



Newfoundland and Labrador
Federation of School Councils

Invest in our Children - Invest in our Future

Submission for the 2014 Pre-Budget Consultation, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	iii
A Social Justice Issue	iii
Seven Key Priorities	iii
Introduction	iv
About the Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of School Councils	iv
<i>Our Partners</i>	iv
Our 2014 Budget Priorities	v
Priority One: NL Federation of School Councils Operational Funding	v
<i>Application of Extra Funding</i>	v
<i>Area Associations</i>	v
<i>Canadian Home & School Federation Membership</i>	vi
<i>Regional Meetings</i>	vi
Priority Two: Teacher Allocations	vi
<i>Student Support Services & Inclusion Service Delivery</i>	vii
<i>Numeracy & Literacy Specialists</i>	vii
Priority Three: Mental Health	vii
Priority Four: Drug, Alcohol, and Addictions Supports	vii

Priority Five: Guidance Counsellor Allocation	viii
Priority Six: Creating Safe & Caring Schools: Bullying	viii
Priority Seven: Parental Involvement Pilot Project	viii
<i>Background</i>	viii
<i>The Funding Request</i>	ix
<i>Project Objectives & Guidelines</i>	ix
<i>Project Goals</i>	ix
<i>Application for Funding</i>	x
Conclusion	x

Executive Summary

It is my pleasure to present this document on behalf of our Board of Directors and School Councils across Newfoundland and Labrador. Enclosed you will find many asks that represent the concerns of parents, community representatives, teachers, administrators, and even students themselves.

We firmly believe that providing quality education and social supports for our young people is the key to continued prosperity for Newfoundland and Labrador. Education is not just about our labour market prospects. Education is about providing opportunities for children to learn, succeed, and obtain the supports they require to live healthy and happy lives. Education is about building an equal playing field for our children regardless of socio-economics, gender, sexual orientation, language, status, or disability.

A Social Justice Issue

The introduction of the inclusion model in our schools is a wonderful investment in education that this government has implemented. However, as a result, we have decreased the number of teachers available to service the needs of all children. When trying to include every student in a fully-immersed classroom learning experience, we have unintentionally excluded our children that need help the most. School Councils and teachers have reported to us that because we have not properly resourced this model of education, we are failing our children. Without an appropriate amount of staffing within a needs-based allocation, our students will not receive the quality of education that our citizens expect.

Seven Key Priorities

We would like to commend government for its progress toward eliminating the deficit while making key investments in education. At this time, the Federation has identified seven key financial priorities in order to support our children. The burden to help each student achieve does not rest solely in the lap of the education system. We must continue to work together with authorities in education, health care, law enforcement, child and youth services, and most importantly: parents and school communities to deliver the programming and supports that our students need and deserve.

School Councils have told us that our young people need more resources than what we currently have in education. On behalf of the nearly 68,000 families with children of Newfoundland and Labrador, I ask: will you help them?

Yours in education,

Nathan Whalen
President
Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils

Introduction

About the Newfoundland & Labrador Federation of School Councils

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

We also have the fortune of partnering with education, community, and youth-serving organizations across Newfoundland and Labrador and Canada to advance our objectives in supporting students and School Councils.

Our Partners

Education	Community and Youth Serving Organizations	
Department of Education	Dept. of Health & Community Services	Dept. of Child, Youth, Family Services
NL English School District	Partners for Mental Health	Royal Newfoundland Constabulary
Conseil Scolaire Francophone TN-L	Canadian Cancer Society	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
Atlantic Home & School Association	School Milk Foundation	Duke of Edinburgh Program
Memorial University of Newfoundland	Egale Canada Human Rights Trust	School Milk Foundation
PEI Home & School Federation	Autism Society of NL	Department of Justice
New Brunswick Home & School Fed.	NL Learning Disabilities Association	Members of the House of Assembly
Nova Scotia Home & School Fed.	Coalition for People with Disabilities	Partners for Mental Health
School Administrators Council	Alliance for the Control of Tobacco	Canadian Home & School Federation
NL School Boards Association	School Councils across all english and francophone schools within Newfoundland and Labrador	
NL Teachers' Association		

It is the position of the NLFSC that education is an investment in the future of this province and must remain a priority area. Newfoundland and Labrador can take pride in its public education system. However, we cannot be complacent about what we have been able to achieve.

