



November 21, 2014

Ref: 176142

John Puddifoot, Vice President  
BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils  
**Email: john@puddifoot.com**

Dear Mr. Puddifoot:

Thank you for your letter of June 26, 2014, expressing your concerns regarding the teachers' settlement. I sincerely regret the delay in this response.

I appreciated being given the opportunity to speak and answer questions at your conference on May 30, 2014. Please find the following questions accompanied by answers, which I was unable to cover at that time.

**1. Not every parent has the ability to have the level of interaction that the future promises. How do we ensure that all students have the advantage of advocacy for their education?**

The vision we have set out for transforming our education system is actually built around the idea that each student needs a system flexible enough to meet their needs.

Realistically, we are unable to anticipate and respond to every possible student and family circumstance. But we can build a system that is more responsive and flexible—provincially and locally—which should provide better opportunities to support each student.

**2. We have heard Minister Fassbender talk a lot about skills development (trades). What about the kids who are more academically focused? How is the minister addressing the needs of kids who want jobs in academic fields like business, law, etc.?**

The focus on skills is absolutely not at the expense of more academic career options. Rather, it is a rebalancing and a recognition that our system has traditionally placed greater emphasis on those more academic paths and not provided enough support for students who are more interested in trades and other skills.

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The broader approach we are taking on things like curriculum is all about helping students develop the competencies they need to be successful in any career path, as well as in life in general. The goal is to ensure students have access to a full spectrum of career information and possibilities.

**3. Why are more financial burdens being placed on School Districts and the backs of volunteer parents with less money being funded in from the Minister? For example: Seismic upgrades.**

We have a well-funded education system that provides a record-level of \$4.725 billion to the 60 school districts.

Over the past few years, we have been working with districts to address pressures in the K-12 sector.

When it comes to seismic upgrades:

- Since 2001 we have spent or committed \$2.2 billion to seismically upgrade or replace 213 high-risk schools.
- As of this September, 143 schools have been upgraded and replaced, 10 schools are currently under construction and 7 schools are moving toward construction.
- It is anticipated it will cost a further \$600 million to address the remaining 104 high-risk schools in the province.

**4. Inclusion BC recently released their report on restraint and seclusion. What measures has the Ministry taken to investigate this practice in our school system?**

Making sure BC classrooms remain safe, secure learning environments is paramount, as is maintaining the dignity and respect of all students and staff.

In response to Inclusion BC's November 21, 2013 report on the use of physical restraint and seclusion in BC schools, a set of provincial guidelines has been developed. It is up to school districts to implement the guidelines.

The guidelines are a culmination of months of consultation and cooperation between Ministry staff, school districts and various partner organizations.

We believe these guidelines will assist boards of education and independent school authorities in creating and maintaining the safest-possible learning environments—for all students and educators.

We remain committed to continuing to work with all our partners, including those in the public and independent school systems, to ensure BC schools are as safe as possible, and these guidelines will be an important resource moving forward.

**5. Given the teachers’ proposal for class composition and support for students with special needs how does the government plan to address these issues?**

This negotiated agreement is an important stepping stone towards a better relationship. Teachers will get a 7.25 percent wage increase over the six-year term.

The government is committing an additional \$125 million over the next five years to the Learning Improvement Fund, bringing the total up to \$500 million to address class composition issues, but in a way that targets those supports where they can do the most good for students.

Of this \$500 million, the agreement with the BC Teachers’ Federation sets \$400 million for a new “Education Fund” to be used exclusively to hire more teachers, teachers with specific skills, or to increase their assignments.

The LIF now commits \$100 million to hire more educational assistants or increase their hours over the course of the next five years. The agreement gives educators in our schools the opportunity to consider the unique needs of every classroom, and then make decisions on how to address workload issues and the learning needs of students.

We are also interested in the proposal put forward by The Victoria Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils for a Classroom Resources Fund, and look forward to exploring that concept with them further.

**6. Some stakeholders may have concerns about the new skills development funding program diverting resources from other special interest programs. Can you please speak to how the ministry intends to maintain an appropriate balance?**

Our increased focus on skills is intended to provide a more balanced range of support for students whichever career options they wish to explore.

Districts have already demonstrated strong support and are seeking out innovative funding options through existing resources or partnerships with industry and community partners.

7. **How can we be sure the answers we receive are not spinned for political gains? There are schools in this province that are NOT in the Lower Mainland that are in extremely poor shape. No bathroom doors and leaky roofs, holes in concrete. When can we expect a new school in the Kootenays? We waited 12 years already. As parents we tell children to not put all their eggs in one basket so why is the government putting all their eggs in the LNG basket? What is the back-up plan?**

Government's mandate is to support a balanced budget. We do not want to leave our children with provincial debt.

Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) is one of many opportunities that government is pursuing to help grow the economy. We do not have unlimited resources or funds so we have to make the best use of the available funding for the education system.

8. **Parents may have different viewpoints on the current negotiations between the BCTF on behalf of teachers and BCPSEA on behalf of the provincial government and tax payers. One thing I feel we would agree on is that public education needs to better serve the needs of each and every student. Investing in our students and public education is the best way to spend tax dollars. The return on money spent on public education will reward our entire province in the future. Public education would be served better with an increase in funding targeted to provide additional support for our most vulnerable learners and students with learning differences. When will this happen? The BC Ed Plan and the move towards personalized learning is an exciting prospect and long overdue. To move forward it is essential that funding to support and equip students, teachers, and schools is for learning. When will the BC government and treasury commit to fully funding public education? – Money spent on public education is the best investment.**

BC has low class sizes, record levels of education funding and our students are continually recognized in national and international assessments.

We agree that education is the best investment we can make as a society. It does not serve our children well if we leave them with debt and a weak economy.

With many competing fiscal pressures, our focus is on making the best use of the funding we currently invest in the system, while also transforming our approach to learning one we know works better for students.

Government funding to school districts remains at record levels. The Ministry of Education is providing \$4.7 billion to districts in operating grants in 2014/15, an increase of 27 percent compared to the \$3.7 billion in operating grants provided in 2000-01.

**9. Fund the CUPE wage increase.**

With regard to your comments about negotiated collective agreements with teachers and support staff this school year, the Province committed to fully fund the agreement, and we intend to meet that commitment.

**10. How long do you expect it to take to change the education model?**

In many ways, the transformation in education has been underway for some time in many districts and schools across BC. The major policy changes we are undertaking now are designed to enable more of what the system is already pursuing in the interests of our students.

While many of those pieces of work will be completed in the next 2-3 years, the timeline for our system to truly change is largely dependent on the willingness of all our education partners—including parents—to fully embrace a new model of learning and what that means for how we shape our schools.

An important part of the transformation is also to build a system that can more easily adapt and respond to an ever-changing world. In that context, the change will be ongoing.

**11. How are you going to facilitate the increased workload that the new student information system may create? If there is an increase in parent engagement there may be an increased demand for teachers and school administrators to be resigned to these requests.**

We are working with our district partners to ensure they are preparing the required and appropriate training opportunities for teachers and parents, to make the transition as smooth as possible.

The initial roll-out and transition to MyEducation BC is underway, with province-wide implementation in 2015. BCeSIS will be decommissioned in early 2016.

The new service is designed to meet the requirements for a single student record containing all relevant enrolment, demographic, and achievement information from kindergarten to grade 12.

There will be significant improvements to service and functionality, including features and flexibility to support personalized learning.

MyEducation BC will also provide a secure, comprehensive web-based portal that allows parents and students to access student records, monitor student progress on a continual basis, and communicate privately with teachers.

**12. How do we ensure that all students get their needs met when every cost increase from raises to hydro rate increases comes right out of our core learning budget without a corresponding increase to district budgets.**

We have heard from school districts that they face many pressures. That is why government continues to work in partnership with school districts to look at ways to address these pressures within the K-12 sector. This means working with districts to support them in their efforts to reduce administrative overhead systems, and to redirect those resources into the classroom.

In the last three years (Budgets 2012, 2013, 2014), government has made a commitment to work with school districts, health authorities and post-secondary institutions to reduce overhead costs, look for efficiencies and find additional savings through collaboration.

**13. Why is the government not complying with court decision on class size?**

We all agree that teachers have an important and complex job. Learning conditions and teacher working conditions are related and any effort to address learning conditions tends to improve teachers' working conditions. We want to see fair workloads for teachers and we want students to succeed. However, we have a different view from the BCTF when it comes to class size and composition.

The BCTF leadership's approach would revert back to managing classrooms through rigid ratios and arbitrary formulas. That is a highly inefficient and ineffective approach. No other province in Canada manages their classrooms through rigid contract provisions for good reason.

Experience shows us that class size and composition are best managed through the professional judgment and discretion of educators. So we want teachers, principals and administrators to have flexible solutions to address complex classroom needs. That is exactly what we achieved in the recent agreement with teachers.

This approach relies on meaningful consultation between teachers, their union, and administrators to use the funding in a way that can be targeted to the unique or individual needs of teachers and students in our classrooms.

