



Burnaby District Parent Advisory Council

5325 Kinkaid Street, Burnaby, BC, V5G 1W2

March 2, 2017

The Honourable Mike de Jong, Q.C., MLA
Minister of Finance and House Leader
Room 153, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

The Honourable Mike Bernier, MLA
Minister of Education
Room 134, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Ministers:

The Burnaby District Parent Advisory Council (Burnaby DPAC) represents the interests of Burnaby parents in the public education system. The Burnaby DPAC is an advisory and advocacy council made up of representatives from PACs in the Burnaby School District. On their behalf, I am writing to you to express our concerns on the budgetary constraints faced in the Burnaby School District and throughout BC's public education system. I am also writing to voice our collective support for the recommendations on K-12 Education as found in the November 2016 report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

The recommendations included in the Committee's report focus on the need for adequate K-12 education funding, in terms of operational, programming and capital funding. I will address each of the Committee recommendations in term, starting with the recommendations on operational funding.

Operational Funding: Ministry of Education Funding Formula

While the targeted education funding announced in the 2017 provincial budget gives hope to Burnaby families and those throughout British Columbia, we cannot lose sight of the fact "that the current funding formula does not reflect the true cost of delivering public education, nor does it account for the diversity of education needs across the province."¹ As noted in the report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, the Committee acknowledges the need for a review of the current funding formula:

The Committee recommends to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government:

48. Address inequalities in the Ministry of Education funding formula, including discrepancies in the programs and services offered in rural or urban communities, as well as in administrative staff compensation levels. (2015: #3)

¹ Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services Report, November 2016 – page 30

As parents and as public education advocates, we echo the Committee's recommendation and further assert that students should not be financially penalized based on their area of residency within the province. In Burnaby, the per student funding amount has historically been significantly less than the provincial average. Yet, the educational needs of Burnaby students are, by no means, less worthy of financial investment relative to students in other school districts. To that end, we argue that any reevaluation of the funding formula must address and provide for a student's right to be fully supported with the resources and services they require to thrive in their neighbourhood school, regardless of its location in BC.

Operational Funding: Funding to provide services and supports for diverse learning needs

With respect to the diverse learning needs of students in BC, we also agree with Committee's recommendation for increased supports and services for vulnerable students and students with special needs:

50. Increase funding to provide services and supports for vulnerable students and students with special needs and develop a more equitable distribution process of this funding.

The Province's own policy on Diversity in BC Schools states that "[t]he school system should strive to ensure that differences among learners do not impede their participation in school, their mastery of learning outcomes, or their ability to become contributing members of society."² This policy cannot be realized without sufficient, sustainable and adequate yearly funding.

We acknowledge that the provincial government has set aside \$320 million to continue the half-year, \$50 million interim memorandum of agreement between the BCPSEA, the Ministry of Education and the BCTF for the implementation of the Supreme Court of Canada ruling on class size and class composition. Moreover, we understand that discussions are still ongoing between the parties, and that once an agreement is reached, the rest of the funding, if required, will come from the Province's contingency funds. However, we respectfully remind the Ministers that this funding is specific to the restoration of the language within the BCPSEA-BCTF collective agreement and may not address other funding shortfalls faced by school districts and families of vulnerable students and students with special needs. Other cost implications may include funding for special education assistants, classroom resources and equipment required to meet student needs, in-service training for special education, assessments for early interventions, etc.

Operational Funding: Predictable, sustainable and adequate funding for quality public education

We acknowledge that the new education funding announced in the 2017 provincial budget will provide for enrolment increases as well as union wage increases over the next three years. However, for the last fifteen years, school districts have faced mounting financial pressures and downloaded costs due to the chronic underfunding of the public education system. Yes, the Province's revived commitment to public education in the 2017 budget is laudable; but, it will take more to restore the much needed services and resources that students have lost over the last decade and a half.

