
From: Jenny Trites [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, February 20, 2017 9:48 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: LAC submission about Bill 75

Dear Committee Members,

My name is Jennifer Trites and I am a resident of Halifax-Chebucto. I had hoped to speak about Bill 75 in person, but was not offered one of the limited time slots.

I am an elementary music specialist with HRSB. Over my six years teaching in this province, I have taught at seven different schools (not including the schools where I substituted on a day to day basis). Bill 75 will take away the constitutional rights of over 9000 Nova Scotians, and not in response to an emergency, but for the sake of convenience.

I believe that learning conditions must be enshrined in teachers contracts. If they are not, then there is nothing to hold subsequent governments accountable to the commitments of the current government. Over the years commissions and studies have occurred, and then been ignored when the government realized how much it would cost to properly implement full inclusion.

As a music teacher, I see every student in the school, including the "red zone" students who have been identified as at risk of having a violent outburst. In my experience, the students who have been allocated time with an EPA do not have that support all day, even though the frustrations that lead to a break-down in their ability to function in the class room could happen at any point in the day.

Elementary music is an active and participatory subject, and when a breakdown happens and there is no EPA in the room, the only practical solution is to pause the lesson until I have either: helped the student regain control; convinced the student to leave the room to calm down; or sent for assistance from the administration. In a class with multiple "red zone" students and inadequate support, this can lead to unsafe situations where the needs of none of my students are being met.

I have come home from school bruised from pulling a violent eight-year old off a classmate. I have been kicked by five year-olds, had items thrown at me by twelve year-olds, and ignored a great deal of muttered profanity for the sake of continuing a lesson for the other students. I have evacuated classes because one student is throwing instruments around the room. I have cried afterschool and in the evenings out of concern for some of those same students.

In general, teachers are highly motivated. This can be seen in the hours they volunteer for the sake of their students. When we are unable to meet the needs of our students, we feel guilty, but the truth is that we (and are students) are being set up to fail. Teachers feel like our voices have been ignored over the years, and now we have reached a point of crises.

I am fortunate to teach students at an age where the class sizes are capped, however I also teach in high-density neighbourhoods where we tend to gain new students at the start of each new month. Between my three schools, I teach more classes over than under the cap. Not only do we need hard caps on class sizes, but there must be a plan for supporting classrooms that go over the cap mid school-year (perhaps a part-time EPA assigned to the class to assist the teacher in meeting the needs of the large group).

I am an early career teacher (at the low end of the pay-scale), but I have spent thousands of dollars on my own hard-earned salary to improve learning conditions. I have purchased: a laminator since most of my schools don't have one; laminator sheets; a Bluetooth speaker for schools where I have stereo; hours of student-requested music on my personal iTunes; hundreds of dollars of picture books; countless puppets and toys to go with various singing games; recorders for students unable to afford their own; hundreds of dollars of teacher resources; countless dollar store prizes for reward days; and hand sanitizer and boxes of tissues.

I have printed hundreds of pages in colour since colour coding the notes on the staff helps my students learn more efficiently and my schools have no access to colour printing. I have donated hundreds of hours planning and leading extra curriculums including choir, recorder club, ukulele club, and school-wide concerts and assemblies.

I have spent time in the summer taking courses and attending conferences to upgrade my classroom efficacy (but not courses that would upgrade my license) I have decorated my classrooms with posters from these conferences, which I paid to laminate to make sure they would last for years.

This legislation is a slap in the face to teachers who have poured financial, intellectual, and emotional resources into their classrooms to hold them together for the sake of their students. I urge you to reconsider this bill, save the province a fortune in legal fees, and return to the collective bargaining process.

Jennifer Trites

B Ed (Memorial), B Mus (Memorial)

Orff Specialist (Carl Orff Canada)