

RESPONSE to BILL 13-an ACT to AMEND the EDUCATION ACT- LAW AMENDMENTS COMMITTEE

The Amendment speaks to reducing the minimum number of School Board seats on a School Board. It recommends reducing the minimum number of seats from 8 to 5. It does not speak to any change in the maximum number of seats on a Board.

I would submit that fewer people to represent the communities may provide less flexibility to a School Board. In today's world of School Board Governance, it is imperative that Board Members work closely with their staff, setting goals and formulating and setting policy. In so doing, it is very valuable to have diverse views and representation of the various geographic areas of a Board. It is very important that the recommendation for a number of School Board seats come from elected Board members, who have had the experience, and who know the time that is required to do the job. It is important to note that the recommendation for the significant reduction of seats on the South Shore Regional School Board, has come from a 1-person, appointed Board, who has not experienced elected representation from communities being represented.

At any given time, it is desirable to have a good mix of both experienced and new Board Members. Having been *given up-to-date Professional Development, the new members should gain valuable team experience, and will hopefully become confident in their ability to make difficult decisions.* The most important factor is that there are good, capable folks running for elected office, some of whom have the time and commitment to represent the Board at the provincial level, as well as at the local Board level. It is also valuable to have a good representation of people, a mix of parents, business people, and anyone else who has a serious interest in furthering education in our province. If numbers are substantially reduced, as has been suggested, I am not confident that a School Board would have the capacity to do its job well.

To have experienced the way that School Boards across this province have worked together over the years, and in most cases have also worked hand in hand with the Department of Education, on curriculum initiatives, has been a very positive exercise for me to see first-hand.

We hope that some provincial School Board Members will also wish to assist with promoting the cause of education with our other Atlantic Provinces, and at the National level with the Canadian School Boards Association. I have had the opportunity to do that, and hopefully, have been able to assist our own Board in various ways. All of this does take time, and it is certainly not for remuneration! Should all of these things be simply thrown out, just for the sake of possibly "being able to manage a much smaller Board?" After all, I believe we need an "engaged" Board, who will be empowered to provide leadership in education.

It happens that I was first elected in 1991, when Nova Scotia, for the first time was able to have fully elected School Boards. Prior to that, there had been one-third elected, one-third municipally appointed, and one-third politically appointed members to make up a School Board. Since that time, until the fall of 2012, I had experienced several municipal elections, at first, three-year terms, and more recently, four-year terms. The scope of the work of School Board Members seems to have become more complex in that time. Boards are much larger, more curriculum development is done at the local Board level, the expectation to have very qualified staff is far greater, and the ability to operate within the confines of inadequate funding is more challenging than ever. Effective evaluation and support of that staff is a much greater emphasis. The additional responsibilities of compliance with provincial regulations such as fire, environmental, occupational, health and safety, have broadened those responsibilities as well.

I cannot emphasize enough the need for high level, ongoing Professional Development for School Board Members. No matter how well intentioned the members are, one rarely realizes the scope of responsibility until the work has begun. For many years the South Shore Regional School Board has held all meetings in the

evenings to better accommodate working schedules. Even then, with the challenges of travel, serious challenges of the economy, illnesses, there are sometimes problems in the ability of Board Members to always be able to attend meetings. There have not usually been problems with having a quorum for meetings, but the point I wish to make, is that a Board of too few numbers would make it increasingly difficult to have people to serve on the usual committees, let alone, to cooperate at the provincial level.

When in 1996, School Boards in our province, were amalgamated from 23 to 7 (later 8), it had been the expectation of our Department of Education, and of Boards, that Boards would work closely together on shared issues such as Curriculum, Cost-saving Initiatives, and Professional Development opportunities, to name a few. Through the shared vision of Boards, through our provincial association, Nova Scotia Schools Boards Association, that has happened. They always are looking for ways to collectively represent the students of Nova Scotia, and to advance the cause of education. That link of the Board with their provincial association is vitally important, given the objective and advantages of working together.

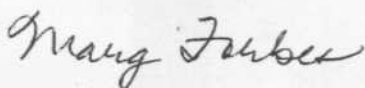
School Boards across this province try very hard to "keep the public" in public education. It should be an objective of any School Board to keep its public well informed about its vision for education, and of the need for the public's support in that effort. The communication between the School Board, School Advisory Councils and Home and Schools is vitally important in getting information to the public.

School Board Members take very seriously their roles and responsibilities. It may surprise you to know how many hours per week are required to manage representation at meetings and also the preparation time that is necessary in order to do the job properly. I would caution that too few School Board Members on a Board would severely limit the ability of the Board to function well.

In closing, my main point that I wish to emphasize is that you should have enough views around any Board table to represent the views of your area as well as possible. Usually, more ideas can be of benefit to everyone, providing that all views are respected. You also must have the capacity for the School Board to do its job. The most important thing is to encourage good folks to run for election.

Robert Parker, a former, very experienced School Board Member, and now Municipal Councillor, has had an interesting and, in my view, excellent opinion piece published in the February 29 Chronicle Herald, entitled, Local Governance in NS: "Smaller May Not be Better". I encourage that it be read.

Respectfully submitted,



Marg Forbes

Former School Board Member for SSRSB

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