

The Honourable members of the Law Amendments Committee, and
MLA's.

Dear Committee,

I am writing to you as a parent, and as a teacher, to try to persuade you to not vote to implement the Bill. I have two children in the public school system, and have volunteered for their school for the last 5 years. I have also been working in SSRSB, schools for the last 15 years. I have been a substitute teacher for 13 years and the last two and a half I have had term positions in two different High Needs classrooms at my local High School.

I have watched my son through his school years struggle with the presence of different and at times difficult students his class. There are many days I have had to argue with and persuaded my son to go to school, because he did not want to go back to the classroom where he had no fun. I remember the year that my son got bored of telling me they were evacuated from their classroom again because of other students, because it was just expected it would happen on an almost weekly basis. I talk to his speech therapist when she is at the high school and finally in grade 2, 3 and 4, she was able to squeeze him in with another group of students with like speech problems. I am very thankful. I am thankful because his speech is not just stopping him from being understood but affecting his ability to spell.

You see, my children's school used to have extra rooms, but when my son entered Primary, his school and another local school merged. There was room in the school for this merge. But it became clear as the year went on there would be extra demands on the school. I volunteered on the H&S, that would have to be more money fundraised for iPads and other classroom materials not provided by the Department of Education. Their school is one of the few rural schools with a growing student population. Each year, the school grew by ½ a class. That meant split classes and classes that were bigger than the cap every year, not to mention the growing diversity of the children coming to school. Last year the library was dismantled to put more books in the classroom and the Library was made into a commons room that still has no furniture. But that is expected in today's school system.

I am however upset that my daughter's and son's education was changed and will be ever affected by your governments quick and unconsidered decision to add two Pre-Primary classrooms. The Principle soon to be Manager, insisted there was no room for two Pre-Primaries class. This meant that they lost their art room, which was also use for pull out sections for students that needed a little extra help or running record keeping. My son has also lost his french classroom. That means that the french teacher has to move from classroom to classroom. Being a teacher myself I understand what you can do to a classroom to make learning fun and easier. You see all the words and picture we put up in our classrooms are best practice for helping all students and struggling learners learn. You have taken this away from my son and daughter because the teacher can't put up all this before every lesson as he enters the room or be able to afford to put them up in every classroom. You have also strangled the

school in its ability to grow. This will mean next year their will be even more classes over the cap, because there is no more classrooms. I know my kids school is not the only school affected this way.

To and injury to insult the Pre-Primary class that has taken resources away from the teachers, the teachers can't even use the program. The program starts 50 minutes after teacher have to be there if they have no early morning meetings. Then the teacher have to stay 50 minutes after the program finishes. The local Family center before and after school program is already full and can't let any more families in. There is no other daycare within walking distance, and Pre-Primary has no bussing. If that was not a hard hit the licensed daycare that many of the teachers used is shutting down because it has lost too many kids with the new free program. So the teacher are forced to send their children to at home daycare. Is was the Liberal government's mandate to get more children into licensed daycare and the opposite is happening.

I mentioned that I am a teacher myself and for the last three years I have taught up at the local High School. Four years ago the school changed from a grade 10-12 school to a 9-12 school. When this happened, we were to get two extra classrooms built out of the storage rooms in the back of the school, the rooms were built to be classroom when the school would need them in the future. At around the same time the school was chosen to be a new Skill Trades School. This meant two classrooms being made into a workshop. This has done a lot for some of the population and the grade 9 being up in the high school has worked. But the student population is growing and the school is getting too small, and the two rooms off the back to the school are still storage rooms.

Every year at around May the school braces for the bad news of how many teaching positions will be lost. The school population keeps growing, as well as the students that are have DA's or behavior problems. The number of grade nines that came into the school increased this year and the amount of students that graduated went down. So like the year before that, and the year before that, the school has to do more with less. So that means there are less courses that the school can offer so there are less classes that interest students that want to got to university or community college. This students then have to take courses they didn't want to be in, so they don't put an effort in and end up back at school the next year.

