

FACT SHEET: Education Building smart communities

We all benefit from excellent public education that's available to everyone. And CUPE members are an important part of Canada's education system, supporting learning at all levels. From preschool to postdoctoral studies, we are teaching assistants and clerical staff, library workers and caretakers, bus drivers and trades people.

Trade talks underway at the World Trade Organization (WTO) threaten the future of public education. The WTO sees Canadian public education and other public services as a missed business opportunity. To cash in, corporations are using the WTO's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to open up our education system for an all-out take-over.

Canadian governments are paving the way, cutting funding and creating the conditions for privatization. With private universities opening up and corporations playing an active role in the classroom, we're already feeling the impact of privatization and commercialization of education. Trade agreements like the GATS speed up and lock in this trend, guaranteeing it can't be reversed in the future.

Federal government claims that public education is protected from the privatizing scope of the GATS don't tell the real story. Only those educational services delivered and funded completely by the government are exempt from the GATS. This means that public education is not exempt because governments are forcing public schools to mix with private interests.

The privatization of Canada's public education is reinforced by wide-ranging GATS provisions that will prohibit governments from giving preference to public educational services. Instead private, for-profit corporations will have the right to bid for and deliver educational services, turning scarce public dollars into private profits.

The WTO's plan for public education includes:

- **Shrinking staff** – The quality of education will decline as fewer teaching and support staff try to work with more students.
- **Eroding standards** – Educational staff, including non-teachers, fight for standards and regulations to protect and ensure quality education. The WTO will review education standards and regulations according to what will make the most money, not what are the best and safest practices. Anything seen as restricting trade and profits will be challenged, using the WTO's powerful and secretive dispute resolution process.
- **No community control** – Multinationals won't be required to have local, accountable representation on boards that run for-profit schools. They won't be required to hire in the community, either.
- **Corporate cash in** – Governments won't be able to direct funds to public education alone. Corporations will be guaranteed access to public dollars.
- **'Ad'ucation** – It will be difficult to prevent school materials funded by corporations, include advertising disguised as educational content.
- **No more classrooms, no more books, no more teachers...** Technology will combine with weakened standards and regulations to make classrooms, books and staff unnecessary as for-profit distance learning is delivered to students through the internet.
- **Cracking open libraries** – Canada's GATS commitments include a wide range of technical, computer, data processing and research and development services that support library services. Foreign libraries might use a GATS challenge to demand equal access to public funding support, low postal rates, preferential tax treatment and low-cost use of public infrastructure.

The WTO will reinforce problems we're already fighting:

- Introduce private, for-profit hospitals run on a pay-per-use basis and staffed cheaply by less qualified, contracted-out or "imported" non-unionized workers.
- Force Canadian public schools to compete with for-profit educational institutions for scarce resources.
- Divert public tax dollars into foreign-owned for-profit corporations instead of publicly owned and operated services.
- Prevent governments at all levels from favouring Canadian, local, or not-for-profit municipal services and utilities over foreign for-profit corporations.

Public education is a right!