



POLICY STATEMENT

EDUCATION

Public education is an important building block of our democratic society. Universal access to a basic level of education is the right of every citizen. As the world and economy become more complex, working people need to have greater access to public education throughout their lives. The labour movement understands that when governments cut back on funding to public schools, colleges and universities, and encourage privatization and commercialization of public education institutions, working people stand to lose the most.

Labour education is not neutral; it reflects a worker-centered vision and values. Underlying every labour education program is a particular vision of society and what it means to be human.

1. The Goals of Public Education:

To prepare learners for a socially responsible life in a free and democratic society;

- To provide learners with the knowledge and wisdom to encourage their natural joy of learning; to encourage them to become persons of character, strength and integrity; to infuse them with hope and with spirit and to guide them to resolute and thoughtful action;
- To provide affordable access to programs and learning environments of choice to all students;
- To help learners take responsibility for the world they live in as active agents;
- To make all learners feel welcome and supported in all aspects of their educational life;
- To provide quality learning opportunities and support that enables learner success, and that is accountable to the public; and
- To ensure that access and tuition is affordable for post-secondary education and eventually, free to all learners.

2. Principles of Public Education K-12 and Post-Secondary:

- The learner is at the centre of public education;
- Public education must be broad-based and include aesthetic, cultural, emotional, social, intellectual, academic, physical and vocational development;

- Critical thinking is nurtured and valued and learners are equipped to be reflective, analytical, global citizens;
- Learners are full participants and together with others in the education community develop their own goals, learning activities and curriculum;
- There is an “environment for learning” that insures each learner can reach their greatest potential, where each learning style is affirmed and the achievements of each learner are measured and assessed accordingly;
- There is a safe and respectful environment for life-long learning that celebrates diversity, embraces the physical, spiritual, emotional and intellectual integrity of each individual, recognizes and acknowledges differences and prevents discrimination in all of its forms;
- Public post-secondary education is a right for all citizens and immigrants in BC wherever they live and whatever their income level;
- The expansion of private for profit-schools, colleges, universities and institutes must be opposed;
- Schools and post-secondary institutions must be learning communities that respect and support the on-going education needs of those who work in these institutions. These workers must have the right to unionize, to free collective bargaining and to strike; and
- Governance in these post-secondary education institutions must include faculty, staff and students and must be democratically accountable, transparent, and respectful to the internal and external community they serve.

3. Expectations:

- Government is responsible for fully funding all aspects and levels of a quality education system. Funding levels must fully finance the cost of employee collective agreements, as well as other costs that are imposed by the government;
- Government must increase its share of funding as well as the level of investment in learners so that a fully enabled, quality post-secondary education system can meet the needs of all British Columbians. The reliance on tuition fees must be decreased and eventually eliminated over time;
- Government must support apprenticeship and industry training. A key attribute of a successful and modern economy is the skill and mobility of its workforce. High skill levels support high productivity and allow workers/learners to easily adapt to changing technologies. Increased mobility allows regional economic development to be more evenly paced. Neither attribute will be realized unless the commitment to training is universally shared by government and employers. Workers need to be provided with the opportunity to receive fully-funded,

properly-credentialled, portable skills in our training institutes and public post-secondary institutions. In order to maintain the integrity of the training process, there must be a reinstatement of labour and public sector educator roles in the governance of trades training. Affordable opportunities for youth and other interested learners must be expanded and funded so that the number of participants in trades training can increase;

- Government must also maintain strong, local, democratic governance within the provincial education system to protect academic freedom. The academic freedom of educators is essential for an honest, critical quest for knowledge and must be protected through educational governance and policies within institutions including tenure;
- Government must reverse the trend towards self-regulated private institutions that may grant publicly-recognized credentials. It must reverse the trend towards allowing private institutions to indirectly rely on public support through publicly-funded financial support of students. Public funds must be used in public institutions;
- There must be fully-funded equitable access for communities to programs, resources and opportunities for learners, regardless of geographic location or socio-economic status;
- Disadvantaged or equity-seeking learners must have equitable access and support for success in the programming of their choice. Each First Nation learner has a right to an education respectful of his or her history, language and culture. All BC schools and post-secondary institutions must be funded to provide opportunities for First Nations students, supported and delivered by First Nations Instructors and always in consultation with First Nation's communities;
- Government must commit to provide tuition free developmental programs such as Literacy Training, Adult Basic Education and Adult Special Education;
- Government must provide English language training and skill development training for immigrants. Government must fund and mandate public post-secondary institutions to develop and deliver affordable programming that meets the educational needs in their communities;
- Government must establish a provincial certification for teaching assistants;
- Government must establish regulation and adequate funding for the safe transport of students;
- Government must eliminate school-based budgeting;
- School boards must seek submissions from all stakeholders affected by budgetary cutbacks and publicize all submissions before Trustees make final budget decisions; and

- Funding for special needs students must include training, preparation time and professional development for special needs support staff.

