

For Immediate Release

October 26, 2026

Regional Centres for Education cutting supports to students with exceptionalities to save money: parents, union

HALIFAX, NS — CUPE School Support workers have learned that recent layoffs of Educational Program Assistants may be tied to a directive from the province to reassess the support needs of students already receiving assistance.

Shelley McNeil, president of CUPE Local 5047, Halifax Regional Centre for Education, says more than 50 educational program assistants were laid off this fall after being told there was no work for them to do.

“It was odd, because these redundancies are happening even though the needs are not decreasing. From what I can tell, the needs are continuing to rise,” said McNeil.

Robin Gushue, whose fifteen-year-old daughter has cerebral palsy and requires full-time support, says she suspected there may have been an attempt behind the scenes to reduce the number of support workers assigned to her daughter.

Gushue had received an unusual email in September from her daughter Olivia’s Learning Centre teacher, who she says wanted access to her daughter’s care plan. Gushue says she was surprised by the request. “Olivia needs to be accompanied at all times while she’s in school. She has a full-time support worker and that support worker is always replaced when they take a break. If Olivia needs help being transferred to or from her wheelchair, she always has two support workers available to assist her. That’s been the case from day one, since we moved to Nova Scotia almost ten years ago. I can’t imagine why they’d need to see the safety plan unless they were looking to reduce her supports.”

Gushue has heard stories from other families who have been confronted with support reductions after their children were reassessed and deemed ineligible for services they had received just last year.

McNeil says CUPE has filed a Freedom of Information Request with the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development to find out what prompted these reassessments. She says parents deserve to hear the truth directly from Minister Brendan Maguire. “Every student in this province has the right to a quality public education. Minister Maguire needs to explain to parents why these critical supports are being taken from their children.”

For more information please contact:

Mary-Dan Johnston
CUPE Communications
902-412-5780
mjohnston@cupe.ca

:bw/cope-491