² Diversity in BC Schools, Policy Statement <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/diversity-in-bc-schools>

With that in mind, it is not surprising that the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services has repeatedly recommended that the provincial government:

49. Provide predictable, sustainable and adequate yearly funding to enable school districts to fulfil their responsibility to continue to provide access to quality public education, with recognition of the increased costs that school districts have incurred. (2014: #22 and 2015: #2)

As parents, we voice this same recommendation to the provincial government. In addition, we call on elected representatives to acknowledge that for too long parents have been subsidizing the needs of BC's public education system through a culture of fundraising: fundraising to provide our students with basic education resources and equipment that ought to be supplied by tax dollars.

Programming: Funding for BC's new curriculum

With the implementation of BC's redesigned K-12 curriculum, further funding will also be required to provide education resources to "bring B.C.'s new curriculum to life in classrooms"³ and support student learning. This reality was also addressed in the report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services wherein they recommended that the provincial government:

51. Fund additional support and services to implement the new curriculum.

We agree with the Committee's recommendation. And, while we welcome the announcement of the new \$29.4 million Student Learning Grant, we would respectfully submit that one-time funding that equates to approximately \$50 per student will fail to fully address the financial implications associated with the delivery of the new curriculum and "the provision of materials such as lab equipment, computer and technology equipment, and other classroom supplies and teaching materials."⁴

Capital Funding: Adequate funding to meet capacity needs

The remaining recommendations from the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services speak to capital funding for public schools wherein it recommends that the provincial government:

45. Provide adequate capital funding to urban and rural school districts for facility improvements, seismic upgrades and additional schools in rapidly-growing communities. (2014 #23 and 2015 #1); and

46. Recognize portables as a capital expense for school districts, rather than as an operating expense.

While the 2017 provincial budget included \$2-billion in capital funding for the next three years, it is our understanding that much of this funding is already allocated for projects that have been announced. Consequently, this funding will not be able to meet existing demand for seismic upgrades in public school facilities that have been identified as being at "high risk" of structural collapse in an earthquake.

Another pressing concern regarding capital funding relates to capacity issues in BC schools. As the Committee report acknowledges, a number of school districts are experiencing significant growth and

³ "\$29.4-million back-to-school boost for B.C. classrooms," Education media release, February 19, 2017 <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2017EDUC0030-000359>

⁴ Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services Report, November 2016 – page 30

require new schools to keep up with enrollment requirements. As an interim measure, students are often housed in portables while they wait for more permanent infrastructure solutions. However, insofar as the expenditure for portables falls under operating funds, school district operating budgets are stretched even thinner, potentially compromising the learning needs of students. For this reason, we support the Committee's recommendation that the provincial government "reconsider accounting methods whereby portables are included in operating budget, rather than capital budget."

The Committee's recommendations on capital funding are of significant importance given the Supreme Court ruling on class size and composition: it's expected that many school districts will face capacity shortages when the 2002 collective agreement language is restored. For this reason, adequate capital funding is needed now more than ever, and efforts to mitigate capacity shortages (i.e. portables) should not rely on limited operational funding.

In summary, the Burnaby DPAC strongly supports the recommendations of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services regarding K-12 Education, as found in the November 2016 report and urges the provincial government to implement them. By implementing the Committee's recommendations with a commitment to predictable, sustainable and adequate funding for capital and operational expenses, the provincial government will ensure that the purpose of the British Columbia school system, as found in the *School Act*, is achieved: "to enable all learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy."

Sincerely,



Kristin Schnider

Burnaby District Parent Advisory Council Chair

Cc: Ron Burton, Burnaby Board of Education Chair
Gina Niccoli-Moen, Burnaby School District Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Jane Shin, MLA Burnaby-Lougheed
Richard T. Lee, MLA Burnaby North
Raj Chouhan, MLA Burnaby-Edmonds
Kathy Corrigan, MLA Burnaby-Deer Lake
Rob Fleming, MLA Victoria-Swan Lake and Official Opposition Critic for Education