4. The Goals of Labour Education:

- To provide a vehicle for the labour movement to achieve our goals of equality and economic and social justice in an approach that is relevant and accessible to all workers including youth workers;
- To develop a deeper and comprehensive understanding and analysis of class, race and gender in order to effectively challenge unequal power relations in workplaces, communities and civil society;
- To encourage participation, inclusion and creativity;
- To involve the entire person, including the heart, mind, body and spirit;
- To engage members about learning and encourage sharing with others about what we have learned and how we learned it;
- To promote group learning, individual learning and learning on the job, at home, in the union hall, on picket lines, at labour conferences, union schools and in the public education system;
- To develop democratic practices;
- To encourage members to foster a just and socially responsible society;
- To keep the union movement relevant and strong;
- To reinforce worker-to-worker organizing that passes on the rich history of workers and our unions while recognizing the need to embrace continuing collective action in the present that is focussed around the issues in people's daily lives;
- To help union members learn and grow within the labour movement and their communities;
- To support the concept of paid educational leave and urge all affiliates to make paid educational leave a bargaining priority; and
- To urge all affiliates to create scholarships for delegates to attend Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) and B.C. Federation of Labour weekend and weeklong schools, conferences and workshops.

5. The Principles of Labour Education:

- Workers share and build on their experiences in a way that respects and values their histories, knowledge, whole bodies and diverse cultures;

- Workers learn from and with workers. “Education by, for, and of the people”;
- The goal of educating and organizing within our unions to increase our capacity to mobilize our members to achieve justice in the workplace and in society must be reinforced;
- Workers develop critical thinking and organizing skills for analysis and collective action as part of the wider process of organizing for social change and movement building;
- Workers develop responsive leadership skills at and for all levels of the labour movement and civil society;
- Workers develop capacity to critically examine and challenge inequitable power relations, integrating an analysis of class, race and gender;
- Workers are encouraged to be creative and use artistic and cultural expression as both a tool for action and an inclusive process of learning and organizing; and
- Workers learn from our history and in doing so build solidarity, create democracy, work for equality and collective action, and promote lifelong learning.

6. **Expectations:**

- To have workplaces where ideas are valued and where workers are respected with a decent salary, benefits and working conditions;
- To have workplaces where diversity is celebrated;
- To have unions that play an effective role in the political system of our country and province, and demonstrate the value of an active, engaged civil society;
- To have legislation that is worker and union friendly;
- To have communities that respect people and our environment; and
- To have citizens valued over profits.

7. **Current issues in Public and Labour Education and Recommendations**

- a) In May 2003, the provincial government passed into legislation **Bill 51 - Teaching Profession Amendment Act**. Because this **Bill** significantly affects the work of teachers and violates fundamental democratic and union rights. It is recommended that: the B.C. Federation of Labour fully support the BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF) in its efforts to lobby the provincial government and opposition parties to repeal the **Teaching Profession Act**;

- b) Tuition fees at BC institutions have increased beyond the bounds of affordability for most learners. Tuition fees must be reduced and eventually eliminated;
- c) The **Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act (Bill 28)** breaches collective agreements and removes bargained provisions. We must continue to lobby for the repeal of this **Act**;
- d) Apprenticeship and skill training programs must be expanded in the K-12 and post-secondary sector;
- e) Initiatives that involve youth in apprenticeship programs in the public school system must be promoted;
- f) Educating school counsellors and academic advisors about the benefits of apprenticeship and trades training must be encouraged to better advise students as they make career choices;
- g) Improvements to trade union acts, labour standards, human rights, health, safety and environmental legislation must be sought;
- h) Labour education must become fully inclusive and accessible for all members regardless of language, geography, resources, literacy, gender, race, sexual orientation, ability and age;
- i) Academic freedom in public schools, colleges and universities is increasingly under attack. Protection of this hard-won freedom must be a priority;
- j) Initiatives to improve worker's access to colleges and universities for career training and personal development must be created and promoted; and
- k) Health and safety education in public secondary schools must become a priority.

Adopted in Convention 2004
B.C. Federation of Labour

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