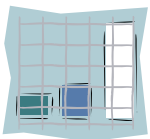


# **Excellence in Education** *A Challenge for Prince Edward Island*

## **Final Report of the Task Force on Student Achievement**



**Prince Edward Island  
Task Force on  
Student Achievement**

**Richard Kurial  
December 2005**

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23 December 2005

Honourable Pat Binns, Premier  
Government of Prince Edward Island  
P. O. Box 2000  
Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N8

Honourable Mildred Dover  
Minister of Education  
Government of Prince Edward Island  
P. O. Box 2000  
Charlottetown, PE C1A 7N8

Dear Premier Binns and Minister Dover:

I have the honour to present to you this day the Report of the Task Force on Student Achievement (PEITFSA).

To say that this has been an educational experience for the members of the Task Force would constitute understatement, I am sure. The opportunity to avail ourselves of the collective wisdom of the multiplicity of stakeholders in our education system has been most enlightening and revealing.

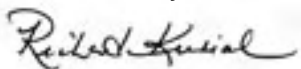
We are confident that the recommendations in this report fully reflect the submissions and presentations received by the Task Force. Having said that, these recommendations also capture the intense discussion that occurred among the Task Force members on every issue herein presented. I commend the government for its wisdom in selecting such a wide array of competent and committed individuals for this task. I commend each and every member of the Task Force for the time and energy they brought to this undertaking and for the contribution—as varied, prescient, and diverse as it was—each and every member made to this report.

All of us are confident that when these recommendations are implemented, it will result in a positive enhancement in the level of student achievement experienced by our collective heirs apparent, the children of Prince Edward Island.

Again, let me take a moment to praise the hard work and perseverance of each member of this Task Force. Their dedication throughout has been exemplary and has, in so many ways, eased the burdens of the chair of the PEITFSA. Special thanks are also in order for my administrative assistant Jane McKay, and for my primary researchers, Dominique Taylor and Janice McKendrick. Without their able assistance, well might I still be working to complete this report.

Thank you for the opportunity of allowing me to participate in the work of this Task Force. I trust that the recommendations will meet with a most favourable response from government. I believe that, if this is so, a major contribution to the enhancement and enrichment of the student experience will be realized.

Most sincerely,



Richard Kurial  
Task Force Chair

## **II. *Summary of Recommendations***

The Task Force recommends that:

### **1. Curriculum**

- the Department of Education create and provide clear outcomes, standards, and benchmarks in all areas of the curriculum;
- the Department of Education ensure that all curricula be fully supported with the appropriate textbooks and resources;
- the Department of Education provide teachers with adequate training to effectively use the developed curricula;
- the provincial government provide the appropriate staffing levels to the education system in order to meet these needs effectively;
- the Department of Education continue to evaluate and adopt successful programs from other jurisdictions and apply a “made in PEI” approach only when necessary;
- the Department of Education ensure that measures be taken for effective and ongoing review of all curricula.

### **2. Student Assessment**

- the province, in conjunction with stakeholders, administer common assessments to Island students at grades 3, 6, and 9, and for designated subjects at the senior high school level. These assessments must involve teachers at all levels and must
  - reflect the various learning styles of students;
  - not be used for the ranking or comparison of either students or schools;
  - be tied to the provincial curriculum, which will be updated from time to time;
  - guide professional development at all levels;
  - be used to accurately inform parents, teachers, and staff;
  - be used positively to improve teaching and learning; and
  - be part of the school improvement plan.

### **3. Early Childhood Intervention**

- to ensure consistency and quality in the kindergarten system, the provincial government should put in place more rigorous requirements regarding program content, the number of hours, and the length of the school year;
- the provincial government integrate francophone kindergartens into the public school system and investigate whether this would be advantageous for all kindergartens;
- the provincial government lead the way in identifying children with learning disabilities as well as those who may be academically and socially at risk;
- the provincial government develop an intervention program for children identified as being at risk.



#### **4. Learning to Read by Grade 3**

- the Department of Education investigate appropriate models and programs and resources to assist all children in learning to read by grade 3;
- children in need of assessment for possible reading difficulties or disabilities be referred as soon as possible for such an assessment.

#### **5. Student Engagement**

- the Department of Education investigate and adopt a more effective scheduling model for intermediate and high schools;
- the Department of Education develop strategies to enhance student/teacher contact and mentoring relationships;
- the Department of Education address the credit value of courses currently offered in the education system. In so doing, serious consideration should be given to increasing the teaching time (and relative course credit value) for mathematics and the language arts;
- new strategies be employed in the delivery, value, and structure of alternate programs at the intermediate level, as well as general and practical courses at the senior high level;
- new instructional strategies be examined, developed, and introduced which take into account differentiated instruction, particularly with regard to instructional strategies that work for boys;
- the Department of Education develop a strategy for students who need academic enrichment;
- the Department of Education accredit programs, including, for example, trades experience or Royal Conservatory of Music programs, taken by students outside the existing school system.

#### **6. Parental Engagement**

- parental involvement continue to be an integral part of the school improvement plan and that schools identifying success in engaging parents share their practices with other schools;
- the Department of Education, along with stakeholders, investigate models of family literacy initiatives and allocate funding to support those that give parents an opportunity to assist their children, whether at risk or not, to learn to read and write;
- the provincial government allocate resources to assist parents to organize effectively for the purpose of identifying community and family educational needs.

#### **7. Sustainable Schools**

- the government abandon its commitment to the policy that it will close no schools on PEI;
- school boards assert their authority and responsibility to examine changing demographics, existing educational facilities, and current school zoning, with a view to enhancing and rationalizing programs and services.



## **8. Use of Instructional Time**

- guidelines be developed to limit the number, length, and types of non-pedagogical activities that are held during class time;
- school days listed as “instructional days” should be used for instruction to the greatest extent possible.

## **9. Integrated Services for Children and Youth**

- the Premier designate an official to lead the integration and enhancement of government services that support children and youth.

## **10. Teachers as Life-Long Learners**

- continuous teacher training be provided, adequately recognized, and funded for incentive so that teachers can fulfil their roles as educators and that such Professional Development (PD) is recognized through a teacher’s growth plan;
- that mentoring models for PD be utilized more consistently. It is necessary to train exemplar teachers as teacher mentors, specifically in language arts and mathematics, but also in other areas that improve general teaching strategies. Once a mentoring model is established, it has to be understood that resources are required to provide consistent delivery of the program;
- teachers teaching outside their field of expertise must gain competency in that field in order to continue teaching those subject areas. In order to meet the current gaps, the Department of Education must provide bursaries or incentives in the short term to allow for the teacher to gain new competencies. The Department of Education must also put mechanisms in place for the long term, which will ensure that teachers are assigned appropriately;
- PD and in-service be provided in a manner that allows maximum instructional time.

## **11. Leadership**

- provisions be put in place to provide sufficient classroom teachers to every school in order to afford the leadership time so necessary to school administrators;
- ongoing, appropriate, and updated training and support opportunities, including training in leadership, be provided for all administrators.

## **12. Staffing Model**

- the provincial government reinstate the previously developed and implemented staffing model;
- in the process of reinstating the model, the provincial government ensure that it occurs in a coherent, accountable manner, which takes into consideration the practical reality of school needs.



### **13. The Role of the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) in Training Teachers**

- the Faculty of Education at UPEI consider increasing the emphasis on classroom management and student behaviour in the courses required for the BEd program;
- consideration be given to extending the length of practicums, both domestic and international, in the second year of the program;
- a personal interview be a key feature of the admission process to UPEI's BEd program;
- the Department of Education work closely with the French School Board to define and fulfill the needs of the French language system in the area of pre-service programs.

### **14. Community Engagement**

- a provincial campaign be undertaken to promote the value of education to the general community. Such a process should demonstrate the benefits of building and living in a veritable culture of learning.

### **15. Trades Strategy**

- the provincial government commit to implementing the new Trades Strategy;
- the general stream of courses in senior high be refined and upgraded, especially in math and numeracy, in order to better prepare students for college, the trades, or the workforce;
- allowance should be made for the French School Board to have access to similar programs in the French language.

