

It's Not Business as Usual in our Classrooms – and That's Not OK

NLTA Pre-Budget Submission 2024



Introduction

The K-12 public education system in Newfoundland and Labrador is in triage mode; it is not business as usual, and that's not ok. Teachers and Administrators are applying bandages daily, trying to create an environment in which students can learn and grow – an overwhelmingly difficult task when they are faced with inadequate resources, complex class compositions, daily incidents of violence, and teacher shortages. Our teachers and administrators cannot continue to deal with this alone. A comprehensive strategy is needed to address teacher recruitment and retention, and the overall resourcing shortfalls that are impacting our public K-12 education system – this has been the case for quite some time (*see Appendix A*). Budget 2024 offers decision makers an opportunity to focus on the current challenges in our education system and to embark upon a path that will help us achieve the long-term social and economic benefits that would come with investment in education.

The working conditions for teachers ARE the learning conditions for students; this is reality. School is a shared experience. The context in which teachers carry out their professional roles and responsibilities providing instruction, striving to create safe and inclusive environments in which students can learn, grow, and benefit from access to positive role models, relationships and opportunities is the same context in which students spend six or more hours a day each school year. Close to 50% of a student's waking hours, not counting co-curricular and extra-curricular activities, are spent in the classroom. This actuality should be the foundation for all decisions that affect the K-12 public education system in Newfoundland and Labrador. There is no one factor that has a more significant impact on teaching and learning, or more potential to advance public education and the future of our province, than the provision of appropriate, professional human resource levels in our schools.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA) hears daily from its members, certified professional teachers in the field, about the impact that teacher shortages and other resource inadequacies are having on students, student programming and the well-being of teachers. As the Association's recent *Hidden Reality* campaign has highlighted, inadequate school resourcing and the shortages of certified teachers are impacting students:

"I am a parent of three children, one of whom has multiple disabilities. The school has been really great but with resources stretched so much my child is really not getting the education they deserve. It's just so heartbreaking! My heart also breaks for teachers and administrators at schools who are trying to piece everything together." – A parent

"Every morning is a problem-solving exercise, figuring out who can be reassigned, what services we will have to cancel each day, which student supports will not be available. The impact on students is heartbreaking and, as an administrator, I see that the increased workload and demands on my staff are not sustainable." - School Administrator

"Classes doubled up, multiple groups taken to the gym or cafeteria to ensure supervision, certain grades/groups of students sent home on occasion, incomplete report cards due to inconsistency in teachers or vacancies – this has been and is the reality in my school, for our students and staff. I am questioning whether or not I can continue to work in such conditions." - Classroom Teacher

"As a classroom teacher, I see the unfortunate impact on learning for my students who do not receive IRT and Reading Specialist programming on a regular basis due to these teachers often being reassigned to cover for lack of substitutes." – Classroom Teacher

"As a Guidance Counsellor, I am often reassigned to cover classes when substitutes are not available. This means I have less time for counselling, and less opportunity to build

relationships with students at a time when the need for student mental health supports is incredibly high.” - Guidance Counsellor

“When students’ needs can’t be met due to inadequate human resources, there is an overall decline in morale and well-being in the school, for students and for teachers.” - Classroom Teacher

“I have two children in Junior High and my job has placed me in many schools throughout the last several years running programs and doing presentations. I know that the lack of resources is fueling high levels of disruption, learning issues, significant (and sometimes violent) student behaviour and anxiety – it’s disgraceful. I am terrified for the teachers, administrators, support staff, students and parents alike. I cannot fathom attempting to prepare myself for this on a daily basis.” – A parent

The NLTA has commissioned public opinion polling for the last number of years. In 2021, significantly more parents and the general public felt that the quality of the education system had gotten worse compared to 2019. In 2023, the proportion of those who felt it had gotten worse remained consistent with 2021. Recent polling shows there is strong support for investing more in the K-12 education system and this has grown since 2021. Overall, 87% of the general public believe the provincial government should invest more in K-12 education, up 12 points since 2021 (75%). Parents are even more likely to believe more investment is required (93%). When it comes to teachers’ experience in the classroom, just over two-thirds (68%) affirmed that the school they work in has reduced or restructured services due to unfilled positions or roles. Respondents from Labrador were significantly more likely to agree with this statement (96%).

