

Lynn Green and Edie Dunphy
Learning Disabilities Association of Newfoundland and Labrador
66 Kenmount Road, Suite 301
St. John's, NL A1B 3V7

Dear Ms. Green and Mr. Dunphy,

Thank you for your correspondence and for providing a detailed overview of the challenges that individuals with learning disabilities face in our province. I appreciate the information you have provided in this letter and would be pleased to receive more information to review in the future.

1. Access to Timely Assessment

If your party forms the next government, how will you ensure that all students suspected of having Learning Disabilities have access to a timely comprehensive diagnostic assessment?

As you outlined, it is often educators who recognize that a student has a learning disability. Early diagnosis is key to providing the appropriate supports to a student who has a learning disability. Early intervention can make an enormous difference in helping all children reach their full potential. There are many different kinds of learning disabilities, and best practices vary according to the diagnosis. A PC Government will support early diagnosis by making sure our education and health care systems are integrated, and professionals across many disciplines – from educational psychology to pediatric care – are communicating effectively with one another and working together to achieve the best possible outcomes for our children. We will ensure that teachers and education professionals who recognize that a student may have a learning disability have all the information they need to connect the student and their family with the appropriate supports and resources promptly. We know that for this to occur, our teachers and education system must be sufficiently supported. We will empower teachers with additional training and awareness about learning disabilities, and hire the professionals needed to provide proper educational opportunities for children with special needs.

In our policy book “The Blueprint: The Progressive Conservative Plan for Jobs and Growth in Newfoundland and Labrador,” you will find the following policy statements:

- A PC Government will make it a priority to ensure our public education system is adequately funded and resourced, and treated as an investment rather than an expense, regardless of the current budgetary pressures.
- A PC Government will guarantee quality public education for students by improving class sizes and ensuring an immediate and independent review of the Teacher Allocation Model.

- A PC Government will be committed to providing adequate human resources to improve educational opportunities for children with special needs.
- A PC Government will improve students' access to assistance and support from school counsellors, mental health professionals, and related personnel.
- A PC Government will ensure our school system maximizes the potential of all children.

I believe that improving class sizes, providing adequate human resources and improving access to educational specialists will assist in getting children assessed earlier and thereby ensure they receive the necessary supports earlier.

2. Provision of Accommodations in K-12 Schools

If you are the Premier after this election, how will you ensure that students with Learning Disabilities and/or ADHD have their entitled accommodations delivered consistently throughout their education and what is your plan to bridge the gap between policy and implementation in the K-12 education system?

A PC Government will ensure our school system maximizes the potential of all children. All children should have access to the accommodations and supports they need to succeed.

Your letter described situations where agreed to accommodations either cannot be, or are not being, successfully delivered to the student. It is not fair to deprive students of the support they require to get the most from their education at school.

I believe a key component in addressing this is to determine why it is occurring. As Premier, I will ask the Minister responsible to consult and work with parents, teachers, school administrators and your association to hear the concerns and discuss ways to address them effectively. Once we know the shortcomings, we can work on implementing solutions. I will ensure that areas of strength and success are also captured so we can share best practices and capitalize on the success already occurring. As previously indicated, A PC Government will be committed to providing adequate human resources to improve educational opportunities for children with special needs.

3. Assessment and services for adults

If your party forms the next government, how will you ensure that adults with suspected Learning Disabilities have access to free assessment and support in order to improve their lives?

My vision for Newfoundland and Labrador is one where all individuals are encouraged to fulfill their potential. Adults who have an undiagnosed learning disability should not fall through the cracks. They should be supported and empowered. I believe we can work together with our post-secondary institutions and community organizations to implement an action plan to help adults be assessed and receive the necessary supports.

A PC Government will work with our post-secondary institutions to explore opportunities to provide individuals who may have a learning disability with assessments and supports. We will also review the current programming in our corrections facilities with a view to implementing assessments to help incarcerated individuals who may have a learning disability.

Two specific policies in our platform can be tailored to address these issues:

A PC Government will develop a new Poverty Reduction Strategy to help improve the well-being and quality of life of those who are now living in poverty. Our strategy will enable many to escape the grip of poverty, pursue opportunities and achieve personal self-reliance.

A PC Government will create a new strategy for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in collaboration with non-profit and community organizations to remove systemic barriers and help achieve the full inclusion of persons with disabilities in all aspects of Newfoundland and Labrador society, including education and employment.

4. Access to LD-based literacy programs and specific needed services

If your party is in power after the election, how will you ensure that students with Learning Disabilities have a free and equitable education?

As I previously noted, our education system should maximize the potential of all students. Be assured that a PC Government will be committed to providing the supports and resources, including human resources, required to improve educational opportunities for students with Learning Disabilities.

Your letter notes that access to an occupational therapist can help a student who has a learning disability. Again, the educational system and health care system should not operate in silos. A PC Government will find a way to help students access Occupational Therapy directly through the education system.

5. Inequities in Core Funding

What is your plan to address the issues around the equitable allocation of core funding for non-profit organizations in the province to meet their day-to-day operating costs?

We recognize the value of our service organizations and non-profits and we applaud the important work that groups such as yours do to support individuals, families and communities across our province. A PC Government will provide multiyear grants to the community service organizations and non-profits it supports to ensure groups have certainty in their budgeting process. I would also welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss any additional ways a PC Government could support your efforts.

Thank you once again for your letter and thank you for the tremendous work you do to support individuals with learning disabilities and their families. I look forward to working with you in the months and years ahead.

Sincerely,

Ches Crosbie
Leader
Progressive Conservative Party of Newfoundland and Labrador