



Report to Atlantic School Boards Conference

Milton Peach, President

Hotel Gander, 2011-11-19

Introduction

Public Education is no longer the domain of a single community or region. Our modern world has broadened our fields of consideration to reach beyond such traditional geographic boundaries. Economics, pedagogy, brain research, environment, peace, security, technological developments in communications and information management, have increased the challenges of preparing our young children to become self fulfilled and responsible citizens capable of leading themselves, their families and our nation forward into the future. As our world has grown in complexity so has our understanding that we are not alone.

As I stated at the Conference opening we are proud to host the Atlantic Conference 2011. Thus far our discussions have been engaging and informative. The Key Notes and Breakout Presentations were as we had planned. The traditional format of the conference, once again supplied those in attendance with a first rate learning experience. Adults learn best from their peers in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect. Nevertheless, times are changing for all of our organizations. Our good friends in PEI await future developments with respect to the structure of their island School Boards. New Brunswick 's DEC's while similar in many ways to School Boards seem to labor under travel and budget restrictions. We have more in common than we do apart and I sincerely hope that the future will enable a return to the larger attendance numbers from prior years. The NSSBA and the NLSBA are laboring onward. However, it may be time for each of us to rethink the Atlantic Conference concept as well as the delivery format and organization of this exercise.

You have received a wealth of background information about Newfoundland and Labrador throughout our agenda. It is not my intention to regurgitate this. However there are some highlights which I wish to raise at this time.

Strategic Review

In response to a major priority set by the 2010 AGM, the Association embarked upon a strategic review of its operations and direction. In 2005, a thorough re-organization and re-alignment of the NLSBA took place. Now, five full years out from that point, it was deemed appropriate that we re-visit as an organization our basis for existence, review our goals, objectives and accomplishments, and prioritize our overall directions for the immediate years ahead. An external consultant was retained to work with the Board of Governors on this task. Efforts have been taken to outreach to our constituencies and a major working session at the 2011 AGM has taken place.

Currently this is exactly where we are. In January every Board will have reported back to the NLSBA Board of Governors. It is our intention that during our February BOG we will finalize a prioritized listing of Strategic Issues and begin Action Planning for the years to come. We will embark upon another five year planning cycle with annual strategic issues reviews and reports to our AGM. This will begin with AGM 2012 in June.

Collective Bargaining

During the 2011-2012 year each of the six collective agreements involving School Board employees will come up for re-negotiation. Our system of bargaining is a provincial one. The President of Treasury Board is responsible for the negotiations. However, School Boards are an important employer partner throughout the process. Processes are underway to evaluate the current agreements and establish opening positions for the Employer. The coming school year will therefore be a very busy one on the labor front. It is too early at this stage to comment upon any negotiations priorities or expectations.

French Language Service

The NLSBA is not a bilingual organization. Yet, one of our members is a Francophone School Board. Therefore, an effort is being undertaken to provide some documentation in both official languages. This is challenging as the cost of translation is significant. Our emphasis at present is in the identification of documents and materials which can reasonably be provided in this manner.

Program Evaluation

A major emphasis in our discussions with Government over the coming budget has centered upon our ability to demonstrate that the tremendous budget increase afforded our sector of education have had the desired effects. This will translate into efforts to report and measure in addition to student achievement, items such as: teacher

recruitment and retention; subject registration patterns; graduation rates and admittance into post secondary training / university programs; student life quality indicators.

Student Evaluation Reporting

There is a new emphasis from the provincial Department of Education with respect to reporting student and program achievement. This will see a subtle shift away from specified reporting to one whereby multi-year trends and overall student growth and patterns are reported. It is hoped that this will enable a stronger overall determination with respect to program or student growth and development. Clearly, this is a symptom of the internal competition for resource allocation vis-a-vis the provincial budget.

Statistics

Overall NL provincial population levels remain our most significant variable with respect to schools resources and the equity of educational opportunity afforded students. On the bottom line schools upon opening in September revealed:

- (i) 5420.5 teacher units, a dip of 23 over the previous year.
- (ii) The overall enrolment dropped by 1900 students to a level of 67,800 students;
- (iii) There are 268 schools operating. However, many of these are in regions where population levels are in serious decline due to economic and demographic related variables.

Issues to Begin School Year 2011-12

During liaison meetings with the Department of Education at the beginning of the 2011-12 school year it was announced that there will be provincial initiatives on the following:

- A comprehensive province wide evaluation of the safe and caring schools program will be initiated;
- School and student achievement reporting will include the identification of trends over time for program and individual school/regional data from a provincial perspective;

- A late October deadline and process for capital requests and the up-front backup documentation required for same has been implemented. (In NL, School Boards can only recommend capital priorities to the Minister. The Boards are responsible for carrying out the capital work but the actual budgets and projects are set by provincial cabinet.)
- A market adjustment clause achieved in the last round of collective bargaining will be utilized to assist School Boards with respect to hiring retired teachers in remote regions of the province and recruiting teachers as well in these regions;
- A paper outlining initiatives with respect to promoting women in skilled trades and professions has been circulated. It will be discussed and transformed into a revised provincial policy and action plan in due course;
- Statistics outlining a decrease in the hiring of retired teachers throughout the province reveal a reasonably balanced approach on the part of School Boards;
- There is a provincial policy with respect to the implementation of the inclusion model for schools. It is ongoing. The Department of Education is committed to engaging all stake holders in dialogue to ensure that the achievement of the model is in keeping with the needs of all pupils and schools. In some instances, schools in response to local needs have embarked upon the implementation work ahead of schedule. While this is applauded, it has created some support needs which are difficult to address. A proposal to assist in this regard is under development for the current year.
- Early learning initiatives within the province remain a priority. Related future planning under this umbrella is underway;
- One of the achievements of the Association over the years has been the establishment of a positive linkage with both the Minister and the senior executive level of the Department of Education. As Deputy Ministers and the Ministers have changed the Association has maintained this relationship. One result of this has been a regular timed visit by the Minister or the Deputy at each of the regular BOG meetings of the association. This enables a current overview of the emergent issues and an opportunity for direct feedback between the District Chairs/and the Minister. The Deputy Minister expressed the Minister's regrets at her being unavailable for the meeting and stressed her preparedness to visit the BOG and continue direct liaison meetings with our President.

Conclusion

While the linkage between the personal development of our students and the growth of our province has long been identified, I am encouraged by the efforts to ensure that equitable and adequate means to achieve these goals are being identified within various public policy debates across our province. School Boards have a direct role to play in these exchanges. Indeed, as School Boards we hold a responsibility to encourage and facilitate the involvement of parents and the entire community in this regard. A provincial government has clear and distinct responsibilities for public education. However, these do not absolve parents and every citizen from the responsibility to ensure that the public school system reflects local heritage and priorities and that the schools are responsive to those. Together we can make a difference!

Respectfully submitted,

Milton Peach, President