We believe that a sound fiscal plan is a necessary, but there are, of course, important programs and services that require investment – especially education.

We also understand the provincial budget is complex and fraught with many competing issues and interests. As part of the process of collecting stakeholder input on the government's budgetary policies and priorities, we would like to make you aware of our concerns about education funding and are pleased to offer the following comments and recommendations.

Our 2014 Budget Priorities

Priority One: NL Federation of School Councils Operational Funding

NLFSC expresses its gratitude for the sustaining grant of \$30,000 that it receives annually from government. Unfortunately due to cost cutting measures in the 2013 Provincial Budget our sustaining grant was cut by \$5,000 leaving us with \$25,000 to run our organization. However it is important to note that following the budget NLFSC received \$10,000 from the Department of Education to assist with our AGM costs. This funding allowed us to provide our membership School Councils with free registration and meals during our AGM.

In addition to this our sustaining grant, we are fortunate to have the in-kind support of various other stakeholder agencies. We are able to fulfill our mandate, to the best of our ability, with the help of these stakeholders through the provision of services free of charge which includes our office space, printing, and bulk mailing. We are also supported through the provision of one time, in kind services from time to time, such as speakers for our Annual General Meeting and Conference.

However without the support and assistance of these stakeholders we would not be able to maintain the level of service that we now are able to provide with the direct financial assistance that we receive from government.

Since 1999, there have been seven resolutions passed at the Annual General Meetings of the NLFSC regarding financial support from the Department of Education for School Councils.

Acting on these resolutions the Executive of NLFSC has had several discussions with the Minister of Education and Department officials over the past ten years.

In 1999-2000, NLFSC received a grant of \$40,000, however a year later it was reduced to \$30,000. Despite repeated requests for the past numbers years we have not received an increase in the grant to account for the rising costs of goods and services (inflation) or the additional needs of School Councils and communities.

NLFSC requests an increase of \$20,000 in the sustaining grant from government to make the yearly grant \$50,000. This would put our funding more in line with those received by other non-profit groups, help us to cover some of the increasing costs, and to try to maintain our current level of activity in supporting the enhancement of education of our children.

Application of Extra Funding

In compliance with the objectives of our Federation, we want to ensure the continued development of policies, practices and activities that will enhance the quality of school programs, the learning environment, and the level of student achievement in our schools.

NLFSC would like to establish School Councils Area Associations; renew our membership with The Canadian Home and School Association, and offer support to School Councils in our province through regional meetings.

Area Associations

At the time of the establishment of the NL Federation of School Councils, there were several area associations in place. Area Associations are addressed in the Constitution and By-Laws of the NLFSC. Area Associations provide the most effective approach for dealing with regional issues and events. Their purpose is to ensure communication among School Councils at the regional level.

Area Associations can draw upon a larger audience than can individual School Councils. With larger audiences, it becomes more feasible for the Federation to provide speakers and other resources for talks, discussion groups, and workshops. They can also work to bring new and existing Councils in their region into the provincial Federation. New councils can need help in getting off the ground, and a regional contact can be provided through the Area Association.

An increase in our grant would help us cover the cost of organizing four Area Associations each year.

Canadian Home & School Federation Membership

The founding meeting of the Newfoundland and Labrador Home and School and Parent-Teacher Associations was held in Gander on Saturday, October 20, 1979, under the leadership of the President of the Canadian Home and School and Parent-Teacher Federation, Mr. Tom Wilkinson.