### **16. Aboriginal Education**

- the Department of Education work with all stakeholders to design and deliver improved educational offerings and opportunities for all Aboriginal students in the system.

### **17. Immigration**

- the provincial government develop and implement a plan to address the needs of immigrant children and their families, particularly in the area of providing the necessary second-language skills;
- the provincial government identify the roles of various government agencies in supporting these children and determining the financial and human resources needed to support the integration of these children into the school system.

### **18. Educating the Whole Child**

- programs such as art, theatre, music, and physical education continue to be available to all Island students;
- these programs be taught by teachers trained in those fields.



## **19. The Role of Technology**

- the provincial government commit itself to the continued implementation of the Communication and Information Technology in the Public School System Strategic Plan.

## **20. Monitoring and Reporting Progress**

- the provincial government develop a process to monitor the implementation of the recommendations, and that it report to the Legislature within two years, indicating to what extent it has succeeded in implementing the recommendations of this report.





### III. *Preamble*

In terms of “talking the talk” on matters pertaining to education, each of the three school boards on Prince Edward Island possesses a clearly defined and strongly compelling mission statement.

1. In its mission statement, the Eastern School District states that it is “committed to excellence in education. In partnership with the community, we will provide a safe and caring learning environment in which all students have the opportunity to reach their potential and face the future with confidence.”
2. On its website, the Western School Board affirms that “the ultimate goal of education is to provide the student with the skills necessary for life in the 21st century and to become life-long learners who are responsible and moral decision makers. We believe that the school must provide a positive, caring climate where individuals can grow as responsible community members and stewards of the environment and each other. We believe that the students’ needs must be the most important focus of the educational system. We believe that parents, students, school and community should and must be equal and active and full partners in education.”
3. Finally, la Commission Scolaire de langue française notes that it is an Acadian and Francophone collectivity that offers quality education to its students in a friendly and safe environment. In so doing, it endeavours to promote and develop its language and culture. Together, it strives to foster success and global development for every student; create a pedagogical framework based on proven practices and sound research; foster a dynamic collectivity, proud of its language and culture; and create a close co-operation between all educational partners.

Overall, when “walking the walk,” the vast majority of stakeholders in this education process are committed to fulfilling this collective vision. However, this vision can only be realized in the context of a rapidly changing world. On our planet today, systems are in place that allow for the convergence of many billions of people. Things that were true last century are no longer true today. Walls that existed in the past are all being taken down in our increasingly integrated, interconnected, and globalized planet. In a world that is opening up as never before, our province and our country will have to get smarter and study harder if we are to sustain and maintain a strong social fabric.

There is no question that, in our society, parents and schools and cultures can and do shape each succeeding generation, both in terms of the cognitive skills they acquire and the character they possess. In shaping our children for the 21st century, it is imperative that we encourage them to reach beyond their comfort zones, to exploit each and every learning opportunity, and to seek to do things right. We need to empower and educate our children in order that they might participate in a world where all knowledge centres are being connected.

We need to acknowledge a goal for education and commit ourselves collectively to reaching that goal, instilling in our Island society an appreciation of a culture that embraces education in all its forms.

Today, young people who leave high school without excellent and flexible reading skills stand at a great disadvantage. In the past, those students who dropped out of high school could count on an array of options for establishing a productive and successful life. But in a society driven by



knowledge and ever-accelerated demands for reading and writing skills, very few options exist for young people lacking a high school diploma. Even with a diploma in hand, today's young people face increasing literacy demands. In order to meet those demands, researchers, funders, policy-makers, administrators, parents, and students must work together as common stakeholders in the improvement of literacy in our province. Achieving that goal makes all the rest possible. (Gina Biancarosa & Catherine Snow, "Reading Next: A Report to Carnegie Corporation of New York," 2004)

The Task Force on Student Achievement undertook its mission cognizant of the underlying goal inherent in this undertaking. Simply put, that goal is well-reflected in the phrase, "Every kid should learn."

In realizing that goal, it became abundantly clear that the means for knowing what our students know and when they know it was critical in dealing with student achievement. It was equally clear from the public input to the Task Force that strong support existed for some form of assessment as outlined in the publicly available background document, which stated that "assessment through regular monitoring and feedback is essential to know whether students have learned, whether teaching has been effective and how best to address student learning needs." Despite this apparent consensus, there was considerable debate throughout the process concerning the value of standardized assessment tests such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP), or a provincially mandated method of standardized assessment. In order to discuss the issue of student achievement, let alone set recommendations concerning student achievement, the Task Force realized that it was imperative that it clarify its position on assessment. Indeed, no other issue considered by this Task Force raised as much debate and discussion as the issue of assessment.

In order to be communicable to various sectors of society and the world, the concept of student achievement must include within it a standard of measurement. As student achievement refers to the performance level of students in school, as determined by their accumulated knowledge in school, home, and life experience, there must be a system that recognizes student performance levels and organizes this information to provide a framework for consistent performance analysis. If such a system were established, the analysis of student performance levels would also provide insight into the status of school, home, and community performance levels. Thus, in order to understand and measure student achievement in Prince Edward Island, there ought to be an agreed-upon province-wide standard.

In important submissions by education stakeholders to the Task Force, the argument was made that the wide application of a single set of standards could in fact harm students' educational experience and consequently be detrimental to the measured achievement results. Specifically, concerns were raised that a focus upon province-wide standards could lead to teachers "teaching to the test" and ignoring the needs of each individual student. The Task Force is indeed committed to the individual needs of students and recognizes the importance of the postulate in the Philosophy of Public Education for Prince Edward Island Schools, which states that "[p]ublic education in P.E.I. is based on a quality program that respects the intrinsic value of the individual and centres on the development of each child" (11). Of course, the Task Force also recognizes the importance of a related passage in the same text:



The development of the child implies providing each student with the basic education required to participate in and contribute to society. It also means preparing students with the knowledge and intellectual training needed to enter the workforce or to pursue post-secondary studies. (11)

Public education in PEI must respect the value of the individual while ensuring that students are prepared for post-secondary life, particularly in a rapidly changing, technology-dominated planet. Although the fact of post-secondary life may initially seem to be an ambiguous measure for student achievement, the global demand for an increasingly literate (literacy and numeracy) and technologically oriented workforce can easily be used to determine a standard for student achievement. Of course, the Task Force neither wishes to suggest that province-wide standardized tests are necessary or that teachers teach their students according to the specific requirements of such tests. Rather, the Task Force wishes to impart to the PEI public education system the importance of recognizing the relevance of existing social and global standards as a measure of student achievement. Such recognition implies that teachers assessing student achievement would teach to a standard and not a test.

The Task Force is also aware that it is naïve and even harmful to view the standard of measurement for student achievement as immutable and static. With a society that is constantly re-evaluating its goals and priorities, standards must necessarily hold a dynamic function. In relation to this, the Task Force recognizes the importance of re-evaluating and updating standards over time in order to ensure that students are achieving in light of current social and economic demands. It is also aware that having publicly available standards demonstrates a high degree of fairness for all education stakeholders.

It is also necessary for the Task Force to recognize the cultural significance of a well-defined and widely recognized set of educational standards. Rather than be seen as an intimidating barrier to education, many public contributions to the Task Force conveyed the message that a widely promoted standard for student achievement could act as a method of engaging and unifying the culture at large.

It is important at this point to reiterate that the creation of a standard of measurement for student achievement is not a socially disjointed and abstract process, but is, rather, linked directly with its surrounding community. Post-secondary institutions such as Holland College, the University of Prince Edward Island, and multiple areas within the workforce currently hold various standards by which they admit or reject students. Due to the inability of many students graduating from the PEI public education system to meet such standards, these institutions have created remedial programs in the most important areas of their assessments. Generally, as expressed by these institutions, they judge the major standards of competency for achievement to be literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, and, in many cases, general scientific knowledge. Interestingly, these are the standards by which many large-scale standardized assessment tests, such as PISA and SAIP, evaluate the performance level of students. It must be stressed that linking the standards of other social institutions with those of the PEI public education system is necessary for the development of the student. This was the central argument contained within the Philosophy of Public Education for PEI Schools.



