



A HEALTHY FUTURE STARTS IN OUR CLASSROOMS

NLTA Pre-Budget
Submission 2026



Introduction

Today's students are tomorrow's doctors and nurses, engineers and tradespeople, educators and leaders. That's why we must give our schools and teachers the support they need to prepare our children for a future. Education must always be a priority for us in Newfoundland and Labrador. Everything else depends on it.

As the new Progressive Conservative Government develops its first Provincial Budget, it is critical for them to prioritize the future of our province's children and youth by providing meaningful funding for public K-12 education in Newfoundland and Labrador. Our public schools are the foundation for social and economic progress, however, the previous government's vision for education in this province was lacking to meet the growing needs of a diverse and ever-evolving student population.

We must remember that the working conditions for teachers ARE the learning conditions for students. This is a reality. Strategic investments in education that improve learning conditions for students will make a positive corresponding difference daily to teachers, with smaller class sizes, more school-based resources to support complex class compositions and student mental health, improved access to specialist services, more administrative time for instructional leadership, and meaningful incentives to address recruitment and retention of certified teachers.

Progressive Conservative Party Commitments

During the most recent election campaign, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA) called on all party leaders to make specific commitments related to public education. Based on the [PC Party responses](#), below are the budget expectations of the thousands of educators across this province:

- The PC Party acknowledged teacher recruitment and retention as one of the most urgent challenges facing the education system and committed to working directly with the NLTA to improve working conditions, reduce class sizes, and address school violence. The Party emphasized that improving working conditions is central to stabilizing the workforce and committed to increasing classroom supports, including additional student and teaching assistants, and ensuring supports such as school counsellors and psychologists are available on-site when needed.
- The PC Party also committed to expanding teacher training and strengthening incentives to keep new graduates working in Newfoundland and Labrador. This included commitments to train more teachers at Memorial University, implement paid work terms for teachers in training, and establish a tuition refund program to support retention of educators in the province.
- In addressing workload pressures, the PC Party committed to hiring more teachers and classroom supports to reduce class sizes and improve conditions for both students and educators. They also specifically committed to improving employment stability for teaching and learning assistants and student assistants. These measures were linked to ensuring teachers can focus on student learning and that specialist teachers are not routinely pulled from their roles to cover shortages.
- On school safety, the PC Party stated that violence and aggression have no place in schools and committed to strengthening mental health supports by improving access to psychologists and social workers year-round, rather than only during the school year. They also committed to providing early intervention tools and resources to identify and support students before issues escalate, while recognizing that safer schools are connected to broader efforts to create safer communities.
- The PC Party also committed to working with the NLTA to develop an action plan to prevent and respond to online harassment and aggression toward teachers. This included commitments to ensure incidents are taken seriously, investigated, and addressed through corrective action, and to provide training and resources to teachers and administrators.

Collectively, these commitments align with what NLTA members have been consistently communicating: that improving working and learning conditions requires sustained investment in staffing, student supports, safe schools, and stable services. The NLTA is calling on government to ensure Budget 2026 reflects their own election promises and delivers with clear implementation timelines and accountability for results.

Education and Our Society

It has often been said that our education system reflects our society. Schools are not immune from the concerning issues we see broadcast each night on the evening news – violence, drugs, mental health issues. The safety of students, teachers and other staff must be a priority in our schools. The NLTA advocates regularly for safe and secure working conditions for our members. Unfortunately, aggression and violence among students and directed towards teachers and school staff occurs too often. The most recent statistics show there was an average of 23 violent incidents in our schools per day last year, an increase from the previous school year.

Students are stressed, parents are worried. Teaching and learning suffers when children and teachers don't feel safe and secure.

Budget 2026 must ensure that the necessary systems and supports are accessible and effective in communities, for families and in schools to really tackle this issue.

Education and Our Health

While health care spending in our province has been rising for years, available services have not kept pace with demand, particularly with respect to needs for mental health treatment and supports. The February 2022 report of the Health Accord NL found that, in this province:

*We have the **highest rate of children and youth with complex health care needs**, 53% higher than the national average. Our province has one of the highest prevalence rates of children and youth in alternate care, and these children and youth are among the most vulnerable groups in our society. ... Many children in this group have developmental trauma, complex mental health issues, **learning and academic challenges**, and significant medical diagnoses. [emphasis added]*

The report goes on to identify mental health as a concern that arose consistently throughout the Accord's public engagement initiatives, including a special symposium with high school students. It was further noted that the suicide rate for the province "has tripled since the 1980s and is among the highest in Canada." Without a focus on prevention and earlier intervention, we will never catch up. Better access to student supports within our education system can produce long-term savings in healthcare.

We can no longer ignore the gap between students' needs and our education system's resources. School counsellors and psychologists, instructional resource teachers, teaching and learning assistants, student assistants, speech-language pathologists, behaviour management specialists, safe and inclusive schools itinerants, teachers with specialized skills to support students with hearing and visual impairment, EAL and LEARN teachers who support newcomers, and program specialists – these are vital student supports, not optional luxuries. When these services and others are lacking in our classrooms and schools, we aren't saving money in the long term – we are in effect passing along an even bigger and longer-term cost to our over-burdened healthcare and social assistance systems.

