

For Immediate Release
March 26, 2024

NLTA MEDIA STATEMENT

RE: GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO ADDRESS ISSUES IN EDUCATION

Introduction

I would like to thank you all for coming here today. On behalf of more than 6,500 NLTA members in this province, we felt it was time to do more to raise awareness of the hidden reality in our schools and the significant issues impacting students, teachers and other school staff.

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association hears from members on a daily basis about their concerns and struggles in the field. We work hard to assist and support them through advocacy efforts and individual advice and representation, and we take seriously our legislated right and obligation to speak on matters that impact public education. There are concerning trends in the K-12 school system that the Association has been talking about for some time. The recent Teachers Think Tank process amplified this, with feedback from more than 2,200 NLTA members who took the time to share their lived experiences and demonstrate the unfortunate impact of declining teaching and learning conditions in our schools. Budget 2024 was a missed opportunity to build on the initial announcements following the Think Tank and leaves us feeling that the provincial government has not been listening and is largely ignoring the public education system.

Violence in Schools

One of the most concerning trends is the increasing frequency and severity of violent incidents in schools across the province. The safety of all our students, teachers and other staff must be a priority in our schools. The NLTA advocates regularly for safe and secure working and learning conditions for our members and their students. Unfortunately, aggression and violence among students, and directed towards teachers and school staff, occurs too often in our province.

In the Fall of 2023, we submitted Access to Information (ATIPP) requests to the then Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial, the Royal Newfoundland and Labrador Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. The information received confirms what we know from anecdotal reports – violence is on the rise in our schools.

The data received from various sources reveals an increase in the average number of reported violent incidents per day in schools, from 20 per day in the 2018-19 school year to 29 per day in just the first two months of 2023-24. When you take some time to consider that data, the trend is troubling. Looking at the English K-12 system alone, in 2018-19, there were 3,562 reported violent incidents during the 185 teaching days of that school year. For the first two months of the current school year, 997 violent incidents were reported over a period of just 38 teaching days. This notable increase in the average number of occurrences of violence per day over just the first two months of the 2023-24 school year suggests an alarming trend towards a generally higher incidence rate of violence in schools.

Following a record low during the 2019-20 school year, likely due to the pandemic-related suspension of in-school instruction, there have been year-over-year increases in reported incidences of violence, with a 19% increase from 2021-22 to 2022-23, and a projected increase of up to 40% in 2023-24 compared to the 2022-23 school year. This is a disturbing glimpse into the future for students and teachers.

Unfortunately, we know from our members that violent occurrences in schools are also underreported. The general experience is that of having very limited time to document incidents, along with a widespread feeling that reporting procedures are a waste of valuable professional time as effective action and intervention rarely occur. However, the information we do have, through ATIPP disclosure, our own tracking tool, and the anecdotal reports we hear from teachers in the field, paints an extremely troubling picture.

Class Size and Composition

The increasing violence we are seeing in schools is compounded by large class sizes and the complexity of student needs in those classes. The NLTA hears repeatedly from teachers that, more and more, their work environments are becoming less conducive to fostering and supporting student achievement and overall well-being. Increasing class sizes, inadequate resourcing of inclusive education, rising incidents of student behaviour problems and violence in schools, and increases in mental health issues are having a negative impact on teaching and learning.

The past and ongoing impact of COVID-19, along with vacant teaching positions and the daily disruption caused by substitute teacher shortages, have exacerbated many of these issues. It seems an obvious premise, something that “goes without saying,” that you cannot expect to improve system outcomes by under-resourcing the very processes and structures that are meant to support student learning.

Teachers Think Tank

In February of this year, those issues were shared loudly and clearly with government – in fact nearly one-third of NLTA members told government exactly what struggles they face each day. Of the over 2,200 teachers who participated in the Teachers Think Tank questionnaire, 78% indicated the demands of their working conditions are negatively impacting their mental health and wellness, and over 86% said they have experienced symptoms of burnout. While the announcement of some additional supports immediately following the Think Tank gave us reason to hope that decision makers were listening, Budget 2024 has demonstrated the opposite.

All stakeholders in public education, including parents and the general public, should be saying that this is NOT OKAY. After all, the reality is that the working conditions for teachers ARE the learning conditions for students.

Our Education System is NOT OKAY

To help bring needed attention to these issues, the NLTA is launching a new public awareness campaign entitled – NOT OKAY. Large class sizes, violence in schools, teacher allocations and other supports that are not adequate to meet complex student needs are NOT OKAY. We invite parents and guardians to join the Association in speaking up for their children and demanding better, safer teaching and learning conditions from the decision makers in this province.

School is a shared experience. The context in which teachers carry out their professional roles and responsibilities, providing instruction, striving to create safe and inclusive environments in which students can learn and grow, is the same context in which students spend six or more hours a day each school year.

We need government to recognize that the K-12 public education system in Newfoundland and Labrador is in triage mode. Teachers and Administrators are applying bandages daily, trying to create an environment in which students can learn and grow – which has become an overwhelmingly difficult task. The NLTA approached participating in the recent Teachers Think Tank event and the announcement of the Education Accord in good faith and with cautious optimism, but the time has come to stop talking and act.

