



Just the Facts: Educational Opportunities

At SEIU-West, we believe in having an engaged membership. In anticipation of the Saskatchewan election on April 4, 2016 we have identified several key issues that matter to you, your families and communities. "Just the Facts" sheets on those issues are part of the information, education and tools we offer to help you make informed choices about voting and getting involved in the election.

Government funding has not kept up with the changing educational needs of our growing population.

Public education matters to everyone.

- "Education, training and learning...activities whose purpose is to develop knowledge, skills, understanding, and values" – statement at the beginning of a Statistics Canada data collection document.
- Access to quality education, at all stages of life, is key to equal citizenship: increasingly, it can make or break your ability to take part in your community, and make or break the well-being of that community as a whole.
- A significant amount of public/government regulation and investment is necessary to ensure access for everyone and that the benefits of this crucial resource are distributed fairly.
- Public education is essential to integrating immigrants into the community.
- The same forces that press for greater privatization in other sectors are at work here, For example, the government has ordered the construction of nine new schools using the public-private partnership (P3) model. (See "Just the Facts: Privatization Schemes".)
- There is a push in Saskatchewan (and elsewhere) that education should be more focused on "skills"; this is part of a broader agenda to transfer more and more of the costs and risks of job training onto job seekers and their families.

Early childhood education and care are critically important, but Saskatchewan is falling behind.

- Evidence increasingly shows: the learning opportunities children receive before the age of five have a huge, lifelong impact.
- Wealthy, well-educated families will always have access to quality early childhood education and care – public involvement is needed to ensure that every family has access.
- Not possible for all children to be exclusively cared for by parents or family members.
- About 70% of Saskatchewan mothers with a child under three work outside the home.
- Developmental disorders like autism need to be identified and treated as early as possible, to minimize their impact and maximize the child's potential.
- There are at least 6,000 more children under the age of five in Saskatchewan than there were five years ago – a 9% increase.
- Saskatchewan ranks last in Canada in availability of regulated child care spaces for kids under the age of five; not surprisingly, we have the highest use of unlicensed child care.
- Saskatchewan government does not regulate how much child care facilities can charge. It does pay a Child Care Subsidy, but only families with incomes below about \$50,000 are



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eligible, and only if their children are in a licensed child care facility. Also, the subsidy amounts have not been increased for ten years, despite the fact that child care costs have risen by 40% during that same time.

- There is evidence that lack of access to affordable child care is hurting parents' access to post-secondary education.

The K-12 sector is under stress.

- Due to the immigration of new Canadians and migration from other provinces, Saskatchewan's population has grown, including the number of children. Our members in the K-12 education sector tell us that class sizes and workloads have increased dramatically in recent years, but that education funding has not kept up.
- Over the last five years, K-12 enrolment in Saskatchewan schools went up by 9% – 14,000 additional students.
- The number of children with special needs is rising: earlier estimates were that one in every 166 school-age children in Saskatchewan had autism spectrum disorder, but more recent figures suggest the true prevalence could be as high as one in every 68 kids. Saskatchewan has a reputation as having some of the poorest levels of support for families living with autism of any province in Canada. There is evidence that some families, after years of frustrating attempts to obtain adequate and timely autism treatment services have moved to other provinces with better programs.
- Many of the growing numbers of immigrant children need additional support for learning English. Some of them, especially refugee children, need additional support because their education in their home countries was inadequate or disrupted by war.
- At least half of the province's school boards have cut Educational Assistant (EA) positions since 2011. This is in large part due to a desire by the Ministry to move away from in-class EAs toward special needs children having occasional sessions with professionals such as speech pathologists – who are in very short supply.
- Saskatchewan has one of the lowest high school graduation rates in the country. This is especially true for Aboriginal students: less than 40% graduate on time.
- After its expensive and questionable experiments with Lean management in health care the province has begun to use Lean in the education sector, and has plans to fully implement Lean in education in the coming years.
- The K-12 education sector is a dangerous place to work. According to Workers Compensation Board (WCB) statistics, when compared to workers in other sectors, people working in K-12 education have an above-average risk of being injured at work, and about double the chance that their injuries were due to an assault or violent act. In recognition of this heightened risk of violence, Occupational Health & Safety (OH&S) regulations first passed in the 1990s state that every school board must have a clear and detailed plan for preventing violent incidents, and must have a policy for dealing with such incidents if they occur. However, it is not clear if the province is consistently enforcing this requirement.

