



# Reponses to Questions Posed to Executive Candidates

<b>Question</b>	<b>Page</b>
1. What are your views on how the NLTA can address issues of violence towards and abuse of teachers, including physical, verbal and online attacks, by students and/or their family members, as well as support Association members in such situations? . . . . .	<b>2</b>
2. What are your thoughts on how the NLTA could achieve improvements to address members' concerns regarding access to sick leave, including lower accruals for teachers who entered the profession from 2006 onward and medical note requirements? . . . . .	<b>4</b>
3. Increasing workload and unmanageable expectations related to class size and composition, unreasonable caseloads for specialists, supervision, and demands that fall outside the regular school day are concerns being voiced by Association members. If elected to the 2023-25 Provincial Executive, how would you advocate with the employer/government and in the public domain for solutions to address these issues? . . . . .	<b>6</b>
4. What do you think are the biggest challenges for recruitment and retention of teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador? What types of measures would be most effective in attracting certified teachers to the profession in our province and retaining them in our schools? . . . . .	<b>8</b>
5. The schedule options for the 2023-24 school year have caused a lot of discussion recently. Recognizing that NLTA members have different and diverse opinions on this issue, what approach do you think the NLTA should take in advocating to ensure that teacher perspectives are given due consideration when options are being developed? . . . . .	<b>10</b>
6. If you could choose one change/improvement in the K-12 public education system to help improve teacher mental health and well-being, what would that be and why? . . . . .	<b>12</b>



Angela Dawe



Stephanie Drover-Edmunds



Darryl George



Kelly Loch



Tracey Payne



Colin Short



Sheldon Slaney



Russell Stockley



Della Way



Sean Weir

# Provincial Executive Candidate Question Responses

## **Question 1. What are your views on how the NLTA can address issues of violence towards and abuse of teachers, including physical, verbal and online attacks, by students and/or their family members, as well as support Association members in such situations?**

### **ANGELA DAWE**

The NLTA should demand the employer adequately address abuse, and validate the realities of many of our members. Anyone that has experienced abuse, and its fallout, will know that the Prevention of Workplace Violence policy is lacking in its ability to adequately protect our members. The NLTA must insist that the resources/personnel that should be in place are in place – rather than simply redeployed from non-violent students within the same school. The NLTA should advocate for district leadership positions to be on rotational terms – including returning to the classroom before being eligible to serve another term at the district level – so that the decision makers are less removed from the daily realities of being in the trenches. Finally, the NSTU's latest Twitter activity utilizing #weneedhelp packs a powerful message. This is a national issue, and we need to band together to demand adequate supports in our schools.

### **STEPHANIE DROVER-EDMUNDS**

Issues of violence towards, and abuse of teachers, including physical, verbal and online attacks, by students and/or their family members has to be approached holistically. In conjunction with NLESD and CSFP, an NLTA facilitated teacher wellness PL needs to be provided to all members during district-wide shutdowns. The NLTA can inform members of all the services available to them, including legal services. In addition, NLTA should poll members every year via survey to allow them the opportunity to share their experiences on this issue. The NLTA needs to continue its lobby of school districts and government to take the proper steps to create a culture of respect and understanding in schools, so that such incidents are less likely to occur in the future.

Bottom line, our membership needs to know their employers support them when they are harassed or otherwise abused.

### **DARRYL GEORGE**

Violence towards and abuse of teachers is serious and evolving problem. Addressing it will require action on several fronts. Foremost among these is the need to strengthen the provisions in the collective agreement to ensure proactive measures to prevent these incidents and supportive and protective action when they do occur. Our association must at all times be diligent in ensuring that the employer lives up to its obligations outlined in the collective agreement. Moreover, the NLTA can be a catalyst for broader societal change through lobbying efforts outlining the reality and pervasiveness of this violence, its negative impact on

teachers, and the education system as a whole. The goal would be to have a positive influence on public opinion, district policies, and government legislation aimed at correcting this problem. In addition, the NLTA must ensure it has responsive policies and programs to support members who are faced with these situations.

### **KELLY LOCH**

NLTA is currently working on a plan with the Government and other agencies for a School Safety Coalition to help address safety and violence in our schools. Many teachers “brush off” these attacks and don't do anything about it for a number of reasons. This type of attack on ones' career and character can be stressful. Teachers need to take a stand. First of all, seek assistance and advice from NLTA as to what can be done. Report incidents to the employer. Contact law enforcement and see if anything can be done. It is important to explore avenues that can help mediate the situation. Parents and students need to get the message that this type of behavior will not be tolerated. Educating parents/guardians and holding them accountable for their actions is crucial and there needs to be action from the employer to support this.

### **TRACEY PAYNE**

The Association members need to be educated. The NLTA staff have presented on the rights of teachers with respect to violence and abuse and they need to continue to do so. They need to encourage teachers to report incidents of this nature. Encourage teachers to exercise their rights and report incidents to the appropriate authorities. The NLTA needs to continue to offer support to the teachers through EAP/counselling. They should also partner with NLESD to put specific protocols in place for these incidents. Teachers need to be provided a safe, healthy, and supportive work environment.

