

Thursday February 16th, 2017

Law Amendments Committee,

I am a parent of two school aged children as well as a third yet to enter public school. I am also an educator with the Halifax Regional School Board. Since 2003 I have worked as a teacher in Nova Scotia. Over that time, I have seen Provincial Governments progressively become more and more combative with the NSTU, teachers in general and the education system. The culmination of which has been occurring with the current Liberal majority government and your constant assault on education; your consistent message that teachers are the enemy and the cause of our system being in disrepair; your continued disregard for what it is being told by those same teachers regarding the issues in education; and your dismissal of collective bargaining rights and freedoms that are a pillar of the Canadian Legal and Political systems.

On Saturday, it was announced by Premier McNeil that a contract will be imposed on NS teachers. The premier says he wants to put an end to this dispute. This is the first time in a long time that the Premier and I want the same things. Previously, he wanted to take money out of the pockets of teachers while refusing to put real money into address REAL educational reform. What is odd is that many impactful reforms can happen without spending any money at all. Yet, contract offer after contract offer, we don't see those changes being made. The latest offer did include improvements to classroom conditions and positive steps were included in that tentative agreement, unfortunately for the membership of the NSTU, there are some thing we are just not willing to give away, thus it was rejected.

Now we come to the legislation, Bill 75 appears to have been done as a punitive measure against the NSTU. Most of the additions achieved with Tentative Agreement #3 have been removed; no arbitrator for the Council to Improve Classroom Conditions, a roll back of the wage package to the original offer for salary and service award, and removal of the 2 days of paid leave. While I can respect (but not agree with or like) the decision to move forward with the wage package being given other unions, what became of the money allocated to the above TA3 additions? If the government were truly interested in improving the classroom situation across Nova Scotia, would it not be a prudent option to take the approximately \$25,000,000+ promised in the last tentative agreement and reallocate it to help improve the education system? That money could easily be moved into immediate reforms to education. With planning for 2017-18 on the horizon a commitment of the government, through this legislation, to put that \$25M into hiring more EPAs province wide, hiring more elementary classrooms teachers to meet the planned caps on class sizes and more JH and HS teachers to alleviate the overloaded classes at these levels.

Beyond that benefits that could be achieved by the \$25M described above, there are also many items that could be added to this legislation that will not cost anything, but would go a long way to improving not only the education system, but also the relationship between the NS Liberal Government and the NSTU and its members. For example, placing a moratorium on



ALL standardized testing and all new initiatives planned by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development until such a time as the Council to Improve Classroom Conditions can review the benefits of these tests and programs and determine whether they need to occur.

In conclusion, my profession has been attacked, my professionalism has been questioned, my passion and caring for your children has been denigrated, my rights to free and collective bargaining have been ignored and my rights to strike, under the Teachers Collective Bargaining Act, are being taken away. Without a concerted effort on the part of the government to meet the NSTU at a compromise position and TRULY address the needs existing in the education system our children will continue to fall through the cracks, our children will be packed into overcrowded and underfunded classrooms, and they will continue to fail to realize their potential, as their teachers to focus on putting out fires of frustration and discipline, rather than fanning the flames of their curiosity and passion for learning.

Respectfully,

Todd Van Ritchie BEd, MPE

Father of 3 Children

Physical Education Specialist, HRSB