



## **BC Education at the Cutting Edge**



**Do the people of BC realize how much has been lost over the years in funding to our schools? Here is a list of cuts in our school district alone that demonstrates how chronic underfunding has incrementally made our education system the hollowed shell it now is compared to what previous generations grew up with.**

**Contributed by the teachers of Harbour View Elementary School, SD#43 (Coquitlam).**

### **Cuts to curricular support**

- The district resource centre (Winslow) was closed. This was a huge facility with full lending libraries of professional resources (films, slide shows, kits, class sets of specialty materials, big books, picture books, photocopied units in all subjects, professional manuals, and more). There was a full time office staff and an area for teachers to create materials with a laminator, photocopiers, and other supplies. Students no longer get these resources for their learning.
- District Committees were once funded to write curricular support materials for our schools, accompanied by workshops and release time. These are no longer funded which again means less meaningful material for our students.
- The many workshops that supported new curricula such as Social Studies, Math and the Fine Arts, and added valuable skills to existing programs, have been largely eliminated. Professional Development days have offered the invaluable opportunity for teachers to attend skill-based training to improve their teaching, learn new curriculum, and improve the learning outcomes for their students. This cannot happen without expert outside mentorship. In the past, these workshop opportunities were provided and championed by our district and the Ministry of Education. Now these have been largely eliminated. Several decades ago, teachers chose to extend the school year by a week in exchange for these Pro-D days, recognizing how this learning would benefit students. The stripping of these funds in BC impedes the adoption of new, more meaningful curriculum.
- All schools had a teaching librarian, who brought classes with their teacher to the library for cooperatively taught lessons that integrated all curricular areas. The two adults helped children to read, research, and learn information literacy. Now, if there is a librarian, they deliver preps and no funding is provided for collaboration. If there is a librarian, it also means that another program has been sacrificed, such as music or computer education.
- District Learning Teams provided teachers with support to meet six times a year to discuss and develop programs, resources, and materials with a specific curricular development interest. District Learning Team support is gone.
- Staff Development provided financial support (TTOC – Teacher on Call - costs) to help mentor new teachers and allow others to upgrade their skills. This is no longer available. New teachers are left to struggle on their own.
- An itinerant French specialist visited all elementary schools to teach lessons 3 times per week. Now, the regular classroom teacher must teach French to their class, regardless of their fluency in that language. At first, program resources like Aventures (books and tapes) were provided but now teaching materials are not provided. Again, no practical resources for students.
- The SD43 Journal of Writing that showcased student writing each year and was distributed to all schools was terminated in 2013. Students can no longer showcase their writing skills to larger audiences and learn from the writing of their peers.

### **Cuts to school budgets**

- All school supply budgets were much larger, from science materials to art supplies.
- Textbook budgets were much larger. Teachers must make difficult decisions about which books to buy with very limited funds. For this reason, our school and many others are still using outdated books such as atlases in which the U.S.S.R. is listed as a country and Nunavut is not yet a territory of Canada.
- There were no “have” and “have not” schools because the same services and materials went to all schools. There was much less dependence on PAC (Parent Advisory Committee) fundraising and specialist teachers were available to smaller and larger schools alike.
- School computer labs were funded by lotteries and supplemented with money from the district and sometimes PAC. Schools were equipped with new computers using a choice of two platforms (Windows and Apple). BC lottery funds have been redirected and labs are one platform only (Windows) with used computers. Parents have paid for many labs and while the district provides some computers on a cyclical basis, parents must still fundraise for much of the school’s technology.
- There has been a huge decrease in library budgets. Elementary school budgets have been reduced from thousands of dollars to amounts that in many schools allows for only about 45 new books per year. This means that libraries are shrinking. Parents now fund purchases to make up some of this shortfall.
- Many student school supplies and workbooks were provided. Families now have to purchase all of these.
- Musical instrument and gymnastics budgets have been eliminated. As well, with no music teacher to maintain them, many existing musical instruments fall into disrepair and cannot be used.
- Playgrounds were district funded. Now parents are forced to pay for these.
- Some schools had their own buses to transport teams and student groups. Now parents are forced to transport.
- There is no longer a budget for health and nutrition education.

### **Cuts to programs**

- Two funded school field trips a year, including bus, were once provided. Later, this was reduced so classes had to share buses. Now, none are provided.
- All elementary children received two swimming periods a year. In addition, Grade 3 had a week of survivor swimming and Grade 5 had a week of lessons.
- Several skating periods were provided to elementary classes each year.
- Grade 6 students had a full day of district sponsored canoeing and sailing lessons at Rocky Point.
- A set of gymnastics equipment circulated to the schools.
- A set of canoes on a transport trailer was available for classes to rent.
- The Artist in the School program is no longer funded. Students have lost this unique learning opportunity.

### **Cuts to student services**

- School nurses visited regularly and dealt with health issues such as lice, diabetes, allergies, asthma and health education. These visits are gone and there is now no dedicated First Aid for students.
- Teachers for students needing behaviour support (Itinerant Behaviour teachers) have gone from 1 teacher per 20 schools this year to 1 teacher per 40 schools for next year. The itinerant behaviour team also lost Youth Workers who worked with

students at all grade levels. These workers helped some of our most vulnerable families through home visits, meeting with parents, and helping them connect to community resources and supports.