These results did not come as a surprise. The NLTA hears repeatedly from teachers that, more and more, their work environments are becoming less conducive to fostering and supporting student achievement and overall well-being. Increasing class sizes, inadequate resourcing of inclusive education, rising incidents of student behaviour problems and violence in schools, and increases in mental health issues are having a negative impact on teaching and learning. The past and ongoing impact of COVID-19, along with substitute teacher shortages and vacant teaching positions, have exacerbated many of these issues. It seems an obvious premise, something that “goes without saying,” that you cannot expect to improve system outcomes by under-resourcing the very processes and structures that are meant to support student learning.

The NLTA has been an active participant in recent and past reviews of public K-12 education and other provincial public services and government functions, taking advantage of all opportunities to engage with those who led the Premier’s Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes, the Premier’s Economic Recovery Team, the Health Accord NL Task Force, and the Teacher Allocation Review Committee. The planned Teachers Think Tank event is another important opportunity for government to hear straight from the front-line workers in education as to what the issues are and the solutions to address them. The Association has and will continue to be an active participant in this process and will encourage participation from every NLTA member. The theme of our messaging has been consistent throughout: a well-resourced public education system will support overall social and economic improvements for the province and should be seen as an investment.

Education and Our Health

While health care spending in our province has been rising for years, available services have not kept pace with demand, particularly with respect to needs for mental health treatment and supports. The

February 2022 report of the Health Accord NL found that, in this province:

*We have the **highest rate of children and youth with complex health care needs, 53% higher than the national average. Our province has one of the highest prevalence rates of children and youth in alternate care, and these children and youth are among the most vulnerable groups in our society. ... Many children in this group have developmental trauma, complex mental health issues, **learning and academic challenges**, and significant medical diagnoses. [emphasis added]***

The report goes on to identify mental health as a concern that arose consistently throughout the Accord's public engagement initiatives, including a special symposium with high school students. It was further noted that the suicide rate for the province "has tripled since the 1980s and is among the highest in Canada." Without a focus on prevention and earlier intervention, we will never catch up. Better access to student supports within our education system can produce long-term savings in healthcare.

We can no longer ignore the gap between students' needs and our education system's resources. School counsellors, educational psychologists, instructional resource teachers, teaching and learning assistants, student assistants, speech language pathologists, behaviour management specialists, safe and inclusive schools itinerants, teachers with specialized skills to support students with hearing and visual impairment, EAL and LEARN teachers who support newcomers, and program specialists – these are vital student supports, not optional luxuries. When these services are lacking in our classrooms and schools, we aren't saving money in the long term – we are in effect passing along an even bigger and longer-term cost to our over-burdened healthcare and social assistance systems.

Even educational resources that do not directly target mental health problems and illnesses can save our healthcare system money, since education is a major factor in determining/predicting mental health. Education is an accepted determinant of other socio-economic outcomes. Indeed, the recent report of the Health Accord NL identifies the importance of education:

People with higher education tend to be healthier than those with lower educational attainment. The level of education is highly linked with other SDH such as the level of income, employment security, and working conditions.

Given the struggle to meet student needs with current resourcing levels, it should come as no surprise that the level of stress, burnout and compassion fatigue among teachers remains high. Over the past four school years, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) statistics indicate a steady increase in the number of teachers accessing counselling supports – from 8.8% of the total teacher population in 2019-20 to 10.53% in 2020-21 to 14.69% in 2021-22, increasing to 21.7% in 2022-23.

Teachers' reasons for contacting EAP are also telling – emotional/mental health and personal stress and coping have increased as a presenting issue, accounting for 74.38% of EAP cases consistently during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 school year, compared to 51% of EAP cases in 2015-16.

