

**2020 Pre-Budget Document by The NL Federation of School Councils**

Respectfully submitted by:

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**Introduction**

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC) welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to Government as part of the pre-budget consultation process for the 2020 Provincial Budget.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC) is a non-profit, provincial umbrella group for parents, teachers, students, and community supporters who are committed to enhancing the quality of school programs and improving the levels of student achievement in our schools.  We provide school councils and parent groups with a voice on educational issues and encourage parental involvement at all levels of education.

NLFSC believes education is a partnership involving parents, students, teachers, principals, school boards, government, and the community. Education gives every child an opportunity to succeed and is society’s greatest equalizer. One of the NLFSC’s primary goals is to engage parents as much as possible in their children’s learning and as such, we encourage all school councils to make this a priority as well. Learning begins at home and parents are their child’s first teacher. NLFSC and School councils can play a major role in helping this continue as children progress at every grade level.

NLFSC has been providing input to Government through this venue for two decades to bring a focus to critical areas in K-12 education which require greater attention and additional resources. We are pleased that some of our previous recommendations have either been implemented or are underway through the establishment of the Education Action Plan. We believe the plan will make changes to our education system, that will improve the learning experience for generations of students for many years to come. We have met with Minister Warr, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, regarding the Education Action Plan and have received an update and presentation on the progress of the plan from Eldred Barnes, Associate Deputy Minister.

NLFSC believes the Education Action Plan marks the beginning of great change and improvements in the education system. We continue to express concerns on behalf of our membership, and are committed to doing everything in our power to ensure promises are kept.

We realize the recommendations will take time to implement and are willing to assist in any way we can. We would like to offer the following comments and recommendations for consideration as part of the 2020 Prebudget Process.

**Mental Health and Addictions**

We realize government has invested significantly to provide support for students suffering from mental illness and addictions, however mental health problems among children and youth have become a major issue facing public schools, and is a growing concern throughout the province.

According to new data, released May, 2019, by the Canadian Institute for Health Information,

the number of youth, from this province, who are hospitalized for mental health reasons is greater than the national average.

From 2007 to 2018, hospitalizations in Newfoundland and Labrador for mental health reasons went up 65 per cent while youth hospital stays for all other reasons dropped by 24 per cent. In 2018, there were 537 hospitalizations per 100,000 people in NL — a number that has gone up every year since 2007 — compared with the national average of 495.

Parents and School Councils who contact the NLFSC office say they do not know where to go to get help for depression and addictions – or that help is simply not available. Numerous barriers exist to mental health provision for students including: lack of adequate staff training in dealing with children’s mental illness; lack of funding for school-based mental health services; an insufficient number of community-based mental health professionals; and a lack of coordinated services between the school and the community. NLFSC recognizes there is no easy solution to address mental health and addictions and more tools and early intervention are needed.

* **NLFSC encourages government to follow through with the recommendations outlined in the education action plan for a social and emotional learning curriculum that will include: improved education for teachers and early childhood educators on mental health and wellness; increased accessibility to health services for children and youth; improved timelines of service delivery, review of roles and responsibilities of specialist personnel, and specific learning outcomes for student mental health and addictions in most curriculum.**
* **NLFSC also recommends government provide better access to family doctors (***particularly in rural areas where the number of hospitalizations for mental health issues are higher).*
* **NLFSC recommends government increase the number of early intervention services for mental health and addictions, and provide supports for parents and teachers to teach their children and students better coping skills and stress management at an early age.**
* **NLFSC recommends government increase the current Guidance Counsellor allocation from 1:500 to at least 1:300.**
* **NLFSC also recommends that more assistance be provided to schools by mental health professionals - whose areas of expertise would complement that of teachers.**

**Review of the Teacher Allocation Model**

High quality teaching and a sufficient number of teachers is critical for academic success. There is no doubt that school councils and parents recognize and appreciate teachers, however they also believe teacher workloads are too high, and disruptive behaviours often prevent teachers from teaching, and students from learning. Parents and council members say class sizes are too large and it is humanly impossible for one teacher to be able to address the different learning styles and emotional needs of 25 plus students. The smaller the class size, the more opportunity there is for teachers to provide the necessary attention to the diverse needs of students.

The NLFSC membership believes a review of the Teacher Allocation Formula will show more teachers are needed to address barriers in the system - including large class sizes from Kindergarten to Senior High. We realize this will mean another increase in funding to education – but it would be money well spent.

**With the implementation of the Education Action plan well underway and many improvements happening in schools, NLFSC feels this is a perfect opportunity for Government to conduct a comprehensive, independent review of the Teacher Allocation Formula.**

**Healthy Eating in School**

NLFSC supports and commends the work of the School Lunch Association, Kids Eat Smart and The School Milk Foundation for providing students with nutritious food they need to learn and grow. We also greatly appreciate the dedication of hundreds of teachers, parents, and community leaders who organize and serve at school breakfast programs throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Many students would go hungry if it were not for the above-mentioned groups and volunteers.

