

Law Amendments Committee

I write today to implore all MLAs to consider voting against Bill 75, An Act Respecting A Teacher's Professional Agreement and Classroom Improvements. This Bill holds some very disconcerting legislation. In particular, Article 14, which states:

No arbitrator or arbitration board established under any Act of the Legislature or in accordance with a collective agreement and no board, or tribunal, including the Labour Board established under the Labour Board Act, has jurisdiction to

- (a) Determine the constitutional validity or constitutional applicability of this Act; or
- (b) Determine whether a right conferred, recognized, affirmed or otherwise guaranteed by the Constitution of Canada has been infringed by this Act.

This in and of itself gives cause for concern, as it undermines the whole democratic process and ability for collective bargaining to take place. Despite the fact that Premier McNeil asserted in 2013

You know, Mr. Speaker, the real foundation of any collective bargaining is the fact that the employer and employee have to be at the table feeling equal, feeling that they are both feeling respected, feeling that they are both having their voices heard, and negotiating and working out what is an agreement that will potentially last for years down the road. In order for that agreement to have any kind of substance, both the employer and the employee have to feel valued at the end of the day when the agreement is finished. It is never easy.

Mr. Speaker, I have not been part of a collective bargaining situation, I have not been at the table but I can only imagine how difficult that is on both sides, to sit down and basically negotiate and hammer out terms and an agreement of a path forward of employment in this province. It's an important part of the democratic process in the Province of Nova Scotia. We have a history in this province of men and women fighting to the very end to preserve and protect that right to strike in the Province of Nova Scotia.

Clearly, the Premier has had a change of heart in the past four years which must have come as a result of his soul searching. He clearly doesn't respect the hard working people of Nova Scotia, as he attempts to undermine and destroy every collective bargaining negotiation. This current Bill is immoral and undemocratic. On February 14th, on CTV News in an interview with Steve Murphy, the Premier said that sending collective bargaining to arbitration will cost too much money for taxpayers. However, the very fact that he has included Article 14 in this Bill makes it unconstitutional and begs legal action which will likely cost taxpayers more in the end.

Facebook has been actively engaged in discussions regarding the current contract negotiations. I have attempted to keep informed and also participate in dialogue. Several people have discussed possible solutions to the financial burdens the government deems would occur if it were to offer fair wage increases and maintain Service Awards. On February 7th, Allan MacMaster, MLA contributed an

article to the Cape Breton Post offering valid suggestions to changes to our education system. In the article, Cape Breton MLA offers suggestions to improve education system. He sets out eight improvements that could be made to our educational system. These improvements are not only doable, but cost little to nothing and would make a huge impact on the Education System.

They are as follows:

1. Have children start school at age 6 (by the end of December in the year they start). Some countries have children starting at age 7 because they are more developed and ready to learn. Pre-school supports can be offered to parents to help in that development.
2. Restore an attendance policy. Require students to attend 90 per cent of classes outside of snow days and excused absences. Allow discretion for students who are doing well.
3. Require children to meet outcomes to pass. In this way, children will only advance when they are ready, and it will help to eliminate the many custom-made classroom lessons which lead to teachers trying to teach five classes in one classroom at the same time.
4. Give teachers the power to establish and enforce rules for homework and assignments. These are tools teachers have always had to bring students along in their development until someone got the bright idea to eliminate consequences for students. Life has consequences. Part of education should be teaching students how to make good decisions that benefit them.
5. If marks and attendance don't matter for students, why should discipline? Changes made to attendance and marking policies will lead to better student behaviour.
6. Technology like "Power School" should be eliminated from grades primary to 6. It is unnecessary and will save government money. Keep it for core subjects like math and science for grades 7 and 8. This number-based grade reporting system has no benefit for students at these ages based on what they need to learn.
7. Eliminate testing and data collection designed for the purpose of measuring student performance for school boards. One example is "Literacy in Progress." While the aim to make sure children are learning to read is important, having a requirement that students meet outcomes before they pass to the next grade satisfies that measurement in a much simpler and more effective way. It also save teachers time which could be better spent teaching.
8. Eliminate standardized testing. Teachers can get back to teaching students to learn as opposed to teaching them to pass a test. Studies have shown standardized tests lead children to avoid risk

taking and can cause boredom and fear. Not everyone was born wired the same way. Teaching and learning need to be given creative freedom.

So why not save on the \$20 million study and make a few simple changes today that will make a difference?

