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provide a separate teaching allocation to be dedicated as school-based reading specialists who will work directly with students:

- a) who are reading below grade level in Grades 1 and 2 as determined by early reading assessments;
- b) who continue to read below grade level in Grades 3 – 6 as determined by school assessments.

46. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development eliminate the Literacy Numeracy Teacher positions.

47. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development allocate five permanent program specialists with expertise in reading instruction to provide leadership and curriculum support to the school-based reading specialists.

- a) The program specialists should be deployed as follows: one in each of Labrador, Western and Central regions and two in Eastern region.
- b) A protocol to ensure that the roles and responsibilities for K – 6 reading program specialists are sustained over time should be developed.

48. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development explore options with Memorial University's Faculty of Education or another Canadian university for a graduate level specialization program to prepare reading specialists.

49. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop and implement a reading intervention program for Grade 7 – 12 students who experience reading difficulties.
50. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review and revise how it calculates and reports graduation and pass rates so that these statistics more accurately reflect student achievement.
51. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review and revise the language arts curriculum to ensure that it sets clear expectations to inform teaching and learning and contains reading materials that are responsive and meaningful to students.
52. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development increase the capacity of school libraries and teacher-librarians to support the curriculum by ensuring provision of sufficient library resources and personnel.

**Reading Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> See: Government of NL (1968), (1992), (1996) & (2000a)

<sup>2</sup> Government of NL (1998a)

<sup>3</sup> Government of NL (2000b)

<sup>4</sup> Government of NL (2013)

<sup>5</sup> Government of NL (2015b)

<sup>6</sup> See: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2005) & (2010)

<sup>7</sup> See: Government of AB (2010); Government of BC (2012); Government of NB (2016a); Government of NB (2016b); Government of NS (2016); Government of ON (2013b);

<sup>8</sup> Government of MB (2014)

<sup>9</sup> Government of SK (2017)

<sup>10</sup> See: Government of NB (2016b); Government of NS (2015)

<sup>11</sup> Government of ON (2017b)

<sup>12</sup> Singapore Ministry of Education (2017)

<sup>13</sup> Finnish National Agency for Education (2014a)

<sup>14</sup> Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2010a)

<sup>15</sup> PISA was administered in 2000, 2003, 2006, 2009, 2012, and 2015

<sup>16</sup> Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2010a)

<sup>17</sup> Labrecque et al. (2012)

<sup>18</sup> O'Grady & Houme (2014)

<sup>19</sup> Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2013)

<sup>20</sup> Information obtained from EEC (2017)

<sup>21</sup> Information obtained from EEC (2017)

<sup>22</sup> Canadian Library Association (2014)

<sup>23</sup> Government of NL (2017c)

<sup>24</sup> See: National Reading Panel (2000); Wise & Chen (2009); Reed (2012); Rose (2006); Paris & Paris (2007); Concannon-Gibney & Murphy (2012)

<sup>25</sup> See: Berninger et al. (2008); Slavin et al. (2009)

<sup>26</sup> See: Slavin et al. (2008); Slavin et al. (2009)

<sup>27</sup> See: Klinger & Shulba (2006); Lance (2012); Lance & Hofschild (2012); Lonsdale (2003); Oberg, B. (2015)



## Chapter 5

# Indigenous Education

Indigenous Education is important for Newfoundland and Labrador. It is important for both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people. Approximately 100,000 individuals in the province self-identify as Indigenous.<sup>1</sup> Exploration of Indigenous education in this chapter focuses on teaching and learning for Indigenous students in K – 12 schools and teaching and learning about Indigenous peoples for all students in the province.

### Indigenous Education Governance in NL

Responsibility for the delivery of K – 12 Indigenous education may be federal or provincial depending on factors such as land claim settlements. On Reserves, Indigenous authorities control and administer the school system with financial support from the Government of Canada through federal legislation. Many Indigenous students, however, attend provincially operated schools. Non-Indigenous students depend on the provincially authorized curriculum to inform them about Indigenous history and experiences.

Since 1987, the Miawpukek Mi'kamawey Mawi'omi (Conne River) band has been operating and staffing its own school. The staff and teachers of its education system are all members of its Indigenous community.

The Innu Nation, since 2009, has exercised jurisdiction and organizational responsibility for the education of its K – 12 students in Sheshatshiu and Natuashish. It is the policy of the Innu Nation to increase and promote employment of qualified Innu in the school system.<sup>2</sup>

The Nunatsiavut Government (NG) collaborates with Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLES) which operates and staffs K – 12 schools. The NG government offers support and guidance to NLES to help the district respond appropriately to the educational needs of K – 12 Inuit children in northern Labrador. The NG government partners with Memorial University in offering the IBED teacher education program at the Labrador Institute in Happy Valley-Goose Bay.

The Qalipu First Nations (QFN) band does not operate its own schools. Member children attend NL publicly funded schools. Representatives of the Qalipu community, however, maintain liaison with officials of the Western regional office of the NLES to coordinate and deliver outreach programs such as outdoor education and school visitations that focus on Indigenous content.

The Nunatukavut Community Council (NCC) represents the Southern Inuit people in Labrador. The council does not operate schools but does lend support to school-based initiatives in Indigenous life skills, heritage and culture.

## **NL Context**

Students in Indigenous schools in NL follow the provincially authorized curriculum which provides graduates with the credentials to pursue post-secondary education. In addition to the prescribed provincial curriculum, schools for Indigenous students offer Indigenous language courses and Indigenous studies courses. Indigenous language courses are exempt from the local course policy which applies to senior high school course options offered by the school districts.<sup>3</sup> Non-language Indigenous high school courses, such as Indigenous life skills, however, are subject to the local policy. This means that a school must submit course descriptions for Indigenous studies courses to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) for re-approval at least every three years. The policy also limits the number of local high school course offerings per student to four. Indigenous school systems would benefit from a different mechanism for the approval of Indigenous studies courses that reflects the unique requirements of Indigenous communities to include Indigenous studies in the high school curriculum.

The Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee (AEAC), which includes representatives from Indigenous peoples in the province, has worked with EECD to provide advice on Indigenous content in the provincial curriculum. Indigenous groups have collaborated with EECD to develop and produce relevant teaching and learning resources for Indigenous classrooms, such as books for young children. EECD has also partnered with Indigenous groups to support cultural events and innovative initiatives.

The provincial K – 12 curriculum for all students includes Indigenous content, particularly in social studies, religious education and health. But a recent analysis<sup>4</sup> of that content showed that the depiction of Indigenous populations and events was “inconsistent and contradictory” with strengths in grade seven and nine texts, and multiple weaknesses in the rest. The conclusion was that much remains to be done to accurately represent Indigenous experiences in the NL provincial curriculum to all students in the province.

Indigenous populations, the government of Canada, the province of NL and other partners have worked together to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. EECD has supported learning initiatives for Indigenous students and has aimed to infuse provincial school programming with increased levels of Indigenous content. But the results of such collective efforts have been uneven. Graduation rates among Indigenous students have improved but student wellness, absenteeism and early school leaving remain concerns.

In summary, there is work to be done, firstly to improve the educational quality and outcomes for Indigenous students, and secondly to Indigenize curriculum to enhance non-Indigenous students’ understanding of Indigenous knowledge, history, experiences, culture and practices.

## **Canadian Context**

Canadian society has been slowly recognizing the significant wrongs visited upon Indigenous peoples by the country’s colonial practices. Canadians are beginning to understand how past and present assumptions and injuries continue to harm Indigenous populations today. Injustices in

Canada and other countries prompted the United Nations in 2007 to proclaim the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* to affirm that “all peoples contribute to the diversity and richness of civilizations and cultures, which constitute the common heritage of humankind” and to remind the world that “Indigenous peoples have suffered from historic injustices [because of] colonization and dispossession of their lands, territories and resources.”<sup>5</sup> The UN has called upon countries to respect treaty obligations, acknowledge the rights of Indigenous peoples to better economic, educational, and social conditions, and preserve Indigenous cultures, traditions and languages. The declaration has challenged countries to communicate to their general populations the need to demonstrate respect for the dignity, identity, histories, practices and aspirations of Indigenous peoples, and to combat prejudice and promote good relations and understanding among all citizens.

In Canada, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report,<sup>6</sup> an examination of the effects of residential schooling on Indigenous peoples in Canada, has called upon Canadians to address the state of Indigenous education in the country. Among the recommendations, the Commission has directed the Government of Canada to provide sufficient funding for education, to develop and implement culturally appropriate curriculum and teaching methods, to protect and conserve Indigenous languages, and to enable communities and parents to assume responsibility and control of their children’s schooling. The commission has called upon federal, provincial and territorial governments, in consultation with Survivors, Indigenous peoples and educators, to include age-appropriate learning materials about residential schools, treaties and Indigenous communities as a mandatory education requirement for all Canadian students from kindergarten to the end of high school. The TRC report has urged provincial and federal governments to establish high level leadership positions with responsibility for ensuring the inclusion of Indigenous content in education. The report further recommended that the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) work with provincial education partners to improve teaching about Indigenous issues for all students.

CMEC has identified the need to develop teaching resources and materials about residential schools and Indigenous peoples and to improve initial teacher education. The Council has underlined the importance of sharing best resources and practices for teaching in Indigenous communities. CMEC has recognized the importance of increasing the number of Indigenous teachers in Canada and has resolved to improve the educational outcomes and the well-being of Indigenous students.<sup>7</sup>

Many provinces and territories, such as Ontario, Manitoba and British Columbia, have developed framework documents to establish priorities and articulate plans on how best to support Indigenous education in their jurisdictions.<sup>8</sup> In 2015, Manitoba announced its intention to revise its framework document to ensure that all students were educated about residential schools and Indigenous peoples’ experiences, knowledge, culture and values. Manitoba committed to renew the framework document every three years and to revise their current curriculum to reflect Indigenous history and perspectives. Manitoba also pledged to consult with post-secondary institutions to introduce more Indigenous content in teacher education programs. NL has many initiatives in Indigenous education, but no framework or foundational document to inform or guide the province’s planning.

Indigenous populations in NL and elsewhere have benefited when school teachers and support staff belong to their communities. Research has shown that when Indigenous teaching staff work in their own schools, student attendance improves.<sup>9</sup> Researchers have also observed that Indigenous students score higher on standardized tests when test items reflect Indigenous experiences.<sup>10</sup> Other observers have noted that Indigenous knowledge is “foundational to learning for Aboriginal persons and … part of the collective genius of humanity”.<sup>11</sup> Scholars have described Indigenizing education in K – 12 as a process that involves “re-centering Indigenous knowledge ways in the core of instructional practices … relationships, [and] curriculum choice, [and helps counter] racism.”<sup>12</sup>

## **Consultations and Submissions**

In the consultations with stakeholders, consensus emerged around the need to provide greater and more accurate presence, visibility and evidence of Indigenous knowledge, culture, traditions, history and experiences in school curriculum materials and resources in NL schools.

