



Hoping for “Common Sense” in an Education Plan

Few would dispute that one of the most effective ways of moving this province towards prosperity is through a well-educated population, yet this is the very element most endangered by short-term, simplistic and/or misguided decision-making. Between now and 2025, more than seventy thousand students will move through our K-12 public education system. They truly will be the citizens of our future society and economy. The collective cost of not investing in the supports they need to reach their full potential will certainly surpass any financial challenges we are experiencing in 2015. If we expect these young people to contribute to their full potential, they need support. This is particularly true of those most vulnerable (“at-risk”) students, for whom public education provides the best chance of future success. Our students need a long-term, realistic plan, and leaders who realize that education is a crucial investment in our future prosperity, not an inconvenient cost!

Budgets are Undermining Public Education

If we are to move ahead, we have to be willing to let the budget speak for itself. The combined amount spent (revised budget) in 2014-15 by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development was 1.18 billion dollars - the same is budgeted for the 2015-16 year. The Early Childhood Development segment of this budget has been increased by 5 million dollars over 2014-15, therefore, public schools (K-12) will get at least that amount less. If you factor in the cost of inflation, K-12 education is clearly losing ground. The Government speaks about increased spending and re-investing savings in Education, but at the same time have set a further 100 million dollar target of reduction in that Department. It is difficult to understand how this logically fits together.

Focus and Stability are Needed

Millions of dollars have been wasted as successive governments have substantially changed the educational priorities of their predecessors. For example, 21st Century Learning and High School Renewal both had their time in the limelight, devouring huge amounts of resources and time from educators, but were later abandoned. For the past several years, inclusion has been the primary focus. As well, simplistic solutions have been imposed upon our system solely for budgetary reasons such as District Amalgamation and school closures. The changes in districts resulted in significant dislocation and communication challenges, yet there has been no evidence of any savings. Multiple, shifting priorities and years of improperly planned and unsupported initiatives have made it far more difficult for teachers to teach and school administrators to be educational leaders in their schools.

Three Essential Elements of an Education Plan

While meeting the growing and diverse learning needs of New Brunswick students is complex, an Education Plan must include some fundamental elements.

1. **Research/Student Learning Needs** – The Plan must take into account the current lack of supports for the mental health and educational needs of our diverse student population that present significant challenges in the learning environment in our schools. A starting point should be the MacKay and Porter–Aucoin Reports. However, if the depth of the research is reduced to only the numbers of teachers and students, any “plan” will be doomed to failure. We need to realistically establish where we are, before we can chart the course forward.
2. **Set Realistic Goals** – Words and promises on their own are not a Plan. Realistic goals, and clear steps mapping out how to achieve them are required and these must be developed with input from educational, not public relations, experts.
3. **Initiatives will require Proper Funding and Resources** – Any successful Plan requires an implementation strategy and proper support.





New Brunswick Teachers' Association

Opinion Piece

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Student Attendance

This issue has a major impact on student learning and should be addressed in the Education Plan. An integrated approach is needed involving several government departments (Social Development, Health, Public Safety) and a variety of stakeholders, such as students, parents and teachers.

A Light on the Horizon

Prior to the September 2014 provincial election, the NBTA asked all NB political parties to commit to developing a long-term education plan. The Liberal Party responded that they would take on this challenge, and would "...rely on experts, the educators and those with a strong knowledge of the education system to draft that plan." The teachers of New Brunswick remain committed to helping develop and supporting a long-term, non-partisan Education Plan. Recently, we helped facilitate a gathering of teachers for some initial input. We hope this marks a change of direction, and that there is an honest interest in developing a realistic, research-based, fully supported road map to serve the needs of the children of this province.