

First of all, thank-you for allowing me the opportunity to voice my concerns about this insulting "slap in the face" bill. I am a hard working and dedicated grade one teacher who is heartbroken by the disregard this liberal government has shown to my profession, during teacher appreciation week no less. From my perspective as a teacher, I could write an impassioned essay about the sorry state the liberal government has allowed education to descend into since coming into office in 2013. But I won't even bother because this government is clearly not interested in listening to the real experts in education which are classroom teachers such as myself. However, your leader is professing through media outlets that he is denying thousands of Nova Scotian workers their right to fair collective bargaining rights in the best interests of parents and their children. Therefore, I will put my parent hat on today and emphatically let you know that the imposition of a punitive contract on Nova Scotian teachers will have a long-lasting, detrimental effect on the students of this province.

I am a mother of three children in grades 11, 8, and 6. Because I am a teacher myself, I understand the system and can advocate for my children when necessary. Thousands of other parents lack the cultural capital that it takes to advocate for their child effectively. I am here today to be a voice for every parent whose child has struggled but does not know the language of the education system or how to navigate through it to get support. I want to thank this government for their extreme actions that have galvanized parent support and engagement in their child's education. Nova Scotia parents for teachers has surpassed 20 000 members and these parents are becoming increasingly involved, informed, and infuriated by the liberal government.

My oldest daughter is now 16 and she endured a very tough middle school experience. She is a gifted student and she has been diagnosed with anxiety. From grades 6-8, she was socially and verbally bullied at school on a daily basis. You have been hearing a lot about students who require extra help and are not able to meet academic expectations. At the other end of this spectrum are students like my daughter who requires enrichment and support to fit in socially as a gifted child. How is her teacher supposed to meet the needs of 38 teenagers in a grade 10 math class including several foreign exchange students who struggle to speak English, students on IPPS, adaptations, behavior problems, and mental health issues? My daughter is not getting the enrichment or even the education she deserves in this environment. Her anxiety has been gut-wrenching for our entire family. I am not even sure she would be here today if it were not for the interventions we put in place for her privately. Because there is a lack of mental health professionals in our schools, we paid for a private psychologist to see our daughter once a week for 3 years. We hired tutors to challenge her academically and so that she could work at her own level. We paid thousands of dollars of our own money to have Psych. Ed testing done because people with a 98% average are not high on the priority list in schools where struggling kids can wait years to be assessed. This "normal" that you profess parents want to get back to is not normal at all. It is devastating and unsustainable. My daughter's Europe trip was in question at one point because of WTR. That was inconvenient. As a parent, I still supported WTR because I know what devastating really looks and feels like. As a teacher, I voted no to three offers that offered nothing for the kids I teach and care about. I also voted no for my Abigail.

My middle child loves the social aspects of school and was minorly inconvenienced by WTR through athletic participation. Because he was not devastated or even disappointed by this, his reaction was not newsworthy enough to be widely shared. My son was diagnosed with ADHD when he was in grade two.

Again, I paid out of pocket for a Psych. Ed assessment because the school informed me there were so many children with more severe needs that they would not "get to" my child during that school year. Is it "normal" that I had to pay 3000 dollars out of pocket so my child did not slip through the cracks for at least a school year? The psychologist came to the school (at considerable expense to us of course) and shared her recommendations with the teacher, admin, and resource teacher. I have attended dozens of these feedback meetings with my teacher hat on reassuring parents we would do our best etc... This was my first such meeting as a mom and I am not ashamed to admit I broke down and cried. I cried tears of frustration at each recommendation the doctor suggested that I knew in my heart (and because I am a teacher) would not be implemented due to lack of resources. No speech language pathologist, no occupational therapist, no EA would follow the report recommendations. Just an over-worked teacher expected to spread herself a little bit more thin to put yet another child on classroom adaptations and manage his impulsive behaviours in a diverse classroom. We paid for private speech lessons for 2 years, a private occupational therapist for one year, and continued to work with a private psychologist to manage his ADHD at our own expense. It was a stressful, frustrating, long, hard road we travelled as parents to make sure our son could be successful socially and academically at school. Fortunately, we had the knowledge and resources at our disposal to fight for our child. Many other caring and wonderful parents don't have that luxury. I voted NO three times for every one of those parents. I can look them and my son in the eye and say this woefully inadequate "normal" was imposed on us but I did not agree to it nor accept it. It is not a teacher professional agreement or even an agreement at all. I voted NO for lan.

