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School support workers urge SD8 to reinvest surplus into student services

NELSON –The Kootenay Lakes School District No. 8 \$4.4 million budget surplus should be reinvested to strengthen and increase direct student supports, says the district's school support workers. CUPE 748, the union representing over 300 support workers in SD8 public schools, says the surplus is an opportunity to help students, families and communities in the region.

"This surplus is a chance for our public schools to recover from years and years of cutbacks to student services," says Kathy Centrone, a school support worker and president of CUPE 748. "It is also our opportunity to invest in new services that families in the region desperately need."

Starting over 20 years ago, provincial funding for public schools in the Kootenay region was slashed and has not kept pace with the needs of students and their families. Now that SD8 finances are stronger, CUPE 748 says SD8 could expand direct supports for the most vulnerable students with complex learning needs, as well as mental health and addictions needs.

"We have many students who need one-on-one help to succeed in a classroom. Having more supports could be life changing for them and their families," says Centrone. "With a bit more help from education assistants, youth and family support workers, all students could have a chance to thrive in school and in the community."

CUPE 748 also says the surplus could be used to establish before- and after- school child care. Centrone points to the successes of this model of child care in other B.C. school districts, like Southeast Kootenay School District No. 5 and Arrow Lakes School District No. 10.

"We already have the infrastructure—our districts 20 public schools—and we have the qualified staff—existing school support workers," says Centrone. "CUPE 748 is ready to work with SD8 make this a reality. It could be a legacy that SD8 can sustain for generations of families."

CUPE 748 represents over 300 school support workers in the Kootenay Lake School District No. 8, as education assistants, youth and family support workers clerical support, custodial and maintenance services, and many more positions. They work in all

20 SD8 schools, and service over 4700 students from the communities of Crawford Bay, Creston, Kaslo, Meadow Creek, Nelson, Salmo, Slocan, South Slocan, and Winlaw.

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