The NLHSF and later the NLFSC was able to maintain membership in the National organization until the 2004-05 school years. The yearly membership fee up to then had been \$1,000. At the 2005 AGM, the CHSF membership fee structure changed to a flat fee of \$2150. This change made it impossible for NLFSC to maintain its membership.

In addition to the membership fees, the cost of travelling to attend the semi-annual and annual meetings of the CHSF became prohibitive. Each of these meetings cost between \$1500 and \$2000 depending on the location, for a total commitment of between \$3,000 and \$4,000 per year.

NLFSC would like to renew the relationship with the national organization and an increase in our grant would enable us to once again become a member.

Regional Meetings

NLFSC uses the weekend of its Annual General Meeting to provide professional development to the member Councils. However, we have not been able to reach the numbers of our members via this route since we tend to see mostly regional representation at these meetings. Given that this happens only once each year and is done on a rotational basis throughout the province, we would like to be able to offer professional development to our members on a yearly basis in all regions.

An increase in our grant would give us the funds necessary to provide at least three other regions with professional development in addition to the AGM weekend.

Priority Two: Teacher Allocations

In the 2013 Provincial Budget 160 teacher positions were cut from our schools. Over the past year NLFSC has heard from, and spoken with, many of our members on how the reduction to the Teacher Allocation, Administrative Allocation, Specialist Allocation and Learning Resource Teacher Allocations is impacting their schools. The message is a very strong one. These cuts will have severe, long-term impacts that will put the students of this province at an extreme disadvantage for years to come.

The reduction in the allocation for School Administrator time in last year's budget means less time that School Administrators have to carry out their duties and responsibilities.

Important initiatives such as Anti-bullying and Healthy Living programs are further compounding the stress placed upon our Administrators. For example it is unreasonable and unrealistic to expect a School Administrator to implement the Department of Education's newly revised Safe and Caring Schools policy with less Administrative time, to carry out these initiatives, than he/she had the year before.

The NLFSC still believes that a Needs Based formula as recommended and accepted by government in previous years, but has not been fully implemented, is critical to our schools and students. A Needs Based formula will address many deficiencies in the education system in the areas of Special Needs/ inclusion, improve classroom size at both the elementary and high school levels and provide full educational programming in our rural schools. This model would take the geography of our province into account and eliminate the need for a set pupil-teacher ratio. We feel it

would ensure that students across the province are treated fairly by ensuring they are all offered at least a defined level of education.

Providing this level of programs to every student in Newfoundland and Labrador would likely require an increase in funding to education - but it would be money well spent. Below are two educational areas where a needs-based model would greatly benefit our students.

Student Support Services & Inclusion Service Delivery

The Department of Education has adopted an inclusionary model of Special Services delivery. As a result, significant changes are occurring in Special Education which has a direct impact on students, teachers and our classrooms. Special Needs Students who had been pulled out of the regular classroom, to work with a Special Needs Teacher in a small group setting, now have to stay in the classroom. In most cases the individual support they once received from a Special Needs Teacher no longer exists, putting an increased demand on the classroom teacher.

The NLFSC is fully supportive of the philosophy of inclusion, but the necessary supports and resources must be provided for successful inclusion in the regular classroom. If the philosophy of inclusive education is to work as it should, additional teacher resources are required to support special needs children. Our Association receives many calls and e-mails from parents expressing concerns about the lack of teachers and student assistants to meet the needs of their child.

To fully support our Special Needs Children and to help them achieve to the best of their ability, additional teaching units are needed to address the needs identified with the implementation of the Inclusion Model.

Numeracy & Literacy Specialists

Unfortunately many students continue to struggle in the areas of math and reading and are in need extra support. Government needs to provide more in the way of training and placement of numeracy and literacy specialist teachers at the classroom level, not just at the district office, but within our schools. These school-based specialists would assist the classroom teachers in diagnosing the needs of students who are struggling and provide adequate programs (individual or small group support) to meet their needs. Research has proven that small class size and individual and small group support has yielded tremendous academic successes in the areas of math and reading for students who struggle. The objective of these school based Numeracy and Literacy Specialists would be to improve the quality of literacy and numeracy teaching within our schools, but more importantly, help our students see themselves as true learners.