I work in one of the Learning Centers in the school. Every year we have to fight for the TA we have. We try to pair up our students so that our resources can stretch further, but the students interest and abilities are so vastly varied that it is difficult to do. Pairing up the student also means that there are more needs in some classroom and that is hard on the teachers. I have student that would love to being a class learning with their peers on an IPP but their is no TA to bring them to class and stay with them, so they will stay in the LC and I will have be teach them along with the other students. I could go on about the juggling act I have to put on and the decisions the school has to make that will affect the students future but that is for another day.

I understand too well that the education system is broken. I remember school back in the late 90's before inclusive education was introduced and students were held back. I would like to say I am a product of the system but I spent 10 years of my education in the private school for children with Learning Disabilities. When I was in grade 4 the public school decided my sister and I were unfit for public school and was going to send us to an institution. We were lucky because my parents were able to pay for private school. I did go back to High School in 94 for two years, hearing at meeting my last year in Public School that Inclusive Education was going to be the way. I left High School the spring the new Education Act was introduced. I remember being thankful that kids like me would have an easier time in public School. I then went on to University and became a Teacher. The school system now has systems put in place for student with LD and more but the resources are too limited and many of these students are not getting what they need and are just being pushed through to learn that High School is really hard when you don't have the skills from the previous grades. Now the new Education Act does not even mention inclusive education.

So I do understand that the system has to change. I understand that Nova Scotia has to live within its own means. I also understand that an undereducated population with all the problems that they leave with will not be good for Nova Scotia either. Taking a system that is so fragile as it is and changing it suddenly as you plan will not be good for education. You have already disappointed so many student and teacher with broken promises, I do not see how the system could go through it again with any better results.

I do not see how changing how principal or vice principal relate with teacher and students make the LC better this year. I have had to rely on my principle several time this year to make the right decisions to keep my students and me safe this year. I do not see how he, as a manager would be able to make these decisions. I do not see how splitting our relationship up will make it easy for me to admit that I don't have the answer or need more support.

Remember the students that I was talking about before that have no plans to go to University (24% of NS Students go to university) and do not plan to go to NSCC? This is because learning from books and about topics they have not interest they find very hard. These kids are taking extra years to graduate and more often than not they are given a pass, just so another teacher doesn't have to go through the treatment the last teacher had to go through. When all the teacher wants to do is help the student and all the student wants to do is get out of doing the work they really don't want to do. We have had to discontinue courses that appeal to our students locally. These students that I am talking about love Human Biology and Forestry. These courses had material that the student could relate to. Standardized tests and being able to choose what textbook I want to teach from will to help these students. As a side note I am yet to see were all this new money is going to come from, because there is none now.

This bring up another concern that I have, for the last 5 years I have been volunteering to fundraise from my children's Home and School committee, for lunches, school supplies and special functions. Plus a well deserved class trip for the grade 5, most grade five students have

been out to see the province they live in further than a walk three time, since primary. Know you say that the SAC will have more say on how funds will be spent on guest speaker, school supplies and special events. What I here for that is I will volunteer my time to make funds available to the SAC to decide how to spend it. I don't see H&S surviving why would I spend time fundraising if I had know say where the money went. The pool of money will dry up fast.

The Liberals say that what I have stated above will not happen. They will sit down with us and work thing out, you will consult with us. I have seen your consulting: it has have negative consequences for my children's education. My children have not seen improvement in their classrooms. They have old book from a library that was turn into a commons room that has no future now. They have had resources taken away from them. Only to look in to a will equipped Pre-Primary room that they will never experience and their teachers kids will never experience. They have to share specialists just to be seen and have little access to guidance when they have a problem they need help with.

As for my classroom, well it was another teacher's classroom but after years of more and more needs with less and less resources, that teacher could not take it anymore. So I have stepped in to make the impossible seem like it is possible. I patch holes with my money and bail as hard as I can. As I do this I can say that I have seen no classroom improvement at my level either. If your really want to make improvements and consult with teachers as you say, you will stop the legislation that will open up our last legislated contract and will slash our just-voted on regional contract and sit with us and listen. I am not saying that stop the Glaze report all together. I am asking you to sit down and make a plan on how this report and the Commission on Inclusive Education report would look like. Give the teacher of NS a reason to trust you again. We need to come up with a plan together that has evidence solutions for all the students of NS to make a strong education system.

Patricia Finlay

Parent and Teacher how has to teach because their is a sub shortage.

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