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May 4, 2008

The Honourable Ken Krawetz,
Minister of Education and Deputy Premier
Room 348, Legislative Building
2405 Legislative Drive
Regina, SK
S4S 0B3

By e-mail

Honourable Minister :

Re: Proposed changes to section 178 of Bill 29

I am writing to express my dismay at the proposed changes to Section 178 of Bill 29 and to urge you to revise them so that children with disabilities are not inadvertently more likely to be educated in segregated settings.

On May 3, the new United Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities came into force. Canada has signed but not yet ratified the Convention. I think that the negotiations on Article 24 on education may provide some guidance on how your government can ensure that the special educational needs of all students are met within inclusive education systems. During the negotiation process, initially many governments were prousing language similar to that in the proposed changes to section 178 of Bill 29. However, after five years of hearing about the experiences of other governments, from civil society representatives, and from education experts, there was unanimous agreement to reframe the article to focus on how individual supports could be provided within the regular system. Such language does not preclude providing individualized supports in cost-effective ways, but it ensures that the regular system maintains responsibility for educating all children. The wording currently proposed in your drafts opens the door to transferring this responsibility to a special education system, and global experience has shown that when this transfer of responsibility takes place, segregation is the result for large numbers of children.

Underlying your proposed changes seems to be a concern that currently children with certain types of special needs are not having their educational needs met, or

are placing financial and other strains on the education system. I was pleased to learn that the University of Regina has just appointed as its new President Dr. Vianne Timmons. Dr. Timmons is one of the foremost global experts on the inclusion of children with disabilities in regular education. One of her skills is to include children with disabilities while improving the overall quality of education. Might I propose that you take advantage of the expertise that is now available in Saskatchewan and invite Dr. Timmons to work with your officials to develop a new proposal that will meet your needs and also guarantee the rights of children with disabilities to be included in their home schools, and in their communities.

Saskatchewan is recognized in Canada and around the world as a province that champions human rights and equality and has been a leader in promoting the rights of persons with a disability in particular. We count on you to build on this reputation and to ensure that Saskatchewan provides a quality, inclusive education for all its children.

Sincerely,



Diane Richler
President

cc. Ms. Laurie Larson
Dr. Vianne Timmons