### **COLIN SHORT**

The NLTA has to protect our members to the best of its ability. There are some measures of protection under Article 58 of our collective agreement. However there are only two clauses in this Article. We must continue to strengthen it through negotiations. As well, we must continue to seek improvements for members who are hurt or injured as a result of these actions and find themselves in receipt of wage-loss benefits from Workplace NL. Members have to use all means of protection at their disposal, including Occupational Health and Safety legislation. I have

been a member of the Provincial Executive that has strategically hired NLTA Administrative Officers with a legal background to better serve our members with these concerns.

### **SHELDON SLANEY**

While putting procedures in place to safeguard teachers, the NLTA needs to be more outwardly proactive. Building welcoming, empathetic, and secure connections with students, families, and outside agencies is essential. Creating a relationship with the RNC or RCMP may give all staff and students a sense of security. Teachers, parents, and students should all be aware of the standards for every social contact through the School Code of Conduct as well as the ramifications of not upholding these expectations. If there were written guidelines for how and when parents/guardians should contact teachers, the constant exposure and access that teachers currently experience with relation to student/family communication could be minimized. Any staff member who experiences violence should receive immediate mental, physical, and/or emotional support tailored to their individual needs.

### **RUSSELL STOCKLEY**

To address physical violence, we must ensure safeguards are put in place for teachers. We must advocate to ensure that the employer adheres to its OH&S policy in every fashion. Administrators must support their teachers by ensuring that students are removed from classrooms if they are demonstrating violent actions. The association must continue to advocate for more student assistant support to help protect our teachers.

We must encourage teachers that experience verbal abuse and abuse on social media to report these actions to the NLTA. We cannot help out our colleagues if they keep these actions to themselves.

For members impacted by violence, we need to advocate for special leave provisions around violence so that those affected can physically and mentally recover from their violent attack, especially if our members experience trauma. How can they possibly do their job without being in the right mind frame to do so?

### **DELLA WAY**

Violence in schools is on the rise and we do not fully understand the extent of it because people are afraid to report such instances. We have to create a safe place where teachers, students, parents and administrators can connect with professionals anonymously to voice concerns, seek advice, and report incidents. Creating a partnership with law enforcement, mental health agencies and other community supports where people can freely discuss issues and seek solutions would allow for a safe space for people to come forward. Creating this safe environment will allow people to face the issues head on and curb the occurrences.

### **SEAN WEIR**

Abuse of NLTA members is a real issue in today's system of education, whether it be physical, verbal, online, or even an orches-

trated assault upon one's professional reputation, and it can not continue to be tolerated. In my opinion, the perpetrators of such heinous acts must be held accountable for their actions. Unfortunately, for our members, I do not believe that this is presently the case. The impacts of these "assaults" on our members are real and include the depletion of sick leave, a loss of income, social-emotional trauma, and disruptions to family life. I feel that it is about time that the offenders are given real consequences for their actions. As such, I would like to see the NLTA lobby the provincial government to bring forth legislation (specific to educators) to protect our members from these incidents.

## **Question 2. What are your thoughts on how the NLTA could achieve improvements to address members' concerns regarding access to sick leave, including lower accruals for teachers who entered the profession from 2006 onward and medical note requirements?**

### **ANGELA DAWE**

The NLTA needs to exercise an aggressive approach to this matter. The reality is that our post-2006 members are without sufficient leave. From regular illness, to mental health days, to medical/specialist appointments, to menstrual/menopause needs, to Covid, to children w/symptoms, to recovery periods post surgery/car accident/etc, many post-2006 members are flailing. The NLTA should prepare a comparison chart of leave availability that highlights the discrepancy between the employer and the post-2006 members. This could easily illustrate the gross inequity to the employer during negotiations. As for medical notes, and substitute teachers having to show up body and bones to utilize a sick day, this flies in the face of our members, as professionals. With the doctor shortage, and the increased need for mental health days – due to the harsh realities in our classrooms, an MoU should be enacted to remove the need for medical notes.

### **STEPHANIE DROVER-EDMUNDS**

Seventy percent of our membership is female, many of whom begin their families soon after embarking on their career. These members are disproportionately affected by the 12-day limit. All this is not to say that other members have nearly enough sick leave. They do not! As frontline workers, teachers face countless pathogens every year and a 12-day sick leave bank is not adequate.

With the increasing pressures and stresses of teaching, many of our members need far more sick leave, particularly for mental health issues, as well as all other forms of leave.

NLTA advocacy on this topic must be focused on creating an equal system where all members have the same and adequate bank of sick and other leaves.

Sick notes should be banished once and for all. It is a waste of all human resources related to doctors' visits and is an unnecessary and potentially invasive tracking process.

### **DARRYL GEORGE**

The sick leave provisions for teachers who entered the profession from 2006 onward are inadequate in meeting the needs of our members. This is having a detrimental effect on their well-being and is playing a role in the difficulties around recruitment and retention. An improvement in sick leave provisions is of vital importance. The pathway to resolving it runs through the collective agreement. Two key steps are required. First, a detailed analysis of the negative impact the current sick leave provisions are having on our members needs to be conducted. The findings of this analysis should form the basis for future negotiations

where improvements to sick leave should be a priority. By demonstrating the impact this issue is having, combined with it being a priority at the bargaining table, improvements should be realized in future collective agreements.