Thank you.



Analysis Results
School Violence Incidence
Trends 2018–2023

Our education
system is

**NOT
OKAY.**



BACKGROUND

In the Fall of 2023, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association submitted Access to Information (ATIPP) requests to the then Newfoundland and Labrador English School District, the Conseil Scolaire Francophone Provincial, the Royal Newfoundland and Labrador Constabulary and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The ATIPP requests were for the total number of incidents of:

- physical violence or aggression by students and/or visitors to school(s);
- threats of physical violence or aggression by students and/or visitors to school(s); and,
- threats to the safety/security of students, staff and/or school property (for example, bomb or weapon scares)

which occurred in Newfoundland and Labrador K-12 public schools for the last five (5) school years and the first two months of the 2023-24 school year.

KEY TAKEAWAYS:

- **Substantial decrease during pandemic:** There was a significant decline in the number of reported violence cases during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years, which can be attributed to the reduced number of in-person school days due to COVID-19 closures.
- **Trend of increasing cases post-pandemic:** Following a low in the 2019-2020 school year, there has been a year-over-year increase in reported violence cases, with a 19% increase from 2021-2022 to 2022-2023, and a projected increase of up to 40% in 2023-2024 compared to the 2022-2023 school year.
- **Potential to surpass pre-pandemic levels:** The total number of cases has nearly returned to pre-pandemic numbers and is projected to potentially surpass those levels by 23% in the 2023-2024 school year.
- **Rise in daily incident average:** Analysis excluding the years impacted by COVID-19 closures reveals an increase in the average number of reported violence incidents per day, from 20 per day in 2018-19 to 29 per day in the first two months of 2023-24.
- **Emerging post-pandemic trend:** The notably higher average number of cases per day in September-October 2023 suggests a trend towards a generally higher daily incidence rate of violence, coinciding with normalization of in-person school days per year.

The following table shows the total number of incidents reported across NLSchools schools, along with the behaviour categorization provided, and the consolidated categories associated with each used to combine data from multiple sources.

PROVIDED CATEGORIES	CONSOLIDATED CATEGORIES	2018–2019	2019–2020*	2020–2021*	2021–2022	2022–2023	2023–2024 (Sep-Oct only)
	TOTALS:	3,562	2,152	2,248	2,624	3,109	997
Biting	Physical Violence or Assault	210	76	67	138	253	54
Bomb threat	Weapons and Serious Threats to Safety	5	1	3	1	10	2
Bullying -Physical	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	294	177	221	203	324	97
Choking	Physical Violence or Assault	9	8	8	6	9	2
Fighting	Physical Violence or Assault	975	718	674	696	825	243
Grabbing (Non-Staff)	Physical Violence or Assault	75	44	31	74	56	24
Grabbing (Staff)	Physical Violence or Assault	375	164	191	272	314	108
Hair Pulling	Physical Violence or Assault	58	31	41	64	57	7
Physical assault	Physical Violence or Assault	836	570	648	575	710	228
Striking (Non-Staff)	Physical Violence or Assault	149	87	48	137	80	46
Striking (Staff)	Physical Violence or Assault	538	253	298	433	445	173
Threat school property- Electronic	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	11	3	4	6	5	5
Threat school property-Verbal	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	20	17	11	15	19	6
Threat school property-Written	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	7	3	3	4	2	2

* Schools were closed during 2019-20 (March-June) 2020-21 (December-January) due to COVID-19.

The following table shows the total number of incidents reported by the Royal Newfoundland Constabulary (RNC) in schools, along with the behaviour categorization provided, and the consolidated categories associated with each used to combine data from multiple sources.

