

Teachers united with trustees, parents, and school workers against education cuts

This fall, for the first time ever, the presidents of British Columbia's largest education stakeholder groups united to send a letter to the Minister of Education outlining their growing concerns about recent cuts made to BC's public education system. Through this unprecedented letter, parents, school workers, teachers, and trustees asked the government to recognize the pressure of increasing costs and the damage cuts, like the elimination of the \$110 million Annual Facilities Grant, have made. The letter, signed by Irene Lanzinger (BCTF), Connie Denesiuk (BCSTA), Barry O'Neill (CUPE BC), and Ann Whiteaker (BCCPAC) stated:

"British Columbia has one of the best public education systems in the world. Collectively, all of our members work hard every day to ensure BC's students are well supported and receive the best education possible. We are worried, however, that our system's excellent standing is at risk as our ability to meet the needs of every student erodes due to these cutbacks."

CommunityLINK funding

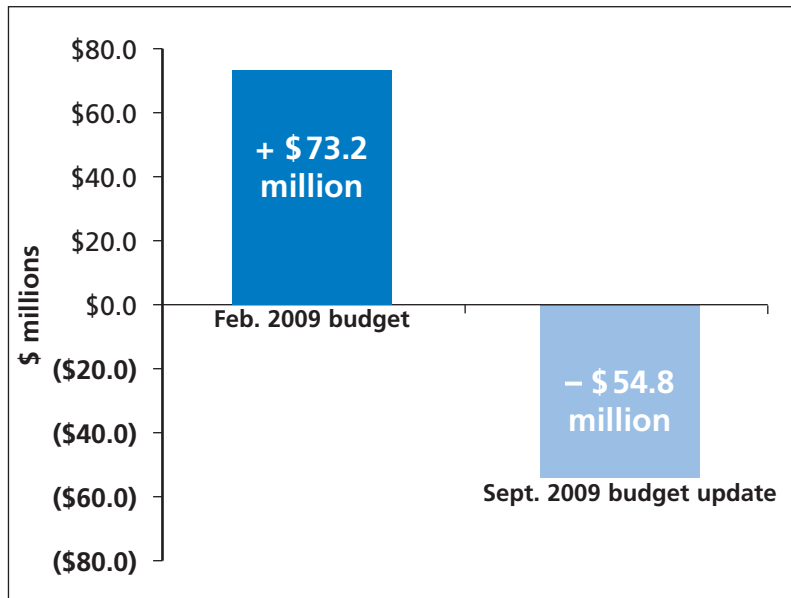
In the 2009 Budget Update, the Ministry of Education transferred CommunityLINK funding (\$48.5 million) for vulnerable students from its core services to the government's gaming grants program, which makes the future of this funding uncertain. While the ministry contributed an additional \$2.5 million in CommunityLINK funding for 2009-10, there is no guarantee they will do so in future years. Teachers are very concerned that there is no guarantee that funding for this critically important program will continue in years to come, resulting in significant impact on our most vulnerable students, including Aboriginal and inner city children.

The decision to fund CommunityLINK through gaming grants also forced other important community programs, such as support for school sports and Parent Advisory Councils, to be reduced or cancelled. Funding for this essential program should be returned to the ministry. It is a core service and should not be treated as a one-off.

New funding for education vanishes

Instead of a \$73.2 million dollar funding increase to Education Programs as announced in the February 2009 budget, education funding actually decreases by \$54.8 million in the September 2009 updated budget.*

Change in Education Program Funding* 2008–09 to 2009–10



*The change in funding from year-to-year is calculated by comparing the 2009–10 estimates to the 2008–09 restated estimates figures in the Resource Summary Table (for the February and September budget estimates).

The funding changes mean there is no new funding to reduce class sizes or improve support for children with special needs. The funding shortfall also means additional costs associated with a 6% increase in Medical Service Plan premiums, carbon neutral requirements, the Harmonized Sales Tax, efforts to prevent the spread of the H1N1 virus, and potential BC hydro rate increases will not be covered. The ongoing shortfalls and unfunded cost pressures downloaded by government could have a serious impact on the ability of districts to implement all day kindergarten in 2010 and 2011.

Testing and assessment

The overuse and misuse of standardized testing is forcing more and more teachers to teach to the test. This narrows the curriculum and strips students of other valuable learning opportunities. A recent survey of science teachers found serious problems with the Science 10 provincial exam. Students are so busy memorizing hundreds of scientific terms that they are missing out labs, group work, field trips, and hands on science.

Teachers continue to have serious concerns about the Foundations Skills Assessment given every year to grade 4 and 7 students. Last year's results showed more parents than ever before share teachers' concerns about the test and the Fraser Institute's rankings. In the Comox Valley, more than 20% of students did not write the FSA. In Vancouver, that number was over 30%. In Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows, more than 40% of Grade 7 students did not write the FSA.

Teachers in BC would like the government to implement a moratorium on standardized testing and create a task force among all education partners to develop a system that better meets the needs of our students. Learn more about testing and assessment on the BCTF YouTube page; www.youtube.com/BCTFvids

