



kids & learning first

A plan to help
every student succeed

kids&learning **first** A plan to help every student succeed

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Message from the Minister

As a former teacher, as Minister of Education, and as a parent and grandparent, I care deeply about the quality of education our young people receive. And Nova Scotia has real strengths to celebrate.

The province has wonderful, hard-working teachers. Our class sizes are smaller, and we are investing more money per student than ever before.

The province also faces serious challenges. About 30,000 fewer students are in our classrooms than 10 years ago. This trend will continue.

Assessments show students are losing ground in fundamental skills such as math, reading, and writing.

In the past, more and more money was spent on fewer and fewer students. Yet student results did not improve.

Kids and Learning First is about doing things differently and improving results by focusing on students' needs:

- *Students will get more help earlier, particularly in reading and math. They will also get more attention in critical years—in primary and in grade 9.*
- *Teachers deserve more support. We will work with them to ensure they have the background, experience, and resources they need, based on new provincial standards. More services for kids and families will also be available in schools.*
- *Time for learning is a priority. How can time be used to get the best results for students? Do students have enough time now to learn all they need to know?*
- *Our young people will be better prepared to create and compete for good jobs in Nova Scotia, so they can stay here and build a life for their families. New skilled trades courses, opportunities for students to earn credits outside of school, and a review of high school courses are on the way.*

Kids and Learning First is a multi-year plan, and we have a lot to do. I look forward to working with families, teachers, students, school boards, and community members to put this plan into action.



Education Minister Ramona Jennex



Executive Summary

Kids and Learning First is the province's multi-year plan to help students succeed.

The plan is based on recommendations from educational expert Dr. Ben Levin. It also reflects the priorities of parents, teachers, students, school boards, employers, and community members.

The plan builds on what is working well and identifies key challenges that must be accepted and addressed.

Student enrolments keep going down. Education costs grow year after year, even as student numbers drop. Student test results are not improving, and are declining in some key subjects.

Kids and Learning First is about doing things differently, to get better results for every student.



A Halifax teacher works closely with her students, while using technology to enhance their learning.

Put students first

The province will help children get off to a better start by strengthening links among day care, other early childhood development programs, and grade primary.

Students will get more support in critical subjects and transition years. The province will introduce a new math curriculum, expand Succeeding in Reading, and review grade 9.

Teachers will have the information they need to monitor the progress of students with special needs more closely. Teachers will share more information with parents and other professionals to support greater achievement, independence, and development. The province's autism plan, school mental health framework, and upcoming mental health and addictions strategy are other priorities.

African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw students deserve equitable education. Strengthening efforts with partners and community organizations, putting the recommendations from Reality Check into action, and negotiating a new agreement with Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey are key steps.

Kids and Learning First protects the quality of education in rural communities, where enrolment declines are sharpest. More students can soon take more high school courses through Nova Scotia's virtual school. The goal is to triple student enrolment and double the number of courses over three years.

Isolated schools must also be protected, while ensuring school space is used to provide the best educational benefits for students.

Support effective teaching in every classroom

Parents know what a tremendous difference great teachers make in the lives of our children. But teachers face serious challenges the province can help them overcome.

Working with teachers, the province will develop standards for quality instruction. These standards will guide their teaching, ensure they have the background and experience they need for the courses they are asked to teach, and bring greater consistency among schools.

Teachers will spend less time on paperwork and more time with students. The province will also talk to teachers, school boards, and parents about time for teaching and learning. How is time being used now? Do students have enough time to learn what they need?

Average class sizes are lower than ever. Kids and Learning First will help keep them that way.

Prepare young people for good jobs, citizenship

More than 150 high school courses are offered across the province, with just 18 required for graduation. While students deserve reasonable choice, courses must more closely match the needs of employers and communities. As well, the courses must keep students interested and motivated.

High school courses are being reviewed, based on student interest and how they contribute to what today's graduates need to know and do.

Students will be able to earn a new personal development credit earned in the community through organizations like the Cadets, 4-H, Junior Achievement, or Nova Scotia Dance.

The province will introduce a new manufacturing trades course. The course is linked to opportunities presented by the province's shipbuilding contract. More students, in twice as many schools, can soon take skilled trades.

A new Discovering Opportunities program will help struggling grade 9 students get excited about school again, make up lost learning, and be better prepared for high school.

Protecting arts education and helping students develop French-language and information and communications technology skills are continuing priorities.

Strengthen links between schools, parents, and the community

SchoolsPlus will soon bring more services for kids and families into schools in every county. SchoolsPlus works. Students enjoy school more, discipline problems go down, teachers and parents feel supported, and student test results improve.

The province will introduce a community use of schools grants program this year. This program will enable more people to use schools for physical activity and educational and cultural programs.

Parents will have easier and immediate on-line access to information about what and how their children are doing in school. Information includes attendance, marks, and assignment due dates. Parent workshops are also expanding.

