

## **Resolution 5A**

### **PROVINCE UNDERTAKE ROYAL COMMISSION ON PUBLIC EDUCATION (PASSED)**

⇒ UNSM Board of Directors

**WHEREAS** public student enrolment went from 165,739 in 1991 to 128,250 in 2011, a decrease of 29 per cent; and

**WHEREAS** the number of teachers employed in the public school system went from 10,684 in 1991 to 10,109 in 2011, representing a small decrease of only 6 per cent; and

**WHEREAS** school board expenditures went from \$810 million in 2001 to \$1.2 billion in 2011, an increase of nearly 100 per cent; and

**WHEREAS** since 2001 approximately 35 new schools have been constructed while only 39 schools have ceased operating; and

**WHEREAS** in 2009-10 municipalities paid over \$187 million for mandatory public education costs representing 15 per cent of public education funding with no say in how local school boards spend that money; and

**WHEREAS** HRM provided annual supplementary education funding in the amount of \$19 million in 2010-11; and

**WHEREAS** effective April 1, 2012, the Province will no longer honour its commitment to the UNSM-Provincial MOU which limits municipal increases to education at CPI; and

**WHEREAS** over the last 57 years, only two major studies on public education have been undertaken by the Province—the Royal Commission on Public School Finance in Nova Scotia by Vincent Pottier in 1954, and the Report of the Commission on Public Education Finance by George Walker in 1981; and

**WHEREAS** the Pottier Report stated that “the sum required for an adequate teachers' salary scale must place a severe burden on both governments,” but “it should not be an oppressive burden, because if so, it will end in the collapse of our school system,” and

**WHEREAS** the same report, in referencing schools and equipment, indicated that the proposed system “requires a wise and carefully managed expenditure and nothing more,” and

**WHEREAS** on December 23, 2010, the Education Minister announced that the Province will hire respected educator Ben Levin to conduct a two-month review to provide advice to help the department and school boards improve the learning experience and outcomes for students; and

**WHEREAS** Levin's Report released on May 6, 2011 recommended school closures be considered where a number of underutilized schools sit in close geographic proximity and that the number of teaching assistants for students with learning disabilities or behavioural problems be reduced; and

**WHEREAS** unfortunately this study did not address issues of governance or funding models and will not include a review of the budget scenarios given to school boards this fiscal year; and

**WHEREAS** the public education system in Nova Scotia is in serious jeopardy if the status quo is maintained; and

**WHEREAS** given declining enrolments and escalating school board expenditures, the Province needs to give serious consideration to developing a strategy to address how the public education system will be funded in the future;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the UNSM write to the Minister of Education requesting that a Royal Commission on Public Education be undertaken immediately.

Forwarded to:  
*Minister of the Department of Education*

**RESPONSE:**

*Thank you for your letter of November 21, 2011, containing the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities' (UNSM) Resolution calling for a Royal Commission on Public Education in Nova Scotia.*

*I recognize that municipalities across this province, through the mandatory minimum contribution, are providing a very significant investment in our public school system and I understand the UNSM's concern about ever increasing public education expenditure while our student population continues to decline. That is why our government believes it is imperative that our considerable investment of approximately \$1.1 billion in education matches the needs and numbers of students. The system is putting resources where they are needed most, and that is on student learning.*

*The government has introduced a number of initiatives aimed at ensuring the system is spending our tax dollars in the most efficient manner possible. In*

*addition, my department is reviewing the funding formulae methodology to ensure we are allocating those resources to school boards in a transparent and equitable manner.*

*Nova Scotia has a strong public education system that is serving students well, but we must adapt to ensure the ongoing success of students in the face of a changing society. By addressing our fiscal challenges now and by focusing our resources on the classroom, we can and will make our children's future better. Our government is making those difficult decisions today that will protect the quality of our public school system now and for the future.*

*At this time my preference is to allow the changes being introduced across the public education system to take effect before we consider the need for another Royal Commission on Public Education.*

*The Honourable Ramona Jennex  
Minister  
December 13, 2011*