

September 21, 2016

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
Room 224, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C., V8V 1X4

Dear Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to present our views on the needs of the K-12 public education system, and in particular, the specific need of students in Richmond.

As in previous years, this brief is presented to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services jointly by the Board of Education of School District 38 (Richmond), the Richmond District Parents Association, the Richmond Association of School Administrators, the Richmond Teachers Association, CUPE Local 716 and the Richmond Management and Professional Staff. Our joint presentation demonstrates the strong commitment to collaboration and cooperation that is shared by all associated with the Richmond School District – we are truly “focused on the Learner”.

Recommendations

Our school district has presented to the Select Standing Committee each year for the last five years, whether in person or through a written brief. We believe that you have heard us, and the other advocates of the public school system in BC, since your recommendations have consistently supported the need for adequate and sustainable funding of both school operations as well as capital and maintenance needs.

1. Provide Increased Funding For Student Instruction and Support

We feel we must continue our advocacy for adequate and consistent funding, because our need has not diminished in any significant way. Funding for the public education system in BC continues to lag behind that of other provinces in Canada, and the requirement that school districts reduce administration costs, imposed as part of Budget 2015, has further exacerbated the budget management problem for districts through out the province. While the decision by the provincial government to reinvest \$25 million of the \$54 million in administration costs that had been cut has helped, school districts need to have the entire \$54 million returned to the system. In addition, education funding has not kept up with inflation for many years, which has eroded the ability of school districts to provide the level of services required by our students.

Board of Education:

Debbie Tablotney - Chairperson
Donna Sargent – Vice Chairperson
Ken Hamaguchi Jonathan Ho Sandra Nixon
Eric Yung Alice Wong

Funding levels simply have not kept up with the service demands that school districts face. We continue to have an increasing number of students with complex needs, students who face mental health issues and a changing curriculum that demands more personalization and new approaches to learning. We cannot implement the new curriculum and provide the services that our students require without sustained additional funding. This needs to be remedied as soon as possible.

The Auditor General for BC has recently published a report on budget and expense management practices in BC school districts, and has concluded that districts do a good job in this area. As one of the school districts that was part of the AG's audit, we believe that this is an important report for us as a sector, since it gives the public assurance that monies are managed well. Additionally, a report on administrative costs, commissioned by the BC Association of School Business Officials, has documented evidence that administrative costs in BC are the lowest in all of Canada, and amongst the lowest in North America. Reports such as these demonstrate the efficiency with which the public education sector operates, and suggest that additional funding to the public education sector will be money well spent.

2. Institute Funding For Technology Investment

We appreciate the Select Standing Committee's strong support for the need to integrate technology and technology-related skills in the classroom. Technology is not a luxury – for our students in the modern world, technology is an absolute necessity. Currently, school districts are expected to fund technology acquisition from existing budgets. As previously demonstrated, existing budgets are insufficient to keep up with inflation, let alone provide funding for ongoing investments in technology tools for education. We ask that the provincial budget provide new funding targeted for technology investment, that would allow school districts to acquire, maintain and replace technology so that students are best prepared for the new curriculum and are able to acquire the skills demanded by modern society.

3. Increase Capital Funding For Facilities

The Select Standing Committee has consistently supported the need of school districts across the province for capital funding to meet emergent needs, especially as they relate to the need for space and seismic remediation. In Richmond, 23 of our 38 elementary schools have been evaluated to be of high seismic risk. Factoring in the possible liquefaction of soils in the Richmond area makes these high risk schools even more vulnerable. We also recognize that our schools will need to be an integral part of any local community support plan in the event of an earthquake, so the need to ensure that they are safe is paramount. Our district has therefore been working very closely with the Capital Branch of the Ministry of Education to develop a plan to remediate our schools.

As a Board, we recognize that the Ministry must have guidelines to ensure that facilities are well utilized in all school districts, so that investment in infrastructure is made efficiently. We welcome the Minister of Education's recent announcement that the 95% capacity target will no longer be in place, since we believe that the target afforded districts little flexibility in dealing with changing student demographics. Our community places a tremendous value on daycare and preschool programs that are located in schools – we believe that these uses should also be given value when determining appropriate utilization levels.

We urge the ministry to work with individual school districts to determine what a reasonable utilization rate is, taking into account local circumstances, including community uses that may fall outside of the direct mandate of the Ministry of Education.

Our Board has been working hard on a public consultation process over school closures. We expect to have a final decision within the next month, and are looking forward to sharing our long range facilities plan with the Ministry of Education. For our students, it is imperative that the approval of seismic remediation projects occurs on an urgent basis, and that there be flexibility around the determination of appropriate capacity utilization levels.

Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to present the Standing Committee with this brief. Trustees, staff and parents in Richmond are committed to ensuring that our K-12 system continues to be strong, vibrant and efficient. We are hopeful that our continued advocacy will result in improved funding for our sector, because we believe that there is no better investment than an investment in the children of BC.

Sincerely,



Debbie Tablotney, Chairperson
On Behalf of the Board of Education
(Richmond)



Al Klassen, President
Richmond Teachers' Association



Ross McLuskie, President
CUPE Local 716



Sean Harrington, President
Richmond Association of School
Administrators



Dionne McFie, President
Richmond District Parents Association



Joel Canlas, Richmond Management &
Professional Staff Representative

Cc Trustees
Superintendent of Schools
Stakeholder Presidents
Secretary Treasurer
Richmond MLAs
House Leader, Official Opposition
Education Critic, Official Opposition
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