Nova Scotia Teachers Union
Commissioned Results – Autumn (Q4) 2018

November 2018
## Methodology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>• Probability telephone survey</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of Interviews</td>
<td>• 400 in each of two waves</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sampling</td>
<td>• Random samples of adults aged 18+ years from Nova Scotia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data Collection Dates</td>
<td>• October 3 to October 21, 2018</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• November 13 to November 27, 2018</td>
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<tr>
<td>Margin of Error</td>
<td>• Overall results accurate to within ± 4.9 percentage points, 19 times out of 20</td>
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<td>Reporting</td>
<td>• Current results are compared with tracking data from previous Atlantic Quarterly surveys conducted from 1992 to 2018, and NS Education Issues studies conducted in 2005, 2008 and 2010.</td>
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<td>• Results may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.</td>
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Assessment of Performance

Negative assessments of the performance of the provincial government in managing the public education system remain widespread across the province. Confidence in the government’s ability to act in the best interest of the public school system and perceptions of the overall quality of education are relatively stable but modest, with a minority providing positive assessments.

When asked to assess the actions taken by the government related to public education in recent years, a majority of Nova Scotians once again perceive an overall negative impact. Among those who believe they had a negative impact, the most commonly cited reason for this opinion is that teachers are not satisfied, followed by teachers being overworked and issues not being resolved. Among those who believe the actions had a positive impact, opinion that there have been improvements, there is dedicated funding to classroom improvement, and the contract dispute affected education are most commonly mentioned.

Favourable opinion of public school teachers in Nova Scotia remains widespread. Favourable opinion stems from perceptions that teachers do a good job, do what they can with limited resources, perceiving them as hard-working, along with residents having a personal relationship or interactions with teachers, among other reasons.

Public Education Issues

Nova Scotians’ ratings of the importance of specific issues for the public education school system reveals that a number of issues are widely viewed as critically important. Lack of support for those with special needs and violence in the classrooms are most often considered critically important, followed closely by poor student achievement, availability of support personnel in the classrooms, and teacher morale. Also considered critically important by a majority are teacher workloads and class sizes. One-half consider bussing or transportation issues as critically important.

Violence in the classroom has increased in importance, after declining in second quarter. Also increasing in importance over the past six months are teacher morale, teacher workloads, and class sizes, while availability of support personnel in the classroom has increased relative to the beginning of this year.
Impact of Shift to Single Provincial Advisory Council

- Compared with results in the spring of this year, there has been a widening of opinions regarding whether the move from seven school boards to a new single provincial advisory council will make the public education system in Nova Scotia better or worse. Residents are more inclined to believe the shift will make it worse than better, although neither viewpoint is a majority one. Top reasons residents believe the new single advisory council will be better include improved efficiency/less waste and improved consistency across the province. Conversely, the most common reasons residents believe the move will make it worse include it being too centralized, regional differences, and reduced input from community/groups.

- Also widening after shifting to a more equal split in second quarter 2018, residents are more likely to anticipate a negative than a positive impact on student achievement from the move from seven elected school boards to a single advisory council. Specifically, one-quarter anticipate a positive impact, while four in ten anticipate a negative impact.

- In examining more specific potential outcomes from moving from seven elected school boards to a single advisory council, a majority of residents continue to believe the move will make it harder to take into consideration local needs and for parents to have a say in education, it does not address the current problems in the education system, and it will create new problems in the education system. More residents agree it will be harder for parents to have a say in education, after agreement declined in second quarter. Residents are least inclined to believe it will have positive outcomes including improving efficiency and consistency, or improving the openness and transparency of decisions made for the education system.

Administrative Changes

- Residents’ assessment of the anticipated impact on the quality of public education of various administrative changes proposed based on the recommendations of an independent consultant are generally similar to results earlier this year. Residents are most inclined to anticipate positive impacts from enhancing the role and influence of School Advisory Councils, and giving teachers and principals the responsibility for the selection of text books and learning materials, with two-thirds anticipating positive impacts from each action. Approximately one in two residents believe short-term exchanges of government department and staff will have a positive impact, while moving principals and vice-principals out of the NSTU is the one change from which residents are more likely to anticipate a negative than a positive impact.
Substitute Teachers

✓ A large majority of residents remain concerned about the impact on public education of a shortage of substitute teachers.

School Bus System

✓ Nova Scotians view were transportation company, the regional Centres for Education, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development as most responsible for the effective operation of the public education school bus system.

Inclusive Education

✓ The vast majority of residents once again indicate it is important that the public be kept informed of the progress of inclusive education in the province despite opinion on, the confidence of the public will be kept informed in this regard, remaining split. It is important to note that only a small number of residents are very confident the public will be kept informed.

