



Submission

By  
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To the Law Amendments Committee  
On Bill No. 72

The Education Reform Act  
March 5, 2017

We completely oppose this legislation.

We agree that changes are needed but ramming it through this way without real consultation is wrong. We have great reservations with Bill 72 and we need to ask why are you excluding the voices that are fundamental to the advancement of the education system? The elimination of the English Boards will exclude many voices from many communities. We are worried that this is a plan to move to a more private education system in Nova Scotia.

We are concerned that Dr. Glaze owns a company called Edu-Quest International. The Minister left out that Dr. Avis Glaze is the Founder and CEO of Edu-Quest International Inc. For us, this is a red flag when these reports often begin a process that will see private entities make money and where private schools creep into the system. It seems odd that only 11 recommendations will be implemented at this point of the 22 by Dr. Glaze. She also said her report should be implemented in whole not gradually. That's reason enough to stop this now.

Then we have the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS). They are a lobby group for big business and often undermine the confidence in our public-sector institutions. AIMS director is a well-known Liberal supporter, as reported by media. In 2015, the Minister of Education, Karen Casey put forward an Action Plan on education that had included several recommendations on improving the system which came from the AIMS report of 2014 written by Paul Bennet.

Then let's consider the Liberal Government's buy-in on a resolution about abolishing elected school boards from the Liberal Party's 2016 AGM. Frankly, it's hard for us to accept this is actually about improvements for kids and classroom.

Education privatization will mean that kids from families who cannot afford private tuition end up in a public system that is underfunded. Under-spending the NS education budget last year makes one wonder if this is the start of the dismantling of the public education system. That's often when private enterprises swoop in to provide for-profit solutions. These entities make money off the public purse and we see private schools flourish.

We think that the Liberal MLAs need to ask some fundamental questions about those points and do their own research. A quick check on what's happening in the USA and in the UK will show some surprising facts.

MLAs need to ask themselves what's wrong with working with the unions representing workers in the schools? Bill 72 will do little to make classroom improvements. It will do little to build on the success of the students.

The loss of local voices has been devastating in Health Care and will be in education.

I'm shocked that the government is failing to recognize that the centralization of healthcare has created chaos and crisis in our public healthcare system.

Today every person in this province is living with the consequences of that poor decision. The 100,000 people without a doctor or the thousands who face a closed sign on their local hospital emergency room live with the devastating results. The thousands of seniors in our province waiting for a bed in a nursing home live every day suffering in a broken system. The centralized health authority that was supposed to give us huge advances in healthcare isn't working so let's step back, take out time and get this right.

How will the centralizing and abolishment of the English boards of the public education system produce better results for students? The decisions made today by the Liberal Government will greatly impact the lives of our students and their families. We are talking about hundreds of thousands of students that will be impacted by this legislation.

Do the Liberals not see the huge opportunity we have to work together to ensure we use this opportunity to get this right? Education has many moving parts and we owe it to all those kids and their families to make sure that their questions can be answered before we forge ahead.

Think of it this way - our teachers had to put forward a threat of illegal the job action to get the government to do two things:

1. Meet with government
2. Ask for pause and make necessary positive changes

People want to see government work together with their unions to ensure better decisions get made. People want to understand what the government is trying to achieve.

When the government stands up and says “we know best - don't worry about the details we'll figure that out later, well that's not good enough. Together with our kids and their families, we want changes that are well thought-out, and well-planned. That's why so many people feel disrespected - because their concerns are real, and no one will listen or answer questions.

Dr. Glaze's report has some good points but there is also a lot of information that's under dispute. What matters in the classroom is the teacher that's in front of the room, it's the bus driver that get your kids to school, it's a teaching assistant in the classroom, it's the janitor that keeps the school clean and tidy. We can understand that school boards may not be the answer, but this move leaves many unanswered questions and we don't understand the rush.

There's nothing in Bill 72 to reassure parents that things will get better for the kids in school with better supports for the classroom.

If you look at the Glaze Report recommendations, number five suggest making all schools wraparound facilities where students and families can access support to any government department, which is a good thing. Sadly, reform number five was not one that will be implemented by the government quickly.

Workers in our schools are teachers, cleaners, bus drivers, teaching assistants, groundskeepers and supervisors - all of these people are front-line education workers. They deserve to be respected and be consulted with.

I wonder how our Sisters and Brothers in the African Nova Scotia community feel? Do they feel consulted, when at the end of the day their voices as school board members as the boards will go from 7 or 8 to 1? Will the newly appointed representatives become a political arm for the government wishes?

School boards were able to make specific decisions on how to best serve those communities. When it comes to the hard choices for school closures, the school boards were responsible, so who now will make those decisions?

Women represent over 50% of the members of elected school boards and we need more women in politics not a government that diminishes those women from elected positions. Nova Scotia is losing 57 elected women from local decision-making.

We have repeatedly heard that there is no money, the province is broke. We know this change will be costly. Has it been costed out? Let's remember that the 39 P3 schools, that cost taxpayers upwards of \$1 Billion dollars and those were implemented by a Liberal government.

We agree the status quo may not be the answer. The answer is to bring the unions and the stakeholders to the table, and work out education reforms together. The Education Minister called this the single most important educational reform in Nova Scotia in our history and it needs to be rammed through in a week?

To just suddenly abolish an entire democratic governance structure weakens the voice of rural communities, racialized communities and women, and this will not help students.

Let me say that listening to the union members who are on the front line every day is the answer. We ask again that this government work with us, invite us to the table and let's get this right together.

Thank you.