NLFSC urges government to allocate greater fiscal resources for teaching units at the school level (within our schools).

Priority Three: Mental Health

The issues of students suffering from untreated Mental Health illnesses, are becoming more and more prevalent in our schools. Parents and students who contact our office say they do not know where to go to get help for depression – or that help is simply not available. The concerns around Mental Health, and the lack of supports for our youth has been topping the agenda at our AGM for the past 3 years. Because Mental Health and Addiction concerns are on the rise and because the current level of services cannot adequately respond to the needs of children who are suffering from it, **NLFSC urges government to create a new allocation for Youth, Mental Health and Addiction Counsellors, at a ratio of 1:500 students.**

Priority Four: Drug, Alcohol, and Addictions Supports

Mental Health issues and Alcohol and Drug use among our youth go hand in hand and are at increasing at an alarming rate. Research indicates that youth are not only more likely than adults to engage in risky substance use, but also to experience greater harm from that use. This can negatively impact their health, safety, safety of others and academic achievement.

Drug abuse education and prevention has never been more important that it is now. Our communities are struggling to keep pace with drugs that have high euphoric effect (and greater risk for addiction), greater affordability, and more accessibility. Drugs that were once considered "hard-core" only a generation ago are no longer taboo.

NLFSC encourages Government to fast track the construction and establishment of the Youth Addiction Treatment Centres in CBS and Central NL.

Priority Five: Guidance Counsellor Allocation

Our schools are facing an increase of students that are undergoing difficulties such as drug use, addictions and mental health illnesses and quite often it is the school's Guidance Counsellor who they reach out to for help. Unfortunately the current Guidance Counsellor allocation of one full-time personnel for 500 students, compounded by other responsibilities and workload, does not provide enough time for them to help students who require counselling services.

NLFSC believes that an increase the Guidance Counsellor allocation from 1:500 to at least 1:300 is needed to meet the needs of our students and be in line with most other Canadian jurisdictions.

Priority Six: Creating Safe & Caring Schools: Bullying

Education is the key to success; however a child who is bullied or who becomes involved in drugs may never accomplish their educational goals. Every child deserves to go to school and grow up without the fear of being bullied, unfortunately for many this is not the case. The psychological effects of bullying, whether it is verbal, physical, cyber or social bullying can be severe and long-lasting. Bullying within our schools is without a doubt harmful to a student's emotional and physical health and can make learning virtually impossible. It leaves them feeling shamed, battered, and powerless, which can lead to further problems and other violent behavior.

The NLFSC will continue to support the Department of Education with their initiatives and programs to discourage bullying and create Safe and Caring School. NLFSC will also continue to encourage students to take a stand against bullying and parents to become more active in their child's schools. Our schools are communities and it will take all of us, everyone from parents in their homes to the Minister of Education and his colleagues at the Confederation Building, to deliver a common and effective message about the long lasting psychological and physical effects of bullying.

Priority Seven: Parental Involvement Pilot Project

NLFSC seeks funding to support a pilot project for an innovative parental involvement program for School Councils in Newfoundland and Labrador. The program will serve 50 School Councils in developing and carrying out projects that will enhance the involvement of parents in their children's education. At a grant of \$500 each, this means a total project fund of \$25,000.

Background

According to Joyce Epstein, Director of the Center of School, Family and Community Partnerships at Johns Hopkins University, parent involvement in education can be categorized into six types: (Epstein, 1997)

1. Parenting—Families take care of the health and safety of children, and maintain a home environment that encourages learning and good behavior in school.
2. Communicating—Schools reach out to families with information about programs, student progress and transitions to higher grades.
3. Volunteering—Parents make significant contributions to the life of the school.
4. Learning at home—Family members help their children with homework assignments and other school-related activities.
5. Decision-making—Schools may include parents in decision-making about their own children or involve them in school decisions through School Councils, committees and regional School Councils. Parents may also join independent community groups to work for improvements in education.
6. Collaborating with the community—Schools can help to link families with support services offered by other agencies, such as healthcare, cultural events, tutoring services, and after-school childcare programs. They also can help families, students and community groups provide services to the community.

