



HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
Newfoundland and Labrador

James Dinn, M.H.A.
District of St. John's Centre

June 16, 2026

Barry Petten, Minister
Department of Transportation and Infrastructure
Confederation Building
St. John's, NL, A1B 4J6

Dear Minister Petten,

RE: 1.6 km Bussing School Opening and Closing Times

I urge you not to proceed with plans to implement double bus runs and force changes to the daily start and end times of schools. In effect, you would be paying for the promise to eliminate the 1.6 km policy your party made on the backs of our school communities – the children, parents, teachers and staff. By your own admission, this is a budget-based decision designed to bring huge cost savings to government. Educational justification is secondary. Based on my 36 years of teaching, it has not been my experience that savings will be reinvested into the education system.

Throughout my career, small schools closed and bus routes became longer and longer. I've witnessed school boards amalgamated into fewer and fewer districts until finally integrated into the Department – always in the name of efficiency. I remain unconvinced there was any educational benefit. Recent discussions of doubling bus runs and changing start and ending times of schools is yet another example of efficiency trumping education needs.

Since being elected in 2019, I listened as PC MHAs presented petition after petition in the House of Assembly calling for the elimination of the 1.6 km bussing rule. When former Premier Furey announced the phasing out of the distance requirement in August 2023, you attempted to take credit. You stated you were happy the Liberals were finally doing it, that it should have happened years ago. You noted, "It's an issue that I, along with my colleagues in the party, have fought for years," that, "It's been in our blue book policy since 2019." I am not convinced your party fully appreciated the cost.

At no point did you or your colleagues in the PC caucus raise concerns about the cost of the eliminating the distance policy, even when the Liberal government announced it was spending \$20M in 2024 including the purchase of additional school busses. At the time I raised concern about the cost, the serious problems facing our schools that needed prioritization, and whether problems associated with the policy change would fall to schools. Your government's proposal to double-up bus runs and change start and finish times means schools will be forced to live with the consequences of your political promises.

Your proposed changes will have a significant impact on schools. It will have an impact on family life. For young students, it will mean a long day and getting up very early (in the dark) to catch the bus. It will create difficulty for parents who have childcare. For teachers, with children in childcare, it will impact supervision duty schedules. The ability to engage in field trips and extracurricular activities will be reduced. It will negatively affect teachers who are split between schools and will impact programming and course delivery. You noted in an interview that there would be benefits to older students since studies show they would benefit from later starting times. This is nothing more than a weak attempt to justify cost savings on the backs of schools. While research shows that adolescents benefit from a later start time, there is little evidence that shows young children benefit from an earlier start time. Just because the double run bussing system is used elsewhere, doesn't make it appropriate from an education perspective or in all areas.

Now that your government has realized the full cost of its Blue Book promise, it decided it's wise to engage parents in a pro forma survey and consultation exercise. Consultation should have been done long before now when the idea was first proposed. Parents should have been made aware of the potential financial impact of eliminating the 1.6 km rule and the impact on schools.

If your government continues with the elimination of the 1.6 km restriction do so but without doubling up bus runs and forcing schools to change schedules. This action would, among other things:

- Allow reasonable daily start and dismissal times (9-3) for all students, teachers, and parents.
- Eliminate the need for young children to get up very early to access bus transportation.
- Allow high school students to start the school day at a time that optimizes their learning.
- Minimize inconvenience and disruption to parents
- Minimize disruption to school activities.

If your government really wishes to help school communities, address long standing issues of class size and composition, school violence, resources for inclusive education, and retention of teachers then stop adding more stressors.

I look forward to your reply. If you wish to have a further conversation on this topic, I am willing to do so.

Sincerely,



James Dinn, MHA
St. John's Centre
Leader, NL NDP

Cc: Paul Dinn, Minister of Education