In 2022, the NLTA conducted research on the mental health and well-being of our members. Through a membership survey and a series of focus groups, we asked about member stress levels. When asked to rate the level of stress they experienced during the school year on a scale from 1 (not at all stressed) to 10 (extremely stressed), the average reported number was 9. One participant stated that it was the worst year for teaching since they started 20 years ago. Although some teachers indicated that their level of stress fluctuated throughout the school year, it was very clear that the majority of teachers are experiencing a heightened level of stress. Lack of support, behavioural needs of students, and increased workload and demands on professional time ranked highly among the identified causes of increased stress. These

findings reinforce the point made above, that the conditions in which teachers are expected to carry out their professional responsibilities are the same as those in which students are expected to learn and grow.

Education and Our Economy

While natural resources have historically been and remain important to our province, Newfoundland and Labrador's greatest resource is its people. Education has always affected our economy, but it's more important than ever in the current information age. Without a focus on innovation and increased skills, we cannot diversify our economy. We need to invest in education. Smaller class sizes in our public K-12 education system support more effective teaching and learning and would be an investment towards long-term economic gains.

In *Does Class Size Matter?* (2014), Dr. Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach of the National Education Policy Center of the University of Colorado, states that “‘common-sense’ is validated by research demonstrating that class size does matter and is ‘an important determinant of student outcomes.’” The study found that teachers are able to be more effective with small class sizes and that the resulting benefit to students is not limited to their performance in school, but will continue to be an advantage over their entire lifetime. The author's recommendations include:

Money saved today by increasing class sizes will be offset by more substantial social and educational costs in the future. The payoff from class-size reduction is greater for low-income and minority children, while any increases in class size will likely be most harmful to these populations.

Dr. David Zyngier, Senior Lecturer in Curriculum and Pedagogy at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, in his review of 112 studies on class size (2014), has concluded that while lower class size has a demonstrable cost, it may prove the more cost-effective policy overall. Zyngier concluded that:

Findings suggest that smaller class sizes in the first four years of school can have an important and lasting impact on student achievement, especially for children from culturally, linguistically and economically disenfranchised communities.

William J. Mathis in *The Effectiveness of Class Size Reduction* (2016) concurred with this research finding that:

The payoff from class-size reduction is greater for low-income and minority children. Conversely, increases in class size are likely to be especially harmful to these populations – who are already more likely to be subjected to large classes. While lowering class size has a demonstrable cost, it may prove the more cost effective policy overall particularly for disadvantaged students. Money saved today by increasing class sizes will likely result in additional substantial social and educational costs in the future.

Other research studies have indicated that there is not only a sound academic argument for reducing class sizes but a strong health and economic one as well. In their study, *Health and Economic Benefits of Reducing the Number of Students per Classroom in US Primary Schools* (2007), Peter Muennig and Steven H. Woolf found that:

From a societal perspective (incorporating earnings and health outcomes), class-size reductions would generate a net cost savings of approximately \$168 000 and a net gain of 1.7 quality-adjusted life-years for each high school graduate produced by small classes. When targeted to low-income students, the estimated savings would increase to \$196 000 per additional graduate. From a governmental perspective (incorporating

public expenditures and revenues), the results of reducing class sizes ranged from savings in costs to an additional cost of \$15 000 per quality-adjusted life-year gained.

These conclusions are echoed in the key findings of the 2019 Conference Board of Canada report, *The Economic Case for Investing in Education*, which included that:

Each dollar of public education spending generates \$1.30 in total economic impacts to Ontario. At the same time, the inverse holds true for each dollar taken from public education. Public education can generate social benefits, such as a healthier population, a higher standard of living, and a reduction in crime. That lessens demand for Ontario's social assistance, public health care, and criminal justice services.

We can no longer afford to ignore the gap between our resources for primary and secondary education and our province's social and economic health.

