



## FROM PROVINCE HOUSE TO HOME

Leo Glavine, MLA

Kings West

During the last school day before March Break, I started receiving letters from parents expressing concern about the financial outlook for public education in the government's 2009-2010 budget. I attended the Provincial Education Partners press conference in January which was held to urge government to increase the budget by 4.5%. Since then, I have met with five of the province's seven school board chairpersons to receive a candid message about education funding. Simply put, the consequences of a status quo or no new money will affect all Nova Scotians. I discussed this bleak outlook about staff cuts, changes to programs, larger class size and a more rigid application of bus service policy to Minister Stretch in late February.

The background to the present challenges is that in the 2007/2008 school year, the increase in the education budget barely covered cost escalation. In the 2008/2009 school year, the increase was less than cost escalation. The AVRSB is also being affected by the enrollment supplement. \$19.4 million is provided to five of the eight regional school boards to offset the effects of enrollment decline in excess of 2% per year. The Annapolis Regional School Board does not qualify for this funding that is based on a five year running average. Over that period, the Valley Board has had a student decline of 1% to 1.5% each year, and in my view, should qualify for some transitional funding. This additional funding received by five boards is creating an accumulative gain for them and causing a negative impact for the other three boards, one being the Annapolis Valley.

Another area that has translated into reduced funding is the class size supplement. There is \$10.6 million provided to six of the eight school boards who have average class sizes below the provincial average. The information for this calculation is always at least two years delayed, with the 2005/2006 school year being the most recent. School boards that have small classes are rewarded with additional funding. This is an aspect of the current formula that makes unequal, more unequal. While in my view the current funding formula needs a review, if the Department of Education adjusted the Annapolis Valley board's share of Formula Adjustments, this would ease the current crisis.

The funding formula has major categories of which the Annapolis Valley board and all boards receive a share. In five of the categories, such as the board's allotment as a share of provincial enrollment, they receive 11.5%. This percentage holds true for four other categories, but the local board's share of Formula Adjustments is just 6.92%. With no accommodation for declining enrollment and a class size supplement, the AVRSB is disadvantaged. There is no time for a formula review; the valley board needs the 4%

missing from their share of Formula Adjustments. This would mean an additional \$4 million infusion and give the board the ability to maintain the highest quality education for its students.

It is important to realize that the 4% needed that was explained in relation to the funding formula, is not the 4.5% needed in this year's budget. In order to balance the 2008-2009 budget, the AVRSB used \$1 million from its accumulated surplus, which was 1% of the budget. This, plus an additional 3.5% is needed to cover increased wages and costs. When the Board had to make cuts last year, they did not impact staffing. This year, however, it is imperative to receive a 4.5% increase or a crisis will be upon us. Without the increase, there will be a reduction in both teachers and support staff. Class sizes will increase and effective programs, especially those that support the most vulnerable students, will be lost.

I will hear from you in the coming weeks and your voice will be essential in the following demands on government. Provide AVRSB and all boards across the province with their 'profile sheets' (budget information). Have MLA's return in a timely manner to Province House to debate education funding, the economy and other critical issues. One such issue is the introduction of KENO gambling that used several million dollars---- money that should instead, be spent on quality education for our children.

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