How are the Educational Budget Cutbacks Affecting You?

Keating Budget Facts – KHASA Executive Report

While walking around Keating School this year, have you noticed that: often times the library is void of a librarian, class sizes have increased -- along with teacher and student frustrations -- and counsellor availability is challenged this year? If so, your observations accurately reflect the crisis occurring within the walls of our school. These and other cutbacks are a result of the shortfall in this year's School District 63 operational budget.

As your Parent Advisory Committee Executive, KHASA is committed to bringing you information that impacts your child here at Keating. In our mandate to promote the education and wellness of our children, we work toward creating a forum for discussion on critical issues.

This report has been designed to provide information that will give you a better understanding of how provincial and district budgetary cutbacks are affecting your child's educational experience here at Keating School, and to empower you to speak with your collective voice to make positive change.

The inspiration for this report comes from our PAC partners at Deep Cove School. It is through their initiative and leadership that parents in our district are only now grasping the impact of budget shortages on our children.

You may have read in the newspapers over the last few weeks that the B.C. Ministry of

Education has "increased public education funding" to provincial school districts for the 2010/2011 school year. While technically true, it does not take into account the increasing costs that the province has downloaded on the school districts such as salary settlements, medical plan premium increases and cost increases. After satisfying these expenses, little money remains to deliver quality and diverse education to your children.

As a result, Saanich School District 63 will still be entering the 2010/2011 school year with a **$3.3 million operational deficit**. This deficit falls on the heels of last year's School District budget shortfall of $3.6 million that resulted in the most significant teacher reduction in our District's history.

Did you know... BC legislation mandates Saanich School District to submit a balanced budget to the Province each year? In order to do so, our District must undertake more cost-saving measures.

In order to balance out for the 2009/2010 year, after a $3.6 million shortfall in government funding the District eliminated **23.5 teaching positions** (8.5 due to enrolment decline). These reductions also affected Saanich District's:

- classrooms
- libraries
- counsellors
- music programs
- school administration
- clerical staffing

- crossing guards
- education assistants

to name but a few impacted areas.

And Keating? Reduced student enrolment equals lost resources. However, even with a reduced student enrolment of only two students from 423 last year, **Keating has lost 1.2 staff positions**. This reduction is also attributed to our share of the 2009/2010 budget cuts. These lost staff positions at Keating have impacted our:

- classrooms
- integration support
- library
- reading recovery program
- administration
- counselling

Most of our senior grade classrooms are operating at capacity, with some classes at the maximum three designated (learning assistance) students. As a result, Keating School cannot accept new enrolments in some grade levels.

Does your child require learning assistance? Keating's educational assistant time has been cut from 132 to 72 hours for this school year.

Counselling services are now only available **four days out of the month**. There have been occasions when a Keating student has required counselling, only to have the district counsellor unavailable. Mr. Notte and Mme. Pinder have stepped in during times of crisis, but what will happen when they are unavailable?

Indeed, our library sees less librarian time. This year's budget cuts resulted in a 10% reduction in teacher-librarian time, a loss of one half day per week, with a further 10% proposed for next year. These cuts to our teacher-librarian time have reduced and will continue to reduce:

- library programs that include Preschool Story time, author visits, literacy theme day, Family Read-Ins, etc.
- literacy support and promotion
- collaborative work with classroom teachers to teach information literacy skills
- time available for collection development, magnified by the recent closure of our District Resource Center
- increased need by teacher-librarian to fundraise
- opportunity by teacher-librarian to assist students with technology
- teacher-librarian flex time (used for special events/projects/library management)

Seven percent of administrative duties performed by Mr. Notte and Mme. Pinder have been converted into instructional time. If this trend continues, the current open-door policy for parents meeting the Principal/Vice-principal will change.

Music at Keating? That's history. As music does not meet the definition of a "core subject", it is usually the first to be cut. Sad, as research has repeatedly shown that music education has many benefits, including cognitive development, self-discipline and self-esteem.

Remember those fun-filled field trips as a child? District funds to cover Keating trips have been **slashed over 65%** to $3.50/student. Without the fundraising activities of KHASA parents, our children's extra-curricular opportunities would be minimal to, in future, non-existent.

