

presented by
Darlene Bereta

Pam Etkins
will not return
her call so
she ask me
to read this
today.

I am a grade six teacher, trying to teach under the middle school model. This itself is challenging as Nova Scotia's grade six program is very different from the grade 7 and 8 programs. Assessment and grading is different, as are the expectations as to how classes should run. I am tasked with teaching math, science and health to 2 sections of grade six students, as well as teaching grade 7 health. The needs are great and the challenges are many, but today I will focus on a typical grade six class as an example of what teachers face in NS today.

One class has 27 students on the roster. In that group of 27, there is a wide variety of learning and social needs that I must attempt to meet on a daily basis. However, I have 2 more students who come to me for math, science, and health. That brings the number to 29. Yes that's over the cap for grade 6. Then there are three others who come to me for science and health. Yes, that puts my number to 32. Yes, that is WELL over cap. However, those students "don't count". At least, that's what I was told when I questioned why my class cap wasn't being respected. You see, those kids are sent to me for "inclusion".

While I care for each and every student in my classroom, the reality is that I am unable to actually TEACH all of them. You see, there is only one of me and so many of them. Those who are "included" are basically sitting in my room watching everyone else. My attempts to engage them are often met with blank stares as the program is difficult for them and no matter how easy I try to make it, they struggle. This is not what inclusion is intended to be. Inclusion is supposed to include and INVOLVE all students. Am I failing at inclusion? I sure feel like I am. I don't have the supports to make it work. I NEED more support.

Let's now talk about learning needs. As a math teacher, I see how students struggle. Some of them are unable to read the assignments. So I read to them and guide them as they complete their work. Others cannot count or multiply. So I help them to use operation charts for simple math operations that a typical

get
a class

(whatever that is) grade 6 student could do in their head. Some students cannot write. They need me to scribe for them in order for their ideas and answers to be put on paper. Other students have difficulty with attention and need me to constantly remind them to stay on task and to offer them incentives to complete class work. Some students have behavioral issues that take up a great deal of my class time. I sometimes feel more like a referee or a guidance counselor or even a security guard than I do a teacher. Then there are the students who can read just fine...and they can write just fine...they just need a little bit of extra attention so they can move forward with their work. Maybe they're stuck on a problem or hesitant about a next move. I'll get to them. Maybe not this class...maybe not even the next one...but I will eventually get to them.

I will exhaust myself trying to meet the needs of every single student in my care. I will lie awake at night trying to figure out how to help them. Because there is only one of me and there are so many of them. And they need me. They also need you. They need YOU, the government of NS, to stand up and say "NO MORE!". "We won't do this to the kids!" "We won't force a legislation upon the teachers that further cripples them in the classroom". "We will stand up for the children of the province because they are our future". That's what they need you to say and do. Will you do that for them? / Or is your political career worth destroying the future of these children?

To the premier I ask this: Will you please take the money you have allotted for committees and invest it directly into the classroom, immediately? Will you use the money you are saving by taking our service awards and cost of living increases and immediately impose hard class caps in all grade levels? This would result in the hiring of more classroom teachers for the 2017-2018 school year, which would be an immediate gain for the students in NS. Will you please use some of the money to hire additional resource teachers, including math resource (math mentors are not what students need right now in NS)? Will you hire more mental health professionals to work in our schools, so that students have access to the real help they need? Will you stand up for the students of this province by putting your money where your mouth is?

Stacey Barrie Grade 6 teacher at Dr. TL. Sullivan Middle School - Pam Eyking

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Darlene Bereta

She has emailed
phoned and texted
you and you
have not responded
to her. So I give
you
this
on
her
behalf

My name is Tanya Chislett, and I'm sure you are tired this morning, and so am I. I'm writing you because I feel that my voice has to be heard for my family and my students. As you well know teachers are fighting for what's best for our students. I'd like to say that I'm pretty well versed in things political and I know that you have a voice that represents both your constituents and your own perspective. I'm writing, again, to tell my story.

Yes, I am a teacher but first and foremost I am a MOTHER. I'm asking you to think of your children who will eventually enter this broken system or have already begun the journey. I have 2 daughters Frankie, 11 and Sophie, 9. They are already statistics to this broken system. Frankie is a very engaged child and needs little to no support to go about her day, and I'm very thankful for that. Sophie, well she is a totally different story. We've always known from a young age Sophie didn't really like change and was very quiet when in public. We chalked it up to her being our baby-until that day in Grade 1 when our lives came to a screeching halt and pieces started to fall into place about her social anxiety and that she was struggling in school. We have been lucky over the years that Sophie has had amazing, supportive teachers to help her but, as the years go by, her classrooms become much more complex and the numbers increase. Sophie is quiet and therefore doesn't cause a disturbance in class and often goes without because she can't advocate for herself. She can't advocate for herself because she fears speaking out (this is part of her anxiety.) Sophie has the great support system of a family that encourages her at home and we are in constant contact with her teacher. I fear for her that she will fall through the cracks and never truly develop to her potential. It's not fair that my child should come home daily upset that her teacher hasn't had a chance to bring her to the reading table because he was busy dealing with the 2 students who ran out of the class again, or he needed to enter data into his computer, or he had no time to do reading because there was too much math to complete, to catch up from days ago, when their were more disruptions in the classroom. You see, my Sophie does want to do her best, my Sophie does want to overcome her fear of reading aloud but sadly in a broken system that focuses much of a teacher's time on data entry or a failed inclusion model she gets lost and left behind!

Derek Ab.

I've been planning for the future with every step. As she enters middle school in the next few years her class size will no doubt exceed the limits and she will pay the price for not receiving the time she deserves. I've gone as far as to secure a job in my local middle school so I can be there to help her! Sophie is one of the lucky ones, she's got advocate to be her voice but many students don't. This is the point where real life mixes with my teaching life because I seek out the "Sophie's", and trust me when I tell you there are many, because they deserve a chance at meeting their potential, they deserve my utmost attention. They are real, they are human and they matter to me. Creating more committees to attempt to resolve any issues is not what Sophie needs. Sophie needs help now! Sophie is a beautiful, blond haired, blue eyed, 9 year old girl who just wants her teacher to know she is doing her best. She deserves much more than this broken system is giving her! So in closing I ask you to think of your children, the children of this province but most importantly think of Sophie- she needs you now!

Thank you for your time,

Tanya Chislett -

Sophie's mom and education advocate

Whitney Pier Memorial Middle school - Derek Mombourquette