

Education Funding Facts

Over the past nine years, since my children started in public school in District 63, I've watched the district cope with decreasing funding and increasing commitments. While I think that the quality of education that my kids receive is very good, I can see that the system is stressed.

Last fall, the Deep Cove PAC decided to prepare the original version of this newsletter to explore some of the issues that contribute to the current financial stress in public schools. Martine Lunke has children at Bayside and at Deep Cove and she has updated the letter to discuss the impact of the latest round of cuts on Bayside School. Sources of information are the Ministry of Education, the Saanich School District, the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC), the BC Teachers Federation (BCTF), the Centre for Civic Governance and local newspapers. Information was also obtained from Bayside principal, Shirley Elm, district superintendent Dr. Keven Elder, Board Chair MaryLynne Rimer and district Secretary-Treasurer, Joan Axford; thanks to them for taking the time to share their knowledge and answer questions, at COPACS meetings and in person.

As we move into the spring, the school district will start to prepare its budget for next year, in the face of decreasing funding from the Ministry of Education and increasing responsibilities, such as a move towards full-day kindergarten.

It is part of the PAC's mandate to inform parents and to advocate for the families who use the public education system. To do this, your executive needs to know your views on these issues and how you recommend that they should be communicated.

Please send us your comments, feedback, links to more information as you find it. Where do you want public education to go in the next few years? We will do our best to share your views with other parents, the district and the Ministry of Education. We hope that you will find this information helpful.

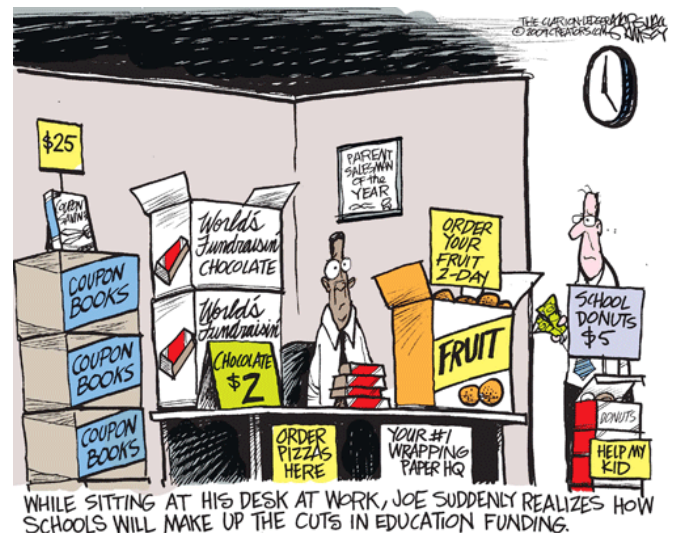
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Another \$2,700,000 to cut

The first draft of the School District's Operating Budget for 2010/2011 indicates a shortfall of **\$2.7 million**, or in other words, the budget will have to be cut by another 3.85%. So what will be cut next? The School District will hold some meetings to get your input before they make the next round of difficult decisions. A few important dates to remember:



- **April 7, 3:30 - 5:00 pm at Bayside: School Communities Meeting**
- **April 21, 7:00 pm at Bayside: Public Budget Meeting**
- **May 5: Approval of the budget for next year at the School Board Meeting**



WHILE SITTING AT HIS DESK AT WORK, JOE SUDDENLY REALIZES HOW SCHOOLS WILL MAKE UP THE CUTS IN EDUCATION FUNDING.

As education funding gets cut back, it is likely that school administrators will come to PACs asking for funding for items that cut closer and closer to core curriculum areas. Parent groups have been funding playground equipment, library books and field trips for many years. But what about computers, digital projectors and interactive white boards in this day and age? Extra materials for the learning resources room? Enrichment for the science curriculum so that students have hands-on experience instead of just textbook learning? At what point do we as parents say "No - this item has to be part of public funding"?

Please send us your views.



How is Bayside School affected?

Bayside is a great school, with dedicated teachers and a deep sense of community. However, all the budget cuts year after year are having a cumulative impact, and this trend seems set to continue. The overall budget for Bayside School has been cut by 8% this year alone.