Pre-Primary Program

✓ A majority of residents support the introduction of the pre-primary program in the province’s public schools, with support increasing over the past year.
✓ Residents are more likely to view the job done by the government in introducing the program negatively than positively, although there has been some narrowing in the discrepancy between positive and negative opinion relative to a year ago.
✓ Knowledge regarding whether educators in the provincial pre-primary program are required to have the same qualifications as other public school teachers is clearly limited, with a mix of opinions of whether they do or do not have to have the same qualifications.
Just fewer than one in five residents believe the provincial government is doing an excellent or good job at managing the public school system, consistent with results in second quarter. By contrast, the vast majority of residents rate the Nova Scotia government’s performance in this regard as only fair or poor, which is also consistent with findings in second quarter.

As would be expected, rating the government’s performance on managing the public school system negatively is elevated among residents who express an unfavourable rating on the quality of public education in the province. (Table U2)
Residents’ confidence in the government’s ability to act in the best interests of the provincial public school system is relatively on par with second quarter results. Currently, opinion on this topic is split, as just under one-half of residents are very or somewhat confident, while slightly more than one-half of residents are not very or not at all confident.

Lack of confidence among those who believe the quality of public education in Nova Scotia is only fair or poor is more than double that of those who view the quality of public education as excellent or good. (Table U3)

Q4 2018 AQ
Very confident = 4%
Somewhat confident = 40%
Not very confident = 33%
Not at all confident = 21%
Perceptions regarding the overall quality of education in the province remain relatively stable compared with second quarter. Specifically, one-half of residents consider the overall quality of public education to be *fair* or *poor*, while a slightly smaller proportion believe the quality of public education is *excellent* or *good*.

Opinion in this regard is generally consistent across the population. (Table U3)
Similar to second quarter, residents are roughly twice as likely to believe the actions taken by the provincial government in recent years have had a negative impact than a positive impact on the quality of public education in Nova Scotia.

Specifically, close to six in ten residents indicate the actions have had a negative impact, while one-quarter believe they have had a positive impact.

Across the population, residents are more likely to believe there has been a negative than a positive impact. (Table U14)
Among those who believe the recent government actions have made a positive impact on the quality of public education in the province, top mentions include things having improved, dedicated funding to classroom improvement and the contract dispute affected education. (Table U15a)
Among those who believe the recent government actions have made a negative impact on the quality of public education in the province, opinion that teachers are not satisfied is once again mentioned most often. Other commonly cited reasons include opinions that teachers are over-worked, the education system has not improved, the government did not bargain in good faith, teachers are now less inclined to lead extracurricular activities, and there is too much government control. (Table U15b)
Consistent with historical results, public perception of Nova Scotia’s public school teachers is largely positive, with eight in ten Nova Scotians having a favourable opinion.

Across the population, residents who believe the quality of education in the province is excellent or good are more likely than those who believe it is fair or poor to hold a favourable opinion of public school teachers in Nova Scotia. (Table U8)

**Q4 2018 AQ**
- Completely favourable = 14%
- Mostly favourable = 70%
- Mostly unfavourable = 8%
- Completely unfavourable = 2%
Residents continue to offer a variety of reasons for their favourable opinion of Nova Scotia school teachers, with teachers doing a good job remaining the top reason, followed by teachers doing what they can with limited resources, believing teachers are hard-working, and having a personal relationship or interactions with teachers, among others. (Table U9a)
Among the small number of residents (n=45) with a negative perception of public school teachers, **doing a poor job** is the most prevalent mention, and has been steadily increasing since Q4 2016. Other top mentions include perceptions that they are **overpaid**, only **think of themselves**, and are **not dedicated**, along with mentions of **past interactions**. (Table U9b)
In assessing the importance of specific issues, it is evident that Nova Scotians consider various issues important. Topping the list, three-quarters of residents consider the lack of support for those with special needs to be critically important.

There has been a notable rebound in perceived importance of violence in the classrooms, which declined in the second quarter. Currently, seven in ten view it as critically important. Meanwhile, two-thirds of residents view poor student achievement as critically important, and a similar number of residents perceive the availability of support personnel in the classrooms as a critically important issue. The latter aspect has increased in importance compared with February 2018 results.

It merits mention that viewing violence in the classrooms as critically important is elevated in Cape Breton (89%) compared with Halifax (68%) or mainland Nova Scotia (71%). (U8b-e)
Close to two-thirds of residents consider teacher morale to be critically important, which is an increase relative to second quarter.

Just less than six in ten view teacher workloads and class sizes as critically important, with both experiencing increases in perceived critical importance over the past six months.

Bussing or transportation issues, measured for the first time this quarter, is perceived as least important, with one-half of residents assigning it critical importance. (Table U8a, f-h)
While shifts are modest, this quarter residents are more likely to view the move to a single advisory council as having a negative impact than a positive impact on Nova Scotia’s public education system. Specifically, one-third of residents believe this move will make the public education system better, while four in ten believe the decision will make it worse. One-quarter believe it will either have no impact or did not have a definite opinion. (Table U10)
Reasons residents believe public education will be better with the new advisory council include improved efficiency/less waste, improved consistency across the province, saving money, problems with the school board, it being time for a change, and more focus on education/students.

