

March 18, 2020

Dear Applicant:

Re: Your request for access to information under Part II of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (Our File #: EECD/015/2020)

On February 26, 2020, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development received your request for access to the following records/information:

“Any and all briefing notes, hot topic updates, information notes, decision notes, question period notes, key messages, etc for the Spring sitting of the legislature by/for the Minister, and/or Deputy Minister and/or Director of Communications.”

I am pleased to inform you that a decision has been made by the Deputy Minister of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to provide access to the requested information.

You may ask the Information and Privacy Commissioner to review the processing of your access request, as set out in section 42 of the *Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, 2015 (the Act)*. A request to the Commissioner must be made in writing within 15 business days of the date of this letter or within a longer period that may be allowed by the Commissioner.

The appeal may be addressed to the Information and Privacy Commissioner as follows:

Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner
2 Canada Drive
P. O. Box 13004, Stn. A
St. John's, NL. A1B 3V8

Telephone: (709) 729-6309
Toll-Free: 1-877-729-6309
Facsimile: (709) 729-6500

You may also appeal directly to the Supreme Court Trial Division within 15 business days after you receive the decision of the public body, pursuant to section 52 of the *Act*.

Please be advised that this letter will be published following a 72 hour period after it is sent electronically to you or five business days in the case where records are mailed to you. It is the goal to have the letter posted to the Completed Access to Information Requests website within one business day following the applicable period of time. Please note that requests for personal information will not be posted online.

.../2

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact the undersigned by telephone at 709-729-7180 or by email at garynoftall@gov.nl.ca.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gary Noftall." The signature is written in a cursive style.

Gary Noftall
ATIPP Coordinator

Attachment

TABLE OF CONTENTS

School System Reviews.....	Tab 1
Teacher Allocations/Class Sizes.....	Tab 2
Student Assistants/Extra Resources, Inclusive Education.....	Tab 3
Hold Back Teaching Units.....	Tab 4
Deaf and Hard of Hearing Supports.....	Tab 5
NLESD - AG report/fraud.....	Tab 6
NLESD – Shared Services.....	Tab 7
Absenteeism – CYA Report.....	Tab 8
Schools Act Review.....	Tab 9
Busing Policy.....	Tab 10
Alternate Transportation.....	Tab 11
Video and Camera Surveillance.....	Tab 12
Bullying/Violence in Schools.....	Tab 13
Provincial Libraries Funding.....	Tab 14
PRMA – Provincial Reading and Mathematics Assessment.....	Tab 15
Cell Phones.....	Tab 16
Delayed Childcare Subsidy Payments.....	Tab 17
Affordable Child Care.....	Tab 18
Junior Kindergarten.....	Tab 19
Child Care Pay - January Storm.....	Tab 20
Support for Early Childhood Educators.....	Tab 21

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: School Systems Reviews

As part of its school review process, the Board of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District have put forward motions involving the closure or reconfiguration of schools in various communities throughout the province.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Why did you deny school closures were happening and is government now driving these possible closures?

Will the Minister be upfront and admit, as the Minister of Finance noted himself, that this review is about saving money and not about improving education?

KEY MESSAGES:

It is elected school boards that have the authority under legislation for organizing schools and services, not government.

The board has stated clearly that it is about ensuring resources are being used to maximize programming opportunities for all students in a region.

I encourage all members of the school communities to make representation to the board. Consultations have been ongoing for several months with opportunities for parents to provide input. A second phase of consultations got underway early in the new year and public meetings are taking place in March.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- School reviews are not new and are certainly part of the work of a responsible Board to ensure the best programming for students. Such reviews, following a similar format and led by the school board, have occurred under the previous administration on a number of occasions.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- The Schools Act, 1997 gives the elected Board of Trustees legislative authority to organize and administer K-12 education with the District (s.75). This process is led and directed by the Board.
- At its June 16, 2018 meeting, the Board passed a motion to suspend school reviews that could lead to school closures until a review of the Schools Act, 1997 was completed. However, that motion was rescinded one year later, at the June 8, 2019 regular public meeting.
- Consultations: The ThoughtExchange is a platform that is used by many other schools districts in other jurisdictions. The school district advises in consultation materials that any member of the school community who has issues with the platform can and should connect with the school administration and that schools are committed to ensuring families are able to provide their input.
- The school system reviews underway are:
 - Stephenville High School and Piccadilly Central High School Systems
 - Dorset Collegiate School System
 - Glovertown Academy School System
 - Phoenix Academy and Gill Memorial Academy School Systems
 - Marystown Central High School System.
- Public meetings scheduled to date are:
 - Stephenville High/Piccadilly Central High system – March 5
 - Dorset Collegiate system – March 4
 - Glovertown system – March 3
 - Phoenix Academy/Gill Memorial system – March 17
 - Marystown Central High system – March 2

