



We're Committed to Doing Better

May 26, 2023

This statement is being issued in response to the email Autism Nova Scotia sent through our Respite Database earlier this week. Autism Nova Scotia wishes to acknowledge the hurt and confusion this email has caused Education Program Assistants (EPAs) and school support workers, a group that we deeply care about, and have a long-standing relationship with over the last 20 years. To these EPAs, support workers, and anyone else who was hurt by our email, we sincerely apologize.

It's important to Autism Nova Scotia, and the families we serve, that we make clear our support of EPAs and school support workers. These dedicated and highly-skilled workers are integral to the success of an inclusive education system. We support their right to strike and we support their calls to government to return to the negotiation table to find a resolution. We want to be clear that you cannot replace the skills or talent of our EPAs and support workers, and the longer this strike goes on, the bigger the risk of losing this talent from our system permanently.

The email that we sent through our Respite Database was motivated by the heartbreaking stories of students with complex needs and their families who have reached a dangerous breaking point. This specific group currently have no solutions or options for support while this strike continues. Our misguided goal in sending the email was to ensure a minimum level of training and background for the inevitable hiring of temporary school support workers. Although it was never our intention to undermine the labor dispute or importance of getting striking support workers back into schools, we acknowledge that sending the email did exactly that.

For our organization, there are no "sides", there is only the autistic students and learners with disabilities who are caught in the middle of this profoundly difficult situation. To this point, Autism Nova Scotia sent a letter yesterday to the Department of Labour, Skills and Immigration, Halifax Regional Centre of Education, and CUPE Local 5047 requesting the opportunity to meet with all parties in one room to share the stories we are hearing from families in crisis, and their need for immediate, acute support.

We are hopeful this invitation will be accepted, and more importantly, that a resolution will be found between parties to end this strike and give back excluded students their human right to be in the classroom where they belong.

Again, we wish to express our sincere apology for the hurt inflicted by our original email and statement. We are committed to doing better in the future.