It is the view of the Task Force that a socially relevant standard of measurement for student achievement in the PEI public education system is required for the benefit of all education stakeholders. Although the Task Force is not prepared to declare the exact specifics of such a standard or set of standards, it is quick to observe that such standards are already at work in society and currently exert a certain amount of pressure on the educational experience of students. The Task Force believes that it is the duty of the public education system to acknowledge these standards and consequently put them into place.

Finally, in preparing this report on student achievement, it became abundantly clear that this was not merely a report about students. Certainly, students stand to be the beneficiaries of this exercise—but, if students benefit from education, then society benefits, too. As such, all stakeholders—from students to parents, from teachers to principals, from administrators to policy-makers, from government to the people—should endeavour to promote a veritable “culture of education” in which learning—pre-school learning, school-learning, post-secondary learning, life-long learning—is recognized and valued by all.



#### ***IV. Chronology of the Activities of the Prince Edward Island Task Force on Student Achievement***

This past winter, the provincial government chose to strike a Task Force to address the topic of student achievement in the Prince Edward Island public school system. Thirteen members of the community were invited to participate in an exercise to consider ways in which to enhance and enrich the educational experience of all Island students.

The original members of the Task Force on Student Achievement were:

Richard Kurial, Chair  
 Beth Cullen  
 Gary Doucette  
 Zaïr Essegheïer  
 Ken Gunn  
 Kim Horreht  
 Steve Loggie  
 Dr. Alex (Sandy) MacDonald  
 Rob MacDonald  
 Justin MacLeod  
 George Morrison  
 Maurice Poirier (resigned December 2005)  
 B. J. Willis  
 Shauna Sullivan Curley, ex-officio  
 Linda Lowther, ex-officio

To allow the newly appointed members of the Task Force to familiarize themselves with issues surrounding education and achievement in Prince Edward Island, a presentation was given by Linda Lowther, Senior Director for Public Education and Task Force ex-officio, in the Faculty Lounge at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) on 15 March 2005. The focus of this event was to provide Task Force members with contextual information on the results of the 2000 and 2003 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) internationalized standardized assessment tests. Having obtained and analyzed this information, the members of the Task Force proceeded to hold numerous other meetings (29 March, 12 April, 19 April, 3 May) in the Faculty Lounge at UPEI to establish and further clarify their mandate and overall goals. From the outset it was decided that the actions and interactions of the Task Force would have the objectives of increasing public understanding of student achievement as well as engaging the public in a discussion on student achievement solutions, not problems.

During these deliberations, the Task Force developed a consultation strategy intended to reach members of the general public as well as special interest groups and all other stakeholders in the education system of PEI. Although public consultations in the format of public forums were to be announced through various media outlets well in advance of their occurrence, the Task Force strictly maintained that it was imperative to provide individuals and groups with various opportunities for consultation with the Task Force. With this in mind, it was determined that numerous dates would be set aside for interested parties to present their viewpoints directly to the Task Force. Furthermore, to accommodate the schedules of PEI high school students, it was also



deemed necessary that Task Force members be made available for in-school discussions concerning achievement. Finally, the Task Force identified the need to also accept and take into account any material that was sent to them (via post, fax, e-mail, Internet, or phone message) in relation to their purpose.

During their initial meetings, the Task Force began the formation of a background document meant to inform the public discussion on student achievement. This information package was made available to schools, school board offices, the Department of Education, and online prior to the public consultations, in order to give the public ample time to consider the issues presented. To ensure that the public forum process would be efficient, effective, and focussed on solutions, the Task Force formulated four concise questions to be included with the background document to guide the public discussions:

1. What are we doing well in Prince Edward Island to prepare students to achieve?
2. What can we do better?
3. What are the barriers to improving student achievement?
4. What do **you** think we should be doing to improve student achievement?

Along with these questions, the document included clear definitions of “student achievement” and “literacy,” as well as an overview of issues affecting student achievement. The information provided was intended to stimulate a public discussion that would emphasize the comprehensive nature of education and achievement, rather than focus on highly specific issues within education, each with its own set of complexities.

After the background document was completed, the public was advised of the upcoming public forums on student achievement via school newsletters, posters, public service announcements, advertisements in newspapers, radio announcements, and a news release and media briefing. The Task Force then prepared to engage the public directly in a productive and positive manner. To ensure that the widest sample of public opinion concerning student achievement was taken into account, the Task Force conducted these forums in various high schools throughout the Island. Furthermore, those attending the forums were encouraged to comment on the proceedings either with written or oral submissions.

The first public consultation was held in Montague, at Montague High School, on 10 May 2005 (total public attendance: 30). The second consultation was held in Summerside, at École-sur-Mer, on 11 May 2005 (total public attendance: 30). The third consultation was also held in Summerside, at Three Oaks High School, on 12 May 2005 (total public attendance: 60). The fourth consultation was held in Elmsdale at Westisle Composite High School, on 17 May 2005 (total public attendance: 30). The fifth and final public consultation was held in Charlottetown at Charlottetown Rural on 19 May 2005 (total public attendance: 145).

Along with these public consultations, the Task Force also allotted time for scheduled presentations. The initial presentations took place in Charlottetown with six presenters on 19 May 2005. The demand for participation in scheduled presentations was considerable. Two other times were subsequently allotted in Charlottetown, both at Queen Charlotte Intermediate School on 7 and 13 June 2005, on behalf of education stakeholders. Although the Task Force determined 15 July 2005 as the tentative final date for submissions and presentations, it extended its deadline to



accommodate further public input. Additional presentations took place on the UPEI campus on 18 and 25 July 2005.

To engage students directly, members of the Task Force conducted student discussion sessions at Three Oaks High School in Summerside on 10 June 2005, at Souris High School in Souris on 13 June 2005, and at Kensington High School on 21 June 2005. The main objective of these discussions was to determine current and relevant issues affecting students, rather than seeking an indirect assessment of practices employed in the school system.

A special discussion session was arranged to gather input from recent high school graduates from the French Language School Board of PEI (La Commission Scolaire de langue française) on 29 August 2005. The purpose of this discussion was to receive input from the students concerning their views on how they felt the school system had prepared them for post-secondary life (including post-secondary education and direct workforce experience). Similarly, in order to further receive information on the direct experience of parents/guardians and school staff, the Task Force convened with the West Kent Elementary School Council (composed of parents and staff) on 6 June 2005.

The Task Force also sought professional input at the Open Forum on Student Achievement, held by the UPEI Faculty of Education on 17 May 2005, and also at the Forum on Student Achievement, held by the Department of Education on 13 June 2005. Furthermore, the Task Force organized a consultation with T. Scott Murray, a specialist in the field of assessment and student achievement, formerly of Statistics Canada and now with UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), on 11 July 2005. Murray's presentation on the Adult Literacy and Lifeskills Survey results demonstrated that Canadian society is increasingly based upon a knowledge-oriented economy that requires certain essential skills in order to adequately manoeuvre and advance. The essential skills listed by Murray, including prose literacy, document literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, teamwork, ICTL (information and communication technology literacy), and adult education, provided an extensive analysis of relevant information that could be applied in many ways to the situation concerning student achievement on PEI.

### **Issues brought to the attention of the Task Force during public consultations, scheduled presentations, and student discussions:**

The Task Force divided the issues brought forth into four interrelated and interdependent categories: (1) assessment, (2) engagement, (3) resources, and (4) curriculum. These categories were not selected to limit the analytical scope of the Task Force, but rather they were chosen for the purpose of clarity and conciseness. Furthermore, within each category, a range of positions emerged, demonstrating the heterogeneous and complex nature of the task at hand. In effect, in undertaking its duties, the Task Force endeavoured to both assess and analyze in a manner that consistently sought to consider the interests and needs of our students.

#### **1. ASSESSMENT**

**1.1 Common Assessment/Authentic Assessment:** Considerable debate and dialogue emerged on the relative merits not only of standardized assessments such as PISA and SAIP, but also on the relative merits of testing in general. In particular, the interpretation and validity of these tests produced a remarkable divergence of opinion. While most agreed that consistent



assessments are vitally necessary in the education system in order that students might thrive in an increasingly global and interconnected world, others interpreted such assessments as incomplete (in that they only measure but a fraction of the total learning experience), irrelevant, and, in some cases, harmful to the students.

