



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, November 3, 2022

OPEN LETTER TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Dear Minister Druhan:

We write to you today as representatives of two of Nova Scotia's leading organizations in the disability sector to express our deep concern around how students requiring learning support are being excluded from school during the current Nova Scotia Government Employee Union (NSGEU) strike.

Autism Nova Scotia and Inclusion Nova Scotia, as you are aware, work alongside, and support, students and families impacted by the current NSGEU strike. It is important for members of our communities to be aware of the rights afforded them through the Nova Scotia Education Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. **Any action taken by an elected official that suppresses those rights is unacceptable.**

Today, standing in solidarity with students with disabilities and their family members in Nova Scotia, we address you through this open letter.

Our message to you is clear; **there are no exceptions to the right to equal treatment in education.**

Equal access to education for students that need learning support is a protected human right. Requiring students with learning support needs to stay home during a strike differentiates them from their peers, significantly disadvantages them, and is discriminatory.

Ensuring learning is equitable rests with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and Regional Centres for Education. The lack of appropriate contingency planning is not a burden to be placed on our province's children. Denying access to education is discriminatory.

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that Regional Centres for Education have the resources needed to ensure equal access to education for all students. Educational assistants are a learning accommodation. Removing that accommodation is no



different than insisting a child with a physical disability remain home because of a limited access to mobility devices.

Collective agreements should not be a barrier to providing these accommodations. To do so is a violation of The Nova Scotia Education Act and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

Autism Nova Scotia and Inclusion Nova Scotia are calling on the Government of Nova Scotia to take immediate action to make sure students requiring support in the classroom have access to the necessary accommodations to keep them with their peers in school. Many of these students have already lost valuable education opportunities when classes were shifted to online learning during Covid-19. Remote learning was challenging for all students but had a greater impact on students with disabilities. We cannot justify taking additional learning time away from these students.

Our expectation is that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, along with the Regional Centres for Education work quickly and cooperatively to put in place contingency plans that will allow all students to return to school.

If you require input or cooperation from community organizations or individuals to help you prepare those contingency plans, we, along with other disability support organizations, are ready, willing and able to step-up and help.

Placing the educational needs of students requiring learning support at such a low priority is not only entirely unacceptable, it is absolutely discriminatory. We hope you agree.

Respectfully,

A blue ink signature of Cynthia Carroll, consisting of a stylized, cursive 'C' followed by a horizontal line.

Cynthia Carroll
Executive Director
Autism Nova Scotia

A black ink signature of Patricia Neves, written in a cursive style.

Patricia Neves
Executive Director
Inclusion Nova Scotia