### **KELLY LOCH**

With major stresses on our Health system, requiring a medical note for any days less than 3 days at a time by the employer should not be one of them. Being in a school with many children on a day to day basis lends to a breathing ground for sickness. Not to mention the daily strains on our mental health that can lead to sickness. Teachers need to take a "mental health day" now more than ever. Our young teachers cannot continue to borrow sick time from next year or the year after. Improving lower accruals for post 2006 teachers needs to be the number one focus of our Collective Bargaining and a concern of all teachers in this profession. We have a moral obligation to leave this profession in a better place for our present and future teachers.

### **TRACEY PAYNE**

Post 2006 sick leave is an issue for many. Attempts to negotiate increases have been futile. The introduction of personal leave days would help. Higher accruals have been part of the current negotiations and we need to strive to obtain these higher accruals in future collective bargaining as well.

Changes are needed to the provision of sick notes. Several teachers do not have a family physician and would have to go to the hospital to seek a medical note. They are difficult to get and it is putting an unnecessary strain on the health care system.

NLESD should make available to teachers the number of sick days used and the number of sick days remaining. It should be easily available to teachers. Teacher payroll can put this information on the pay stubs like other government employees. Teachers should not have to bother the secretaries of the schools for this information.

### **COLIN SHORT**

In a perfect and fair world, all members would have the same provisions as those who started their careers prior to September 1, 2006. Every NLTA Negotiating Team includes provisions to improve this in its opening package and tries to improve it during each round of negotiations. The current opening package seeks to make some improvements to this clause. It may take more than one round to fix, but we cannot give up on this issue. The issue of medical notes is equally important due to the shortages of primary health care providers, many members do not have one, those that do, have long waits to secure appointments. The NLMA does not want to waste appointment times

to complete these notes. We do have the ability to negotiate an MOA that could eliminate the need for notes, similar to the one agreed to during the early stages of Covid.

### **SHELDON SLANEY**

The disparity in sick leave for teachers was a bargaining concession that has yet again segregated our profession. There should be no discrepancies between the number of days each and every teacher receives at the beginning of a school year. We have responsibilities as parents to our children that results in us having to take time away from work to ensure the wellbeing of our entire family and equally important, ourselves. Therefore, we should all be given the same number of days and providing notes should cease. We are professionals and therefore, like many others including some federal employees, we should not have to be penalized for having to take a day off without a medical note. In order for this adjustment to occur we, as a unified body, have to highlight to the government its importance when we sit at the table to negotiate our next contract.

### **RUSSELL STOCKLEY**

Teachers on the post 2006 agreement are exhausting their time quickly. The NLTA must continue to lobby the government for more than the 12 days allocated to post 2006 teachers. Many of these members know and understand the differences in the sick leave provisions within the collective agreement.

The association must also seek other leave provisions within the agreement. Teacher wellbeing has been well highlighted within the priorities of the membership. Some form of mental health leave or personal leave would help teachers during these times of need.

The healthcare system is overwhelmed like us. Still for all, the employer is requesting a doctor to “prove” that you are sick. Is that really a good use of the physician’s time? Medical certificates are costly to the taxpayers of the province, and are unnecessarily burdening teachers by proving they are sick. We need to advocate for the elimination of these notes.

### **DELLA WAY**

The pandemic has opened our eyes to a wide variety of issues. Sick notes and the lack of sick leave for teachers who entered the profession after 2006 is definitely two that were highlighted for the teachers of this province. We need to eliminate sick notes if we are requiring teachers to stay home for flu like symptoms. Requiring notes at a cost to teachers who do not have a family doctor is adding financial strain and unnecessarily using up healthcare resources that are strained to the max already. We need to work with what is realistic to attain and I believe that the 18 days that is proposed in the current negotiations is a step in the right direction to getting our members more sick time benefits and would be a significant gain.

### **SEAN WEIR**

Sick leave for post-2006 hires is a vital issue which must be recognized by our employer. As we saw during the pandemic, schools are breeding grounds for airborne viruses, and, as a result, staff within those buildings are at a greater risk of getting sick than many other public sector employees. A “one size fits all” approach to sick leave for public sector employees didn’t make sense back then and it continues to lack common sense right now. If the risk of illness in a profession is greater, then greater sick leave benefits are required. Improved sick leave benefits should be presented to the employer as a means of recruiting more teachers.

In terms of medical note requirements for short-term absences, the NLMA is quite clear in its disdain for its usage. This should be enough for our provincial government, with a doctor at the helm, to abolish this practice.

### **Question 3. Increasing workload and unmanageable expectations related to class size and composition, unreasonable caseloads for specialists, supervision, and demands that fall outside the regular school day are concerns being voiced by Association members. If elected to the 2023-25 Provincial Executive, how would you advocate with the employer/government and in the public domain for solutions to address these issues?**

#### **ANGELA DAWE**

I once invited the Minister of Education to work from my classroom for a month – it was declined. I regularly write elected government officials to express my dire concerns about the education system. “Making it work” has not bode us well. Deep learning and UDL sounds like an oasis – yet we are so grossly under-resourced, buried in expectations, and are left fulfilling innumerable roles. If we were to revoke our volunteer hours, and put away our superhero capes, the system would invariably collapse. The disconnect between the government’s perception of our system and our lived reality is staggering. Hungry students. Students with inadequate home support. Students laden with trauma. Students with complex needs. Violence. The invitation for someone from government to visit my classroom and teach me how to effectively do my job without burning out is ongoing – they can even use the washroom at recess time.

