



December 14, 2020

Honourable Andrew Furey, Premier
The Office of the Premier
Confederation Building, East Block
P.O. Box 8700
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Premier Furey,

I am writing at this time regarding the prioritization of individuals in our province for receipt of the newly approved COVID-19 vaccine, and others that may be approved and in use as the vaccination process moves forward. It is the position of the NLTA that teachers and other school staff should be prioritized for vaccination, immediately following vulnerable populations and health care workers.

Since the release of the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's K-12 Re-entry Plan in July, the NLTA has consistently raised concerns regarding the safe reopening of schools and the discrepancies between the Public Health measures in effect for other workplaces and community spaces in general, as compared to the lesser precautions in place for the health and safety of students and teachers. The daily reality of the environment of many classrooms includes weak masking rules and minimal, if any, capacity for maintaining physical distancing. This is in stark contrast to the Chief Medical Officer of Health's regular reminders to avoid spending extended periods of time in crowded spaces with poor ventilation. The shortage of substitute teachers, exacerbated by COVID-19 screening requirements, also raises concerns as the reassignment of existing staff for internal coverage and/or combining of classes decreases any protective impact that cohorting, in schools where this is required/possible, may have.

If keeping our K-12 schools open and functioning is a priority for government and important to society, then ensuring the safety and well-being of teachers should also be prioritized. The Canadian Teachers' Federation is advocating for this, and the NLTA supports and is calling for this approach in our own province. Teachers and other school staff should therefore be "next in line" for vaccination against COVID-19, just after our most vulnerable residents and those who care for them.

Sincerely

Dean Ingram

- c. Honourable Tom Osborne, Minister of Education
Steve Brooks, Executive Director, NLTA
Stefanie Tuff, Assistant Executive Director, NLTA