

news



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N O V A S C O T I A T E A C H E R S U N I O N

Date: February 12, 2018 **For Release:** Immediately **Contact:** Angela Murray

Op Ed: Public education system needs unity, not division and distraction

Last year, thousands of parents, teachers and students descended on our provincial legislature to speak out against declining classroom conditions in our schools.

Our education system has been torn apart due to neglect from this government. Classes are overcrowded, students with special needs can't get the support they deserve, and teachers are overworked and overtired.

Yet in spite of this, our students' performance ranks in the top five in Canada—a testament to the ability of teachers and principals to work together to overcome very low levels of per student funding.

Unfortunately, instead of dealing with the real issues facing students, the McNeil government has decided to implement the Glaze report—a plan that will only worsen the challenges in our system.

While Education Minister Zach Churchill has some slick talking points, the evidence suggests this plan will just create turmoil.

Instead of teachers and principals working together for students, Minister Churchill wants to divide them by banning administrators from the union. In the 1990s British Columbia and Ontario adopted a similar approach. It didn't end well. In BC grievances doubled each year for ten years after principals and teachers were divided. The increase forced each school and school district to employ a grievance manager or shop steward, a drain on crucial resources. In Ontario grievances rose 41 per cent in the Ontario Elementary Catholic Teachers' Association following this change. The result was an extra \$2.5 million in legal expenses that could have helped support students. It is for these reasons that almost every province in Canada has teachers and administrators in the same union. This is also the case in Finland, which is considered by many to be the gold standard for public education worldwide.

Zach Churchill also wants to create a "College of Educators", an extra level of bureaucracy paid for by teachers to deal with certification and discipline. Only one other province employs such a model, again Ontario. British Columbia dissolved its teachers college after an independent review proved it was dysfunctional. This body won't help students. It won't help teachers. It's a solution to a problem that does not exist.

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The McNeil government also wants to collapse all regional seniority lists into one provincial list. It claims this will make it easier for teachers to transfer around the province. However, no evaluation has been conducted to determine what the result will be on rural communities. One can't help but worry that this will lead to a further drain of resources in schools outside the HRM.

Finally the province is eliminating English school boards and consolidating them into one. Unlike current school boards, members won't be elected by the public, but appointed by the Minister. Pretty much the same restructuring took place in our health care system a little over three years ago, and we know how well that worked out.

If we are going to fix the problems in our education system we need to work together. The government's strategy of dividing teachers and parents, and distracting from the real issues facing students does not work. What we need is collaboration and cooperation within all levels of the education system. Not just more dictating from the top.

That's why I urge you in demanding better for students and their teachers. Let's toss away the Glaze report that will just bring more disorder to our schools. Let's start listening to each other to build a better education system together.

- Liette Doucet, NSTU president

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