
From: Aaron Peck [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2017 5:11 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel
Subject: My submission because I cant talk.

To the Law Amendments Committee of Nova Scotia
Re: Bill 75
February 16, 2017

First and foremost I want to express my extreme anger and disappointment of you denying my democratic right to speak at the Legislature on this bill. The pillars of democracy, the very purpose of this house, is to govern for the people, by the people. This Liberal government will be remembered in history as denying these fundamental right to push an imposing piece of legislation which is detrimental to the future education in our society. Had I be granted the right to speak, this is what I was to say.

I have the privilege of being an educator in Nova Scotia and part of that has granted me the responsibility of influencing hundreds of young minds. I wish to quote Socrates, "I cannot teach anybody anything, I can only make the think". This philosophy has grounded my teaching to know that schools are not just about classroom learning. In fact, it is my firm belief that schools exist to help develop the full potential of individuals. Schools are as much about community and climate as they are about learning. For students to truly think, to truly become engaged citizens they have to belong. Work to Rule (WTF) has been hard on our students, to that end, I refuse to accept the business model of education that has been thrust upon us.

Mr. McNeil, in reference to the state of our school system, I stated to the chamber of commerce this week that he "entered a powder keg 20 years in the making". I have never agreed more with a comment from our premier. It was in fact, 20 years ago under the Savage government (a Liberal party) who started the dismantling of our education system by demoralizing teachers with massive cuts and roll-back of teachers salaries. It is ironic that today, Mr. McNeil stands before his proverbial power-keg with the match to light the fuse. Bill 75 further erodes the Nova Scotia education system and puts to an end what Savage started 20 years ago.

Countless hours in schools are spent on data collection in the name of accountability. Standardized tests are given to measure student success. Numerous acronyms for various improvement plans take teachers' time away from students. Mental health issues are rampant. Attendance issues are deplorable. Violence and drug use are huge. Discipline is none existent. Interruptions to class time are monumental. Students are not succeeding that can not otherwise do it on their own.

What is so striking to me is that the accords to which I hold myself accountable are the accolades and feedback I receive from my students and their parents. Over my career many of my students have shared with me their successes and have offered praise for the things I have done for them. Do you want to know what is funny? Not one. Not one of the dozens of success stories I can share did a parent or student ever thank me for the test I gave them. Not once did they credit their success to data collection or interventions. Never do they reflect on the times I was taken away from class for meaningless meetings or initiatives. In all cases – everyone- they thank me for allowing them to see themselves and trust in their own abilities and think for themselves.

They praise me for showing them a path that allows them to be a critically minded individual in a world that is full of political agendas, self-serving policies and injustice. I hear them say how I helped them see differently, to appreciate different perspectives and to see that sometimes there isn't one way to solve a problem. Most of all, they thank me for believing in them and demanding their best.

Work to Rule temporary solved a lot of problems. It allowed me to focus on teaching and preparing my lessons to the needs of my students. The time I spent in the classroom free from distractions, data collection and other mind-less fluff afforded me to give my full attention to those who needed it most. What WTR suffered is the extra-curricular. As a teacher who believes strongly in school climate I have dedicated a large portion of my career to Student Council leadership and running a technical production team. These young students are leaders of our schools and help create an atmosphere of acceptance, enjoyment and development that quite frankly is the reason many students bother to show up to school. WTR was hard on them because it removed this very necessary part of our schools. However, I want to stress that this part of our schools is completely volunteer. I do it because I believe in it. I believe that it is what makes a well-rounded individual and is what helps kids focus on their academics.

Without two very influential teachers in my life, Sheila McLean and James Farmer, I would have likely not finished high school. It was their passion and dedication to students that went above and beyond their duties that allowed me find a passion in theatre. They created an atmosphere that made school important to me. It is not until now, that I realized how much people like them gave despite all the obstacles that made it difficult for them. They sacrificed, as I and my colleagues do, our families, our health, our well being to provide these opportunities for our children. It is maddening to me to see what bill 75 will do to this.

Sure, as the Premier has stated, some teachers will no doubt find themselves going back to the way things were before and giving all of themselves to their students at the expense of their well-being. But many will not. It will be hard to find chaperones, it will be difficult to find advisors and coaches, it will be near impossible to ask colleagues to supervise trips and go on sporting events. It will pit colleagues on each other, and it will unfairly make students make judgements about teachers who will, and will not participate in the extras. It is unfair for this government to expect the good-will of teachers to pay for the short-falls of their education system. It is unreasonable to think that after imposing a contract upon Teachers that is disrespectful, demoralizing and as hurtful as this is that things will ever return to normal.

I know that I am one of many teachers who is struggling with can I do that again. I love my students, and that love is what will likely make me cave and go back to McNeil's normal, but my self-worth and my respect for my colleagues tell me that it is the wrong thing to do. If we do, McNeil has won, and when the next negotiations start in two years, it will be so much worse for us.

Thank-you for taking the time to hear my concerns.

Aaron Peck
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Sent from my iPad