

Full text of BC Finance Minister Colin Hansen's budget speech ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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EXCERPTS

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We are providing more support for low and middle income parents. Over the next three years, we will invest an additional \$26 million for child care subsidies, which offset the costs of child care for about 28,000 children every month.

...

With this budget, we are also moving forward with our plan to improve education for B.C.'s youngest learners -- the people who will one day run this province.

Building on the success of our StrongStart early learning centres, we are fulfilling our commitment to provide full day kindergarten for five year olds. The program is being phased in starting this September, and as it becomes fully operational, annual funding will rise to \$129 million by 2012.

We will also work in partnership with the private sector to open new preschools for three and four year olds in neighbourhoods throughout B.C. And we will work with partners in municipal governments, school districts and community organizations to turn more of B.C.'s schools into Neighbourhood Learning Centres, where people of all ages can access learning opportunities and other services under the same roof.

With declining enrolment, many of our schools now have under utilized space, and we are working with them to put that space to use for the benefit of whole communities.

For example, a new Neighbourhood Learning Centre in Revelstoke will offer the province's first early learning hub, with a full range of supports for families with young children. The centre will offer seamless services to children from infancy through to school age, including not just childcare, but also medical, dental, literacy and community services as well.

Mr. Speaker, this model is the way of the future. It recognizes the vital role of schools in our communities. It has the potential to make life easier for parents, with services all in one location. And it builds on our commitment to get the greatest benefit from every one of the billions of dollars invested in public education.

We have increased education funding every year since 2001, and with this budget the trend continues. In the coming school year, per pupil funding will increase to \$8,300. That is the highest ever in British Columbia.

We will provide an additional \$150 million over three years to fully fund teachers' wages and benefits, and to offset other cost pressures.

And we will provide \$110 million to school districts between now and March 2011 for annual facilities grants.

These are all important investments. But, with this budget, we are not just doing more of the same. Yes, we're putting more money into education; but we're also taking steps to find greater efficiencies to help ensure the system is sustainable for the long term.

We will work in the year ahead to identify further administrative savings and redirect those dollars to benefit students. And, Mr. Speaker, this is what we mean when we say we are "refocusing" government spending.

We are redirecting dollars from administrative and management functions so we can invest more in front line services.

This includes a commitment for a new case management system to deliver better front line services to women, children, income assistance recipients and those most vulnerable.

We are also refocusing spending in health care... emphasizing innovation... with the goal of making the system financially sustainable

...

- reprinted from the Vancouver Province

Region: British Columbia ^[2]

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