



Statement from Autism Nova Scotia May 25, 2023

We would like to respond to the feedback we are receiving regarding information being issued to respite workers on Autism Nova Scotia's distribution list.

Since the beginning of this strike on May 10, Autism Nova Scotia's focus has been on the health, safety, and educational rights of autistic learners. Over the last two weeks we have heard from many families who have found themselves in an impossible situation, and heart wrenching stories of students who are desperate to return to their classrooms.

Our continued focus is on getting autistic learners back into the classroom. There is nothing that our students, our families, and our organization want more than for the hardworking, dedicated and highly-skilled EPAs and other essential support staff to return to the schools that rely on them so heavily. Since the strike began, Autism Nova Scotia has been urging the Nova Scotia Government, HRCE and CUPE to return to the negotiating table immediately to find a resolution.

While some autistic students, and students with disabilities, are able to continue to go to school with minimal disruption, students with complex support needs have not been provided with a contingency plan from HRCE to offer a minimum number of hours per week. With the continuation of the strike, and both the health and safety of many autistic and learners with disabilities on the line, an alternative solution must be found, until a permanent resolution is reached.

For over 20 years Autism Nova Scotia has been guided by a deeply rooted vision for a world where autism is understood, accepted and everyone is living their lives fully. This vision is certainly not being reflected in our province today with hundreds of students being excluded from their human right to access an education.

For over 20 years Autism Nova Scotia has supported and advocated for EPAs and TAS. We have amplified their voices and their needs through the various reports we have submitted to government, and through our consultations with the Commission on Inclusive Education. This commitment to support and advocacy will not change.

For over 20 years, Autism Nova Scotia has partnered with government to develop policy that had a direct and positive impact on making our province more inclusive for autistic people across the lifespan. This commitment to partnership will not change.

Our job has always been, and will continue to be, to fight for the over 32,000 autistic Nova Scotians and their families.

Today that fight is against the gross injustice of selectively denying students access to enter their classrooms based on their ability. It is crucial to prioritize, protect and maintain the integrity of students' right to education as an independent non-negotiable principle, separate from any disputes or negotiations. Our commitment to this fight will not change.

Preserving this right should be a shared goal, ensuring that all students have uninterrupted access to education. We cannot allow autistic and students with disabilities to continue to be caught in the middle, while being left out.

Our students deserve better.