

Hello Members of the Law Amendments Committee.

My name is Pat Savage and to use the terminology of Bill 72 I am the designated manager of Island View High School, slated to open in September 2018.

I am here today to talk to you about the Glaze Report and Bill 72. I will talk about it from two points of view; as a citizen and as a principal.

First of all I want to speak as a citizen. One of the major criteria I judge a government by is the way they demonstrate their desire to strengthen the quality of our democracy. By that I mean, if a citizen wants to be involved in the running of their community does the government take steps to make this easier and meaningful?

No politician will explicitly speak against this so this commitment should be judged on a governments actions and not their rhetoric. The quality of our politics and democracy is not fixed; it strengthens and wanes under leadership. Every government has to ask itself are we strengthening or weakening the quality of democracy, the sense people have that they can be involved in the decision making of their community? What has this government done to strengthen or weaken this involvement by its citizens?

In the case of this government they have chosen "stream lining" over democracy and allowing people input into the educational decision making of our province. The proposed changes to implement the Glaze Report want to centralize power in the hands of the minister of education and the employees of the EECD and eliminate all obstacles to a minister of education imposing his/her will on the school system. The most striking example of this is that this Government has chosen to eliminate all English Language Elected School Boards. Why?

Ms. Glaze suggests that the elected school boards have been dysfunctional. If this government has identified that as a problem what has this government done to bolster democratically elected boards? Show me the concrete steps taken! If this government cannot show me that, I question the value they place in democracy and local oversight of education.

So locally elected school boards are identified as needing help and the only solution is their elimination? Does that not seem a little drastic to you? In education we say if the only tool you have is a hammer-kids start to look like nails. I would suggest this minister and premier look at elected school boards and the NSTU like a box of 4 inch galvanized representatives getting in their way.

Difficulties should not lead straight to abolition. Last year the Law Amendments Committee by any reasonable standard was dysfunctional. Only 1 in 3 Nova Scotians who wanted to speak to their elected representatives was given the chance; is the government looking to eliminate the Law Amendments committee to "stream line" how bills become law? In the name of greater efficiency?

What do we lose when we eliminate elected school boards and local control of our schools?

We lose local input on, and interpretation of, Provincial policies; closest to where they are implemented. One of the principles of good governance is that the decision makers should have to live with the consequences of their decision. We will have decision makers in Halifax and implementers in Meat Cove and Digby.

We will lose the opportunity to have general citizens oversee educational specialists. We also lose educational specialists being forced to explain their decisions to the general public in non-edu-speak, jargon free language. Education specialists should have to explain to the public what they mean when they say attendance is a non-achievement factor and deadlines don't matter. If EECD specialists can't convince an average citizen of good will, well to paraphrase; Education is too important to leave just to the professional educators.

For our larger political culture we lose the level of governance with the highest representation of women, Mi'kmaq and African Nova Scotians. We lose a level of governance that can act as an entrance way into our province's politics. I am from Dartmouth. In the first election for school board members in Dartmouth in 1978 four people were elected. One went on to become Mayor of Dartmouth and later Premier of Nova Scotia. Another went on to become our education minister. Both from different parties. Both started off in elected office as school board members. That "on ramp" and political education will be lost and we will be the poorer for it.

What do we lose when we lose elected school boards?

As a citizen and Principal I can monitor my elected school board.

- Their meeting agendas are posted ahead of time.
- Their meetings are open to the public.
- Reports presented to the board are posted so I can read them.
- Correspondence is published.
- Minutes are kept and made available to the Public
- Their budget is open to public scrutiny.
- All of these things are available on a public website.

What does Bill 72 want to replace locally elected school boards with? PACE- The Provincial Advisory Council on Education.

- A 15 member board for the whole province- up to 12 members appointed by the minister.
- This is an advisory board. Advisory boards do not make decisions. They advise, they make suggestions to the minister.

While much remains unknown about this body, let's look for clues on how it will be run.

- Possibility of two terms at 2 years each (How long does it take to develop the capacity to provide real oversight of 15 Directors, 7 educational entities, and a budget of over a billion dollars? I would suggest this bill wants PACE to be incapable of real oversight. )
- Meetings of PACE must be presided over by a member of PACE chosen by the Minister-This council cannot even choose its own chair.
- The Minister may establish terms of reference for PACE.-The minister will decide how it runs and works.

So, as a citizen if I want to get involved in education, what dose PACE mean to me?

In short, I cannot determine a lot based on this legislation. I can tell you that:

- 79 elected positions have been replaced by 12 appointed positions.

- Advisory boards do not vote on budgets. Who will oversee the allocation of resources in the education budget? Who will question the Minister, Deputy Minister and Civil servant's decisions?

What I would like to know:

- Will PACE's meetings be open to the public? Like my school board.
- To what standard of communication will PACE be held? Will they publish agendas, meeting minutes, correspondence with the minister and others, and generate reports like my locally elected school board does?
- Will all of this communication be readily available on a maintained website or will citizens have to make expensive FOIPOP requests?

