

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

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The following is an OP-ED from NSTU President Ryan Lutes

More work needed to reduce violence in schools

The severe and traumatic violence that impacted the Charles P. Allen Community in March still weighs heavily on the minds of Nova Scotians.

While we are fortunate that incidents of this severity are uncommon in our schools, the fact remains that the level of violence is increasing. There is a deep sense of trust that holds up our school system – that when parents send their children to school, and when school staff members go to work, that they will be safe. That didn't happen at CPA that day, and the unfortunate reality is that there are far too many members of our school community that experience some level of violence in their schools on a daily basis.

According to a recent survey completed by more than 2,500 Nova Scotia teachers and school specialists, 92% have witnessed violence in their schools, and 55% have either been a victim of, or threatened with violence at work. All told 87% of teachers surveyed believe the level of violence has increased in their schools over the past 5 years, and 90% say they are concerned about the current situation.

While some may wish to characterize these incidences as normal school yard behaviour, that is not the case. A recent CBC article reported that since 2018, police have responded to 424 incidents at Halifax area high schools resulting in 77 criminal charges. And make no mistake, serious violent incidents are happening in every corner of our province. According to the Province, there were 13,776 incidents of physical violence in Nova Scotia's public school system during the 2021-2022 school year.

All too often I receive phone calls and emails from teachers who are upset and concerned about a violent event they witnessed or experienced at school. Incidents between students are becoming more frequent, more severe and alarmingly more dangerous. Teachers and school staff members are often kicked, bit, hit, punched, threatened and verbally abused. Unfortunately, these incidents frequently go unaddressed or are characterized as just part of going to school. This is unacceptable.

It is for this reason, that the NSTU has continued to call for the government to increase school staffing in every region of the province, while conducting a comprehensive review of the state of public education in Nova Scotia and to create a provincial school violence prevention strategy.

This review needs to be system wide in its approach and consider a variety of factors including: the provincial code of conduct and its application, staffing levels, reporting tools for teachers, occupational health and safety, mental health supports, lack of reporting on violence, and supports for inclusion, just to name a few.

Our students are the future, and our teachers and schools are working well past their capacity to try to give kids a bright future – but they need more concrete supports to make that happen.

Our schools should be the safest places for our children. Our teachers, kids and all members of our school communities deserve immediate government action on this.

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