Indigenous community spokespeople want more control over non-language Indigenous studies courses for Indigenous students. Commentators found the current renewal and approval requirements for Indigenous courses under the local courses policy to be tedious, time consuming, and restrictive. It is urgent that a new way be found to incorporate Indigenous course offerings into the approved high school curriculum.

In submissions, discussions, presentations and documentation, members of Indigenous groups stated that they wanted what was best for their children’s education. Representatives expressed concern about academic achievement, graduation rates, attendance rates, and wellness of Indigenous students. They stated that while gains have been made in recent years, there is still room for improvement. Presenters talked about high drop out and suicide rates among young people. Others reported that instances of racism occur every day for members of Indigenous communities and commented that in some schools, bullying was often race-based. There is urgency also, they said, in addressing the needs of families because they play a vital role in the education of their children.

Contributors asserted that non-Indigenous teachers who teach in Indigenous settings need to know more about Indigenous peoples and Indigenous ways of teaching and learning, and demonstrate greater intercultural competency when they work in Indigenous communities. Teachers who teach about Indigenous populations to all students require more knowledge and accurate information about Indigenous history and experiences.

Presentations and meetings revealed that Indigenous school authorities want to hire more educators from their own communities. This is already happening in Miawpukek Mi’kamawey Mawi’omi (Conne River). In other Indigenous locations, some teachers and many support staff belong to their respective Indigenous groups. The Nunatsiavut Government (Inuit) is currently collaborating with Memorial University on a teaching degree program in Labrador studies to encourage community members to pursue degrees in teaching.

Indigenous students who attend schools outside their community may require dedicated English second language learning to allow them to succeed in their courses. At present, there is no provision for ESL support to these students. Conversely, Indigenous students receive no support for their first language and traditional cultural practices when they reside outside their communities for reasons such as foster care. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report was clear in describing the dangers of depriving children of their Indigenous language and identities.

## **Towards Improvement**

Addressing two important issues in Indigenous education will enhance educational outcomes. The first of these is supporting authentic educational experiences for Indigenous children. A framework document for Indigenous education, developed in collaboration with representatives of Indigenous populations, EECD and the school districts, would guide future planning for Indigenous education. The framework document should include the following directives: Indigenous students will see themselves reflected in the provincial curriculum, in guides and resources; the ways of life of Indigenous populations will be represented accurately and respectfully; and the works of Indigenous artists, writers, and scholars will be present in curriculum materials.

The second issue is the education of non-Indigenous students in NL who will benefit from learning more about Indigenous peoples. Development of curriculum that is infused with the history, culture, and traditions of Indigenous peoples will enhance the educational knowledge and experiences of non-Indigenous students and will help to address racism and lack of respect.

Indigenous education requires a better approval policy for Indigenous studies courses. At present school systems must seek EECD approval of Indigenous studies courses at least every three years even though the courses are essential parts of the Indigenous curriculum.

Indigenous spokespeople, CMEC and provinces such as Manitoba have identified the importance of increasing the number of Indigenous educators in Canada. Indigenous representatives, EECD Memorial University, the College of the North Atlantic, and other partners share the responsibility to have this goal realized.

Contributors revealed great passion and optimism about the future of Indigenous education in the province. It is timely to bring together the commitment, resources and leadership to achieve the goals of improving educational outcomes in Indigenous education.



## **Recommendations for Indigenous Education**

53. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in collaboration with the Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee, develop a framework document on Indigenous Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, to be completed by June 2019, which:
  - a) supports and improves educational opportunities for Indigenous students in K – 12; and
  - b) provides direction for revision of existing curriculum and development of new curriculum that reflects the history, contributions, traditions and culture of Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Canada.
54. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development establish a stand-alone Indigenous Courses Policy independent of the restrictions and renewal obligations imposed by the local courses policy.
55. The Faculty of Education, Memorial University
  - a) continue to actively recruit and provide support for Indigenous teacher education candidates;
  - b) infuse appropriate knowledge and learning experiences in teacher education programs for teaching Indigenous students and teaching about Indigenous populations.
56. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in collaboration with other agencies and partners, provide cultural and linguistic support services for K – 12 Indigenous students going to school away from home communities. This would include safeguarding first language skills and providing adequate ESL skills to students to help them succeed in school.

## **Indigenous Education Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Based on conversations with representatives of the Intergovernmental and Indigenous Affairs Secretariat, Government of NL

<sup>2</sup> Mamu Tshishkutamashutau Innu Education School Board (2013)

<sup>3</sup> Government of NL (2015c)

<sup>4</sup> Godlewska et al. (2017) p.2

<sup>5</sup> United Nations (2008) p.2

<sup>6</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015)

<sup>7</sup> Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (n.d.a)

<sup>8</sup> See: Government of BC (2015a); Government of MN (2015); Government of ON (2017a)

<sup>9</sup> Dupuis & Abrams (2016)

<sup>10</sup> Battiste & Henderson (2009)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p.13

<sup>12</sup> Pete et al. (2013) p.103

## Chapter 6

# Multicultural Education

Multicultural education is important in this province for two reasons: many newcomers to Newfoundland and Labrador, especially refugees and those who do not speak English or French, require educational supports if they are to succeed in NL schools; and, students in NL need to learn about, and learn respect for, the many different cultures in the world. The task force considered both aspects of multicultural education.

In *Planning the future: A discussion guide for immigration in Newfoundland and Labrador* (2016), immigration was identified as crucial for the continued prosperity of NL and key to addressing the province's future "demographic and labour market challenges".<sup>1</sup> It can be expected that there will be increasing numbers of students in NL schools who come from different countries and cultures, and these students will require support from the NL education system.

### Canadian Context

Immigration allows Canada's population to grow and thrive. One in five Canadians is foreign born. Approximately 250,000 immigrants arrive in Canada each year, 50,000 of whom are school-aged children.<sup>2</sup>

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) describes multiculturalism as "acknowledging the existence of ethnic diversity and ensuring the rights of individuals to retain their culture [while] enjoying full access to, participation in, and adherence to constitutional principles and commonly shared values prevailing in society."<sup>3</sup> The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) reports that "a successful school and education system treats diversity as a source of potential growth rather than as an inherent hindrance to student performance [and uses] the strength and flexibility of its teachers to draw out this potential."<sup>4</sup> Canada, for almost 50 years, has embraced a policy of multiculturalism and inclusion that recognizes "the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation."<sup>5</sup> The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrines the rights and freedoms of all citizens.<sup>6</sup>

Research cautions Canadians not to assume that because the country's federal and provincial governments subscribe officially to multiculturalism that racism and discrimination do not exist across the nation.<sup>7</sup> Awareness exists about the importance of combatting ignorance of and racism against diverse cultures and practices. The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) has affirmed that all "13 educational jurisdictions...are committed to the elimination of discrimination in education at all levels".<sup>8</sup>

The process of promoting multiculturalism to students is difficult for teachers, obliging them to assume multiple roles including caring supportive citizen and advocate for social change in addition to qualified and competent teacher.<sup>9</sup>

Provinces and territories throughout Canada have developed policies and prepared documents that address multicultural education for all students. Ontario, Alberta and Nova Scotia have produced documents on multicultural education using a variety of terms, such as inter-cultural education, equity and diversity.<sup>10</sup> English or French as second language (or as another language) courses are offered in schools throughout the country. Academic bridging programs are also in place for newcomer learners who require foundational knowledge in literacy and mathematics to help them transition to the regular school curriculum in K – 12 schools.

## **NL Context**

Multicultural education deserves more attention as the number of newcomers increases and the province recognizes the importance of encouraging immigrant families to stay and contribute to the cultural diversity and economic prosperity of the province. While NL receives less than one percent of the overall Canadian number of immigrants, newcomers to this province have an impact on the communities where they reside and the schools their children attend. The number of immigrants arriving in NL annually is growing, almost doubling in number from 546 in 2007 to 1,122 in 2015. Nearly 70% of immigrants live in the northeast Avalon region with the remainder living in different parts of the province.<sup>11</sup> Newcomers are young, and many have families with young children. If NL is to encourage newcomers to settle and stay, it must respond to the educational needs of their children.

Services currently provided in K – 12 schools in NL include English as a Second Language (ESL) in eastern, central and western regions of the province, but not in Labrador. ESL students include international students, the children of foreign-born non-immigrant parents, international post-secondary students, voluntary immigrants, and refugees from war-torn and destabilized countries. Allocations for ESL teachers in the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLES) are linked to language assessments conducted by ESL teachers. Delays in assessment can result in students not receiving ESL services in a timely manner and an insufficient allocation of ESL teachers. This is particularly worrisome for refugees who have fled traumatic circumstances and find themselves unable to understand the language of instruction in schools. Statistics show that 495 ESL students in NL received services from 12 ESL teachers in 2015-2016, an average of more than 40 students per teacher. Most ESL teachers work as itinerants travelling to the schools and spending as little as two hours per cycle with students. High school services and teachers are centralized in one St. John's high school, Holy Heart, which students must attend if they are to receive specialized services. Teachers in the centralized model do not have to travel to teach their students, but students who live too far from the central location may not have a means of transportation to avail of the centralized services.

In addition to ESL courses, NL offers the Literacy Enrichment and Academic Readiness for Newcomers (LEARN) program in four junior high schools and one high school, all in the St. John's area. The LEARN program is designed for newcomers who do not have sufficient literacy or school experiences to transition to the regular curriculum. LEARN 1, offered in junior high or high school, addresses basic literacy and mathematics skills and is meant to be completed within two years. Students spend approximately one hour per day in the program and the rest of the school day in their regular classrooms. LEARN 2 includes courses in more advanced literacy

development, mathematics, social studies and science courses and is designed to enable students to transition to regular high school courses that lead to graduation. In the current school year, 90 students between the ages of 12 and 21 in five schools in the St. John's area are enrolled in the LEARN program. When students finish the LEARN programs they still require support to help them succeed with the regular curriculum.

From 2007 to 2012, the NL government employed a consultant dedicated to supporting multicultural education and ESL. Since 2012 the responsibility for multicultural education has been shared among program development specialists at EECD. Most documents and professional development resources available to NL teachers and schools date from 2010 and earlier. Since 2012 the number of immigrants has increased by 35% with many newcomers arriving from countries where English is not their language of communication. At the school district level, where hiring, professional development, and program delivery occur, there is no designated program specialist for ESL and the LEARN program. The programming for newcomers can default to special education personnel who are presented with challenges in assessing and addressing their needs.

NL's efforts in multicultural education rely on partnerships with agencies and organizations which respond to the needs of newcomers. The Association of New Canadians of NL (ANCNL) based in St. John's, is a federally funded agency that reports to the Department of Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).<sup>12</sup> ANCNL also receives financial aid from the provincial government and organizations such as the United Way. ANCNL offers services to refugees and immigrants in the Northeast Avalon, but does not formally work with 'visa or study visa' international students or their dependents. ANCNL also provides outreach to several communities in the province. ANCNL is an important partner for newcomer students because it works with families who need help navigating public systems including schools. In some cases, newcomers do not read or write in any language and have no experience with formal schooling. Through their Settlement Workers in the School (SWIS) program, the ANCNL, with the support of staff and volunteers, offers after-school homework programs one day a week in 26 schools in the St. John's metropolitan area. In 2015-16, they served over 350 newcomer students and their families including 114 Syrian children and youth.<sup>13</sup> ANCNL employs a dedicated worker at Holy Heart and Brother Rice schools. The association provides many supports for school-aged children such as weekend youth groups for junior high and senior high students, lunchtime gatherings, and multicultural celebrations and events. ANCNL staff work closely with teachers and school administrators and offer translation services for school meetings, but they do not go into classrooms. ANCNL receives support from EECD to operate after-school programs and provide a four-week long summer session using the LEARN program.