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Teacher Allocations/Class Sizes

The Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association has called for a review of the Teacher Allocation Model and launched a public awareness campaign called Class Size Matters which contends that classes are becoming overcrowded.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Will you commit to a review of teacher allocations and class size caps?

KEY MESSAGES:

Since the launch of the Education Action Plan in 2018, we have been adding teaching resources – new reading specialists, a new position called teaching and learning assistant and we've increased learning resource teachers.

These resources – an additional 350 - will be fully implemented in September. It is also important to note that class size caps in this province are comparable to other provinces.

While the class cap for grade 4 is 28, only 19 out of 226 classrooms have 28 students. For grade 7, only 8 classes out of 228 are at the cap, and in grade 9, only 8 out of 218 are at the cap.

While we look at allocations every year as part of planning for the school year ahead, it would be premature to begin a formal review until the additional resources are fully in place. At that time, there will be a formal review of the Teacher Allocation Model.

Secondary Messages:

- Implementation of the Education Action Plan is on target with 65 per cent of the actions completed or substantially underway.
- In classrooms this school year we have allocated:
 - 48 new reading specialists, increasing to 104 for September;
 - 100 teaching and learning assistants, increasing to 200 for September;
 - 26 additional teacher-librarians, increasing to 39 for September.
- Some may suggest that there shouldn't be soft caps; however, other provinces also have provisions in place to allow for some flexibility, depending on certain circumstances.
- We understand and appreciate Mr. Ingram's point about composition as a factor when considering class sizes. That is why we have been creating new positions and adding teaching resources through the Education Action Plan.
- Class Size Caps:
 - K = 20
 - 1-3 = 25
 - 4-6 = 28
 - 7-9 = 31

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Student Assistants/Resources to Support Inclusive Education

Periodically there are calls for greater supports in the classroom such as more students assistants, to ensure a more inclusive education system.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Will you take necessary actions, such as providing more student assistants, to ensure a truly inclusive education system that actually works?

KEY MESSAGES:

The health and well-being of students and staff is paramount for me and for our government. We are taking steps to support the needs of all students, including those with exceptionalities.

Under the Education Action Plan, we have been increasing resources, creating the new position of teaching and learning assistant, one of a number of positions to support students.

Student Assistants make an important contribution to the education system helping to meet the needs of students. Recognizing their valuable role, we have reinstated the student assistant budget to previous years' levels.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- The new teaching and learning assistant position is one of a number of additional teaching resources that are helping to ensure we are responsive to students' strengths and needs.
- There is also other work ongoing under the Education Action Plan to provide increased support to meet the needs of *all* students, including those with exceptionalities.
- This includes a new student services policy which is being phased in and involves

Establishing *individualized* programs through a *revised* individual student support program (ISSP) model, which will have the involvement of several government departments.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Hold Back Teaching Units

The Member for Bonavista read a petition asking that teacher allocations be finalized in the spring of each year, rather than in the fall when class sizes have been confirmed. The petition also noted that the Department has not completed a review of the teacher allocation model despite being directed by Cabinet to do so.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Will you end the practice of “holding back” teaching units until September, which creates uncertainty for teachers, parents and students?

Will you do a review of the teacher allocation model that is now long overdue?

KEY MESSAGES:

In accordance with the Collective Agreement, preliminary teacher assignments are determined in May and most are finalized at that time. However, changes can occur over the summer and therefore, some teacher assignments are not finalized until September.

This ensures that the district is operating within the allocations and that there are necessary teaching units available if there have been enrolment or other changes that must be addressed.

