



Burnaby District Parent Advisory Council

5325 Kinkaid Street, Burnaby, BC, V5G 1W2

January 28, 2018

The Honourable Carole James, MLA
Minister of Finance
Room 153, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

The Honourable Rob Fleming, MLA
Minister of Education
Room 124, 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 for the past several years. I am also writing to voice our collective support for the recommendations on K-12 Education as found in the November 2017 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 and capital funding. The report further asserts the need to provide supports for special needs students and the provision of adequate learning resources and technology. I will address each of the Select Standing Committee recommendations in turn, 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 gave hope to Burnaby families and those throughout British Columbia, we did not 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 2017 report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services, the Committee acknowledges the need for a review of the current funding formula:

66. With broad stakeholder input, review the per-pupil funding formula to develop a new needs-based, stable and sustainable model to fund actual costs, resource needs, and professional development requirements of each school district. [2016: #48]

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 for a review of the per-pupil funding formula. Moreover, any such review necessarily requires the input of all stakeholder groups to be considered authentic and transparent.

As you are likely aware, under the current funding formula, students are inadvertently financially penalized based on their area of residency within the province rather than being accommodated based on their actual resource needs and the school district's actual costs. 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 school districts that have equivalent resource needs and comparable professional development requirements. 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.

On the matter of developing a funding model that is both stable and sustainable, we would like to remind you that for the last sixteen years school districts across the province have faced mounting financial pressures and downloaded costs due to the chronic underfunding of the public education system. As parents, we implore the Provincial Government to heed the recommendation for stable and sustainable funding. Predictable funding is needed to restore the much-needed services and resources that many students have lost over the last decade and a half. It is important to note that these resources and service also include those that the Committee recommends the Province fund in recommendation #70:

70. Fund innovative and creative endeavours within the K-12 system, including the arts, graphic design, music and theatre in order to support the new creative economy.

Operational Funding: Funding for BC's new curriculum

With the implementation of BC's redesigned K-12 curriculum, further funding is required to provide education resources to "bring B.C.'s new curriculum to life in classrooms"² and support student learning. This reality was previously noted in the 2016 report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Service (recommendation 2016: #51), and again in 2017 when the Committee recommended that the Provincial Government:

69. Provide funding for new materials, training and supports for the new K-12 curriculum, for LGTBQ inclusive sexual health education, as well as information about mental health and addiction. [2016: #51]

We agree with the Committee's recommendation, and we respectfully submit that one-time funding (such as the 2017 announcement of the Student Learning Grant) fails to fully address the financial implications associated with the ongoing delivery of the redesigned curriculum and the provision of materials such as lab equipment, computer and technology equipment, and other classroom supplies and teaching materials. This recommendation is further echoed by the Committee under recommendation #68, which reads:

² "\$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>

68. Increase learning resources to school districts so that students have equitable access to books, equipment, technology and other resources necessary to provide a quality learning environment.

A 'quality learning environment' is a critical component to the successful delivery of the K-12 curriculum for BC students.

For far 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, technology and equipment that ought to be supplied by tax dollars. Without ongoing parent fundraising initiatives, we submit that the 'quality learning environment' that BC schools have managed to maintain over the last sixteen years would not have been possible. In the 2017 BCTF document, "It's Time for Change" it is estimated that parents contribute \$142M to subsidize BC's public education system.³ That said, it is time for the Provincial Government recognize this fact and further recognize its sole responsibility to fully fund the K-12 public education system.

Capital Funding: Adequate funding to meet seismic, capacity and maintenance needs

The majority of the capital funding recommendations from the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services speak to the need for adequate funding to meet capacity needs in BC schools:

62. Provide adequate funding for seismic upgrades, accelerate the Seismic Mitigation Program, and allow concurrent non-seismic upgrades to take place where appropriate. [2016: #45]; and

60. Develop a strategy and proactively fund the construction of new schools at elementary, middle and high school levels to meet the demand in geographical areas of current and anticipated population growth, and to address issues such as overcapacity and reliance on portables. [2016: #45]; and

64. Streamline the process by which school districts access capital funding from concept to completion.

While the 2017 provincial budget included \$2-billion in capital funding for the following three years, it is our understanding that much of this funding was already allocated for projects that had been previously announced by the former Provincial Government. Consequently, that funding was not sufficient to meet the demand for seismic upgrades in public school facilities that had been identified as being at "high risk" of structural collapse in an earthquake, nor was it adequate to address the funding required to ensure proper repair, maintenance and upgrades of aging school facilities. The 2018 provincial budget needs to address this capital funding shortfall so that our students and public education providers are afforded safe learning and working environments to which they have a right.