NL also recognizes the value in teaching students about multiculturalism and diversity in the classroom.<sup>14</sup> Religious education and social studies courses in particular address multiculturalism, and EECD's *Safe and Caring School Policy* condemns discrimination. Updated and improved curriculum guides and resources should reflect the changing cultural and religious realities of NL. Statistics Canada projects that by 2031 nearly 30% of Canadians will belong to a visible minority group; in NL that translates into thousands of citizens. Children born in 2017 will graduate in 2035 into a far more culturally diverse province.<sup>15</sup>

## **Consultations and Submissions**

NL faces many challenges in delivering and improving multicultural education. The concerns are twofold. One challenge is finding the resources and developing the expertise to respond to the educational needs of newcomer students from diverse linguistic, religious, cultural, educational, and social backgrounds in K - 12 schools in NL. Refugee children in particular experience difficulty in adapting to the school system. The second challenge is ensuring that schools are welcoming places for newcomers where they feel comfortable, respected and accepted, where teachers and students demonstrate inter-cultural competence, and where racism and discrimination are not tolerated.

In addressing the first challenge, contributors made many suggestions and observations about multicultural education. They expressed appreciation for the work of ESL and LEARN teachers and the generally positive learning environments in schools. They suggested, however, that ESL teachers and teachers in the LEARN program should acquire defined qualifications like those required of other specialized teachers. Commentators contended that the current ratio of one teacher to 40 children for ESL teachers does not adequately respond to the complex needs of newcomers, especially the refugees and the immigrants who are victims of trauma and who lack prior formal education experiences.

Contributors recommended that the LEARN program be available at more locations than the current five schools in the St. John's area and be expanded to include younger grades. They observed that housing is very expensive for newcomers in the centre of St. John's where high school ESL and LEARN services are located and lamented that students who live outside the area cannot avail of the services. They indicated that the current LEARN program does not adequately address the needs of older youth who may not complete the program before they exit the K – 12 school system and may find themselves underqualified to access post-secondary options including adult literacy programs.

High school student newcomers said they struggled with the financial burden of going to school. Some worked long hours to pay rent and buy bus passes to get to the one centralized high school with services. They had trouble planning for post-secondary studies. Some students lived alone without family or friends to give them guidance and support in their education. There was concern expressed that students who have difficulty in getting to high school because of transportation or related problems would drop out.

Newcomer students said they were planning to leave NL after high school to go to locations in Canada to seek work opportunities and be with family and friends. Immigrant students constitute a ready pool of potential permanent citizens of this province, who could contribute to NL's cultural and economic diversity. It is evident that deliberate steps will be necessary to entice them to remain in this province after they finish school.

The second challenge in multicultural education, according to commentators, was making sure that all students acquire accurate knowledge about and appreciation of diverse identities, cultures and practices. Contributors said that curriculum developers must ensure that guides and resources

support and reflect multicultural experiences. Other respondents expressed appreciation for the multicultural celebrations that occur in schools but said they would like to see more. Students, teachers and parents said they hoped for increased interaction between newcomer students and other students, but many felt that students were socializing more and commented that the current generation of young people seemed “less racist and discriminatory”. Parents said, “We need to keep teaching tolerance and acceptance in our schools to produce a generation of good people.”

Others commented that teachers in regular classrooms in NL would benefit from professional development to improve their inter-cultural competencies and teaching strategies to create more welcoming classrooms for newcomers. They recommended that the documents and programs on multiculturalism available on the EECD website be updated and revised. Contributors spoke of the need to establish ESL and multicultural education leadership positions in the school system to address multicultural education needs.

**“We need to keep teaching tolerance and acceptance in our schools to produce a generation of good people.”**

**Parent**

## **Towards Improvement**

NL is becoming increasingly diverse and multicultural. Multicultural education presents two main challenges for the province. One is how to better respond to the needs of multicultural students, particularly newcomers. The second challenge is to educate all students about diversity and multiculturalism. A provincial multiculturalism framework for education will enable a broad and meaningful directive to respond to both challenges.

It is essential that EECD and the school system designate individuals to assume a leadership role with reference to both aspects of multicultural education included in the framework. These positions would be responsible for ensuring that ESL and LEARN teachers possess the appropriate teacher credentials, and for providing the resources and supports to respond appropriately to the needs of newcomer students. They would also provide professional learning opportunities for classroom teachers who teach multicultural students and who teach about multiculturalism.

The ratio of ESL teachers to students requires improvement to address the complex needs of newcomers, particularly refugees who have little or no knowledge of English, have limited experiences with formal schooling, and who have experienced trauma in their previous environments. ESL and LEARN teachers who work directly with newcomers need improved initial teacher education and ongoing professional development, and they require support in assessing and responding appropriately to newcomer students' educational, social and psychological needs.

Newcomers encounter problems that extend beyond the purview of the education system but still affect their schooling success. The province must work together with other levels of government and agencies to reduce or eliminate barriers that impede newcomers' access to services.

## **Recommendations for Multicultural Education**

57. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a framework document for multicultural education that will articulate a plan:
  - a) to address the needs of multicultural students; and,
  - b) to ensure that all students learn about multiculturalism.
58. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the school districts designate individuals in leadership positions in their respective organizations to have responsibility for multicultural education to ensure that specialist teachers and classroom teachers receive the direction, support and resources they need:
  - a) to teach multicultural students, and
  - b) to teach about multiculturalism.
59. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development enhance ESL and LEARN programs by:
  - a) improving the pupil-teacher ratio of ESL teachers to reflect the complex needs of newcomers;
  - b) examining ways to extend access to ESL and LEARN programming in more areas of Newfoundland and Labrador; and
  - c) establishing standards for the qualifications of ESL and LEARN teachers.
60. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour develop and implement educational options for young newcomers who exit the K – 12 system before they acquire sufficient credentials to access post-secondary or adult literacy programs.
61. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development collaborate with the school districts, government departments and agencies, and non-governmental organizations to remove systemic barriers that prevent newcomers from accessing educational opportunities.

### **Multicultural Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Government of NL (2016c)

<sup>2</sup> Statistics Canada (2016)

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO (n.d.)

<sup>4</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2010)

<sup>5</sup> Government of Canada (2012)

<sup>6</sup> Government of Canada (n.d.)

<sup>7</sup> Galczynski et al. (2011)

<sup>8</sup> Council of Ministers of Education Canada (2012b)

<sup>9</sup> Galczynski et al. (2011)

<sup>10</sup> Government of AB (2015); Government of NS (2011a&b); Government of ON (2014)

<sup>11</sup> Government of NL (2017a)

<sup>12</sup> Association for New Canadians (2016a)

<sup>13</sup> Association for New Canadians (2016b)

<sup>14</sup> Government of NL (2017a)

<sup>15</sup> Statistics Canada (2010)

## **Chapter 7** **Early Years**

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has a long history of providing a range of programs and services for young children and their families, while striving to increase access to affordable, high quality child care.

Recent government initiatives reflect an understanding of the significance of the early years and a commitment to early learning. Department structures have been reorganized bringing early learning and child care into the same ministry with K – 12 education. In 2016 the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) implemented full-day kindergarten province-wide.

Research supports the importance of the early years to success in school and in later life. Children who have high quality early childhood education experiences before the age of five have improved language skills, social skills, and self-regulation, a term which encompasses self-awareness, self-motivation and emotional management.<sup>1</sup> There is also evidence that early childhood programs promote the development of literacy and numeracy skills. All of these skills are transferable and enable children to function independently and well in the school environment, contributing to their subsequent academic learning and emotional well-being.<sup>2</sup> A focus on high quality education and intervention during the early years, when needed, is pre-emptive to later reliance on support services. High quality early learning and child care is an investment in improved educational and social outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

### **Canadian Context**

Every province and territory in Canada is involved in strengthening their early learning sectors and most, including NL, have combined child care, support for families and education in one ministry. All provinces are engaged in expanding public early years education for younger children in some way, and most are implementing some form of school-based early childhood education program for four-year-olds. Ontario has province-wide junior kindergarten and the Northwest Territories and Nova Scotia are in the process of phasing it in. These regions started where capacity existed and where the need was greatest, grouping four- and five-year-olds together in a two-year intentional play-based curriculum taught by early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers. A comprehensive overview of early years programs in Canada is available in *The Early Childhood Education Report, 2014*.<sup>4</sup>

### **Atlantic Canadian Initiatives**

Each of the Atlantic provinces has an interest in collaborating on the early years. Challenges in the region, such as dispersed and small populations, are similar. With the support of philanthropic foundations, early childhood learning directors have been meeting regularly, sharing information and knowledge. The provinces are working toward improving the quality of child care services,

building professional learning experiences for early childhood educators and developing early identification and intervention approaches. In August 2017, the group, with representatives from each of their provinces, is hosting the first *Atlantic Institute on Early Learning and Care* to continue dialogue on policy development and research opportunities, as well as more formalized Atlantic collaboration.

## NL Context

In 2004 the Department of Education expanded its role beyond K - 12 by creating a Division of Early Childhood Learning. In 2014 the Division of Family and Child Development, with a mandate for child care and family resource centres, was incorporated into a renamed Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD).

Child care for children below school age (0-5) is governed by the *Child Care Services Act (1998)*. In NL 37% of children aged 0 to 4 attend regulated programs in a child care centre or a private home, either full- or part-time. There is space for a larger number, 41.6%.

**Table 7.1**  
**Regulated Early Learning Enrolments\***

Region	Child Care Centres				Licensed Family Child Care Homes			
	Centres	Capacity	Centres which reported	Enrolment	Homes	Capacity	Homes which reported	Enrolment
Eastern	116	4 756	110	4 115	94	508	85	445
Central	48	1 453	48	1 350	25	141	25	137
Western	29	701	25	639	36	213	36	240
Labrador	13	387	13	341	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>7 297</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>6 445</b>	<b>155</b>	<b>862</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>822</b>

\* most recent data available (January 2016) as submitted by operators. Some data missing.

The remaining children are being cared for in their own homes or through private arrangements. In addition, there are 31 family resource centres from which 123 satellite programs are operated across the province. These function on a part-time basis for families who visit with their young children. The range of programs and services offered depends on the identified needs of a particular community. Family resource centre programs are well attended and held in high regard by both the families who visit and the communities in which they operate.