Direction to review allocations was given by the previous government which then failed to conduct a review. We are currently looking at teacher allocations and class size caps to determine what changes may be required.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- Under the Education Action Plan, our government is adding 350 teaching resources to classrooms over three years.
- Additional positions include:
 - 48 new reading specialists, increasing to 104 for the 20/21 school year;

- 100 teaching and learning assistants, increasing to 200 for the 20/21 school year;
- 26 additional teacher-librarians, increasing to 39 for the 20/21 school year.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Deaf and Hard of Hearing Supports

There continue to be calls for increased supports for deaf and hard of hearing students, and for families to be represented on the steering committee which is examining services for these students. The Child and Youth Advocate has invited feedback from those affected by services for children and youth who are deaf and hard of hearing.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Will you allow families to be a member of the steering committee and take the necessary actions to ensure the needs of students are being met?

KEY MESSAGES:

This is a priority for the department and the school district. Families will be engaged in the review and will have an opportunity to provide their input and perspectives.

I have also spoken with some parents and I can assure you their concerns are being heard.

As part of the review, a working group is developing a series of actions to improve early learning and outcomes for deaf and hard of hearing children.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- The teaching resources provided in our province are comparable to or more favourable than other Atlantic provinces.
- Other current actions:
 - We have been in contact with the Child and Youth Advocate and have invited her to present to the steering committee on the input she is gathering on the experiences of deaf and hard of hearing students.
 - A new Director of Programs for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services has been hired at the school district and professional learning has been provided to deaf and hard of hearing itinerant teachers with the assistance of the Atlantic Provinces Special Education Authority (APSEA).
 - There are also students from this province who will be attending APSEA camps. This is an opportunity for students to socialize and interact with their peers, all of whom have similar abilities.

- We are also working with APSEA to have student assessments done which will help determine what individualized supports students require.
- Discussions are also happening between the school district, the department and Eastern Health which will also extend to the other health authorities, to ensure services are in place to support early language development, especially in the development of American Sign Language.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: NLESD – AG Report/Fraud

The English school district continues to implement actions to address the issues identified by the Auditor General in September 2018. The Board publically released its Action Plan in November 2018 and the Plan and associated budget request were provided to the Public Accounts Committee in January 2019. The Committee requested a follow-up meeting with the Board in fall 2019, but cancelled and has not yet been rescheduled.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Can you provide an update on the implementation of recommendations by the Auditor General? Have all issues been addressed?

KEY MESSAGES:

The school board has taken action on all recommendations, with many actually actioned prior to the AG’s investigation and report.

Some have been completed and some are in the process of being completed.

For example:

- **strengthened purchasing approval procedures, to ensure there is appropriate oversight with multiple signatures required;**
- **established requirement for log books on all board-owned service vehicles to record trip purposes, fuel purchased; and**
- **tighter controls and recording of purchases for vehicles accessories, such as wipers and tires.**

SECONDARY MESSAGING:

- The school board provided a full update in late 2018, followed by a full report in January 2019 to the Public Accounts Committee.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- On December 18, 2018 the Public Accounts Committee conducted a public hearing in the House of Assembly Chamber to review the findings of the Report of the Auditor General entitled Management of the Procurement of Goods and Services, Newfoundland and Labrador English School District.
- During the course of the meeting, some members of the Committee asked for a more formal report on the actions taken to address the issues raised by the Auditor General's report. The District submitted a full report with detailed information on each action to the Committee on January 14, 2019.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: NLESD Shared Services

There have been media reports in recent months about delays in implementing a new financial management system to address issues identified by the Auditor General while government continues to explore options such as shared services. The district is now moving forward with its own system.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Why have you moved away from the plan for shared services with the school district?

KEY MESSAGES:

We worked with the school district and the Department of Finance to find the best possible solution to the issues raised by the Auditor General, including the request for new financial management software.

It was determined that new software specific to the school district is best suited to their operations.

The district is still very much part of the shared services initiative. We are also exploring a shared services model for human resources, supply chain and IT.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- The analysis was completed by a working group of internal government employees.
- The District is required to follow the Public Procurement Act and uses the services of the Public Procurement Agency when appropriate.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Absenteeism – CYA Report

The Child and Youth Advocate released a report on chronic absenteeism from school in January 2019. The report includes four recommendations to address the issue, which involves several government departments, the regional health authorities and the school districts.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Have you acted on the recommendations of the Child and Youth Advocate?

