

NEWS RELEASE

November 18, 2020

District Issues Statement on Substitute Teacher Discourse

The following statement was released today by Tony Stack, CEO/ Director of Education of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District.

There have been some recent public comments around substitute teachers shortages which have caused the District some concern, as it has been suggested that extreme measures may be taken - such as routinely doubling up classrooms, or sending students home - because of staff shortages.

The District wishes to reassure families and the public that these scenarios, as presented in the public arena, would be an absolute last resort, and could not be undertaken in a manner which would violate current health and safety protocols.

We acknowledge there are substitute teacher shortages, in both urban and rural areas. School administrators have options available to cover the unexpected absence of a teacher if they are unsuccessful in securing a substitute teacher for a day. Depending on the situation, they can reassign a teacher who is not assigned for that period; they can reassign a teaching and learning assistant (if they have a teaching certificate), or ask the assistance of a specialist teacher. Some administrators have covered classes themselves, or come up with any number of creative solutions to ensure teaching and learning continues in a safe learning environment. Administrators throughout the province, in both rural and urban areas, have responded to day-to-day challenges around unexpected teacher absences long before the advent of Covid-19 and will continue to do so.

Meanwhile, the District continues to recruit regular and retired substitute teachers.

Over the past three years, through the Provincial Government's Education Action Plan and, more recently, through special Covid-19 allocations, about 400 additional teaching resources have been deployed to schools in the District. This, in itself, has been very positive for the education system, but has impacted the pool of substitute teachers available. The Department of Education has also recently indicated it would allow additional substitutes to be hired on term contracts and a loosening of restrictions around the hiring of retired teachers. We believe this will help address our short-term needs.

Meanwhile, we will continue to work with the Department of Education, Memorial University, and the NLTA to develop both short-term and long-term strategies to address any substitute teacher shortages in our schools.

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