NLFSC is supportive of the new School Food Guidelines, and for all efforts being made to promote and ensure healthy eating in schools. However, in order for new School Food Guidelines to be truly effective – healthy food must be affordable and accessible to ALL students.

* **NLFSC recommends government provide more funding for agencies such as the School Lunch Program and the Kids Eat Smart to ensure these programs are available to students in every school.**
* Parents and school councils have repeatedly expressed concern about the cost of healthy food provided by food service providers to schools. In an economic climate where many families are being frugal to make ends meet, parents cannot afford for their children to avail of the service.
* **NLFSC recommends government work with school food service providers to ensure the cost of ordering healthy food is reasonable and affordable.**
* **We also recommend government consider implementing a food subsidized program for low income families, and provide improved access to healthy, safe, and affordable food.**

The NLFSC has a long-standing concern for child poverty and the number of students in our schools who are affected by it. At the beginning of each school year, and just before Christmas, NLFSC receives 15 to 25 calls/emails from school council members (parents and teachers) looking for school supplies and Christmas gifts for students in need. Unfortunately, NLFSC does not have the funding to assist with these requests so we solicit support from the public and various organizations .

**Administrative Allocation**

The NLFSC membership recognizes Principals have a huge responsibility in the educating of our children.

Principals are on the front-lines in the education system; they know the challenges and see the need.

Their expertise and knowledge should be valued, respected, welcomed and embraced to affect positive change.

The role of the principal covers many different areas. Being an effective administrator is challenging, endless work. Principals are among the hardest working, yet quite often the least recognized, individuals in education. Principals set the academic tone for their schools. It is their vision, leadership and dedication that often motivates staff, students and the entire school community to pull together to address academic concerns and celebrate success.

The reduction in the allocation for School Administrator time in the 2013 and 2015 provincial budgets

resulted in less time for School Administrators to carry out their duties and responsibilities.

The cuts to administrative time in schools are having a direct and detrimental impact on our students and schools.

* **NLFSC recommends** **government reinstate the Administrative allocation to the level it was in**

**2012**

**NLFSC Operating Grant**

In 1999-2000, the Federation received an operating grant of $40,000; however, a year later it was reduced to $30.000. We continued to receive this $30,000 grant until the 2013 provincial budget when it was cut by $5,000, leaving us with $25,000 to run our organization. Despite a promise, made by the current Premier, to increase our funding to $50,000 during the NLTA Leadership Debate on Nov. 18, 2016 – our grant was reduced to $22,000 in the 2017 provincial budget.

*(In addition to our operational grant, NLFSC usually receives $5,000 from Government to assist with the cost of our Biennial Meetings).*

**In order to continue to support our membership and move forward with our mandate NLFSC needs an increase of $28,00 to its operational grant. This would put our funding at $50,000 and more in line with those received by other non-profit groups. This funding would be used to help cover some of the increasing costs of operations, and to maintain our current level of activity in supporting the enhancement of education of our children.**

**Conclusion**

NLFSC fully recognizes the challenges that our current government faces to regain control of the provinces’ finances. However, we believe the best solution to our province’s pressing economic and social challenges is providing our children with the best possible education so that they will develop into productive, active members of our society. These children will one day be our workforce, business-owners, and political leaders.

Education affects everyone and it provides every child with an opportunity to achieve a prosperous future.

NLFSC commends government for its prudent fiscal plan and progress to date. We recognize there have been many important initiatives to improve the quality of life for all and to create an even more prosperous province.

NLFSC believes in the future of this province. We still have the hope that the day will come when our children will be able to stay in this province and enjoy a standard of living comparable to anywhere else in the country. We believe that our children can achieve for Newfoundland and Labrador what generations before them could not, by providing them with a high quality of education that is supportive, promoted and valued by all.

Some of our past recommendations:

* **NLFSC recommends government implement a Needs Based Formula for allocating teaching units in the province.**
* NLFSC**recommends that Government budget for150 additional teaching units to be deployed by the Department of Education as required, to address needs identified and associated with the implementation of the inclusive model of education*.***
* **NLFSC recommends government create a new allocation for Youth Mental Health and Addiction Counsellors, at a ratio of 1:500 students.**
* **NLFSC recommends more assistance be provided to schools by mental health professionals whose areas of expertise would complement that of teachers***.*
* **NLFSC recommends government increase the current Guidance Counsellor allocation from 1:500 to at 1:250.**
* **To address the increasing mental health and addictions in schools, NLFSC also recommends government increase the current Educational Psychologists allocation to 1:100**