



CANADIAN UNION OF PUBLIC  
EMPLOYEES LOCAL 3550

BUDGET PRESENTATION  
TO EDMONTON PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS TRUSTEES

MARCH 2011

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March 8, 2011

Mr. Chair, Trustee Colburn;

Trustees;

Superintendent Schmidt;

Staff Members;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

**CUPE 3550 Members Are Your Partners  
In Public Education @ Edmonton Public Schools**

My name is Trudy Grebenstein. I am the President of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3550, also known as CUPE Local 3550.

With me here tonight are several members of the elected executive of CUPE Local 3550; they will stand as I introduce them to you:

1<sup>st</sup> Vice President Rosemary Kostiuk

2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President Jody Carey

Chief Steward Gloria Lepine

Treasurer Carol Chapman

Recording Secretary Darlene Romao

Sergeant at Arms Lynn Nelson

Board Members Pat Gallivan, Karen Parks, Sharon Meinke

Board Member Linda Harris and CUPE National Representative Deb Gervais-Arbane send their regrets

CUPE Local 3550 represents approximately 1936 permanent full-time and part-time non-teaching education workers, and approximately 500 hourly non-teaching education workers that are often referred to as your Support Staff at Edmonton Public Schools. To put these numbers in perspective - picture the student enrolment at Jasper Place High School. It is very close.

CUPE Local 3550 members contribute to our students' bright futures on each and every school day. Over 2000 CUPE Local 3550 members are on the job daily in this District's offices and schools. These non-teaching Support Staff workers are

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proud to provide front -line services for all the staff, students and parents that encompass the K-12 community of Edmonton Public Schools.

CUPE Local 3550 members, as this Board's partners in public education, are the Educational Assistants, Administrative Assistants, Clerks, Secretaries, Food Preparers, Science and Library Technicians and Interpreters that support teachers and students by making it possible for them to do their very best work.

CUPE 3550 members are not your only partners! This ongoing partnership of all staff groups that do this very important work of teaching and learning that we call public education depends on contributions from each and every staff member: support staff, maintenance staff, custodial staff, teaching staff, and exempt staff.

Bright futures for our students means that all of these partners are providing high quality teaching and learning experiences and demonstrating commitment to the highest public education standards, whether their work is at our central departments or at our school sites. The videographers from the United Kingdom seem to think so too. Imagine how even greater those videos could have been had they considered feed-back from all our staff groups.

On behalf of the members of the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 3550, I appreciate this opportunity to outline what this non-teaching staff group believes should be considered by schools, central departments and the Board in reviewing, amending and developing the 2011-2012 Proposed Budget and future multi-year plans.

### **Reality for the CUPE 3550 Members**

As valued education workers, CUPE 3550 members are crushed by the government's reduced education funding for 2011-2012. Promises of more funding for 2012-2013 continues to be speculation. Current budget numbers which are \$17 million short of what is needed for 2011-2012 will surely create lay-offs and reduced hours of work for CUPE Local 3550 Support Staff.

CUPE 3550 members have appreciated the wage increases that are tied to an annual Alberta Average Wage Earnings Index. It makes sense to the membership, even though raises are received a good nine months after other Albertans enjoy their raises. Unlike the Tory MLA's that gave themselves a 30% wage increase and then magnanimously agreed to a "pass" on their annual AAWEI pay raise, CUPE Local 3550 members, who are not at all in the same salary league, cannot afford to forgo annual automatic cost-of-living pay increases. Many CUPE 3550 members hold second jobs to pay for basic family necessities.

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In February 2011 Education Minister Hancock delivered a public education budget that really means this Board and every other school board in our province will be looking for severe operating budget reductions. At Edmonton Public Schools that means only the “must haves” can be afforded for 2011-2012. As President, I can tell you what students and teachers must have – that is enough support staff to help both students and teachers do their best work.

The 2011-2012 Budget means we are all expected to deliver high quality public education and create bright futures by increasing the number of students in our classrooms and to provide fewer non-teaching supports for students and teachers. Due to government funding, public education is always changing how it responds to fiscal issues but the actual children we're working with and their needs remain fairly constant.

**We are working here because of the children.**

That's what has to drive our work each and every day and is our challenge as the Alberta government continues to take its responsibilities for public education on a roller-coaster ride.

**Underfunding K-12 Public Education**

The membership clearly understands that the Alberta Legislature can annually pass a budget bolstering education funding or reduce the funding. Members also clearly understand that in the end, all that really matters is that all partners in education must continue to focus on their students even when the funding is uncertain.

Student achievement soars, and teachers do their best work, when an adequate number of well trained Support Staff are on the job. I think I have said this in every Budget Presentation and I think you will agree that this continues to be what works the best in our schools.

