

April 2, 2013



All British Columbia Boards of Education  
c/o British Columbia School Trustees' Association

Dear Colleagues:

***Re: 2013/14 Public Education Budget***

The public education system in British Columbia is the envy of many countries around the world. We should all be very proud of that stature and achievement. For the sake of our children and the future well-being of this Province we need to make adequate investments in education, to ensure we can continue to achieve that standard, providing the kind of public education British Columbia families have come to expect.

Our Board is concerned our ability to meet that expectation is being seriously eroded with the adoption of the Provincial Budget and advice from the Minister of Education that sufficient funding is not being provided to cover approximately \$134 Million in cost pressures over which Boards of Education have no control. Of course these cost pressures do not include whatever wage settlement may be reached in the current labour negotiations, nor do they include the reductions in funding resulting from declining enrollments.

We know from discussion at BCSTA Regional Branch meetings that many other Boards are concerned that our collective ability to provide the kind of education we want for our children is being significantly compromised and, despite our best efforts to communicate the concern through the BC School Trustees Association, it seems government isn't listening.

In the most recent report to regional BCSTA Branches, Vice President Teresa Rezansoff is quoted as having said the following to the media during the budget lock up, "Programs and choice for students will be sacrificed as school districts struggle to meet these cost pressures". She was referring to the approximately \$134M calculated by the BC Association of School Business Officials. As we wrestle with the process of finding ways to submit a balanced budget in this District we know Teresa's statement is absolutely accurate.

We know our story is not unique. Like most Districts we've closed a number of schools and reduced staffing in all areas of our operation for several years. Like most we have had a decline in enrollment and acknowledge that reducing our resources in response to that decline is fiscally prudent and responsible. If that was the only funding shortfall we were facing we could handle that. However, the \$2M in cost pressures we have no control over (pension contribution adjustments, HST to PST, Inflation on supplies and services) coupled with our decline in enrollment and need to replace the contribution to our 2012/13 budget that came from contingencies (now very close to being depleted) amounts to an overall 2013/14 budget shortfall of \$6M or five percent of our total budget. Again, this does not include any wage settlements which may be reached in the current labour negotiations.

All of this is challenging however, it is having to address the \$2M in cost pressures noted above without any Government assistance which is particularly galling given our continuing struggles to manage the other shortfalls. Of course we couldn't possibly cover any wage settlements within

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the existing funding envelope even though we believe modest wage increases are appropriate in an inflationary environment.

In light of this situation we urge all Boards of Education to write to the Premier's office to share your stories and register your concerns and request the \$134M referred to in the BCSTA literature be fully funded by the Ministry of Education in the 2013/14 budget year.

We recognize BCSTA continues to have meetings with both the government and opposition on this subject and are very hopeful they will be successful. Our purpose in requesting that all Boards join us in writing directly to the Premier's office is simply to support their efforts. Our view is that it is one thing for a Provincial Organization to be able to say they represent sixty school Boards but much more compelling if sixty letters have been received by government reinforcing the same message.

To quote from the 2002/03 Charter for Public Education;

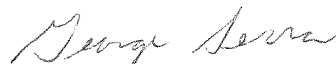
“Public Education is a sacred trust. As a community we promise to prepare learners for a socially responsible life in a free and democratic society, to participate in a world which each generation will shape and build. We promise a public education system which provides learners with knowledge and wisdom, protects and nurtures their natural joy of learning, encourages them to become persons of character, strength and integrity, infuses them with hope and with spirit and guides them to resolute and thoughtful action.”

We cannot possibly honour this commitment with continually diminishing resources. A hold the line budget in the face of inflation and other significant cost increases over which we have no control represents a budget cut. As Teresa Rezanoff indicated budget cuts represent reductions in programs and choice for students. All of the trimming has been done over many years of austerity. One of our educational partners aptly described our collective frustration in a budget consultation meeting by saying, “We've already cut the fat....we're now moving into bone and muscle and it hurts a lot”.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Palis, Vice-Chairperson  
Board of Education



George Serra, President  
Maple Ridge Teachers' Association



Leslie Franklin, President  
Canadian Union of Public Employees



Kellie Marquet, Chairperson  
District Parent Advisory Council

cc: Board of Education  
Jan Unwin, Superintendent of Schools  
Flavia Coughlan, Secretary Treasurer

MM/to