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Education
August 2, 2010

Newfoundland School for the Deaf to Close

With no students attending the school in the coming school year and no new enrolments projected for the next five years, the Provincial Government today announced that the Newfoundland School for the Deaf will close.

"Our government is committed to providing the best possible educational opportunities to students who are deaf and hard of hearing, just as we are for all students with special needs," said the Honourable Darin King, Minister of Education. "The Newfoundland School for the Deaf has served generations of deaf and hard of hearing students in our province but the time has come for change. We have seen a major shift in the last decade with new cochlear implant technology, in what is considered to be the best way to deliver education to deaf and hard of hearing students, and in parental choices to have children remain at home with the necessary supports provided in school. This shift is clearly reflected in enrolment at the school. Given these factors, maintaining an empty school is not justifiable."

All 199 students who are deaf or hard of hearing in the province are currently in the public school system. Twelve of these students receive teaching services in their schools through teachers employed with the Newfoundland School for the Deaf. These teachers will now be transferred to Eastern School District and there will be no impact or change on the supports for these students in the school system. They will continue to access the same full range of services put in place for them by the Provincial Government including special education teachers, student assistants, assistive technology, alternate format materials, American Sign Language (ASL) Interpreters, teachers of the deaf, itinerant teachers of the deaf, and a departmental liaison.

"Students were offered the opportunity to move to community schools and they each individually made the choice to do so," said Minister King. "They have full access to the same services and a full range of courses and programs. In addition, they can avail of a variety of extra-curricular activities at their schools, which they would not have had access to at the Newfoundland School for the Deaf, given the small number of students. This change is consistent with our inclusive education approach and is in the best interest of students' academic and social development."

Four students currently live in the school's residence. Where possible, these students will return to live in their homes with full supports put in place by the school district. Students who will remain in St. John's will still be provided residential service with host families able to communicate using American Sign Language (ASL). Initial discussions have occurred with parents and further meetings will be taking place this week with families to explore options. The Provincial Government has also appointed a departmental liaison to work with the families to ensure a smooth transition.

"The school itself may be closed, however this does not mean a reduction in services for deaf and hard of hearing students in our province" said Minister King. "I want to assure deaf and hard of hearing students currently in our school system and any student that may require it in the future, that we will continue to provide all the necessary services and supports to them in the school system so that they can receive a quality education."

The closure will not result in the elimination of any teaching positions. All teaching staff will be assumed by the Eastern School District and all eight will be able to transfer their seniority status. Other staff will be declared redundant and will be able to exercise their rights under their respective collective agreements. Of these, there are 12 permanent and 10 temporary employees with NAPE

and one employee position is half time with the Newfoundland and Labrador Nurses' Union. There are also two management positions. The Department of Education has implemented specific measures to ensure compliance with respective collective agreements for the educational, administrative and residential staff.

Minister King added, "Laying off employees is not something we take lightly. The reality is that we cannot continue to operate a school with no students."

Use of the building will be temporarily transferred to the Eastern School District for the next three to five years. This will ensure that the school facility can be integrated as a part of the school district's infrastructure plan. Students from Paradise temporarily attending the facility will continue to do so until the new Paradise Elementary school is opened in early 2011.

- [Video of Minister's News Conference](#)

- 30 -

Media contact:
Tara Power
Director of Communications
Department of Education
709-729-0048, 727-5953
tarapower@gov.nl.ca

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