Conclusion

Together, we can put kids and learning first. This will give families confidence that their children have the best opportunities to learn and develop into caring, responsible adults, ready to build a life for families of their own.

Introduction

Nova Scotian families want the best for their children. When parents send their children to school, they expect that they will get an education as good as anywhere else in the country.

We have a lot to celebrate. For example, parents value our great classroom teachers. Our class sizes are lower than ever. And programs like SchoolsPlus that bring more services into our schools are making a big difference.

We also face challenges. Student test results are declining in some critical subjects. Enrolments continue to drop.

Student test results declining

On a positive note, students achieved above-average results in the most recent international testing. French first-language students perform well in national math testing.

While these results are encouraging, students generally perform below the national average in math and reading. Perhaps even more alarming, provincial student assessments are showing no significant improvement in math and literacy—in some cases, students are losing ground.

For example, test results show that students who do well in math in grade 3 fall behind by the time they reach grade 6.

Spending more on fewer students didn't work

For the past 10 years, governments have tried to spend their way to better student results. It didn't work.

More than \$320 million was added to school board budgets between 2000 and 2010. That's a 43 per cent increase. During that same time enrolments dropped by almost 30,000 students. Despite more money for fewer students, student results are not improving. In some areas, they have gotten worse.

The province spends over \$1 billion to educate students. That amounts to \$3.6 million a day. Nova Scotians expect their government to live within its means, and bring costs under control, while matching resources to the needs of every student.

Preparing to do things differently

In December 2010, the province hired Dr. Ben Levin, a professor and educational expert, to advise on how to meet these challenges. Dr. Levin submitted his report, *Steps to Effective and Sustainable Public Education in Nova Scotia*, in May 2011.

Kids and Learning First reflects Dr. Levin's advice. Parents, teachers, school boards, students, and community members also identified priorities in surveys, meetings, and other consultations.

Putting kids and learning first

Our vision is for every student in every classroom to become well-educated, confident, responsible adults—with the skills they need to create and work in good jobs, ready to build a life for families of their own.

How do we get there? Kids and Learning First presents four goals:

- Put students first
- Support effective teaching in every classroom
- Prepare young people for good jobs, citizenship
- Strengthen links between schools, parents, and the community

Some actions are new. Others build on what is already working. All require everyone working together in the coming days, weeks, and years to put kids and learning first.

Put Students First

All students—wherever they live, whatever their ability, whatever their background, identity, or ethnicity, whatever their individual circumstance—deserve the best possible education to reach their potential.

Some kids do pretty well. Test results show others are struggling. They will do better if

- children get off to a better start before they begin school
- teachers have better information about their students' strengths and challenges
- students get more help in critical subjects and transition years
- school boards and the province have better information to improve planning and set priorities

Declining enrolments create additional challenges—yet a lower number of students is no excuse to lower our expectations or limit opportunities for any one of them.

Everyone must work together to ensure students in all communities continue to have access to an equitable, high-quality education.



A young student from Colchester County enjoys a good book!

► Objective: Help children before they begin school

Actions:

- **Co-ordinate all government programs and services for pre-school children** to improve support for young children and their families. Build on this work to strengthen connections between day care and elementary school.
- **Continue implementing the province's autism spectrum disorder action plan.** This plan includes
 - working with doctors on a screening tool that could identify children with autism at their 18-month check-up
 - making the IWK's Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention program available to all children who need it (Until the province acted this year, only 50 per cent of the children who needed Early Intensive Behavioral Intervention received it.)
 - involving health professionals, educators, and families in developing individual school entry plans for children with autism
- **Support healthy living for young children and their families.** The province is now developing a childhood obesity prevention strategy.

► Objective: Monitor progress closely, help earlier and in critical subjects and transition years

Actions:

- **Expand iNSchool, the province's student information system, to all schools.** iNSchool will give teachers easy access to meaningful, timely information about their students, including information on behaviour, attendance, and how their test results relate to what they need to learn. iNSchool will also give the province and school boards better data on a wide range of issues. For example, Dr. Ben Levin estimates that as much as 25 per cent of what is spent on high school education is spent on students repeating courses or years. This is not a good use of students' time, can affect their interest in school, and lowers their self-esteem. It also wastes as much as \$80 million a year, money that could be spent more effectively. iNSchool will give the province better information to address these kinds of concerns.
- **Assess students in earlier grades,** and remove duplication in school board and provincial testing. Testing earlier will help teachers identify problems and provide help earlier. Streamlining provincial- and board-level assessments will give students more time for learning.