Funding for SWOC (Students with Outstanding Capacities) has been eliminated. In the absence of funding, our Administration has worked hard to offer meaningful opportunities to these students.

Crossing Guard hours at Keating X Rd. have been reduced to only five hours/week, with costs now shared by the municipal government.

School Annual Planning includes meetings between the School Planning Council (that includes three Keating parents) and school leadership team. These groups worked to develop events that have included Olympic Day, the CanWest spelling bee, and skip-a-thon. The once $7,200 budget has been eliminated.

As Saanich School District grapples with yet another operational shortfall in the neighbourhood of **$3.3 million (4.7%),** more teacher layoffs are possible in 2010/2011. Fewer teachers may mean an even greater increase in class sizes and thus less individual time spent with each child. Fewer teachers mean less support for students with special needs and deeper cuts to libraries, counselling and career programs. Even the prospect of reducing and/or restructuring the school calendar is being considered.

As education funding is reduced, expect school administrators to approach PACs asking for funding for items that cut closer and closer to core curriculum areas. Parent groups have been, out of necessity, funding playground equipment, library books and field trips for many years. But what is next? Materials for the learning resource room? Additional art supplies? Paper? Photocopiers? At what point should PACs say "No" to purchasing when the items fall under "Public Funding"?

So, what next? We must stand together to support our children's public education. History has shown that elected officials and other decision-makers listen to the collective voice of parents. We are, after all, the voters and taxpayers to whom the officials are responsible. So, now – while budget decisions and reforms are being made – is the time to let your local school trustees, Superintendent, and elected officials know how much importance you place on the specifics of your child's education that matter to your family.

How? The District is deliberating on a number of options before they approve a final budget on **May 5th.** These options are captured in the 2010 Budget Backgrounder at: http://www.sd63.bc.ca

Make your voice heard:

In person*:* The School District will be hosting two public events where you will have an opportunity to listen and offer input into the process:

School Communities Meeting - April 7th, 3:30 – 5:00 p.m.

Bayside Middle School
Public Budget Meeting – April 21st, 7:00 p.m.

By E-mail*:* provide your feedback to budget@sd63.bc.ca.

By Letter*:* A letter or fax speaks louder than an e-mail due to the sheer physical volume of a piece of paper versus an electronic message.

Dr. Keven Elder, Superintendent of Schools
2125 Keating Cross Road
Saanichton, BC
V8M 2A5

Saanich School Board of Trustees (Board Chair: Helen Parker).
2125 Keating Cross Road
Saanichton, BC
V8M 2A5
(fax 250-652-6421)

Despite these tough economic challenges placed upon them by our provincial government, we have faith our District Board of Education will continue to build and maintain the strongest learning environment for our children.

Significant reforms to public education will be announced by the BC Government in the coming months that are expected to have

significant impacts on our traditional educational system. As funding of public education is decreased, we expect it will be diverted to subsidize private education, along with the government decree that they will be continuing with this trend. This action is demoralizing and leaves a great disparity between public funding to public schools and private schools. This may be presented as "choice", but is it in our democratic society? KHASA will be keeping you apprised of these reforms as them are announced.

Please write our MLA, Minister of Education and Premier Campbell; as it is them who are making the decisions regarding funding of our children's education. Write to them; let them know your opinion!

The Honourable Murray Coell
MLA Saanich North and the Islands
Suite F, 2412 Beacon Avenue
Sidney, BC
V8L 1X4

The Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045, Stn PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC
V8W 9E2

The Honourable Gordon Campbell
Premier of British Columbia
Box 9041, Station PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Contact us too! Your KHASA Executive would love to hear your feedback on these discussion points. Please send us a note to our e-mail account at khasa63@gmail.com

WHILE SITTING AT HIS DESK AT WORK, JOE SUDDENLY REALIZES HOW SCHOOLS WILL MAKE UP THE CUTS IN EDUCATION FUNDING.

****

To learn more about the 15 year reign of budget cuts to the Saanich School District, and the big issues in BC, please visit our website at www.khasa.ca

****