

September 24, 2015

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.

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. The school district's motto is "Our Focus Is On The Learner", and as a concrete demonstration of what we all stand for in Richmond, we have chosen to present this brief together.

Recommendations

Our school district continues to present to the Select Standing Committee because we truly believe that our advocacy is heard and responded to by the Committee. Not only did the November 2014 report of the Select Standing Committee state that public education was the most frequently commented upon area of focus by members of the public, it also reflected the concern that funding of the system is not keeping up with operating, maintenance and capital cost pressures.

Last year's Select Standing Committee recommendations included the following that related specifically to the K-12 education sector:

- Provide stable, predictable, and adequate funding to enable school districts to fulfill their responsibility to provide continued equitable access to quality public education, and to meet required repair and maintenance needs.
- Provide adequate capital funding to school districts for facility improvements, seismic upgrades, and additional schools in rapidly growing communities.
- Provide support for proposed new K-12 initiatives such as personalized learning and enhanced trades and technology training.
- Provide resources to identify and address the growing number of students with special needs and those with minimal English language skills.

We appreciate the fact that the Committee's recommendations correspond directly to the recommendations that we have consistently made as part of our advocacy.

Board of Education:

Eric Yung - Chairperson

Debbie Tablotney - Vice Chairperson

Ken Hamaguchi Jonathan Ho Sandra Nixon

Donna Sargent Alice Wong

We would like to continue our advocacy in these areas, especially for adequate and consistent funding, because our need has not diminished in any significant way. However, for this year we would like to focus in particular on a couple of concepts.

1. Provide Support For Implementation of New Curriculum

The Ministry of Education has released an implementation schedule for the new curriculum that has been developed for the K-12 sector, with the current school year designated an optional/trial year for kindergarten to grade nine. We welcome the changes inherent in the new curriculum, especially the focus on core competencies, as this approach will allow for greater teacher flexibility in determining the content that they will teach and translate into more personalized learning opportunities. However, even positive changes such as these mean significant extra time, effort, learning and collaboration on the part of everyone in the education system. Successful change initiatives need to be well funded, and so we are requesting that the budget provide new and incremental funding for the implementation period of 2015 – 2018.

The new curriculum and the entire approach of personalized learning require a rethinking of how school space is designed and utilized. Supplementary learning spaces such as break out rooms that allow for small groups to work together (ideal for project work or even when English Language Learners need a place to practice their new language skills), calm rooms for children with special needs who might need a place to allow them to self-regulate, and dedicated space for fine arts programs such as music are all needs that are not currently taken into account in the standard space design process for schools. If we are to transform education in BC, as is intended with the advent of the new curriculum, then the infrastructure which supports student learning must be modernized too. We recommend that the school design guidelines be updated to include the types of new spaces that will facilitate the delivery of the new curriculum, and that capital funding be set aside to allow districts to upgrade their facilities.

2. Technology in the Classroom

We appreciate the Committee's strong commitment for the need to support the integration of technology and technology-related skills in the classroom. We believe that there is still room to improve access to computers and technology for students' learning environments, including expanded connectivity and network infrastructure for K-12 schools, increased funding for professional development, technical assistance, hardware infrastructure and network support. Opportunities for students to develop computer literacy requires continued support from the Ministry of Education, as these skills not only prepare them for a society that increasingly demands these skills, but the process of learning provides the means for students to represent and express uniquely creative ideas, as well as deepen their thinking.

3. Enhance Capital Funding For Facilities

The Committee's recommendation for adequate capital funding for facility improvements, seismic upgrades, and additional schools in rapidly growing communities is one that is echoed by the Richmond School District. We have a significant need for seismic upgrading throughout the district, and are working with the Ministry of Education to identify remediation projects that can proceed.

We would ask that the seismic funding program take a more broad perspective than only seismic mitigation. Many of the schools that will receive seismic funding also have significantly aging mechanical and electrical infrastructure.

We believe that there will be much greater impact and efficiency if the upgrading of these systems were to be funded at the same time as the seismic upgrades.

In some instances, we believe that the need for expansion of school capacity is imminent, and that prudent planning and fiscal management would involve consideration of seismic mitigation, school expansion and infrastructure upgrades at the same time. However, the nature of the capital funding system, with separate allocations for seismic upgrades, capacity expansion and infrastructure replacements makes such a holistic approach difficult to implement.

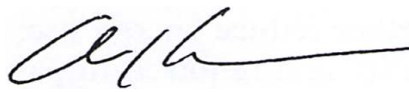
Conclusion

We appreciate the opportunity to present the Standing Committee with this brief that emphasizes our belief in the importance of public education in BC. We know that an economy that is sustainable in the long term is only possible through an excellent public education system. Despite funding challenges trustees, staff and parents are committed to ensuring that our K-12 system continues to be strong, vibrant and efficient. We look forward with hope to the implementation of your recommendations for our sector.

Sincerely,



Dr. Eric Yung, 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



Anne Chen, President
Richmond District Parents Association



Anita Doig, Richmond Management &
Professional Staff Representative

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