

**PRESENTATION TO LAW AMENDMENTS COMMITTEE  
NOVA SCOTIA LEGISLATURE**

***Bill 72 Education Reform (2018) Act***

By Nan McFadgen, President, CUPE Nova Scotia  
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Good morning.

My name is Nan McFadgen and I am the President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Nova Scotia Division. CUPE is Canada's largest union, with more than 650,000 members across the country.

In Nova Scotia, CUPE proudly represents more than 19,000 men and women working in communities throughout the province to deliver important public services in education, both school boards and post-secondary; healthcare, hospitals, long term care and home care; municipalities; provincial highways; and community services, among other sectors of the economy.

I want to thank the members of the Law Amendments Committee for this opportunity to speak to Bill 72 today.

In my remarks, I will address three points:

1. The need for meaningful consultation
2. The need for a democratic governance structure, and
3. The threat of centralization and shared services

## **Need for Meaningful Consultation**

The Premier and the Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development have both described Bill 72 as the most significant restructuring of Nova Scotia's public education system in decades. There were no public consultations. The private consultant from Ontario who penned the report had less than three months to consult stakeholders and develop recommendations for massive system change.

CUPE Nova Scotia represents some 4,000 support workers in every one of the province's seven English language school boards and its French language school board, the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial (CSAP). CUPE members include education assistants/teaching assistants; facility operators; secretaries; school bus drivers, mechanics; caretakers, cleaners, custodians, building specialists, janitors, and maintenance workers; librarians and library assistants; cafeteria workers; community outreach workers; tradespersons; lunch ground supervisors; early childhood educators; and other school support positions.

While not at all surprising, it was still disappointing that neither government nor Avis Glaze sought input from CUPE members working in the school board sector on how public education services might be improved.

I say it was not surprising that CUPE school board workers were overlooked given that they have been excluded from other important discussions in public education, namely inclusion in our schools.

A large part of the inclusion program is working with students with special needs. This work is performed by dedicated CUPE members who are educational program assistants and teacher assistants. There has been no place for their voice in the Commission on Inclusion.

CUPE members are frustrated by this government's continued refusal to recognize the value of the jobs education workers do and the value of their voice at the table.

## **CUPE Supports Democratically-Elected School Boards**

Public education is a critical part of a democratic society. Public education is a public good and important for the development of students' mental, physical and emotional well-being.

The obliteration of elected school boards will have a negative impact on parents' ability to have input into their children's education at the local level and will reduce community engagement and accountability.

CUPE believes that our public-school system should have elected boards that are small enough to ensure input from parents and accountability to communities within their boundaries. Parents and communities must have a significant voice in their children's education.

Abolishing elected school boards is a move in the wrong direction, going backwards, not forwards. Nova Scotia will become the ONLY province to not have elected boards. There are elected school boards in ALL other provinces and territories, aside from Prince Edward Island where the English language board is appointed while the French language school board continues to be elected – as it must be because of Constitutional protections to minority language rights.

New Brunswick – a province that once abolished elected school boards – returned to an elected governance structure. Saskatchewan conducted a school board governance review in 2016 and while appointed boards were considered, citizens pushed back strongly at public consultations, especially in rural areas, and elected boards remain in place.

Taking away the ability of parents to deal with a locally elected governing body in their own community eliminates a key educational pillar upon which a democratic society is built. The Local voice is the power in all communities.

## **Centralization and Shared Services**

Bill 72 replaces school boards with "education entities". But for how long will there be any sort of regional presence in our public education system? How long before there is further consolidation and centralization of decision making?

The Glaze Report recommends establishing shared services. CUPE is not convinced that a shared services entity in education will create savings and we are very concerned that such an entity will push the privatization of educational support services and job loss in rural Nova Scotia.

If government or a shared services body centralizes information technology, payroll and accounts payable, positions that currently do this work in school divisions will be lost.

CUPE members have lived through the McNeil government's centralization of our healthcare system. Such restructuring created massive disruption and chaos to the system. We fear the same disruption and chaos in education.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, CUPE urges you to protect the democratic governance structure of elected school boards in our public education system and ensure communities maintain their voice and power.

Thank you for your time, I will take any questions.