

**Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin**  
**MLA Cumberland North**



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**Députée Cumberland North**

**Nova Scotia Legislature**

February 4, 2025

The Honourable Brendan Maguire, M.L.A.  
Minister of Education and Early Childhood Development and Advanced Education  
Maritime Centre  
1505 Barrington Street  
P.O. Box 578  
Halifax, Nova Scotia  
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Dear Minister McGuire,

Thank you for agreeing to serve the people of Nova Scotia as Minister of Advanced Education and Education and Early Childhood Development. It is both a privilege and responsibility to contribute to building a stronger, more resilient Cumberland County, a region with untapped potential and boundless opportunities.

Governing is about people. On November 26th, 2024, Nova Scotians entrusted us with a mandate to shape a brighter future. We share a belief in the strength of our communities, the ingenuity of our industries, and the rich heritage that defines Cumberland County. Together, we will harness this potential to foster economic growth, improve healthcare, and elevate the quality of life for all residents.

Cumberland County stands on the precipice of tremendous opportunity. By investing in our people, supporting innovation, and ensuring sustainable development, we can unlock prosperity and lead Nova Scotia into a new era of progress. Our collective success hinges on collaboration, bold action, and a steadfast commitment to addressing the unique needs of our communities.

As Minister of Advanced Education and Education and Early Childhood Development, your leadership will be pivotal in advancing the initiatives that matter most to the people of Cumberland County. I expect you to work closely with your colleagues and community partners to deliver tangible results. Your department's work will reflect our shared vision of a prosperous, inclusive, and thriving Nova Scotia.

Specifically, I ask that you prioritize:

1. Conducting a comprehensive study into the increase of **violence in schools**, with the goal of identifying root causes and developing effective strategies to ensure safer learning environments for both students and teachers.
2. **Addressing the staffing shortages (teacher shortage as well as the Educational Assistant shortage and other valuable staffing resources such as school psychologists)** in Cumberland County by creating pathways for local individuals to enter the profession, supporting retention efforts, and enhancing professional development opportunities. Nova Scotia must compete with New Brunswick in terms of wages and classroom conditions, as many teachers and teaching assistants in our region choose to work across the border for higher pay. Additionally, there is a pressing need to increase the number of teaching assistants to support classrooms effectively. Please consider passing Bill 436 [Educational Assistants and Substitute Teachers Remuneration Act](https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/64th_1st/1st_read/b436.htm)

The purpose of this Act is to ensure that the remuneration of educational assistants and substitute teachers in the Province is on par with the highest levels of remuneration for those positions in the Maritime provinces.

[https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/64th\\_1st/1st\\_read/b436.htm](https://nslegislature.ca/legc/bills/64th_1st/1st_read/b436.htm)

3. Expanding post-secondary options in rural Nova Scotia, particularly in Cumberland County, by increasing funding to Nova Scotia Community College and supporting satellite campus initiatives. **Amherst should be considered for a new NSCC campus in its downtown core, which would create significant economic growth and revitalize the area.** Furthermore, **Amherst should be evaluated as a location for student housing** to accommodate the influx of students and foster a thriving academic environment.
4. **Loan Forgiveness Program for Nurses should be available to nurses who live in Cumberland County and work in NS but go to nursing school in New Brunswick.** There is no program to become an RN in all of the Northern Zone. Many students choose to study in Moncton, NB as the waitlist to enroll is less time to become a LPN. Also studying in Sackville or Moncton, NB is the only option to become an RN without moving, something many cannot due to financial and family responsibilities.

It is interesting that paramedics that live in Cumberland and study in Moncton are eligible for the free tuition but nurses are not eligible for loan forgiveness.

5. There is an urgent and long-term need to educate more Registered Nurses and I recommend that you **add a RN program in the Northern Zone** similar to the Dalhousie School of Nursing Satellite site in Yarmouth. Next door in Sackville, NB, they just started

a RN program with Beal University. This could be done at Cumberland Regional. There is a LPN in Amherst at NSCC and the clinical lab area could be shared for a RN program.

6. Investing in infrastructure improvements for schools in Cumberland County, ensuring that students have access to modern, well-equipped learning environments that foster educational success. Additionally, while I support the removal of cell phones in classrooms, there are schools where the only way to communicate with the office is by using a cell phone. In some of these schools, cell service is unreliable or nonexistent. **We need to find effective solutions to ensure that teachers and students feel safe and have reliable communication options at school. Classrooms must be equipped with a communication system such as landlines for safety purposes.**
7. Supporting initiatives to enhance digital learning tools and **broadband access for rural students** to ensure equal opportunities for success in the digital economy.
8. Agricultural knowledge must be made a priority in Nova Scotia. The enrollment at Truro Agricultural College, now owned by Dalhousie University, has decreased in recent years. Student housing is in poor condition. **Investment is needed in this Agricultural College to support the advancement of local food production now and into the future.**
9. Promoting workforce readiness by strengthening partnerships between schools, post-secondary institutions, and local industries to align educational outcomes with the needs of the job market.
10. In Fall 2024 I tabled a bill to **restore the use of the Sir Frederick Fraser School in Halifax to serve its original purpose of providing specialized education for students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or visually impaired.** Advocates, including former students and educators, are calling for the school and residence to be utilized once again to meet the growing needs of these students, rather than remaining underused. The bill addresses the critical need for specialized education services in Nova Scotia, ensuring that students with these challenges have access to the support they deserve.

<https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/bills-statutes/bills/assembly-64-session-1/bill-496>

11. In March 2024 I tabled an amendment calls for School Principals with exclusive authority to make weather related school closure decisions. Currently the decision is being made for the entire region, the weather in Amherst does not always reflect the weather in Pictou County. <https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/bills-statutes/bills/assembly-64-session-1/bill-448>

12. In March 2024 I also tabled a bill Calling for increased Community use of Public School Facilities asking for a standardized procedure for booking schools gyms to ensure that there are being used to the full benefit of the community.

<https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/bills-statutes/bills/assembly-64-session-1/bill-446>

13. I ask that you the Minister commission a School Board Reintroduction Report to determine an effective system of county-level school board oversight, addressing the number and locations of school boards, their composition including representation of under-represented groups, and their powers, duties, and responsibilities.

<https://nslegislature.ca/legislative-business/bills-statutes/bills/assembly-64-session-1/bill-443>

I would like to request a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss how we can collaborate on these priorities. A stronger Cumberland North will lead to a stronger Nova Scotia, and together, we can lay the foundation for lasting success.

Your mandate will be shaped by the voices and needs of our citizens. I expect you to engage regularly with the people of Cumberland County, ensuring that our policies and programs reflect their aspirations and address their concerns.

I look forward to working with you to build a stronger, more vibrant Cumberland County. Together, we will seize the opportunities before us and create lasting positive change for

generations to come.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Smith-McCrossin  
MLA for Cumberland North

CC: Deputy Minister of Advanced Education, Deputy Minister of Education and early childhood development.