The Alberta government's deficit declarations and annual underfunded K-12 education budgets continue to be of great concern to this Local's membership. Many members are the survivors of the severe cutbacks to public education funding proclaimed by the Klein government during the 90's. Facing that again will have many members re-examining their retirement options, and that could create a tsunami-like wave of retirements resulting in a huge loss of experienced and talented CUPE 3550 members.

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Well aware of the budget shortfalls for 2011-2012, the CUPE Local 3550 membership continues to annually brace itself. The memberships' reminder to this Board is that regardless of the K-12 funding, in the interests of bright futures for our students', retaining employees, respect in the workplace, honouring collective agreements, a fair collective bargaining process and fair workload expectations continue to be a CUPE Local 3550 priority.

### **Stable Funding for Support Staff Collective Agreements**

The Local is requesting that the Board immediately lobby and request that the provincial government annually fund non-teaching staff collective agreements in the same manner as the government is currently automatically funding teacher collective agreements. We all deserve the same annual raise, don't you think? After all, a percentage increase to support staff wages does not cost nearly as much as for Edmonton Public Schools' higher paid staff.

As President, I again spoke with Minister Hancock at the legislature after the recent education budget was presented to the public. While it is not predictable that he will hold the Public Education portfolio once a new party leader is elected, we can only hope that the next Minister will stay the course and improve the annual funding.

Minister Hancock did tell me that he could agree to meet with some CUPE 3550 executive members in May 2011 to listen to our concerns. As President, I will be pursuing that offer to meet and I invite interested Trustees to join in that meeting.

Such progressive measures would assist with the Board's annual budget planning process that at any time may mean making decisions between allocating funding for educational programming or allocating funding for the collective agreement obligations to the valuable CUPE Local 3550 Support Staff workers that are important partners in the teaching and learning at Edmonton Public Schools. It is important that annual salary increases do not divide our staff into those that are deemed worthy and those that is deemed to not be worthy.

### **Support Staff Training & Development is Essential**

In spite of their very serious concerns about classification, work-load and compensation, Support Staff are delighted to be part of the quality teaching and learning that takes place every day in Edmonton Public Schools safe and well-kept facilities. On behalf of the membership, I would like to take this opportunity to thank CUPE 474 Custodial workers and CUPE 784 Maintenance & Trades workers for their partnership in this important work.

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As valuable Support Staff, CUPE Local 3550 members need continued opportunities to participate in the professional development and training that will provide the knowledge to win that daily challenge of a huge multi-tasking workload. Professional development and training can only make support staff better at “working smart” in the best interests of our students.

What keeps CUPE Local 3550 members on the job are the children in our schools is knowing that as partners in their education, we are making a difference in their school experiences and achievement.

Over half of the current permanent CUPE Local 3550 Support Staff have worked for Edmonton Public Schools for (10) years or less. Interestingly enough, current demographics indicate that well over fifty percent (50%) of CUPE 3550 members are now Educational Assistants.

I have to pause for a moment here, since there has not been a significant increase in the overall CUPE 3550 membership over the past five (5) years. Does inclusion mean that there has been a reduction in all the other support staff positions in order to hire more educational assistants? While that is important work which supports teaching and learning, has inclusion been paid for by reducing other support staff positions in our school offices, libraries, science labs? It sure looks that way. The local’s membership is very interested in your feedback in that regard.

It seems fair to warn this Board and the administration that this membership and their union, who have lobbied long and hard for professional development opportunities, will continue to remind you of the importance of continuing such initiatives. Such actions make Edmonton Public Schools an employer of choice.

The Local is again requesting that continued significant financial support be allocated to provide in-house professional development opportunities to facilitate the personal growth and expertise of its CUPE 3550 Support Staff members.

### **Workload & Overwork vs. Balance & Wellness**

The continued accepted culture of overwork at Edmonton Public Schools and other public school districts not only in this province, but also found around our globe is very similar and it continues year after year.

Dedicated education employees accept this work environment because they believe students are worth it, knowing that the government funding is never

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enough. Our reality is that if public education is crippled or allowed to fail, private schools that serve only special interest parents and students will soon fill the gap.

In spite of all the issues that come along with overwork CUPE Local 3550 members, continue to do their very best every day.

The downside cannot be ignored. Dedicated CUPE Local 3550 members, knowing they are valuable partners in public education every day, often willingly participate in the abuse of their good will, dedication and health “for the good of the team/students”. Especially the students.

This as often as not puts personal and/or organizational health at risk and can have cumulative negative outcomes, regardless of whether or not it is done with the best of intentions and good will. Occupational disabilities become a factor for Edmonton Public Schools and they are costly.

The Local is again requesting that this Board provide additional resources for professional development and training to assist CUPE 3550 members in becoming more familiar with worker wellness and work/life balance.

It is a well-known fact that the results of overwork and burn-out mean that very valued and experienced staff members may be unable to perform their duties due to increased medical appointments, sick leave, and in extreme cases, long-term disability or WCB due to life-long health difficulties that were contributed to or created by their work at Edmonton Public Schools.

