

The voice of experience—Paul Wozney, President, Nova Scotia Teachers' Union

The Manitoba Government announced on Saturday, March 16, that Dr. Avis Glaze, an eminent education leader recognized for her work in more than 20 countries and 50 American states, would be the lead consultant to the Commission spearheading a comprehensive review of K-12 education. That Dr. Glaze is qualified and accomplished is clear. Still, there is cause for concern.

Dr. Glaze led the charge towards educational reform in Nova Scotia in *"Raise the Bar"*, a report she produced for that province's government in early 2018. The results of that effort have been far-reaching and detrimental to the province's public education system, according to the president of The Nova Scotia Teachers' Union (NTSU). Paul Wozney shared his thoughts with MTS on Monday, March 18.

On Dr. Glaze:

"She's done some phenomenal things around equity in education and in developing countries working to address school leadership concerns. She's made great contributions to innovation in education."

On Consultation (or the lack thereof):

"The Manitoba Teachers' Society needs to get in front and say if you want to consult with us you need to meet with front line teachers in a comprehensive, legitimate and trustworthy way. The MTS is not going to stand for sham consultation. We need to see Avis Glaze in real rooms with real parents and real teachers all across this province. You can't reform a school system based on consultation with 80 people."

On Predictability:

"If you look at what she's published in Nova Scotia, what she's published in Scotland and what she's published in other jurisdictions, you can predict with alarming certainty what's going to happen—getting rid of school boards, removing principals from the union, radical change to teacher accountability mechanisms, and after all that, no savings, no improvements in classrooms."

On Removing Principals and Vice Principals from the Union:

"In Dr. Glaze's opinion the administrators had to be separated from the union. In Nova Scotia, 900 administrators province-wide were forced out of the union, to an "association". What we did were able to negotiate was legislation that allows them to retain the seniority they accrue as administrators, so they have it if they decide to come back to the classroom. So operationally if you had 20 years of teaching experience before you became a principal, and you had five years as a principal, you'd have 25 years of seniority if you went back to the classroom. But they're not allowed to belong to a union ever again so long as this law remains in place."

"Contractually speaking, if you are a principal for any percentage of your duty, you are not a teacher union member while you are teaching. You are not protected by the teachers' union. So it's conceivable,

and I'm waiting for this, that some principal is going to be called onto the carpet because somebody doesn't like the way they teach half of the time, and they are going to lose their job as a principal on the basis of their work as a teacher. And they're not going to have any ability to grieve that like a teacher would."

On the Proposed Teachers' College:

"We had taken an illegal strike vote right on the heels of a legislated collective agreement—an imposed contract—so we took an illegal strike vote and threatened to walk out in the middle of a school year. The Teachers' College was on the table. Ultimately we went back and forth and the government backed away from it. One of the things we did was work with the government on teaching standards, the criteria used to measure teacher effectiveness in every school board in Nova Scotia. We brought in Anne Rodriguez, a consultant from Ontario with a lot of experience working with the college of teachers. So she's been very influential and collaborative, collecting feedback from our members, working with the government, so those standards are about to roll out. With that on the horizon I think the appetite for the college went away. We're on the cusp of a provincial framework that will serve as the foundation for consistent teacher evaluation across the province."

"Our government, and perhaps yours too, wants to be able to say we have consistent measures for performance across the province. That's a win for them and they'll have a multi-year roll out with the union as a partner."

"We have data from Ontario to talk about that there was a 40 percent uptick in grievances to the Ontario College of teachers which meant millions of dollars spent on litigation, grievances and arbitration that wasn't being spent in classrooms anymore. Do you want to spend money on lawyers or classrooms?"

"It's our view that working together, we can keep this money where it belongs, in our classrooms. An us vs. them approach is expensive and inefficient."

On Collective Bargaining:

"The government wanted to make collective bargaining easier on themselves by chopping off arms of the union, forcing people into smaller units that are less able to self-advocate or where the government could impose terms and conditions of employment as they see fit."

On Eliminating School Boards:

"The elimination of democratically elected school boards has had a detrimental effect on classrooms and communities. Your francophone school board will be fine. English language boards it's a different story. So anybody who's been elected is being paid to not do their job until the end of their elected term. And all of the decision making power is being handed to the former superintendent of the school board division, so where the former superintendent was answerable to an elected Board of Trustees, they are now answerable to the department. So you used to be able to push back at the department as a superintendent but now you can't. You are directly accountable to the minister of education. Now our superintendents are called regional executive directors."

“So for parents if I have a school governance issue, I used to be able to take that up with Trustees. Now that there’s no Trustees, I have to talk to the principal, or go right to the Minister of Education through a maze of bureaucracy.”

On How NSTU Responded:

“The Glaze report was tabled in January, 2018, and was adopted hook line and sinker by the government the next day. Then they announced their intention to pass it two-and-a-half or three weeks later. So we really only had three weeks of turnaround time to respond.”

“So we did regional meetings and town halls. There was initially a fair bit of support behind the government’s move, but the farther it went along the less willingness there was to do things the government’s way. People heard teachers in communities saying we’re concerned about what this means for students. How does this help our students thrive?”

“We only have about 50% of our members’ emails. But with what we did have, plus our social media connections with members allowed us to reach the vast majority.”

On Savings Achieved:

“Not a dime. They’re paying all these school boards all the salaries they always did. We had an organization called the NS School Boards Association. That organization was a key advocate on the parent side the way the union is on the teacher side. They would lobby the government. When they terminated school boards they said we’ll just fold that organization as well, not realizing that that body held the certificate for the pension and the insurance benefits for all school board employees that were teachers. So they laid off sixteen full-time staff and then had to pay them all severance. When they realized their mistake they said give your severance back and we’ll give you your job back. But some people had already spent the money. For those who came back, they quietly paid them people to sit there and do almost nothing for over a year, and then rebranded it as a new branch of the educational bureaucracy called the Common Services Bureau.

Avis Glaze is going to say, education needs more resources, teachers are working really hard, and they’re excellent people, and they need more support so, these savings cannot result in a decrease in overall spending. So when you save all this money it all has to be reinvested in education so there are more supports and more resources. It sounds good. But what they decided to do was set up committees at all the schools and give them all \$5000 plus a buck a student. In a high school with 1400 kids \$6500 gets you a few new sets of team uniforms. It’s not going to fix any systemic issues. It’s not going to hire you another teacher. It’s an attempt to say we value parents and local perspectives and we’re going to give you money to spend. But it’s not resulting in additional resources in the classroom.”

On Academic Outcomes:

“We’ve not seen any evidence that this process has moved the needle on academic success. This process hasn’t reduced class size, it hasn’t driven those ratios down so kids get more face time with their teachers or specialists trained to help them with their unique needs, so why are we doing this? If it’s going to be status quo on all the things we know tangibly make a difference to outcomes for students, why are we doing this? Why would we spin our wheels and make all these changes and not end up any

further ahead in terms of how much money we have available to support kids, especially those that are the most disadvantaged.”