



105B Walker Street, Truro, NS, B2N 4B1

April 29, 2022

The Honourable Becky Druhan
Department of Education and Early Childhood Development
4th Floor, Brunswick Place
2021 Brunswick Street
P.O. Box 578
Halifax, Nova Scotia
B3J 2S9

RE: Education issues impacting workforce

Dear Minister Becky Druhan,

The Truro and Colchester Chamber of Commerce has been the voice of business in Truro and Colchester since 1891. Serving a membership of over 460 businesses and organizations, the Chamber advocates on issues that impact local business.

We are writing today, to raise a concern expressed to us by our membership, over the frequency of notices to parents, of late and/or unavailable buses to deliver children to schools during this academic year. We recognize, these are operational challenges that the Chignecto Central Regional Center for Education (CCRC) is attempting to navigate through.

However, we would like to bring to your attention that these delays or cancellations place enormous stress on parents and burden employers who must accommodate employee's needs to source alternate transportation, which in many cases results in staff leaving work early, arriving late or missing shifts completely. The distraction and lost productivity impacts a business's competitive position as well as a community's economic health.

Policy positions of past and current governments that have forced the consolidation and centralization of schools has resulted in the reliance of buses while the expansion of the pre-primary has placed further demands on a fragile system.

With the end of the school year on the horizon, we are bringing this issue to your attention in hopes you will work to address it. We would like to be informed of what measures the Department, and management of the bus service, plan to employ to ensure that the resources are available in September and into the future to prevent the repeat of the current state of service. We



would also like to understand if there is a correlation between student absenteeism and late or cancelled bus services.

As the voice of business in this region, our organization is deeply concerned about the preparation of the future workforce and the role our education system plays in this regard. Statistically, Nova Scotia has the second lowest rate of productivity in the entire country. This must be improved to be a more economically competitive province.

Ian Munro, Chief Economist of the Halifax Partnership, recently provided a presentation to our membership which included startling data about our local children's academic performance in three key subjects.

It is extremely concerning for our membership to learn that Nova Scotia has increased public school spending while results have continued to decline. Spending more and getting less is not acceptable and cannot be allowed to continue.

Comparing Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores of students across Canada to Nova Scotia, we fall below the national average in reading, science and math. Math showed the greatest disparity of all.

Even more concerning, is the consideration of Grade 6 Student Performance at CCRCE measured for a five-year period from 2015 to 2020. Just 71 per cent of students are at or above expectations in reading, which has slowly declined in the period; 68 per cent are at or above expectations in mathematics, seeing only a three per cent improvement in five years; and a shockingly low 60 per cent, are at or above expectations in writing, representing a drop of 5 per cent over the period.

Our employers are already facing a critical need for employees. We need to ensure that our future workforce is well educated and prepared for the future. We are willing to work with the Department of Education in any possible way within our resources to support improvements in education.

Our Chamber has a track record for going above and beyond to support our schools, including fundraising to establish a welding lab at Cobequid Education Centre in Truro, as well as providing opportunities for the Career Exploration Program students to work with business leaders. We continue to provide annual \$1,000 scholarship to each of our three local high schools.

We invite you to reach out to our Chamber to further discuss these issues. We are willing to host a roundtable discussion with our members so you may hear their concerns. Contact Executive Director Sherry Martell via email at ed@tcchamber.ca or by phone 902-895-6328.



Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Matt Mossman".

Matthew Mossman

President

Truro & Colchester Chamber of Commerce

CC: Gary Adams, Regional Executive Director of Education, CCRCE
Larry Harrison, MLA Colchester Musquodoboit Valley
David Ritcey, MLA Truro-Bible Hill-Millbrook-Salmon River
Tom Taggart, MLA Colchester North