KEY MESSAGES:

The comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach recommended by the Child and Youth Advocate makes good sense and our government has brought all parties together to help address this and other issues.

Extensive discussions and planning have taken place with departments and organizations identified by the Child and Youth Advocate. (CSSD, EECD; school districts)

The Department has met with the Child and Youth Advocate to discuss the work to date and our progress.

A plan to improve recording and monitoring of attendance is being implemented by the school districts and a plan to address chronic absenteeism and dropout prevention is being drafted for implementation in September 2020.

SECONDARY MESSAGING:

- EECD, in partnership with both school districts, is also working to develop a viable program for early school leavers to return to school.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2019**

ISSUE: Schools Act Review

The initial consultation period to help inform a review of the Schools Act, 1997 concluded in March 2019. This was followed by several one-on-one discussions with key stakeholder groups. The department continues its analysis and discussions with key stakeholders on proposed amendments.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

What is the status of the review of Schools Act?
Will such issues as violence in schools and absenteeism be addressed?

KEY MESSAGES:

- **It has been a very productive few months reviewing the current Act and consulting with both the public and key stakeholder groups on possible amendments.**
- **It is important that legislation keep pace with developments in the education system and address current challenges and that includes matters related to violence and absenteeism.**
- **This will be new legislation and therefore the work involved is extensive. We certainly look forward to bringing this important legislation to the House for debate when this work is complete.**

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- There were 18 submissions from both organizations and the general public.
- The Department has also held one-on-one meetings with key stakeholders such as the school districts, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association and the Federation of School Councils.
- I have also met with the Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women, in which we talked specifically about violence and how legislation can be updated.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Written submissions were received from the following targeted stakeholders (some were sent in during the consultation process and others came in over the past few months):

- Association of Early Childhood Educators of Newfoundland and Labrador (AECENL);
- Child & Youth Advocate (CYA);
- Conseil scolaire francophone provincial de Terre-Neuve-et-Labrador (CSFP);
- Federation des francophones de Terre-Neuve at du Labrador (FFTNL);
- Federation de parents francophones de Terre-Neuve at du Labrador (FPFTNL);
- Newfoundland and Labrador Federation of School Councils (NLFSC);
- Newfoundland and Labrador English School District (NLESD);
- NLESD Board of Trustees;
- Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA);
- Nunatsiavut Government;
- Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner (OIPC);
- Provincial Action Network on Status of Women (PANSOW); and
- Provincial Advisory Council on the Status of Women.

Meetings were held with the following stakeholders once the department had reviewed the submissions (April/May 2019):

- CSFP
- CSFP Board of Trustees
- NLESD
- NLESD Board of Trustees
- NLTA
- Federation of School Councils
- Federation des francophones de Terre-Neuve at du Labrador
- Federation de parents francophones de Terre-Neuve at du Labrador

A second round of meetings were held with select stakeholders in November/December 2019 to discuss preliminary findings and recommendations:

- CSFP
- NLESD
- NLESD Board of Trustees
- NLTA

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Busing Policy

The opposition continues to call on government to review and change the current 1.6 kilometre busing policy. The Progressive Conservative election platform stated the party would develop a new policy on school busing within 1.6 kilometres of school.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Will you change the 1.6 kilometre policy and if not, what are you doing to ensure the safety of young children on busy roads and highways?

KEY MESSAGES:

Our province has one of the best busing policies in the country.

Over the past year, every bus run in the province has been reviewed and to date, 706 additional courtesy stops have been implemented *within* the 1.6 kilometre zone.

The current policy is working and clearly, we work with the school district to address issues that may come up, adding a courtesy stop on 74 per cent of the bus runs.

SECONDARY MESSAGING:

- It is prudent to consider thoroughly if, for example, additional funds *were* to be put into education, would this be the best use or should they be placed in other areas such as teaching resources.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

To remove 1.6 kilometre:

- K-3 - approx. \$4.8 million
- K-6 - approx. \$7.9 million
- K-12 - >\$10 million

To change eligibility zone from 1.6 kilometres to 1 kilometre:

- K-6 – approx. \$3.1 million
- K-12 – approx. \$3.5 million

Busing Eligibility

- Students who live 1.6 km or more from their zoned school are eligible for busing.
- Since September 2018, 706 courtesy stops have been added within the 1.6 kilometre zone. This accounts for approximately 74 per cent of all bus runs, with the remaining 26 per cent being deemed not required.

