



British Columbia
School Trustees
Association



BCSSA
British Columbia
School Superintendents Association



December 8, 2009

Ministry of Education, Board Chairs, Superintendents, Secretary Treasurers – Joint Session, December 5, 2009 at BCSTA Academy

Introduction

BC Ministry of Education representatives, board chairs, superintendents and secretary treasurers participated in a joint session at the BC School Trustees Association Academy on December 5, 2009. The meeting was organized and hosted by the presidents of the BCSTA, BCSSA and BCASBO.

The purpose of the session was to provide an opportunity to discuss how districts are managing the current financial challenges, and to provide input to the Ministry of Education on changes that could be made by government.

The following is a summary of the comments and themes arising from the table discussions on the five questions.

1. What processes are you using that will help your stakeholders understand the challenges posed by the financial realities as you establish your 2010/2011 budgets?

- Holding budget meetings and public consultations as early as possible
- More in-depth and transparent communication around the budget process (meetings, letters and communication with media)
- Involve union presidents
- Meetings with MLA's and stakeholders in order to generate awareness within communities and move people toward advocacy for restoration of funding
- Communicating that layoffs are imminent
- Developing a strategic plan
- Re-establishing the new "normal" that creates balance through either increased funding or a reduced mandate
- Letting stakeholders know that the district is holding a comprehensive reviews of facilities, transportation and special education

2. What areas are being considered for reductions and what revenue enhancements are possible?

Reductions

- Looking at school consolidations/closures
- Closing unused portions of schools
- Considering cuts to: student services, pro-d, special education, administration, curriculum and development coordinators, literacy, technology, travel to communities, adult education, enrichment, distributed learning and retention
- Looking at reducing French immersion programs
- Considering contracting out where savings can be realized
- Offer fewer programs and options
- Considering additional school closure days or a four-day work week.
- Reduce support staff, bus routes and admin staff
- Early dismissal to allow for pro-d
- No replacement of non-enrolling teachers
- Reduction of school supply budgets
- Consider cancelling all school transportation
- Consider only covering transportation fees for those unable to afford it

Revenue

- Take whatever action is required to have government acknowledge and fund the additional pressures, beginning with HST
- Increase fees for international students
- Review maintenance costs (closely look at the revenue versus admin costs and insurance requirements)
- Incorporate carbon tax fees in cost of rentals
- Increase user fees for facility rentals
- Offer revenue-generating courses through adult education and distance learning
- Considering charging fees for transportation services
- Increase user fees for: Distributed Learning, Adult Education and Repeated Courses
- Offer revenue-generating courses through adult education and distance learning

- 3. Are there any potential for costs savings through “shared services” or opportunities for revenue enhancements in 2010/11 and over next three to five years? What are they, and what tools are necessary for their implementation?**
- Ensure that we understand the implications of proposed shared services, and the savings if any
 - Develop a mechanism to share best practices
 - Share Director of Education between districts where possible
 - Share pro-d with neighbouring districts
 - Share WCB services (rural districts)
 - Create a district/departmental staff and supply
 - Shared purchasing arrangements between districts to save money
 - Seek opportunities to partner with municipalities
 - Exploring options to share payroll and facility planner services
 - Considering sharing a secretary treasurer
- 4. What is being done, even with the challenges, to ensure quality of education for all children?**
- Ensure that our vision for quality education is front and centre in all budget discussions
 - Continue to push for government's declaration of its vision for quality education, and participate in the formulation of that vision
 - Focus on core courses
 - Review of all programs/services and determine critical programs and services
 - Offer more virtual courses.
 - Clarify school district mandates.
 - Looking closely at what children need to succeed at 21st century learners
- 5. What kinds of flexibility, regulatory changes or other supports could we request of government?**
- System Reviews**
- Create a commission to review public education and clearly define the focus Delivery of secondary education
 - Review and streamline reporting requirements. In some cases, districts are required to report data to the Ministry that the Ministry already has: FSAs, grad rates, exam marks.
 - Review public education funding formula
 - Review assessment tools
 - Examine Ministry of Education staff requirements in terms of the significant overhead that comes with increased and unnecessary compliance reporting
 - Review the role of the Ministry in public education. The Ministry may be more effective as the funder and not system overseer

Land Disposals

- A change in the land disposals policy is necessary to allow land-rich districts that will never use a property for educational purposes to sell off that property.
- Preferential mediation through government, not municipality, which would mean that boards would have access to 25 per cent of the sale of property

Funding Issues

- Fully fund teacher collective agreements and pension plan increases
- Return to base funding away from per-course funding
- Eliminate grants to private schools
- Amend collective agreements to allow for greater flexibility in contracting out
- Permit school districts to run a deficit, just as the provincial government has for the Olympics and BC Place.
- Make capital funding available to districts that consolidate

Facilities

- Reinstate the AFG
- Eliminate carbon tax.
- Ensure tax exemption status from HST
- Give lease revenue back to districts.

Class Size and Composition

- Allow more flexibility on class composition and do away with class size restrictions
- Eliminate primary district average of 22 and making it the same as the class size maximum of 24
- Increasing class size – secondary and intermediate
- Remove class size language and improve the legislation

Programs

- Delay the implementation of All Day Kindergarten
- Reduce summer school obligations
- Examine who should pay for correspondence courses and distributed learning when students take them at the same time and graduate with more credits than required
- Review who should pay for courses which are taken with the sole purpose of improving marks for postsecondary admissions

Miscellaneous

- Eliminate the Appeals branch
- Recreate and reinstate the Secretariat for Children and Families or some other body that would be tasked with examining the entirety of the public school system.
- Protect public education from the downloading of costs from other ministries, i.e., healthy schools, drugs and alcohol
- Create an inter-ministerial committee (Health, Education, Finance) to support project and alleviate cost burdens, facilitate restructuring and support revenue enhancements (leases with community organizations, small businesses i.e Neighbourhoods of Learning Program.

International Students

- Allow more flexibility for international students.