



Educational Assistants Cut under the Wall Government

NDP Education critic Pat Atkinson was joined in the legislature today by concerned parents, students and Educational Assistants (EAs) who are upset with the Wall Government's policy of tying funding to the reduction of EAs in schools, and demanded greater accountability and transparency from Education Minister Donna Harpauer for her government's short-sighted policy.

"EAs provide support to students with special needs, including learning disabilities and behavioural problems and they are an essential part of a team that provides support to students," said Atkinson. "Since the Wall Government came to power, the number of EAs in the province has fallen which is no coincidence. The Minister claims that cutting EAs is not the policy of the government, and that school divisions have misinterpreted the policy. But the 2009-2010 funding guide for school divisions has a chart suggesting a ratio of 1 educational assistant for every 100 students and ties the level of funding to the number of EAs in schools. How can the Wall Government claim that cutting EAs isn't their policy?"

Atkinson noted that between 2007-2008, the last year of the former NDP government, and 2009-2010 under the Wall Government, the numbers of EAs in the province has fallen by 200 positions, according to the numbers provided by the Minister's own department.

"The Wall Government claims that the lost support of EAs will be replaced by increased professional support from social workers, counselors and occupational speech language therapists. While the work of professional staff is valued, in many communities these professional staff are simply not available," said Atkinson. "At a time when student enrollment is rising and the number of students requiring extra support is increasing, why is the Wall Government cutting the very people students rely upon to help them succeed?" questioned Atkinson.

"The Wall Government's policy towards EAs fails to ensure that the needs of these students are being met and fails to take into account the many students who can attest that an EA made all the difference in their lives," said Atkinson. "It's time for the Minister to be held accountable for the decisions of this government and address the concerns of so many students, parents, and EAs whose communities have been hurt by the Wall Government's policies."

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