**14. Being that public education is the corner stone of democracy. When is our economy going to be good enough to start appropriately start funding public education?**

Government funding to school districts remains at record levels and there have been no cuts to education funding over the past 12 years.

Compared to 2000/01, annual funding has increased by \$1 billion and per pupil funding is at near record levels (Average per student is estimated to be \$8,626 for 2014/15, an increase of 38 percent since 2000/01 when it was \$6,262).

The Ministry of Education is providing \$4.7 billion to districts in operating grants in 2014/15, an increase of 27 percent compared to the \$3.7 billion in operating grants provided in 2000/01.

Under the new agreement, government is committing an additional \$125 million over the next five years to the LIF, bringing the total up to \$500 million to address class composition issues, but in a way that targets those supports where they can do the most good for students.

Of this \$500 million, the agreement with the BCTF sets \$400 million for a new “Education Fund” to be used exclusively to hire more teachers, teachers with specific skills, or to increase their assignments.

**15. What would be most beneficial to our children? A.) teacher’s raise; B.) Class size; C.) Aides in classrooms.**

What would be most beneficial for our children is a more personalized approach to learning that is more responsive to the needs of each student.

As part of our ongoing Education Transformation, we are creating a more flexible, personalized curriculum that better meets the needs of students now and in the future.

International research tells us that factors such as class size can have some impact on learning, but it is not nearly as significant as having highly skilled teachers working with students in a way that responds to their learning needs.

**16. Is there new money/funding to make this new education plan successful?**

When BC’s Education Plan was launched, government dedicated more than \$10 million. But one of the main underpinnings of the education transformation is that more money does not necessarily make for better education.

Government funding to school districts remains at record levels. The Ministry of Education is providing \$4.7 billion to districts in operating grants in 2014/15, an increase of 27 percent compared to the \$3.7 billion in operating grants provided in 2000/01.

**17. If this isn’t over by the end of the month as we all hope it is; does the government commit to direct its team to keep negotiation through summer until it’s done?**

As you know, a negotiated settlement has been reached between the BCTF and BC Public Service Employee’s Association with a historic six-year contract with teachers- both sides should be congratulated for their efforts in reaching a deal.

Government has found a way to give teachers a fair raise, improve classroom composition, and address class size, all without raising taxes. The settlement is also an important step in building a better relationship with the BCTF.

- 18. Comments: Commend government for having forward looking view on preparing students for the working world re: skills training and transition to workplace. Question: I heard Bill Vander Zalm propose to follow/take on a European education model in which bargaining is eliminated and teacher wages are linked to other sectors. Class size and composition would also be regulated (once, permanently) what is your view on this being a possibility for BC?**

We are pleased that our new agreement with the BCTF provides flexible solutions to class composition.

Government remains committed to reviewing the bargaining structure for the K-12 sector and much work has already been done. However, after a difficult start to the school year, our immediate priority is to foster labour stability in our schools and to refocus on what is most important: student learning.

Government also needs to remain focused on concluding all the other public sector bargaining currently underway. There is plenty of time ahead to prepare for the next round of teacher bargaining. We will continue to consult with key stakeholder groups, including BCCPAC as we move forward on this issue.

- 19. Budget pressures have propelled school closures across the province. How will the government help protect these vital community resources?**

There are fewer schools because there are 70,000 fewer students in BC since 2000/01.

Boards of education, in consultation with local communities, have been making often difficult but appropriate decisions to consolidate the delivery of education to better meet their students' needs.

Funding near-empty schools diverts important resources from classrooms. It can also deprive students of the same quality and breadth of educational opportunities that are only possible to deliver in schools with larger populations.

- 20. How does class size not matter?**

While some researchers agree that smaller class sizes in particular circumstances result in small changes to student achievement, most recent research supports other less costly interventions with higher impact—including investing in teacher development.

There is no class size and composition crisis and no demonstrable learning benefits. Compared to other high-performing jurisdictions, BC does not have large classes. This year's (2013-14) average class sizes are near historical lows of:

- 19.3 students for kindergarten.
- 21.5 for grades 1 to 3.
- 25.7 for grades 4 to 7.
- 23.0 for grades 8 to 12.

I hope this letter addresses your outstanding questions. For further feedback please address the appropriate contacts below:

Paige MacFarlane, Assistant Deputy Minister  
Partner Relations Division: [paige.macfarlane@gov.bc.ca](mailto:paige.macfarlane@gov.bc.ca)

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Again, thank you for writing.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Peter Fassbender', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Peter Fassbender  
Minister