

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: Feb 16, 2023

For Release: Immediately

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Op-ed by Ryan Lutes: It's time to address Nova Scotia's teacher shortage

Our public school system is under unprecedented strain. A perfect storm of population growth and a pandemic has exacerbated a teaching shortage that had been building for nearly a decade. Similarly, the needs of students have become increasingly more complex, especially against the backdrop of rising inflation, which is having the greatest impact on already marginalized communities.

Every day I'm hearing from teachers who are telling me that their working conditions, and their students' learning conditions, are not sustainable. The struggle to meet the growing needs of students with less and less support is taking an enormous emotional toll on many teachers who have dedicated their entire professional lives to educating our children.

Too often teachers are being asked to supervise multiple classrooms due to a chronic shortage of qualified substitute teachers. As a result, teachers are finding it increasingly difficult to develop and prepare those rich learning experiences that leave an indelible impression on students. Those in our system who are tasked with ensuring the needs of our most vulnerable students are met, such as guidance counsellors and resource teachers, are now often being pulled away from their primary focus, which means a child in crisis may not get the support they need in timely manner. Of course, less one-on-one attention from teachers will have a negative impact on student success.

While I'm encouraged by many of the initiatives the province has launched in recent months to support student learning, new programs coming from government need to be accompanied with proper staffing and human resources, otherwise, those initiatives will not achieve the desired outcome.

Something the NSTU is recommending to improve the current situation is better pay for substitute teachers.

Nova Scotia's substitute teachers are amongst the lowest paid in Canada and as such many young teachers are choosing to pursue different career paths, especially in today's economy. The NSTU would like to see compensation for substitutes increased to become more competitive. Not only would this help fill many of the gaps the system is currently experiencing, but it would also encourage more young qualified teachers to pursue their careers in our province.

We all want our children to succeed. Let's not allow the current situation to grow worse. Let's take steps now to ensure that no student falls unnecessarily through the cracks which will only widen with inaction.

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