

N.L. junior kindergarten plan 'progressing,' says education minister ^[1]

Brian Warr disputes NLTA claims class sizes will increase

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EXCERPTS

The Newfoundland and Labrador government plans to release information on how to integrate junior kindergarten into the school system "sometime in the near future," according to the provincial education minister.

"Work on the implementation plan is progressing," said Brian Warr, minister of education and early childhood development, on Tuesday.

The Newfoundland and Labrador School District has sent an email survey to all principals in its system requesting information about school facilities and infrastructure, as the province is considering a combined classroom approach that would see junior kindergartners mixed in with the current full-day kindergarten students.

The email, provided to CBC News by the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association said the attached survey was based on a "notional class cap" of 24 students in a combined junior- and full-day-kindergarten class.

That raised a red flag to the NLTA, which distributed "Class Size Matters" buttons for its members to wear Monday.

"This increase in class size was not referenced in public consultations on junior kindergarten, or during individual consultations with the NLTA," said union president Dean Ingram in a press release.

But Warr said the province has no intention of increasing class sizes, and the email survey was meant to assess infrastructure, and only infrastructure, when it comes to junior kindergarten considerations.

He stressed that the current cap would not change.

Looking to Ontario

The email states the survey is "not assessing the pros and cons" of junior kindergarten or capping sizes.

Junior kindergarten is aimed at four-year-olds, and to accommodate those students, the province is "exploring a combination of teachers and early childhood educator positions in the classrooms, similar to the Ontario model," Warr told CBC Radio's St. John's Morning Show.

Ontario's full-day kindergarten classes have an average of 26 students, and classes of 16 or more require both a teacher and an early childhood educator, according to its Ministry of Education.

Junior kindergarten in Newfoundland and Labrador was first floated by a government task force in 2017, with plans to release an implementation guide by June 2019. The province later released its Education Action Plan in 2018, which also mentioned junior kindergarten, and asked for public input on the topic earlier in the spring.

Warr said that action plan will be fully implemented by 2021.

Full-day kindergarten rolled out in the province in 2016.

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