

February 12, 2017

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Legislative Assembly,

I am a teacher. I am a mother. For over a year I have seen a government voted for, take my profession and try to devalue it in the media and through legislation. This final act of legislating a contract, breeds distrust in the governing body, both from the teachers you are legislating and the public you serve.

I chose this career because I love kids. I love watching them grow and learn. I love seeing their faces light up when they make connections or catch on to something they couldn't grasp before. I love watching them rise to a challenge and discover a confidence they've buried somewhere deep inside them. I've worked hard to get to where I am now with years of post secondary education, and continuously increasing my knowledge base through further education and professional development. Over the last 15 years I have taught science and math courses in both highschool and junior high. Within these courses I have taught (or tried to teach) students of various levels. I have seen a steady decline in not only the academic abilities of our children, but their problem solving skills, creative thinking and overall resilience for everyday life adversity. Our education system is broken and everyone believes it is the fault of the people who are doing the educating: the teachers. It is difficult to be faced with criticism from students, parents, community and government. Many of whom have not been part of this system since they graduated, but are self-proclaimed experts.

Similar to the Hippocratic oath of health care professionals, I have promised to educate children and guide them on their journey to becoming productive members of society. Unfortunately, this current system has the hands of the teachers tied and we are unable to fulfill this promise.

In our classrooms there are many different levels of ability; IPPs, adaptations, the average student and the high achievers. Class sizes of 30+ mean that not one of those groups is pushed to their full potential. I have taught many students on IPPs and these are the students I feel we are failing the most. Children with severe needs who cannot work at grade level should not be sitting in a classroom for the sole purpose of having them feel included. These children should be able to grow in their knowledge and abilities as much as they can. Sitting at the back of the classroom doing work packages with little to no instruction does not facilitate this growth. In theory, we should be able to meet the needs of these children, but honestly, I have not had the opportunity to actually teach any of my IPPs anything valuable in my 15 years. I have had full classes, and lately the needs are so great that I cannot give the necessary attention to my IPP students.

The implementation of policies seems to come swiftly with little discussion or input from the teachers. No one discusses how a new policy may affect us and our ability to teach effectively. There is little research as to whether the new policy (or curriculum) will be advantageous or not. Millions of dollars are spent on consultants and out of province "experts". Policies are either created hastily or recommendations are ignored in lieu of balancing the budget. Teacher input is free. Teachers in Nova Scotia are experts. We have been working on the front lines, making observations and collecting data in the most extensive longitudinal study lasting 150 years. And we are the cheapest experts you will find. We're FREE! I would gladly sit on any committee as an equal representative, giving up my evenings, to develop an education system that will promote growth amongst ALL of our students.

Many of this system's current problems centre around societal issues. However, we are not adapting our system to meet those societal issues head on. My own children are now part of this system and I am worried for their growth. I would never raise my children the way that teachers are expected to "help raise" the students in my classroom. Entitlement, lack of self-discipline, lack of work ethic, ever growing mental health issues and disrespect are running rampant in our schools with little encouragement to improve.

My two children are fortunate enough to not have any barriers academically, intellectually, physically or mentally, and do not require support within the classroom. However, they are not being challenged and I have already heard my son complaining about how bored he is at school. We're not fostering their growth, imagination, creative problem solving or

physical prowess. If I could afford private school I'd send them both. What a sad testament to our system, when even teachers aren't happy to put their own children in it.

The Liberal government has an opportunity to take this archaic education system and revolutionize it. Along with NS teacher collaboration, we could create an education system so progressive, that other governments will be looking to us for ideas. We could make this a system that fosters growth leading to happier, healthier more productive members of society. This is our chance. Please don't squander this opportunity with promises you don't intend to keep.

This system is broken. The small band-aid fixes with policy changes, committees and partnerships are not truly addressing the issues on a deeper level. Education should be effective, not efficient, we're not manufacturing robots, after all, we're creating our future doctors, lawyers, electricians and politicians. From where I stand today, from what I see, we may be in trouble.

Thank you for allowing me to address this issue of our education system. I believe that imposing a contract will not foster growth in our system. Imposing a contract will create contempt between the teachers and the government resulting in the maintenance of status quo. Please consider your vote on this legislation and the real effect it will have on our children.

Sincerely,

Jessica Attwater
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