

“Support staff in schools across Nova Scotia are concerned that restructuring school boards will create unstable labour relations, much like what we’ve seen happen to our health care system,” says Nan McFadgen, president of CUPE Nova Scotia. “They feel this will also negatively impact quality of education for students.”

“Any restructuring will create massive disruption to our education system – not just for teachers, but also for education assistants, secretaries, bus drivers, custodians, mechanics, librarians, community outreach workers, as well as many other hard working and vital front line school board workers,” says McFadgen.

As the Nova Scotia education system is restructured, the “entire” sector is going to be struggling to figure out what this new education system and sector of work looks like.

“It should be noted that the government is silent on labour relations issues. With several of our locals currently engaged in collective bargaining, this restructuring creates significant uncertainty around what the workplace will look like for school board support staff in the future,” says Grant Dart, CUPE school board coordinator.

“Our collective agreements are with individual school boards. If those boards cease to exist, what does that mean?” asks Dart. “There are many questions that we have asked the government, but haven’t received answers to.”

“Our members have pension plans and benefits that are administered by the individual school boards. If those boards are not there, what happens to those benefits and pensions?” asks Dart.

“These questions go to the very livelihood of our members and their families. They deserve answers to calm their fears and uncertainty.”

“If the government had reached out to us or consulted in any way, we could have mitigated some of these problems to achieve their desired outcomes, as we have done on many occasions with employers,” says Dart. “Instead, we’re facing major upheaval.”

“As parents and as residents, we should all be concerned about what these wholesale changes to our education system will mean for our children,” says McFadgen. “The interests of children are best served with school boards that are democratically elected and accountable to their communities.”

CUPE Nova Scotia represents more than 4,000 support workers in eight school boards in jobs that include education assistants/teaching assistants; facility operators; secretaries; school bus drivers, mechanics; caretakers, custodians, building specialists, janitors, and maintenance workers; librarians and library assistants; cafeteria workers; community outreach workers; tradespersons; lunch ground supervisors; early childhood educators; and other school support positions.