Province	Maximum Non-Eligible Distance (km)	
	K-6	7-12
Newfoundland and Labrador	1.6	1.6
Nova Scotia	2.4	3.6
New Brunswick	2.4	2.4
PEI	1	1.6
Ontario	1.6	3.8
Manitoba	1.6	1.6
Saskatchewan	1	1.5; No funding provided for grades 9-12 living in urban centres*
Alberta	2.4	2.4
British Columbia	4	4.8
Quebec	1.6	2

*Urban centres are considered to be areas with population over 5,000.

Updated October 2019

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Alternate Transportation – Requests or Issues

Periodically, there are requests for changes to alternate transportation arrangements or the arrangement provided is unsatisfactory to a parent.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

What are you doing to ensure the transportation needs of students with special needs are being met?

KEY MESSAGES:

I am unable to speak to individual circumstances due to privacy reasons.

Alternate transportation is provided in circumstances where accommodations are required to support students who may have mobility issues or other needs.

I can tell you that every effort is made to further accommodate the documented needs of students, with safety always as a top priority.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Video and Camera Surveillance

A recent incident of an alleged threat against teachers and an incident of unauthorized access to a school by some students, may prompt the Opposition to ask about the use of video surveillance at schools and on school buses.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Will you look at using video surveillance on school buses and in schools?

KEY MESSAGES:

We fully understand, as do the school districts, the responsibility to ensure the safety of students, teachers and staff. We also understand the importance of protecting the privacy of all individuals in our schools.

Video and cameras are currently present at schools; however, cameras are not approved in instructional spaces to ensure a balance between protection of privacy and safety.

The office of the Privacy Commissioner has advised in the past the importance of considering a range of options and that video surveillance should be a last resort. We will continue to work with the school districts to identify measures to increase student safety on buses where necessary.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- To further ensure a balance of safety and privacy, the viewing of video footage is restricted to as few individuals as possible and access to the system is secure.
- Other actions the school district has taken include:
 - Beefed up the application process for schools to have video surveillance (includes a floor plan to show location of cameras and a privacy scan by our ATIPP co-ordinator).
 - Developed a database of video security systems to ensure there is updated and complete information for each school.
 - Conducted a survey of schools and followed up where there might be some gaps in compliance (e.g., signage).
 - Developed and distributed standard signage to ensure consistency.
 - Added a video surveillance section to the annual administrator's planner to remind principal's of their obligations under District policy and administrative regulations - as well their obligations under ATIPPA.
 - Provided professional learning opportunities to administrators and emerging leaders within the school system.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Bullying/Violence in Schools

There have been recent reports in media of violent incidents in schools. Last fall, CBC National aired a series on violence and bullying in schools. The issue has been also raised in Question Period.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

What are you doing about violence in schools to protect students and teachers?

What is the status of the review of the Safe and Caring Schools Policy?

KEY MESSAGES:

It is disturbing to hear of any incident of bullying or violence. Early prevention and intervention must be top of mind in all that we do, just as it should be in our communities, at work and everywhere.

Possible changes to legislation to ensure it is up to date on matters related to violence is part of the ongoing review of the Schools Act.

The Safe and Caring Schools Policy is being reviewed to determine where changes are necessary and how it can be strengthened.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- School administrators have been directed to report any allegation of sexual misconduct to the Regional Assistant Director of Education.
- There has been training for district staff, important amendments to the Schools Act and there is an active district-wide Sexual Violence Committee.
- New curriculum is being developed to include social and emotional learning. Students will learn skills for problem solving, decision making and getting along with others.

Work to support teachers to meet educational, mental health, and social-emotional learning needs of students *continues*:

- Education and Early Childhood Development, Health and Community Services and Children Seniors and Social Development are working with the Regional Health Authorities to develop a new Child Health Care Model.
- The model was a recommendation of the Premier's Task Force and action in the Education Action Plan.
- The purpose of the model is to ensure a seamless delivery of services.
- This model will be a tremendous support to teachers by offering a more integrated service delivery; psychologists, speech language pathologists and other health professionals will be more closely connected to schools.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Provincial Libraries Funding

In November 2019, the Harris Centre released its annual Vital Signs report which noted that funding for libraries in this province is the second lowest funding per capita at \$23 compared to the Canadian average of \$39.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Will you increase funding to public libraries?

