

For Immediate Release

April 28, 2023

NLTA SHOCKED BY MINISTER'S COMMENTS REGARDING STAFFING SHORTAGES IN LABRADOR WEST SCHOOLS

St. John's... The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association is shocked by recent statements made in the media this week by the Minister of Education on teacher staffing concerns in Labrador West. In response to concerns that have been raised by the local MHA for the region, Minister Haggie stated, in part, that there is only the equivalent of one teaching position (one half-time and two-quarter time positions) currently vacant in Labrador West.

"I was astonished to hear the Minister's comments as we know that, in the Labrador West francophone school alone, there are 1.25 teaching positions currently vacant, almost one quarter of their total teacher allocation," said Trent Langdon, President of the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association. "The 'staffing shortfall', to use the Minister's language, in this one school alone exceeds the number he referenced for the entire region, which includes three English schools and one French school. As well, it is my understanding that there is at least one vacant position for an educational psychologist in Labrador West, a lack of specialized support for students and teachers in the region that has been ongoing for quite some time."

The NLTA has been calling for a comprehensive and consistent strategy to address teacher retention and recruitment challenges and, while discussions with government and the school districts are ongoing, circumstances in many schools are concerning. In addition to longer term vacancies, there is a critical shortage of substitute teachers in Labrador West and many other areas, resulting in multiple, daily teacher vacancies that have a significant impact on teaching and learning. Regular staff redeployment/reassignment for internal coverage, combined classes, cancellation of specialist instruction and supports are all part of the hidden reality in our K-12 public education system.

"When you look at the full picture for schools in Labrador West, Minister's Haggie's statement that shortages of teaching staff 'does not appear to be an issue' is alarming and disheartening," said President Langdon. "Teachers and school administrators in Labrador West schools, and indeed across the province, are doing double and triple duty every day to keep schools open and operational despite vacancies and daily shortages of substitutes, and this is just not sustainable. Newfoundland and Labrador is in competition with the rest of Canada and other countries when it comes to retaining and recruiting qualified teachers. This province cannot afford to ignore the fact that the working conditions for teachers ARE the learning conditions for students."

- 30 -

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