- The itinerant teacher for occupational therapy is gone. Now we get two to three assessments a year at most.
- Psych. Ed. assessments have been cut over the years, and were cut further during this school year. Students have commonly waited two years or more for assessment, and now will wait even longer. More and more families are going outside the district and paying out of their own pocket for Psych Eds. However, those children whose families can't afford the fees of private testing (\$2000 or more) have no choice but to wait for years or give up altogether. In the waiting, the already struggling student has lost years of potential funded support which they could have qualified for much sooner, when intervention would have been most effective.
- Speech and language pathologist numbers have been cut. Many students will be moved to 'consult' lists and not receive their help.
- Students with special needs were once provided with a separate facility and specialist teachers. With integration into regular classrooms, these children are often provided with very little support, which requires more classroom teacher attention and limits the time available to other children in the classroom.
- Student services teachers spend a significant amount of time writing IEP's (Individualized Education Plans) for low incidence students (students with special needs) and for the greater number of high incidence students. However, with no individualized materials and not enough personnel to support the IEP's, this is a time cost that is not repaid in service to these students.
- The funding formula has changed for support for low incidence students. Allocation is schoolwide and never enough, so students with health and safety issues are served first (tube feeding, diaper changes, personal care), depleting time from others. A severely physically challenged student who requires full time attention receives 30 hours, but this doesn't provide support during the EA's (Education Assistant's) break and lunchtimes, so time must be taken from other students to provide this essential supervision.
- FAS students (those with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome) do not receive any designated special education support, although their level of need can be very high.
- The districtwide language skills support program Fast ForWord (sic) has been discontinued. Whereas before, students attended the program at an off-site school while student services teachers worked with other students at their school, now schools must buy the resource and use their own school learning assistance time to run the program.
- Reading Recovery is no longer funded and is gone. Students needing early intervention with reading now fall through the cracks.
- With support teacher staff time so limited, the help given to children who require assistance is limited or delayed. Many high incidence students (those with a learning disability and an IEP) qualify for only 2 learning assistance lessons per week although they need much more time. After the school is staffed in September, schools are not allocated additional time to support students who are tested and qualify later in the school year. Schools are not allocated any time at all to support students on the long Psych. Ed. wait lists.
- The T and E (Teaching and Evaluation) centre, which provides intensive remediation for reading and writing for students with learning disabilities, has been reduced by one full classroom.

- The Language Acquisition Class held at Central Elementary, for students diagnosed with language processing disorders, has been cut.
- The Mundy Road Challenge program for gifted education is gone.
- International students come with little support, drawing teacher time from other students. While the district profits from their revenue, they don't generate support at the classroom level. Coquitlam has one of the highest numbers of International Students in the province.

### **Cuts to staffing**

- One elementary teacher recalls, "I taught in a school of 120 children. We had a full time administrative officer, principal, librarian, and a half time music specialist."
- Every librarian position in Coquitlam has been eliminated. In elementary, there is no library program unless the staff chooses to receive their teaching preparation coverage as library in lieu of other programs such as computer or music.
- Further regarding our school libraries, CUPE staff used to assist in shelving, tracking, and repairing books. An average elementary school of 300 students easily circulates 800-1000 books a week. This is now done by parent volunteers or by a prep-delivery librarian who may be shelving books at two or more schools. In effect, under-resourced libraries are now only open sporadically making it less likely that students will develop that early love of reading that empowers them academically through later years. For our students today, what is the long-term price of underfunding literacy?
- Teachers in charge of elementary school computer labs face the same problem of managing facilities that need maintenance even when they're at another job site.
- All Teaching Assistant positions (a minimum of one in each school in the district) were eliminated this spring. Teaching Assistants photocopied, laminated, did office tasks, and helped the school function in many ways.
- CUPE staff at Winslow and in schools also catalogued and laminated covers of newly purchased library books and curricular resources, including ordering, receiving, and storing office and art supplies. This service has not been provided to libraries for several years, and with all Teaching Assistant positions recently eliminated, the whole school will now lose these services.
- Music specialists all but gone - certainly from elementary schools, cut in the middle schools, now high school programs are being slashed.
- Physical Education specialists in elementary schools are gone.
- Beside school-based specialists, our district had many district-wide itinerant specialists—Primary, Intermediate and Secondary. They provided resources, helped with unit planning made regular appearances in the schools to support and assist. Curricular resource teachers also taught demonstration lessons in classrooms to support new curriculum.

### **Cuts to building maintenance**

- Custodian hours have been cut back. There is no custodian in most elementary schools between 10 am and 2:30 pm, meaning that if problems arise (e.g. blood, vomit, diarrhea), there is no custodian to clean it up. This is a health concern.
- Secretarial draw time (extra secretarial time provided during busy times in the year) has been reduced greatly.
- School upkeep from building maintenance to grass cutting has been cut. Some schools in our district need significant upgrades like new roofs and cannot afford it.