

For Immediate Release

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## **NLTA URGING GOVERNMENT TO REASSESS COHORTING IN CLASSROOMS**

St. John's...The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association recognizes that some increased safety protocols have been implemented in schools; however, concerns remain regarding the reliance on cohorting as an effective safety measure for K-9 students and the staff who work with them.

"We are pleased to see a continuation of and return to Scenario 3 online learning protocols for high schools to address physical distancing challenges without an impact on instructional time," said Dean Ingram, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. "We are calling for the same assessment of the physical distancing and cohorting realities for primary/elementary and junior high classrooms as well. Maintaining cohorting is challenging at the best of times, and it is not realistic to think children are keeping to their classroom cohorts outside of instructional time. Have Public Health officials actually sought to observe and understand the typical day to day of a crowded K-6 or 7-9 school, with class sizes of 25 plus? Have they looked into the close contacts and mask compliance of students on the school bus, during lunch periods, after school? The mantra of people, place, time and space is repeated daily in press releases from Health and Community Services and we should be doing everything possible to ensure our schools have the same safety protocols and are able to follow the same Public Health guidance as is in effect for other public and community spaces."

In many schools, student cohorting cannot be maintained consistently, staff regularly move between student groupings, and there are continued challenges with respect to lack of physical distancing and poor ventilation. The Association continues to call for implementation of the same level of protections for students and teachers that are expected for other community interactions for everyone's safety.

"Hearing Dr. Fitzgerald recognize that our schools are a reflection of what is happening in the community is acknowledgement of something the NLTA has been saying since last year – schools are where all of our homes, workplaces and community contacts come together," said President Ingram. "Strengthening protections for students and staff, and by extension their families, to make school re-entry safe and sustainable for all should be the focus moving forward. An abundance of caution should always be the rule."