Mentions of improved efficiency have marginally increased since the beginning of the year, while mentions of problems with school boards have declined. (Table U11a)
The most common reasons residents believe the move will make public education worse include it being **too centralized**, **reduced input from community or groups**, and **regional differences**.

Mentions of the need for multiple boards to account for regional differences has marginally increased since the beginning of the year. (Table U11b)
Advisory Council Impact on Student Achievement

After having shifted to a more equal split between positive and negative opinion in second quarter, once again residents are more likely to anticipate a **negative** than a **positive** impact on student achievement from the move from seven elected school boards to a single advisory council. Specifically, one-quarter of residents anticipate a positive impact, while four in ten anticipate a negative impact. One-third of residents anticipate no impact or do not provide a definite response. (Table U12)
Generally speaking, residents continue to be more likely to anticipate negative outcomes than positive outcomes after moving from seven elected school boards to a single advisory council.

Consistent with previous results, three-quarters of residents believe it will make it harder to take into consideration local needs, while seven in ten anticipate it will make it harder for parents to have a say in education. Of note, agreement on the latter aspect has increased, after experiencing a decrease in the second quarter.

Two-thirds anticipate that it does not address current problems, while the same proportion believe the decision will create new problems. (Tables U13c-f)
Moving School Boards to a Single Council

Just under six in ten believe the decision will improve consistency and just under one-half anticipate improved efficiency, both measures consistent with previous results. Measured for the first time this quarter, only a minority believe the move will improve the openness and transparency of decisions made for the education system. (Tables U13a,b,g)
Residents were asked to assess the anticipated impact on the quality of public education of various administrative changes proposed based on the recommendations of an independent consultant. Anticipated outcomes for each measure are generally consistent with results earlier this year.

Specifically, two-thirds of residents believe that enhancing the role and influence of School Advisory Councils and giving teachers and principals the responsibility for the selection of textbooks and learning materials and will have a positive impact. Meanwhile, one-half of residents believe short-term exchanges of government department staff and school staff will have a positive impact. The one change for which residents continue to be more likely to anticipate a negative than a positive impact is moving principals and vice-principals out of the NSTU.

(Table U76a,c-e)
Similar to second quarter, seven in ten Nova Scotians are extremely or moderately concerned about the impact of a shortage of substitute teachers on public education.

Overall concern is elevated among women and those with annual household incomes of less than $100,000. (Table U76)
Nova Scotians widely believe it is important for the public to be kept informed of the progress of inclusive education in the province, similar to second quarter.

Specifically, close to nine in ten residents indicate that it is critically important or important, but not critical that the public is kept informed of the progress of inclusive education in the province. Meanwhile, one in ten believe it is not very or not at all important.

The importance of the public being informed of this topic is generally consistent across all demographic subgroups. (Table U17)
Confidence that the public will be kept informed of the progress of inclusive education in the province remains split.

Specifically, one-half of residents are very or somewhat confident that the public will be kept informed of this topic, while just under one-half of residents are not very or not at all confident. It is important to note that nearly all residents confident in this regard are somewhat confident, with only a small number expressing they are very confident.

Across the population, confidence is higher among younger residents and those who believe the quality of public education in the province is excellent or good. (Table U80)
When asked who is most responsible for the effective operations of the public education school bus system, no single organization was identified by a majority. The top three responses were the transportation company, the regional Centres for Education, and the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. Close to one-half of residents view the transportation company as most responsible, either alone or in combination with another organization. This compares with three in ten who identified the regional centres for Education, or the Department.

There is some regional variation with the transportation company most often identified (alone or in combination with another body) in Halifax and elsewhere in mainland Nova Scotia and the regional Centres most often identified in Cape Breton. (Table U9)
Increased relative to one year ago, two-thirds of Nova Scotia residents support the introduction of the pre-primary program in the province’s public schools. Three in ten oppose.

Residents 18 to 34 years of age are more likely to support the introduction than older residents. (Table U6)
There has been a slight narrowing of opinion compared with a year ago, although residents remain more likely to hold a negative than a positive opinion of the job done by the provincial government in introducing the program. One-third provide a positive assessment, while close to one-half provide a negative assessment, and one-fifth do not provide a definite opinion. (Table U7)
Knowledge regarding whether educators in the provincial pre-primary program are required to have the same qualifications as other public school teachers is clearly limited. Residents are largely split between believing they do or do not, with one-quarter expressing uncertainty.

There is a notable difference by income, with those with higher household incomes more likely to state they are not required to have the same qualifications. As well, indicating they are not required is elevated among 35 to 54 year olds compared with those younger. (Table U77)