

Provincial Government Considering Changes to BC School System

Recently, the provincial government announced it is considering a new plan to implement "School Centred Leadership" in BC schools.

The Deputy Minister of Education indicated this new direction "changes some traditional roles and responsibilities". While all the details are not known at this time, officials have said this project proposes a variety of changes to the way schools are governed and the role of locally elected school boards.

According to Ministry of Education spokespeople, this model will give more responsibility to principals and the parents involved in School Planning Councils (SPCs) for the way schools are run.

Another potential change is in the way schools are funded, with more funds coming directly from the province rather than being allocated by school boards. Schools might also have more financial autonomy - keeping budget surpluses but having to make up any deficits.

This new direction raises many questions about school governance and management.

What will be the role of elected school trustees? Do parents really want a role in the hands-on management of schools? What will happen at schools where there is no functioning PAC – to whom will the SPC parents be accountable?

Education Minister Shirley Bond is conducting a tour of BC to consult with educators, parents and students. If you have questions about the government's proposed direction, talk to a principal or teacher, or ask your own MLA or the Minister of Education. Right now there are more questions than answers.

You can help ...

BCSPE is a 100% parent volunteer organization. Your help would be appreciated to assist with the costs of doing things like operating the website and photocopying. If you are able to make a contribution, please contact our treasurer at hluke@bcspe.ca

Please sign on! We invite you to visit our website www.bcspe.ca and sign on to our email list.

Human Rights Tribunal rules that ministry of education and school districts must meet learning needs of students with learning disabilities

A December 2005 ruling by a BC Human Rights Tribunal could have a significant impact on how school districts meet the educational needs of students with learning disabilities.

The ruling in "Moore v. B.C. (Ministry of Education) and School District No. 44" found that: "Failure to provide appropriate support and accommodations to a vulnerable group could not be justified on the basis of cost."

The Moore family sued to recover the costs of privately educating their son who has severe learning disabilities. They successfully argued that their public school district was not meeting their son's learning needs due to cutbacks in services for students with learning disabilities.

The Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, an intervenor in the case, hailed the ruling as a major victory for children with learning disabilities across Canada.

The case is not over, however, as the province and school district have appealed the decision to the BC Supreme Court.

Teachers to Withdraw from School Planning Councils

A decision by teachers to withdraw from School Planning Councils was among the resolutions passed at the British Columbia Teachers Federation March Break Annual General Meeting.

While the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association has been opposed to SPCs since the Province created them in 2002, the decision by the BCTF means that teachers will stop electing representatives to sit on SPCs or similarly mandated committee, starting in September or sooner.

Though it is possible that some principals may attempt to appoint a teacher to fill a vacant SPC position, such a move is likely to lead to a legal battle about the right of teachers to refuse to sit on SPCs.

Coming hard on the heels of talk about an expanded role for SPCs, the BCTF vote calls into question the Province's plan for School Centered Leadership. Without teachers on board, parents may begin to question the legitimacy of their own involvement.