

February 11, 2017

Dear Ms. Regan,

I am once again writing to you looking for support. I am not only looking for support for me, as a teacher, but for all of our current and future public education students. You are lucky, as you told me your children have already graduated from our now broken system, but I have two young boys attending school in our system, and I cry when I see the lack of supports and the overcrowding that they have to contend with on a daily basis. I worry about them eating lunch at school where there is only one lunch monitor shared between two or three classrooms. I am concerned because of the lack of support for all students, but especially some of our students with special needs.

When the third tentative agreement was presented to the union, I considered voting for it. I considered voting for it not because I thought it was a great contract and that we were going to see huge changes in our school system, but because I knew that the government was digging its heels in and that the education system was not ever going to get what it needed. But I couldn't vote for this agreement. I couldn't vote for it because when the school system completely crashes (which it will if MAJOR changes are not made in a timely fashion), I need to know that I voted in favour of change and did not settle for what was put on the table.

If the liberal party is looking for support from myself, I would hope that as a party you would at least acknowledge some of the challenges being faced in our current education system.

- We have a severe shortage of Educational Program Assistants in the school system. I believe this impact is felt even greater in the city as the special education document states that funding for Program Assistants is provided based on student population, not student need. There are more students with high needs living closer to the IWK, which means the allocation of funding really needs to be looked at if it is to be adequately split between students with needs. Regardless of what the special education document states, we need more support (teachers, specialists and Educational Program Assistants) for our students with special needs. I am concerned because I have a caseload of 36 students with exceptional needs in our school and we have been allocated 7.9 Educational Program Assistants to help with programming and high needs support. How do we decide who gets the support? Is it the student who is going to hurt a staff member, another student, themselves or the ones that are going to leave the school grounds and possibly get lost or even worse? What about the students who are literally "lost" in the classroom when they do not have someone to support them? How do we manage to help them interact positively with peers on the playground with the other 590 students? What about the students who are not learning to their full potential because the government does not adequately fund the staffing and programming for these students. All of our classrooms are over the cap, and we do not have the proper supports for our students with special needs. What is happening to these students? They are getting lost in the system. The system is failing to help them thrive both in the school and in the real world. If we do not front load the support and programming in the younger grades, we are doing

nothing but putting a band-aid on the "wound", which is our students' challenges. Our current system is built with supports in place to react to and help minimize the damage, but is doing nothing to help heal the wounds.

- Support for mental health needs to be addressed. I am not a medical doctor, psychiatrist, psychologist or any other professional who works in this field, but I can tell you that mental health is an overwhelming problem in our schools and not just in high schools. Kids need support and teachers are not professionally trained in the areas that students have needs. It is a very big concern and I spend nights researching counselling strategies and reading books and trying to figure out how I can try to help my students feel successful in life and just be happy (and that's definitely in addition to the basic health lessons that are covered in the curriculum).
- Students need more physical activity. With each generation we see how kids are different. Students now need to move more than ever. Students are being misdiagnosed with ADHD when they truly have sensory or movement disorders that no one knows about, or if we do, we don't have the equipment and supports necessary to help that child succeed at school. Kids are more successful both emotionally and academically when they are more active, so we need physical activity to be a HUGE part of the school system.
- Stop with the assessments, committees and meetings. Just let us teach. With a standardized curriculum, report cards should be more than enough to give you the data that you need to see where we need to improve as a province. Let us spend more time planning lessons and less time talking about standardized assessments.
- Occupational therapists, social workers, guidance counsellors, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, etc. need to be available in our schools on a daily basis. Crisis' do not wait until someone is scheduled to be at our school. We need to be more proactive than reactive and develop programs for students that can be embedded into their school day, not something that is an add on, if they are lucky enough to get the support they need from a community organization.
- We need technology that WORKS!!!! We need to get with the times. Students need to be using technology that they will be using in the real world. It is not okay for me to have to bring in my own computer from home because I cannot rely on the computer in my classroom. Technology issues don't just happen on Mondays when the tech person is in to fix our computers. We need to be able to have reliable technology in our classrooms EVERYDAY!
- Let teachers be the "experts" in the field of teaching. As teachers, we need to be able to make educated decisions about student programming and we shouldn't have that questioned on a regular basis. I have four university degrees and have taught grades primary to six, including some extensive teaching with students with cognitive and behavioural challenges. Sometimes, I know more about what my students needs at school than some "expert" who has never been in a classroom. Lets stop spending money on committees and collecting data and ask the teachers for what they need to make a difference!
- Lets stop with useless data collection. This year my son (in grade one) was given a forty minute reading assessment (one on one). My son entered grade one

reading at the end of grade one level. His previous teacher could have told you that he was not a struggling reader or writer. No one needed to assess him to see if he needed early literacy support. Why can't you let teachers give you the information you need, as opposed to dictating which assessments will be done just so you have more data. Imagine all of the students that were assessed at our school alone (4 grade one classes). How many of those students were reading at or above the expected benchmark? The time teachers spent assessing those students could have been spent providing remediation for students who had already previously been identified, by their teachers, as needing support.

- Either have class caps or don't! I say this because in bold letters on this last contract it stated that class caps **WOULD NOT** apply if your school did not have the physical space for more classrooms. Well guess what, we have been over the "caps" for years at our school and this was one of the biggest reasons I was so upset with the last contract. I will admit that the media can spin the contract to look great, so I noticed that not one time in the media was it ever mentioned that the class cap does not apply if the physical space is not available. At our school we have teachers who are actually working out of storage closets. When I met with our previous school board representative about our overcrowding issues, he said that our area was not currently being considered for needing another elementary school at this time and that the money they [the government] were allocating to building new schools was to be used for the schools stated and could not be recommitted to other schools. If I were you, I would halt all school developments until you see how crowded our school is projected to become. In the next few years, it is projected to reach over 1000 students. We are over capacity at 620 students. Where do you think we should put the rest of the students?. As our MLA, you should be fighting for a new school for us, and the ground should already have been broken on this project! I would not support anyone who would not support my child having the right to be in a class under the class cap.

As you can see, there are a lot of issues I have with the current school system (and I didn't even go into detail on the data entry or the one size fits all data collection program that does not work for elementary schools). The liberal party may feel that they inherited some of the difficulties in the school system from previous governments, and perhaps you did, but where I think the liberal party is failing most, is that you are trying to build an education system on how you THINK schools are today. Maybe your entire party feels that since they went to school they know what it's like in the schools, but I am telling you, even in the last few years, students are DIFFERENT. The world is a different place. Social media, smart technology, rapid pace of life. . . there are so many factors that play into the way students need to learn today, and our system is years behind where we need to be.

I would love the opportunity to speak to you directly and invite you to come and visit me at my school. I would love the opportunity to answer any questions you have and listen to your reasons for supporting any decisions the liberal party makes. I am not a lazy employee. I do not want things to be handed to me. I do a lot of extra curricular activities and if you come to my classroom, you will also see that I have outfitted both my room and my teaching partner's room

as well with things from my home, that I have gotten from friends or neighbours or that I have purchased with my own money. I care deeply about my students and do feel that I regularly go above and beyond for them, but by imposing a contract on teachers, I truly feel that you will take my love and passion for my job and replace it with a bitter distrust for our government.

I truly do appreciate the time you take to read this and can be reached at 902-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Passionate Mom and teacher

Tricia Schmeisser