As we move forward to face the challenges in our education system, we must continue to encourage parents and guardians to become active participants in their children's education. Parental involvement in the school community provides schools and school councils an opportunity to understand relevant issues and to provide input and feedback to decision makers at all levels. We must continue to improve partnerships and involve the parental community to ensure that a strong parent voice is heard and expressed at all levels.

The Funding Request

NLFSC is proposing that the funding support to school councils take the form of a grant program for parental involvement. This decision has been made after reviewing funding programs that exist in other provincial jurisdictions for school councils. By way of examples, we refer to the Ontario Parent Involvement Policy, British Columbia Funding for Parent Advisory Councils, Yukon Territories School Councils Contribution Agreement and the PEI Parent Engagement Opportunity Fund.

We are proposing that the grant program be a pilot project with a grant of \$500 per school council for a total of 50 schools. This means a commitment of \$25,000. This grant program would offer funding to school councils for specific projects. Grants would support school-based initiatives focused on engaging parents who may experience challenges in becoming involved in their children's education.

Some examples of activities include professional development sessions for parents with focus on the school curriculum, literacy, etc.; workshops on topics such as math; guest speakers on topics related to school curriculum, parent engagement, literacy, behavior management, bullying prevention, special needs, etc.; orientation programs for new parents; resources including parent information handbook, newsletter publication and/or books; the role of the school boards and trustees as it relates to school councils; and any project that provides information, ideas and activities to parents about helping students learn and succeed at school.

Some activities that would NOT be eligible for funding include purchasing goods or services provided by the Department of Education's funding such as textbooks, library books, school furniture, computers; student focused activities such as book bags, software, prizes, etc.; or entertainment costs for celebrations such as barbecues and dinners.

Project Objectives & Guidelines

The objectives of the program would be:

- To encourage parents' involvement in their children's education;
- To support student learning;
- To support school based initiatives to reach parents who face barriers to becoming involved in their child's education or school.
- The program would include activities that involve reaching parents who:
 - Are living in a larger geographic area;
 - Have a child in school for the first time;
 - Have recently moved into the area;
 - Have not usually been involved in the school activities and events.
- Any other initiatives that are designed to inform or engage parents in their child's achievement.

Project Goals

The goals of the projects approved under the program would be to:

- Create a welcoming environment for parents;
- Enhance attendance at parent events at the school;
- Enhance communication between school and parents;
- Enhance parent involvement with their child;
- Provide skill-building opportunities for parents;
- Support student learning at home;
- Highlight the school as an important resource for parents in the community.

Application for Funding

To be eligible to apply for funding through the program, school councils must be members of the NLFSC. Individual school councils could apply or they can apply as a partnership with other school councils. School councils can submit only one proposal. The maximum amount provided for a school council proposal would be \$500. Multiple school councils could work together to identify potential projects. Each school council would be responsible for its project budget, the successful completion of the project, and the submission of a final report.

Conclusion

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

In compliance with the objectives of our Federation, we want to ensure the development of policies, practices, and activities that will enhance the quality of school programs, the learning environment, and the level of student achievement in our schools.

If we truly believe that all students deserve equitable access to quality programs and services, regardless of where they live and where they attend school, then the government of Newfoundland and Labrador must continue to invest in education.

NLFSC believes in the future of this province. We believe that our children can achieve for Newfoundland and Labrador what generations before them could not----- But it all hinges on **making education a priority, creating safe and caring learning environment and adequately resourcing the system** - thus providing them with a quality education!

*“Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.”
- William Butler Yeats*