All early childhood and child care programs which serve three infants, or four or more children, without their legal guardians for nine hours a week or more are governed by the provisions of child care legislation. The provisions set out minimum required standards for the physical environment, staff qualifications, staff-to-child ratios, equipment, and programming, and the regulations are enforced by regional child care services staff.

In 2012 government launched a child care strategy entitled: *Caring for Our Future: Provincial Strategy for Quality, Sufficient and Affordable Child Care in Newfoundland and Labrador 2012-2022*.<sup>5</sup> The strategy was built on three key pillars - quality, sufficiency and affordability, and aimed to strengthen the child care system in NL.

EECD is developing a provincial framework to outline a pedagogical approach to early childhood learning with focus on play-based learning, the importance of the role of adults in supporting children's early learning, a holistic approach to children's development and learning, and inclusion of children with exceptionalities. The framework includes a priority focus on emergent literacy skills and learning goals for children across all their environments – home, child care settings, community, and school.

EECD offers a KinderStart program as a transition to school experience for four-year-olds. Several times during the school year children and their parents attend a 2.5 hour session in the kindergarten environment with the kindergarten teacher. Kindergarten children do not come to school on those days to allow space for the four-year-olds.

EECD maintains a website with information on early childhood development and learning. EECD also distributes parent resource kits to families of children at different stages from birth to age three to increase access to developmentally appropriate materials and to enhance the consistency of information provided on early childhood learning.

## **Early Childhood Educators**

The Association of Early Child Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador (AECNL), the professional association for qualified early childhood educators, provides professional development programs for its members and implements a legislated certification system. Those working in the early childhood education sector can range from having entry level credentials (42%) to having Level IV certification (4%).

**Table 7.2**  
**Certification Levels of Early Child Educators**

<b>Certification Level</b>	<b>Number of Early Child Educators</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
entry	446	42%
I	98	9%
II	421	40%
III	56	5%
IV	41	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1 062</b>	

All certified early childhood educators must participate in ongoing education to maintain their credentials.

Despite the inherent rigour in attaining and maintaining certification, a long-standing move to professionalize the sector, and a wage supplement paid directly to educators and operators with a minimum of Level I certification, the prospect of low wages offers little incentive to those working in the field to improve their qualifications. The College of the North Atlantic offers a one-year diploma and a two-year certificate in Early Childhood Education. The Faculty of Education at Memorial University does not offer any courses or programs specific to the pre-school years. There is no provincial post-secondary opportunity to acquire additional certification higher than the two-year program at the College of the North Atlantic, and there is no wage incentive for those with a Level I certification to attain higher levels.

## **Issues in Providing Educational Programs for Early Learning in NL**

### **Space**

Families having fewer children and years of out-migration have resulted in many rural communities having such small populations of children that the viability of schools is uncertain. (See Table 7.3.) Conversely in urban areas such as metro St. John's there is a growing student population. Having sufficient enrolments and creating appropriate space are challenges in expanding public education to include programming for children before five years of age.

Table 7.3 illustrates the declining numbers of children in many smaller communities: 62 schools have fewer than 15 four- and five-year-olds, and 41 of them have fewer than 10. In fact, there are 30 schools with fewer than five four- and five-year-olds and 43 schools have fewer than five incoming kindergarten students.

**Table 7.3**  
**Schools with Low Populations of Four- and Five-Year-olds**

Region	Number of Schools			Fewer than 5 Kinderstart participants
	Fewer than 15	Fewer than 10	Fewer than 5	
Eastern	4	4	2	4
Central	22	17	12	18
Western	23	18	10	13
Labrador	10	8	5	5
CSFP <sup>6</sup>	3	2	1	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>43</b>

### **Affordability**

In NL, most child care centres are privately owned and operated. Affordability of and accessibility to early learning programs are significant challenges for many families.

In addition to a means-based subsidy program, government established an Operating Grant Program in 2014 designed to create access to affordable child care programs and to define and ensure quality of programs. Centres that choose to participate in the program receive an annual operating grant with the proviso that fees are capped, and standards for salaries and quality are maintained. Centres availing of the operating grants program are increasing.

### **Identification and Intervention**

Early identification and intervention is one of the best predictors of school success for children with disabilities and/or those who are ‘at risk’. Government has made a commitment to begin implementation of a health risk assessment tool for school-aged children to guide provision of supports for healthy child development.<sup>7</sup> Beginning this process during the early years would allow intervention to begin earlier.

**“...the insights of the early childhood educator are not part of the school transition... there is a huge disconnect between the school and the early childhood educator.”**

**Educator**

### **Consultations and Submissions**

Presentations to the task force in public sessions, briefs and meetings indicated that citizens of this province are well aware of the importance of the early years, especially with reference to supporting young families and promoting school readiness skills. Educators spoke of the relationship between early learning experiences and later school success. Parents and teachers recognized that early years programs provide opportunities for early identification and intervention for children with developmental needs.

Teachers of full-day kindergarten pointed to the value of having the extra half day with young children to identify and provide interventions for social and emotional needs which can improve children’s readiness for learning in the school environment. There was recognition of the benefits of play-based learning.

Integrated governance is new to EECD and there are numerous points of intersection between the Division of Early Learning and other divisions of EECD. Opportunities to study and strengthen integration will arise as EECD continues to make this transition. One example is the absence of continuity between early childhood experiences in day care centres and the K - 12 education system. Many children spend a number of years in these centres and when they move into kindergarten the knowledge that early childhood educators have acquired about children is not transferred to schools, a particular concern for children with identified needs. Many children lose the services they were receiving when they enter school and must wait for the school system to do its own assessment and program planning.

## **Towards Improvement**

The issues presented identified the importance of focusing on the early years to improving educational outcomes. The *Schools Act (1997)* defines a 'student' as being 5 years of age and older by December 31 of a school year. This precludes schools from providing any service to children under school age unless a parent is present. The incorporation of responsibility for early years programs and services into the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has the potential to facilitate the development of school-based programming for children under school age if the *Schools Act (1997)* were amended.

Integrated governance and an amended *Schools Act (1997)* also create opportunities to strengthen transition planning so that knowledge of a young child's development gathered during the early years, especially for those with identified individual needs, becomes a part of their educational file and moves with them into kindergarten.

Transition planning is also required at EECD to strengthen the relationship among the divisions of curriculum, evaluation and the early years to ensure a learning continuum with effective communication and planning, and fluid delivery of programs. Other provinces are realizing that bringing early learning into ministries of education involves more than co-housing the two previously separate sectors. Policies and procedures for program planning, evaluation and communication are required to create a seamless system of support. Early years programs provide an opportunity for early identification and intervention that could have an impact on programs and services in the K - 12 system, especially special education and mental health services.

As EECD considers educational opportunities for the early years, it can look to other Canadian jurisdictions that are developing publicly funded services for four-year-olds. Models of phased-in junior kindergarten, as evident in Ontario and the Northwest Territories, provide examples for this province.

There is a school with primary grades within reach of every four-year-old child in NL. Many of the schools have capacity and low and/or declining enrolment, and could accommodate low numbers of early learners. In 2016, there were 43 schools with fewer than five students registered for kindergarten the following year. These low enrolments provide an opportunity to build downwards from the kindergarten program to include four-year-olds. Delivering programs in schools is particularly important in communities where there are few early learning programs. In examining options for a junior kindergarten program, qualifications for early childhood educators and financial incentives require consideration.

Analysis of the issues also pointed to the value of strengthening the child care centre Operating Grants Program which ensures high quality support for preschool children in more affordable sites. While families should always have a choice over how to care for their young children, those who need child care should have access to affordable, high quality programs, delivered by well-educated early childhood educators.

High quality early learning programs benefit all children, and benefit those at risk of school failure disproportionately. Early learning programs offer opportunities to stimulate language, cognitive, and social skill development, setting children up for success for learning in the school environment. They constitute a recognized strategy for improving the educational outcomes for children from challenging backgrounds who have persistently scored poorly on provincial and pan-Canadian academic assessments, struggle in school, and drop out in larger numbers.

Alignment of services for young children in NL with those available in other regions of Canada is essential if NL is to keep pace. NL was the last province in the Atlantic region and the seventh in Canada, to implement full-day kindergarten for five year olds. NL can take advantage of opportunities to collaborate with other provinces, especially those in Atlantic Canada which face similar challenges, to develop programs and services for pre-school children.



## **Recommendations for Early Years**

62. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development amend the *Schools Act (1997)* to enable schools to offer programs for pre-school aged children.
63. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop and implement a protocol to ensure a fluid and effective transfer of knowledge and transition of services for children, especially those receiving early intervention services, moving from early years programs to kindergarten.
64. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a plan to establish strong linkages, including communication and planning protocols, among the department divisions, where there is an intersection between early years policy and programs and the K - 12 education system.
65. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop and release by June 2019, a foundational document with an implementation plan for a junior kindergarten program that would be accessible to all four-year-old children in Newfoundland and Labrador, using the phased-in approach and other lessons learned from the models in Ontario and the Northwest Territories.
66. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development expand the Operating Grants Program to increase access to affordable, high quality early learning and child care programs.
67. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development collaborate with the other Atlantic provinces to develop professional learning opportunities on self-regulation and play-based learning, common early learning program frameworks, and education programs for early childhood educators.
68. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development include relevant child development data collected during the early years in the early identification data repository outlined in Recommendation 13.
69. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop financial incentives and opportunities for early childhood educators to improve their professional education levels including linking certificate and diploma programs to university degree programs.

### **Early Years Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> See: McCain et al. (2011); Melhuish et al. (2012, 2016); Pascal (2009); Pelletier (2012, 2017) & Sylva et al. (2004, 2009, 2010, 2014)

<sup>2</sup> Zimmerman (2002)

<sup>3</sup> Alexander (2012)

<sup>4</sup> [www.ecereport.ca](http://www.ecereport.ca)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/publications/childcare/caring\\_for\\_our\\_future.pdf](http://www.ed.gov.nl.ca/edu/publications/childcare/caring_for_our_future.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial de Terra-Neuve-et-Labrador

<sup>7</sup> Government of NL (2017a) p.57

## Chapter 8

# Career and Co-Operative Education

Career guidance courses, co-operative education, and apprenticeship training can all provide information and experiences which help students make informed educational, career, and employment choices. There is support and demand for career information and counselling. However, in Newfoundland and Labrador the career education course, although mandatory, is not seen as being valuable, and co-operative and apprenticeship programs have proven difficult to implement and sustain.

