

Presentation to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

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[Bruneau]

A Framework for Education Funding in British Columbia

Over the past century, this Committee and its predecessors have faced at least four periods of especially rapid change in British Columbia. Each time, the government has increased funding for public education, for the health system, and for social assistance.

The year 2017 is the fourth such occasion.

In the 1900s government spent significant amounts to take public education from the 19th to the 20th century. Now we must fund the system for the 21st century, not the last one.

A century ago, before and after the 1914-1918 war, the public (and government) realized that fair and equitable funding for schools was crucial in a young democracy, as British Columbia then was. System-wide growth, along with increased public funding, built public confidence in the schools, and in our society's capacity to deal with change.

Since then, administrative costs have held steady from year to year. Further, the system has become more accountable and transparent.¹ None of this changes a fundamental fact of educational governance in the province: the system is run from the top down.

Then, after World War II, the post-war baby boom produced serious overcrowding in schools, even as the economy began to diversify. The government response was to increase spending well over the rate of inflation.

¹ For evidence in support of this claim, see chapters on finance and administration in the royal commissions of H.B. King (1935), but also of 1925 (Putman-Weir), 1945 (Maxwell Cameron), 1960 (Chant et al.), and 1988 (Sullivan, including its technical appendices). All are available online at the Legislative Library, excepting the Putman-Weir report, freely available on Google Books.

In the late 1960s, a third moment of rapid social change, the public agreed schooling must help to stimulate students' critical thinking powers—from kindergarten to Ph.D. In response, the government of the early 1970s briefly and significantly increased public education funding.

Forty years later we enter a fourth period of change. We do so with a background of fiscal “restraint” going back to the 1980s. In school boards across the province, the cupboard is bare.

In 2016, boards shoulder many social and educational responsibilities—the education of differently able children, the provision of ESL instruction, the fair distribution of educational benefits to all citizens, and the best possible teaching of the compulsory public curriculum. Yet boards have too little funding and too little discretion.²

It is extraordinary that the Vancouver School Board should be discussing closure of Britannia Secondary, Gladstone, and other schools with records of success in the areas of concern we have listed.

Meanwhile British Columbians are amazed to see the Government offering well over \$300,000,000 annually in subsidies to private schools under the Independent Schools Act (1977).

Our main points remain: on historical and educational grounds, we argue that British Columbia per-pupil funding should rise in the next two fiscal years to match funding in Canada's most generous provinces. We say school closures should be prevented. We argue that programmes in the arts and basic academic fields should be retained, and strengthened, and made available to all young British Columbians.

[Zlotnik]

Why Public Education Must Be Democratized

The current BC funding system does not support democracy and undermines efforts of parents and teachers to teach students democratic principles and values. The BC legislature, in addition to deciding the funds for public education, is also teaching lessons about governance, democracy, deliberation and fairness. While local communities and school boards can best discern what students and the community need, there is no realistic way for school trustees to determine or even

² R.L. Bish and E.G. Clemens, *Local Government in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Union of British Columbia Municipalities, 2008), esp. pp. 66-69; also Judith A. Clark, *A Guide to School Legislation in British Columbia* (Vancouver: British Columbia School Trustees Association, 2007),

influence the total amount of money for their school districts. This approach to funding public education fails in three ways: (1) The total amount of money for public education is inadequate. (2) The principle that every student in the province should have an equal opportunity to be educated is violated. (Unequal opportunities to learn reflect both economic and social inequalities and the impact of unequal capacity to raise funds through charity, student fees or parental fundraising to ameliorate the underfunding crisis. More generous funding of some private schools is another source of inequality.) (3) The *processes* for determining budgets convey *anti-democratic* messages.

Democracy is learned in the ways we govern ourselves more than it is taught as a doctrine. When parents, students and citizens see their ideas and concerns disregarded, showing they have little political efficacy, how can they believe that public education is preparing them for democracy? This centralized, top-down approach has devastating impacts on public confidence in public education and on the belief that citizens can influence decisions about, not only education but also other realms of concern. This woefully broken system discourages parents, students, educators and citizens from believing they have significant influence over education policy. It undermines belief in democratic processes of deliberation. If parents want to have more influence over the education of their children, the present system practically invites them to abandon public education in favour of private schooling. As the now elderly son of a World War II veteran, I know my dad would see this as a setback for the democracy he fought for.

[Bruneau; Zlotnik]

Proposed Solutions

Our guiding purposes should be to honour democracy as we set education budgets, and to ensure adequate funding in those budgets. These two purposes lead to practical objectives in 2017 and later. We propose

1. that this Standing Committee report to the legislature that the system of funding public education needs a major overhaul. The new system should
 - give school boards more discretion, including the ability to respond to long-term population flows—changes in age distribution, immigration and migration
 - fund school districts over longer periods
 - free public education funding from the formulaic per-pupil approach under which it has laboured for nearly forty years
 - give public education a firmer basis in revenues from the progressive income tax.