- **Expand Succeeding in Reading** from grades primary and 1, into grades 2 and 3. Children who have difficulty reading get focused, daily support in small groups, or one-on-one, from an early literacy teacher. The literacy teacher also works closely with the classroom teacher so the small-group work is linked to the children’s daily learning, to improve their reading, writing, and language skills throughout the day and school year.
- **Adopt a new math program for all grade levels**, based on the math curriculum used in leading Western provinces. Students will have more time to learn and master key math ideas at the right grade level, building on their math knowledge and skills year to year. Research and results in other provinces show that this program gives students a greater depth of understanding in mathematics, supporting their development as problem solvers and critical thinkers.
- **Review and improve grade 9**, a critical transition year, so students stay interested in school and are better prepared for high school. The review involves
 - what students are being taught
 - how they are taught and tested
 - how students themselves can actively influence their learning
 - how to strengthen connections between what is taught in the classroom and what can be experienced in the community, workplace, and the world. Having more high schools include grades 9 to 12 students, versus 10 to 12, is one approach. Grade 9 students would then have access to larger programming spaces—from libraries to labs to gyms—and more specialist teachers. As well, high school programs like skilled trades could more easily expand to include grade 9 students.

“Succeeding in Reading strengthens community. Students are able to stay in their classroom and be supported by another teacher. The transition from small group practice to whole class learning becomes a smoother process. It provides me the opportunity to see what the literacy support teacher is doing and I can weave those same strategies into my daily practice.”

—Rochelle Whitney, grade 1 teacher, Brookland Elementary, Sydney

► Objective: Help students with special needs succeed

Actions:

- **Gather better information on the progress of students with special needs** and work with teachers and others on how to use the information to support greater achievement, independence, and development.
- **Determine why the number of students on individual program plans (IPP) has doubled** in the past 10 years. The number of African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaw students on IPPs also requires discussion. IPPs define services and supports for students who are expected to meet different outcomes than those in the provincially approved curriculum. An IPP will only benefit a student when a program planning team, including parents, decides it is appropriate to meet the student's needs. This decision should be reached only after the team has determined that resources and strategies provided to the student to meet the public school program are not resulting in learning. As well, closely monitoring the progress of these students can enable more of them to move back to the regular public school program when they are ready.
- **Determine why the student-to-teacher-assistant ratio varies so widely** among regional school boards. The discussion will include school boards, school staff, unions, and parents.
- **Promote guidelines that help parents understand the role teacher assistants play in the classroom.** Primarily, teacher assistants focus on supporting children's personal and safety needs so that teachers can focus on teaching them. The best thing teacher assistants can do for children is help them gain more independence and participate fully in the classroom and in school life.
- **Implement Well-Beings: the Nova Scotia School Mental Health Framework.** Actions include: incorporating mental health curriculum into health education and healthy living programs; providing mental health training to teachers and support staff; and providing tools and information for students and their families. Nationally, about 15 to 20 per cent of young people suffer from some sort of mental health disorder. Schools are a good place to reach them with the help they need. The province is also developing a mental health and addictions strategy.

► Objective: Promote equity for students from diverse backgrounds

Actions:

- **Strengthen partnerships** with the Council on African Canadian Education, the Black Educators Association, Mi'kmaw Kina'matnewey (MK), and the Council on Mi'kmaq Education.
- **Continue implementing the province's response to Reality Check**, a review of programs and supports for students of African ancestry. Priorities include
 - building more Africentric content into the curriculum
 - training and hiring more African Canadian teachers
 - creating a monitoring committee
 - assigning a regional education officer to work with school boards
- **Negotiate a new education agreement between the province and MK.**
- **Provide better information through provincial assessments** to help MK improve support for their students as they move between band and provincial schools.
- **Increase awareness among entitled families of their childrens' right to French first-language education.** Information will be included on all student registration forms, provincewide, as part of this effort.

► Objective: Protect the quality of education in rural communities

Actions:

- **Triple the number of students (from 500 to 1500) who can take on-line courses through Nova Scotia's virtual school.** Double the number of courses from 22 this year to at least 44 in three years. Virtual communication is already very familiar to young people who are growing up using this technology, socializing and learning with it. This
 - increases access for students to courses unavailable at their schools
 - helps all students with scheduling conflicts
 - enables all students to develop organizational, independent learning, and technological skills
 - helps ensure that students in math, sciences, and other courses, are taught by a teacher with background and experience in those subjects

About Nova Scotia's Virtual School

What students say:

"... my virtual course has come to be my favourite class. I love that I can work at my own pace and do my assignments from home if I want to. One of my favourite things about my virtual class is how I don't always have a teacher standing over my shoulder but if I need help I just go into Via and Guy is almost always there to help in any way he can. Another great thing about the virtual course is every activity and assignment you will do is laid out for you, like a timeline. I like that because I am a very organized student and like to plan as much ahead as I can. I would recommend taking a virtual course to anyone who thinks they are able to work independently, as it is a great experience and a lot of fun."