### Canadian Context

Career education can “yield large returns by developing the career-related skills, self-awareness and self-esteem which lead to rewarding choices” according to the Organization of Economic and Cultural Development (OECD).<sup>1</sup> Throughout Canada, provinces such as Ontario, British Columbia and Prince Edward Island offer students two options for credit, namely, in-class career education courses or a combination of in-class courses with co-operative education job experiences. Apprenticeship training, another form of career education, is available in many jurisdictions. In Alberta, high school students can complete credit courses in trades that result in valid trade credentials upon high school graduation. In New Brunswick, industry offers high school students paid apprenticeship work placements during the summer months. Manitoba provides a high school apprenticeship program that combines regular classroom instruction with trade related work placements to be completed outside school hours.<sup>2</sup>

The Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET) describes career development [as] “focused on understanding … labour market complexities, and ensuring individuals have the critical knowledge to effectively navigate educational and employment choices, transitions and progression”.<sup>3</sup> In 2015 CAMET commissioned a report that set forth goals for career development in Atlantic Canada that included: adopting a whole school approach to exploring career education themes; implementing age-appropriate career development courses, services and supports; promoting career development as an integral part of student learning; providing opportunities for students to engage in experiential learning in their communities; and ensuring that each student graduates with a personal career plan. The report emphasized the need for educators to participate in high quality professional learning experiences and to be aware of current career and labour market information. Other CAMET initiatives include a pilot of an Atlantic Canada Career Week and inter-provincial collaboration on a Framework of Career Competencies.<sup>4</sup> In NL the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (EECD) has indicated its support for the recommendations of the CAMET report.

Research reveals that for high school students at risk of dropping out, co-operative education experiences can provide them with a “heightened and sustained sense for the value of pursuing education and training beyond a high school diploma.”<sup>5</sup> But research cautions that employers often prefer employing “high achieving students.”<sup>6</sup>

## **NL Context**

The NL Department of Education Foundation Document for the Career Development Curriculum – Draft (2015) defines career development as a life-long, on-going process that involves personal, family, and community learning experiences which influence the choices learners make about schooling, career aspirations, changing circumstances, and quality of life. *The Way Forward*<sup>7</sup> identifies career education as important, especially for disengaged and at-risk students.

NL once supported a co-operative education program sustained in large measure by federal grants. In 1997, 49 schools and 1,200 students in NL participated in co-operative education at the high school level. In 2017, co-operative education programs in NL no longer exist. The disappearance of the programs has occurred for many reasons including a decline in financial support, increased difficulty in finding student work placements, problems with transporting students to and from work sites, and heightened concerns for student safety on the job.

In 2012, NL launched an apprenticeship program for high school students as a pilot initiative in nine locations in the province. Participating students did not receive high school credits but they gained apprenticeship credit to be transferred to their post-secondary studies after graduation. The College of the North Atlantic agreed to formally recognize the students' work experiences and to guarantee them a placement to continue their trade studies. Despite great enthusiasm for the project at the outset, the apprenticeship pilot no longer exists. Problems included transportation and safety issues, and the difficulty of securing work placements with employers who received no financial incentives to hire high school students, as they do for post-secondary apprentices.

Career Development 2201, a high school course, is mandatory for graduation in NL and includes a volunteering requirement. Employment and Labour Skills 1106, a course introduced in 2013, exists on paper but has had no enrolment since its inception. Intermediate schools (Grades 7 – 9) offer a module on career development. At the elementary level, a career education module is being piloted in three schools and there is a plan for province-wide implementation.

There are also career awareness initiatives in NL schools, often led by guidance counsellors. Interactive computer software programs are available to students in all schools in grade 7 to the end of high school to help them explore career options. The NL Department of Advanced Education, Skills, and Labour (AESL) works with Skills Canada, a non-profit organization, to partner with school authorities and businesses to organize and deliver forums, visits, and competitions that focus on skills and career planning. Skills Canada programs promote the participation of females in the trades.

## **Consultations and Submissions**

In the task force online surveys, students identified career and co-operative education as an important area of interest to them. They differed in their opinions, however, with only about 50% of respondents seeing any value for career preparation in the current volunteering requirement, or in the career online tools and high school course offerings. Over 80% of respondents, in contrast, indicated a desire to experience real work opportunities during high school. In focus groups,

students showed little knowledge about co-operative education possibilities, but they complained about the mandatory high school course, Career Development 2201, saying it occurred too late in their schooling to be of value, and in their opinion was a waste of time and “useless”. They claimed the course did not provide the information they needed for life – the practical skills to find work, do taxes, manage personal finances, and live independently. Students thought opportunities to engage in real work including job shadowing, skilled trades experience, and mentoring programs in their communities would be meaningful.

Teacher surveys mirrored the students’ opinions with concern expressed about the integrity and value of the current career course offerings in high school and the need to provide students with better career planning tools and opportunities for authentic career experiences. During the in-person consultations, teachers advocated for topics such as self-esteem and self-efficacy in the early grades and for financial literacy and life skills for grades 7 - 12. They suggested utilizing a semester-based approach to offer out-of-school work experiences for high school students.

Parent surveys indicated support for a financial literacy component in career education courses and more student exposure to career options. In submissions and presentations, when career and co-operative education were mentioned, the public also emphasized the importance of teaching financial management to students and communicating to them the financial implications associated with their career choices. Meetings with stakeholders such as post-secondary officials revealed the importance of students’ receiving the correct information about the high school courses needed for the careers they were pursuing. For example, many university programs require students to complete advanced mathematics as a pre-requisite. Many skilled trades programs require students to have completed academic mathematics although colleges accept applicants with basic mathematics credits. This important information is either unavailable to students or they do not consider it when choosing high school math courses.

## **Towards Improvement**

Effective career and co-operative education provides students with information and experience in a wide range of career options, creates awareness of the kinds of careers which might appeal to students, and directs students to the courses they should pursue in school to prepare them to enter post-secondary programs. The lack of information or incorrect information about requirements to enter some programs at the College of the North Atlantic and Memorial University and other post-secondary institutions must be redressed.

Career choices and planning, personal financial management, and job application skills are among the topics and experiences of value to students in preparing them for participation in the world of work. Providing learning experiences on career choices, even if only a course in career education, would be meaningful if presented early in the school curriculum and if the content were useful.

If experiential components of career education are to be realized, partnerships are essential to creating viable programs. Federal agreements and partnerships with local businesses are vehicles for sustainability of career education. There is value in exploring other options as new and small business developments in the province start up.



## **Recommendations for Career and Co-operative Education**

70. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development continue to use the CAMET 2015 report “Career Education in Atlantic Canada” as foundational for career and co-operative education in Newfoundland and Labrador.
71. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop partnerships with other provincial government departments, federal government agencies, post-secondary institutions, industry and organizations, to support dynamic high school co-operative education and apprenticeship programs in Newfoundland and Labrador.
72. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the school districts develop communication strategies directed at high school students on information about program requirements at the College of the North Atlantic and Memorial University.
73. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development discontinue Career Education 2201.
74. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development create a course in career education, to be offered at the Grade 8 level, with a component focusing on informed selection of senior high school courses.

### **Career and Co-operative Education Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Organization for Economic Cooperation Development (2011)

<sup>2</sup> See: Government of AB (2017); Government of MN (2017); Government of NB (2017); Government of ON (2016); Government of PEI (2007)

<sup>3</sup> Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education (2015) p.x

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Gemici & Rojewski (2010) p.253

<sup>6</sup> Taylor (2006) p.50

<sup>7</sup> Government of NL (2017a)

## **Chapter 9**

# **Teacher Education and Professional Development**

Teachers have a profound impact on student learning. Investment in teachers from the beginning of their teacher education programs and throughout their careers is directly related to improved educational outcomes for students.<sup>1</sup>

There are two components to teacher education, initial education through university degree programs, and subsequent professional development programs for teachers after they have begun their teaching careers. The degree program includes courses in child or adolescent development, teaching methodologies, learning theory and a school practicum. Professional development offers a range of educational experiences which enable teachers to become proficient in teaching new curriculum and to be current in emerging issues and new policies.

Effective teacher professional development (sometimes referred to as professional learning<sup>2</sup>) has three pillars:<sup>3</sup>

1. quality (is evidence based, has subject and pedagogical content, focuses on student outcomes, meets teacher and system needs);
2. design (engages teachers, is collaborative); and,
3. support and sustainability (is ongoing, is resourced, and engages leaders).

Collaborative professional development, such as workshops and peer working groups, is most effective for teacher learning and for student outcomes. Sustainability requires dedicated resources (personnel, time and money). It also requires support for school administrators and other teacher leaders who are in the best position to foster a culture of teacher and student learning in schools. System- and school-directed professional development is essential for implementation of new curricula, policies and emerging educational realities. The link between teacher professional development and student outcomes is well documented.<sup>4</sup>

### **Canadian Context**

Many Canadian provinces and territories have developed professional development policy statements which reflect the current research that effective professional development is collaborative, sustainable and resourced. These include, for example, The Professional Learning Report (PEI), A Working Table on Teacher Development (ON), Alberta Consortium (AB), and Provincial Curriculum Days (BC).

### **NL Context**

#### **Sources of Teacher Education**

The main sources of teacher education and professional development available to teachers in NL are the Faculty of Education at Memorial University, the Department of Education and Early

Childhood Development, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association and both school districts.

**The Faculty of Education** plays a significant role in teacher education. Over ninety per cent of teachers in NL receive their initial teacher education degrees from Memorial University. The degree requirements are the domain of the university and satisfy the regulations for teacher certification governed by the *Teacher Training Act*. The Faculty's graduate degrees are an important source of professional development providing advanced learning and creating opportunities for career advancement. There is a financial incentive for teachers to complete a graduate program.

**The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's (EECD)** role in delivering professional development is focused on the implementation of new curriculum and policies in areas such as safe and caring schools and inclusion. Program development specialists in EECD are expected to work with district program specialists to facilitate the development and delivery of professional development for new curriculum implementations.

**The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers` Association (NLTA)** supports professional development through the development and delivery of a range of sessions and programs. The NLTA's network of special interest councils, each with a common educational focus, provides a vehicle for professional development and support.

**The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESĐ)**, in addition to collaboration with EECD for delivery of professional development for new curriculum, also develops and implements professional development to align with its strategic plan which identifies areas of professional development needs, such as literacy, math and safe and caring schools. Regions of the district also set priorities which are informed by multiple sources of data including school development plans, teacher professional growth plans, innovations, and topics identified by teachers, such as student mental health needs.

**Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial (CSFP)** and EECD collaborate on professional development for CSFP teachers to respond to their specialized needs.

## **Models of Professional Development Delivery**

As a follow up to the 1992 Royal Commission on Education,<sup>5</sup> the Department of Education created a Professional Development Centre with professional and financial responsibility shared among the major stakeholders: Department of Education, Faculty of Education, NLTA, school districts, and the Newfoundland and Labrador School Boards Association (NLSBA). However, within two years the Centre floundered.

In 1999, the report of an Advisory Committee on the Coordination of Professional Development<sup>6</sup> affirmed principles of professional development: accessibility, affordability, sustainability and relevancy. The Committee recommended that recognition for professional development should include incentives, rewards, and certification. The Committee also recommended that a process

be developed for monitoring, assessing, and evaluating the various professional development initiatives to determine their impact on learners (teachers and students) and on the education system.

The Committee further recommended a provincial coordinating board for teacher professional development, composed of senior decision makers. This was the genesis of the Professional Development Alliance (PDA), a consortium comprising senior representatives from the Department of Education, school districts, Faculty of Education, NLSBA and the NLTA as recommended in *Supporting Learning: The Report of the Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom*<sup>7</sup>

The principles of the PDA were that professional development: requires resources; engages individuals; supports continual renewal; has broad choice; is responsive to teacher and student learning needs; is linked to student success and outcomes; is sustainable, relevant and accessible; is embedded in teacher work; and has incentives and rewards for teachers.

