



## **Mission Board of Education has its priorities wrong...**

May 31, 2010

### **Introduction**

District 75 Mission faces serious financial problems as a result of chronic provincial underfunding and downloaded costs without proper financial support. As a result, the District faces a \$2.8 million funding shortfall as it takes steps to prepare its annual budget for the 2010-11 year.

CUPE Local 593 is sympathetic to the District's financial plight. At the same time, the Union does not support the direction proposed for staff and spending reductions as reflected in the District's *Projected Expenditure Plan* of May 1 and presented for consideration to trustees at the May 18 meeting of the Board.

It is our Union's view that the draft plan is flawed in three key respects. First of all the Plan does not make sufficient effort to minimize the impact of cuts on students. Secondly, the Plan places a wholly disproportionate share of the burden of the cuts onto district support staff. And thirdly, the Plan does not look sufficiently at making cuts to growing administrative layers and costs in the district where the impact on students and learning would be minimized.

### **The Plan does not protect students and student learning**

The primary problem with the District's Plan is the fact that it does not adequately protect services to students, especially those with special needs or those facing special challenges in gaining access to an education.

The District is proposing cuts to two youth care worker positions, staff currently working with many of the District's most vulnerable youth. At the present time, youth care workers can carry high caseloads in excess of 50 students each. To eliminate two positions will not only make for an impossible workload for the staff person who will remain. At the same time, it will victimize many of the

most vulnerable students and families in the District who rely on the services these workers provide.

Youth care workers bring needed stability and consistency to the lives of vulnerable children. The services provided by these workers need to be protected simply because these services help ensure the stability and support required for these children to attend public schools and be successful in a full range of programs and activities.

Similarly, cuts to Education assistants in the proposed Plan are not appropriate. These workers provide vital support to special needs students in the District, many of whom rely on this support to participate in school life. To seek to bring district revenues and expenditures back into balance next year on the backs of these students and their families is unconscionable. The District's figures suggest that 5.2 FTE EA positions will be lost next year; however, the real loss based on current staffing levels will be 24 headcount positions comprising a total of 16 FTE staff. This is a loss that will be borne by special education students in the District if these cuts are allowed to stand.

EA ranks within District 75 have grown to a small degree (by about three positions since 2004), even as overall enrolment continues to fall. However, it should be remembered that the total funded enrolment of children with distinct educational requirements – special education, aboriginal and ESL students – has risen in Mission during this period, up 4.6 per cent in the past two years and a more than 32 per cent since 2004/05. It is this latter group that our EA members work with and provide support to on a daily basis and whose educational chances will be adversely impacted if the proposed cuts are allowed to proceed.

Cuts to career advisors (2) also translate directly into a reduction of services provided to students in District 75. Career advisors work under the direction of the Career facilitator to assist students to make good and informed choices regarding post-secondary education or career options. Students in Mission District face a complex and rapidly changing job market. Providing our students with supports to enable them to negotiate their way through this environment into the field of post-secondary education and the world of work is essential if our students are to have maximum opportunity for future success.

As important as it is to keep the impact of cuts as far away from the classroom and learning environment as possible, it is important also to note that other areas of planned reduction – in staff as well as spending – will mean school facilities that are cleaned less often and maintained to substandard level. The District's *Projected Expenditure Plan* contains planned reductions to janitorial staff (\$165,000). Dirtier schools will make students and staff more susceptible to

H1N1 type threats. This is something that will make for substantial future costs – to students and families as well as to staff.

School supervision assistants also provide vital services to students, ensuring that student safety on playgrounds and in cafeterias is given the high priority it deserves. Layoff notices have been issued to 21 of 92 such positions in the District. If these positions are eliminated who will attend to the threat of outsiders coming onto to school property, to situations where student altercations occur, or to problems that routinely occur within the lunchroom?