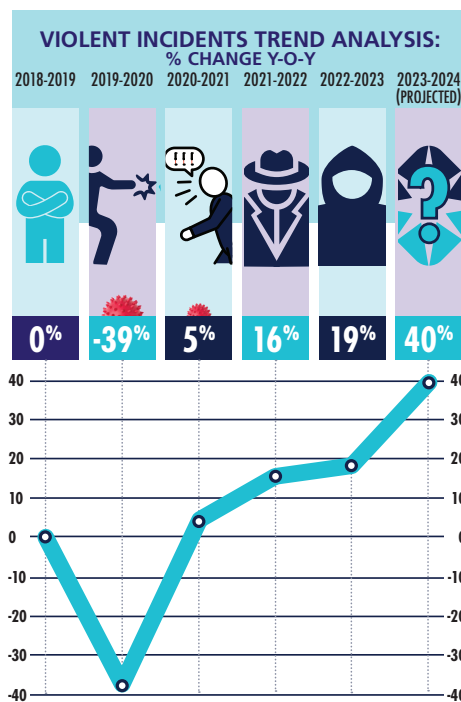
Violence in the Classroom

The safety of all our students, teachers and other staff must be a priority in our schools. The NLTA advocates regularly for safe and secure working conditions for our members. Unfortunately, aggression and violence among students and directed towards teachers and school staff occurs too often in our province. Information recently obtained by the NLTA through access to information requests reveals an increase in the average number of reported violent incidents per day in schools, from 20 per day in the 2018-19 school year to 29 per day in just the first two months of 2023-24. Following a record low during the 2019-20 school year, due to the pandemic related suspension of in school instruction, there have been year-over-year increases in reported incidences of violence, with a 19% increase from 2021-22 to 2022-23, and a projected increase of up to 40% in 2023-24 compared to the 2022-23 school year.

An effective approach to addressing violence in schools that is both responsive and preventative requires the involvement and cooperation of other partners and stakeholders. Our schools absolutely have a critical role, but students are not in school 24/7. There are often societal, community, family and mental health factors that contribute and require supports and interventions that go far beyond what schools are able or resourced to provide. The answer does not rest with schools or the Department of Education alone. We need to ensure that the necessary systems and supports are accessible and effective in communities, for families and in schools in order to really tackle this issue.

Closing Comments

Given the research, studies, reviews and reports that have been carried out in recent years, the NLTA was surprised by the announcement of the Education Accord NL. Government needs to ensure that any targeted approach to transforming and modernizing the education system in this province includes ample and meaningful opportunities to truly hear and listen to the lived experience of teachers in the field. The most significant concerns of NLTA members relate to the teaching and learning conditions they and their students face every day, and this province has seen the consequences of not listening to their voices (*see Appendix B*). It is not clear how or where the current state of teaching and learning conditions fits into the four pillars of focus for the Accord, but to have any real chance of successfully improving the K-12 system, this process



must take a long, hard look at the circumstances in which teachers are required to do their jobs.

The NLTA has, in good faith, participated in and prepared presentations and submissions for many and varied committees, task forces, panels and commissions in the hopes of seeing practical and tangible positive change. The Association will continue to fulfill its legislated role and responsibility to promote the cause of public education in the province through affording decision makers and the public with the advice and experience of teachers. **But, the K-12 public education system does not need another action plan that is not effectively implemented, improvements that are rolled back over time, or policies and procedures that are not adequately resourced.**

Public education in this province is on a precipice. If government does not act now through investments that reduce class size, support the student needs that come with complex class compositions, and properly resource inclusive education, there will be far-reaching consequences and impacts in K-12 education and, ultimately, throughout all the social sectors.

APPENDIX A

They Should Have Seen it Coming (like we did...)

by Stefanie Tuff

The Bulletin - November/December 2023

The Association knows that teacher shortages are being experienced by schools across the province. The impact of vacant positions and substitute teacher shortages on teaching and learning is the focus of ongoing lobbying efforts and recent NLTA campaigns and messaging, under the “Hidden Reality” slogan. Targeted advocacy for a comprehensive strategy to address the retention and recruitment of qualified teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador has been a priority focus for NLTA for almost three years now. But, while the NLTA would argue that teacher shortages have reached crisis levels in recent years, we have in fact been sounding the alarm for much longer.

