

## PUBLIC EDUCATION IN BC

# Ensuring a better tomorrow

British Columbians are struggling with the fallout from the global economic crisis. While they are focused on this daily challenge, they also want to prepare for a better tomorrow for their children and themselves.

An important part of working towards that better future is looking beyond the current crisis and making the necessary investments in our human infrastructure—our public learning institutions.

When British Columbians emerge from the current economic downturn, we want to be ready to seize the opportunities of tomorrow, and for that we must be healthy, educated and creative.

Investing in our public learning institutions—people, programs, the technology, buildings and grounds (all the things that make them world-class)—lasts generations.

When we ensure the ill or injured are cared for, the poor are clothed, fed and housed, children are educated, and young people are prepared to fully participate in our economy and society, we do this not only because it is a measure of our humanity, but because it is our economic and social legacy to our children and children's children.

As the current fiscal crisis has amply demonstrated, economic and social stability depend on a healthy public sector.

In looking for the best path to economic recovery, it makes sense to build upon a solid foundation of public services.

Investments in public services and infrastructure will provide short-term and long-term economic stimulus and ensure our children are educated, young people are prepared for a rocky job market, and displaced workers can upgrade their skills or train for new careers.

The Coalition for Public Education includes students, civil society organizations, and people who teach and work in our schools, colleges, institutes and universities.

We speak from the front-lines of education at every level in BC and have a shared vision of how education, in all its forms, will contribute to our better tomorrow.

The first major step in preparing for that tomorrow is the provincial budget that will be released on February 17, 2009.

The coalition's member organizations have individually provided advice to government on priorities for the upcoming budget. But we have also come together to present a comprehensive plan to build upon the successes of our system of public education.

Government must ensure taxpayer dollars are spent wisely. We urge decision-makers to reject the false economy of starving our public schools, colleges, institutes and universities of the resources they need.

We believe there can be no better investment than in the resources to educate our children, refurbish institutions, train tradespeople, technicians and administrative workers, prepare the next generation of entrepreneurs and scholars, and make the discoveries that will fuel our social and economic prosperity.

The coalition has set out a plan for new and renewed investments in education to improve the quality of elementary, secondary and post-secondary education in BC and make educational opportunities more accessible to all British Columbians.

Although all the elements of this plan fall within the jurisdiction of the BC government, the federal government has an important role in providing funding to repair and replace physical infrastructure.



BC Teachers' Federation  
B.C. Government and Service  
Employees' Union  
Canadian Federation of Students  
Charter for Public Education  
Network  
Confederation of University  
Faculty Associations of BC  
B.C. Division of the Canadian  
Union of Public Employees  
Federation of Post-Secondary  
Educators of BC

Coalition   
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We recognize there are many pressures on governments. But we strongly believe that now is the time to make critical investments in our citizens and our children's future.

Children are children only once. Opportunities for young people to enter the job market without post-secondary education are rapidly disappearing.

Displaced workers can't play their part in the economic recovery without skills upgrading or retraining. Researchers will make their discoveries in other provinces or countries if we can't keep them here.

And the major public investment in our educational facilities—the grounds, buildings and facilities—will be squandered if we do not maintain them.

## THE PLAN

*To ensure a better tomorrow, the Coalition for Public Education proposes a five-point educational investment plan:*

### **1. Make education affordable for students and families.**

Alleviate the financial burden on students and families. Eliminate extra fees for supplies, class activities and programs that are barriers to participation for many school children. Reduce post-secondary tuition fees and enhance student financial assistance programs for college and university students.

### **2. Provide adequate operating funds to public educational institutions.**

Provide adequate and ongoing funding for public education at all levels to meet the needs of individuals, families and communities. Indicators of adequate funding include: maintaining reasonable class sizes, meeting increased demand for specific programs, cushioning against fluctuations in enrolment, addressing geographically-determined variations in costs, keeping up with inflationary increases in the costs of supplies and services.

### **3. Meet the special needs of students.**

Ensure that our schools have the resources to meet the special needs of students by restoring specialist teacher positions in English as Second Language, library services, counseling and special education, and by making Education Assistants available to students throughout the school day.

### **4. Invest in growing and transforming the economy.**

Increase and enhance trades training and apprenticeship opportunities to ensure British Columbia has a strong, well-equipped workforce to meet the demands of today's and tomorrow's economies. Make British Columbia a world-class centre for research and innovation by increasing funding for masters and doctoral degree programs and expanding scholarship programs to keep the most promising graduate students in the province.

### **5. Fast-track safety upgrades and deferred maintenance of facilities.**

Fast-track spending on promised seismic upgrades to elementary, middle and secondary schools. Provide funding to address delayed maintenance of educational facilities due to past funding shortfalls. Funding for both these initiatives should be through publicly-financed and operated projects, with a strong focus on green infrastructure and tied to made-in-Canada procurement measures.