In short we will have traded locally elected school boards for, to quote an Irish folk song describing a diminished fighter an "armless, boneless, chickenless egg." The role of this powerless council is so undeveloped, that it does not even figure in Glaze's report. If you look at Page 30- PROPOSED GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE this council- PACE does not even exist. I can only imagine the government strategist when they read the report-"Jeez, guys we gotta throw em something. Yeah lets come up with an acronym"

In this flow chart, and God knows educational consultants and civil servants love nothing better than a good flow chart, the Regional Education Offices (formerly school boards) essentially become compliance officers for the Deputy Minister-"responsible for implementing provincial programs and policies". Then the arrow ominously points to Principals.

This leads me to looking at Act 72 from the point of view of a principal.

If this act passes into law what is the new role that Principals play? This not an abstract question. All over this province principals are trying to figure out what is this new job? Is this the job I signed up for? By when do I have to decide if I want to do it?

What is clear is that Principals are now managers- this is the terminology used to describe us in bill 72. The terminology is so upsetting to those of us who see our primary goal as educators that I am going to start calling myself the manager and the teachers as the "not the managers" to communicate the essence of the change, the weakened understanding of educational roles.

In Nova Scotia one of the most exciting recent developments for educational leaders is the Nova Scotia Instructional Leadership Academy administered by the Nova Scotia Educational Leadership Consortium and the certificate it offers in Educational Leadership. It is now accepting applications for its eighth cohort and 300 school based administrators have finished or are currently enrolled its program. Fundamental to this program is the idea of principal as instructional leader and coach. That can only happen when a principal has a coaching relationship with a teacher and cannot happen with a principal as boss or manager. At that point teacher evaluation is going on which is an entirely different dynamic, and less likely to lead to instructional change. Yes, I know that may be complicated for the Department's flow chart, but in reality it works.

It seems a shame that a homegrown success story in Nova Scotia education is about to have the rug pulled out from underneath it with the change in status from principal as head teacher to manager. I wonder why this government can only appreciate models that are lifted holus bolus from elsewhere and cannot appreciate successful, collegial, locally developed approaches.

What is clear in Bill 72 is that principals are not afforded the same protections as we had as NSTU members. We are not allowed to form a union- we are not considered employees under the Trade Union Act. However the government has kindly started the Public School Administrators Association for us and affiliated it with the NSTU in an arrangement that makes explaining the Holy Trinity to my children, easy by comparison. I will need a theologian and a labor lawyer to explain to me who negotiates for me, who defends my interests in regards to benefits, who I go to if I have a disagreement with my employer.

And let me stress that last point. The whole purpose of this bill has been to "streamline" the education system so the minister can implement change- whatever that may be.

My employer is no longer a school board, it is the minister. I have been removed from a union that the minister saw as getting in the way and am now represented by a body set up by him. If policies are being generated in Halifax, and there is no local elected representation, then my job as Principal is to carry that local view back to the minister. That seems to me as increasing the possibility for conflict, just as I lose the security the NSTU affords. That does not strike me as a coincidence, the government calls it-streamlining the system, and the stream is meant to carry away dissent and different views.

As principals will there be opportunities for consultation?

In education we say the greatest predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour. Let's look at this minister's record of consultation. The Glaze Report is presented to the government, the next day it announces that all recommendations will be accepted. No consultation outside of government.

The minister decides to go around the province and consult with people concerned about education. These meetings are by invitation only. Who is invited? Why? Who do they speak for? I can't tell you. I know a principal who hosted such a meeting at their school, but was not invited to participate. This government likes to consult in private, with people it invites, with no public record of what was said. What chance does a non-unionized principal have to bring about change when this is the pattern of consultation?

I do not raise this issue to elicit sympathy for school based administrators, rather so you understand what those of us trying to decide if we can work in these conditions are considering and our fear for the culture we see evolving under this system.

Finally, we do not have a lot of time to make up our minds should we remain as Principals under this new "streamlined" system. I think most of us accept that the government will not be able to provide clear answers to our questions if it sticks to its present timetable. We will be making significant personal and professional decisions based on inadequate information. These rushed decisions will have impacts for the whole education system.

The saddest part of this is the destructive cycle we find ourselves in; created by this course of action. Teachers had to threaten an illegal strike to get our elected representatives to meet with us. Principals

and V.P.s have to make rapid, poorly informed decisions so a government can meet an arbitrary timeline. And all of this negative swirl as we await a report on Inclusive Education that affects the most vulnerable in our education system -which should demand all of our best.

I beg of this government to slow down and carefully consider the consequences of this act. I beg of this government to weigh what will be lost if it forces this act rapidly into law. I beg of this government to consult on the Inclusion Report before it makes final decisions on its implementation, not after the fact. Otherwise I fear this destructive cycle will continue in Education and we will all be the worse for it.