



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**If BC's best accountants are baffled by education funding,
Imagine what it's like for the rest of us**

BURNABY — "Pressure from Tom Christensen [Minister of Education] may cause the Institute of Chartered Accountants of BC to re-spin their originally reported observations suggesting that education spending has been cut by 3.5 percent in BC since the Liberals came to power; but it couldn't be more clear that when the group examined the BC's education funding the first time round, the reporting suggested the same to accountants as it did to school boards, parents, support staff, teachers and students," says Barry O'Neill, President of CUPE BC.

"Even number crunchers can't make hide nor hair of the Liberal government's K-12 education finance figures," O'Neill continued in reference to the defensive position adopted by Tom Christensen, in response to the report that pointed out what public education stakeholders have been saying for the last three years.

"The K-12 system has been hurt by the Liberal's re-jigging of education funding including cutting budgets based on enrolment, then throwing extra money back at the system to cover up glaring gaps," said O'Neill.

Well over 100 schools have been closed in BC since 2001. In addition, school boards faced with budget shortfalls, have had to cut programs and in some cases, severely reduce the number of weekly or yearly instructional days for students.

"The impact to communities of the budget slashing in schools that Christensen denies on the one hand and justifies on the other, has been devastating to everyone," says O'Neill. He says this is especially the case for students who are struggling to meet academic standards and continue the extracurricular activities; and school support staff who, in some communities, are losing up to 20% of wages and benefits due to these cuts."

O'Neill notes that cuts are also having devastating effects on the quality of life for students inside and outside schools. "Services are cut to the bone, even to the point of putting cleanliness and maintenance of schools at risk." Students on the 4-day school week are known to be playing video games instead of studying on extra days off or sleeping in to make up for their extra long school days.

"Its time for Tom Christensen to wake up to what he's defending and stop blaming accountants, or school trustees or others for misreading reports or bad planning. The minister must take some responsibility, be accountable, and get on with strengthening the public school system or step aside and let someone with the required courage take the job."

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