#### **STEPHANIE DROVER-EDMUNDS**

I have participated in a number of focus groups regarding the teacher allocation review, voicing the concerns of not only Special Services, but all teachers impacted by these issues. Focus groups identify concerns to bring to the attention of the employer and government departments. As a member of the Provincial Executive, I will continue to take every opportunity to support NLTA in its lobbying of government and school districts for improvements for all of our members. I will continue to identify these issues in consultation with our members, outlining our suggestions and/or recommendations for improvements. I will continue to work hard to build consensus among all stakeholders, including school administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other members of the community. I will advocate for increased funding to hire more educators in order to create better learning environments through smaller class sizes, classes that consider composition in concert with student numbers.

#### **DARRYL GEORGE**

The NLTA is the collective voice for teachers in our province. We are strongest when we speak with a united message through our association. My role as an executive member is to help shape the priorities and actions of the association. It is essential that we keep these concerns at the forefront of our collective action. To start, we must establish effective lines of communication with our members through input from each of our Branches. Once a clear understanding of teachers’ concerns and needs is established, we need to strategize as to how to best advocate for

positive change in these areas. The actions taken will include; attempting to change broader public opinion on the need to make improvements on these issues, influencing government decision-makers to support change, working with the employer to facilitate more favorable policies, and working to include provisions in the collective agreement to address these issues.

#### **KELLY LOCH**

Our new #HiddenRealityNL media campaign needs to continue to bring strong, true stories about these pressing issues. The unreasonable workload of our classroom teachers needs to be put in various role play scenarios and show how the lack of support is hurting everyone including our students! Class size and composition issues and others listed above need to be shown to parents/guardians and the public through various media. We need their help to demand proper support for their children – our students! Our specialists such as Speech Language Pathologists and Ed. Psychologists have a distinct workload that will be increased with the changes coming forth in the new Special Education Policy. We cannot keep “making it work” to the detriment of ourselves. We need human resources who are on the ground helping our children daily!

#### **TRACEY PAYNE**

The employer is tasked with staffing schools. They need to partner with NLTA to address these concerns. Workload is impacted by the number of teachers in a school, as is class size and composition. Teachers need to know their limits and strive to obtain work-life balance. Demands being placed on teachers must be reasonable. I would advocate for class size and composition being included in our collective agreement. The severe needs of students must be counted as more than one student when determining the allocations and class size. Hard caps for all grades need to be embedded in the collective agreement, a maximum of 25 students for lab courses, contract out supervision and have one substitute permanently assigned to every school.

We need to continue with our public relations campaign, such as the “Class Size Matters Now More Than Ever” campaign, to express our concerns and issues we face daily.

#### **COLIN SHORT**

The education system in our province is in crisis. There are shortages in all corners of the province that can only be addressed by adding more units to the system. We need an increase in administrative time, IRT allocations, Speech Language Pathologists, Educational Psychologists, Guidance Counselors BVI/

DHH and Autism Itinerants. Class sizes must be reasonable and manageable. Mileage and meal rates must be reasonable. This situation becomes more untenable when there are not enough substitute teachers available to replace members away for valid reasons. One solution offered by the employer is to offer “voluntary PL” outside of the workday. Another solution is to only replace “classroom teachers” who are away from their positions. These solutions are completely unacceptable. We are always trying to do more with less and members are exhausted. The “Hidden Reality” campaign is a start. We must continue to press on this issue at every opportunity.

### **SHELDON SLANEY**

As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. I truly believe that we need to visually show society what our current working lives entail. A parent/guardian cannot visualize what it’s like to teach high school geography to 37 unique students with varying academic, emotional and behavioral needs in one classroom. So let’s show them. Let’s bring the day to day life of a teacher to the forefront. It’s easy to cast stones when you haven’t walked in someone’s shoes. So let’s have society lace up the footwear of a teacher and see if the system is working. Media advertisements that expose the negative aspects need to be expressed by society, not teachers, as we are often viewed as whining entitled people. Therefore, we need to educate parents who have the loudest voice with regards to enticing the government, so together we can make the necessary changes.

### **RUSSELL STOCKLEY**

The employer and general public often forget that the job of a teacher does not conclude at the end of the instructional day. Both have to be reminded that there is a workload beyond the instructional day for teachers.

Class sizes and composition are burning teachers out, especially with the lack of human resource supports available to many of our teachers. In the recently published Independent Review of the Teacher Allocation Model (2022) there are many recommendations around class sizes and caps. We must lobby the government to adhere to these, as the review was sanctioned by them in the first place.

Far too often meetings are scheduled beyond the instructional day when teachers are exhausted. We must advocate to hold any ISSP/IEP/RTL meetings during the instructional day to help alleviate some of the workload issues on teachers.

