Tuition fees not enough to fill ESL funding gap, post-secondary cutbacks block pathways
to higher education for BC immigrants, teachers say

Vancouver — Charging students tuition fees won’t be enough to meet the growing demand for high-quality post-secondary English as a Second Language education, BC’s oldest and largest association of ESL professionals warned today.

Classroom closures and faculty layoffs at public post-secondary institutions will still go ahead despite new ESL tuition fees announced by BC Advanced Education Minister Amrik Virk last week, and the association of BC Teachers of English as an Additional Language is urging Virk to restore funding in the next provincial budget.

BC TEAL made one of 1,800 recent submissions to the legislature’s Select Standing Committee on Finance, which recommended last month that the 2015-16 BC budget restore stable, predictable and adequate funding for public post-secondary ESL, and that the province develop a long-term, sustainable plan for ESL delivery across BC.

“It’s hard to imagine how fewer students in fewer classrooms is going to restore stability, predictability or adequacy to our public post-secondary ESL system, said BC TEAL board member Joe Dobson.

“Public post-secondary institutions have provided intensive academic preparation and job-ready training in BC for more than 40 years, with targeted, focused language programs and direct pathways to higher education,” Dobson said, adding that “other provinces continue to fund post-secondary ESL because that public investment pays obvious economic and social dividends as newcomers graduate and enter the workforce.

“Backing away from our ESL investment like this makes no strategic sense—we need more skilled workers, and immigrant British Columbians need strong language skills to take their place in our economy and communities. Our membership wants to offer government whatever support or information we can to open more ESL classrooms.

“Last week’s tuition announcement was an empty gesture for ESL students. If we don’t take our ESL investment seriously, we’re effectively blocking the educational pathway to economic and social success for thousands of British Columbians. We think there’s still time to persuade the minister that ESL cuts today will hurt BC tomorrow.”

Dobson said BC TEAL leaders have been invited to brief members of the Official Opposition on the issue next week, and the organization is asking for similar meetings with Virk and senior ministry staff. The 1000-member association of English-language learning professionals was formed in 1967.

Contact: Joe Dobson, 1st Vice President, BC TEAL
cell: 778-220-0875
dobson@tru.ca

Shawna Williams, President, BC TEAL
cell: 604-315-6908
email: president@bcteal.org