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Partnerships BC supports 'British-style' model of privatized education services

Comments by CEO Larry Blain raise suspicion about Campbell government motives

VANCOUVER—Recent comments by the chief executive of Partnerships BC have once again raised the specter of mass privatization in the British Columbia school sector, says the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE).

During a speech recorded on November 23 at a conference held by the Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships (CCPPP), Larry Blain expressed enthusiasm for a British model of privatized school services that has been discredited by the Audit Commission in the United Kingdom.

In the speech, a recording of which was obtained by CUPE BC, the CEO of Partnerships BC included schools among a range of public services that British Columbia will have a "huge requirement" to offload to the private sector over the next 10 to 15 years.

"We very much are interested in the PUK (Partnerships United Kingdom) Partners for Schools model," said Blain. "Instead of...the RFP type of model, we would implement more of a strategic partnering type of model" that has not only embraced P3 schools but also privatized a wide range of education services in Britain.

Blain's endorsement of Partners for Schools—coming just a week after the disclosure of a secret plan supporting shared services in Fraser Valley schools—has added fuel to the perception that the school sector may be the next target in the Campbell government's relentless campaign for wholesale privatization, says CUPE BC president Barry O'Neill.

"Given that Partnerships BC was formed by the B.C. Liberals to encourage P3s, Larry Blain's comments are clearly designed to get things rolling in the school sector," says O'Neill. "Students, trustees and parents should be very concerned about the future of education in this province if this model is introduced."

P3 schools in both the UK and Nova Scotia have been cited for inferior design and delayed construction, higher costs for cleaning and maintenance, loss of local control, disruption of teaching and even reduced student achievement.

BC Education Minister Tom Christensen will be speaking from noon to 1:30pm on Friday at a B.C. School Trustees Association luncheon at the Coast Plaza Suite Hotel at Stanley Park.



For background information please go to the CUPE BC website at the attached link http://www.cupe.bc.ca/files/dec_2_04_backgrounder_on_partnerships_bc_and_schools_privatization.pdf.

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Contact: Barry O'Neill, CUPE BC President, 604-916-8444 or Daniel Gawthrop, CUPE Communications, 604-999-6132.