Class sizes:

The main difference this year is that **the classes are on average larger**. Because of the budgetary pressures, Bayside school has lost the equivalent of **2.2 full time teachers** since last year, although the student enrollment has decreased by about 30 students only. This is most noticeable in grade 7 where all the classes (except splits) have the legal maximum of 30 students. (The grade 6/7 classes have fewer students due to the increased complexity of teaching two grade levels.) As a result, Bayside School is not in a position to accept new students in the middle of the school year. Some requests from out-of-catchment families who wanted their children to attend Bayside already had to be rejected.

Class composition issues:

Bayside did not lose any **Educational Assistants (EAs)** this year because of the high level of need. The school has a reputation of offering good instructional support for students with special needs and this draws students to Bayside. As a result, while classes generally have 30 or fewer students, many of them have more than 3 students identified with special needs. In order to meet the class size and composition legislation introduced by the provincial government in Bill 33, such classes benefit from the help of educational assistants. It should be noted however that many students who are struggling with their grade level are not considered as special needs students and do not benefit from extra hours of EA time. There is no doubt that classes with a wide range of abilities are more complex to teach. The teachers have to do some “scaffolding” and teach at several grade

levels simultaneously. Bayside School has in the past used some of the School Planning Council grant to help teachers develop programs for scaffolding, but this grant of \$10,000 has been eliminated this year as a result of the budget cuts.

Fortunately, and unlike many other schools in the district, Bayside School has been able to retain all its counselors this year.

Fewer options in Fine Arts and Applied Skills:

Some of the options are no longer being offered to all classes in Fine Arts and Applied Skills (formerly known as United Arts). For instance some of the grade 7 students do not have Arts classes because there is no money to extend the Fine Arts teacher's hours.

Building maintenance and repairs:

With the province-wide cancellation of the Annual Facilities Grant, all major repairs and renovations to school buildings have been put on hold. Bayside is a relatively new school and much repair work had been done prior to the cancellation of the Annual Facilities Grant, leaving us in a better position than some other schools. There are however some concerns that the situation will deteriorate if the Annual Facilities Grant is not restored soon. Of particular concern is the water damage resulting from a leaky roof, with the water travelling quite some distance in the ceilings before it drips into the library and other places.

Field Trips: The money the school district had allocated for field trips last year is gone. As a result, all field trips are now considered optional and the parents are being asked to pay for them.

Supplies:

The money for consumable supplies and learning resources has been reduced considerably. Teachers are being asked to be thrifty in their use of paper and printers, to use technology (computers and smart boards) instead of paper whenever possible, and the remaining money for supplies has been channeled primarily towards Arts supplies. Some of the costs have been offset to parents, hence the photocopy paper and the Kleenex boxes that every student is asked to bring in at the beginning of the year.



In the Province: the Big Issues

The total amount of money spent on public education in BC has been increasing every year; however, **the increases have not kept up with the costs of providing the same level of service.** In its report entitled “When more is less”, the Centre for Civic Governance estimates the shortfall at \$132 million for the 2008/2009 school year. As a result most school districts are experiencing financial difficulties. Many factors contribute to this crunch:

- *Declining enrollment and current Per-Student Funding Formula:* Student enrollment in the province has declined by 8.5% since 2000-2001. With the per-student funding formula implemented in 2002, the operating grant for each school district is determined primarily by the number of students enrolled. **For 2009-2010, the estimated per-student amount is \$8,323** (half for kindergarten kids). In other words, for every student that a school district loses, it receives \$8,323 less in funding. However, many costs remain the same. Whether 25 or 20 students are in a class, the teacher still needs to be paid, the school needs to be heated and lit and cleaned, and the support staff, administrators, librarians are still required. **Our school district estimates that for each student that leaves the system, only \$2,828 can be saved.**
- *Labour settlements:* In 2006 the BC Teachers Federation negotiated and signed a labour agreement with the province of British Columbia. This settlement was negotiated fairly, agreed upon by both sides and has prevented labour unrest since then. All BC public school districts are bound by this agreement. It would therefore be reasonable to expect that the province, having granted the increases in salaries and benefits, would fully finance the resulting increase in labour costs for the districts. The labour settlement costs for the 2008–2009 year

were \$137 million, yet the total operating grants only increased by a total of \$122 million (or \$15 million short). For the 2009-2010 year, the labour cost settlements are estimated to add an additional \$100 million to the labour cost, but the total provincial grant was only increased by \$84.4 million. **Therefore, once the labour settlement is accounted for, almost all public school districts actually receive less discretionary money each year.** This is expected to continue next year.

