



British Columbia
School Trustees
Association



British Columbia
Teachers' Federation



October 6, 2009

VIA FACSIMILE: 250-387-3200

Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid
Minister of Education and Minister Responsible
for Early Learning and Literacy
PO Box 9045 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister MacDiarmid:

On September 23, 2009, the elected representatives of British Columbia's largest education stakeholder groups agreed to write you to express our growing concern regarding the recent cuts made to BC's public education system. We agreed to send this unprecedented letter outlining our shared concern about the cutbacks to programs and grants that are now being felt by students in classrooms across the province. Through this letter parents, school workers, teachers, and trustees have come together to ask you to reverse these damaging cuts.

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.

As minister of education, you have stated that your intent in these difficult economic times is to protect services for students, especially vulnerable students. However, unfunded cost pressures such as salary and Medical Service Plan increases, as well as costs associated with rising BC Hydro rates, H1N1 prevention, gas prices, the Harmonized Sales Tax, and carbon neutrality mean less district funding is available to directly support students.

Additionally, the cancellation of the \$110 million Annual Facilities Grant part way through the year has caused significant disruption. Many boards had already committed to school repairs prior to being informed that the normally expected funding would not be forthcoming. While some boards were able to divert funds earmarked for other projects to pay for the repairs, others were left with significant deficits, and many support and trades positions have been eliminated. We are also very concerned that there are no indications in the budget documents released on September 1, 2009, that the Annual Facilities Grant will be restored.

The decision to transfer stable CommunityLINK funding for vulnerable students from the Ministry of Education's core services to the less reliable gaming grants program, also causes

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education partner groups a great deal of concern. There is no guarantee that funding for this critically important program will be forthcoming in years to come, resulting in significant impact on our most vulnerable students as well as our Aboriginal students.

Furthermore, the decision to fund CommunityLINK through gaming grants has forced other important community programs, such as support for school sports and Parent Advisory Councils, to be reduced or cancelled. As parent fundraising efforts increase in order to make up for the lost gaming funds, their energies will be diverted from conversations around educational goals in their respective schools.

The result of the above funding decisions will likely result in long-term instability, larger class sizes, and reduced services for students including those with special needs. School sporting events will be at risk, and Parent Advisory Councils will have to reduce support for student supplies, field trips, computers, and library books. Schools in poorer communities will be hardest hit by these cuts. Districts will be forced to reduce staffing and student support services, including teachers, special education assistants, and counsellors.

On behalf of the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, the BC School Trustees Association, the BC Teachers' Federation, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees BC, we urge you to reverse these cuts to prevent significant erosion of BC's outstanding public education system.

Yours sincerely,



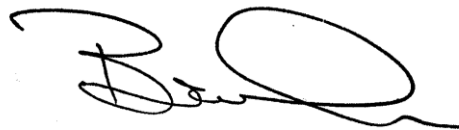
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Connie Denesiuk
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