—Kaitlin Lake, Hants North Rural High

"Online learning provides so many opportunities to all kinds of students. A lot of students spend a lot of time with technology, and are very good with it. Online learning gives these people the chance to express their talents and their lifestyle. This is an amazing experience, and it gives us the chance to show our skills and be proud of them."

—Dawn Moore, film and video 12,
Pugwash District High School

Teachers can lead classes via a large group e-chat. Students do group work in e-chats and can participate in labs through computer simulations. Teachers have regular office hours posted so that students can ask questions, show their progress, and discuss ideas via webcam. Lesson plans are posted for each day's work, and teachers monitor student attendance and participation. Courses already offered (including some for French immersion students) range from oceans to chemistry and African Canadian studies to advanced math.

What teachers say:

"I was a little leery about trying this because I really like to get to know the kids I teach. I am amazed that I actually get to know my students better, and can help them more, because of the daily office hours."

—Carole Lee Boutillier, visual arts teacher,
Cape Breton-Victoria

"Teachers regularly assess and respond to the individual needs of their students. Our need and opportunity to do so is just as much there virtually. As well, in a regular classroom setting, some students are too shy or intimidated to ask questions and share ideas. But students are often much more comfortable texting or asking these questions during my office hours, therefore participating and learning more."

—Kathleen Baxter, physics and chemistry teacher,
Chignecto-Central

- **Protect isolated schools, while ensuring that school space is being used to provide the greatest educational benefits for students.**

- Parents and community members should be involved earlier in discussions about the future of schools.
- Boards should look at groups or families of schools in planning, before focusing on individual schools for review.
- Factors to consider include appropriate spaces to deliver programs (including skilled trades, options and opportunities, SchoolsPlus, music, arts, physical education, and community use), access to specialist teachers and resources, and access to cafeterias, extra-curricular opportunities, travel time for students, the impact of declining enrolment, and age of schools.

Declining enrolment is creating a lot of empty space in our schools—about 5 million square feet—roughly the size of 38 high schools. Maintaining empty space costs about \$100 million a year. As well, many schools are more than 50 years old, at a time when students should have access to more modern learning opportunities.

► **Objective: Ensure resources are directed at students first**

Action:

- **Develop a schedule for performance reviews of school boards** to identify ways to improve efficiencies and ensure effective governance.

Support Effective Teaching in Every Classroom

Parents know what a tremendous difference great teachers make in the lives of our children. Ask any parent how things are going in school. More often than not, parents will comment on the quality of their child's teacher.

But teachers need support too:

- They are working without the benefit of provincial standards to guide their teaching, leaving them unclear about expectations and leading to inconsistencies from school to school.
- They are sometimes expected to teach courses without having as much training, background, or experience in the subject as they would like.
- They struggle to find time: time to teach everything that is required in the curriculum and to plan with other teachers on ways to improve student learning.
- They want practical, accessible resources—and reasonable class sizes—so they can bring curriculum alive and make it meaningful to every student.



More and more, teachers work with small groups of students, enabling them to teach students with different needs and strengths differently.

► Objective: Develop provincial standards for quality teaching

Action:

- **Develop provincial teaching standards** to define expectations for instructional quality in every classroom. Standards will be developed with teachers, the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, and school boards. Standards can define background or experience required for courses taught, how teachers should incorporate information and communications technology in their teaching, and participation in professional learning opportunities. Standards also bring greater consistency in teaching practices across the province.

“Good practice is not something that professionals are ordered to do; it is something that they own and embrace as part of their professional identity and [that] provides the base from which innovation and professional creativity emerge.”

—Dr. Ben Levin

► Objective: Ensure teachers have relevant background and experience

Actions:

- **Improve the match between what teachers are asked to teach and their training, background, or experience.** The most recent data show that just 37 per cent of junior high math teachers had an academic background directly related to math. The same data identified twice as many junior high teachers with a math under-graduate major or minor than were actually teaching math.
- **Ensure that training leading to teacher certification upgrades is based on the needs of the classroom**—and that it is relevant, comprehensive, and high quality. This work will be done in partnership with teachers, the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, and school boards.
- **Help create professional learning communities in every school**, where teachers work together focused on student success. The classroom teacher plays a critical role in each student’s learning. But in our best schools, every teacher shares responsibility for every student. Research shows that this approach makes a significant difference in teaching practice and leads to better student results.
- **Continue the instructional leadership program for principals and vice-principals** to help champion effective teaching practices, use assessment to improve achievement, and support teachers’ professional learning.

► Objective: Enable teachers to spend more time teaching

Actions:

- **Streamline administrative tasks, reduce paperwork,** and allow teachers to spend the maximum amount of their work-day focused on students.
 - The province wants advice from teachers and school boards on streamlining the accreditation process to ensure it supports student achievement and school improvement, without wasting valuable teaching time.
 - The province will streamline provincial- and board-level assessments to remove duplication.
 - As more services and other professionals are available in schools to deal with issues outside of, but affecting, learning, teachers will have more time to teach. (See p. 30 on plans to expand services through the SchoolsPlus program).
- **Keep class sizes low.** Average class sizes are lower than ever. More than 80 per cent of elementary classes have fewer than 25 students.