**1.2 Manner of Assessment:** Although extensive input on the importance of teaching for evaluative purposes was received, concerns were raised with regard to the issue of testing as an evaluative practice. In this context, the importance of incorporating an educative component into the testing experience was stressed by many, even as apprehensions were raised about the dangers of teaching class material solely for the purpose of evaluating students.

**1.3 Types of Assessment:** The argument was raised that generally tests were unfairly designed in favour of students who excelled in reading, writing, and conceptualizing. In parallel, it was noted that other “types” of assessment methods, such as olfactory, auditory, or tactile, were often ignored or rejected. Consequently it was suggested that such “alternative” forms of testing should be implemented more widely. Notwithstanding the multiplicity of variations on these themes, public input clearly revealed a desire to have more information made available on how our students are performing in the classroom. “How do we know what our students know?” was a question that was repeated time and time again. Having said that, there was considerable opposition to the importation of externally created standardized tests.

## 2. *ENGAGEMENT*

**2.1 Parent/Guardian Engagement:** Many educators, parents/guardians, and students claimed that there was a strong link between parent/guardian involvement and the quality of education received by their children. While the claim was often repeated that heightened emphasis on voluntarism would increase such involvement, considerable reference was made to out-of-province programs in which parents/guardians were paid to participate in certain school duties.

**2.2 Student Engagement:** The contention was made on numerous occasions that if curriculum was more adaptable to the needs of students, and students felt more engaged by educators, student achievement would improve. In relation to this, some contributors noted that efforts should be made to engage all genders within all subject matters. In contrast, other participants felt that students were already well-engaged with the education community as demonstrated by the high retention and inclusion rate in PEI schools. The inclusive atmosphere of PEI classrooms, in particular, contributed to the strong engagement of students.

**2.3 Educator Engagement:** While some felt that PEI educators were performing enough tasks, or were even overburdened, others felt that educators lacked the enthusiasm to motivate the students. Furthermore, considerable discussion emerged on the issue of producing incentives, both positive and negative, in order to ensure that educators continuously undertake professional development in various forms.

**2.4 Community and Cultural Engagement with Education:** The impact of the community at large upon education was recognized as a critical factor in student achievement by most individuals. While some believed that PEI should focus on creating a “culture of learning,” others stated that such a goal would undermine other important factors of life, such as those most clearly understood and felt within the various communities that make up the social fabric that is PEI. This difference of opinion often depended upon what was understood by the terms “culture” and “education.”





### 3. *RESOURCES*

**3.1 Specialists and Specialization:** A constant theme arising from these discussions focused on the importance of educators only teaching subjects in which they have acquired a certain level of specialization. Moreover, there was a consensus that all educators should have some level of specialization in the language in which they teach. Parallel to these positions, it was recognized that educators who work with students having various difficulties (learning and physical) require the proper specialized training. Consequently, it was stressed on numerous occasions that more specialists with such training were required and that resources should be allocated accordingly.

**3.2 Rural-Urban Divide in Resources:** Another theme that received considerable attention centred on the allocation and distribution of human and monetary resources. In general, there was a sense that urban schools had an advantage over rural schools in terms of programming. In relation to this, there was also an acute concern over rural schools sharing administrative and educational staff. On the other hand, other contributors downplayed the urban/rural divide as somewhat artificial. For example, Statistics Canada information suggested that the urban/rural divide was, in part, something of a myth as, in Statistics Canada terms, PEI constitutes a rural province in its entirety. Often, the urban/rural split merely masked the significant demographic challenge the province will face in coming years, particularly with regard to student population.

**3.3 Socio-economic Factors:** Concerns over the socio-economic situation of students were considerable. In order to provide the most effective education possible, accounting for and addressing differences in socio-economic status was deemed, by many, essential. It was universally recognized that a child well-prepared for school is a child ready to learn. In that context, many Task Force contributors acknowledged the success of the provincial breakfast program, while adding that a wider application of these sustenance programs might further enhance student achievement. In terms of equity, there was clear recognition that low-income families require and should have access to all available services, programs, and interventions that might facilitate their school success well before the commencement of school itself. The front-end investment will more than pay for itself in the future success of our children.

**3.4 School Materials:** It was widely recognized that more resources for school materials, including textbooks and library resources, could positively contribute to student achievement in both rural and urban schools.

### 4. *CURRICULUM*

**4.1 Enforcement of Curriculum:** One suggestion that occurred with some frequency involved holding teachers more accountable in terms of their adherence to the provincially mandated curriculum. It was felt that not only did the current curriculum allow reasonable freedom for educators, it also enforced enough structure and standardization for accurate provincial assessment possibilities. On the other hand, some felt that educators should not be constrained by the provincial curriculum, as the needs of students vary from individual to individual and from region to region.

**4.2 Time-on-task:** Many individuals expressed the belief that, during school hours, students should be continuously engaged in educational activities. Every subject, from mathematics to physical education, should be structured consciously to incorporate and address various aspects of the educative experience. In relation to this, while some felt that increased or enforced time-on-task would no longer necessitate excessive homework, others felt that effective time-on-task would render homework more meaningful and engaging for the students.



**4.3 Different Ways of Learning and Teaching:** It was mentioned in various ways and by various stakeholders that all aspects of learning should be addressed by educators and curriculum researchers. While some emphasized the oft-neglected educational role of music, others believed that olfactory methods of teaching could be employed to the benefit of certain students. The general nuance of these comments was that far too often students were not achieving simply due to the limited perspective of teaching styles available to educators.

**4.4 Rural-Urban Divide in Educational Goals:** It was noted that often curriculum and school programming, in both rural and urban areas, emphasized the utility of education within a university context, whereas in rural communities it was felt that greater emphasis might be placed on the utility of education within a college or trade school context, in order to be more practical and realistic. In contrast, some contended that to impose a different style of education upon students based upon their geographical location was arbitrary and ineffective at best. In relation to this, some felt that all post-secondary options should be fairly and truly available to all students, regardless of their rural-urban or socio-economic status. From this perspective, students would be given the opportunity to determine their own choices regarding their future goals, and thus become more actively engaged in the process of their own education.

### **Assessment of Public Input**

Following the completion of the public consultations and scheduled presentations by various stakeholders, the Task Force convened on 14 September 2005 to determine the direction of their activities. At this meeting it was decided that the Task Force would only proceed in pursuing the selection of recommendations once a comprehensive survey and assessment of issues brought forth in the previous months' consultations were compiled and made ready for discussion by Chair Dr. Richard Kurial. Following the creation of this document, the Task Force met on numerous occasions through October and November to determine and establish a clear set of recommendations. Given the range, diversity, and commitment of the individual members of this Task Force, each recommendation came forth only after the most detailed and intense discussion. On every topic relevant to the matter of student achievement, the views of every Task Force member were incorporated or, at the very least, fully acknowledged.

The Task Force agreed that it would limit the number of recommendations, but, given the scope and scale of the enterprise, this proved to be a difficult task. Nevertheless, the Task Force was cognizant of the fact that, although itemized, its recommendations are interdependent, and it is anticipated that they might be regarded as a collective series of proposals, which, taken together, will contribute to the improvement of student achievement on PEI.

In making these recommendations, the Task Force contends without reservation that education needs further and additional investment. It also recognizes that such investment will pay ever greater dividends in the sustainable society that will result, and in the sustainable and meaningful lives of our citizens who receive their education in our public school system.

With regard to creating a sustainable system, well might it be noble to attempt to maintain each and every school currently operating on the Island, but, nobility aside, some schools face overwhelming demographic challenges. The current policy of retaining every school on the Island has created inequities in school families consuming vast amounts of dollars that might be better directed toward the improvement of overall student achievement.



Throughout its deliberations, the Task Force was well aware that there were no simple answers to and no magic bullets for the complex issues surrounding education and student achievement. In this light, the Task Force developed a set of key issues to highlight and guide the direction for specific recommendations:

- The development of curriculum benchmarks
- The value of common assessment for prescriptive purposes
- The need for adequate school facilities and technology
- The requirement for schools having more access to specialists such as resource teachers, psychologists, and speech language pathologists, as well as the necessity of integrating essential student services with health and justice
- A reassessment of early childhood development and intervention
- The training of educators in the subject of teaching to read and to write
- The development of clear guidelines for time-on-task in schools
- The development of a clear system of alternative options in high schools
- The need to address the issue of family literacy
- The development of school programs for meaningful parental involvement
- The reassessment of teacher evaluation and the development of a teacher mentorship program

It is the hope of this Task Force that the recommendations contained within this report have addressed these critical issues in a clear, effective, and positive manner.



