

Good-day –

I am Colleen Scott. This is my 17th year as an educator. I am here today on behalf of my students, myself and my colleagues. I speak against Bill 75.

I was educated in Nova Scotia, having graduated in 1995. Three of my Primary years of my education saw me in my mother's class (herself a teacher of 32 years). I do not recall a time in my younger life that I did not want to be a teacher. Encouraged by my own teachers in Junior and Senior high, it just seemed the most natural and best fit for me. I feel fortunate when I reflect on my Secondary education; I am so very appreciative of having passed through the system when 'streaming' was the norm.

As an adult I have gone on to earn a BSc, a BEd, an MEd (Admin) and an MEd (IT). So why is it that this government feels it necessary to think it knows more about education than do I? How do you get off telling me that you know my students better when there are days that I spend more time with them than do their own parents. I hear Minister Casey when she speaks, however, in my opinion, she doesn't seem to understand the education system. She has been away from the classroom for far too long seemingly. Through this entire process – that is, for the past year and a half - I have felt that this majority government has been lacking information that is vital to the betterment of our education system. You have continually stated collectively, and as individuals, that you have been speaking and listening to teachers. If indeed you have (and had) been listening, we would not be in the situation in which we all currently find ourselves – sitting in Law Amendments seeking a final chance to be heard before you forever detriment an otherwise open opportunity to mediate, arbitrate, or heaven forbid, freely and fairly negotiate.

About the Work to Rule job action our Union has taken: I have enjoyed it thoroughly! My students were not detrimented by teachers focusing on being in their classrooms with their students. I actually got to teach (as opposed to doing data entry for attendance and the like). And teach I did! I managed to keep my students safe while doing so too. Imagine that! As an added bonus I was able to cover more material in a class period. When I collected material in from my students I found I was getting an increased number handed in and students were 'with me', mastering more of the content. There were so few interruptions to my class, relative to the "old normal". I will be embracing the "new normal" and here are my reasons as to 'why'....

If I had children I would not wish for them to be in this current system of education. I find this rather tragic. Public education is supposed to be for everyone. Yet the needs of the students today are so far reaching and inadequately supported/funded. From severely disruptive student behaviours that rob other students of their right to an education, to learning challenges that are grossly underfunded with regard to supports not being made available to those individuals who need such. To this list I would be remiss if I failed to highlight

other health issues - namely depression, anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, autism spectrum disorders, bipolar disorder, bulimia, anorexia, diabetes..... the list goes on and on. I provided you with a list of my credentials already but nowhere in there did I mention psychologist, health practitioner, mediator, nutritionist, and many of the other roles we fill, or attempt to fill, on a daily basis.

Mobility issues, poverty, home life - divorced or divorcing parents, single parents, violence and many other issues are all challenges a students can bring to school every day. While some teachers and administrators attempt to work with children in less than ideal family environments, they can only do so much – especially when parents are often not willing to partner with the schools to provide for the children. We need supports!

Bullying - has a profound impact on the learning aptitude of many students today. It occurs daily.

Students' attitudes and behaviours - apathy and disrespect for teachers, tardiness, and absenteeism posed significant challenges for teachers.

Class size and composition - When money gets tight, classroom numbers are often impacted. Yet, a majority of teachers cannot effectively teach every student in a classroom, if the class size exceeds about 25-30 – depending on the age, and composition of the class (inclusive of students on behaviour management plans/IPPS, and adaptations). Where are the class caps for ALL grades levels? Each IPP student is another lesson to prepare for on top of the already intense course loads that most, if not all, teachers have.

- Split classes – This year is the first in my 17 years of teaching that I have had to teach a split 7/8 class for two different curricula. I haven't had to deal with split classes since I myself was in Grade 6. These are far from being an ideal educational environment. They are indeed further proof that this system is moving away from anything that reflects advancement. The developmental levels of these students is marked and this should never be allowed. Not only is there a variance in maturity and socialization factors at play, there is the strain on teachers having to balance their time between two groups of students (two curricula) in the same period of time that another class would have designated to themselves, unshared with the teacher. Some of my colleagues have upwards of three grade levels in a class! This is wrong and needs to stop. Class composition seriously needs to be dealt with.

Technology (this needs to come into the classroom to keep up with the learning demands of the 21st century). Schools that are already cash-strapped may find an insurmountable challenge in coming up with the funding to bring computers and other forms of technology into their classes. This statement however, does not pertain to our current use of some programs forced on us by our Department. The learner profile, and comments needing to be generated are onerous to teachers and meaningless to parents and students but yet and still we spend our

time on these and other forms of data entry. Don't even get me started on assessments. A weight was lifted off of me when I found out I would not have to conduct the mandated, one-on-one assessments with each and every one of my Junior High students. These rob me of valuable 'facetime' with my students as a collective and as individuals.

Daily I find myself asking 'why do I have so many Grade 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12 students who cannot print a simple sentence let alone compose a simple paragraph? Capitals, proper punctuation, and grammar skills are lacking. Then there are the lacking math skills. Students in junior and senior high still ask how to do a basic function such as calculate a percentage? – this is basic content that was to be mastered in the lower grades, yet students are "socially promoted" time and again.

This province seems to no longer care about students being held accountable. I used to be held accountable for my grades, as were my peers. If we did not do our work we would have received zeros, and we were actually penalized for assignments handed in late (not that I ever did such). Yet all of this has been thrown by the wayside. I only have to speak to my colleagues who work in the Community College to have it confirmed time and again that this is detriming their educational realms. We 'pass off' students lacking a sense of responsibility. Students can miss class after class after class and yet earn credit for a course that they missed an extensive amount of time in? This is bothersome at best.

What is the point of having outcomes if a student truly does not have to meet or exceed these in order to pass. Why do I spend countless hours in the evenings and over the weekends planning and preparing, grading and evaluating? Clearly our system lacks adequate time for teachers to do these essential tasks during our workday. These endless hours trying to get ahead, or in some cases simply caught up, is affecting teachers' health and well-being. Teacher burnout is ever-increasing.

Public School Program – variety of courses offered needs to be expanded for more learning opportunities. Students should have more choice in what they are studying in school and at a much earlier time in their mental development so as to capture and enhance each individuals unique skills, abilities and interests/passions. How does this impact teachers? Well, teachers are told what courses they are going to teach in many, if not all schools. There is little to no autonomy. Scheduling, the inability to have reasonable class sizes and loss of teaching positions restricts a variety of courses being offered to students. Teachers have their own unique skills, abilities and interests/passions as well. And it would be great if we could have more of these teachers teaching in their preferred subject areas. Again, we are highly educated, and specialized individuals. We shouldn't be forced to teach in subject areas of which we have no interest or background – unless it is of course, a self-directed professional development opportunity.

I am absolutely tired of hearing the statement that this government has "bargained three different times with two different executives". In actuality, you have not freely and fairly bargained at all. Bills have been hanging in the precipice and the bargaining tactics utilized are archaic. This current Bill is all that is constitutionally wrong for Nova Scotians here and now. And then there are the numerous 'spins' that parents, students, and the public were bombarded with. I find it shameful that our government "leaders", who should be respected, would attempt to cause such detriment to a group of hard-working, dedicated, and caring individuals who simply want what is best for the future generations of Nova Scotians.

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(Submitted
Thurs. Feb. 16/17)