

December 14, 2015

Honourable Dale Kirby
Minister of Education and Early
Childhood Development

Dear Minister Kirby:

I am honoured to welcome you to your role as Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development. We have been given an extraordinary opportunity to serve the people of our province and together we will work to create a stronger tomorrow for Newfoundland and Labrador. Over the next four years, we will fulfill our commitments, building on the trust placed in us on November 30, 2015. We shall, without fail, act with integrity in all aspects of our service, striving for excellence in discharging our responsibilities.

Embarking on this journey together, we will be guided by *A Stronger Tomorrow: Our Five Point Plan* to Restore Openness, Transparency and Accountability; Build a Stronger, Smarter Economy; Improve Health and Healthcare; Support Safe and Sustainable Communities; and Invest in Our Future Through Education.

As Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador I expect you to follow the principles of openness, transparency and accountability. It is my intention to ensure policy decisions in government are informed by research, evidence, and evaluation so that citizens can understand how and why decisions are made. It is critical that our government's decisions are also informed by engagement with stakeholders, including our Aboriginal partners, to ensure everyone's voices are heard.

Our government is committed to modernizing our province's legislative process in accordance with these principles and I call upon you to engage your fellow Members, constituents and the general public; avail of the Committee process of the House of Assembly; and seek opportunities for non-partisan cooperation.

We are also committed to creating an environment that captures the full potential of our province's many riches, through diversification, job creation and growth. We will take action to improve the health and well-being of people, empower sustainable community development, protect public safety and advance educational opportunities and outcomes.

Our province is facing significant fiscal challenges that require our collective leadership and the engagement of the public. Together, our government will lead our province towards a more sustainable, economic future.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development is charged with the critical task of supporting the development and education of the youngest residents of the province, and building programs which will carry them through to the end of high school. The availability, quality and affordability of child care supports our economy through attachment to the workforce. Along with these central functions, as Minister you should pay special attention to improving education outcomes, increasing our performance on national and international assessments and improving the system for all involved. Specifically, I expect you to focus on the initiatives outlined below.

Premier's Task Force

Educational outcomes in Newfoundland and Labrador are consistently below those in many other provinces. You will work with my office to develop a Premier's Task Force on improving educational outcomes. The task force will be comprised of non-partisan key stakeholders, including teachers and parents, whose mandate will be to examine the K-12 education system and recommend improvements including measurable goals and milestones. These recommendations will lead the development of a comprehensive Education Action Plan to better engage students in learning and to foster development of skills and competencies. The task force will ensure accountability of the education system to the public through the development of measureable education goals and by publically reporting progress on an annual basis.

Learning and Assessment

A number of key actions in learning and assessment must be undertaken to improve our educational outcomes:

- Reading is essential for student success in every aspect of school, and of life. You will conduct a review to understand why our reading scores are lower than those in other jurisdictions and ascertain what actions can be taken to ensure our programs are research-based, our teaching methodologies are strong, and teachers are receiving the necessary training and professional development.
- Similarly you must address our declining math scores, including a review of the curriculum and the training opportunities available to ensure the necessary resources are in place to provide our students with high-quality math instruction.
- You are directed to eliminate the "no zero" policy in consultation with the school districts, to ensure more rigorous assessment standards that are reflective of the quality of each student's classwork and homework.

Education curriculum

Under your direction, a number of specific curriculum areas should be addressed:

- I expect you to enhance the high school education curriculum by including a mental health and addictions course tailored to meet the needs of students and raise awareness about mental health and addictions.
- Work must be undertaken to ensure a coordinated and seamless approach to mental health and addictions in collaboration with community partners and schools.
- A culture of innovation in schools should be fostered by increasing options for cooperative education (including re-training programs for teachers, expanded resources for schools and an awareness campaign for students) and consider the introduction of entrepreneurship programs.

Teacher Education

I expect you to work with Memorial University to enhance teacher training programs, including actions to promote more time in schools and classrooms, and increased roles for teacher mentors.

Inclusive Education

All children need to have opportunities to succeed. You must ensure that schools receive the support they need in providing inclusive education which will include more teacher training opportunities and increased administrative support.

Educational Facilities

Work with the Department of Transportation and Works and other stakeholders to improve educational facilities so that they provide exemplary learning environments and support school grounds as areas of learning and play. Tremendous advances have been made in educational technology and you should ensure that the province's education system is positioned to take full advantage of this technology and that schools have the resources and training required.

Other K-12 Priorities

Other priorities in the K-12 system include:

- Ensuring school board elections are held within the next 12 months;
- Reviewing the distance criteria for school bus service eligibility and implementing a more flexible policy; and,
- Empowering schools to be available for after school physical education programming, which will be a component of the Health Promotion and Healthy Living Strategy being developed jointly by the Ministers of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development, and Health and Community Services.

Early Learning and Child Care

Emphasis must be placed on high quality early learning for children. Completion of the implementation of full-day Kindergarten for September, 2016 is essential and you should identify and implement other options to expand early learning education. I also expect you to partner with local child care providers to extend opportunities for before and after school child care programs and review the Voluntary Operating Grant Program for Child Care Centres.

Early childhood educators are key professionals in supporting a continuum of early learning opportunities for children. Actions in support of these professionals will include:

- Reviewing the roles and responsibilities of early childhood educators to recognize their professional designation and ensure their compensation is reflective of their training and contribution (an increase of \$3 over three years as part of the Early Learning and Child Care Supplement is one example of actions to be taken); and,
- Working with the federal government to provide for a national approach to Early Learning and Child Care, including funding to grow the early childhood educator profession and reduce costs to families.

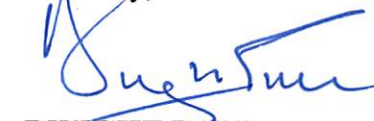
In fulfilling your responsibility as Minister you must ensure collaboration, in a positive and constructive manner, with your Cabinet colleagues. I take this opportunity to remind you that as you carry out your responsibilities, as a Member of the House of Assembly and Member of Cabinet, adhering to the Code of Conduct and the Conflict of Interest guidelines are mandatory, to ensure you discharge your duties with the highest ethical standards.

Deputy Ministers are your key source of support and will provide you with non-partisan advice in meeting your responsibilities. I expect you to develop a positive, respectful and trusting relationship with your Deputy Minister and the public service. I would also ask that you be mindful that Deputy Ministers, among their various responsibilities, are ultimately accountable to me, through the Clerk of the Executive Council.

Our government will report back to the public annually on the achievement of our commitments and make adjustments as required. As a Minister you are accountable for achieving these priorities and meeting other responsibilities within your Department.

Together, we will provide strong leadership to deliver the change we need to move beyond today's challenges and on to a stronger tomorrow.

Sincerely,



DWIGHT BALL
Premier