

For Immediate Release

January 20, 2022

NLTA FEARS RETURN TO IN-PERSON LEARNING IS TOO MUCH, TOO SOON

St. John's...The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association fears today's confirmation of a return to in-person learning for the majority of students on January 25 is premature, does not err on the side of caution, and will likely lead to further disruptions in learning for students.

"The NLTA cannot support a return to in-person learning on January 25 – it is simply too soon given the current COVID-19 situation in the province," said Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association President, Trent Langdon. "The mantra for government and Public Health officials throughout the pandemic and ongoing state of emergency has been that we should 'err on the side of caution.' With the most transmissible variant we have seen so far still circulating in the province, high daily case counts from testing, unknown numbers of individuals who are to assume they have COVID-19 without testing, and record numbers of hospitalizations, we have grave concerns that government has, in this context, decided to resume the largest daily indoor gatherings in the province of individuals who are not required to be vaccinated. At the very least, we should see a sustained return to a lower Public Health alert level before resumption of in-person learning for most students is considered. We recognize that schools have been open for in-person learning during Alert Level 4 previously, but that was before the degree and intensity of spread and outbreaks we are experiencing with the omicron variant."

The NLTA has consistently stated that it supports a return to in-person learning, but not at all costs and only when it is safe to do so for students, staff and the families and loved ones they go home to each day. The Association continues its call for a cautious approach, including implementation and enforcement of robust measures to ensure a return to in-person learning is safe and sustainable for students and school staff. Returning to the classroom prematurely, without proper precautions and protocols in place to address safety and operational realities, will only serve to further disrupt learning for students and, with increased transmission, add to the burden on our health care system.

"We agree that having our students back in the classroom is the goal, and is important for learning as well as social and emotional well-being. However, we simply do not feel it is safe or sustainable to do so now, in our current COVID-19 context. There was a lot of information in today's briefing, and we will be reviewing the revised Public Health guidance that was introduced around what constitutes high or low risk and which types of close contacts trigger different types of isolation requirements. Some of this is complex, will require clarification and may present challenges for compliance and enforcement. There are critical questions/issues that still require clarity, such as risk assessment and PPE protocols, restrictions on non-essential school access for voluntary and community activities, etc."

- 30 -

For further information contact:

Jennifer Tulk, NLTA Communications; 682-3751; jtulk@nlta.nl.ca