The Association supported the research conducted by Dr. David Dibbon and Dr. Bruce Sheppard of Memorial University, which was the basis for their 2001 report and recommendations entitled, ***Teacher Demand, Supply and Retention in Newfoundland and Labrador***. This work confirmed many things that the NLTA and its members already knew, including that there has always been a degree of challenge in recruiting teachers for remote/rural locations and filling certain teaching assignments. While the report found no evidence of an overall teacher shortage in the province at that time, it did find cause for immediate action by key stakeholders,

To proactively deal with the current situation and to avoid the prospects of an overall shortage of teachers... and work in partnership to find creative solutions to current and future problems that are related to teacher supply and demand.

The recommendations made more than twenty years ago included many of the approaches that the NLTA has been advocating for over the past several years, including:

- A combination of targeted incentives, including increases to salaries and bonuses, travel allowances, accommodations/housing support, student debt forgiveness, etc. for teaching positions in hard to fill locations and assignments/specialized areas; and,
- Providing opportunities for individuals to pursue university studies to become certified teachers in and from their local area(s)/cultural environment.

Of particular interest is that, even back in 2001, the research identified the importance of substitute teachers to the overall effectiveness of the K-12 public education system and found evidence that “... **the substitute teacher pool is declining in numbers** and that some schools currently find it difficult or impossible to find substitute teachers.”

Not long after this report was completed, the NLTA commissioned research conducted by Dr. Dibbon on the impact of teacher workload on teaching and learning in the province. This study was completed in 2004 and resulted in conclusions and recommendations set out in ***It's About Time – A Report on the Impact of Workload on Teachers and Students***. The findings regarding the effect of teacher workload intensification, increasing demands without added resources or time, the resulting rise in burnout, and the increasing cost of emotional labour all still ring true today, and circumstances in our public schools have not improved. The undeniable fact that working conditions for teachers ARE the learning conditions for students has been and remains a key point in Association messaging and advocacy. With respect to the issue of teacher shortages, Dr. Dibbon noted, almost twenty years ago, that,

*The conditions under which teachers are expected to work have a direct impact on their capacity to perform their job functions, and dysfunctional working conditions are known to reduce both high levels of capacity and high levels of motivation – to the point where some teachers burn out and others **just leave the profession...***

*Failure to address the issues associated with a high workload will likely result in lower levels of teacher satisfaction and **higher levels of attrition** – two conditions that would have a negative impact on the provincial school system.*

But, decision makers did not heed the warnings that research and experience over the past two decades have shown to be well-founded. Opportunities have been missed, the problems identified at the turn of the century have grown more severe, and effective solutions have become more difficult to implement. Teacher shortages are the reality, to varying degrees, province-wide, but are also the norm right across Canada and internationally. The issues are complex and multi-dimensional, and there are no easy fixes. But the Association continues to identify and advocate for actions that could set us on a positive path forward.

There are a variety of responses that may help attract new people to the profession and reduce the loss of experienced teachers, most of which are not new ideas, but have been identified in various studies and input from teachers over the years. In addition to incentives and enhanced, localized access to teacher training programs, the NLTA has been and continues to work – through collective bargaining, advocacy, outreach and public information campaigns – to achieve measures that include:

Improving teacher compensation and benefits: Teacher salaries have not kept pace with the cost of living; improving teacher salaries and employment benefits would help make the profession more attractive in comparison to other alternatives, including competing opportunities in other Canadian jurisdictions.

Improving classroom conditions: The working environment for teachers IS the learning environment for students. Increases in class size and in the complexity of class compositions are exacerbating long-standing challenges and increasing demands on teachers, contributing to burnout, compassion fatigue, and leading some teachers to leave the profession.