My third child has been fortunate to have no issues at school socially or academically. She is a kid who is breezing through the system with a wind of privilege at her back. She is privileged because of her race, her parent's educational backgrounds, her positive family dynamics, her good physical and mental health, strong ability level etc.... She understands how fortunate she is and knows that many of her peers are not as privileged. Therefore, when work to rule was introduced, my well-adjusted child was not fazed or even disappointed. In fact, she was hopeful that her peers who need extra help and support might actually see real changes like smaller class sizes and more EA's. My daughter missed out on a school play and that's about it. Frankly, she did not perceive it as a problem let alone a full-blown "emergency" requiring your staff to brave blizzards to bully a profession.

Her teachers were still at work (which I know might come as a shock to a few of you here). They had more time to focus on teaching because they were not bogged down by powerschool and tienet. They continued to communicate with us and to help our daughter succeed because that's what teachers do. I trusted she was safe in their care even during the debacle your government created on December 5<sup>th</sup>. However, I am increasingly worried about her safety, education, and well-being if the liberal government imposes this contract. I understand that people can't be legislated or forced to volunteer their own time, help, and financial resources. So many of the aspects of WTR that parents did not enjoy will not necessarily return to normal, especially if you leave teachers feeling exhausted and demoralized.

As I mentioned, my third child has no issues of her own to deal with at school. However, she has been exposed to violent outbursts, severe behavioral problems, profanity, and over-crowded classrooms. Last year, she was hit in the head with a sneaker while an out-of-control student had a very frightening outburst. There have been numerous other examples of very severe and scary violent outbursts she has witnessed when she goes to her school, a place that is supposed to be safe. This particular student did not qualify for an EA but the presence of this child in my daughter's class from grade primary-grade 5

had an enormous impact on all her teacher's ability to focus on teaching the rest of the class. Is this "normal"? Let's all do a little soul-searching and really think about that. When I told my daughter that the government wants a committee to address such classroom conditions she replied, "They could just ask any teacher or even a student. You need more people, more teachers, more EA's and guidance counsellors. You need less kids in the classrooms and more helpers." She gets it and she's 11 years old. I voted no for Katherine.

I love my three children more than anything in the world. I would take a bullet for each of them without hesitation. If I felt that wtr was an emergency that was threatening their education or well-being or that of my students, I would have voted Yes to each of the collective agreements. Parts of wtr were refreshing because it reminded me to have a work-life balance and focus on the stuff that matters in the classroom instead of all the data collection and other nonsensical initiatives that take away from effective teaching. I would like this government to hear and acknowledge that many, many teachers are parents of current Nova Scotia students who are scared about the state of our own children's education. We are dangerous parents for you because we know the truth about what is happening in schools and we know the difference. Was WTR perfect or totally painless? No, and it wasn't supposed to be. However, it was far preferable to the old normal that students, parents, and teachers have suffered through for too long. Had we had the opportunity to bargain in good faith with a government who cared to invest in education to better the lives of children, we would never have reached this breaking point.

On the news last week, I heard the Premier allude to the fact that if there was another pathway he would take it. I would like to challenge the Premier to do just a little bit more searching for his soul and consider making some immediate, tangible improvements to classroom conditions. With my parent hat on, this is not about salary or benefits for anyone other than my children. You still have an opportunity to change the direction of this bill. Don't allow your legacy to be the government that incited the first teachers strike in the history of this province and that put fiscal restraints before our children's education. Search your souls and decide to be the government that stepped up and really listened to the voices of your constituents, your teachers, your parents, and your children of Nova Scotia. They are taking to the streets in protest. There are thousands of teachers, parents, and students outside your door begging to be heard. Please listen.

I will leave you with this thought. Perhaps the greatest indicator of student success according to research is teacher efficacy. All workers, teachers included, work better and harder when they feel valued, appreciated, supported and respected by their employer. Had you succeeded in reaching an agreement with 9300 teachers, some aspects of normal would look a lot different. If classroom conditions had been addressed in a meaningful way, many teachers might feel re-energized and motivated to resume activities like extra help outside of teaching hours and extra curricular volunteer activities. Denigrating, devaluing, disrespecting, and demoralizing almost 10 000 Nova Scotia teachers obviously will not improve the education system or the lives of students and parents you profess to care about. As a teacher, I know this. As a parent, I know this. My question is: Do you not know this? Or do you just not care?