### **DELLA WAY**

We need to educate the public on what is happening in our schools. Because a school is open does not mean that students are receiving the quality of education and supports that are required where each student is able to achieve to the best of their ability. Schools need to be resourced properly with staff, specialists, and qualified substitutes so that people can do their own jobs. We need to continue to fight for Cap sizes in all grades and alleviate some of the unnecessary duties that can be covered by outside agencies. Alleviating the supervision duties for staff

would allow for more collaboration time amongst our members and ease the demands being placed on all stakeholders.

### **SEAN WEIR**

I believe that the real changes that we all desire for our workplaces, and are so desperately needed for our students, can only be achieved when the public becomes more informed about what is truly happening (or not happening) in our schools. Nobody knows the realities of today’s schools quite like us – the NLTA members who staff those buildings. If elected, I promise to continue to bring our stories to the Executive table where the next Executive can strategize how best to deal with these issues, whether that be through the media or some other strategic action. That being said, I would like to see the NLTA organize a series of “Education Forums” around the province where NLTA members can discuss the “challenges” of their profession with local MHAs, members of school councils, and the media.

## **Question 4. What do you think are the biggest challenges for recruitment and retention of teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador? What types of measures would be most effective in attracting certified teachers to the profession in our province and retaining them in our schools?**

### **ANGELA DAWE**

The realities of today's grossly under-resourced and complex classrooms is a RED ALERT. From abuse, to being unable to meet the needs of all of our learners, to behavioural issues, to mental health needs, to the expectation of "make it work", our members are burning out – and potential teacher candidates are choosing paths that fulfill their passion for learning in other fields. Currently, many teachers are not encouraging others to go into education. This is a RED ALERT. Living through the pandemic and other such uncertainties in the past few years has given rise to people opting to reprioritize their priorities. We must make gains in Collective Bargaining that coincide with the priorities of our members – including substantial gains on class size/composition, annual leave, enhanced sick leave, signing and retention bonuses, housing/travel benefits for remote areas, and a concrete plan to address the abuse/violence in our schools.

### **STEPHANIE DROVER-EDMUNDS**

The biggest challenges for recruitment and retention of teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador are the lack of financial incentives compared to other provinces, maternity benefits, increased workload, and an increase in violent incidents within the classrooms.

In order to attract certified teachers to the profession and retain them in our schools, school districts and government should consider offering incentives such as higher salaries and benefits, job security, professional development opportunities that are teacher/student forged, and ways to provide safety inside classrooms. They should also offer programs for tuition reimbursements for new teachers, and for teachers wanting to complete additional certification training.

They should consider providing more funding and resources to rural schools in order to improve their infrastructure and make them more attractive to potential teachers. When vacant positions prove difficult to fill, incentives such as housing and moving allowances would be effective.

### **DARRYL GEORGE**

There are a lot of challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers in our province. The one that predominates is the hiring practices of the employer. More specifically, the practice in recent years of creating partial teaching positions, especially those that are less than half-time. This practice is highly unusual in the employment field. It does not take into consideration teachers' educational qualifications or the realities of the modern job market. Simply put, it is not a respectful way to introduce new teachers to the profession, and many are refusing to enter or remain, under this approach. Added to this is the practice in recent years

of requiring teachers to have majors in all core teaching areas, with double majors required in some instances. These practices create a barrier to entry into the profession and they can delay the obtaining of permanent positions, both of which negatively impact recruitment and retention.

### **KELLY LOCH**

**Salary, lack of permanent status and lack of human resources** are some of the top challenges for the recruitment and retention of teachers. We have gone too long without a proper increase in our salary scales and we have not been able to keep up with inflation. I recommend a debt relief program for new teachers who stay in NL, housing and financial incentives where needed and more full time permanent positions. Teachers need stability for their families and the future. These incentives need to be provided to **all** teachers who are in coastal Labrador and remote rural areas. Teachers need help in classrooms to support the many diverse needs of their students. If these challenges were addressed, we would see positive changes in our Teachers' Mental Health and Wellness! Action by the government with these suggestions will help with the recruitment and retention of teachers in this province.

### **TRACEY PAYNE**

The biggest challenges come from under the umbrella of teacher shortages, both regular teachers and substitutes. As a result, workload has increased, internal coverage is constant, and stress levels are increasing. One effective measure would be to increase teacher training opportunities at MUN. You cannot recruit what does not exist. Secondly, continue new incentives for new hires and offer them as retention incentives for teachers already in hard to fill positions. Thirdly, offer a subsidy for travel. Have two round trips a school year paid in full for each teacher in hard to fill positions. Lastly, partner with NLESD to bring teachers to recruitment fairs to speak about the challenges and rewards of teaching.

### **COLIN SHORT**

The recruitment and retention issue is the greatest challenge we face as an organization. In order to solve this issue, we have to lobby the Districts and the Department to be more aggressive in attracting teachers to the profession and the province. Financial incentives would be one prong to the approach – teachers can be offered signing or retention bonuses. Memorial University has to be a partner in this too in order to attract more education students. Why can't there be paid internships? Student loan forgiveness plans for graduates to commit for a period of time in the profession? The second prong would involve making the



profession more desirable by addressing the workload issues that we have been lobbying for: adequate administrative time, reasonable class sizes/caseload numbers, guaranteed preparation time, fair and equitable sick leave provisions, improvements to educational, parental, family and even new paid leave opportunities.