## V. *Recommendations & Rationale*

### **Recommendation 1: Curriculum**

In order to increase student achievement effectively, it is necessary for teachers to have a clear strong curriculum supported by these four elements:

- outcomes with well-described standards and benchmarks;
- human, physical, and material resources to assist in curriculum delivery;
- research-based teaching and learning strategies; and
- assessment practices and tools to provide information for decision-making.

In researching the programs offered in Island schools, the Task Force recognized that there is a wide variety of courses available. In order to teach these courses, teachers need curriculum guides and textbooks. Curriculum guides prescribe what outcomes are expected of students and should also prescribe the standards and benchmarks that are to be pursued. In order to have meaningful benchmarks and standards, the curricula must be fully developed.

Currently, half the courses in the province have curriculum guides that are over 10 years old or non-existent. The same can be said for textbooks. This makes it very challenging for educators to know what to teach and even more challenging for other stakeholders to know what to expect, particularly in an era of ever-expanding knowledge. As well, once curriculum and standards are set, they need to be applied consistently throughout the province and they must emphasize expectations for students.

As part of the Council of Atlantic Ministers of Education and Training (CAMET), PEI is participating in an initiative to develop such benchmarks and standards for language arts and mathematics. This initiative will only be able to achieve full effectiveness once standards and benchmarks have been developed for all subjects taught.

The Department of Education should continue to evaluate and adopt successful curricula from other jurisdictions and apply a “made in PEI” approach only when necessary. A system to examine and react to deficiencies in our curriculum more quickly also needs to be established.

In conjunction with this initiative, the importance of teacher participation in the development of outcomes, standards, and benchmarks must also be recognized. Because teachers have direct access to current classroom experience, they are an invaluable resource to the creation of curriculum. To ensure the effectiveness of teacher participation, teachers require adequate training for both designing and using outcomes, standards, and benchmarks. Teacher-training needs are a provincial responsibility and must be financially supported.

#### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- the Department of Education create and provide clear outcomes, standards, and benchmarks in all areas of the curriculum;
- the Department of Education ensure that all curricula be fully supported with the appropriate textbooks and resources;
- the Department of Education provide teachers with adequate training to effectively use the developed curricula;



- the provincial government provide the appropriate staffing levels to the education system in order to meet these needs effectively;
- the Department of Education continue to evaluate and adopt successful programs from other jurisdictions and apply a “made in PEI” approach only when necessary;
- the Department of Education ensure that measures are taken for effective and ongoing review of all curricula.



## Recommendation 2: Student Assessment

When outcomes, standards, and benchmarks are available, teachers can create effective and meaningful assessments that will help them determine more accurately what students have learned, how to adjust their teaching, and what specific resources are needed for various possible learning difficulties in students.

Once these are available, it will also be possible to undertake provincial assessments to provide consistent information to the Department of Education, school boards, and teachers to effectively adjust curriculum and teacher professional development (PD). This will provide an accurate assessment of the education system for students, educators, parents, and guardians. In order to remain relevant to the provincially established curriculum and benchmarks, these assessments will also have to be developed by stakeholders in the PEI education system.

Providing accurate and useful results requires that the assessments take into account the various learning styles, such as tactile and auditory learning of students. These assessments must also account for the learning experience in different grade levels. Assessments in the early grades or at key stages would also help to identify children in need of assistance. While such assessments could be part of a teaching unit in the primary grades, they could be prepared in a joint province-wide initiative by subject teachers for senior grades. It is important to note that the purpose of gathering this information is solely to allow for the improvement of both the learning experience of students and the teaching experience of educators. Clearly, teachers must play a central role in the development of assessment procedures and practices. As well, student assessment needs to be tied to the existing provincial curricula.

To reiterate, the goal of assessment is to improve teaching and learning. As a tool, common assessments can be used to inform students, parents, guardians, and teachers about student progress. As such, it should help to guide professional development and appropriate intervention for student learning at all levels, and it should be applied consistently to students across the province.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- the province, in conjunction with stakeholders, administer common assessments to Island students at grades 3, 6, and 9, and for designated subjects at the senior high school level. These assessments must involve teachers at all levels and must
  - reflect the various learning styles of students;
  - not be used for the ranking or comparison of either students or schools;
  - be tied to the provincial curriculum, which will be updated from time to time;
  - guide professional development at all levels;
  - be used to accurately inform parents, teachers, and staff;
  - be used positively to improve teaching and learning; and
  - be part of the school improvement plan.



### Recommendation 3: Early Childhood Intervention

It is more than evident that the time from birth to approximately when children enter grade 3 (eight years of age +/-) is crucial for the academic and social development of children. This can be thought of as a key foundation period that will heavily influence the learning capabilities of a child. The Healthy Child Development strategy identified actions to support this stage in a child's life and those strategies need to be vigorously pursued. In particular, actions that support healthy practices during and after pregnancy, and which aid in identifying children with special needs and learning disabilities as early as possible, are crucial. Many stakeholders identified the need for more supports and services in order to have children well-prepared for school.

While the provincial government has set in place a kindergarten system with common curricula for kindergarten education providers, the Task Force believes that more consistency is required in the present system to ensure the best possible education for children. For example, the length of kindergarten programs can affect the completion of the proposed curriculum, but the current system does not hold a strict policy concerning the length of operation of such programs. Concerns have been expressed that without rigorous guidelines, it is difficult to ensure such consistency in the kindergarten system while it remains in a community-based, publicly funded model.

In addition to the establishment of consistency, the evidence strongly suggests that the francophone system requires an integrated kindergarten system in order to provide the essential supports necessary for the preservation of the French language and culture. This will also have the added benefit of encouraging francophone parents to send their children to the French-language school system. The Task Force is unanimous in its desire to support the francophone community.

The Task Force determined that, before and beyond the kindergarten system, there is a need for the early identification of children who are at risk academically and socially. Children with possible learning disabilities need to be identified as early as possible as they are often most prone to be at risk if interventions are not in place for them. In relation to this identification, consultation with and education of the family of the given child must also take place. Only when the family is actively engaged and informed in the education of their child can there be positive development in a child's education. There are programs in place, such as the Best Start program, which perform this function. The provincial government should look at this and other models, and support them on a province-wide scale.

#### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- to ensure consistency and quality in the kindergarten system, the provincial government should put in place more rigorous requirements regarding program content, the number of hours, and the length of the school year;
- the provincial government integrate francophone kindergartens into the public school system and investigate whether this would be advantageous for all kindergartens;
- the provincial government lead the way in identifying children with learning disabilities as well as those who may be academically and socially at risk;
- the provincial government develop an intervention program for children identified as being at risk.



### **Recommendation 4: Learning to Read by Grade 3**

As noted, learning to read is the single most significant factor in determining a child's success in school and in life. Learning to read by grade 3 is essential so that students can then read to learn. There is presently an excellent initiative to identify the children most at risk in grade 1. However, this is not sufficient as students still may have learning disabilities. They may still encounter some difficulties after grade 1, and in many cases may be hampered by emotional and social needs. Thus it is important to put strategies in place to address the needs of those who may still "fall through the cracks."

**It is therefore recommended that:**

- the Department of Education investigate appropriate models and programs and resources to assist all children in learning to read by grade 3;
- children in need of assessment for possible reading difficulties or disabilities be referred as soon as possible for such an assessment.





## Recommendation 5: Student Engagement

To engage in learning, students should have a firm foundation in literacy and numeracy before they are introduced to significant program content. Students need basic literacy and numeracy skills to understand and interpret subject information in a meaningful way. Although these skills are first learned at an early age, they must be developed continuously throughout the educational process.