Adequately resourcing inclusive education: Teachers have always supported the principles of inclusion, but insufficient student supports has created an unsustainable situation, including increased incidences of violent/aggressive student behaviour. The constant struggle to meet students' needs without adequate resources and safety precautions is a significant source of teacher stress and dissatisfaction.

Respecting teacher professional judgment and autonomy: Teachers often report that they are not supported in exercising their professional judgment and are second-guessed when they do. Teachers derive great satisfaction from fostering students' innate curiosity and love of learning, but too often they are constrained by excessive and overly prescriptive curriculum and assessment policies. This problem is exacerbated by attempts to politicize education and efforts by certain external interest groups to impose their own agendas on teachers' practice.

Increasing supports for student well-being so that teachers can focus on learning: Teachers teach students, and for this to be successful, students need to arrive at school well rested and fed, with their medical/health needs met, secure and looked after outside of school so that they are ready to learn. Teachers cannot solve all the systemic societal problems that impact student learning, but they see and deal with the consequences of those problems as they present themselves in the classroom, taking time and focus away from teaching and learning.

The NLTA will continue its efforts to lobby for action on teacher retention and recruitment in Newfoundland and Labrador. One piece of good news is that Minister Howell has acknowledged the significance of this issue and has authorized the establishment of a **Teachers Think Tank**, in collaboration with the Association and other stakeholders, **to address teacher retention and recruitment and discuss ways to respond to the challenges and concerns facing teachers and the K-12 public education system in the province. Input and feedback from NLTA members in the field will be of critical importance.** The anticipated timeframe for this is January/February 2024. It will start with a teacher questionnaire administered online through EngageNL – please keep an eye out for more information on this early in the new year. The NLTA will be strongly encouraging all members to take the time to complete the online questionnaire, the results of which will inform the next steps in this process, including the Think Tank session(s). There are no simple solutions, but the Department of Education’s willingness to work with us on this is a step in the right direction.

So, I will close with a question borrowed from the title of a recent article written by my counterpart with the Alberta Teachers’ Association on this all too familiar topic, “Where have all the teachers gone?” The answer, unfortunately, is that we knew where they were headed twenty years ago, as did government. The Association will keep drawing attention to this issue because teachers, students, and our public education system cannot afford any further delay.

Reflections on a Recent Human Rights Decision in Public Education

by Stefanie Tuff

The Bulletin - May/June 2023

The Board of Inquiry decision in a complaint filed with the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Commission by the parents of a student, Carter Churchill, against the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District was recently released. This case received a great deal of media attention at all stages of the process, and no doubt many NLTA members are aware of it. I followed with interest as much of the online streaming of the hearings as I could when they were held during August and September of 2022, and I have read the final decision closely. The ruling is a significant one for this province, our public K-12 education system, teachers and students.

The Human Rights complaint filed by the student's parents alleged that the District discriminated against their son, who is deaf, by failing to implement appropriate accommodations so that he could access K-12 education services that are offered to the public. My intention in this short piece is not to opine on the specific outcome of the case, the Chief Adjudicator's findings that discrimination did occur, or the remedy granted. I will not comment on the past or current status of K-12 education services and supports for students who are deaf or hard of hearing as this is not my area of expertise. However, there are some key takeaways from this decision that stand out for me which I think are important for all NLTA members to be aware of:

1. Teachers and School Administrators care about their students and do the best they can, as professionals, with what they have to work with; but, they do not determine or control the allocation of human resources to schools. Based on the evidence in this case, the adjudicator found that,

The school was trying to provide the best education it had with the resources it was allowed by the District. (p. 46)

2. The expertise and experience of teachers in the field, on the front lines in our schools should inform employer decisions on the allocation and deployment of resources in a manner that will best meet student needs. Decision makers should be listening to teachers, not ignoring them or preventing them from discussing their ideas and recommendations with parents and guardians. The adjudicator stated,

I reiterate that during this school year the roster of Itinerant Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing [ITDHHs], re-submitted their proposal that the District establish a Satellite Support Classroom for Students who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing, a proposal which would have responded to the requirements of the [student's] ISSP. ... It was not pursued by the District. (p. 55)

