



SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

S O U T H E A S T K O O T E N A Y

June 6th, 2018

Hon. Stephen McNeil
Office of the Premier,
P.O. Box 726
Halifax, NS
B3J 2T3

Dear Hon. Stephen McNeil:

RE: The Province of Nova Scotia's decision to abolish locally elected School Boards

On May 8th, 2017, School District 5 (SD5) Southeast Kootenay in BC unanimously carried the following motion at their public Board meeting:

M/S that the Board write a letter to the Premier of Nova Scotia in support of the Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA)'s letter submission regarding the Province of Nova Scotia's decision to abolish locally elected School Boards.

Our Board agrees with the entirety of the CSBA's letter to your government, dated February 25th, 2018. Rather than restate what the CSBA has already outlined as "incredibly disappointing", we wish to address aspects of your government's recent decision that are deeply disturbing, and rather shocking to our Board.

It is our understanding that the province of Nova Scotia announced the hire of Dr. Avis Glaze on October 11th, 2017, to review public education in Nova Scotia and provide government with a report of her findings. This final report, titled "Raise the Bar: A Coherent and Responsive Education Administrative System for Nova Scotia" was given a due date of December 31st, 2017.

- 1. Our Board is dismayed and disappointed by the tight timeframe given to Dr. Glaze to complete such an enormous and important task.**

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• Curtis Helgesen • Chris Johns • Doug McPhee • Patricia Whalen

Raise the Bar identified the main contributing factors leading to conflict within the public school system and the resulting disparate outcomes in student achievement across the province, as:

- a) Unclear or loosely defined roles, responsibilities, reporting chains and accountabilities,
- b) Redundancies/overlapping authorities, and
- c) The existing reporting structures within the administrative system.

The Report recommended the creation of “a coherent system with clear and unified leadership that streamlines administration and allows frontline educators to be empowered and responsible for what they are supposed to be doing...to reflect a unified, coordinated, province-wide focus on students”. The report outlines twenty-two (22) recommendations on how that might be achieved.

The first recommendation in *Raise the Bar* was to eliminate all seven (7) elected School Boards.

On January 24th, 2018 the “Raise the Bar” report was adopted by government and that same day, despite the magnitude of such a decision, government announced its intention to fire the seven (7) provincial public School Boards.

From hiring to firing, this process took a meager fifteen (15) weeks to complete.

2. Our Board is dismayed and disappointed by the rashness of any government that would adopt such a drastic measure as the abolishment of an entire level of democratically-elected government representatives –especially with deployment as swift as the Nova Scotia government’s –less than one month following the receipt of a report:

- a. That was researched, authored and submitted to government within a timeframe of less than three months,
- b. In which the stakeholder feedback/engagement upon which much of the report is based was conducted during one of the busiest times for schools, districts and trustees –the Christmas holiday season. (As Trustees, we are only too aware of how thinly stretched staff, administration and Trustees are at this time of year.), and
- c. Was prepared by a sole individual rather than co-authored by a(n) additional co-author(s).

Canada is ranked as one of the top 10 countries in the world for providing outstanding education to our students. Based on the OECD PISA results,

Canada ranks third (3rd) in reading, seventh (7th) in science, and tenth (10th) in math while the US rates twenty-fourth (24th) in reading, twenty-fifth (25th) in science and doesn't even make the top thirty (30) list in math.

If Canadian provinces were calculated into PISA tests results as countries, three of them –Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec— would place in the top five (5) ranking in the world for science.

3. Given these facts, our Board was dismayed and disappointed to read that:

- a. Only seventeen (17) out of the more than fifty (50) bodies of work that were cited in *Raise the Bar* were from Canadian sources, while twenty-nine (29) were from US sources.
- b. The recent, 2013 *School Boards Matter: Report of the Pan-Canadian Study of School District Governance Report*, authored by Dr. John Wiens, Dean Emeritus and Professor, Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba along with three (3) professors from Memorial University in St. Johns NL, in collaboration with the Canadian School Boards Association was not one of the sources cited in *Raise the Bar*.

Had your government taken the time to look more closely at Canada for ways in which to strengthen your public education system you would have found that across Canada there are Boards of Education that can –and do— run a “coherent system with clear and unified leadership that streamlines administration and allows frontline educators to be empowered and responsible for what they are supposed to be doing...to reflect a unified, coordinated, province-wide focus on students”.

Every day, Boards across Canada make informed, ethical decisions based on clearly articulated criteria that support their primary mandate of quality education. These decisions reflect community and regional values and priorities that are then dialogued at the policy table so that district resources can be deployed in the most effective manner to enable our frontline educators to respond to these priorities –just as the system was intended to do since Confederation over one hundred and fifty (150) years ago.

These are the very same outcomes your province wants for your own students, parents, staff and communities. Your government simply needs to do its due diligence and research these highly effective School Boards and Districts to ascertain their key attributes and determine how these results can be replicated in your own province.

4. Our Board is dismayed and disappointed that the government of Nova Scotia chose to employ the blunt instrument of legislation and remove democratically elected representatives –elected to advocate to government on behalf of their communities— in favour of a government appointed leadership to work on behalf of government.

All elected officials, including Trustees, MLAs/MPPs and MPs are responsible for the smooth operation of government and its institutions. To do this requires time, intent and process to restore systems, working relationships and public trust when they are broken.

Yet, instead of doing the hard work required to make democracy work as it was intended your government chose to “hit the easy button”, throwing an entire province of students, parents and staff into turmoil rather than do the difficult job to which the public elected you.

We sincerely hope that the government of Nova Scotia recognizes the rashness of its decision to abolish Boards of Education and that it takes the time necessary to study the many successful School Boards across Canada, to seriously review its options and make appropriate changes to its existing system so that democracy can once again work as it was intended –as a local voice for the people of your province.

Sincerely,



Frank Lento, Board Chair,
SD5

Cc*: Honourable Zach Churchill, Minister of Education, NS Liberal Party
Karla MacFarlane, Leader of the Opposition, NS Conservative Leader
Tim Halman, Education Critic, NS Conservative Party
Wayne Stetski, MP, Kootenay Columbia
John Horgan, Premier, BC New Democratic Party
Rob Fleming, Minister of Education
Andrew Weaver, Leader, Green Party
Mike De Jong, House Leader, Liberal Party
Tom Shypitka, MLA Kootenay East BC
Mary Polak and Dan Davies, Education Critics, BC Liberal Party
Floyd Martens, President, Canadian School Boards Association (CSBA)

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Valerie McLeod, Executive Director, CSBA
CSBA for distribution to member Associations
Gordon Swan, President, BCSTA
Mike Roberts, CEO, BCSTA
BCSTA for distribution to member Boards of Education
Glen Hansman, President BC Teachers' Federation
Jen Mezei, President, BCCPAC
Shelley Balfour & Chris Kilpinski, CFTA Co-Chairs
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