To engage students adequately, there should be systems in place to address the wide-ranging needs and interests of students. Many bright students find their classes too easy and they are bored with school. With so many demands, teachers often find it difficult to find the time to challenge these students. One option may be to have some teachers assigned as “coaches” who could explore and implement cross-curricular independent study projects for these students. Schools should also find meaningful ways to challenge lower-achieving students.

Task Force members heard that the general and practical course model could be improved and that more hands-on learning opportunities should be offered. Technical courses must be taught as pathways to higher learning and/or employment, and they must be embedded with meaningful programming for students. They should not be viewed simply as courses for students facing academic challenges. Such action must take place earlier than in senior high school—indeed, as early as grade 7—so students have time to carefully consider these courses.

The Task Force heard concerns about the present semester system in relation to student engagement. The semester system is popular with many students and teachers. Having only four subjects at a time is convenient. However, questions arose as to whether this system provides students with enough sustained contact with certain subject material to make it meaningful. Long gaps in learning can happen between years. Many students may take a grade 10 English class in their first semester, and not have another English class again until September or February of grade 11. Students often lose skills during this time.

Another concern with the semester system had to do with the length of the classes. Most adolescents find it difficult to sit in one class and concentrate for 75 minutes at a time. This is especially true for students who are at risk academically and socially. Longer classes are sometimes helpful for science labs and some technical classes. A new scheduling model could build in occasional longer classes or double periods for these purposes.

It is difficult to offer an adequate amount of information in short semesters. Much learning also takes place outside class hours. Shorter class periods spread out over the full school year would allow for greater retention and understanding.

In senior high schools, student engagement is greatly affected by the credit value of certain courses. For example, some courses, such as math and language arts, require more teaching time. The fact that all courses are 110 hours in length makes the system inflexible when it comes to offering more options to students, such as science students who are also in music or French Immersion programs.



It was also noted often that students were just beginning to connect with their teachers when the semester was ending. Seeing the same teachers all year, or having a home room teacher for three years, are models that can benefit both students and teachers by strengthening relationships, engagement, and achievement.

In the 1994 Intermediate School report, the authors discussed the possibility of instituting block scheduling in order to organize the school day differently. The authors went on to say: “The subject matter taught in one class should not be taught in total isolation of subject matter in another class” and

...a model more closely resembling that of elementary schools might be more effective. It is argued that younger students, especially those in grades 7 and 8, need to be exposed to fewer teachers. They need to see that their “learnings” are often connected, and have a relevance to the world in which they live. Implementing block scheduling would help to alleviate this concern.

In this same report, it was also suggested that integration would assist in reshaping the intermediate curriculum.

Youth are engaged in many learning activities outside school. Students and parents questioned why this learning could not be recognized as it is in other jurisdictions. Examples included students in Royal Conservatory of Music programs and piloting lessons in Air Cadets.

The Task Force became aware of the growing demand to address the needs of boys in school, many of whom have become disengaged from the educational process. For many years there has been a decline in boys entering post-secondary institutions, and few of those boys who enter university become teachers.

**It is therefore recommended that:**

- the Department of Education investigate and adopt a more effective scheduling model for intermediate and high schools;
- the Department of Education develop strategies to enhance student/teacher contact and mentoring relationships;
- the Department of Education address the credit value of courses currently offered in the education system. In so doing, serious consideration should be given to increasing the teaching time (and relative course credit value) for mathematics and the language arts;
- new strategies be employed in the delivery, value, and structure of alternate programs at the intermediate level, as well as general and practical courses at the senior high level;
- new instructional strategies be examined, developed, and introduced, which take into account differentiated instruction, particularly with regard to instructional strategies that work for boys;
- the Department of Education develop a strategy for students who need academic enrichment;
- the Department of Education accredit programs, including, for example, trades experience or Royal Conservatory of Music programs, taken by students outside the existing school system.



## Recommendation 6: Parental Engagement

Research has demonstrated the positive impact of parental involvement in children's learning. During consultations, the theme of parental engagement emerged as one of the most supported concepts necessary to improve student achievement. The recently announced model for school improvement has a component that inquires about parental engagement. Schools cannot be expected to be the sole source of academic challenge for Island children. Parents need to be given every opportunity to assist their children in the learning process in order that their children arrive at school ready to learn.

Schools need to share best practices and need to lead initiatives that promote parental engagement. In most grade 1 classes in Prince Edward Island, there are a number of students with the intellectual capacity to learn to read but who are at risk of not becoming successful readers. Those children, like all children, are in school learning to read 10 per cent (900 hours) of their time in a year. This means that there are approximately 4,500 hours of "awake learning time" that takes place at home and in community settings. In terms of literacy, children's capacity and ability is directly related to the amount of time spent on practice reading, on one-on-one learning-to-read support, on real-life experiences that help to make "learning connections," and on the extensive positive reinforcement of specific reading skills.

All the available research reinforces the central fact that parental involvement in their children's learning has a most positive impact. In the early stages of educational development, parents and other family members can provide children in grades 1 and 2 with hundreds of hours of no-cost reading and writing skills development support. In order to do so, however, parents and families require basic literacy and numeracy knowledge, and skills to accomplish these tasks effectively.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- parental involvement continue to be an integral part of the school improvement plan and that schools identifying success in engaging parents share their practices with other schools;
- the Department of Education, along with stakeholders, investigate models of family literacy initiatives and allocate funding to support those that give parents an opportunity to assist their children, whether at risk or not, to learn to read and write;
- the provincial government allocate resources to assist parents to organize effectively for the purpose of identifying community and family educational needs.



## **Recommendation 7: Sustainable Schools**

The school system in Prince Edward Island is currently facing, and will continue to face in coming years, a significant demographic challenge. Over the next 20 years, the number of young adults in PEI will decline dramatically. The following table provides a graphic view of this problem. It reveals that, by 2010, the projected school-age population of PEI will have dropped almost 20 per cent from the beginning of the century. The declining enrolments will deplete many classrooms of students in the near future.

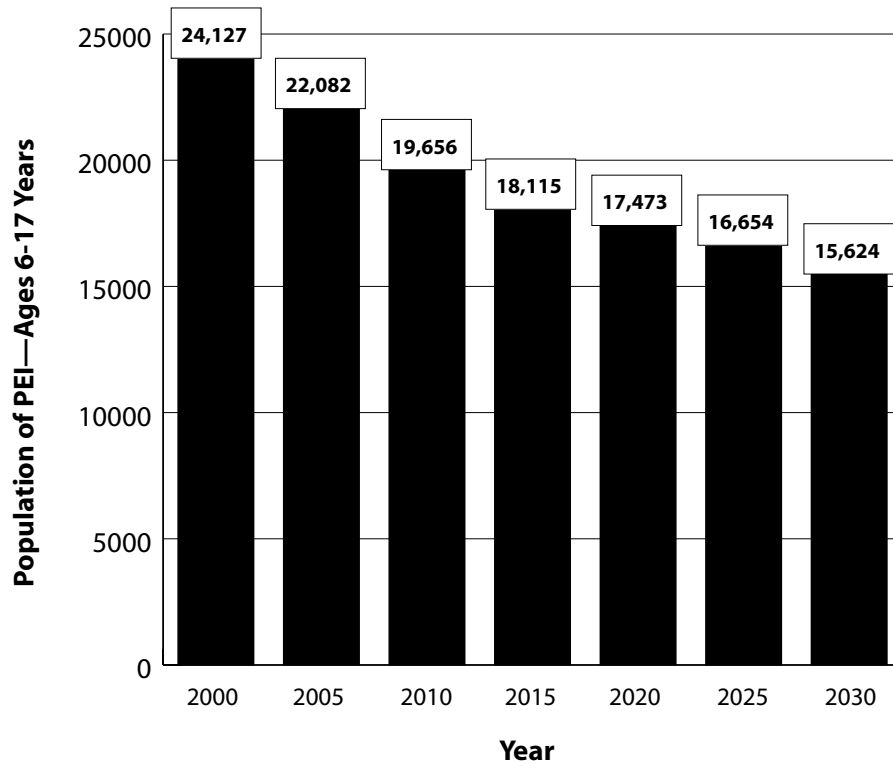
With declining enrolments, serious consideration needs to be given to the manner in which resources, programs, and facilities can best be made available to all Island students. In view of this development, school boards need to have the power and authority to address rapid demographic change in order to ensure sustainable schools capable of providing, improving, and enriching educational opportunities for all Island students.

