

For Immediate Release

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NLTA CONCERNED ABOUT STATUS OF PUBLIC HEALTH MEASURES FOR SCHOOLS POST-MARCH 14

St. John's...The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association is calling on government and Public Health officials to engage with the Association in advance of final decisions being made around Public Health measures that will be in effect for schools post-March 14, when the easing of broader COVID-19 restrictions in Newfoundland and Labrador is anticipated.

"The NLTA is encouraged that government has taken a measured approach to assessing masking requirements in schools, and we hope that an approach that errs on the side of caution will prevail overall. We cannot rely on masking alone to ensure student and staff safety," said Trent Langdon, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. "The fact remains that school buildings host, on a daily basis, large indoor gatherings of individuals who are not required to be vaccinated and for whom close contact and self-isolation rules have been relaxed. Government has indicated that we should not expect life to instantly return to the pre-2019 reality, before COVID-19 hit our shores. Therefore, we urge officials to not expect our schools to do so either. Our Association must be consulted along the way, as we move forward, to ensure decision makers have the benefit of feedback and perspectives from teachers in the field when determining what is needed to keep everyone in our school communities as safe as possible and ensure the operational sustainability of schools."

Recent input from teachers indicates that NLTA members remain very concerned about the lack of capacity to allow for physical distancing in schools, removal of contact tracing and notification of COVID-19 cases within school communities, continued shortages of substitute teachers, challenges with enforcement of student masking, and student absenteeism.

"Many of the issues facing Association members existed long before the pandemic, but our collective experience over the past two-plus years has shone a spotlight on matters that are in desperate need of improvement in our public education system, which is considered to be essential," said President Langdon. "Class size and composition, the availability of substitutes and recruitment and retention of teachers overall, insufficient resources to meet individual student needs – these are all significant and longstanding concerns, among others, that must be addressed to ensure the K-12 system in our province is sustainable and resilient. These are matters we will be raising with the committee formed to review the Teacher Allocation Model."

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