Another pressing concern regarding capital funding in the Committee's report relates to capacity issues in BC schools. As the Committee report acknowledges, a number of school districts are experiencing rapid growth and overcrowding, and 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. Insofar as school district have had to use their limited operating funds to

³ "It's Time for Change" BCTF 2017, <http://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Issues/EdFinance/ItsTimeForChange.pdf>

procure portables, school district budgets are stretched even thinner, potentially compromising the learning needs of their students. For this reason, we fully support the Committee's recommendation that—until the reliance on portables is eliminated—the Provincial Government:

63. Provide bridge funding to cover the cost of portables while new schools are being constructed.

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

Supports for Special Needs and Diverse Learning Needs

With respect to the diverse learning needs of students in BC, with specific attention given to children and youth with special needs and their educators, we also agree with Select Standing Committee's recommendations for increased supports and services:

72. Ensure that teachers are well supported to implement inclusion, equity, and quality learning opportunities for all students, including diverse learners, by increasing funding to allow schools to hire more trained educational assistants and specialist; and

73. Provide funding to enable early identification of students with special needs, and to provide appropriate support programs, as required. [2016: #50]; and

67. Increase funding to Community LINK and the Vulnerable Student Supplement, and provide a more equitable allocation process of these initiatives among school districts. [2016: #50]

The Province's own policy on Diversity in BC Schools states that "[t]he school system should strive to ensure that differences among learners are respected through their participation in schools, their learning, and their ability to become contributing members of society."⁴ This policy cannot be realized without sufficient, sustainable and adequate yearly funding, which should include targeted funding for students with special needs and the staff supports required for these learners.

We acknowledge that the previous Provincial Government set aside funds to carry out the 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. However, we respectfully remind the new Provincial Government that this funding was specific to the restoration of the language within the BCPSEA-BCTF collective agreement, which does not address all the funding shortfalls faced by school districts and families of vulnerable students and students with special needs over the last sixteen years. Other cost implications may include funding to hire trained special education assistants and specialists, classroom resources and equipment required to meet student needs, in-service training for special education, assessments for early identification and interventions, etc. The Committee recommendations referenced above acknowledge this fact insofar as they call for additional funding in this area.


⁴ Diversity in BC Schools, Policy Statement <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/diversity-in-bc-schools>

In summary, the Burnaby DPAC strongly supports the recommendations of the Committee on Finance and Government Services regarding K-12 Education, as found in the November 2017 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, as well as the provision for supports for special needs students and diverse learners, 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."

After sixteen years of funding cuts and offloaded costs to school districts, students in BC's K-12 public education deserve a quality system that is adequately and appropriately funded by a government that recognizes the value in investing in BC's future. We cannot sit back and hope that our kids 'make do' with the limited (and unsustainable) education funding that has been provided to them over the last decade and a half.

During the 2017 provincial election campaign the BC NDP "promise[d] to 'properly fund' classrooms and school equipment so fundraising would not be needed. [The BC NDP promised to] replace portables with 'real classrooms' and make all schools earthquake safe."⁵ Now is the time to make good on these election promises, starting with the 2018 budget. This is especially true given the fact that these election promises mirror the very recommendations found in the 2017 report from Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services.

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
Hon. Katrina Chen, MLA Burnaby-Lougheed
Janet Routledge, MLA Burnaby North
Raj Chouhan, MLA Burnaby-Edmonds
Anne Kang, MLA Burnaby-Deer Lake
Mary Polak, MLA Langley and Official Opposition Critic for Education
Dan Davies, MLA Peace River North and Official Opposition Critic for Education

⁵ "B.C. Election 2017: What you need to know about the BC NDP platform" Global News, May 6, 2017
<https://globalnews.ca/news/3428046/bc-election-2017-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-bc-ndp-platform/>