### **It is recommended that:**

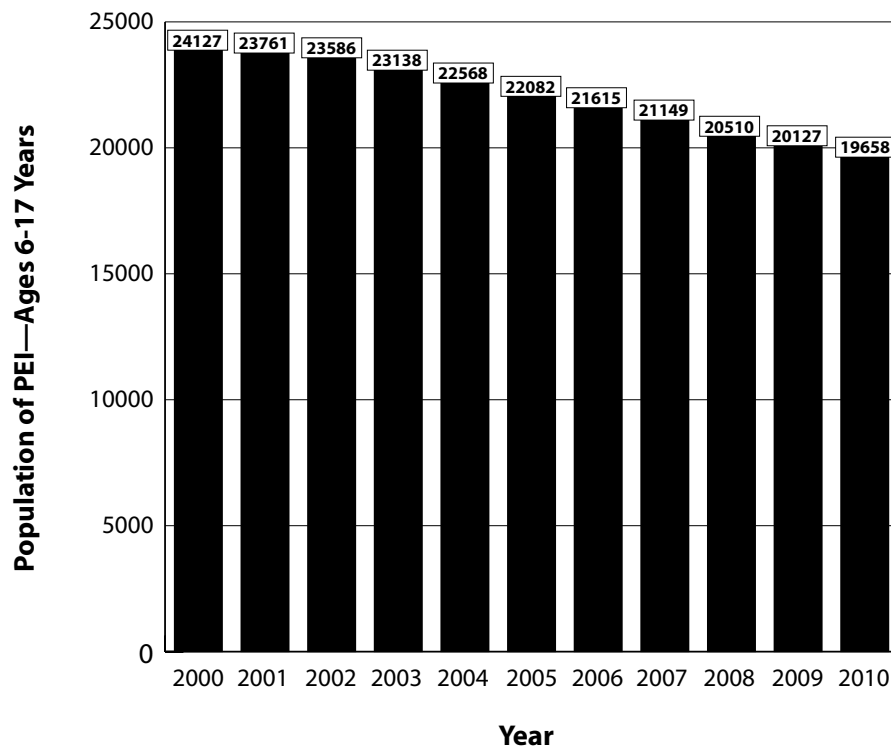
- the government abandon its commitment to the policy that it will close no schools on PEI;
- school boards assert their authority and responsibility to examine changing demographics, existing educational facilities, and current school zoning, with a view to enhancing and rationalizing programs and services.



### Projected School-Age Population of PEI for Years 2000–2030



### PEI School-Age Population 2000–2010



## **Recommendation 8: Use of Instructional Time**

It has been noted that many schools currently hold numerous extracurricular class activities during school time. While the importance of such activities (such as charitable events and motivational speeches) is recognized, the amount of instructional time lost to these activities can disrupt the teaching and learning process. Often such non-class activities interrupt the learning process to a degree that necessitates excessive amounts of time dedicated to reviewing subject material that would normally have been covered. We need to create a school environment where children can be challenged and where everyone is working to their greatest potential.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- guidelines be developed to limit the number, length, and types of non-pedagogical activities that are held during class time;
- school days listed as “instructional days” should be used for instruction to the greatest extent possible.



## Recommendation 9: Integrated Services for Children and Youth

While it is recognized that the school performs various societal functions, it is also recognized that teachers and administrators must perform their respective duties of educating and managing in order for the school to perform effectively its educational function. To perform their assigned functions, teachers and administrators should not be burdened with the duties of other professions required in the school setting.

In consultations, the Task Force heard on numerous occasions that there was a significant need for speech language pathologists in the system. The Task Force also heard that children requiring the services of a psychologist faced wait times in excess of a year. This is a significant amount of time for a child already in need of special services.

A specific issue requiring the integration of services relates to the fact that the *Youth Criminal Justice Act* has significantly decreased the number of students in custody and increased their presence in schools. However, this has occurred without the shift in human resources from one sector to another (justice to education). This has significantly burdened intermediate and high schools with increased cases of violence, addiction, and truancy. Although the Task Force recognizes the positive societal contribution of having such youth in schools, it believes that specialists should be present in schools to provide assistance for these cases.

Thus, there is a need for a variety of support services in the education system. To meet this need, existing services from within the provincial government should be designated to schools in an integrated and collaborative manner. Social services, breakfast programs, certified nutritionists, youth workers, speech language pathologists, counsellors, addiction counsellors, psychologists, and physiotherapists are but some of the supports needed to support learning. This will require a joint effort by various provincial government branches to act as a unified body to identify the supplementary needs required to serve children, youth, and their families, and to co-ordinate the delivery of those services.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- the Premier designate an official to lead the integration and enhancement of government services that support children and youth.



## Recommendation 10: Teachers as Life-Long Learners

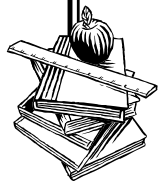
We have the most highly trained teaching force in our history, but we are still facing significant challenges. At times, teachers may find themselves teaching subject matter that they are neither specialized in nor comfortable with through no choice of their own. It is the role of teachers, regardless of grade level, to understand children, how they learn, and to teach accordingly. This role cannot be upheld if teachers are not familiar or at least comfortable with the material that they are teaching. Furthermore, because instructional strategies are always evolving, teachers must continuously adapt their teaching methods. Once again, such adaptation is limited if the teacher does not have the required background for the subjects they teach. Recruiting subject-specialized teachers can be difficult, and thus it is imperative that the province ensure that proper training opportunities be made available for teachers. Past practice has shown that investing in Island teachers to fill existing gaps allows them to stay and work in the province.

In its investigations, the Task Force reached several key conclusions concerning the role of teachers. It determined that in order to provide the necessary foundation in literacy and numeracy required for further meaningful learning, elementary school teachers should hold an excellent understanding of how children learn to read and write. Intermediate and high school teachers should have specific skills in the subject matter they teach, so that they can build upon the foundational knowledge their students have already developed. The subject specialization of the teacher is more important in certain subjects. For example, many students are apprehensive about learning mathematics. Being taught by a teacher who is comfortable with and passionate about mathematics would greatly benefit a student's learning experiences. In second-language teaching, teachers need to have excellent language skills, as they need to be the language models for their students. Clearly, serious efforts have to be made to provide solutions that will address existing gaps in curriculum availability. Lastly, it is imperative that adequate numbers of fully trained special education teachers be available to determine and meet the specific needs of all students in a system that rightly prides itself for its inclusive policies.

To cultivate their roles, teachers should be given the structured opportunity of gathering best practices in the field of teaching on PEI. Although PD days for teachers currently exist, there is reason to believe that they could be restructured more specifically to meet the needs of teachers. For example, teachers widely recognized by their peers as master teachers could be trained to act as teacher mentors in their teaching subjects. The Task Force believes that the current situation of teacher training specifically indicates that such teacher mentors are most needed in the crucial areas of language arts and mathematics.

### It is therefore recommended that:

- continuous teacher training be provided, adequately recognized, and funded for incentive so that teachers can fulfil their roles as educators and that such Professional Development (PD) is recognized through a teacher's growth plan;
- that mentoring models for PD be utilized more consistently. It is necessary to train exemplar teachers as teacher mentors, specifically in language arts and mathematics, but also in other areas that improve general teaching strategies. Once a mentoring model is established, it has to be understood that resources are required to provide consistent delivery of the program;
- teachers teaching outside their field of expertise must gain competency in that field in order





to continue teaching those subject areas. In order to meet the current gaps, the Department of Education must provide bursaries or incentives in the short term to allow for the teacher to gain new competencies. The Department of Education must also put mechanisms in place for the long term, which will ensure that teachers are assigned appropriately;

- PD and in-service be provided in a manner that allows maximum instructional time.



## **Recommendation 11: Leadership**

Leadership is demonstrated at various levels of the school system, but nowhere is it more influential than within a school. School leaders, and administrators in particular, are responsible for the environment of the school, the learning and teaching culture found within its walls, and the relationships created and sustained among educational stakeholders.