Despite agreement, collaboration, and an enormous use of resources, the PDA, like its predecessor Professional Development Centre, was not successful largely because no resources were attached to the initiative, no one agency was designated or accepted the leadership role, and there was no champion for the project.

NL, in keeping with current research and professional development models in other Canadian jurisdictions, has moved from a ‘one-size-fits-all’ model<sup>8</sup> to one which espouses three principles: occurs in community and is collaborative; is guided by teacher and student learning needs; and is designed to foster change in practice.

## **Consultations and Submissions**

### **Initial Teacher Education**

The NLESĐ reported that new teachers lack competencies in high need areas, most especially, reading, inclusive education and mathematics, creating a gap between the teaching needs of the school system and the competencies of newly certified teachers. Additionally, new teachers are often unprepared for the complexities of classrooms and experience difficulty in creating an effective learning environment. The NLESĐ recognized that new teachers deserve support and mentorship which is not always available. The NLESĐ, in addition to its responsibility for ongoing professional development for emerging, identified and strategic areas, must provide professional development to new teachers in these high need areas.

EECD referenced requests to the Faculty of Education (Memorial) for changes in teacher education programs but these have not been realized. The Faculty has not taken action on many recommendations in reports for changes in teacher education programs.<sup>9</sup> The Faculty of Education is the provider of 90% of the teachers with the NLESĐ, but at present there is no imperative for the Faculty to align its programs with the needs of the system. A formalized protocol between the Faculty and NLESĐ could address this issue.

**“Many decisions about PD are far removed from the realities of the classroom... It is somebody else’s choice, rarely the teacher’s.”**

Teacher

**“We are often forced to sit in on sessions that we feel are irrelevant or to listen to things we already know.”**

Teacher

The NLESĐ called for a review of “teacher certification regulations and the function of the Teacher Certification Committee... A jurisdictional analysis should be conducted to review governance of Teacher Certification in other Canadian provinces.” Similarly, EECD, in the absence of foreseeable change in teacher education programs, suggested to the task force that the Teacher Certification Committee should provide the requirements for the competencies of beginning teachers.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development provided by the NLTA through Special Interest Councils was highly rated particularly by school administrators. Special Interest Councils are responsive to the needs of a group of individuals with common goals, and the sessions are planned and delivered in collaborative formats which are highly valued by teachers.

Teachers acknowledged there has been improvement in the number of days provided, and timeliness and delivery, but positive feedback on professional development was limited to these items. Teachers and administrators made suggestions for improvement: more face to face professional development; professional development for new programs to occur prior to school opening in September; greater teacher choice which at present is minimal or negligible, and more relevant offerings. Teachers spoke about too much professional development being mandated for teachers who do not need it, and there is not enough professional development in subject areas where teachers need support. Teachers want to make decisions about professional development.

Administrators favour professional development that enables them to support teachers and student learning, and creates and sustains a culture of improvement throughout the school.

The misalignment of teacher qualifications and teaching assignment was identified in *A Consultation Paper on Teacher Certification and Professional Development, 1995*.<sup>10</sup> In the school year 2016-17, 45% of those teaching mathematics in high school did not have a major/minor in the subject, and in science 42% were teaching the subject

without a major/minor. Issues of misalignment, particularly at the intermediate and senior high levels (Grades 7 - 12), cannot always be redressed with closer alignment of teacher qualifications and teacher assignment, but professional development can support teachers and improve teaching effectiveness. At the primary/elementary level, 6% of teachers have a major/minor in mathematics. These teachers are a significant resource for providing professional development for their colleagues.

In its submission to the Task Force, the NLTA made the following recommendations to address professional development:

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

## **Towards Improvement**

### **Initial Teacher Education**

The requirements of teacher education degree programs are the domain of the university, and certification of new teachers is the legislated responsibility of the Teacher Certification Committee (TCC). The TCC was established in 1969 and is currently composed of the Registrar (Chairperson, appointed by the Minister), one representative from EECD and two representatives from each of the following: NLTA, Faculty of Education (Memorial University) and the NLSBA. The composition of the TCC has not changed since its inception except to remove denominational educational representatives following education reform in 1996.

The TCC is a statutory committee established under the *Teacher Training Act* (in force since 1969) with a mandate to, subject to approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council, make regulations to prescribe academic and professional standards in the training, examining, grading, certification and licensing of teachers (Section 11 of the *Act*). Sections 5-9 of the *Teacher Certification Regulations* specify the course requirements for teacher certification for the different certification levels. The present regulations mandate for example that a Certificate V teaching certificate for new primary/elementary teachers include ten courses in subjects taught in schools in the province of NL, eighteen courses in primary or elementary education, and a student-teaching practicum.

### **Professional Development**

It is possible that the reason for the two failed attempts of the four educational agencies to collaborate on professional development (Professional Development Centre, Professional Development Alliance) was the lack of clarity about the issues for professional development. The five leadership organizations (EECD, NLTA, NLES, CSFP, and Memorial's Faculty of Education) now have the benefit of knowing professional development needs as presented in this report. With shared resources and strategic leadership from the five organizations, a third attempt at collaboration in professional development should result in success.

### **Meeting System Needs**

Teachers, the NLES defence and EECD identified issues in professional development and teacher education. The issues indicate the need for: a) a review of the standards for teacher certification to determine the alignment between the requirements for certification, the needs of the school system and initial teacher education programs; b) provision of professional development which reflects current knowledge on the quality and sustainability of professional development; and c) a protocol establishing a formalized arrangement between the NLES defence (employer) and the Faculty of Education (provider).

### **Review of Legislation**

The *Teacher Training Act* has had amendments but there has not been a full review of the Act. It is timely to undertake a review of the *Teacher Training Act*.

## **Recommendations for Teacher Education and Professional Development**

75. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development undertake an independent jurisdictional and substantive review of the Standards for Teacher Certification to be completed by Spring, 2018.
76. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development hold an annual meeting with the Faculty of Education to discuss alignment of teacher education programs with the needs of the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador.
77. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial, the Faculty of Education, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association provide leadership and resources to achieve the principles of professional development as envisioned in the Professional Development Alliance and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development model for professional development, particularly sustainability, relevance, and adequate resourcing.
78. The Faculty of Education review recommendations addressed to the Faculty of Education in *Toward an Achieving Society, Special Matters, Focusing on Students, and Now is the Time*, and provide a response by June 2018 to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial and the Provost of Memorial University on intended changes and/or rationale where changes will not be made.
79. The Deputy Minister, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, transmit a copy of *Report of the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes, Now is the Time*, to the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University, with a listing of recommendations applicable to the Faculty of Education.
80. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development undertake a full review of the *Teacher Training Act*.

## **Teacher Education and Professional Development Endnotes**

<sup>1</sup> Fullan & Hargreaves (2016) p.1

<sup>2</sup> For the distinction and overlap between professional development and professional learning see Fullan & Hargreaves (2016) p.3

<sup>3</sup> Professional Learning Association (2016)

<sup>4</sup> See: Antoniou & Kyriakides (2013); Baird (2016)

<sup>5</sup> Government of NL (1992)

<sup>6</sup> Government of NL (1999)

<sup>7</sup> Government of NL (2000)

<sup>8</sup> Government of NL (2017d)

<sup>9</sup> See: Government of NL (1989) Recommendations 13.9 & 13.10; Government of NL (1996) Recommendations 21, 120, 132, 172; Government of NL (2007a) Recommendation 57

<sup>10</sup> Government of NL (1995)

## Implementation of the Education Action Plan

*Our Children Our Future* (1992) and *Supporting Learning* (2000) are notable for the successful implementation of their recommendations. What these education reports had in common was the appointment of an educational leader who was responsible for overseeing implementation.

### Recommendations for Implementation of the Education Action Plan

81. The Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador appoint a steering committee to oversee the implementation of the Education Action Plan.
82. The Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador appoint an educational leader, reporting to the Clerk of the Executive Council, to lead implementation of the Education Action Plan.



## **Conclusion**

It is a good thing to take stock periodically. There is a tendency in large systems to keep doing business as usual unless there is a prompt for change. Government provided such a prompt for educational change in establishing the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes.

The task force considered the topics in the mandate: early learning, mathematics, reading/literacy, inclusive education, student mental health and wellness, multicultural education, co-operative education, Indigenous education, and teacher education and professional development. It is clear that the present model of inclusion, student mental health and wellness, underachievement in mathematics and reading, and Indigenous education require immediate and substantial attention.

On the surface, the topics in the mandate appear to be distinct. But they are not. They intersect in the lives of children and adolescents, their families and their communities, and they are connected to the broader system of education where the arts, physical education, science, social studies, literature, values, and twenty-first century learning flourish.

Now is the time to improve educational outcomes and to begin the next chapter in education in Newfoundland and Labrador.



# List of Recommendations

## Chapter 1: Inclusive Education

1. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, within one year of the release of this report, rescind the 1996 Special Education Policy (draft) and develop a new “Student Support Services Policy” that articulates how to implement a model of student support services, independent of a philosophy of inclusion. This new policy would effectively address each of the main themes identified in this chapter and have a particular focus on:
  - a) effectively using small group instruction, both in and out of the regular classroom
  - b) establishing appropriate, individual programs that ensure all children are in school for a full day and prevent children from being sent home
  - c) defining complex needs with an interdepartmental commitment to reactivate the Individual Student Support Program (ISSP) model for students receiving services from more than one government department
  - d) transitioning all students with special needs between the early years programs and kindergarten and between each grade level
  - e) partnering effectively with early years/child care programs and creating an early identification and intervention system for children with special needs
  - f) including ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure student needs are being met
  - g) providing department-led professional learning on a new special education policy to ensure consistency.
2. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development adopt the principle of *Universal Design for Learning* for all curriculum renewal.
3. The program development consultants for student support services at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development be fully involved in all curriculum renewal.
4. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development create opportunities to reinforce self-regulation and social/emotional learning outcomes in the curriculum across content areas.
5. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development adopt New Brunswick’s model of department-led professional learning on responding to student behaviour with at least one full day devoted exclusively to it annually, supported by ongoing web-based learning opportunities.
6. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a new model of student assistants which would:
  - a) allow flexibility and suitability in calling replacement assistants based on their familiarity with the students; and
  - b) assign student assistants to the school and not to individual students.

7. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a model and a plan to introduce a second level of student assistants as 'instructional assistants' with levels of post-secondary education appropriate to the role.
8. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development conduct a comprehensive research and jurisdictional review on the primary curriculum to identify opportunities to reinforce literacy, numeracy and self-regulation across all subject areas.
9. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial de Terra-Neuve-et-Labrador work with the four regional health authorities to establish regional committees, similar to the Western Child Services Committee, which include persons with decision-making authority, meet on a quarterly basis, and establish working sub-committees where necessary.
10. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Health and Community Services, within one year of the release of this report, develop a provincial child health services model, situated within one government department, to ensure seamless service delivery to schools, continuity of care, and year round access for children and families, and to include: community nursing, speech/language pathology, psychology, occupational therapy and social work.
11. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Health and Community Services review the capacity of social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists and community nurses to ensure adequate service to students and families in the new proposed model.
12. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development purchase the *Special Education Case Management System* which would work with *PowerSchool* and *Review 360* to replace all other data systems related to student support services, with EECD and the school districts having equal access to all information compiled.
13. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Health and Community Services work with the Newfoundland Centre for Health Information and the Office of Information and Privacy Commission to develop an early identification data repository by applying a child development perspective to existing data being collected in Electronic Health and Medical Records, NL Pharmacy Network, and the Client Referral Management System, which can then be linked with electronic records at the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development.
14. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial de Terra-Neuve-et-Labrador and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development ensure that an individual qualified in special education is included in senior leadership teams.

15. The Faculty of Education at Memorial University include two courses on exceptionalities and modules on responding to student behaviour in initial teacher education programs.
16. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development hire a full time librarian to manage the technology library and collaborate with the school districts to ensure that a school-based person, from every school, be given appropriate professional learning to optimize the use of alternate format materials and assistive technology in their school.

## **Chapter 2: Student Mental Health and Wellness**

17. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development, and the Department of Health and Community Services implement and support, province-wide, the Comprehensive School Health Framework of the Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health.
18. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development release the findings of the *Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children* study to support schools in responding to student mental health needs.
19. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador establish a secretariat within Executive Council for a period of five years with evaluation to occur after three years. The roles of the Secretariat will include:
  - a) implementation of the Comprehensive School Health Framework;
  - b) development of a year-round provincial child health services model within one department;
  - c) promoting 'health in all policies and practices in our schools' among all youth serving departments;
  - d) renewing a commitment to the Model of Coordination for Services to Children and Youth for children with complex needs; and
  - e) monitoring the recommendations relevant to schools in the *Towards Recovery* report.
20. The Department of Health and Community Services conduct and conclude within one year of the release of this report a thorough review of the waiting lists for all child/youth related mental health services at each Regional Health Authority, and the Child Development waiting list at the Janeway Child Health Centre.
21. The new provincial model of child health services outlined in Recommendation 10 include clear guidelines for appropriate and efficient referrals of students within a stepped-care system of mental health services.
22. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development make it possible for guidance counsellors to deliver school-based, proactive mental health services by
  - a) revising the *Guidelines for Comprehensive Assessment* to decrease the number of assessments guidance counsellors must conduct;

- b) reducing guidance counsellors' involvement in special education management; and
  - c) limiting guidance counsellors' role with testing to cognitive ability instruments only.
- 23. The Faculty of Education at Memorial University include comprehensive school health in all teacher education programs.
- 24. The early identification system outlined in Recommendation 13 include markers for attendance, mental health and addictions, as well as early signs of youth homelessness.
- 25. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development collaboratively develop a model to monitor the progress of children in care that will enable provision of timely and effective intervention and supports.
- 26. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial develop professional development for teachers on student mental health and addictions including trauma-informed practice and recovery-focused schools.
- 27. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development embed specific learning outcomes for student mental health and addictions in all curriculum as it is renewed, including and reinforcing it across all subject areas.
- 28. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District and Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial implement province-wide healthy eating and physical activity policies.
- 29. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in partnership with both school districts, ensure accurate recording of school attendance and develop a dropout prevention program for every school in the province, engaging the voice of youth.
- 30. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in partnership with both school districts, develop a viable program for early school leavers to return to school.

### **Chapter 3: Mathematics**

- 31. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development discontinue its current provincial assessment program for mathematics and language arts.
- 32. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop an assessment framework similar in scope and structure to those of PISA and PCAP.
  - a) This framework will include a strategy for the use of assessment information to improve achievement.
  - b) New assessments for each of the identified areas should be based on the framework.
  - c) The first assessments based on the framework should have a 2019 start date.

33. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development employ a full time consultant to be the lead on the strategy on the use of assessment information.
34. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Faculty of Education develop standards of practice for the teaching of mathematics in Newfoundland and Labrador.
35. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the school districts provide professional development opportunities to enable teachers of mathematics to meet the standards of practice for the teaching of mathematics.
36. The Faculty of Education ensure that the mathematics methodology courses allow teacher education candidates to meet the standards of practice for the teaching of mathematics.
37. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development introduce a bursary program to encourage teacher participation in university level courses in mathematics content and pedagogy required for Grades K – 6.
38. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development eliminate the current numeracy support teacher and literacy/numeracy teacher positions.
39. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development allocate six permanent K – 6 mathematics program specialists with qualifications in mathematics, mathematics education and where possible have qualifications in primary/elementary education.
  - a) These program specialists should be deployed as follows: one for Labrador, one for Central, one for Western, two for Eastern, and one for Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial.
  - b) Develop a protocol to ensure that the roles and responsibilities for K – 6 mathematics program specialists are sustained over time.
40. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development make the following adjustments to the mathematics K – 9 curriculum:
  - a) Develop clear curriculum outcome statements on the strategies that students must be able to use.
  - b) Provide teachers flexibility in determining the choice and number of strategies, including use of the traditional algorithm.
  - c) Set clear expectations for mathematics learning including addition and multiplication facts for the end of each grade level.
  - d) Adjust the balance between mathematical foundations and concept development.
  - e) Reduce the requirements for reading and writing in the mathematics curriculum.
  - f) Phase out and eliminate the mathematics textbooks and provide appropriate resources as needed.
  - g) Establish the instructional time for mathematics at 60 minutes per day (20%).

41. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development undertake the following initiatives for Grades 7 – 12 mathematics:
  - a) Work with the school districts to develop strategies that will increase participation in advanced mathematics in high school, setting targets for each of the next five years.
  - b) Work with the school districts to develop strategies that will increase students' readiness for high school mathematics during the intermediate grades.
  - c) Review the intermediate curriculum and develop materials, as needed, to better engage able students and to support students who experience difficulty.
  - d) Reduce the requirements for reading and writing in the mathematics curriculum, especially in the applied courses.
  - e) Develop a modern communication strategy that will actively engage students and provide accurate messaging about the different high school mathematics courses.

#### **Chapter 4: Reading**

42. Refer to Recommendations 31 and 32 in *Chapter 3, Mathematics*  
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
  - a) discontinue the current provincial reading and writing assessment and the Grade 1 and 2 reading assessment;
  - b) include reading in the new assessment framework.
43. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop and implement a comprehensive approach to early identification and intervention by:
  - a) building on the work that has already been done in *Working Together for Student Achievement*
  - b) allowing schools to continue to implement programs that demonstrate research-evidenced effectiveness such as *Levelled Literacy Intervention*, *Reading Recovery* and *Barton Reading*.
44. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development adopt a proven, research-based early assessment tool to be administered at the start of Grade 1 to identify students who require additional support in learning to read.
45. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development provide a separate teaching allocation to be dedicated as school-based reading specialists who will work directly with students:
  - a) who are reading below grade level in Grades 1 and 2 as determined by early reading assessments;
  - b) who continue to read below grade level in Grades 3 – 6 as determined by school assessments.
46. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development eliminate the Literacy Numeracy Teacher positions.

47. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development allocate five permanent program specialists with expertise in reading instruction to provide leadership and curriculum support to the school-based reading specialists.
  - a) The program specialists should be deployed as follows: one in each of Labrador, Western and Central regions and two in Eastern region.
  - b) A protocol to ensure that the roles and responsibilities for K – 6 reading program specialists are sustained over time should be developed.
48. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development explore options with Memorial University's Faculty of Education or another Canadian university for a graduate level specialization program to prepare reading specialists.
49. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop and implement a reading intervention program for Grade 7 – 12 students who experience reading difficulties.
50. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review and revise how it calculates and reports graduation and pass rates so that these statistics more accurately reflect student achievement.
51. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development review and revise the language arts curriculum to ensure that it sets clear expectations to inform teaching and learning and contains reading materials that are responsive and meaningful to students.
52. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development increase the capacity of school libraries and teacher-librarians to support the curriculum by ensuring provision of sufficient library resources and personnel.

## **Chapter 5: Indigenous Education**

53. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in collaboration with the Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee, develop a framework document on Indigenous Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, to be completed by June 2019, which:
  - a) supports and improves educational opportunities for Indigenous students in K – 12; and
  - b) provides direction for revision of existing curriculum and development of new curriculum that reflects the history, contributions, traditions and culture of Indigenous peoples in Newfoundland and Labrador and in Canada.
54. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development establish a stand-alone Indigenous Courses Policy independent of the restrictions and renewal obligations imposed by the local courses policy.

55. The Faculty of Education, Memorial University
  - a) continue to actively recruit and provide support for Indigenous teacher education candidates;
  - b) infuse appropriate knowledge and learning experiences in teacher education programs for teaching Indigenous students and teaching about Indigenous populations.
56. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, in collaboration with other agencies and partners, provide cultural and linguistic support services for K – 12 Indigenous students going to school away from home communities. This would include safeguarding first language skills and providing adequate ESL skills to students to help them succeed in school.

## **Chapter 6: Multicultural Education**

57. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a framework document for multicultural education that will articulate a plan:
  - a) to address the needs of multicultural students; and,
  - b) to ensure that all students learn about multiculturalism.
58. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the school districts designate individuals in leadership positions in their respective organizations to have responsibility for multicultural education to ensure that specialist teachers and classroom teachers receive the direction, support and resources they need:
  - a) to teach multicultural students, and
  - b) to teach about multiculturalism.
59. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development enhance ESL and LEARN programs by:
  - a) improving the pupil-teacher ratio of ESL teachers to reflect the complex needs of newcomers;
  - b) examining ways to extend access to ESL and LEARN programming in more areas of Newfoundland and Labrador; and
  - c) establishing standards for the qualifications of ESL and LEARN teachers.
60. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour develop and implement educational options for young newcomers who exit the K – 12 system before they acquire sufficient credentials to access post-secondary or adult literacy programs.
61. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development collaborate with the school districts, government departments and agencies, and non-governmental organizations to remove systemic barriers that prevent newcomers from accessing educational opportunities.

## **Chapter 7: Early Years**

62. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development amend the *Schools Act* (1997) to enable schools to offer programs for pre-school aged children.
63. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop and implement a protocol to ensure a fluid and effective transfer of knowledge and transition of services for children, especially those receiving early intervention services, moving from early years programs to kindergarten.
64. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop a plan to establish strong linkages, including communication and planning protocols, among the department divisions, where there is an intersection between early years policy and programs and the K – 12 education system.
65. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop and release by June 2019, a foundational document with an implementation plan for a junior kindergarten program that would be accessible to all four-year-old children in Newfoundland and Labrador, using the phased-in approach and other lessons learned from the models in Ontario and the Northwest Territories.
66. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development expand the Operating Grants Program to increase access to affordable, high quality early learning and child care programs.
67. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development collaborate with the other Atlantic provinces to develop professional learning opportunities on self-regulation and play-based learning, common early learning program frameworks, and education programs for early childhood educators.
68. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development include relevant child development data collected during the early years in the early identification data repository outlined in Recommendation 13.
69. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop financial incentives and opportunities for early childhood educators to improve their professional education levels including linking certificate and diploma programs to university degree programs.

