

Good evening.

My name is Angela Thornhill. I lived through the Nova Scotia public school system, from 1980 to 1993. I am now the mother of 2 boys who attend Hammonds Plains Consolidated School. I have volunteered there since day 1 and continue to do so. I have been the PTA President and Fundraising Coordinator for 3 consecutive years, and still actively serve on this PTA.

I was a member of the Sackville Bedford Early Intervention Board from 2010 to the end of 2016, and participated in its transition to the Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services.

Over the last 6 years, I have volunteered in the school doing everything from the Safe Arrival program, reading with children who recently immigrated to Canada, hanging artwork, photocopying, and helping to wrangle children on picture day. I am acutely aware of the state of our classrooms and the environment that our children and teachers face every day.

I, like many, have a child who requires resources – resources in order to meet his highest potential, whatever that may be. Resources to help him become the best that he can be and hopefully someday become a taxpayer, who will vote in this province. These resources are needed not only to support him, but most of the 27 students in his class, not because he is in that classroom, but because all students need resources.

Steven MacNeil made my heart happy during the last election for having a platform line item that stated:

Create classrooms that meet the needs of all our students

- Increasing support for students with special needs by reinvesting in education assistants, speech language pathologists and psychologists.

While I can't prove if the Liberals added funds to this area as claimed, I know that my child has not seen any changes for the better in this regard. Our students are crying for services. EPAs. Speech pathologists and psychologists. Behavioural specialists. Resource teachers. Recreational and occupational therapists. Guidance counsellors.

As a parent, when your child comes home with the golden ticket that says “Jack will be receiving psychology services for this block of time”, that’s extremely encouraging. You slowly realize what that really means. A short visit, once a week, from late October until early March. Minus holidays, and times when paperwork needs to be done. This comes after waiting 3 years. Waiting 3 long years without support.

Also, if you are lucky enough to have a psychological educational assessment done to get an idea of learning difficulties, then the door is closed. The list is too long, and since you’ve been seen, you won’t be a priority for another 3 to 4 years.

I believe we need inclusive classrooms. I believe that every Nova Scotian student deserves the opportunity to succeed. The teachers of Nova Scotia are shouldering this responsibility with student to teacher ratios that are not adequate to support each child according to their learning needs. We need to be proud of our province and proud of our progressive education system that sets no limits on any student.

To do that, Mr. Speaker, we need more teachers in classrooms working side by side with their students, and the proper support staff in place so that everyone can. Soft caps are great, until November and more people move into the area.

Lastly, let me address the title of this Bill:

Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements (2017) Act

This is neither “professional” nor an “agreement”. This also does nothing to improve classrooms. If you think for a second that this will end “Work to Rule”, then you haven’t been paying attention. Teachers I know are sad. Sad that they are no longer encouraging another side of their students – athletics, the arts... Using these tactics to force a contract will only encourage a disheartened 9300 voters to go to work every day and do their job. Nothing more.

Karen Casey’s favourite word seems to be “disappointed”. I am disappointed as a parent, as a volunteer who has poured countless hours into doing anything I can to improve things for my children’s school, and as a voter.

I thank you for this opportunity to speak to you, and welcome your questions.