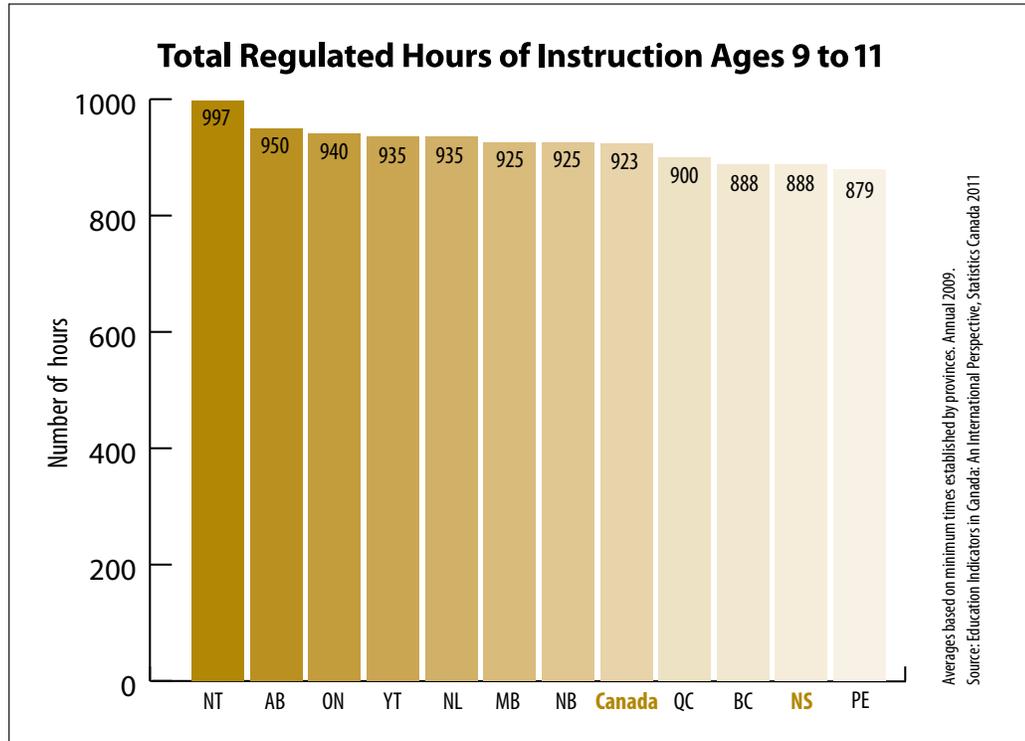
	2011-12	2001-02
Elementary	21.6	23.6
Junior High	20.7	25.6
Senior High	20.4	23.7

- **Examine the time students have for learning, particularly for math, literacy, and physical activity.** Consult school boards, teachers, and families on whether students have the time they need to improve achievement. Factors to consider include
 - educational benefits to students
 - how the current day is scheduled
 - the length of day for bus students
 - cost
 - workload for teachers and other school staff
 - greater consistency in the length of the school day across the province

Currently in Nova Scotia, school boards are required to schedule the school day for at least four hours for grades primary to 2. All school boards exceed this minimum for these grade levels, but the length of day varies by as much as 30 minutes among schools.

For grades 3 to 12, school boards must schedule the day for at least five hours. Most students are being taught at or close to the minimum.

Based on these regulated standards and current school schedules, some Nova Scotia students are receiving less instructional time than students in most other provinces.



► Objective: Provide the information and resources teachers need

Actions:

- **Make iNSchool available to every teacher**, along with support to learn to use it. iNSchool, a new student information system, helps teachers more closely track student progress and follow up more quickly when help is needed.

iNSchool Saves Time, Supports Student Learning

"Once we familiarize ourselves with it, and see how easy it is to use, it will cut back on time significantly. For example, to look up a course for a student for next year, it is so slick. You can flip from one year to the next so easily."

—Nancy MacBain, guidance counsellor,
Sir John A. Macdonald High,
Upper Tantallon

"I really like the online lessons and support. I've played with "Mastery in Minutes" and have signed up for online lessons. I find them to be really helpful and easy to use."

—Janice Gough, principal, East
Antigonish Education Centre

"PowerSchool is a software program that enables teachers to efficiently report on student performance, especially since the learning outcomes have been added to the Gradebook feature. Once the Parent Portal is open, parents will have daily access to information about their children."