PROVIDED CATEGORIES	CONSOLIDATED CATEGORIES	2018 –2019	2019 –2020*	2020 –2021*	2021 –2022	2022 –2023	2023 –2024 (Sep-Oct only)
	TOTALS:	97	69	76	83	111	27
ABDUCTION - SUSPECT UNKNOWN - IN PROGRESS	Weapons and Serious Threats to Safety	0	0	0	1	0	0
ASSAULT - ADULT - ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE	Physical Violence or Assault	1	2	1	1	2	0
ASSAULT - ADULT - IN PROGRESS	Physical Violence or Assault	0	0	1	0	1	0
ASSAULT - ADULT - JUST OCCURRED	Physical Violence or Assault	3	4	0	2	2	0
ASSAULT - ADULT - PRIORITY 3	Physical Violence or Assault	0	1	0	0	5	0
ASSAULT - ADULT IN PROGRESS	Physical Violence or Assault	2	0	0	0	0	0
ASSAULT - CHILD	Physical Violence or Assault	0	1	0	0	0	0
ASSAULT - CHILD - ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE	Physical Violence or Assault	0	0	0	2	3	1
ASSAULT - CHILD - IN PROGRESS	Physical Violence or Assault	0	0	0	1	1	0
ASSAULT - CHILD - JUST OCCURRED	Physical Violence or Assault	6	2	6	5	3	4
ASSAULT - CHILD - PRIORITY 3	Physical Violence or Assault	9	0	17	19	20	2
ASSAULT - CHILD ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE	Physical Violence or Assault	2	5	3	0	0	0
ASSAULT ADULT - PRIORITY 3	Physical Violence or Assault	0	0	3	1	0	0
BOMB THREAT	Weapons and Serious Threats to Safety	6	0	0	3	2	0
CRIMINAL HARASSMENT - ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	1	1	0	0	1	0
CRIMINAL HARASSMENT - PRIORITY 3	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	0	2	0	0	1	0
DISORDERLY CONDUCT - IN PROGRESS	Disturbance or Disorderly Conduct	2	5	1	0	1	0
DISORDERLY CONDUCT - PRIORITY 3	Disturbance or Disorderly Conduct	1	0	0	0	0	0
DISTURBANCE - FIGHT	Disturbance or Disorderly Conduct	6	7	6	3	3	0
SUSPICIOUS - ACTIVITY - IN PROGRESS	Suspicious Activity or Persons	6	6	0	0	8	2
SUSPICIOUS - ACTIVITY ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE	Suspicious Activity or Persons	0	0	1	0	0	0
SUSPICIOUS - ACTIVITY IN PROGRESS	Suspicious Activity or Persons	0	0	13	5	0	0
SUSPICIOUS - PERSON -IN PROGRESS	Suspicious Activity or Persons	16	11	0	0	13	2
SUSPICIOUS - PERSON - JUST OCCURRED	Suspicious Activity or Persons	8	4	0	0	0	3
SUSPICIOUS - PERSON IN PROGRESS	Suspicious Activity or Persons	0	0	12	11	0	0
SUSPICIOUS - PERSON JUST OCCURRED	Suspicious Activity or Persons	0	0	5	3	4	0
THREATS - DEATH/BODILY HARM - ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	0	1	0	2	1	0
THREATS - DEATH/BODILY HARM - JUST OCCURRED	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	5	6	0	3	7	2
THREATS - DEATH/BODILY HARM - PRIORITY 3	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	10	8	4	11	14	2
THREATS - DEATH/BODILY HARM - IN PROGRESS	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	0	0	1	1	1	1
TRESPASSING	Suspicious Activity or Persons	3	0	0	0	0	0
UNWELCOME PERSON - IN PROGRESS	Suspicious Activity or Persons	1	1	1	2	9	1
WANDERING PERSON - IN PROGRESS	Suspicious Activity or Persons	1	0	0	0	0	0
WEAPONS OFFENCE - ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE	Weapons and Serious Threats to Safety	3	0	0	1	0	0
WEAPONS OFFENCE - IN PROGRESS	Weapons and Serious Threats to Safety	2	0	0	3	4	3
WEAPONS OFFENCE - JUST OCCURRED	Weapons and Serious Threats to Safety	3	1	1	1	1	3
WEAPONS OFFENCE - PRIORITY 3	Weapons and Serious Threats to Safety	0	1	0	2	4	1

* Schools were closed during 2019-20 (March-June) 2020-21 (December-January) due to COVID-19.

The following uncategorized data was provided by Conseil scolaire francophone provincial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador (CSFP) and RCMP (police) without behaviour categorization. Due the lack of provided categories for CSFP cases, and given their relatively small numbers overall, we do not include these data in the overall consolidated analysis.

CSFP	RCMP
2018-2019: 2	2018-2019: 79
2019-2020: 4	2019-2020: 55
2020-2021: 3	2020-2021: 58
2021-2022: 0	2021-2022: 81
2022-2023: 0	2022-2023: 87
2023 (September/October): 0	2023 (September/October): 30

The following table shows the total number of incidents reported by consolidated behaviour category for NLSchools and RNC.

The 2023-2024 full year data are projected from Sep-Oct 2023 figures. As two full months of the school year, Sep-Oct are assumed to account for ~23% of the school year after considering breaks. We note that this is a rough projection and does not account for potential seasonal/time of year factors aside from number of approximate in-class days per month.

SOURCE	BEHAVIOUR	2018-2019	2019-2020*	2020-2021*	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024 (projected)†
NLSchools	Physical Violence or Assault	3225	1951	2006	2395	2749	3894
NLSchools	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	332	200	239	228	350	484
NLSchools	Weapons and Serious Threats to Safety	5	1	3	1	10	9
RNC	Disturbance or Disorderly Conduct	9	12	7	3	4	0
RNC	Physical Violence or Assault	23	15	31	31	37	31
RNC	Suspicious Activity or Persons	35	22	32	21	34	35
RNC	Verbal/Non-Physical Threats and Harassment	16	18	5	17	25	22
RNC	Weapons and Serious Threats to Safety	14	2	1	11	11	31

* Schools were closed during 2019-20 (March-June) 2020-21 (December-January) due to COVID-19.

† Full year projected from Oct-Sep 2023 figures. As two full months of the school year, Oct-Sep assumed to account for ~23% of the school year after considering breaks.

