

Nova Scotia Law Amendments Committee

Regarding Bill 75 - Act Respecting a Teachers' Professional Agreement

My name is Stacey Rudderham, and I am a parent to two little girls in Grades 2 and 4. I was not given the opportunity to speak to you in person, because the Liberal Government has chosen to disregard the rights of Nova Scotians in the legislative process and refused most individuals the right to speak. So in turn I have taken time to work harder and after witnessing the presentations by teachers I have been able to expand on my own presentation to ensure my concerns are inclusive.

We are fortunate in our school. My kids have so far had a completely successful educational experience. Except for a few hiccups along the way, my girls are thriving. I spend a good deal of time with them extending their school day into the afternoons with homework, and other learning experiences. I would never profess perfection nor would I ever think I have all the answers. But, I think I can say this. I want their educational career to reflect my own. I remember my school years very well, and I remember them because I loved school, I loved my teachers, I respected them and I wanted to do well, for them. I was dedicated. I started school when I was almost six years old, since the age cut-off was September 30<sup>th</sup> and because of this, I believe I was well prepared maturity wise to succeed.

So why do I think there is a problem? Because I make an effort to take note of my surroundings. I do not deny issues just because they do not impact me directly and consistently. I absorb what is happening in the world around me, because I realize I am affected by it and I can affect it. I realize this is true for my children as well, and I am raising them to understand this. I listen to my kids, their friends, their teachers, the teachers I have as friends and neighbors, and the many teachers I know who walked away from the profession. I am concerned about what is happening now and what will happen in the coming years, when my children move to the next levels. I listen as my clients talk about the students who come to work for them. I listen as friends describe the struggles their kids are experiencing.

What I observe too is sometimes through my own personal experiences and exposures. I had the pleasure of receiving a class project in 2012 from our local high school, prepared for a final year science class. That project was given to me and was submitted to the UARB as part of a community case. The project was extraordinary in its precept, and it filled my heart up that they had agreed to hand this over to me, but the thing I noticed... grammar, spelling, quality. For a class of Grade 12 students to have no concern for capital letters, commas and spelling, or well communicated ideas on an assignment that determined their final grade was alien to me. They did not always use uppercase letters to write even their own names. But each of them would have received good grades on the assignment, because they completed it and because they were not in an English class, so the course did not have a mandated requirement for spelling and grammar. This is a serious trend that has been spreading through our schools for years. I cannot imagine these kids going to University only two months later and enjoying full marks for completed assignments with the volume of errors I found in each and every paper. How does a student get to the last week of high school without the ability, or care for their report writing or presentation skills. How did they pass Grade 8 without knowing the value of a comma in changing the

context of a sentence? How does someone proceed to Grade Two or Six or Nine, without using periods and uppercase letters?

There are private tutoring companies charging 3, 4, even 6 thousand dollars per year for kids with reading, writing and math issues. Kids who cannot get the supports they need in school, visit tutoring centres for hours every week, sometimes for years. These tutoring centres are staffed by former teachers, and current teachers working a second job to help bear the costs of student loans. And these tutoring centres are sometimes populated by only those able to afford the help, while there are so many more children with serious needs. I would like to point out too, that a private corporation is going to build programs that are revenue driven. So while they are a benefit to a small population of economically advantaged children, they are at the end of the day also Private Corporations. Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. The three things we are supposed to learn in school, and thousands of kids are seeking private tutoring, seeking extra help and some are just spinning and flailing, losing out on an important, vibrant and positive, multi-year developmental segment of their lives.

I mentioned I started school at almost six years of age. Kids are now starting at 4 years of age. My Georgia started at four, turning five on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. I was worried because she was still a tiny little girl in my eyes. A brilliant one, truly, but still so little. She was born a little prematurely, had been an adventure for us compared to our other daughter as she had been a hard headed little girl, who was prone to tantrums and emotional bouts. These had long passed as we worked with her to help her learn to express herself and her feelings. We felt she would be motivated and challenged by learning, something she flourished in when we enrolled her in an academic early learners program. Then I was told she was being placed in a Primary One split class, and suddenly I was really and truly considering keeping her out of school for another year. I worried she would be overwhelmed and revert to her prior condition of mercurial tendencies and we would have to start again. But it was the day before class started and she was already prepared to head off to school and I was between a rock and a hard place. My little girl might be overwhelmed in a class of 5 and 6 year olds, but she might be crushed if I didn't let her go. The school administrator and teachers were prepared to move her if there were signs of her struggling. We were invited to meet her teacher the day before school started, and I learned one of my neighbors had a daughter going into the same class, in Grade One. We also came to find that this was the best teacher for this task of taking our bright and younger child into a class of varied ages and make it work for her and everyone around her. Our daughter flourished and continues to thrive in Grade 2.