Will you provide the necessary funding to allow the libraries board to address recommendations of the review that was completed and to implement their Future State Plan?

KEY MESSAGES:

Here in our province, government continues to provide the lion's share of funding to libraries – more than twice the average of provincial government's across the country.

In other jurisdictions, there are various sources of funding for public libraries – for example, municipal government.

We continue to work closely with the libraries board which has been moving ahead with recommendations from the review.

This includes looking for alternate space at a lower cost when leases expire, and exploring and implementing alternate service delivery methods, among others.

Requests for funding increases are considered as part of government's regular budgetary process.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: PRMA - Provincial Reading and Mathematics Assessment

The Provincial Government announced a new Provincial Reading and Mathematics Assessment (PRMA) for grades three, six and nine students to begin in May 2020.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Why do we need more provincial assessments?

Will this new assessment take away from student's regular studies and put unnecessary stress on them?

KEY MESSAGES:

The Premier's Task Force Report identified a need for a new provincial assessment of curriculum outcomes in reading and mathematics curricula to better align with national and international assessments.

This new assessment will help teachers recognize areas of strength as well as barriers that may exist for students and it is presented as a classroom activity. No student preparation required.

The results will help us be more responsive to and accountable for student performance.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- By implementing the recommendations included in the Premier's Task Force Report, we are bringing a positive change to the education system.
- Many of the stresses associated with the previous provincial assessment program have been removed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- PRMA is a new provincial assessment of curriculum outcomes in reading and mathematics for grades three, six and nine to better align with national and international assessments.
- Guided by the Education Action Plan, the assessment will take place each May and June, with reading and mathematics administered in alternating years, measuring what students know in mathematics or reading at a particular point in time.
- As recommended by the Premier's Task Force on Improving Educational Outcomes, a full-time consultant has been hired to lead the PRMA Strategy Framework to ensure that the department, districts and educators are equipped to work with all data and identify where action is needed to improve student learning.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Cell Phones in Schools

NTV Evening News aired a story on the use of cell phones in classrooms in the province. A St. John's mother wants cell phones banned in classrooms.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Are you considering banning cell phones in all schools?

KEY MESSAGES:

- **Government is not contemplating a ban on cell phones and there has been no change to the policies of the English school district on the use of cell phones.**

- **The use of cell phones is not permitted in K-6 in the English school district, unless required to support a student's learning needs. In the higher grades, the district has determined that cell phones should be used for educational purposes only.**

- **Decisions on the use of cell phones is best made by the districts and schools, which have first-hand knowledge of instances where their use is required for a student or for a particular course or lesson plan.**

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Delayed Child Care Subsidy Payments

Child care subsidy payments to child care licensees in the Metro region were delayed. Some licensees raised the issue with the Department in fall 2019. The issue was also raised by Independent MHA Paul Lane on Open Line and in the House of Assembly.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Have all outstanding payments been made?

What are you doing to ensure this does not happen again?

KEY MESSAGES:

This was very concerning and we immediately took action and put a plan in place to have outstanding payments processed as quickly as possible.

All outstanding eligible invoices have been paid up to the end of December 2019, representing both current and arrears that have been processed.

A plan was put in place to ensure consistency across all regions of the province and timely payments going forward. We have also developed service delivery targets and standards.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- We will continue to closely monitor this and make adjustments as necessary.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- The Child Care Services Subsidy Program helps families access regulated services by eliminating or minimizing the cost of child care. A subsidy for an individual family is paid directly to a child care centre on behalf of the family.
- The Inclusion Program supports child care services in supporting children with special needs through such things as consultation, hiring additional staff to reduce the ratio, or purchasing one or two spaces to reduce the number of children in the homeroom.

- A total of \$2.1 million in child care subsidies was paid out between November 1, 2019 and December 31, 2019. The total amount paid out for this fiscal year as of December 31, 2019 is \$6.5 million.
- The Child Care Subsidy Program is application driven and the amount of \$6.5 million reflects the number of applications received and processed for payment in this fiscal year to date. It also includes the arrears identified in the fall.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Affordable Child Care

Periodically there are calls in the mainstream media and on social media platforms for more affordable child care. The NDP has called for the implementation of \$25 a day child care.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

Will you implement \$25 a day child care or at the least, increase funding to help lower the cost of child care for families?

