

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION



MEDIA RELEASE

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NLTA SUPPORTS COVID-19 EDUCATION PLANS THAT PUT FAMILIES FIRST

St. John's, NL...The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA) is responding to online news items which appeared over this past weekend that suggest that teachers in the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD) are not working and supporting their students. This is untrue and such reports are misleading and offensive to the majority of teachers in the province.

The NLTA supports a COVID-19 educational plan that allows teaching and learning to continue while respecting that the pandemic and resulting suspension of in-school classes has exaggerated inequities in our province. "The public school system is one of society's greatest equalizing institutions. When schools are open, every child has direct access to their teachers and in-school supports, regardless of their home circumstances. Unfortunately, in the current situation, this is not the case," states Dean Ingram, President of the NLTA.

Every home has an individual context which may or may not support a one standardized approach to at home learning. There are homes in which a child may have to share a single computer with one or more siblings and working parents; some homes have very limited or no internet access. In contrast, in some homes, a single student may enjoy a private and quiet learning area with dedicated resources. To say, at the present time, that all students are to be treated the same would do a great disservice to many families.

"It would be fairly easy to throw a lot of school work at students right now, and call that learning," says Ingram. "What we would achieve by taking that approach would be to raise both student and parent anxiety at a time when the health, including mental health, of our families should be our paramount concern. Teachers in this province have great experience in prioritizing and compacting curriculum objectives. They have the training and expertise to identify learning gaps when schools are closed, and to determine the necessary measures to remediate for lost learning when schools reopen. This important work will carry on while teachers remain in regular contact and continue to work with their students throughout the public health emergency and resulting interruption in normal in-school instruction."

When comparing educational directives from the NLESD and the Conseil scolaire francophone provincial (CSFP), it is important to be mindful of the very different realities at play, which are clearly evident in government statistics. The English system is huge, with 63,368 students and 5,108 teachers in 253 schools, in stark contrast to the size of the CSFP, with 354 students enrolled in 6 schools, with 46 teachers. These are not the only differences between the two systems. The NLESD has over 15,000 high school students, while the CSFP has a total of 20. The NLESD has 5,194 students on track to graduate this year, compared to the 6 graduating students in the CSFP system.

Teachers in the Newfoundland and Labrador public school system are among the best trained in the world. Over the past fifteen years, significant effort has gone into making Newfoundland and Labrador a national leader in differentiated instruction. Now is not the time, when student access to education is not equal, to start treating all students the same again. The English school system has some of the best online curriculum resources for high school students in the country. Teachers throughout the province are sharing new and creative ways to promote and support learning in what is an unplanned and unprecedented environment. Teachers and school administrators, in both the English and French districts are, and will continue to be, available for their students. To suggest otherwise is misleading and discouraging to the thousands of Newfoundland and Labrador educators who, like many professionals in our province, are rising to the challenge of working from home and adapting to our new reality.

Education system statistics can be found at:

<https://www.gov.nl.ca/eecd/publications/k12/stats/#2020>

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