

In response to the December 13 editorial in this paper, I wish to give some clarity and insight into the proposed cuts to education.

What you call 'rhetoric' surrounding this debate is the direct result of mismanagement by government. Concern, worry and damage to morale exist when a directive to cut budgets is delivered without defining expected outcomes. School boards received this dictate without the benefit of the equivalent of a Dr John Ross studying the system and preparing recommendations. The way government has moved on this issue is out of step with its stated goals of consultation and openness. In that vacuum, school boards came up with drastic solutions to an impossible red pencil exercise. It was a recipe for fear and concern.

I also wish to clarify some points around administration. The government (correctly) has stated school boards should look within their own walls first for cost savings. The fact is, they did. Contrary to yesterday's editorial, school board officials have indicated 300 "regional leaders" -- which means school board staff -- would be cut first, before any classroom cuts would be announced. (And just to clarify, the Minister did not direct boards to consider further board amalgamations as a cost-saving measure.)

While the government has consistently pointed to dropping enrolments as the impetus for these cuts, it has never acknowledged what anyone connected with public education in this province knows: the Hogg funding formula already anticipated and therefore now takes into account dropping enrolments. The Minister's attempts to explain the cuts thusly, echoed by the premier, ring false.

Cynics might say this "exercise" by government to identify more than 20 percent cuts in the education budget is simply a way to soften up parents and educators for a cut of 10 or 15 percent. As skeptical as opposition politicians may be about the intentions of this NDP government, we believe government can and must explain its goals in terms of educational outcomes. Instead, when Opposition Leader Stephen McNeil asked the premier for his plan for education, the premier answered: "our real plan is to make sure that we get the books of this province back to balance." This is hardly a plan for education. This is hardly an answer to inspire confidence.

Cutting education without deciding on priorities first is like beginning a journey without a roadmap. We may get somewhere -- but it may not be where we want -- or need -- to end up.

This government rejected an emergency debate on education cuts shortly before this session of the Legislature ended last week. That too, is "unfortunate"; in the absence of open and frank discussion, misinformation and fear thrive.

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