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For Immediate Release**

Inclusive Education Needs to be Priority

(St. John's) The Coalition of Persons with Disabilities - Newfoundland and Labrador is disheartened at the regressive action of the Board of Trustees of the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District. The Board has once again tabled a motion with intent to close Whitbourne Elementary—a fully accessible school.

The Coalition asserts that this decision was made without the consideration of full inclusion of all persons.

Accessibility ensures equality of opportunity and inclusion of all persons in the school community. To close an accessible school in our province is to regress on the progress we have made so far in advancing inclusion of all persons with disabilities in NL.

From information supplied by the Newfoundland and Labrador English School District there are 110 non-accessible schools province-wide. The closure of any accessible school in NL is a regressive action which threatens the human rights of children with disabilities and their freedom to access education.

As mandated and highlighted by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, "*Inclusive Culture*" is about celebrating diversity and promoting "*a welcoming school culture where all members of the school community feel they belong, realize their potential, and contribute to the life of the school.*" Accessibility features that include things such as alternate back or side entrances and secondary washrooms do not show individuals they belong.

Executive Director Emily Christy states that "It is vital that in this review process and going forward all schools be assessed through an inclusion lens not just assessed on base minimum accessibility and accommodation features."

Operating at the provincial and local levels, The Coalition is an organization that promotes inclusion for all persons with disabilities. It works with all stakeholders including government, business, community and individuals to help identify and remove barriers to inclusion.

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