### **SHELDON SLANEY**

Who wouldn't want to relocate to Newfoundland and Labrador to work as a teacher at a school for less than a full-time unit, without the assurance that you could supplement your pay with substitute teaching time and without having to cross every possible extremity in the hopes that you might luck into another replacement by September? We cannot recruit and retain teachers if the jobs are not available. Generally speaking, you have to take portions of a unit in order to become permanent and you can be bumped to a school far outside your current residence. If a teacher is hired it should be full time units only. In addition, we need to look at 2-3 year contracts that allow consistency and the ability for teachers to earn tenuousness and permanency.

Then, teachers and their families have the chance to make future decisions based on facts rather than wishful thinking.

### **RUSSELL STOCKLEY**

Recruitment and retention start at our junior teachers. We need to find a way to keep them in the province working. A failure to do so over the past few years has created the system which we currently have.

Inflation is making it nearly impossible to keep up with paying the bills. The appetite to teach on the current salary scales is simply not enough. We need to eliminate many of the beginning salary steps so that young teachers can make teaching in NL economically feasible.

Recruitment and retention are next to impossible due to the lack of substitute teachers. Many of these teachers go through the line of substitute, replacement, permanent. This will never happen if we cannot make substitute teaching appealing for all teachers in this category. We must advocate strongly for substitute teachers by making gains in our collective agreement around substitute leaves, pay and pension.

### **DELLA WAY**

As we have seen with recent recruitment efforts by government, money talks. We need increases in salaries for teachers to attract them to the province. We need to help with relocation costs for vacant positions and provide housing in areas where housing is unfeasible or unavailable. Once we have them attracted then we need to make working conditions favorable so we can retain them. We need class sizes and compositions where teachers can work and provide a quality education to all of their students. Teachers cannot continue to be stretched in all directions and left feeling that they cannot help their students achieve to their full potential.

### **SEAN WEIR**

The biggest challenges for recruitment and retention of teachers in our province are the current working conditions, the hiring process itself, inadequate financial incentives to attract teachers to "hard to fill" positions, and the unrealistic expectations placed upon teachers both during and after the work day. Improving the working conditions will make the profession more desirable and ultimately more attractive as a career option for prospective education students. There must be a "Pathway to Permanency" (if so desired) for those currently without full-time employment as teachers/TLAs. The lack of a definite route to permanent full-time employment is discouraging for our members and, quite frankly, in today's economic times, it has become quite challenging for our members. As the medical profession has discovered, financial incentives must be improved to attract individuals to "hard to fill" positions. Any incentives created to attract new hires must also be provided to current staff.

**Question 5.** The schedule options for the 2023-24 school year have caused a lot of discussion recently. Recognizing that NLTA members have different and diverse opinions on this issue, what approach do you think the NLTA should take in advocating to ensure that teacher perspectives are given due consideration when options are being developed?

**ANGELA DAWE**

Members have diverse views, needs, and preferences. This will never change. The NLTA should canvas members to get a reading of where the majority of the membership lies, and what the trends are in reasoning. Armed with this information, the NLTA could request to have a representative sit with the Dept/District when creating the options. A call for transparency in the voting results is also needed. When members are valued/included in the decision-making process of any issue, greater satisfaction is achieved.

Addressing the shortcomings of the current sick leave for post-2006 members would also influence this issue, as mental health days are not a luxury – they are a necessity. As we also consider teacher retention and recruitment, annual leave could help alleviate the added stress of holiday travel for those that work in isolated communities and/or members that work a great distance from their family roots.

**STEPHANIE DROVER-EDMUNDS**

The NLTA should continue to take a collaborative approach in advocating for teacher perspectives when developing options for the 2023-24 school year. The NLTA should engage in dialogue with the school districts, government and other stakeholders to ensure that our members’ considerations are taken into account when making decisions on the school year schedule. This ensures that teachers have a real voice in the decision-making process, and that their opinions and concerns are taken into consideration prior to developing the schedule options.

As well, perhaps it’s time to take a serious look at taking a March Break every year, instead of the floating dates for Easter, as so many other jurisdictions do. To improve teacher wellness, long durations without breaks need to be addressed. The current calendar increases the demand for working long periods without a break, further exacerbating member fatigue and burnout.

**DARRYL GEORGE**

The yearly school schedule is an important consideration for teachers. The current process for providing feedback to the school district is through an annual school survey of teachers. This is an important quantitative measure and should be continued as a means of accurately gauging annual teacher preferences. What is missing from the current method is an opportunity for teachers to provide input into the development of these options prior to them being voted on. A more constructive approach and one that would better reflect the interests of teachers would involve the establishment of a joint committee that has

representation from both the NLTA and the employer. This would provide a greater probability that the options presented would be more suitable to teachers’ interests.

