

For Immediate Release

December 30, 2021

## **NLTA URGING STRONGER SAFETY PRECAUTIONS ONCE IN-PERSON LEARNING RESUMES IN SCHOOLS**

St. John's, NL... The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association supports the move to online learning for K-12 students on January 4th as announced by the Provincial Government yesterday. Considering the unprecedented ongoing transmission of COVID-19, this is a positive move to help minimize the potential for continued disruption to teaching and learning due to illness and isolation requirements. Making decisions weekly, with timely updates for school communities, will provide some needed stability. The Association agrees that in-person schooling is what is best for everyone, when it is safe to do so, and hopes that decision makers will be planning now for what a safe return to in school classes will look like, including increased safety precautions required for both students and staff in response to the realities of the omicron variant.

"The omicron variant has changed the game in terms of transmissibility and we support the switch to online learning for students," said Trent Langdon, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. "NLTA members have transitioned to and from online learning before and I am confident in their ability to pivot. However, I ask students, parents and families to be patient in the transition as this is a stressful time for everyone and some schools were entirely closed to staff and students from December 20 to 22 inclusive due to outbreaks and isolation requirements. The omicron variant has heightened safety concerns and we look forward to continuing discussions with government and the school districts regarding ensuring Public Health precautions and measures for our students and school staff are as robust as possible."

With online learning and circumstances being assessed on a weekly basis, there should be real focus on what is needed to ensure school safety in omicron context. The Association is calling on government and the school districts to use this time to determine and implement increased and effective school safety protocols and supports well in advance of a return to in-person learning.

"We need to be proactive, so that when students are back in schools, we can be confident that the precautions in place are up to the Omicron challenge, to protect them, teachers, and all school staff," said President Langdon. "The NLTA has, since March of 2020, consistently raised concerns about the adequacy of Public Health measures in schools which remain, when classes are in-person, the largest daily, indoor gathering of individuals who are not required to be vaccinated yet spend extended periods of time in often crowded and poorly ventilated spaces. What was in place before might not be enough for omicron and to ensure sustainability of in-person learning. We should be thinking about other options, like reducing class sizes, greater restrictions on non-essential access to school buildings, availability of rapid testing, and the provision of N95 masks for teachers."

-30-

**For further information contact:**

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