

REALITY CHECK – RAISING THE BAR? A MODEST PROPOSAL

“When embarking on radical, systemic restructure, we expect policy makers to use the best information available to inform their decision making.” Thompson & Rutkowski

The NSTU sought external expertise to do an exploratory analysis of the Glaze Report, *Raise the Bar*. Dr. Greg Thompson, Associate Professor, Faculty of Research Ethics Advisor for Queensland University of Technology Australia and Dr. David Rutkowski, Associate Professor in Educational Policy and Education Inquiry at Indiana University USA provided us a research analysis of the Glaze Report, *Raising the bar? A modest proposal*. In their analysis they critiqued Glaze’s report and offered suggestions in moving forward.

Focus on governance rather than on student achievement

- Glaze’s report claims to be focused on the principles of student achievement. Instead, it is focused on administration and governance.
- Glaze states: “While student performance may not immediately be linked to administration and governance, I strongly believe it is.” p. 14.
- Disbanding school boards on a **belief** is not a firm basis for a radical restructuring of Nova Scotia’s education system.
- Proposed solutions should be based on evidence, not based on the opinion of the researcher.
- No attempt has been made by Dr. Glaze to show how each specific recommendation will improve student achievement, equity, and excellence.

Research concerns

- The survey consisted of 3 questions. In terms of survey design the style of questions used were leading or loaded, this can bias the responses.
- Question 1, “What administrative changes should be made to the education system to ensure the focus is on the needs of students?” assumes that changes need to be made and persuaded some participants to believe that change was necessary. Respondents who may have felt the system was fine did not have the opportunity to comment.
- The use of volunteer samples as a basis of research does not represent the general population.
- There is no demographic data provided in relation to the survey. We should expect Dr. Glaze to provide an indication of:
 - how many respondents were teachers and principals working in Nova Scotia’s schools;
 - how many respondents were parents of children in Nova Scotia’s schools;
 - where the respondents lived;
 - which school boards represent the respondents; and
 - what percentage of respondents identified as Acadian, French-speaking, Mi’kmaq, and African Nova Scotian.

Data analysis concerns

- No evidence is supplied as to how the data collected through consultations was systemically analyzed.
- It is not clear how 1500 responses, multiplied by three questions with the possibility of multiple answers were collected, collated, and organized into themes.
- Dr. Glaze’s report does not show how the results inform the interpretations leading to 22 recommendations.
- “[I]t is not clear how the recommendations

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speak to the particular evidence that was collected through the survey. For example, the evidentiary warrant for the recommendation to abolish school boards seems to rely on two quotes on p.20-21, offset by a quote on p.21..."

p. 20 "Elected school boards should be disbanded and replaced with regional offices of the Department of Education that work with local School Advisory Councils that, (in turn), provide direct student, parent, teacher and community input into public education...We need a new approach."

p. 21 "An elected school board has very little purpose anymore. There seems to be more and more power given to these positions, held by people with, in general, little to no educational experience ... other than the fact that they once went to school themselves. I think the elected positions could easily be eliminated. Central office positions could also be sized down and combined throughout the province. This would also allow for some consistency from one area to the next, as currently there can be many differences in procedure and operations from one to the next."

p. 21 Off-set quote "Politics plays a large role in education, as we have seen in recent elections. Boards are a stabilizing factor in that they do not affiliate with any one political party. I want to know that there is a local place that I can go that understands my children's school and community, should I ever need a referee between myself and my school."

- The short timeframe in which 91 consultations took place over 3 weeks is a concern. It appears that working principals and teachers were neglected in the consultations.
- Dr. Glaze states that 187 members and employees of eight school boards and the Nova Scotia School Board Association (NSSBA) were consulted in the report, yet we can find no reference to the evidence.

Summation and suggestions for action

- Dr. Thompson and Dr. Rutkowski suggest that there are many concerns to this report particularly with research methods and access to result data.
- The public should be concerned that this report is used to justify radical, systemic restructuring.
- Nova Scotians should demand that policy makers use the best information possible to inform policy decisions.
- Dr. Glaze's report should, at best, be treated as an exploratory study of select perspective on issues that some educational stakeholders believe.
- Dr. Glaze identifies issues worthy of further research. She must provide more evidence to support the recommendations she has made in *Raise the Bar*.
- Recommendation must be supported by evidence rather than opinion.
- The high-stakes associated with these recommendations amount to a massive reform of the educational system. Before proceeding, the methods and data should be made public so that an independent stakeholder can reanalyze the data to ensure the findings are valid and reliable.

The Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and government should be wary of policy borrowing, where jurisdictions simply copy policies from other systems. Before importing policy solutions to complex problems, the minister must engage the diverse multiple stakeholder communities in building consensus, and using a strong research-base in selecting reforms which will be most beneficial. Nova Scotia needs to build a shared commitment to education in the best interest of all students.



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