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**From:** Mike McIntosh [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, February 15, 2017 12:04 AM  
**To:** Office of the Legislative Counsel  
**Subject:** Letter Regarding Act Respecting a Teachers' Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements

Premier MacNeil, Minister Casey and other legislative members,

There have been a lot of sleepless nights, tears and words my mother would not approve of, in light of what has been happening over the last few months with the negotiations between the government and the NSTU that I felt compelled to write.

So much negativity has caused us to lose all focus on where all of these talks are supposed to lead: an education system where teachers can teach and children can learn!

I spent my weekend looking through the 47 page Education Action Plan put forth by minister Casey in 2015. I read about some of the changes that have indeed been put in place at the lower grades to help improve the poor results we have been seeing in math and literacy and I read about the recommendations for the years ahead and that there will be annual reports on how we are doing. Link attached! (<https://www.ednet.ns.ca/docs/educationactionplan2015en.pdf>)

I looked at the names at the front of the report, none of which I recognized, but I wondered how many of them are teachers currently in the education system. The reason this is of importance is because being in a classroom during the last 10 years and being in a classroom prior to that are two very different things.

I am in my 33<sup>rd</sup> year of teaching, most of which were spent in a primary classroom. The first 22, for the most part, were fantastic and very rewarding. If there was a problem with a student, parents were contacted, the child was disciplined at home and was reminded that they were expected to listen to their teachers and to be respectful at school or there would be further consequences.

Today, classrooms are not places where teaching and learning happen easily due to the changes that have occurred over the past ten years. These changes are VERY REAL and have had a MAJOR impact on classrooms and teachers.

Changes in society have drastically changed the way children are being raised and how schools and teachers are valued. When most of us were students/children we had responsibilities and jobs that we had to do at home. Today that is far less common and therefore, learning responsibility at a very young age, simply doesn't happen for many. Foods full of additives, children raising themselves on various forms of technology, many of whom will go through an entire day and hardly speak a word to another person; a big swing in giving children choices where they are not prepared to make them and that turned into a whole swing in authority; the whole idea that children should NEVER fail at anything or they will be destroyed, and the list goes on. The end result is simply a very different person coming

through the classroom door and anyone who has been away from teaching for 8 years or more, has not seen how drastic a change all of these things have made to our classrooms.

In the action plan, Minister Casey you hit on many important and needed things. You mention how the children coming to school are not prepared but yet the entry age was recently lowered to 4 years of age. That has not in any way been a positive addition to the school system and has affected results on test scores as well as our ability to teach required outcomes.

There was mention of a code of conduct being implemented on page 11. One of the main things teachers have been fighting for is a discipline policy so we can teach again! Minister Casey, you asked parents to support the teachers yet you are not showing that support to teachers yourself! Bringing back firm discipline allows for classroom control and nobody seems to want to put it in place, however, it is badly needed!

On page 12, Minister Casey, you said that you encourage teachers to seek professional development opportunities and later you go on to say that teachers need to continue providing excellent leadership and instruction yet when teachers went to a conference you tried to publically disgrace us and our profession by making a big deal about away conferences and you never once mentioned the many teachers that attend conferences right here at home. Again, you asked parents to support us and then we see you behave in such a manor!

Page 24 speaks of a homework policy and later comments that this teaches responsibility. I strongly agree with homework and it teaching responsibility, and the action plan says that not handing things in or handing them in late comes with a natural consequence, yet this is another thing teachers are fighting for. We want a homework policy and assignment policy that does just that: makes kids accountable, however, teachers in the Jr./Sr. high are dealing with being asked to accept and mark assignments whenever the student decides to hand it in. The homework policy should have been put in place immediately! It is this lack of accountability that the Post Secondary people are commenting on regarding kids not being prepared. As long as we can't insist on *things been handed in or there is NO mark* then we will continue to have a lack of accountability!

Page 27 speaks on INCLUSION but doesn't address the true problem of inclusion. This topic is currently the biggest problem in classrooms across the province. It has always been a very touchy subject but it needs to be addressed. You refer to the racial and cultural inclusion which most educators would strongly support, however, that is NOT the issue affecting our ability to teach.

In the words of one of my colleagues, "Children who can not self-regulate should not be in a classroom."

Minister Casey, this is the message the NSTU and all the teachers are trying to get across when we keep saying things need to change in the classroom. All of the other things in your plan are good and are needed but if you don't address this problem, NONE of your other ideas, projects or programs will work.

Teachers across Nova Scotia have been kicked, bitten, spit on, told to "go F\*#@ themselves", had furniture thrown at them, been threatened with scissors or other objects, evacuated classrooms because of volatile students, and the list goes on. Children as young

as my primary students are telling teachers off, refusing to do things, talking back and arguing, screaming in classrooms, destroying property and creating IMPOSSIBLE teaching and learning conditions.

The remainder of the students have fallen victim to these behaviors and we see more and more children with anxiety issues, we see teachers off on stress leave and we even have parents pulling their children out of public schools and traveling long distances to private schools because they no longer feel their children are safe in the public school system.

THIS is what your teachers are trying to tell you! THIS is what your teachers are fighting for! THIS is why we keep voting NO!!!

Every child DOES deserve an education and that may need to look very different for some children but the days of including ALL of these children in regular classrooms, even for short periods of time, with support, simply is not working! A total and complete change to the inclusion process needs to happen NOW or every bit of money in the action plan programs will be wasted if your teachers can't teach.

I suggest, before anything else takes place, that YOU, Minister Casey, the PREMIER and ALL the other people listed on your action plan, go to classrooms all over N.S. for the next month and really see what teachers face on a daily basis.

I can't imagine any of you, or anyone in any workplace, would keep returning to work every day under those same circumstances, yet your teachers do!

I am very close to the end of my teaching career and simply could have ignored all of this as I'll retire in two years but I am very saddened and worried for my colleagues if current work conditions remain as they are today.

The money is allocated for this action plan and you have found another \$20 million for a committee that you say would address these problems but teachers did not vote for it because, for some reason teachers, can't serve on the committee. That's like building the new hospital and not having doctors and nurses making any of the decisions or giving input.

You have the dollars but now you need to actively LISTEN to the teachers. Go SEE the problems first hand and the changes need to happen IMMEDIATELY after your month of classroom visits! That way, teaching, the way it used to be, can resume in Nova Scotia classrooms once again. We need ACTION!!

I am a teacher at Bridgewater Elementary School and the mother of 4 children. My door is open and I would love to see any or all of you as soon as possible.

Sincerely

Bernadette McIntosh (BCS., MEd.)

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\*\*I would have appeared in person today but have a severe cough/cold and did not feel anyone would want my presence.