

Law Amendments by Nancie de la Chevotière (March 5th, 2018, 5 p.m.)

The government's decision to adopt the spirit of all 22 recommendations from Dr. Avis Glaze's report "Raising the Bar" is troubling not only because of her clear affiliation with the Liberal party; but also, because her findings are based mainly on research from Ontario, meetings with fewer than 500 people and 1500 surveys, all completed in less than three months. When she worked on a similar report in Ontario it took her 18 months and she and her team held public sessions. In addition, there are glaring mistakes in the report and she failed to consider important research completed in NS.

This flawed document in turn informed Bill 72, which I am here today to speak against. The key items the Liberals intend to legislate that I oppose as they will harm students are:

- The removal of administrators from the NSTU
- The elimination of elected school boards (with the exception of CSAP)
- Removal of language related to inclusion

While none of these stand to benefit students, their negative impact will be felt in every classroom in Nova Scotia.

In two provinces in Canada where administrators and teachers are not in the same union, Ontario and British Columbia, there are teacher shortages, high turnover, an US versus THEM mentality within schools which has led to significant increases in grievances, low teacher morale resulting in an almost permanent work to contract environment, and toxic working conditions which negatively impact every student's learning environment.. In Ontario student achievement has been on a downward slope. Why would Nova Scotia bring Ontario's mistakes into our education system? Nobody in the Liberal party including Minister Churchill has been able to effectively communicate how removing principals and vice-principals from the teacher's union will improve student achievement.

Currently, principals and vice-principals work with teachers in a collegial model that is standard in most Canadian provinces. Finland, considered a world-wide leader in education, also has administrators and teachers in the same union. It makes sense on many levels. They are leaders who support school staff as they educate students on curriculum and conduct in the school environment. A collegial model creates the best environment for student learning. Principals are lead teachers, not managers. Good schools work more like families than businesses. Co-operation and shared agendas are needed in order to best support students. If the government was so worried about conflict of interest if ever there was job action then they could simply put administrators in a separate bargaining unit within the union. This would allow them to continue to participate in the union on committees alongside teachers that address issues of equity, professional development and so on. It would also enable the collegial model to continue. It makes no sense to fix what isn't broken.

On a similar note, the current elected school boards are non-partisan and they hire school superintendents and keep them accountable. By removing them, it means the Liberals will be appointing all positions. This does nothing to help students. The loss of elected boards in favour of a single appointed provincial council also means reducing the number of representatives from the African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq communities from 14 elected members to 2 appointed

representatives. This is contrary to Dr. Glaze's acknowledgement of the need for strong representation for African Nova Scotian and Mi'kmaq students. Women represent 55 per cent of elected school board members and their voices would also be reduced or removed completely. In effect, removing elected school boards in Nova Scotia means minimizing female voices, African Nova Scotian voices, Mi'kmaq voices, and rural voices. Almost twenty years ago Ontario and BC made similar mistakes. More recently New Brunswick removed school boards only to bring them back a few years later. Student achievement is not improved by removing elected school boards. Their removal simply eliminates voice and accountability. Why would we do that?

Bill 72 also eliminates language from the Education Act about inclusion*. This is a great concern as countless educators have stated on record that inclusion in Nova Scotia must be better supported. That does not mean we want to return to the segregated system I grew up with in the 70s and 80s. The removal of this language is concerning especially since Dr. Glaze's report completely omitted any reference to students with disabilities.

A real scrutiny of governance and administration in education should have included an overview of the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, as well as, the central school board offices in each region which are much more costly than elected school boards. The fact that this did not happen suggests this legislation is less about streamlining services so the system is more efficient, and more about eliminating accountability by non-partisan entities.

Educators in this province have traditionally not been political. It took 122 years for the NSTU to have any job action unlike Ontario and BC where teacher strikes have become commonplace. Under the McNeil Liberal government, the NSTU has twice voted in favour of job action. Teachers in this province are tired of being disrespected by government. Interestingly, Dr. Glaze warned that governments that beat up on teachers do not get good results. We have been beaten up and we deserve better as do our students. In the next election, teachers will be very political.

Minister of Education Zach Churchill has been going around the province stating that "the status quo will not do" trying to convince people that Bill 72 is going to address governance and administration concerns that will lead to improved student performance, yet he has provided no proof.

While I agree that the status quo in education will not do. I believe Minister Churchill, who has zero experience in education, does not realize what the status quo is in education in Nova Scotia. The current status quo since the McNeil Liberals have governed is to legislate changes that remove accountability rather than speak to stakeholders to find out how best to support education. The status quo has been to ask teachers to do more with less and expect better results. The status quo has been to blame teachers for student achievement without considering mitigating factors like poverty, lack of resources, lack of funding for inclusion, mental health issues etc. The status quo has been to pay for partisan reports that support a corporate model of education that has failed worldwide. In this instance I agree the status quo will not do.

I strongly urge every MLA to vote against Bill 72. I particularly encourage Liberal MLAs to show our youth that in a true democracy one votes not with a party, but in the best interests of its constituents. If you can't clearly demonstrate how these changes help student achievement then do not support them.

*** Section 64 subsection 2**

A school board shall, in accordance with this Act an

D the regulations...d0 develop and implement education programs for students with special needs within regular instructional settings

With their peers in age, in accordance with the regulations and Ministers policies and guidelines