—Annette Lefort, École NDA, Chéticamp

- **Provide mobile technology centres to every elementary school** to help students use technology to develop their literacy skills. This will support the expansion of Succeeding in Reading and Young Writers in Action. These centres include 10 notebooks, software, and links to online resources for students and teachers. Digital recorders were provided to schools last year. Technology to support reading and writing will continue to be a priority in future years.
- **Make more teacher resources available on-line.**
 - A web-based resource will be available to teachers to provide all that they need to deliver the new math curriculum. At the click of a button, they can find detail on what students need to know to achieve math outcomes, observation sheets on what to watch for to chart student progress, lesson plans, and games and other activities that appeal to kids.
 - Nova Scotia's Virtual School offers self-directed professional learning materials to help teachers implement curriculum. Teachers can also video-conference on-line with other teachers.
- **Provide more books, resources, and activities for students and curriculum guides** that help teachers with what experts call "differentiated instruction" or "responsive teaching."

What is responsive teaching?

Responsive teaching starts with planning and reflection, based on what the teacher knows about the individual student and learning styles (such as learning through seeing, through listening, or through moving, doing, and touching). As one example, a teacher may organize students into groups of like-learners and then take different approaches to help each student meet a common learning outcome.

Teachers may also organize groups of learners with varying strengths, so they can support and learn from each other. Homework assignments can vary, and students can present their work in ways that most effectively demonstrate what they know and can do.

Prepare Young People for Good Jobs, Citizenship

Over the past 20 years, Nova Scotia's economic growth has been lower than in any other province in Canada. jobsHere is an aggressive plan to turn this around, so young people can stay and build a future for their families in our great communities.

The work starts in our schools—preparing young people not just to work in those jobs but, with imagination and drive, to create them.

We also hope our children will graduate with a sense of personal and social responsibility. We want them to develop the skills and values they need to be responsible citizens in our communities, able to make a better life for themselves and their families.

Young people must clearly link what they are learning to real life. That's not always the case now. Young people will also be motivated when they can influence what, how, and where they learn. That's what Kids and Learning First is all about.



One of the province's first skilled trades classes from Annapolis County.

► Objective: Keep every student interested, motivated

Actions:

- **Review high school courses**, based on student interest and enrolment, and how the courses contribute to the essential skills and knowledge today's graduates need. While students must have reasonable choice, continually adding courses is not an effective use of resources. Currently, more than 150 high school courses are offered across the province—with just 18 required for graduation. A better approach is to look at how, where, and what we are offering in high schools—linked to real life, university and college preparation, and employers' needs. This work will also consider what courses may be more cost-effectively delivered through the virtual school only.
- **Introduce a new personal development credit**, enabling students to pursue individual passions and demonstrate skill development, leadership, and personal growth. The Canadian Cadet Organization, the 4-H Leadership Program, Junior Achievement of Nova Scotia, St. John Ambulance, Nova Scotia Dance, and approved language schools are some examples of organizations that could offer this credit.

"Students can and do learn many important things outside the formal school system. Finding ways to encourage and recognize more of that learning is both efficient and effective, and can be very motivating for students. It would also reduce the pressure on schools to add more programs."

—Dr. Ben Levin

► Objective: Link learning to the workplace

Actions:

- **Introduce a new skilled trades course, Manufacturing Trades, linked to shipbuilding.** The course will expose students to trades including boat builder, iron worker, machinist, marine fitter, metal fabricator, sheet metal worker, and welder. The province will work with the Nova Scotia Community College on a plan for training, including how to link the high school training appropriately with college courses in everything from trades to information technology.
- **Double the number of high schools offering skilled trades** over the next four years, and increase the number of students taking skilled trades where they are already offered. Skilled-trades courses are giving students hands-on experience in construction, transportation, and, soon, manufacturing. All courses include workforce safety training and equipment. Time may also be used toward an apprenticeship.
- **Expand Options and Opportunities O₂**, a program that helps more students regain interest and excitement in school and find their post-secondary and career path. O₂ provides hands-on learning with a career focus, using a team approach—teachers in different subject areas, families, employers, and students themselves.

- **Establish a Discovering Opportunities program in junior high**, building on the success of O₂. The program will initially target grade 9 students who are performing below their potential. Teachers will work together to help students believe they can succeed and make up lost learning. The program will also be built on strong partnerships with workplaces, post-secondary institutions, community organizations, and families.
- **Market co-operative education to employers in communities where co-op opportunities are now more limited.** Currently, co-operative education is available in 83 high schools and involves more than 3,500 students.
- **Expand career development efforts in high schools.** Specific actions, outlined in the jobsHere workforce strategy (www.gov.ns.ca/jobshere/), include more career planning and job research (careers.novascotia.ca) and expanded entrepreneurship-related curriculum.
- **Expand the Parents as Career Coaches program**, now in high schools, into junior high and more high schools. The program should be doubled by June 2014.
- **Expand partnerships that help students with special needs transition out of high school** into the work world and life in the community. jobsHere recognizes the value of and need for more diversity in the workforce, particularly as the need for more Nova Scotia workers grows. Partnerships like Strait to Work—involving the provincial government, the Strait Regional School Board, and the Nova Scotia Community College—give students volunteer and workplace experience as well as academic and social skill development.

