

June 16, 2015

Doug Bing, MLA
104 – 20130 Lougheed Highway
Maple Ridge BC V2X 2P7

Dear Doug:

Re: Follow up to June 3rd meeting

First let me thank you for meeting with the Board on June 3rd. We appreciate the opportunity to share our thoughts and situation with you so that you are well versed in advance of any discussion in caucus or with the Ministers of Education and Finance on the matters we reviewed. The intent of this letter is to follow up on our conversation.

Although we have copied several letters to your offices over the past year and have had a variety of informal discussions, the last formal meeting we held with you was on June 11th, 2014. We made several requests at that meeting and felt we should review our progress on those requests at our most recent discussion. The requests made in 2014 and our sense of progress or lack thereof since that time are listed below.

1. **Acknowledgment from government that we are managing our resources very carefully and in a fiscally responsible manner.** As noted in our discussion, the implementation of the surprise administrative savings requirement and follow up comments from members of cabinet suggest a lack of understanding of the work school boards are doing to manage their resources, as well as a lack of acknowledgment that we are making the difficult decisions required to balance our budgets. We take exception to the inferences made by government that Boards of Education have been inefficient. We believe a more direct dialogue is required between government and boards of education on the subject of education finance for government to fully appreciate the work boards do and have done to manage their resources effectively and to understand what is truly needed to properly support K-12 education. We have proposed a means to do that in the form of a resolution presented by this Board and passed at the 2015 BCSTA annual general meeting.
2. **Acknowledgment from government that the cuts we are making now (and have made in the past several years) will have a negative impact on student success in the long term.** As we mentioned during our most recent meeting, it is one thing to require cutbacks. It is quite another to do so and expect the same or better results despite the never-ending cycle of funding pressures being placed on school boards. We have given many examples of the impacts of these cuts on our operation in earlier correspondence and in the material we left with you. To suggest these will have no impact on student achievement is to seriously disrespect the work of the people whose positions have been eliminated from our system. Over the past year, there has been no such acknowledgment from government. We understand the need to reduce

service levels and outcomes to balance budgets. We simply wish an acknowledgment from government that the services we are cutting had meaning, were important to the people served, and that their elimination will have negative consequences.

3. **A commitment to encourage other ministries to step up to meet their obligations to the children and families of this province.** The story of Paige, which has been in the news so much of late, is an example we can relate to. As our Superintendent shared so eloquently at our meeting, there are a few Paige-like stories in every school district and we are very concerned. Certainly funding has a role to play in ensuring social service caseloads are at a level that an appropriate response can be achieved to this kind of situation. While they do try their best, the ministries we communicate with on a regular basis are challenged to meet the needs of our students in crisis and that is a huge concern. We continue our dialogue with those ministries to determine what can be done within the current resource levels to meet these very real needs, but know any significant progress will necessarily involve changes to the framework of support available in the province for youth.
4. **A commitment to fully fund additional costs over which Boards of Education have no control (like labour contract settlements and pension plan increases) and cover other inflationary costs.** While government representatives suggested they would do just this with respect to the teachers' settlement, they no sooner negotiated an agreement than they passed a provincial budget which included the administrative savings requirement offsetting a large portion of the cost of the settlement. On top of that, the Ministry of Education passed significant Next Generation Network costs along to Boards of Education (an additional annual cost of \$0.46 M for our school district). It is acknowledged that some inflationary costs have been addressed with increased per pupil funding, but this funding does not sufficiently address the shortfalls we continue to experience as a result of these requirements, BC Hydro increases and increased pension and MSP premiums, necessitating further service level cuts. The cuts to our district necessitated by these changes were outlined during our meeting and are identified in detail in the material we left with you. During the past two years we have made service level cuts of over \$8 M. The budget we just passed included additional service cuts of \$1.25 M over the next two years. These cuts involve eliminating busing and requiring students to provide their own devices (laptops, I pads, etc.).

In the recent past, we've increased class sizes, reduced student support and cut maintenance and administration as much as we dare. Principals and vice principals alone have been reduced by 15% leading to less attention being paid to students and less support for quality teaching. What we are now doing is passing additional costs along to parents. We said last year we would have to consider eliminating busing if government didn't provide sufficient funding and they didn't.

Government continues to indicate they are increasing the funding for education, and they are. Unfortunately the increases are insufficient to cover the increased costs negotiated by government and over which Boards of Education have no control. The chart we provided at our meeting (attached to this letter) demonstrates the actual per student level of funding has decreased since 2002.