Many administrators have significant teaching loads. While we recognize the desire of many administrators to stay connected to students by teaching, we also recognize that time is the single most important factor influencing leadership in schools. Administrators need to be more than managers. They need time to concentrate on teaching and learning in the school. This does not mean that a principal need do it all. It does mean, however, that if time is available, administrators or other school leaders willing to share that leadership can concentrate on school improvement plans, mentoring teachers, and building relationships with parents and the community.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- provisions be put in place to provide sufficient classroom teachers to every school in order to afford the leadership time so necessary to school administrators;
- ongoing, appropriate, and updated training and support opportunities, including training in leadership, be provided for all administrators.



## Recommendation 12: Staffing Model

A new model for staffing schools was developed four years ago in consultation with stakeholders which takes into consideration the various and growing needs of schools. The model provides for services to address class composition, various programming within schools, the need for leadership, and the need for specialists for various subject areas. The model was widely hailed as a significant improvement in education in Prince Edward Island. The model was to be implemented over a six-year period. However, during the 2005–2006 budget process, the implementation of the model was paused.

It is therefore recommended that:

- the provincial government reinstate the previously developed and implemented staffing model;
- in the process of reinstating the model, the provincial government ensure that it occurs in a coherent, accountable manner, which takes into consideration the practical reality of school needs.



### **Recommendation 13: The Role of the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI) in Training Teachers**

The Faculty of Education is responsible for the teaching and training of most Island teachers. The Task Force recognized that the Faculty of Education and the Department of Education need to maintain and enhance a continued collaborative relationship. Action research in Island schools benefits BEd students, school students, and teachers alike, both in the French and English schools. The Task Force believes that areas of mutual benefit should continue to be explored in order to ensure teachers of the highest quality enter our Island classrooms.

**It is therefore recommended that:**

- the Faculty of Education at UPEI consider increasing the emphasis on classroom management and student behaviour in the courses required for the BEd program;
- consideration be given to extending the length of practicums, both domestic and international, in the second year of the program;
- a personal interview be a key feature of the admission process to UPEI's BEd program;
- the Department of Education work closely with the French School Board to define and fulfill the needs of the French language system in the area of pre-service programs.



## Recommendation 14: Community Engagement

We live today in a knowledge-based society wherein essential skills such as literacy, numeracy, problem-solving, and communication are vital to community and provincial sustainability. Post-secondary education institutions and the general workplace hold these skills as necessary, or at least significantly advantageous. Although we live in a rural province that emphasizes what is generally seen to be practical skills, even these skills are continuously requiring significant skills in literacy and numeracy. The education system should be valued as an asset to all facets of society. To do this, it must be demonstrated in real terms that literacy and numeracy are not simply reading and writing and adding numbers, but that they provide the basic framework for social communication and advancement.

**It is therefore recommended that:**

- a provincial campaign be undertaken to promote the value of education to the general community. Such a process should demonstrate the benefits of building and of living in a veritable culture of learning.



## **Recommendation 15: Trades Strategy**

A Trades Strategy Committee is currently in place with a mandate to introduce a meaningful trades strategy for the new economy that must develop if the province is to be sustainable. PEI's economy is rapidly being transformed into one that requires a higher level of education and skills training. Indeed, technology and legislation alone require continued learning in all trades clusters. The proposed pathway from apprenticeship to a "Red Seal" trade commences at the grade 10 level, and proposes the introduction of more preparatory programming and educational linkages to post-secondary institutions such as Holland College and to industry.

This strategy identifies the correct courses and programs for these students and recognizes the essential skills acquired during their high school experience. Still, additional emphasis on numeracy skills would seem most appropriate within the general program stream in Island high schools. Although early in the process, the strategy should, if well-implemented, answer the call for more and better skilled employees on Prince Edward Island.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- the provincial government commit to implementing the new Trades Strategy;
- the general stream of courses in senior high be refined and upgraded, especially in math and numeracy, in order to better prepare students for college, the trades, and the workforce;
- allowance should be made for the French School Board to have access to similar programs in the French language.



## Recommendation 16: Aboriginal Education

It is vitally important that First Nations peoples be afforded the same opportunities for success available to all other students. Numerous reports have been conducted over time outlining the educational problems facing aboriginal peoples in Canada. High dropout rates, high unemployment rates, and limited cross-cultural training for teachers are but a few of the problems cited in the past. Thirty years ago, the Assembly of First Nations issued a report entitled “Indian Control of Indian Education,” a four-point policy dealing with parental responsibility, school programs, teachers, and school facilities. Greater involvement of the Mi’kmaq Confederacy of PEI in the education of their children would result in greater retention of students, improved attendance, better graduation rates, the inclusion of relevant curriculum, the development of appropriate early childhood programs, and adult education programs. The Task Force endorses the idea of providing programs that promote and enhance Aboriginal culture in all Island schools.

**It is therefore recommended that:**

- the Department of Education work with all stakeholders to design and deliver improved educational offerings and opportunities for all Aboriginal students in the system.



## **Recommendation 17: Immigration**

Given Prince Edward Island's Population Strategy, it should be expected that more immigrant families will be moving to Prince Edward Island. Until recently, schools in Prince Edward Island have not seen the impact of large numbers of immigrant children on programs and services that has occurred in major urban centres. This has changed significantly in the last couple of years with the numbers of immigrant students in Island schools increasing dramatically. The number of English and French second-language programs has increased, settlement issues have arisen, and cases of racial bias have been experienced. Some of these children have seen the horrors of war and many have seen their family members become victims of torture and death. Many students, although academically able, have had limited access to schools.

The Population Strategy has effectively described the needs for skilled labour and the economic possibilities brought forth with immigration. However, resources to support the children of these immigrants must accompany resources for recruitment in order for families to successfully settle on Prince Edward Island.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- the provincial government develop and implement a plan to address the needs of immigrant children and their families, particularly in the area of providing the necessary second-language skills;
- the provincial government identify the roles of various government agencies in supporting these children and determining the financial and human resources needed to support the integration of these children into the school system.





## **Recommendation 18: Educating the Whole Child**

Students need to be exposed to various subject areas, various learning styles, and a variety of experiences. To learn, they need to be well of mind and of body.

There is significant research that shows that many students benefit from exposure to the Arts. On PEI, all elementary students have access to music programs. There are many programs available to students in the upper grades in various forms of the arts, such as band, jazz band, visual arts, and so on. Not all students learn the same way nor do they have the same strengths. In order to discover these strengths and allow students to appreciate and contribute to the culture of their community, it is important to continue including these programs within the curriculum.

It is also recognized that students who are physically fit perform better in school. Physical education is compulsory until the end of grade 9 and programs are available in all secondary schools.

PEI is one of the few provinces in Canada where music and physical education are taught by specialist teachers. This action on the part of the system creates and promotes value for these programs.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- programs such as art, theatre, music, and physical education continue to be available to all Island students;
- these programs be taught by teachers trained in those fields.



## **Recommendation 19: The Role of Technology**

In 2000, the Department of Education issued a strategic plan for Communication and Information Technology (CIT) in the public school system. The plan sought to allow Island schools to harness the full potential of our children through the effective utilization and implementation of technology throughout the system.

It recognized that CIT constitutes a uniquely empowering tool for broadening and enhancing each student's learning experience in a knowledge-based society.

The plan envisioned CIT as an integral part of the PEI public school system, which would contribute to student learning outcomes from grade 1 to 12.

Positive results were anticipated in each of the following areas: student use of CIT; leadership; planning and management; integration of CIT into the curriculum; CIT infrastructure and services; human resource development; and, most importantly, the accessibility and equity of all CIT programs and services.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- the provincial government commit itself to the continued implementation of the Communication and Information Technology in the Public School System Strategic Plan.



## **Recommendation 20: Monitoring and Reporting Progress**

As recommendations are studied and implemented, it will be important for the provincial government to monitor and report on the status of the implementation process. There are various ways government can perform this function, but the function is a necessary one.

### **It is therefore recommended that:**

- the provincial government develop a process to monitor the implementation of the recommendations, and that it report to the Legislature within two years, indicating to what extent it has succeeded in implementing the recommendations of this report.



## VI. *Bibliography*

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