2. that the government's vital leadership role is to engage citizens in taking responsibility, strengthening democracy, and pursuing the common good. School

trustees, educators, students and citizens could and should participate in discussions about the principles for funding public education, principles that will have the public's confidence. It is time to consider a Royal Commission.

3. that public funding of private schools be reduced or eliminated. Expenditures of more than \$300 million annually in subsidies to private schools undermine public confidence and do not advance democracy.

Appendix A: Origin of Public Education Network Society (PENS)

In 2002-2003, an independent panel of five members toured the province and visited 42 communities where they invited submissions and listened to presentations from the citizens. (The panel consisted of the Reverend Margaret Marquardt, George Watts, Kathy Whittam, David Chudnovsky and Dr. John Moss). The panel received 620 submissions, which it reviewed in producing its report. Citizens' voices articulated the promises and principles of the Charter, summarized in the Charter poster. Those promises and principles also motivated the organization of the Public Education Network Society (PENS), which Dr. William Bruneau and Dr. Michael Zlotnik represent today.

Our Charter begins with these words. "Public education is a sacred trust. As a community we promise to prepare learners for a socially responsible life in a free and democratic society, to participate in a world which each generation will shape and build." The conviction that there is an intimate relationship between democracy and public education is widely shared in British Columbia. The Charter panel conducted what is probably the largest consultation since the Sullivan Commission Report of 1988.

Appendix B: Material Supplementing Democracy & Education Oral Presentation

In the years immediately following World War II, in the aftermath of enormously tragic destruction, death and suffering, Canadians saw democracy as the basis of a good society. Not only was democracy threatened by fascism, Naziism and other forms of tyranny but it also needed a more robust institutional support within our own country. This internal institutionalized support for democracy was to ensure that all children would have an equal opportunity to be educated and to participate freely and equally in the economy and society; to ensure the sick and injured would be cared for; to ensure the unemployed would have an adequate income; and to guarantee that the old would have pensions that provided dignity. Today and for a number of years, the strength and stability of the internal supports for democracy, specifically with respect to public education, have been eroded. We believe it is time to reaffirm our steadfast support for public education for democracy. For that reason, we address five questions:

What is democracy?

Why is democracy critical to the future of humanity?

What is public education?

What is the connection between public education and democracy?

How is British Columbia doing in supporting public education for democracy?

What is Democracy?

We all understand that democracy involves rights and freedoms to participate politically in governing one's society with a backdrop of institutional arrangements such as elections, voting, rule of law, due process of law and human and civil rights. However, as important as the institutional provisions for democracy are, there are also crucial cultural and pedagogical requirements. In his magisterial history *Toward Democracy: The*

Struggle For Self-Rule In European And American Thought, James T. Kloppenberg stresses that freedom is not a merely individualistic matter but can only arise and persist as part of a *moral order of reciprocity and concern for the common good*. Moreover, democracy is founded on the principle of the existential equality of every human being. The *freedom and rights* that define a democratic society *require a moral order binding citizens together in a culture of mutual care and respect*. Simply allowing everyone else to be an individual does not create the conditions for democracy and rights.

A crucial underpinning for democracy is equality, indeed a number of kinds of equality. There is existential equality, which means that no one can be excluded from the rights of citizenship by reason of their race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, region, etc. As Abraham Lincoln understood so well, slavery is utterly contradictory to democracy. A citizen is a citizen; and citizens are not split into castes or (socio-economic) classes.

Canada is not yet a fully democratic society. Without discussing all the ways we fall short of being genuinely and fully democratic, among them is the legacy of colonialism, racism and cultural imperialism that has so devastated indigenous communities and undermined the opportunities of Canadians, including indigenous Canadians, to share fully and equally in the bountiful grace provided by Canada. Secondly, social class divisions and vast disparities in wealth, influence and education also reveal a profound failure to accomplish democracy. We accomplish democracy, not through requiring everyone to be the same or through having the state take over responsibilities that would otherwise be exercised by families but through a respectful partnership of families and the state. Moreover, families need the social, economic and political provisions of their society to support them. This is especially true of families that are poor or that have suffered from illness or tragedy. When some families are living in poverty and others in luxurious abundance, life and learning opportunities for children are radically different. This is unjust. While public education cannot, by itself, overcome that problem, the people of British Columbia, expressing their convictions and values through their legislature, can make an enormous difference on this matter, which is fundamental to the contributions of British Columbia and Canada to building a global society of peace and justice.

Why is Democracy Critical to the Future of Humanity?