5. **A commitment to review and revise the current system of holding back funding.** Some revisions were implemented and more money was released up front this year. Unfortunately the second half of the 2014 request was that government stop using portions of the holdback for purposes other than what it was originally intended for (to rationalize student enrollment adjustments). Unfortunately, government has chosen to use a portion of the holdback for the Next Generation Network, which will mean a smaller holdback amount available to districts who count on that money to balance their budgets. We are one of those districts.
6. **A commitment to review and revise the current funding formula to ensure a fair distribution of resources across the province.** Minister Fassbender committed to that review at the BCSTA AGM over a year ago and no discussion has occurred to that end.
7. **A commitment to review and revise the current system of capital planning.** Although we have not seen any proposals, we are assured by the Deputy Minister, Dave Byng, that changes are coming. We trust that will be the case and are pleased to have recently received approval on a capital project submission in support of our energy management plan, which will have a positive impact on our annual operating budget. We appreciate how quickly our request was dealt with following our submission of the relevant materials.
8. **A commitment to review Government's tax policy with respect to school property taxes.** We have subsequently recommended an overall review of taxation recognizing the need for balanced budgets going forward. As noted in our earlier letter, we believe government should have a courageous discussion with the public on this subject with a view toward generating the resources required to sustain the essential services citizens need, achieve the goals of the BC Education Plan and maintain a healthy economy. Government has continued to ignore any suggestion of increased taxation as a means to balance the provincial budget in an inflationary environment. School property taxes are still lower now than they were many years ago while the Municipal portion of property taxes have increased considerably. There is something wrong with this picture.

Unfortunately our review of last year's letter and subsequent actions by government do not indicate significant progress. In fact there is evidence of government doing just the opposite of what was requested without any dialogue on the need to do so. This has resulted in a great deal of frustration on the part of Trustees locally and throughout the province. The frustration being experienced has been exacerbated by the Minister's signing of a **co governance protocol agreement** last December with the BCSTA, which committed the parties to advance consultation on any significant policy change which

would impact the other party. This principle has been violated three times in relatively short order since the agreement was signed. The change in providing subsidized access to upgrading courses for adult graduated learners, the administrative savings requirement and Bill 11 were all surprises to Boards of Education. No pre-consultation was held on the first two and very little was provided on one portion of Bill 11. There was certainly no opportunity to review and comment upon the legislation before it was introduced to the house as has been the case with other legislation.

The sense of powerlessness being felt by Trustees is coupled with a significant current concern that our exempt personnel salaries have been frozen since 2009 while the rest of our staff compliment has achieved negotiated settlements. We congratulate government on achieving those settlements and are pleased with the length of term of those agreements. However, the exempt staff salary freeze is causing a morale problem among those we rely so heavily upon to provide leadership in our system. This is even more frustrating since management staff in core government service areas did receive a raise a year ago. Not only have our exempt staff not had a raise, they are under considerably greater pressure today than previously as a result of the budget cuts we have had to make over the past several years.

The freeze needs to be lifted and the required funding needs to be provided by the province to cover those increased costs. If the required funding isn't provided, we will be forced to find even more service level cuts in an already seriously stressed system.

In summary we hope you will:

1. **Encourage the Ministers of Education and Finance to participate more directly in an annual discussion of education finance with the BC School Trustees Association, BC Association of School Business Officials and BC School Superintendents Association to determine the amount of funding required to support the public education system we all want and need.**
2. **Encourage cabinet to provide the kind of support (financial and otherwise) necessary to respond appropriately to the needs of children in crisis.**
3. **Encourage the Minister of Education and the rest of government to honor the co-governance agreement with the BC School Trustees Association in all future endeavors involving significant policy changes. We would also encourage the Minister and Ministry Officials to make every effort to be present from start to finish at important meetings like the BCSTA annual general meeting. We believe the opportunity these meetings present for improved mutual understanding of the issues both government and boards of education are facing should not be missed.**
4. **Encourage the Ministries of Education and Finance to lift the exempt salary freeze and fully fund appropriate compensation increases.**

In closing, we appreciate your willingness to meet with us directly so we can share our thoughts and concerns with you. We do hope the results of our discussions will be more fruitful than what we've experienced over the past year and look forward to that being the case.