KEY MESSAGES:

While \$25 a day child care is not being contemplated right now, we are taking significant steps to create more affordable child care for families in Newfoundland and Labrador.

As of December 2019 there were:

- **1,343 families receiving a child care subsidy.**
- **Of these, 589 were attending centres participating in the Operating Grant Program and receiving free child care.**
- **A further 165 families in Operating Grant Centres pay less than \$25 a day.**

We are also establishing more affordable child care spaces – 1,000 last year – through participation in the Operating Grant Program, with families eligible for a full child care subsidy paying nothing if they register in a child care service participating in the Program.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- **As of December 31, 2019, 64 per cent of child care services across the province are participating in the Operating Grant Program.**

- Funding for the Child Care Services Subsidy Program has been increased to \$17 million annually and the threshold to receive a subsidy was raised to \$35,000 effective July 1, 2019.
- A partial subsidy is also available to many families who have a higher income.
- For example, a two parent family with a net family income of \$65,000 needing child care for two preschool children and an infant would be eligible for a subsidy of approximately \$1,050 a month.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Junior Kindergarten

Government has committed to developing a guiding document and phased-in implementation plan for the establishment of a Junior Kindergarten program.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

The Premier's Task Force recommendation stated that a foundational document and implementation plan be developed and released by June 2019. When can we expect to see this plan?

Will class sizes be increased?

KEY MESSAGES:

Work on the plan is progressing. Consultations were still underway at the time of the General Election last spring and were suspended during the writ period.

Immediately following the election and the swearing-in of Cabinet, this work resumed and consultations with key stakeholder groups continued.

As I have stated before, increases to class sizes is not being contemplated.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

ISSUE: Child Care Pay - January Storm

Child care sector staff is one of the groups of workers referenced in media who were not being paid during the January winter storm. An affordable child care advocate raised the issue on VOXM radio.

KEY MESSAGES:

The department has not received any inquiries from child care licensees, child care centre staff or early childhood educators regarding this issue.

As noted in the public discussion regarding pay during the storm, there is no legislation which requires employers to pay staff in such circumstances.

However, child care centres participating in the Operating Grant Program are required to pay their staff while closed, if they were charging parents for the days closed.

If anyone has an issue or a question, I would encourage them to contact the department.

**QP Issue Note
Education and Early Childhood Development
February 2020**

Issue: Support for Early Childhood Educators

CBC Happy Valley Goose Bay ran a story about childcare being a challenge for most parents in this province. It has been reported that there are waiting lists, affordability issues and staffing struggles.

ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS:

What are you doing to ensure there is training for qualified ECEs to meet the demand and that they are receiving adequate pay?

KEY MESSAGES:

There is a demand for qualified Early Childhood Educators, provincially as well as nationally. The Early Childhood Education program is available through College of North Atlantic campuses, which includes online, and Keyin College.

We provide up to \$7,500 in bursaries and grants to ECEs for upgrading qualifications and certification levels. We also provide a supplement directly to ECEs (up to \$16,900 annually) - one of the best in the country.

I am pleased to report that we are seeing an increasing in individuals applying for the supplement, and as a result, there are approximately 100 more qualified people working in regulated child care than three years ago.

SECONDARY MESSAGES:

- Investments are being made to enhance the quality, availability and affordability of early learning and child care programs and to support early childhood educators and families. This is helping to alleviate pressures on families and allowing them to pursue career opportunities.

- This year alone, there are more than 200 participants in the distance ECE program at College of North Atlantic (CNA) plus others completing the full-time program at the College and at Keyin.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

- ECEs are required to complete an ECE correspondence course through AECENL (offered September, January and May of each year) or an ECE infant course through a post-secondary institution (available online at College of North Atlantic).
- In legislation, child care centres can hire a portion of staff with trainee certification, as long as the trainee is willing to commit to completing two ECE courses per year. Waivers are available under certain circumstances to hire underqualified staff with an agreement to upgrade.
- Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition is also available at CNA to challenge for credit based on learning gained via experience and through non-credit courses. This, plus transfers of course credit from other post-secondary programs, shortens the upgrading component for many individuals.