Even educational resources that do not directly target mental health problems and illnesses can save our healthcare system money, since education is a major factor in determining/predicting mental health. Education is an accepted determinant of other socio-economic outcomes. Indeed, the report of the Health Accord NL identifies the importance of education:

People with higher education tend to be healthier than those with lower educational attainment. The level of education is highly linked with other SDH such as the level of income, employment security, and working conditions.

Given the struggle to meet student needs with current resourcing levels, it should come as no surprise that the level of stress, burnout and compassion fatigue among teachers remains high. Over the past number of school years, Employee Assistance Program (EAP) statistics indicate a steady increase in the number of teachers accessing counselling supports – from 8.8% of the total teacher population in 2019-20 to 10.53% in 2020-21 to 14.69% in 2021-22 to 21.7% in 2022-23 to 25.19% in 2023-24 and 25.26% in 2024-25.

Teachers' reasons for contacting EAP are also telling – personal stress and coping and emotional/mental health factors are cited as the top presenting issues among teachers, accounting for 75.4% of contact with EAP in 2024-25. It's also worth noting that the percentage of teachers presenting with workplace stress jumped from 9.1 % to 15.3% in 2024-25.

Education and Our Future

While natural resources have historically been and remain important to our province, Newfoundland and Labrador's greatest resource is its people. Education has always affected our economy, but it's more important than ever in the technological age and in light of the current national and international demand for skilled workers and professionals. We are in an era of population aging and shrinking working-age cohorts, two economic realities that will likely be with us for the foreseeable future. Without a focus on innovation and increased skills, we cannot diversify our economy or take full advantage of the opportunities ahead. We need to invest in education to realize long-term economic gains through maximizing the potential of our students. Providing quality public education that supports every child in attaining and maintaining their potential is central and essential to this. There is considerable research to support this position, which the NLTA has shared before and is summarized again in Appendix A.

Closing Comments

Investing in public K–12 education is one of the most important investments we can make in the future of our province. When schools have the resources they need, teachers are better able to deliver high-quality learning, students are equipped with the skills and confidence to succeed, and every child has a real opportunity to thrive. The benefits of this investment extend far beyond the classroom:

- When we invest in their education, we're preparing doctors, nurses, and everyone who cares for our communities – reserving a brighter, healthier future for all of us.
- Strong schools and teachers help shape the skilled tradespeople our province depends on. By supporting them now, we prepare our children to flourish in the industries that keep Newfoundland and Labrador moving forward.
- When we invest in our schools, we give our future teachers the foundation they need to inspire classrooms across the province for years to come.

The NLTA, on behalf of the thousands of highly trained, professional and dedicated educators in this province, is urging the Wakeham Government to demonstrate a real and sustained commitment to public education in this province. Stand up for our students, for our teachers, and for the future of this province. Education is the future.

APPENDIX A

In *Does Class Size Matter?* (2014), Dr. Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach of the National Education Policy Center of the University of Colorado, states that “‘common-sense’ is validated by research demonstrating that class size does matter and is ‘an important determinant of student outcomes.’” The study found that teachers are able to be more effective with small class sizes and that the resulting benefit to students is not limited to their performance in school, but will continue to be an advantage over their entire lifetime. The author’s recommendations include:

Money saved today by increasing class sizes will be offset by more substantial social and educational costs in the future. The payoff from class-size reduction is greater for low-income and minority children, while any increases in class size will likely be most harmful to these populations.

Dr. David Zyngier, Senior Lecturer in Curriculum and Pedagogy at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, in his review of 112 studies on class size (2014), has concluded that while lower class size has a demonstrable cost, it may prove the more cost-effective policy overall. Zyngier concluded that:

Findings suggest that smaller class sizes in the first four years of school can have an important and lasting impact on student achievement, especially for children from culturally, linguistically and economically disenfranchised communities.

William J. Mathis in *The Effectiveness of Class Size Reduction* (2016) concurred with this research finding that:

The payoff from class-size reduction is greater for low-income and minority children. Conversely, increases in class size are likely to be especially harmful to these populations – who are already more likely to be subjected to large classes. While lowering class size has a demonstrable cost, it may prove the more cost effective policy overall particularly for disadvantaged students. Money saved today by increasing class sizes will likely result in additional substantial social and educational costs in the future.

Other research studies have indicated that there is not only a sound academic argument for reducing class sizes but a strong health and economic one as well. In their study, *Health and Economic Benefits of Reducing the Number of Students per Classroom in US Primary Schools* (2007), Peter Muennig and Steven H. Woolf found that:

From a societal perspective (incorporating earnings and health outcomes), class-size reductions would generate a net cost savings of approximately \$168 000 and a net gain of 1.7 quality-adjusted life-years for each high school graduate produced by small classes. When targeted to low-income students, the estimated savings would increase to \$196 000 per additional graduate. From a governmental perspective (incorporating public expenditures and revenues), the results of reducing class sizes ranged from savings in costs to an additional cost of \$15 000 per quality-adjusted life-year gained.

These conclusions are echoed in the key findings of the 2019 Conference Board of Canada report, *The Economic Case for Investing in Education*, which included that:

Each dollar of public education spending generates \$1.30 in total economic impacts to Ontario. At the same time, the inverse holds true for each dollar taken from public education. Public education can generate social benefits, such as a healthier population, a higher standard of living, and a reduction in crime. That lessens demand for Ontario’s social assistance, public health care, and criminal justice services.

We can no longer afford to ignore the gap between our resources for primary and secondary education and our province’s social and economic health.