

For Immediate Release

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NLTA SUPPORTS EXTENSION OF ONLINE LEARNING IN RESPONSE TO UNPRECEDENTED COVID-19 TRANSMISSION IN THE PROVINCE

St. John's, NL... The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association supports today's decision to extend online learning for most students for another week. This is the most prudent decision given the unprecedented number of COVID-19 cases in the province, fueled by the highly transmissible omicron variant.

"Right now is not the time to resume in-person classes, which are the largest, daily indoor gatherings in our communities of primarily individuals who are not required to be vaccinated," said Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association President Trent Langdon. "We have seen throughout the pandemic and ongoing state of Public Health emergency that, at the best of times, many students struggle to comply with Public Health protocols like masking and physical distancing. The NLTA supports the continuation of online learning for the coming week, especially considering that COVID-19 case numbers being reported are at an all-time high, and the recent move to Alert Level 4 province wide. This decision will help slow the spread of COVID-19 in our schools and communities, which we know is what our health system needs, and minimize the potential for continued disruption to teaching and learning due to operational challenges arising from student and staff illness and isolation requirements."

The school system is not ready operationally to resume in-person learning at this time. We have seen certain schools closed on occasion for operational reasons related to COVID-19. There are teacher recruitment challenges right across the country right now, to which this province is not immune, including a serious shortage of substitute teachers in many areas.

"Clearly the goal and best scenario overall is in-person schooling, but only when it is safe to do so for students, staff and our broader school communities," said President Langdon. "Since September and last year, we have seen disruptions to learning caused by outbreaks, illness, isolation requirements and families choosing not to send students to school when they are open due to safety concerns. I don't believe the K-12 school system would be able to sustain operational requirements for in-person instruction right now, given the impact of omicron. I was pleased to see that access to rapid testing will be part of the plan for school safety when in-person classes resume, and am looking forward to continued discussions with government and school district decision makers around ensuring that our schools have all the appropriate Public Health precautions and workplace safety protocols in place prior to a return to in school learning."

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