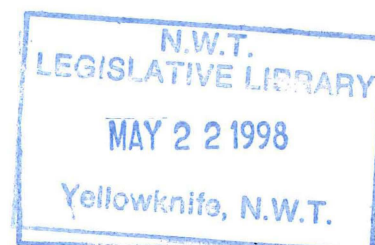




Sheyla Kolola
c/o Joamie School
P.O. Box 910
Iqaluit, N.W.T.
XOAOHO
May 14, 1998

Mr. Charles Dent
Minister of Education, Culture & Employment
Government of the Northwest Territories
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, N.W.T.
X1A 2L9



Dear Mr. Dent,

You may not remember me, since you meet so many people in your line of work. But I'm one of those "replaceable teachers" you spoke to & about during the NWTTA Annual General Meeting in April 1997. Isn't it interesting how people can be so casual about these things when it doesn't affect them directly but it affects so many educators and hundreds of children?

Yes, teachers can be physically replaced (so can MLAs for that matter), but you can't replace their experience and the rapport they build with students and the community. I remember when I was having a difficult time early in grade three and Chuck Tolley, the principal at the time, gave me his patience and guidance which was exactly what I needed for that period of time.

I couldn't have finished high school if it weren't for people like Marilyn Neily, Richard Smith, Ken Watchorn and Mr. Hamilton. They encouraged me to continue my work and graduate. A lot of them fed me, my mother, brother and sister when we didn't have anything to eat. And when we were going through this rough time, they still believed in me to finish.

No, Mr. Dent, you can't replace their support, their care, their hearts. These people have been up here for years. They've got great experience and such commitment. But you're so far from the school, you can't understand the kind of affect committed teachers have on their students. I became a teacher because of people like these.

We're suppose to work as a team in education for the future of our children, but it's getting harder and harder to work with you and your beliefs. Come back down here and see the reality where it really is.

Iqaluit District Education Authority
Pat Thomas, NWTTA President
Ed Picco, MLA for Iqaluit
Bob Moody, Nunavut Deputy Minister of Education
Mark Cleveland, NWT Deputy Minister of Education
Hon. Samuel Gargan, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly

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Dear Mr. Dent,

I am a Program Support Teacher (PST) in the Baffin Region. I am part of a great team at an elementary school who are committed to giving the best possible education for the children who attend this elementary school.

With the creation of Nunavut and Iqaluit becoming the capital in less than a year, there has been a tremendous increase in enrolments this past school year. We're expecting more in the fall. I'm sure the Baffin Divisional Education Council has given you all this information already and you're interacting with them.

The point I want to make in this letter is for the children who need extra support. You know, the ones your Department wrote about in "**Educating All Our Children, Departmental Directive on Inclusive Schooling**" (1993). I'm sure you're very familiar with this document since it is in your Department. In it, and very clearly signed by the former Minister, it says on page 8:

"c. The Department of Education, Culture and Employment shall provide each Board with funding to assist implementation of inclusive schooling. To ensure a cost effective approach, consistency and accountability, the funding will be provided according to the school based funding formula."

AND

"This directive shall be reviewed by the Department of Education, Culture and Employment on an annual basis calculated from the date of issuance."

Have you reviewed this section since you took over the portfolio? Have you seen the dollars that are given to our Board for special needs children? Each year, the number of special needs children has been getting higher and higher but the budget for special needs has not increased along with it. With population growth and people being trained, early intervention is being encouraged so effective programming can be done for children identified as needing extra support. I thought, if there are more students who need extra support that would mean we need extra assistants in the schools, right? Have you lost me here?

Page 17 in the same document says,

"In the implementation of inclusive schooling, teachers need support to meet the broad range of needs of students in their classrooms. This support may take the form of appropriate teacher training and ongoing in-service in instructional and management strategies, consultant support or additional support personnel in the classroom." Very well said, sounds understandable, but maybe it should have ended in brackets like this: (very low pay, minimal benefits, Hurry! Very limited space available). It'd be more truthful, in my opinion.

Our Board is given X amount of dollars from your Department for "support personnel" and they add X amount of their budget to increase the number of Classroom Support Assistants (CSA). Then a CSA Allocation Committee allocates which school gets what number of CSAs for the year. This allocation committee looks over all the Individual Education Programs (IEP) (**page 21 of your Departments document**) which are submitted by Program Support Teachers (PST) like me, from each of the twenty-one schools in Baffin Island. Were you able to get a copy of how many were submitted? Here, I'll show you.

In the Baffin, 288 IEP's were submitted to the Board Office. **288!** This figure does not include the students who need modification or some other kind of extra support (ie: counselling, mental health, remedial help, etc). Children who are on IEPs need more assistance than the teacher could possibly give so CSAs are hired to help teachers implement the programs that were made with the school team and parent support, and thus, the children have more success.

All children who need extra support, one way or the other, deserve to have extra support from "additional support personnel" but take a very close look at the budget your Department has given to our Board. Your Department has forced the CSA Allocation Committee to prioritize children. Children who have been put on IEPs to help with their education are now being put on a priority list. Can you believe this is happening? We're talking about children, not parcels!