As a now elderly son of a World War II veteran, I have visceral personal memories and convictions concerning Canadian democracy. I recall coming home from Charles Dickens Elementary School as a seven-year-old, in October 1944, to find my mother weeping at our kitchen table. She had received a telegram reporting my father being wounded in France. He, along with thousands of other veterans, fought to defend our freedom and democracy. A world war following a devastating depression made democracy more of a future hope than a fulfilment. It was the hope that Canada would build on its basic democratic platform to ensure that every child would be *publicly supported* to grow up and become a full, contributing citizen. It was also about *public provision* of health care for everyone and about publicly provided pensions. At the end of World War II, Canada, along with other countries on a liberal, democratic trajectory, honoured the war-time commitment to democracy by making major improvements to our

public support for equality and democracy, including pensions, veterans access to university, and over time, health care. So the building up of a public sector to ensure social equality, equal opportunity and the elimination of discriminatory practices, laws and policies was earnestly begun and continued. Public education is an integral part of our commitment to democracy. Not only does democracy mean ensuring equal opportunities for everyone to contribute to and benefit from social cooperation but it also means that everyone has a *voice* in shaping our future together.

Our predecessors, like my father, mother, grandparents, uncles, aunts and neighbours paid dearly to win democracy here at home and overseas. They paid in lives lost, traumatic injuries, blood, suffering, treasure and foregone opportunities for achievement, relationships and happiness. We owe a solemn debt, both to those previous generations and to the generations to come, to maintain, extend and improve our democracy. In January 1945, I was taken to the train station in Vancouver to meet my returning father and to put on a brave and welcoming face for a train full of returning veterans. It was far harder than I ever imagined. The smell of vomit, for example, was overwhelming. The train reeked of sickness as the veterans returned wounded, ill and struggling. This commitment to public provision of high quality education, health care and social security is a *sacred trust* and I ask that you as representatives of the people honour the connection between public provision and this democracy that our people have paid so dearly for.

What is Public Education?

Unlike Prussia and France, with their early adoption of *state schooling*, both Canada and the United States were early adopters of *public education*. There is a profound difference between state systems of schooling in which the central state (nation or province) determines the aims, principles, curriculum, assessment criteria and funding versus systems which have a meaningful degree of local involvement in determining these matters. State schooling is an instrument for making subjects of the state understand their duties and be skilled in performing them. In contrast, public education is the preparation of citizens to govern themselves in a democracy and to improve and defend that democracy. The Charter for Public Education calls on government to be responsible for fully funding all aspects of a quality education. When schools have to do fundraising or charge fees to students for the educational programs, this undermines public provision and equal opportunity. The Charter calls for, “Learners, parents, early childhood educators, teachers, support staff, administrators, school boards, post-secondary educators, the Government of British Columbia and communities to work in partnership to meet the needs of all learners.” Additionally it calls for strong local democratic governance within the provincial education system.

To summarize, *public education reflects a partnership* between the provincial government, local school boards, students, parents, a range of educators, postsecondary educational institutions and the communities which these institutions serve. The public participates in determining the aims, principles and requirements of public education.

Moreover, while European countries tended to adopt state systems of schooling, run from

the centre and as instruments of propaganda for nation and empire building through pedagogies that fostered indoctrination and the subordination of the individual to the state, the general pattern, with many deviations by locale, in Canada and the United States, was *public education* that engaged local communities in both *determining or shaping the aims and principles of education and in contributing funds for that education*. While there were tendencies towards a measure of inequality on the basis of the different levels of wealth and will to pay in local communities, the meaningful participation of local citizens and public education contributed to the political literacy and understanding of democracy for both the adults and the children in those communities. Until about a generation ago, British Columbia had found that sweet spot where we combined meaningful local participation and power in public education with an equalization of rights and opportunities in different districts. However, we had not adequately addressed the rights of indigenous communities and learners.

In 2020 hindsight, it takes generous funding and democratic participation to build a democratic culture.

What is the Connection between Public Education and Democracy?

One of the strengths of the Charter for Public Education is its covenantal narrative of “promising.” The narrative of covenant, reciprocity and promise has been integral to the movement for democracy in Europe and North America over many centuries. While all of us should want every child in our province to have abundant opportunities for a rich, broad, liberal education, when we make that desire into a right, which we honour by promising to one another and to the next generation that, “Everyone has the right to a free, quality public education,” then we know we are serious.

As the ancient Greeks understood so well, society produces more than goods and services. It produces *socialized individuals*, which Cornelius Castoriadis characterizes as *the most effective tool ever made by society*. While calling a human being a tool seems to contradict the principle of respect for persons, we might interpret this observation as reversing a particularly recent trend in political thinking and practice, one that sees education as drawing, parasite-like, on the wealth produced through private sector activity. When we see *public education as the process of the cultural, social, political, intellectual, ethical and spiritual development of children and youth so they become enlightened persons, productive and responsible citizens and also the most powerful, useful and decisive element in the quality of a society* and its economy, we will cease shortchanging the investments we make in education and the public support for children and families.