**KELLY LOCH**

NLTA can write a letter to the Minister of Education to express ideas and concerns brought forward by members. Consultation with NLTA would help when deciding on options for the calendar. There is a major concern for the very early return to school after Christmas break – January 2, 2024. This will cause some to have to return to rural areas before the new year due to lack of air and ferry services on New Year’s Day! It is important for decision makers to show that such situations were thought about in advance. This would show concern and respect for the profession and teachers.

**TRACEY PAYNE**

The NLTA should lobby NLESD to partner with them to develop calendar options. Encourage at least 3 possible options and complete this task early in the school year. The NLTA should advocate for the NLESD to survey teachers to determine their preferences for calendar options. Also, the NLTA could advocate for the possibility of regional calendars for teachers.

**COLIN SHORT**

The Minister of Education has the authority to set the opening and closing dates for schools. The consultation process of determining the schedule between these bookends has become flawed. School Board-Teacher Liaison Committees would historically prepare three options for members to consider and vote on – this year it has been reduced to two – and with things in flux with the NLESD, the liaison committee is no longer an effective tool to gather teacher’s opinions. We must lobby the employer to hold these meetings regularly and use the grievance procedure when they do not. Until we can negotiate some control over this issue, it will continue to be problematic. Past surveys have left our Association divided. There is a real issue when the calendar does not cooperate and we are left with a long stretch from the return to school in January to Good Friday.

**SHELDON SLANEY**

Yearly schedules should be presented by teachers to the government not by the government to teachers. Establishing a schedule that avoids any personal conflicts while also meeting the demands of all teachers is difficult. However, the NLTA needs to be involved at the political level to make sure that teachers’ needs and wants are taken into account; as a result, the schedule

possibilities would then represent the holiday and work schedule proposed by teachers. It may be possible to provide varying scheduling preferences based on school levels (Primary/Elementary/Junior/High School), but doing so would require the NLTA and government to do a thorough analysis of both their operational and budgetary aspects. It is crucial to keep in mind that teachers should get schedules a year in advance rather than six months before they are implemented, as their decisions may be influenced by events that have already been scheduled.

## **RUSSELL STOCKLEY**

As acknowledged, teachers have diverse opinions around this topic. However, as an association we also want to have cordial decision making in an area such as scheduling. The employer emphasizes the need for inclusion in our classrooms. I think it would be wise to hold the employer accountable to practice what they preach when it comes to their core employees – teachers.

Teachers have a variety of reasons as to their thoughts and opinions on scheduling. For health and wellness reasons, some teachers want longer Christmas and Easter schedules for travel. Others prefer shorter holiday seasons in lieu of extra days in February and March. Although a teacher may not get the schedule that they voted on, at least getting a vote allows the member to be a stakeholder in this process, which in turn helps with membership engagement, which is a vital part of being an NLTA member.

## **DELLA WAY**

An online form should be developed where teachers can offer online suggestions to government regarding options for each school year. We are living in a technological world where this can be done efficiently by simply creating a google form. Thus, seek the advice from those who are most impacted by the calendar options and offer more options for teachers to choose from. Two possible suggestions for the current year was unacceptable.

## **SEAN WEIR**

I believe that the time has come for the NLTA to survey the membership again to gauge what appetite members have with regards to returning to work prior to Labour Day weekend. The Association needs to have a clear understanding of what our members wish their yearly schedule to be. Also, I think that the NLTA should lobby the employer to consider a “regional” approach to yearly schedules. I feel that years ago, when we had several school districts across the province, there were less complaints about the yearly schedule, as allowances were made for activities, events, and circumstances unique to each region of the province. With all of the frustration expressed by members, it is obvious to me that, since the adoption of a province-wide school calendar, a one-size-fits-all approach is certainly not working.

## **Question 6. If you could choose one change/improvement in the K-12 public education system to help improve teacher mental health and well-being, what would that be and why?**

### **ANGELA DAWE**

We need to have mechanisms in place to cultivate a healthier working relationship with the powers that allocate resources, and for said powers to adopt a heightened awareness of the human element of our membership. An “Us vs Them” mentality devastates our collective efficacy. Having to beg for resources has exceedingly weighed down our system, our morale, and our ability to do our jobs. The struggle is beyond palpable when it comes to a critical array of issues including, but not limited to securing adequate resources/staffing, accessing sufficient leave, replacement teachers caught in the vortex, full time hiring, securing a medical note, dealing with abuse/harassment/violence, and unthinkable caseloads for our specialists. Think about oxygen masks on an airplane – before helping others, you are directed to secure your own first so you have the ability to help others. Anything that veers from this requisite tenet has incalculable ramifications.

### **STEPHANIE DROVER-EDMUNDS**

I believe one change/improvement in the K-12 public education system to help improve teacher mental health and well-being would be greater promotion and provision of a safe classroom environment devoid of physical and verbal aggression/abuse towards our members.

NLTA-facilitated Teacher Wellness PL during district-wide shutdowns, and scheduled time for mindful activities would also prove beneficial.

There are many schools in this province with gymnasiums and various types of exercise and workout rooms, so why is it that so many of our members are not allowed to access them after hours, if they so choose? Yoga, mindfulness, cardio and weight training are interests of many members, yet they can't access that which will physically help them deal with the mental strain of teaching in this province.