► Objective: Strengthen skills that help students

Actions:

- **Help more students communicate fluently in French** to enhance their employability and contribute to the cultural diversity of the province.
 - Support the CSAP Francisation program designed to ensure that children have the French language skills they need throughout their school years. Statistics show that 65 per cent of children need this pre-school support.
 - Recognize CSAP's responsibility for cultural development through the new funding formula.
 - Review the recommendations of the Intensive French Second-Language Pilot projects where students have the opportunity to learn most of their courses in French for half a school year.
 - Analyze the results of the Diplôme d'études en langue française (DELF) and identify the impact on programs, student language skills, and teacher professional development needs. The DELF also gives students an internationally recognized credential in French.

- **Strengthen students' skills in information and communications technology.**
Effective use of technology in teaching supports this action. More multi-media content will also be available to students.
- **Continue to provide resources and support for teachers delivering arts education** in classrooms, and explore new ways to enable students to learn in, through, and about the arts, such as the virtual school, SchoolsPlus, and through community partnerships.

"The arts sector is quickly becoming a key pillar of prosperity here. It all starts with crayons, scissors, and construction paper. Then the sky's the limit—anything can happen once you ignite the imagination."

—Education Minister Ramona Jennex

Strengthen Links between Schools, Parents, and the Community

Students have relationships with family members and others outside the school that strengthen and nurture them. Bringing the power of these relationships into the school—and the caring and knowledge that goes with them—has significant benefits for everyone.

We expect a lot from our education system:

- We expect our kids to get a good education. But with rapid-fire change in everything from technology and information, to the environment, economy and society—globally and here at home—the definition of a “good education” continues to expand.
- Some students are facing challenges at home or in life that are beyond their control. As well, broader social issues—ranging from childhood obesity to cyberbullying—affect the ability of students to learn and develop, and require a broader community response.



A community volunteer shares his talent, time, and love of music with elementary students in Lunenburg County as part of SchoolsPlus.

► Objective: Increase services for kids and families in schools

Actions:

- **Bring more services for kids and families into schools by expanding SchoolsPlus.** Currently, SchoolsPlus serves families or groups of schools within every region. Next year, SchoolsPlus will expand to four more groups of schools, and eventually to schools in every county.

What is SchoolsPlus?

SchoolsPlus brings more services and activities into schools, conveniently and comfortably, for families and kids.

A SchoolsPlus facilitator and community outreach worker consult students, families, teachers, and others on their needs. They then take a team approach, bringing together the right people, professionals, and programs tailored to the needs of the kids and families. A central SchoolsPlus site is selected and then connected to broader groups of schools to benefit as many people as possible.

Community partners—public and mental health workers, social workers, police, literacy specialists, community non-profit organizations, and volunteers—work hard with school board and school staff to make life better for kids and families.

In a recent survey, 70 per cent of these partners say they believe SchoolsPlus helps them serve children, youth, and families better. And they want to do even more.

While every school will be different, current schools participating collectively coordinate and deliver about 100 services and activities: breakfast programs; anger management; parenting; adult literacy and employment support; youth health centres; homework clubs and mentoring; arts, leadership, and physical activity programs; entertainment and hobbies; summer science camps; and programs specifically designed to meet the needs of boys or girls.

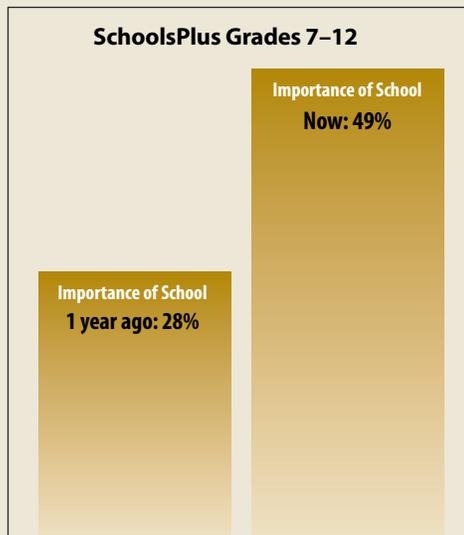
Family members sum up the benefits of SchoolsPlus:

"Before moving to this school, my grandson had no supports. Now he goes to programming and I have seen a real improvement in his anger management." Now he asks, "Why can't I have school on the weekends?"

"SchoolsPlus has been really good and helpful to my child. Before, he would not go to school, and without the support of SchoolsPlus, he wouldn't be there now. His grades have improved and he is doing a lot better academically. Takes a lot of stress off me. It is a real struggle."

Students themselves are feeling the benefits. In a recent survey, SchoolsPlus junior high and high school students reported improvement in their academics, attendance, discipline, and social life.

