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March 16, 2005

Mr. Mike Turner
Managing Editor
The Truro Daily News
6 Louise Street
P.O. Box 220
Truro, NS
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Dear Editor:

I read with interest the article in your newspaper on Friday, March 11th, headlined “Board official says school ranking ‘irrelevant’.” The article quotes the director of education services for the Chignecto-Central Regional School Board, Doug Benedict, attacking the utility of the annual report card on Atlantic Canada’s high schools prepared by the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies (AIMS).

Judging by the hundreds of thousands of times that our report card has been consulted on line and in print, it is clearly not irrelevant to the students, parents or individual teachers who are desperate for hard understandable information about how their school is faring. Indeed, while Mr. Benedict says that there is a growing desire for more data to inform decision-making, it is our report card that has generated the demand for such data. Before our annual report, useful, readily available and easily comparable public information on the performance of our schools was simply non-existent in Nova Scotia.

Many school officials found the old ways quite comfortable. They decided what people would be told about the schools and when. Those days are gone. Efforts to denigrate our report card are merely nostalgic yearnings for a time when there was little accountability in the system. Our commitment to making all the relevant data available to everyone means that those bad old days will never return. As to the “irrelevance” of our report card, it is perhaps worth recalling that the four Atlantic Provinces commissioned a study of our report card which gave our methodology a strong endorsement.

That report entitled “Analysis of Grading our Future” was released in 2003 by the Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation. In it, Dr. Robert Crocker, confirmed that our methodology was “commonly applied in prediction studies and is statistically valid for the purpose at hand”. Additionally, he repeated our criticism of the paucity of data available and called on the provinces to expand the number and accessibility of publicly

available indicators of school performance. Indeed, what is irrelevant now is the resistance of the educational establishment to parent and student empowerment and school improvement through better information.

The release of data about schools is not uncharted territory. We are virtually the last part of North America where such data and school rankings are not part of the every day operation of the school system. In our region both New Brunswick and Newfoundland and Labrador make a great deal of information available about their schools in readily accessible, easily comparable public documents. The fact that Nova Scotia is working toward such an achievement is almost certainly a result of the prodding of the AIMS report card.

The objective of our School Report Card is to stimulate ongoing improvement in system accountability, school performance and the report card itself through discussion and debate on best practices and ways to improve reporting to students, parents, teachers, and administrators. The Report Card is a tool to be used to improve the education system for our children so they are prepared to compete and succeed in the global economy of their future. If we want to make our schools better, we have to know what their individual strengths and weaknesses are, based on real verifiable data; we have to know how they perform compared to each other, so that we can see who is to be emulated and who needs help. We make no apologies for putting the interests of parents and students and individual teachers ahead of those of an educational establishment that finds accountability for results an uncomfortable notion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Lee Crowley".

Brian Lee Crowley
President – Atlantic Institute for Market Studies