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To: <gordon.campbell.mla@leg.bc.ca>

Cc: <premier@gov.bc.ca>

Subject: Education Funding Cuts

Dear Mr. Campbell,

I am writing to express my deep concern for the welfare of my son Theo, and for his peers in the public school system in British Columbia, and to invite you to consider anew the valued role our disabled children can play in every child's education.

Theo is a lively little boy, with a complex genetic condition that presents him with a wide range of challenges. He attends grade 1 at General Gordon School (2896 West 6th Ave) in your home riding, where he benefits from comprehensive care from a dedicated team of professionals from across the school system. But Theo's supported integration into the classroom has yielded benefits well beyond his own development.)Story: <http://www.vancouversun.com/entertainment/Variety+club+helps+bring+hope+child+with+rare+disorder/2453861/story.html>)

The children in Theo's class have formed a unique relationship with him that has allowed them to explore aspects of their own education and development in a way that would not have occurred without his presence. Theo's unique challenges around communication, physiotherapy, speech, vision, and sensory issues, have created a variety of opportunities for enhanced learning across the classroom and have introduced a range of topics, and depth of acceptance and learning that is profound for his peers. The presence of his full time aid in the classroom has yielded benefits to other children requiring small amounts of temporary support. His teacher, in an effort to meet the challenges of his inclusion, has extended the curriculum to include and adapt to Theo's presence, adding to the learning flowing from the classroom. Theo's presence in the school has bred unique relationships with older grades, with children taking an active and long-term role in Theo's care, and introducing notions of cooperation, sharing, inclusion, and learning that go far beyond the school curriculum.

Alexandre Bilodeau, Canada's first athlete to win Gold on home turf this past week expressed deep credit to his disabled brother, Frederic, for inspiring him to maintain his commitment to training and excellence. It was the lessons Alexandre learned from his brother that kept him focused, that brought Canada its first medal. (Story: <http://www.cbc.ca/olympics/freestyleskiing/story/2010/02/15/sp-bilodeau-newsmaker-olympics.html>)

In short Mr. Campbell, there is very clear evidence of the significant benefits - to all children and staff - of supported integration of special needs children into the classroom. It would be a tremendous loss to our typical children, our communities and our futures, if these benefits were not recognized, and support for these children were reduced. Integration breeds learning and acceptance, which in turn builds strong communities and economies, all benefits you have fought hard to achieve. In your home riding there is a tangible example of the strength of the benefits that flow from our support of special needs children in the classroom.

I am concerned that on March 2 I will hear a throne speech that confirms our fears of a budget shortfall for British Columbia's Schools. I am concerned that these shortfalls will severely impact our School's abilities to support special needs students like Theo. I am concerned that this reduction in support will erode the benefits thousands of students from across the province receive from learning alongside their disabled peers. I am concerned for their futures.

Your Conservative Government in BC has an impressive record of growth and development. You have shown clear vision in your management of the province, investment in the future, and pursuit of excellence. I would encourage you now to consider deeply the impact on our provinces future if we do not invest sufficiently in our children.

It's an exciting time in British Columbia, we are the focus of the world's attention. Amidst excellence and inspiration, I would invite you extend British Columbia's welcome, not just to Alexandre and Frederic, but for the long-term to those like them, like Theo and his peers, who can go on to prove, again and again, the value people like Frederic play in not just his brother's life, but in every Canadian's.

Support our school board funding Mr. Campbell, I urge you. It will reap tremendous rewards for our children and our communities. Take the opportunity to make your support public, now, while the eyes of the world can witness the

courage of a province and a leader who supports and educates all its citizens.

In cooperation with Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (<http://www.plan.ca>), I would like to offer you the opportunity to visit General Gordon School, together with Theo and myself, the school Principal Margaret Davidson, Theo's School Support Worker Gail Johnson, and Al Etmanski, Founder and President of PLAN and first Para-Olympic torch bearer. I would be pleased to speak with you first-hand about the direct benefits that have flowed to Theo's peers from his supported inclusion in the classroom, and present some excellent opportunities for media coverage of your support for the school funding required to support our special needs children. Perhaps, if we're quick, Alexandre and Frederic will still be in town and we can add them to the party.

Sincerely,
Matthew Quetton