

Back to school tougher after NDP budget cuts

Many of us sent our children off to school last week, hoping against hope that the \$65 million the provincial government has cut from the education budget won't impact their learning.

But those of us with kids in the system already see the difference. We know their classes will be bigger – in some cases, above 40 -- and we know this matters.

Many years ago, one of my children found herself in a large primary class (of over 30) that had been cut to half-days. Classes were noisy -- despite a stellar teacher -- and the school day was short. I wasn't surprised when our daughter left primary unable to read. We made sure she received extra help outside school, because we knew reading was a skill necessary to her success. But not all families have the ability to pay for that extra help, or the ability to deliver it themselves.

The NDP government says they have made the cuts because there are fewer students in the system. But this convenient excuse ignores the reality of school budgets. If there are 25 students on the bus instead of 30, you still have to run the bus. You still have to heat the school in the winter. You still have to teach all the grades.

And even as the Dexter government gutted funding for classroom resources, removed more than 700 teachers from our schools and eliminated hundreds of support positions, within the Education Department itself, spending on administration within the Department of Education is actually up 30 per cent. The budget for corporate services is up by \$1.8 million dollars.

Are these the priorities Nova Scotians expect from their government? Shouldn't that money be in the classroom?

So what would a Liberal government do differently? First, we'd re-invest that \$65 million in education. We need to rethink how our education system is working and we are committed to this process. While public education may be just another budget line or expense for the NDP government, it's so much more for Liberals. We understand that a strong public education system is good for our children, our economy, and our province's future.

That experience many years ago with my daughter taught me that our children only go this way once. The damage a poor educational experience can inflict on a child can have a lifetime of impact. We can't toss out programs like Reading Recovery without having their replacement ready. We can't shrug our shoulders when one cohort doesn't undergo any standardized testing in high school. We can't just cross our fingers and hope for the best.

These are our children, and our province's future, and they deserve better.

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