Priority 1 are children who can not be in school without assistance all the time. **Priority 2** students are ones that cannot be on a regular school program but need more assistance than their peers to function in school. This year the Baffin CSA Allocation Committee has only enough money to allocate to Priority 1 students. Forget the Priority 2s. Not only that, Priority 1 children (who need support ALL DAY) can only be given half day support! What are we supposed to do for the other half? With the little money your Department gives for special needs children, it has been stretched so far, it's about to snap. And it's not you who's going to get the short end, it's the children.

My school has 20 children on IEPs (including one in Kindergarten). 10 have been given Priority 1 status. Rightfully, I could see at least 8 of the other 10 Priority 2 children who should be considered as Priority 1. They could have more success and progress if only they can be given extra help from "additional support personnel".

Our school is very lucky to have such committed CSAs. They are the lowest paid educators with \$12-\$14 max./hour. Yet they can work with some of the toughest conditions. Mr. Dent, we are starting the school year in the fall with 4.75 CSAs. Some how we are going to have to split them up between 12 classes with 20 IEPs plus 40 other children who need some sort of extra support. How do you propose we do this? With such shortage of CSAs, how are these special children going to be able to go ahead in their education? We are trying the best we can with what little we've got and we've got good parental support but the stress level...oh, the stress level!

Officially, I am inviting you to come here and see if you can hack working alone with two wheelchair bound children for a couple of days. One needs physio, eye tracking exercises & sensory exploration while the other has seizures which range from 3-10/day, legally blind & needs exercises with 1:1 support, both need diaper changes 2-3 times per day. After you keep those two for a couple days, go down the hall to work with a 10 year-old, developmentally delay child, with his speech and language, math work & try to explain to him why he can only attend half days since there's no support available for the other half of the day. All he wants to do is stay in school and learn but he can only assume that he did something wrong. You explain the budget to him!

Once you've done that, go to the overcrowded primary class and work with the group of 7 children on IEPs. They're all in different stages but you have to be sure your program is individualized for each child plus your regular classroom program so be prepared to spend a lot of after hours to plan for their lessons.

How is your nervous system? You think you can react quickly and calmly to an older student who vents out his anger by throwing furniture and anything else that's nearby? He's on an IEP, but no support could be given to him because the Department didn't provide enough in our

budget for extra assistance so he has to make do sharing the teacher with 28 other children in the class, 5 of which are on IEPs.

That's just the tip of the iceberg, Mr. Dent. Unbelievable? That's reality. What's really unbelievable is the fact that money is being cut in education. Children of the Northwest Territories are OUR FUTURE! Yours, mine, and Nunavut, THEY ARE WORTH THE INVESTMENT! I truly believe we have some very bright children, who someday, will take over the Government and who knows, one of them could be appointed the Minister of Education.

Make the right decision now and put more money in the education budget, especially for the Special Needs Budget. Follow through on what your Department has written in the "Departmental Directive on Inclusive Schooling", don't just make it look like another one of those "great ideas" that sit on the shelf collecting dust.

Many children on IEPs have great potential to get back into the regular classroom program. But they have to be given the proper support and programming to succeed. Teachers, Program Support Teachers, Principals, Language Specialists, consultants, elders and parents can work together to make a good program for each individual child who needs that extra assistance. But the question is, is your Department willing to be part of the team? Are you willing to invest in our future?

I have faith in the children of the North. I think they can become great leaders and run our government to benefit everyone living in Nunavut. THEY ARE WORTH THE INVESTMENT! Mr. Dent, I plan to stay here in the North for the rest of my life. I'm going to retire and be buried here in the North. Out of curiosity, where are you going to retire? The children of today are going to be running the government of my society, my future. They are going to need the skills and knowledge to do the job right. It is worth supporting these children now, at a young age, instead of waiting until it's too late for some of them; the ones that fall between the cracks of the education system.

Mr. Dent, children cannot come knocking on your door and say, "Mr. Minister, I need some extra assistance, can you help me?". You can't ignore children because they don't have voting rights. We spend 7 1/2 hours a day, 180+ days a year with children, you don't. They deserve so much more than what your Department gives. How are we suppose to provide effective inclusive schooling programs when we don't have the resources? ALL children lose out one way or the other because of the lack of resources.

I may be one voice but I hope it's loud and clear, somebody needs to rock the boat. I'm tired of reading page after page of why the education budget can't be increased but lots of reasons why it has to be cut so do me a favour Mr. Dent, don't bother responding to my letter unless there is concrete evidence that your Department will help me deliver the proper support these children need. Otherwise, I don't want an excuse letter. We get enough of those in our mailboxes.

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Kiggaqtuijlujusi ikajugiakkanniqataulaurissit!

Sincerely,



Sheyla Kolola
PST Joamie School

c.c. Darlene Nuqingaq, Principal of Joamie School
Don Morrison, Supervisor of Schools, BDEC
Cathy McGregor, Director, Baffin Divisional Education Council
(CONTINUED)