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Left in the lurch

AUTISM • Re: "Court right not to impose autism treatment obligation," Editorial, July 11.

As a parent of an autistic child, I found your editorial insulting and offensive. My 11-year-old spent three years after age six in a publicly funded school system that sure as hell didn't offer "therapeutic" programs designed to meet his needs.

He moved classrooms and schools four times in three years, there was little continuity of programming, and we got the feeling he and other equally affected children were being warehoused. After researching the options, we made the painfully expensive decision, as many parents with autistic children do, to fund his education ourselves.

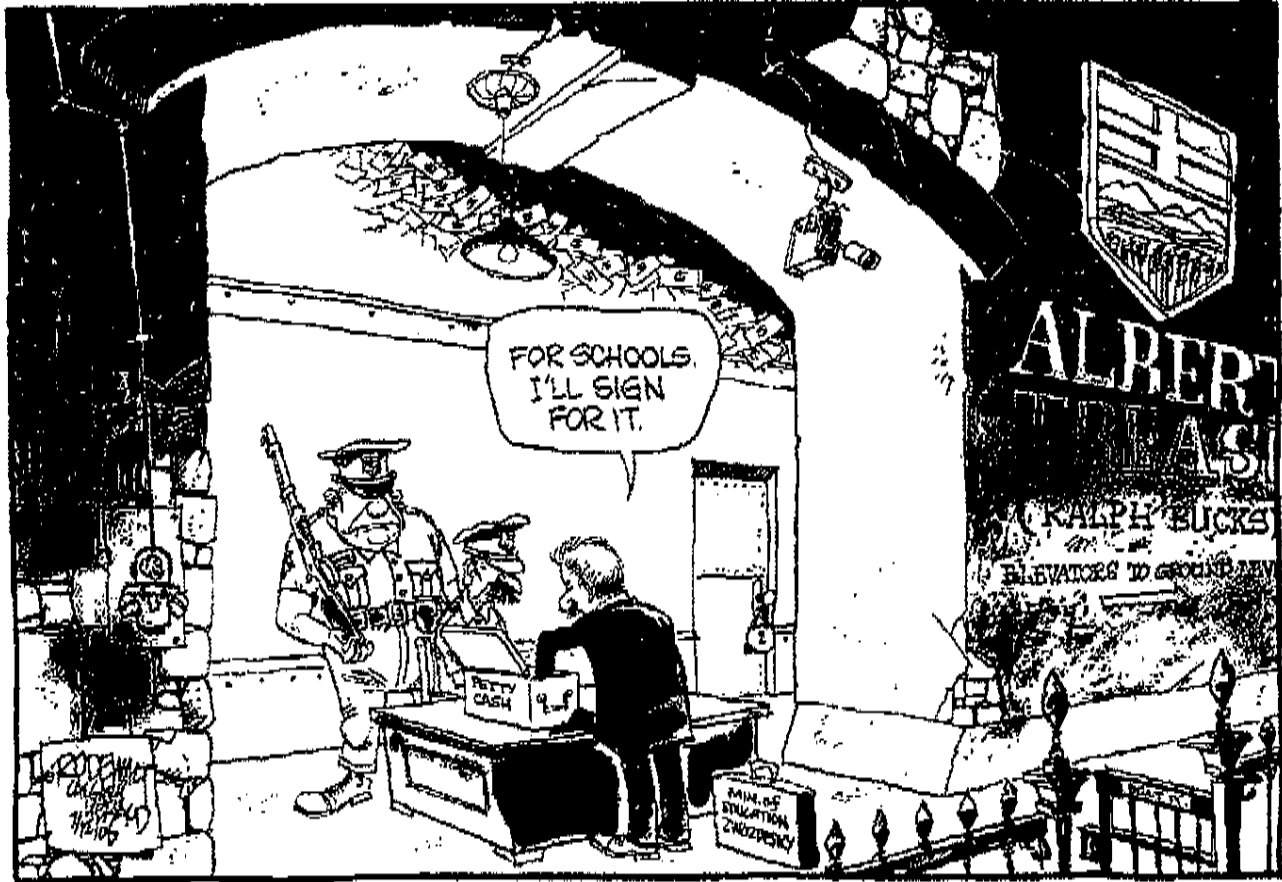
He goes to a school where one-on-one therapy is helping him maximize his potential. Unless you can't see the benefits of meaningful intervention at any age, and can't understand that the alternative is earlier and longer institutional care for these kids at a much greater cost to society, and unless you've not heard any of the statistics surrounding the increase in autism diagnoses, please don't tell me that Ontario parents aren't being left high and dry. I think they are being hung out to dry.

Karen Schweighardt, Calgary





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School staff launch advertising blitz

LIVINGSTONE RANGE • The union representing support staff in the Livingstone Range School Division of southwestern Alberta has launched an advertising blitz to spur action on contract negotiations.

The Canadian Union of Public Employees has purchased radio and newspaper ads suggesting what conditions would be like in schools if support jobs are contracted out in the future.

CUPE represents about 105 school custodians, bus drivers, teacher assistants and library technicians in Claresholm, Fort Macleod and the Crowsnest Pass area. Union members voted 88 per cent in favour of strike action last month.

The dispute centres on job security, wages and health and pension benefits.

Support staff have been without a contract since June 2005.





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Schools to hire teachers, do repairs

Trustees thankful for cash infusion, but demand stable funding

KIM GUTTORMSON
CALGARY HERALD

A long-awaited cash infusion from the province will pay for up to 65 new teachers and allow the Calgary Board of Education to repair leaking roofs and drafty windows, trustees said Tuesday.

But they say the government still needs to come up with a long-term plan for funding that will allow school boards to deal with repair backlogs, including the CBE's \$426-million maintenance deficit.

"What we'd really like to see is some funding and something in writing from the government that says, 'Here's the next three years, five years, however long they'd like to extend it,'" said trustee Pat Cochrane. "We're pleased the issue is beginning to be ad-

ressed by the provincial government."

"There's less frustration today than there was a couple of days ago," trustee George Lane said.

CBE chairman Gordon Dirks lauded the additional funding being put into programs for English as a second language and specials-needs students.



Pat Cochrane "That's something we've been asking for a number of years and we're delighted the government has responded," said Dirks.

About 18 per cent of the CBE's 96,000 students are enrolled in English as a second language programs.

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Gene Zwozdesky announced \$119 million in school maintenance funding Monday.

FROM BI TRUSTEES

On Monday, Education Minister Gene Zwozdesky announced \$119 million in maintenance money for the province's schools, as well as another \$61 million for classroom initiatives. The initiatives include reducing class sizes, adding another year of English as a second language instruction and helping children with special needs.

The CBE will use part of its money to hire an additional 60 to 65 teachers for kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms, reducing the average number of students in each class to 17. That's in addition to the 51 teachers the board is already hiring for next year, which would have brought the class size down to 18.5.

"My big concern is this cannot be a one-shot, one-year wonder," Frank Bruseker, president of the Alberta Teachers' Association, said of the funding. "We need to have that level of (maintenance) funding each year for at least five years to really make a dent in the infrastructure deficit.

"This year was a step in the right direction, but we need to look more long-term."

Trustees said Tuesday they don't know when they'll learn exactly what their share of the new funding is, and can only estimate based on previous arrangements. They anticipate the maintenance money will come in at about \$25 million.

"We would like to know right now how the money will be allocated so we can get to work," Cochrane said.

Cochrane said the funding would be used to address the list of priority repairs and maintenance given to the province in May.

"The basic concept is to keep the rain out and keep the heat in," she said. "Our expectation would be that this is ongoing, sustainable funding."

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