But still, why start them so early and then to have to start in a spit class as well? I have read the various reports I could find on this idea of starting kids at an early age in Nova Scotia to understand why. From what I can tell, there was a need to satisfy a limited number of parents who believed their children were advanced and needed to be in school. There was also reference to other regions and provinces with respect to their entry ages. And I have to say I find this all a lot bewildering. I can promise you, my children are geniuses. Really, they are. And I know this because they are my kids. And many of my friends can tell you the same about their kids. But in reality, none of us as parents are really qualified to be objective about our kids and their intelligence and maturity. We all have our own impressions of our children, so to read the current Minister of Education use parental pressure on the basis parents felt their children were ready, and to impose a policy on all children because every year some parents are

calling... Would we use the same logic in deciding kids should be allowed to drive at 13, because some parents called and said their kids had been driving a tractor for 2 years, so were good drivers? Or would we lower the drinking age, because some parents called and said their kids had been partaking since the age of 15, and could handle their liquor just fine? So then the Minister went on to say the department had considered other regions. Ontario was an example. I lived in Ontario. Junior and Senior Kindergarten have been mistaken by this minister as part of the assessable curriculum in the public school systems. Junior and Senior Kindergarten in fact are Nova Scotia's equivalent of Preschool. In Ontario, preschool daycare is usually for youngsters under 4 years of age. Next comes Junior Kindergarten (for kids who turn 4 before Dec 31) and Senior Kindergarten (for kids who turn 5 before Dec 31). Neither is mandatory, and children are not required to be enrolled in school until they are six. Other districts follow the same path. In Alberta, kids attend Kindergarten at 5 years and Start Grade one at six. In Quebec, mandatory elementary education starts with grade 1 at six years old. In Manitoba, the compulsory age to start school is 7 years old by December 31. Newfoundland, six. BC, six. Only Saskatchewan, PEI, and New Brunswick have an earlier start at five years old by December 31, so the inference that this change was to bring Nova Scotia up to standards is blatantly false. The other aspect of this particular issue is that 5 year olds in every district are in a preschool or kindergarten environment. They are learning through play and song. They are still developing their behavioural skills and based on the fact that this is the first exposure for many children to school, it is intended to be an introduction to their educational experience. In most areas, as I said it is not mandatory for a child to attend school until Grade One.

Since I have told you my children are not impacted intellectually by this early start, why does it matter to me? There have been enough direct impacts on my children from behaviour displayed by other children for me to take serious note to this aspect. Children at four years old and early in their fifth year are still in need of naps, play time and considering the development stages in children and how different each child is, especially at 4 to 6 years of age, a child is still not guaranteed to have the communications skills and concentration levels needed to make it through a school day without acting out from frustration, fatigue or being overwhelmed. There is no pre-assessment of children prior to starting school, so there is no plan in place to attempt to match children based on their abilities, emotional development or prior learning exposures. I would also like to point out this early start is exacerbated by class sizes. Class caps are insufficient compared to other districts, but more ironically, in comparison to current legislation in place in Nova Scotia. Childcare facilities cap staff-to-child ratios for school aged children at 1:15. On an all day basis this ratio is reduced to meet the needs of the youngest child. Can anyone explain to me, why in an environment where kids are not being taught and assessed to outcomes and long-term skill development, the ratios are that much lower than in our schools where we have so many more requirements on both the students and the teachers?

The earlier start is also being cited as a major contributor to learning and behavioural issues later and the requirement for IPPs and adaptations. The increase in these elements of the classroom experience is disturbing to say the least, and to ignore the correlation between the two is incredibly derelict. After generations of using the five years old before September 30 cut-off, with undeniable long-term success, it is beyond frustrating to see this issue being ignored. The cost of this unnecessary policy should be

investigated thoroughly. This is one change that is obviously necessary and would relieve the education system of pressures on staffing, classroom impacts and on the success of our children long term.

The other issue that may be exacerbating the class caps is this earlier starting age. You have added an entire half of a grade into the system without building more schools, adding more teachers or developing adapted programs. And when my child is starting her first year in a split class, that has robbed her of a first year of just Grade Primary programming, but it also robbed the Grade One half of the class from their full year of Grade One curriculum. The same occurred for my older daughter in her Third Grade year, when she was in a split with Grade Twos.

