

Education groups target grassroots for lobby tactics

By CAROL VOLKART
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Concerned that polarized rhetoric and massive one-shot media events have lost their effectiveness in the fight against education financing cuts, the education community has changed its tactics.

Whereas last year at this time many educators were gearing up to take part in a controversial Solidarity Coalition strike, this fall they're staging a low-key grassroots battle aimed at persuading the average citizen of the importance of education.

"Our impression has been that the public has turned off polarized rhetoric," said Jack Finnogason, spokesman for the Defend Education Services Coalition, which organized Wednesday's province-wide day of concern for education.

"We've decided to present our arguments in a reasoned manner over a period of time and leave it up to the public to decide whether we're right or wrong."

In contrast to last year, this fall's campaign is aimed at spreading the word at the grassroots level by staging small events in communities large and small throughout the province.

"Our feeling is that we have to engage in a long-haul appeal to the public to explain the results of funding cuts. You can't do it in a single glamorous event, you have to do it in a long term campaign at the grass roots level," Finnogason said.

As part of the week's events, Surrey Teachers' Association president Brian Porter and Douglas and Kwantlen Faculty Association president John Waters is-

sued a brief calling on the province to review its education financing policies.

Porter warned bigger classes and fewer services are making it difficult for teachers to meet students' individual needs.

"All of the children in our district are being hurt. These cuts have gone too far and are now threatening the equality of educational opportunity."

Waters said budget cuts, tuition fee increases and the creation of an all-loan student aid program "are denying access to college education to more and more residents."

"Some of the students who have gained access have not been able to register in all the courses they need. And the quality of education for all those who are able to attend is dropping."

In another news release, Karen Ewing, vice-president of the College-Institute Educators' Association of B.C., said women students and instructors are being squeezed out of community colleges because money cuts hit them hardest.

She said many programs with a predominantly female enrolment have been cut or privatized and fewer preparatory courses — those needed by women to upgrade their skills so they can get into the new technology programs dominated by males — are being offered.

In addition, many colleges give favored status to full-time students, which hurts women because they are the majority of part-time students.

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