School boards are telling the government that they are having trouble keeping up.

- About five years ago, the province took away the power of school boards to set local education property tax rates. These rates are now set by the province. To make up for this loss of local knowledge and input, the province promised to increase its operating grants to school boards. However, the Ministry of Education has not fully kept this promise, and keeps changing the funding formula, leaving school boards uncertain from year to year about how much they will receive.



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- At its November 2015 annual general meeting the Saskatchewan School Boards Association (representing the province's 28 school boards) passed several resolutions that reveal that the provincial government is not giving them the resources needed to keep up with growing needs. One resolution "strongly urged" the government "to ensure that operational funding provided to school boards in any fiscal year reflects actual student enrolment in that same year". Another resolution essentially complained that funding for pre-kindergarten programs was spotty and didn't correspond to local needs.
- In its 2015-16 budget, the Saskatoon Public School Board listed 11 "Fiscal Issues that Need to be Addressed with the Ministry of Education". According to the largest school board in the province, the Ministry is not providing adequate funding for:
 - Delivering English as an Additional Language (EAL) services in schools with growing immigrant populations
 - Meeting the many goals and plans the Ministry has imposed on school boards
 - Supporting "the elimination of the learning disparity for First Nations, Inuit and Metis students"
 - Making critical repairs to existing schools
 - Transporting students to and from school
- Prairie Spirit School Division, surrounding Saskatoon, is one of the province's fastest-growing school boards. Since 2012, in an attempt to balance its budget, it has cut \$12M of spending, including band programs. In 2015 it submitted a budget to the Ministry with a \$2.5M deficit, saying it couldn't cut more without "significant staff layoffs", larger class sizes and reduced programs. Ministry ordered it to balance the budget by dipping into reserves (the board's rainy day fund); the board feels this was not the kind of "emergency" the fund was meant for.
- The school board representing Saskatchewan's French schools has taken the government to court at least 5 times in the past five years to meet critical needs caused by growing enrolments – the province has seen significant growth in immigration from French-speaking countries.

Post-secondary education has become more expensive.

- Over the past four years, full-time tuition for most university programs in Saskatchewan has risen 16-20%.
- The cost of going to community college has risen at similar rates: for example, tuition for the Continuing Care Assistant (CCA) Program at SIAST/Sask Polytechnic (an important source of workers to address the province's growing health and long-term care needs) rose 16% in the last 4 years. If fees, books, and supplies are included, the cost of the program has risen by \$1000 since 2012, or 22%. The costs of the Early Childhood Education Program—an important source of workers to address the province's growing education and child care needs—have risen at similar rates.

What Can I Do??

Get involved!

- Share this information with family, friends and coworkers, and use it to start conversations about the issues.
- Ask questions of the candidates and other political party representatives who contact you about the issues raised in this "Just the Facts" sheet.



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- Become involved with the party or candidate whose positions on these issues best serve the needs of you and your community.
- Write a letter to the editor to your local paper to share information on issues affecting your community.
- Use social media to share facts about issues that matter during the election.
- For more information about becoming more actively involved, visit www.purplevotes.ca.

Selected Sources

- Friendly M, Grady B, Macdonald L, Forer B. Preliminary data: Early childhood education and care in Canada 2014. Toronto: Childcare Resource and Research Unit, July 2015. <http://childcarecanada.org/sites/default/files/PreliminaryData-ECEinCanada2014-FINAL.pdf>
- Saskatoon Public Schools Budget Report. September 1, 2015 to August 31, 2016. www.saskatoonpublicschools.ca/division/reportsandpublications/Documents/BUDGET%20DOCUMENT%20FINAL%202015-2016.pdf
- Saskatchewan School Boards Association resolutions. <http://saskschoolboards.ca/about-us/resolutions/>

For further information about this topic, including details about the sources of the information on this fact sheet, please contact Karman Kawchuk, Research Officer, SEIU-West, at karman.kawchuk@seiuwest.ca