

Dear Members of the Law Amendments Committee,

I am a new teacher and a new arrival to Nova Scotia, a Come-From-Away who chose to move to Nova Scotia for the quality of life here. Being a mobile young professional beginning a career I had many choices both in Canada and abroad where I and my partner could live and work. We chose Nova Scotia because we felt that it would be one of the best places to both work and raise a family, but also to enjoy our everyday lives.

The first few years of teaching were eye-opening to say the least. My first positions were replacing teachers on medical leave (almost certainly for stress, although those are private details that are not shared). On average I was preparing for 6 or 7 different classes in both French and English. I had to read curriculum guides that were hundreds of pages long, read textbooks and create lesson plans. I often worked to 2 or 3 in the morning to then get back up and drive an hour to my school. And yet I still loved teaching.

It blew me away all of the data entry that was required (and is increasing every day). It shocked me the amount of adaptations and IPPs that were often required. I was already planning for up to 6 or 7 classes. For each adaptation it takes that much more time to tailor assignments and assessments. For each IPP it is basically planning another class for each student tailored to them, usually without an Education Assistant to support them. I did the best that I could for these students (with support from other teachers who took time from their planning to support me) but I still felt that I wasn't able to provide what I wanted to for them. There simply wasn't enough time. I also learned that there were numerous teachers who had years and years of experience who felt the exact same way. They wanted to provide more for students who needed extra support, but there was not enough time or support. There was both a lack of EAs and resource teachers to provide what teachers needed for support. And yet I still loved teaching.

Over my past 7 years of teaching I have been both a substitute and term teacher (replacing other teachers for a set period of time). I have never taught the same thing twice so every year I sit back down with the huge pile of curriculum guides, textbooks and subject guides to prepare to teach something for the first time. This takes hours and hours of work, time that could be spent being more involved at school in extra-curricular, time that could be spent with my family or even time getting a bit more sleep. I spend recess and lunch hours planning and providing extra help. I spend a large amount of my prep time (one hour every 2 days in which we must plan, assess, contact homes, meet and log behaviour notes and enter data into PowerSchool) contacting parents about both missing assignments, low marks and mental health concerns. Most of these conversations go well, but they can be sometimes very unpleasant. And yet I still love teaching.

This is the first year that I finally have a permanent contract. I am now, officially, a full-time teacher. I have always felt mostly public respect for teaching. Unfortunately this is also the year that I have felt less and less of it from the government. This was the first contract negotiation process I have ever been involved in and it has been a shock. It has felt that there have been constant threats and pressure from government and continual work to paint a negative picture of teachers and our union. It has been incredibly disheartening, especially as the government moves to force us through legislation into a contract that we do not agree to.

I strongly urge all MLAs to reject imposing a settlement on teachers. If the government truly wants an effective agreement that benefits our classrooms, they need to listen to teachers. When new offers keep being rejected by an increasing percentage of workers it should be clear that negotiations are going in the wrong direction. Forcing a contract on teachers will create huge resentment (and not just among teachers) that will last for a long time to come. This may help a couple lines on the budget in the short term, but it will be a disaster long-term. Forcing contracts will lead to court challenges that will take years and millions of dollars to finish. The recent BC Supreme Court decision (<http://vancouver.sun.com/news/local-news/b-c-teachers-win-landmark-supreme-court-of-canada-victory>) should be a lesson here. This money and time would be much better spent on our classrooms. If this is truly a case of fiscal responsibility what will the continual decline in education standards and classroom supports cost us in the long-term?

Another thing that I would like to point out is that many details about classroom conditions have been brought forward by the NSTU in bargaining (as well as many other issues). Many were ignored and the few added lack teeth. For example many teachers are very skeptical of more studies (inclusion) as there is no assurance that recommendations will be followed up on. With the removal of arbitration from the clause on working conditions this further enforces fears of a lack of will to actually address teachers' concerns.

In terms of classroom conditions the main items that I would like to see would be:

- class caps for P - 12 (currently listed as flexible, which means they won't be enforced)
- a limit on the number of IPPs and adaptations allowed in one class (creating and assessing the progress of these is a huge amount of work) NOT ADDRESSED
- more money for basic classroom supplies (acquiring even books and stationery not to mention bookshelves, desks, computer programs, computers and other technology can be very challenging due to our budgets) NOT ADDRESSED
- more educational assistants to provide extra help for struggling students (and more open requirements to assign them) NOT ADDRESSED
- a discipline policy NOT ADDRESSED
- an attendance policy NOT ADDRESSED
- an end to data collection that is only for the province and is not communicating to students how they are truly doing NOT ADDRESSED
- more guidance counsellors (many high needs students are not seen as often as they need to be) NOT ADDRESSED
- more resource teachers (they have huge caseloads) NOT ADDRESSED
- more planning time (to be able to plan adequately for increasingly large and diverse course loads) NOT ADDRESSED

If the government forces us back to work with this legislation it will not be a "return to normal". The climate of any workplace is based on the morale of its employees. This legislation will send teachers back to schools feeling bullied and unappreciated (and all of this on Teacher Appreciation Week). It will send teachers back with no significant improvement to our classrooms or extra supports for our students. It will send us back with no hope that we can continue to communicate to families that the situation is improving in our schools.

I urge you to vote down this legislation and return to the bargaining table. Listen honestly to the 9300 education experts you have in your classrooms. Follow honestly the collective bargaining process. Invest honestly in real measures that will improve education in our province. Working together (and only through working together) can we truly make the changes that are really needed.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Leigh Muething

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