After being involved in SchoolsPlus for just one year, those who said school was very or quite important to them rose from 28 to 49 per cent.



- **Act on the issue of cyberbullying** in partnership with families, community partners, and students themselves. Cyberbullying can occur anywhere, yet young people are too often struggling to cope with its harmful and sometimes tragic effects in schools. A cyberbullying task force, with community, school, justice, youth, and parent representation, will report to the Minister of Education this winter.
- **Support and build on programs that help at-risk youth and promote respectful behavior in schools.**
 - A “restorative” approach to managing conflicts is now being used in some schools. Students, teachers, and families work through conflicts together—supported by school board, justice, and community partners. This approach helps students develop problem-solving skills and feel recognized and supported by adults in school and at home. The restorative approach also reduces classroom disruptions, violence in schools, and suspension rates.
 - The Lighthouses Program gives students after-school activities that support their social, physical, and educational development.
 - Actions from the Minister’s response to Promoting Student Engagement continue to be implemented, including better monitoring of attendance, improving communications with parents, and intervening earlier with students who are missing too much school.

► **Objective: Welcome parents and community members into our schools; give them meaningful roles**

Actions:

- **Establish a community-use-of-schools grants program** that will strengthen schools as centres in their communities. Grants will help schools and groups who offer physical activity, cultural, and educational programs but cannot afford current fees charged to cover costs required after regular school hours and on weekends.
- **Give parents and caregivers easier and immediate access to information about what and how their children are doing in school.** The new student information system, iNSchool, provides real-time information on attendance, marks, assignment due dates, school bulletins, and teacher comments.
- **Expand workshops that give parents the information they need, or a role they are seeking.** For example, Positive Parenting Workshops developed for parents of African Nova Scotian students are becoming more and more popular. The variety of topics covered, ranging from reading support to raising a resilient child, is also growing. The Parents as Career Coaches program, now expanding from high school into junior high, is another example of giving parents a meaningful and focused role.

“We, as a system, can learn much from parents and communities, and we must ensure that their voices are heard and acted upon. We must ensure that we are engaging them as partners in a respectful and meaningful way. Only through a co-operative effort can we hope to create the right environment for improvement.”

—Introduction to the Minister of Education’s response to Reality Check report

Conclusion

Just as no individual action will lead to success, no individual or single group can turn this plan into action. In many cases, the identified actions require further work and discussion on the detail. In others, it is the commitment of classroom teachers; the caring and concern of parents; the dedication of our school board members, school and school board staff; the spirit of our community members; the energy and enthusiasm of students that will make a difference.

If you have questions or comments on the Kids and Learning First plan, please

- e-mail KidsandLearningFirst@gov.ns.ca
- call (902) 424-3757
- write to Department of Education, Communications, P.O. Box 578, Halifax, NS B3J 2S9

We also encourage you to follow us on Twitter @nseducation to keep abreast of how we are putting this plan into action.

Together, we can put kids and learning first. Our young people will receive an education that positions them among the leaders in the country. This will draw new investment and employers to our province and enable us to innovate and create more of our own success.

More than that, Kids and Learning First is about giving families confidence that their children have the best opportunities to learn and develop into caring, responsible adults, ready to build a life for families of their own here at home.



Like all families, this Yarmouth couple wants the very best for their children. That's what Kids and Learning First is all about.

New and Expanding Actions: Timetable

● New Action

○ Expanding Action

Put Students First	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
Early childhood program linkages		●	
Childhood obesity prevention plan	●		
Provincial assessment plan		●	
Math curriculum	●		
Grade 9 review	●		
Closer monitoring of progress of students with special needs		●	
Individual program plan, student-to-teacher assistant ratio review		●	
Mental health and addictions strategy	●		
Student registration information (French first-language)		●	
Support for isolated schools, best use of school space	●		
School board performance reviews		●	
iNSchool (student information system)		○	
Succeeding in Reading	○		
School mental health framework	○		
Virtual school		○	
Support Effective Teaching in Every Classroom	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
Provincial teaching standards			●
Teacher paperwork reduction		●	
Teacher qualifications and courses taught			●
Teacher certification upgrading criteria			●
Discussion on use and amount of time		●	
Professional learning communities	○		
Mobile technology centres (literacy)		○	
Prepare Young People for Good Jobs, Citizenship	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
High school course review		●	
Personal development credit		●	
Discovering Opportunities		●	
Manufacturing trades, shipbuilding		●	
Co-op education marketing plan			●
CSAP Francisation	●		
CSAP cultural development support		●	
French second-language programs		●	
Options and Opportunities	○		
Skilled trades		○	
Career development programs		○	
Strengthen Links between Schools, Parents, and the Community	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14
Cyberbullying	●		
Community use of schools grants	●		
SchoolsPlus	○		
Programs for at-risk youth		○	
Real-time information for parents		○	
Parent workshops		○	