... the roster of ITDHHs repeatedly raised concerns with District personnel. ... The ITDHH submitted proposals recommending significant changes in the delivery of education services for this cohort [of students]. ... The proposals were summarily rejected without being adequately evaluated and explored. ... I also find that when the roster of ITDHHs raised concerns with their superiors they were discouraged from discussing their concerns with parents. ... The Churchills were deprived of the opportunity to advocate for the satellite classroom proposal or other similar change. (pp.86-87)

I am particularly concerned by the District's ... failure to respond to the concerns raised by its roster of ITDHH. These teachers were sounding the alarm with respect to the programming being offered to

students with severe language delays ... At times they explicitly framed this as a Human Rights issue. ... Their proposals were dismissed summarily without being properly explored or evaluated by the District. (p. 106)

3. Inclusion does not always mean that all students are best served by being in the regular classroom setting with their peers all the time. There should be an adequate continuum of supports and services, offered in the most appropriate setting and respecting the dignity of the student(s). In this case, the adjudicator found that the teachers' recommended approach was the correct path forward,

In my view the implementation of the DHH Classroom (Grade 4 onward) appropriately responds to Carter's needs. (p. 72)

The only solution which appears to adequately address Carter's need was to remove him from the mainstream and offer an alternative setting where he could receive intensive intervention ... This seems to have been understood by the District's roster of ITDHH and it motivated them to seek changes in programming. (p. 83)

In his decision, the adjudicator referenced and relied upon the 2012 Supreme Court of Canada ruling in *Moore v. British Columbia (Education)*, which was the final culmination of a Human Rights complaint filed in British Columbia by the parents of a student with a learning disability, Jeffrey Moore. This was a landmark decision on disability rights in which the Court ruled that supports for students with disabilities must be adequate to ensure students have meaningful access to education services. Interestingly, the NLTA's 2016 written submission and detailed presentation to the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes focussed particular attention on the issue of inclusive education and the potential impact of the Moore decision in Newfoundland and Labrador. This was the same school year that Carter Churchill started kindergarten. To summarize, very briefly, the Association argued in its brief to the Panel that, in its approach to resourcing the Inclusive Education Model,

... it seems the Provincial Government is not living up to its human rights obligation to provide to students the required accommodations they need to fully participate in the public education system, leaving the NLTA to question how many Jeffrey Moores we have in this province. (p. 13)

During the period of time reviewed by the adjudicator in the Churchill decision, I had the privilege of working with some of the teachers in question, providing support for them in appropriately and professionally bringing their concerns and ideas to the District's attention. Overall, I see this ruling as a win from the educators' perspective. Teachers are highly qualified professionals; they are on the ground, in schools with students; they know when resources are being spread too thinly, they can see what is working and what is not, and they have the knowledge to advise on solutions. In the case of Carter Churchill, the DHH teachers' assessment of the problems and suggestions for resolving them proved, in the end, to be what was needed. Their colleagues in the school and on the student's ISSP/IEP teams, and the student's parents should not have been left to make decisions without the benefit of their expertise and considered assessment of the situation.

Regardless of the end result, I also recognize that nobody wants to be called as a witness in such matters, whatever the outcome. I have been in that chair, multiple times, and it is always stressful, regardless of the strength and integrity of one's evidence. Hopefully, one of the lessons learned and impacts of this decision moving forward will be greater acceptance of and respect for the professional perspectives of and proposals from NLTA members who are on the front lines every day with the students of our province. Students and teachers deserve no less. It is clear from the decision that things could have been very different had the teachers been listened to earlier.

References:

- *Churchill v Newfoundland and Labrador English School District*, 2023 CanLII 16071 (NL HRC)
- *Moore v British Columbia (Education)*, 2012 SCC 61 (CanLII), [2012] 3 SCR 360
- *NLTA Submission to the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes*
(http://files.nlta.nl.ca/wp-content/uploads/public/documents/ptfsubmission_jan17.pdf)