

Dear Law Amendments Committee:

Please accept this as my written submission to Bill 72; Education Reform Bill.

There is an African Proverb which states: ***"If you want to go fast go alone. If you want to go slow go together."***

I stand before you today as the elected African Nova Scotian representative for the Halifax Regional School Board, an educator for the past 24 years, but most importantly a parent of a daughter in grade 10 an uncle of numerous nieces and nephews in the public system and a citizen who is concerned about the education of our students. After much reflection, conversation with others and listening to many make comments about the report commissioned by Dr. Avis Glaze, I am more and more confused and worried as to what will happen to the non-partisan transparent voice of the African Nova Scotian community. ***"What does the future hold for the African Nova Scotian learners in this province who are already marginalized, disenfranchised and disengaged?"*** Taking away the elected voice of the community is going to further marginalize, disenfranchise and disengage the African Nova Scotian community and learner."

I have heard the Minister of Education and the Minister of African Nova Scotian Affairs make mention of the new positions of Executive Director for the African Nova Scotian and Indigenous communities. These are going to be positions within the Department of Education – more bureaucracy is not what we need. We need people at the grass roots level who are there for the learners and will take the concerns to the table. ***Democracy not bureaucracy.***

In December 1994, the Black Learners Advisory Committee tabled the ***BLAC Report on Education Redressing Inequity – Empowering Black Learners.*** I had the awesome privilege to work for BLAC as a Regional Educator during the compilation of this report. Individual interviews and kitchen table focus groups were held in every African Nova Scotian community across this province with African Nova Scotian learners, parents and guardians. The results were not surprising but frightening. This report is coming up to its 24th year and there are still recommendations that are not implemented that would be of great benefit to the African Nova Scotian learner and community. It took the Minister of Education 24 hours to accept in spirit all of the recommendations contained within the Glaze report and acted upon them in haste.

We have heard the government say that the savings from eliminating the elected English speaking Board members will save money that will be invested back into the classroom. I have not heard of what these savings will be nor have I heard how much implementing these recommendations will cost taxpayers.

There are recommendations within the report that are good for students like:

- ✓ Make all schools wrap around facilities where students and families can properly access supports from mental health professionals, health care providers, justice, family services etc.,
- ✓ Establish a dedicated unit in the department in consultation with the Office of immigration, for emerging immigrant communities in schools, with supports for students, teachers and parents,

- ✓ Develop target education strategies for specific challenges in the system (French language and French Immersion, Rural education, students living in poverty, children in care),
- ✓ Put a new funding formula in place; ensuring flexibility for grassroots, bottom-up innovation.

These are the recommendations that will benefit students the most. Taking away the non-partisan, transparent voice of the community, taking Principals and Vice-Principals out of the teachers Union and creating a Provincial College of Educators, will not have any direct benefit to the learner.

No where in Dr. Glazes report does she reference the BLAC Report on Education the Enid Lee Report or any other report that speaks to the marginalization, disenfranchisement and disengagement of the African Nova Scotian nor the Ingenious communities or any other specific community for that matter. She neglected to meet with the Black Educators Association, she met with the Council on African Canadian Education – the Ministers Advisory Council for 15 minutes, the African Nova Scotia School Board Caucus nor the Mi'kmaq community. A total disregard for the communities she references in the report that require services to get on par with other learners.

Government will never have to hastily legislate changes that are good for the learner without consulting with educational stakeholders.

Judge Castor Williams, Chair of the BLAC in presenting the report to the then Minister of Education Honourable John MacEachern, states ***“Redressing inequalities and empowering Black Learners requires the commitment and positive involvement of parents, community, government, the education system and the learners themselves.”*** This Minister Churchill, all we are asking is for your government to slow down the pace and involve the parents, community, other governmental departments, the educational system and more importantly the learners.

Are these changes in the best interest of the learner? No. Are we making progress or losing ground when it comes to the issues of the African Nova Scotian learner?

Archy Beals

March 5th, 2018