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Exposure of secret privatization plan demands answers from government

VANCOUVER—Teachers, school support workers, and labour leaders across B.C. are demanding answers from the provincial government in response to a secret blueprint for privatizing a great range of services in public education.

"This plan clearly aims well beyond privatizing administrative services, and targets student services as well," said Jinny Sims, president of the B.C. Teachers' Federation. "The further losses in terms of local autonomy and democratic control of our public schools will be dramatic if this scheme goes ahead. Teachers care about the kids we teach, and we really fear this will mean further erosion of their opportunities to learn."

Jim Sinclair, president of the B.C. Federation of Labour, noted: "This plan emphasizes that funding has already eroded to the point that the quality of education is suffering. Look around the province. We're struggling to clean up the mess the privateers are making in health care. Let's not impose this failed experiment on our kids' schools too!"

"When you have evidence of clandestine plans around a topic as explosive and damaging as privatizing public education and contracting out student support services, this government has got to come clean and tell British Columbians where they stand," said Barry O'Neill, president of CUPE B.C.

The privatization plan was to have been at the top of the agenda for a meeting that Fraser Valley school trustees planned to hold behind closed doors late last week but, because the plan was leaked, the meeting did not take place as scheduled. Trustees were urged by the plan's proponents not to invite board staff to the meeting, nor to involve them in any discussions about the topic.

The plan calls for groups of school boards to establish "Delegated Administrative Organizations" that could contract out "accounting, finance, purchasing, payroll, personnel, student support services, information technology, transportation, capital construction, maintenance and some educational administrative functions." The DAO would operate in the private sector with little or no accountability to elected school trustees and the communities they represent.

Sinclair, Sims, and O'Neill said they want reassurances from Premier Gordon Campbell and Education Minister Tom Christensen that all aspects of public education will remain public. They all called on parents and other concerned citizens to raise the issue with their MLAs.



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Contact: Nancy Knickerbocker, BCTF, 604-250-6775; Louise Leclair, CUPE, 604-454-4711; Jessie Uppal, BC Fed, 604-430-1421.