When this takes place, it is not only a personal tragedy for the CUPE 3550 Support Staff member but also a great loss to the District. Their personal stories are heart-wrenching. The Local believes that raising such awareness will initiate a better understanding for all District staff of what it really takes to achieve that ever elusive work-life balance and organizational health that we all strive for.

### **Support Staff Staffing Ratio Formula**

Developing a Staffing Ratio Formula for Support Staff is needed more than ever to assist in forecasting this District’s annual needs and addressing work-load issues. Such a formula would scientifically look at individual worksite human resource requirements versus workload and form a pre-set, “ideal” staffing ratio as well as have the ability to consider other internal or external factors that impact every worksite’s ability to serve their customers: our parents, our students and our staff.

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Such an analysis can assist our Principals. It would focus on current and future needs of Edmonton Public Schools as well as the impact of proposed program or procedure changes. It can also focus on the distribution of work among staff in a work unit and consider task duplication, task value and clarification of task responsibilities. Such a formula would be reviewed and updated as procedures, technologies, and dynamics change in order to ensure a true required staffing picture.

The Local is requesting that the union, the Board and administration examine the feasibility of establishing a Support Staff Staffing Ratio Formula.

### **Site-Based Decision Making**

In the mid-1980's site-based decision making was the buzz -word and this philosophy soon became well developed at Edmonton Public Schools. In fact this District continues to be recognized for its successes with site-based decision - making. Educators from all over the world come here to see how it's done. It has taken thirty (30) years to summon the courage to re-examine this organizations' site-based decision making model. CUPE 3550 applauds the courage to do so. Some excellent changes are expected for the 2011-2012 school year. I hope we do not have to be careful what we wished for!

I would like to draw attention to what one of these site-based operational process meant to school staff. Working in a school office continues to be an extremely busy, demanding and multi-tasking position. If you have been in a school lately, you will have noticed that. You will also have noticed that the number of staff in school offices has either decreased or not increased as a response to increased enrolment.

The mystery of why it was important that the data entry work done to pay the bills (which is done in Oracle software) must be done at the school level. That school-based task does not get those invoices paid more quickly. In fact, the central services Accounts Payable Department reviews that data for accuracy and the Finance Department eventually makes the payments. Once the school site's cost-coding and signature has been provided, this data entry task to pay the bills would surely be more effectively completed elsewhere: by CUPE members who are specialists in such data entry in an expanded Accounts Payable Department.

CUPE 3550 members working as Administrative Assistants in our schools are valuable and experienced staff; removing this data-entry task would certainly assist their work-load issues (especially in Elementary Schools with fewer staff). The value added by this task remaining as a site-based task is elusive.

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The Local is requesting that the administration review the effectiveness of data entry taking place at individual schools versus all of it taking place in the central services Accounts Payable Department. The union fails to recognize any value being added to the educational programming for students (especially in Elementary Schools) in continuing with this site-based data entry procedure.

### **Public Private Partnerships (P3's)**

In spite of a growing body of research on the experiences with P3's across Canada and around the world that points out the dangers both to public finance and public accountability that these arrangements with the private sector represent, the Alberta government no doubt thinks it can silence nay-sayers.

The Local is also looking forward to continued financial reports to Trustees that will be publically shared, providing information comparing the operating and maintenance costs of the new P3 schools with other comparable Edmonton Public schools.

### **Volunteers**

The Local is very concerned that due to upcoming budget reductions, school administrators will ignore the EPS Volunteer Handbook and/or make reductions in the hours of work for their support staff and replace that time with volunteers.

The Local again seeks assurances from this Board and the administration that the CUPE Local 3550 membership will experience no reduction in positions or time worked due to the addition of volunteers in the 2011 - 2012 school year.

### **Trustee Support for Public Education is Essential**

The future of K-12 public education for Alberta's children depends on today's Public School Trustees.

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It has never been clearer that Public School Trustees are the last line of defence against forces that would weaken public education and what it stands for.

Community members, parents and district employees and CUPE Local 3550 members are counting on this newly elected Board to continue to join with other Boards and staunchly rekindle the battle to bring back Alberta Education's support for the funding that all public school students so rightly deserve.

### **Representation is Important to CUPE Local 3550 Members**

It has been said here before and it has not changed: CUPE Local 3550 members always place a great deal of importance on Trustee participation in the bargaining process and count on their understanding of Support Staff issues.

The membership of Local 3550 is serving notice now that the membership expects to see Trustees assigned to CUPE Local 3550 negotiations, Trustee Ripley and Trustee Shipka at the table every time when the 2011 negotiations begin.

### **Conclusion**

Thank-you very much for your time and your attention this evening. The Local is optimistic that this presentation has been thought provoking and that the Board and administration will seriously consider CUPE Local 3550's budget presentation in the development of the 2011-2012 Budget.

Trudy Grebenstein,  
President, CUPE Local 3550