Cuts to construction, engineering and grounds (6.8 FTE or eight positions totaling \$425,000) are also found in the *Expenditure Plan*. These cuts are extremely shortsighted and stand to incur substantial additional costs to the District in the future. District 75 stands to lose internal staff capacity to undertake routine maintenance and upkeep of standard equipment if these cuts are allowed to proceed. Maintenance work routinely required for shop and custodial equipment, for air filtration devices within heating and ventilation systems, and for cafeteria equipment all stands to suffer.

Increased costs are not the only consequence of proceeding in this direction. Student and staff safety becomes a critical concern if proper maintenance is not attended to. Health concerns will also escalate if the District is not able to deal with resultant air quality problems, food safety issues or the cleaning of surfaces to eliminate harmful bacteria.

**The Plan places an entirely disproportionate share of the adjustment burden on the backs of CUPE support staff**

The District's *Projected Expenditure Plan* seeks to balance the 2010-11 budget and eliminate a projected \$2.8 million shortfall by placing a series of cuts across a spectrum of district services and operations.

If one looks at full-time equivalent (FTE) staff affected by the planned cuts, almost 70 per cent of them are CUPE support staff. This is despite the fact that support staff account for less than 40 per cent of FTE staff employed by the school district. In terms of actual dollars, the Union notes that almost half of the projected cuts of \$2.7 million are being placed on the backs of CUPE support staff, this despite the fact that our members together account for only 25 per cent of total salary spending within the District 75 budget and less than 18 per cent of total budgetary expenditure.

It is the view of CUPE Local 593 that the Plan places a hugely disproportionate share of the burden of staff cuts on the backs of CUPE support workers who proved a range of vital educational and non-educational services to the District.

The Board should re-prioritize the burden of these cuts so as to impact support staff in the District in a manner proportional to the size of the bargaining unit and its cost within District 75's budget.

### **Failure to address inordinate growth in administrative ranks and costs**

While the district's *Proposed Plan* purports to prioritize cuts with a view to minimizing educational impacts, it is worthwhile noting that the Plan itself avoids placing any substantial reductions on administrative staff working within District 75.

Indeed, subsequent to public release of the Plan and the issuing of 70 layoff notices to support staff on May 12, the District took initial steps to increase administrative staffing levels with the posting of a new human resources administrative position.

In recent years, administrative staffing levels within the District have grown at an unwarranted pace. Since 2004 and during a time when district enrolment continued to drop, the ranks of exempt administrative staff have risen from 17 to 24 staff, a rate of increase of more than 41 per cent. Rapid growth in staffing levels has been matched by discretionary increases in exempt staff remuneration and expenses. The following table summarizes the rate and extent of this growth since 2004 for a range of positions within the District.

<b>Position</b>	<b>2005 cost</b>	<b>2009 cost</b>	<b>Increase</b>	<b>% Increase</b>
Superintendent	131,004	183,862	52,858	40.3%
Assistant Superintendent	113,461	169,872	56,411	49.7%
Director of Instruction	102,757	122,752	19,995	19.5%
Director of Instruction	93,070	109,164	16,094	17.3%
Human Resources Director	106,116	135,410	29,294	27.6%

During the same four-year time period when top administrators within District 75 received increases ranging from 17 to almost 50 per cent, CUPE support staff received wage increases totaling 8.2 per cent (two per cent in each of four years).

The District has a responsibility to seek budget reductions in areas that minimize impacts on student learning and district operations. Taking a hard look at administrative-level staffing levels and compensation would be the best place to start.

### **Conclusion**

District 75's budget shortfall places the Board in a difficult position as it takes necessary steps to formulate a balanced budget for the coming school year. Hard budget choices await trustees as they prepare for this task. In view of this challenge, it is important that the Board be guided by appropriate priorities.

It is the view of CUPE Local 593 that cuts affecting special needs and vulnerable students within the District are not appropriate. Nor are reductions that undermine the capacity for students to make appropriate educational and career decisions. Nor are actions that undermine the capacity of the District to do critical ongoing maintenance and upkeep of equipment and facilities.

The Board needs a fresh look at its budgetary options and the best place to start is an examination of administrative staffing and compensation.

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