## **Chapter 8: Career and Co-operative Education**

70. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development continue to use the CAMET 2015 report “Career Education in Atlantic Canada” as foundational for career and co-operative education in Newfoundland and Labrador.

71. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development develop partnerships with other provincial government departments, federal government agencies, post-secondary institutions, industry and organizations, to support dynamic high school co-operative education and apprenticeship programs in Newfoundland and Labrador.
72. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the school districts develop communication strategies directed at high school students on information about program requirements at the College of the North Atlantic and Memorial University.
73. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development discontinue Career Education 2201.
74. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development create a course in career education, to be offered at the Grade 8 level, with a component focusing on informed selection of senior high school courses.

### **Chapter 9: Teacher Education and Professional Development**

75. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development undertake an independent jurisdictional and substantive review of the Standards for Teacher Certification to be completed by Spring, 2018.
76. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development hold an annual meeting with the Faculty of Education to discuss alignment of teacher education programs with the needs of the education system in Newfoundland and Labrador.
77. The Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial, the Faculty of Education, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association provide leadership and resources to achieve the principles of professional development as envisioned in the Professional Development Alliance and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development model for professional development, particularly sustainability, relevance, and adequate resourcing.
78. The Faculty of Education review recommendations addressed to the Faculty of Education in *Toward an Achieving Society, Special Matters, Focusing on Students, and Now is the Time*, and provide a response by June 2018 to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial and the Provost of Memorial University on intended changes and/or rationale where changes will not be made.
79. The Deputy Minister, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, transmit a copy of Report of the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational

Outcomes, *Now is the Time*, to the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Memorial University, with a listing of recommendations applicable to the Faculty of Education.

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### **Implementation**

81. The Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador appoint a steering committee to oversee the implementation of the Education Action Plan.
82. The Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador appoint an educational leader, reporting to the Clerk of the Executive Council, to lead implementation of the Education Action Plan.



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## **Appendices**



## **Appendix 1**

### **Key Stakeholders**

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association

Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils

Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESĐ)

Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador (CSFP)

Newfoundland and Labrador Association of School System Administrators

Representatives of Indigenous groups

NLESĐ School Trustees

CSFP School Trustees

Officials of The College of the North Atlantic

Officials of Memorial University including the Provost, the Faculty of Science and the Department of Mathematics, and the Faculty of Education



## **Appendix 2**

### **Key Informants (Provincial)**

All Party Committee on Mental Health and Addictions  
Association of New Canadians  
Child Development and Rehabilitation Staff – Janeway  
Choices for Youth  
Disability Policy Office  
Eastern Regional Health Authority  
The Department of Advanced Education, Skills and Labour  
The Department of Children, Seniors, and Social Development  
The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development  
The Department of Finance  
The Department of Health and Community Services  
The Department of Justice and Public Safety  
Intergovernmental and Indigenous Affairs Secretariat  
NL Centre for Applied Health Research  
NL Centre for Health Information  
Office of the Child & Youth Advocate  
Tuckamore Youth Treatment Centre  
Whitbourne Youth Center  
Women's Policy Office



## **Appendix 2**

### **Key Informants (Canadian)**

- A. Robertson and V. Bruce – CHANCES, PEI
- A. Sherman – Dean of Education University of New Brunswick
- B. Morrison – University of New Brunswick
- J. Olsen - Alberta Education
- J. Bertrand – Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation
- J. Freeman – Queens University / Joint Consortium on School Health
- K. Kelly & S. Hornby - Joint Consortium on School Health
- K. McQuaig - Atkinson Centre
- K. Korotkov – Director of Education Support Services, Education and Early Childhood Development, New Brunswick
- L. Doucet – Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority
- M. Dockendorf – Strong Start. Department of Education, British Columbia
- R. Mueller – ADM Department of Education North West Territories
- R. Santos - Healthy Child Manitoba



## **Appendix 3**

### **Consultation Sessions**

Meetings with Students (NLES), teachers, and parents and the public in the following school trustee zones:

<b>Zone</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Date</b>
1-3	Goose Bay	Students, Educators, Parents, Public	February 7, 2017
4-5	Corner Brook Rocky Harbour	Students, Educators, Parents, Public	February 14, 2017 February 15, 2017
6	Stephenville	Students, Educators, Parents, Public	February 13, 2017
7-9	Gander	Students, Educators, Parents, Public	March 3, 2017
10	Marystown	Students, Educators, Parents, Public	February 21, 2017
11	Clarenville	Students, Educators, Parents, Public	February 20, 2017
12-13	Bay Roberts	Students, Educators, Parents, Public	January 30, 2017
14-17	St. John's St. John's	Student / Public Session – Holy Heart of Mary	February 23, 2017 February 27, 2017
	Conception Bay South	Students, Educators, Parents, Public	February 28 <sup>th</sup> , 2017
16	CSFP	Students	March 21, 2017

### **Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI) Sessions**

#### **Coastal Labrador**

- **Students**
  - March 21, 2017
    - St. Peter's School, Black Tickle
    - Amos Comenius School, Hopedale
    - J.C. Erhardt Memorial School, Makkovik
    - Jens Haven School, Nain
    - B.L. Morrison Academy, Postville
    - Northern Lights Academy, Rigolet
    - Henry Gordon Academy, Cartwright
    - Lake Melville School, North West River
- **Parents/Guardians**
  - March 21, 2017
- **Teachers**
  - March 22, 2017

**CDLI Class: Students, Teachers and Parents/Guardians**

- **Students**
  - March 30, 2017
    - Cape John Collegiate, La Scie
    - Copper Ridge Academy, Baie Verte
    - Dorset Collegiate, Pilley's Island
    - John Watkins Academy, Hermitage
    - St. Gabriel's All Grade, St. Brendan's
    - St. Peter's Academy, Westport
- **Parents/Guardians**
  - March 30, 2017
- **Teachers**
  - March 30, 2017

## **Appendix 4**

### **Presentations at Public Consultation Sessions**

There were 99 individual presenters at the public consultations. The following presenters agreed to be acknowledged in this report:

Pamela Anstey	*Karen Goodnough	Pam Parsons
Natasha Asukwo	Lisa Gray	Heather Paul
Tony Bambury	Christine Greene	Jean Pearce
Christa Barfett	Bobby Hancott	Lori Peddle
*Joy Best	Michelle Hogan	Boyd Perry
*Hayward Blake	Ruby Hoskins	Jeremiah Perry
*Leo Bonnell	Allyson Howse	Gina Pickett
Caroline Boyden	Noel Hurley	Heather Pollett
Matthew Brake	*Valerie Hynes	Andrea Reid
Joy Brown	Siti Jalaluddin	Trina Reid
Janice Brown	Annette Johns	Barbara Reid
Kathleen Burt	Ellie Jones	Marilyn Reid
Emily Christy	Donna Kavanaugh	Judy Deanne Rogers
Hazel Clarke	Sean Kenney	Martina Rose
Melvie Colbourne	Patti Kenney	Susan Rose
Frances Cole	Keith Lewis	*Christine Rowe
Colleen Collett	Simon Lono	Katherine Rowsell
*Paula Courage	Lisa Lovelady	Charlene Shears
Francine Couture	Grant Maddigan	Paula Sheppard Thibeau
Scott Crocker	Emily Mayne	Roxanne Skanes
Lisa Crockwell	Gwen Mercer	Roy Snelgrove
Rhonda Curtis	Dallas Mercer	Kimberly Strickland
*Angela Dawe	Maggie Mi	Curtis Strickland
William Fagan	Lorraine Michael	Sam Synard
Shelley Farrell	Ryan Murphy	Dorothy Vaandering
Keith Fillier	John Oates	Rosie Verma
Lynn FitzPatrick	Rhonda O'Driscoll	Michael Walsh
Jessica Foote	Morgan Olynyk	Sean Wiltshire
Michelle Funk	Kevin O'Shea	Debby Yannakidis
Kerry-Lynn Gauci	Cordell Osmond	
Kevin Giles	Michelle Park	

\*Also provided a written submission



## **Appendix 5**

### **Written Submissions from Individuals**

There were a total of 199 submissions received via e-mail, fax and mail. The following agreed to be acknowledged in this report:

Jeanette Avery	Jeanne Piercey
Cathy Baker	Krystal Pike
Karen Banfield Hare	Denise Pike
Mike Barry	Trudy Porter
Paul Bartlett	Andrea Quinton
Catherine Bennett	Bernie Rideout
Joy Best	Christine Rowe
Hayward Blake	John Sandlos
Leo Bonnell	Russell Stockley
David Brazil, MHA Conception Bay East	Mary Stordy
Thea Cammie	Angela Tate
Kimberly Churchill	Dr. Martha Traverso-Yepez
Cassandra Clowe-Coish	Dr. K. Wayne Vivian
Rick Collins	Wilson Warren
Paula Courage	Patrick Wells
Angela Dawe	Krista Williams
Kathy Dicks-Peyton	Angie Wilmott
Elaine Dobbins	
Emily Doyle	
Patrick Duke	
Angela Dunphy	
Phonse Fagan	
Scott Fifield	
David Gill	
Karen Goodnough	
Diane Goosney	
Beverly Hounsell	
Valerie Hynes	
Thomas Kendell	
Nicole Marsh	
Kelly Marshall	
Janet McNaughton	
Tracey Payne	



## **Appendix 5**

### **Written Submissions from Organizations**

Academy Canada	NLTA Special Interest Councils
Association of Early Childhood Educators	Counsellors' and Physiologists' Association
NL	Health Education
Autism Society	Music
Choices for Youth	Physical Education
Canadian Foundation for Economic Education	Teacher-Librarians
Canadian Mental Health Association-NL	NL Youth Corrections
College of the North Atlantic-Memorial University Joint Submission	Office of the Child and Youth Advocate
Democracy Alert NL	Physical Education Special Interest Council
Dietitians of Newfoundland and Labrador	Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women
Elizabeth Park Elementary School	Radhoc Youth Leadership
Egale Canada Human Rights Trust	Relationships First Consortium
Family & Child Care Connections	THRIVE Community Youth Network
Fédération des parents francophones de Terre-Neuve et du Labrador	YWCA
Learning Disabilities Association	
Memorial University Faculty of Education	
Memorial University Department of Mathematics and Statistics	
New Dimensions Child Care Board	
NL Access to Justice Steering Committee	
NL Association of Social Workers	
NL Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists	
NL Association of the Deaf	
NL Coalition against Human Trafficking	
NL Federation of School Councils	
NL Housing Corporation	
NLTA Coastal Labrador South Branch	
NLTA – Long Range Branch	
NLTA – Marconi Branch	



