

February 24, 2006

This week is **budget week** and the focus is again on funding public education. I keep hearing of media stories and comments about the “cuts” to education. The short version is there have been none. So what is the real story?

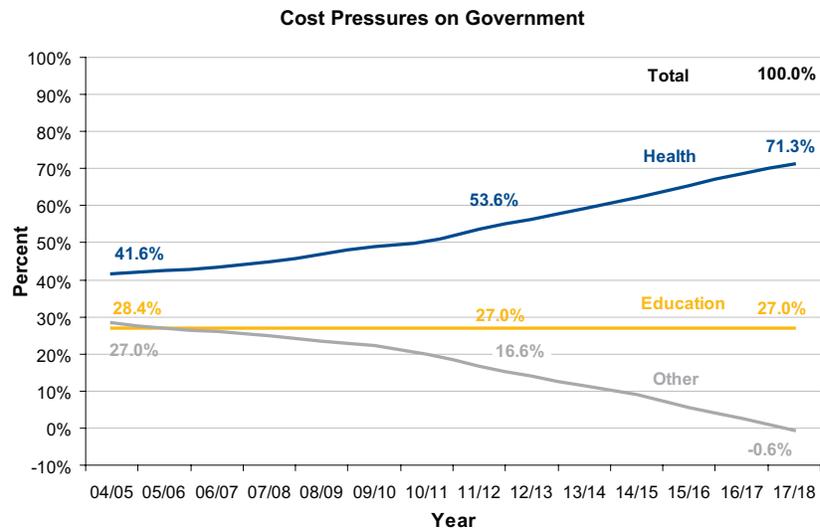
In 2001 the funding system was changed to become more student based and less input driven. This change was based on the view that the student is the most important part of our system. It is the number of students that drive costs not the program or the curriculum but the student. If there are more students, the cost of teaching them will increase. If there are less students the cost of preparing them as citizens should decrease – simple mathematics.

The number of students has been declining. We declined over 6,300 students this year and over 30,000 since 2000/01. In spite of this, government has guaranteed it would maintain funding to school boards. That means that school boards have received increased funding per student in each year. What do the facts look like since September, 2001?

Funded FTE enrollment

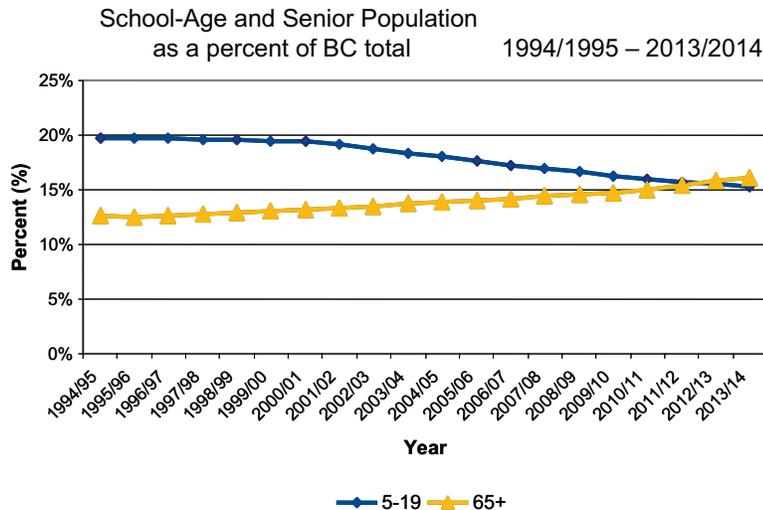
Since 2001, it is true there have been cost pressures – wages, benefits, resources, inflation – but each year enrollment has dropped the funding per student has increased.

Is funding sufficient? Not for us educators – there is never enough to do all that we want to for our students. But think about this question – Will the resource challenge get any easier? Look at this graph that illustrates the competition for funding among ministries providing services. This shows what happens if we, in education, are able to maintain our funding through continued enrollment decline in the face of increasing health costs. Yes, health is important to all of us. New hips, knees and treatments for all our citizens are an important measure of the quality of life of our parents and children, and indeed, ourselves. This is what happens if education maintains its share of the budget and health continues to grow at its current rate. Notice by 2010 only health and education are funded and all other government services are not.



For the first time ever, the number of seniors in the province will be greater than the number of school-age children by 2012. Pressure on health care will continue to grow. Are we likely to see large increases in education funding in this environment? I think not – but our continued declining enrollment will result in increases per student.

continued on page 2



Notes from the Deputy

Next Week

I will talk more about the context and changing demographics in public education. What does this enrollment decline look like? What are the long term projections? What about the profession and the supply and succession issues? Are there sub-groups that buck the trends? You will be surprised at some of the information presented.

continued from page 1

I know that enrollment decline affects districts differently. Those of you in rural BC are feeling the impact of smaller numbers on reducing your economy of scale. We need to pay attention to that. But the fact is, fewer students need to result in lower costs. Getting smaller is not easy, but maintaining funding year over year helps.

We have challenges in our system. There is tension respecting how much to tax our citizens and where those tax dollars should be spent. There is disagreement on how much is enough for education, health and other social services. How do we use our resources most effectively and in the smartest way possible to create the best life chances for all of our citizens?

Next time you hear about the funding cuts to education, refer to this graph that shows the per pupil funding. It is our challenge as leaders to make the best decisions possible with the resources we have knowing the larger context of the competition of resources among the social services.