- *Increasing mandates:* In 2007 School Boards were given **additional responsibilities for early learning and community literacy.** There were no new funds allocated specifically for these purposes, so the increased mandates have to be funded out of the regular operating budget.
- *Other cost pressures:* Inflation, increased cost of energy for heating and transportation, the carbon tax and the implementation of various new programs and requirements (distributed learning, GAAP, targeted literacy, arts and special needs, summer school and course challenge).
- *Cancellation of the Annual Facilities Grant:* In September the government announced the cancellation of the funding to repair and maintain school facilities. Many schools had done work during the summer months in order to avoid disruptions and noise during the school year. These works will have to be paid for with money taken from the general operating budgets, putting many districts in a deficit position, and many essential repairs will not be done.

In Summary:

The Ministry of Education claims that the budget for Education has increased despite declining student enrollment. While this is technically true, it does not take into account the increasing costs that the province has downloaded on the school districts, such as the salary settlements, medical plan premium increases and increased mandates. Once all these are taken into account, the amount of money available for delivering education to our children has actually decreased steadily for years.



Saanich School District: 15 years of cutting back

There have been cuts to our School District's operating budget for most of the last 15 years, so why is the situation worse this year? Well, SD63 has now spent all its savings reserves and they have simply run out of easy things to cut! Most new cuts will affect the classrooms directly. Moreover, it looks like the cuts will continue: consultations about the next round are expected to begin in the Spring.

A few figures to illustrate the situation:



-18.9 %: reduction of the operating budget of the Saanich School District (SD63) between 1995 and the summer of 2009, or **\$13.34 million.**

+31%: inflation in Canada over the same period of time

For 2009/10, the budget was cut back by **an additional \$ 3.6 million** and the impact is being felt everywhere.

- this year saw the most significant reduction in number of teachers in Saanich history.
- the number of classes over 30 students increased from 54 in 2008/09 to 82 in 2009/10.
- the number of classes with more than 3 designated (special needs) students rose from 142 in 2008/09 to 189 in 2009/10.
- Many programs have been cut back. Students in middle and high school have fewer course options.
- There are fewer counselors, teachers, librarians and education assistants.
- The District Resource Centre, a sort of district-wide "library" of shared educational resources, has been closed: all its contents are

being distributed amongst all the classes, making it much more difficult to locate and share these valuable learning tools.

This is not the end of the cutbacks: according to Joan Axford, secretary-treasurer for SD63, there are several more dark clouds on the horizon.

- The cancellation of the *Annual Facilities Grant*, announced at the end of last summer, has hit the district hard. This grant is used to maintain and repair buildings and has been about \$1.5 million per year in the past. SD63 had begun some of the work over the summer and had spent \$ 554,000 prior to the announcement. They are unsure how they will make up the shortfall. About \$800,000 in further projects have been cancelled, including the building of handicapped access and the renovations of classrooms. Worryingly, the Ministry of Education has issued a 3 year budget plan, but the Annual Facilities Grant does not reappear in the next 3 years.
 - *Debt Financing:* The Ministry of Education has reneged on a signed agreement to finance the debt that the district had incurred to built Kelset School and to upgrade Royal Oak and Prospect Lake Schools. This means a loss of \$544,000 for the school district. The school board is currently trying to persuade the Ministry to honor their side of the contract.
 - *Declining enrollment:* Student enrollment in the district is expected to continue declining until 2012, bringing the total decline to 25% of the student population in the past decade.
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"I have no complaints and only admiration for the work that the school staff does with our kids (and my kid especially ;) and I am astounded that morale is still so high given the constant financial grinding down and concomitant cutting and slashing of people and programs. It is hard to be angry at the education system when I am happy with what is happening with my child. Yet I've learned that if there is going to be any courses left but the bare minimum by the time my son hits high school and if I want him to have at least a few classes that are small enough for the teacher to get to know him by name, I am going to have to act."

A Deep Cove mom