Sincerely,



Mike Murray
Chair

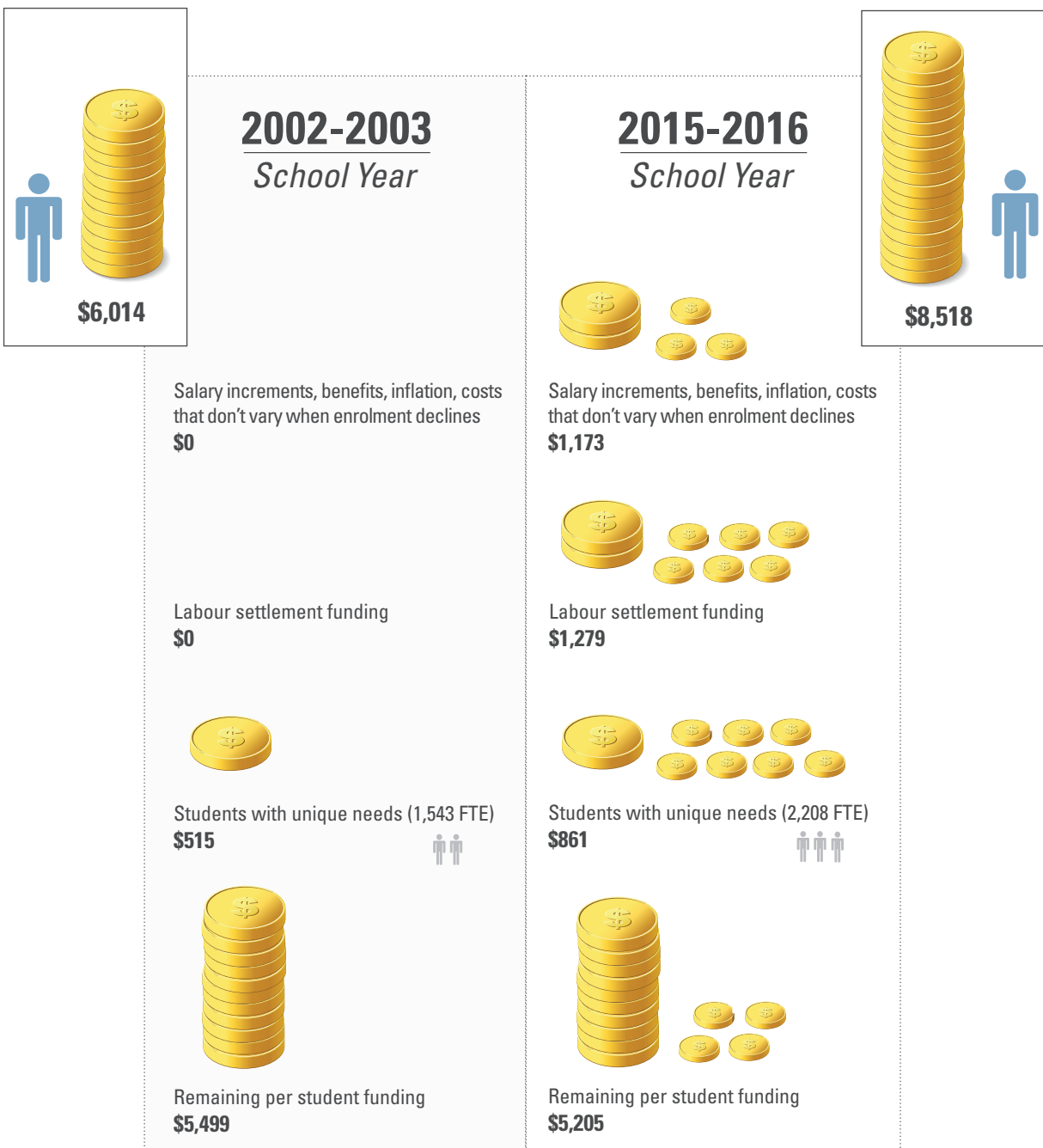
Enclosure

Cc:

The Honourable Peter Fassbender, Minister of Education
The Honourable Michael de Jong, Minister of Finance
Rob Fleming, MLA, Education Critic
All Trustees
Ms. Sylvia Russell, Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Flavia Coughlan, Secretary Treasurer
BC School Trustees Association (for distribution to all Boards of Education)
Mr. George Serra, President, MRTA
Ms. Leslie Franklin, President, CUPE Local 703
Ms. Catharine Watkins, President, MRPVPA
Ms. Kellie Marquet, Chair, DPAC
District Student Advisory Council

GOVERNMENT FUNDING PER STUDENT

for the MAPLE RIDGE - PITT MEADOWS SCHOOL DISTRICT



The things we currently cannot fund include:

Fully addressed class size and composition issues, fully funded school supplies, ongoing operating costs for new schools, regular student transportation to and from school, current textbooks for all students, technology to support 21st century learning, appropriate compensation levels for non-union staff, elementary school playgrounds, optimal building maintenance and school staffing, additional school in session days, and community use of our facilities.

What we have protected:

Choice programs in our schools (trades programs and academies, self-directed learning), support for students with special needs, kindergarten and primary class size, core services.