

Teachers strike could financially devastate families with special needs kids ^[1]

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Source: CTV News, Vancouver ^[2]

Format: Article

Publication Date: 21 Aug 2014

EXCERPTS

The mother of an eight-year-old boy with special needs says she will be financially devastated if the ongoing B.C. teachers' strike continues into the school year.

Anne Belanger's son is physically disabled, and the Ministry of Education funds a full-time one-on-one educational assistant to be with him when he's in the classroom.

While classes are out for the summer, funding is provided by the Ministry of Child and Family Development to supplement regular childcare fees.

But Belanger says she just received a letter saying that funding will run out in September, when the responsibility would normally shift back to the Ministry of Education.

She says she'll be saddled with an extra \$3,200 per month in child care fees if classes don't resume as planned on Sept. 2.

"There is no money, there is no funding," she said.

"I really don't know what to do. One can only imagine how many children across the province are affected by this. We're talking about thousands of children."

NDP MLA Judy Darcy, who represents New Westminster, says the B.C. government has not made provisions for students requiring extra funding, like her constituent's son.

"He's falling between the cracks and the government has come up with no solution, not only to the labour dispute but to families with children with special needs like this," she told a press conference Thursday morning.

She estimates there are 150 to 200 children in the Tri-Cities alone who are in a similar situation.

The B.C. Teachers Federation says there were more than 50,000 students with special needs in B.C. schools in the 2011-2012 school year.

Darcy is asking the province to come up with a solution to the loophole she believes will hurt many B.C. families.

"Children with special needs are going to be severely disadvantaged," Darcy said.

Speaking to CTV News, Education Minister Peter Fassbender says he can't guarantee that children will be back in school in September.

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read online at CTV News ^[2]

Region: British Columbia ^[3]

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