And I mentioned hiccups previously, as although the classrooms my kids are in have been successful for them academically, I do have some experience in the behavioural issues they face in other children. My oldest endured almost daily torment from another five year old in her first year in school. Every day this child told her she was stupid, ugly, to shut up. She called my five year daughter a goddamned whore, told her to fuck off. Called her a little bitch. A five year old, daily saying these things to my five year old. This was happening on the bus. My daughter came home on more than one occasion with bruises on her face from impacts after being shoved out of her seat by this same child. When I finally went to the school, because I could not get it fixed on the bus, it was immediately dealt with. Within minutes. The parents were no help. In fact, I would believe they encouraged this behaviour. The mother had refused to accept any further notes from her child's teachers. But our teachers and the principal put it to rest as soon as we went to them.

My younger daughter had another five year old threaten to stab her. There was no actual risk of this. My daughter did not want to go to school or go outside at recess, but her teacher and her principal were able to promise an environment immediately for her where she had nothing to worry about. It is likely this child had gone one step too far in his testing out new lines, but had no idea what he really did. And the teachers and principal again were the ones who reconciled this situation immediately.

Another child was moved into my oldest daughter's split class because a parent had demanded it. The truth on this was that the child, a seven year old, had been acting out and it had gotten so bad that he was disrupting the class constantly, had been kicked out of Excel, was throwing or smearing his lunch in other children's hair, and had messed and destroyed the bathroom repeatedly. But the parent blamed the teacher. A long term well respected teacher. So here are a couple of examples of teachers having no ability to even work with cooperative parents on these behavioural issues and our children are forced to live through them. When they are suppose to be learning.

I want to see my kids thrive as adults and lead happy and successful lives. Leaving out the accountability factor in their education career is setting them up for difficulties in University or college and in the work force. Discipline, attendance, and deadlines are a fact of life. Leaving the development of these traits and providing zero consequences helps how? I want to know why kids do not fail, and do not tell any parent or teacher that this is not an issue in this province. How do you give a child the same credit for passing a report in 2 weeks late while her peers passed theirs in before the deadline? How many of our young adults are out there wondering why they cannot keep a job longer than 4 months? Or who show

up late everyday and disrespect anyone who dares question them? What does the violence and abuse inflicted on teachers without ramifications do to our societal tolerance for violence, spousal abuse, child abuse? What good does it do anyone whether it is the teacher, the student or the onlooker to allow students to spit on their teacher, curse at the teacher? How do we let anyone, ever, get away with abuse?

The list of issues I support changes to is long, but having watched and read the many submissions to your committee, I feel this is where I will leave off for what seems to be obvious issues for me. But there is one more issue that I must bring to this committee.

This legislation is supposedly the end result of the failure of 3 negotiations with two executives. And the government blames the teachers. The public is well aware that the first negotiations were no such thing but rather a final offer in a brown envelope, essentially left for the NSTU to supposedly just accept. We also know that the teachers have been disrespected by their employer, which is unacceptable. I would think that they should sue for the slander and defamation they have endured. The government has mischaracterized teachers for months, with demoralizing, and insidious falsehoods, attacking their integrity, and encouraging further abuses and disrespect from students and parents. They have created a scenario of chaos, but blamed the teachers. They have lied about a lack of funds, while spending without regard for planning to or attempting to invest in solutions for the classrooms, and blamed the teachers. And based on the lack of regard for the public's right to participate in this process, the false urgency in passing the bill, the ridiculous antics in the Legislature from Liberal MLAs, how would anyone doubt the motives of this government were union busting and nothing more. The shame and embarrassment this government has brought on Nova Scotians, is not going to be forgotten, especially by this committee in how it treated those who were allowed to present here last week. And at the end of the day, this government is placing their single minded agenda in front of the best interests of Nova Scotians, and the democratic and Charter rights of all Nova Scotians.

I can promise you that parents are thankful the teachers have finally started telling their stories. Long time stories of parents struggling to help their struggling children come to mind every time a teacher's presentation plays or a letter is read. The truth of what our kids are exposed to and what they have to face, every day, would make most grown adults depressed. Angry. Anxious. Imagine how that impacts children. Wait you have heard the stories about how it impacts children, and their teachers, and if you cannot see what is grossly wrong with the situation, you only have yourselves to blame now. Not the teachers. This legislation is only going to push an implosive situation further to the brink. Teachers are burned out. Children are failing. Young adults are providing evidence of dysfunctional and entitled ideologies cultivated in a system that has been releasing them into a mean world where their capabilities are falling very short. They have been treated in a way that there is a culture of entitlement and an inability to own ones behaviour.

Do not approve this legislation. See what opportunity lies in letting teachers be a part of the change. No more committees, anywhere. They are not providing results. No councils, anywhere. They are nothing more than a shield to inaction. As a committee, understand the legal and financial disaster this will create for Nova Scotians until long after you have moved on.