Our membership is burning out from compassion fatigue, aggression towards their person, and lack of supports to help them. That is not acceptable.

### **DARRYL GEORGE**

The one change/improvement that would help improve teachers' mental health and well-being would be to make improvements in the area of class size and composition. This factor has a profound and detrimental impact on teachers. Large classes increase the number of hours planning, grading, modifying, reporting, and communicating with students and families. Likewise, large class sizes place an increased burden on the teacher during the school day through the need for a higher level and intensity of classroom tasks. Larger classes also consist of a wider range of learners who require more frequent and varied inter-

ventions, both in terms of learning tasks and behavioural needs. Combined, these aspects of class size and composition negatively impact teachers' work and home life. Therefore, the reduction in class size is the first step toward improving teachers' mental health and well-being.

### **KELLY LOCH**

**Class Size and Composition** affects all teachers daily. The unrealistic workload expectations (RTL forms, completing review 360 and behavior plans, planning diverse instruction, implementing universal design for learning) are deeply affecting many educators' mental health and well-being and contributing to burnout. This is having a grave effect on the recruitment and retention of teachers in this province! We need human resource support such as Teaching and Learning Assistants to help in our classrooms. Teachers can plan for diverse learning, however they need help in executing the plans daily. If we have human support, this will help teachers to effectively teach to the individual and diverse needs of students in the classroom. This in turn will have a positive effect on improving teacher mental health and well-being. Teachers will feel supported and it will help lift the concerns that they have for their students. Thus, lessening mental strain.

### **TRACEY PAYNE**

Effects of staff shortages are increasing workloads and negatively affecting mental health and well-being. Attracting and retaining more teachers has got to be a top priority in this province. Teacher shortages are increasing stress and workload and the need for the more teachers is evident. Assigning a permanent substitute at each school in the province would help alleviate the issue. The schools in the province need more teachers! We need to address the allocations for schools.

### **COLIN SHORT**

I feel that in order to improve the mental health of our members, we need more human resources in our system. Members need to be treated in a fair and equitable manner by our employer and we need to be given the tools to complete our work. Calls to the NLTA Employee Assistance Program are doubling and tripling year over year and teachers are complaining of June tiredness early in the school year. Unrealistic class sizes, duty schedules, covering for colleagues, “optional” PL opportunities after school are becoming far too frequent. All members of the NLTA need reasonable work expectations. If we cannot take care of ourselves, how can we help the students entrusted to our care? We have been lobbying for the Department to fund a third EAP coordinator. We have to find a way to create a healthy work-life balance for our membership.

## **SHELDON SLANEY**

Increased HUMAN RESOURCES are the key component to change for our entire education system. Looking at every prior query, it becomes clear that having more teachers lessens our present concerns and issues. A school environment where all stakeholders feel devoted to, supported by, and engaged in our educational system would result from allocating more classroom teachers, specialists, guidance counselors, and administrators. This would also prompt a decrease in class sizes, a reduction in the workload of teachers, an improvement in their mental health from the additional support and assistance, and a greater ability to give more students the individualized attention they require. Having the necessary number of teachers in every school would ease the strain that many, if not most, teachers currently bear. As Michael Morpurgo highlights, “it’s the teacher that makes the difference, not the classroom.”

## **RUSSELL STOCKLEY**

We want to see our students reach their full potential. Far too often this is roadblocked by the lack of student support services in our classrooms. We have students that are approved for IRT and Student Assistant time that are either receiving less than approved for, or in many cases none at all. The RTL model is making teachers question their “good teaching practices” and many teachers are feeling hopeless for their students, dejected for themselves, and burnt out as a person and professional. The RTL model is touted by the employer as the go-to model moving forward, but all it has caused is increased paperwork and workload for teachers while stripping them of their human support.

Teachers are doing all that they can to monitor overgrown, diverse classrooms. Improperly resourced classrooms are unfair to students and teachers, and are causing more stress onto our teachers than ever before.

## **DELLA WAY**

Class size and Composition would be the number one issue that teachers need dealt with to help with mental health and well being. Large schools have unmanageable numbers with a magnitude of differing abilities. Small schools have unmanageable combinations of multi grading students with differing abilities. Give teachers manageable numbers and combinations so they can individually assess and help the needs in their classrooms. We deal with this issue, then you will see a ripple effect in all stakeholders in the education system. Teachers would find a more balanced approach to teaching and they would be able to create an environment for students where all could achieve at their best potential and lessen the mental health crisis than many are experiencing.

## **SEAN WEIR**

If I could make one change in the K-12 public education system to help improve teacher mental health and well-being it would be to institute a “leave in lieu” clause for all NLTA members. This clause would be used as a means of “compensating” our members for duties performed outside of regular school hours,

and give us all an opportunity for a mental health break; particularly between New Year’s and Easter. How many hours do members spend preparing report cards? Attending meetings? Preparing for concerts? Running school clubs? Coaching sports teams? And the list goes on. Planning for teaching has become more complex over the last decade and takes much longer to do. This also requires an investment of teacher personal time as preparation time is not guaranteed in our collective agreement. (This would be another change that I would make.) Teacher burnout is very real, and must be addressed.