One of the biggest failures of the government's involvement with education is that it relies on people who have no true knowledge of how the system functions to assess, or make recommendations. The people who make decisions have uninformed facts. A blatant example of this is Minister Karen Casey's report, *Disrupting the Status Quo: Nova Scotians Demand a Better Future for Every Student: Report of the Minister's Panel on Education*. The panel is made up of The Honourable Myra Freeman, Chair; Tina Dixon; Mike Henderson; Kyle Hill; Gordon MacInnis; and Donna O'Connell. Now, I have read The Honourable Myra Freeman's CV on Linked in and she does have twenty five years teaching experience, making her knowledgeable about education during her time in this position. Donna O'Connell is also a retired teacher. Tina Dixon is a mother of three, but who worked as an Education Director/Special Needs Liason at the Bear Rivers First Nation, Mike Henderson is VP Manufacturing Stanfields Ltd. He is on the panel because of his involvement as a SAC member. Kyle Hill is from Toronto and the Project Leader at Boston Consulting Group and Co-Founder of Teacher for Canada. Gordon MacInnis is Vice-President, Finance & Operations at CBU. Karen Casey, herself has been long retired from teaching and has little to no understanding of the current crisis in our system. The people on this panel have no direct link to the classrooms of today. Times have changed drastically and at an alarming pace. As I think past over the last decade, I would have very different recommendations for schools ten years ago, than I would today. This lack of relevancy and informed opinions appears throughout the document. Furthermore, the recommendations were never utilized. Basically, it was a very costly make work project, so that Karen Casey could say she is doing something for education.

Anyone working within the school setting on a daily basis will tell you that we don't need more reports. What we need is the supports that were supposed to be put in place years ago when inclusion was first established in our schools. At that time, specialized schools and homes were closed that supported children with special needs and the money that went into their functioning was placed into the school system. This money went to supports such as Educational Assistants, and Speech Language Pathologists, Psychologists, Occupational Therapists and so on. Fast forward thirty years later and we have more and more children with special needs and fewer direct supports. Teachers who work on a daily basis within the classroom are attempting to do all they can to work with all of the children. Individual Program Plans, Adaptations and countless hours in meetings and preparing individualized materials and curriculum is taxing for one teacher. I have felt overwhelmed on many occasions after an IPP meeting, as the result of recommendations by a team of educators, physiologists, parents, administrators, etc. who all offer wonderful suggestions about how to support a child's development and educational needs. It is up to the lone teacher to implement this program and create materials for the child. Without the support of an Educational Assistant, which is likely the case, the teacher must somehow manage the various IPPs and adaptations and orchestrate learning for all of the levels of learners in one room. Usually, even in a classroom that has a cap of twenty, there is always two or three more. There is a lot of juggling for one teacher to accomplish programming for so many levels of learners. Last year, I had eleven adaptations and four IPPs to accommodate. This year, I have fewer and am grateful for this. It is my belief that all children can and do learn. What they learn is a matter of how well we can bridge the

gap between needs and abilities, while accommodating the various levels of learners within the classroom. It is becoming a behemoth that no person can undertake without necessary supports.

It is not just inclusion that is creating problems in our educational system. Such things as inconsistent technology supports across the province from one board to the next are a major challenge for maintaining standards and teaching the technology curriculum. You cannot have curriculum that is great on paper, but impossible to deliver in reality. In our school, the grade Four and Five teachers must now teach and report on technology curriculum with antiquated computers. However, in some boards, individual students have access to and use their own laptops or iPads. What this creates is inequalities within the province relating to the quality of technology education students receive from one board to the next.

The disparity within the province from board to board relating to resources and financial resources directly impacts the ability for there to be equitable delivery of curriculum. This shows up in the level of resources for the delivery of technology based curriculum. It also is evident in the supplies and materials needed to deliver such things as Math, Language Arts and Science curricula. I have never kept track of how much money I have spent on such supplies but it goes well into the thousands. If I don't purchase my own materials, my programs suffer. Some teachers have suggested that we should remove from our classrooms all of the materials, book cases, etc. that we have purchased. I refuse to do this, as it would ultimately handcuff my ability to deliver my programs and stunt my students' ability to succeed. Today, I took pictures of the various supplies I have bought over the years. I'm a bit of a hoarder and am known to have the supplies a teacher might need. I never count on the science room having supplies such as food colouring, or cornstarch because these things are never in supply. However, the curriculum for grade two Science expects such things to be utilized for children to explore liquids and solids. Language Arts Curriculum expects that students have access to a variety of texts ranging from poetry, fiction, nonfiction. I have spent countless hours placing orders to Scholastic, volunteering at Book Fairs and spending my own money on such books. My classroom library is ample and the children enjoy the variety of books that the Department of Education recommends. However, if I were to rely upon the DOE for these resources my students would not have the rich experience with literature they currently enjoy.

The fact that there is such disparity across the province begs the glaring question, why are we trying to assess students using standardized tests? The educational arena is as varied as is the geography of our province. Rural communities with socio-economic challenges do not have the same resources to deliver programming as do those that have solid financial standing. Not to mention the high number of children who live below the poverty line. Such factors are not addressed in standardized tests. All teachers know that there is little merit in these forms of tests. They do not inform our teaching and in many cases impede our ability to continue teaching the curriculum as we prepare students for such tests. Standardized tests do not offer any educational value and that they cost taxpayers an astronomical amount. It seems to me a no brainer that we should get rid of them.

I could go on and on about how our educational system is broken. This is the culmination of thirty years of bad choices by various governing authorities. But, the long and short of it is that we have come to a

point in history where significant change is needed if we want our students to become successful productive members of society in the future. Our children are the future. If you can invest in such things as Ferries to the USA that employs Americans, why not put the money into our most precious resource...our children?

Yours in Education,

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