

The Department of Education did not ensure that former boards placed employees on the approved scale and step as directed by Cabinet. In fact, the Department approved certain salaries paid to executives above those approved by Cabinet and Government policy. In other instances, the former boards were refused approval to top-up salaries and, as a result, the Department contributed to inconsistencies within the system. These salary inconsistencies were a major argument that the former boards gave when they disregarded the Cabinet directive on executive salaries.

In addition to regular salaries, some former boards contravened Government policy in compensating executive staff in other areas. For example, one former board reimbursed each of its four executives \$252 per month or \$12,096 annually for local travel in lieu of submitting travel claims and other supporting documentation. Another former board paid its Assistant Director of Finance approximately \$34,000 for leave and overtime in contravention of executive compensation practices and is allowing this individual to accrue annual leave and sick leave instead of paid leave as per Government policy.

## **2.12 Student Transportation**

At 31 March 2003, there were approximately 84,000 students enrolled in schools in the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador, of which an estimated 57,000 were transported by school buses. These students are transported over a total of about 37,000 kilometers each day. Under the *Schools Act, 1997*, school boards are required to arrange for the transportation of students to and from schools where deemed necessary. Through budgetary, policy setting and monitoring processes, the Department of Education has a shared responsibility with the school boards for student transportation in the Province.

Department of Education officials indicated that a number of years ago a decision was made in certain school districts to have board-owned buses. The reason given at that time was that it was believed to be cheaper for the board to operate their own buses rather than contract out student transportation to private contractors. This has since been proven to not be the case. Furthermore, a financial report issued by Government in January 2004 indicated that approximately

one third of board-owned buses (i.e. approximately 120 buses) will have to be replaced over the next 3 years. Officials indicated that a new bus costs approximately \$80,000. This would equate to approximately \$9.6 million.

There are no standards specific to school bus drivers included in legislation under the *Schools Act, 1997* in this Province and there is no current policy direction from the Department of Education setting out the employment and training requirements for school bus drivers. Furthermore, the Department of Education does not require the school boards to check for criminal records of all bus drivers. We found that a bus driver in the Avalon East School District who had a number of convictions for such matters as multiple impaired driving charges, multiple break and enter charges and multiple theft charges, was not prevented from driving a school bus.

We identified a situation at the Avalon East School Board where irregularities in the bus contract tendering process resulted in the board paying \$1.8 million more annually than in the previous years contract. Department of Education officials indicated that this issue was being reviewed, in consultation with Treasury Board Secretariat and the Department of Justice.

## **2.13 Solid Waste Management**

The Province has a significant issue to deal with regarding waste management. The problem resulted because historically, we have not recycled, there was no strategy as to either the number of landfill sites or their location, there was little control over access to the sites or what was being dumped, open burning and incinerators were commonly used, and the landfill sites were not lined.

In 1989, at a meeting of the Canadian Council of Ministers of the Environment, Government set a goal to reduce the amount of waste going for disposal by 50% by the year 2000. However, in 2002, Newfoundland and Labrador had a waste diversion rate of only 9%, the lowest rate of waste diversion of any province in Canada. The other Atlantic Provinces in 2002 averaged a diversion rate of 27% (three times the diversion rate in this Province) while the Canadian average for that year was 22%, again significantly higher than the diversion rate in this Province.