Canada is a state party to the Convention on the Rights of the child. That convention draws attention to the vulnerability of children and the need for a partnership between parents or guardians on the one hand and the state on the other. [Article 27] We bear a responsibility as a community and society, for ensuring that every child has a “standard of living adequate for physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.” While generally British Columbia provides social support for poor families or families dealing

with addiction and mental health, *we have not yet ensured that every child is supported materially, socially, intellectually, spiritually and morally*. We must do better and doing better with respect to the supports for families and children is an integral part of honouring our commitment to democracy and to making our social and economic conditions aligned with public education.

Instead of assuming that democracy is already accomplished we should commit ourselves to *democratization* as an ongoing, intentional process of extending, defending and fulfilling democracy. A crucial part of building a democracy is public education. The responsibilities of public education are many but among the foremost is nurturing and forming a certain sort of individual who builds, with their fellow citizens, a particular kind of communal, covenantal and reciprocal moral order, which is what we mean by a democratic society. A moral order is founded on the existential equality of all human beings but also political equality and rough, approximate economic and social equality. We want citizens to contribute to the common good, to pay their fair share of the taxes required to maintain and extend democratic institutions and relationships. A democratic society accomplishes both the recognition of a range of diverse ways of being human and the freedom to enjoy those diverse ways while also defending and building a shared culture and shared set of values expressed through our evolving understanding of the *common good*.

How does private education advance democracy? Insofar as it produces inequalities in the amount of resources available for the education of students, private schooling undermines democracy. Insofar as private schooling fails to cultivate a commitment to the common good and a society of existential equality, political equality and general social equality, it undermines democracy. While a case can be made for parents having the right to opt their children out of state controlled schooling, when a critical mass of parents enrol their children in private schooling, that undermines the political will and the institutional conditions for equal opportunity to learn, which is a cornerstone of a democratic society. Traditionally, especially in class-divided societies, private schooling has been one of the pillars of a class system of differential wealth, power, rights and privileges.

If the people of British Columbia are fully committed to democratizing our society, we will *put our public priority on public education*. There is no good argument for public funding of private schooling if our goal is to further democratize our society and to equalize educational, economic, social and political opportunities.

Therefore, it follows that a government committed to a democratic future will unreservedly support public education. It will ensure that funding is adequate. It will consult and listen to school trustees and bodies representing postsecondary institutions, parent groups, educators. It will ensure that the great majority of parents, students, educators and citizens are satisfied with public education. It will not provide public funds to support private schooling. It will do nothing to undermine public confidence and support for public education.

How is British Columbia Doing in Supporting Public Education for Democracy?

The Tyee for July 7, 2016, reports that trustees and parents say the BC school funding formula is broken. It is not acceptable to have a broken funding formula!

The process for setting the budget is dictatorial and moving increasingly towards a state-schooling rather than a public education approach to governance. Local communities have lost not only their authority with respect to the total budget amounts but also any rational process for determining the needs of the students in the community and the resources required to meet those needs. That blows back on education in many ways. It is profoundly disrespectful to school boards, school trustees and local communities. It exacerbates a climate of distrust because the process does not respect the participants, even those with important responsibilities to represent the needs and interests students enrolled in public schools by not bringing them together to deliberate on how the common good is going to be fulfilled or advanced through public education and by undermining respect for deliberation. There are two main ways that the present funding and governance arrangements are undermining democracy: (1) the *process* of determining the purposes, principles, conditions and funding *is authoritarian*; (2) the impact of the funding system on educational equality is distressing because the combination of social policy and education policy is reproducing a class-divided social culture and a future of *increasing inequality, which operates against democracy*.

Appendix C: Excerpts from the Convention on the Rights of the Child

Adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by General Assembly resolution 44/25 of 20 November 1989 entry into force 2 September 1990

Article 27

1. States Parties recognize the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.
2. The parent(s) or others responsible for the child have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capacities, the conditions of living necessary for the child's development.
3. States Parties, in accordance with national conditions and within their means, shall take appropriate measures to assist parents and others responsible for the child to implement this right and shall in case of need provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition, clothing and housing.

Article 29

1. States Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:
 - (a) The development of the child's personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential;
 - (b) The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and for the principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations;
 - (c) The development of respect for the child's parents, his or her own cultural identity, language and values, for the national values of the country in which the child is living, the country from which he or she may originate, and for civilizations different from his or

her own;

(d) The preparation of the child for responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin;

(e) The development of respect for the natural environment.

2. No part of the present article or article 28 shall be construed so as to interfere with the liberty of individuals and bodies to establish and direct educational institutions, subject always to the observance of the principle set forth in paragraph 1 of the present article and to the requirements that the education given in such institutions shall conform to such minimum standards as may be laid down by the State.