



October 1, 2015

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services  
Room 224, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, B. C. V8V 1X4

Dear Committee Members:

RE: Budget 2016 Consultations

The Board of Education for School District No. 42 Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows wishes to join the BC School Trustees Association and other Boards of Education in expressing its serious concern about the state of education funding in British Columbia.

In our June 2015 letter to our MLAs, our Board detailed the impacts that insufficient funding has had on our school district over the past several years. We have attached that letter and supporting material for the committee's information, as we feel a more detailed analysis of the issues as they impact individual school districts is more beneficial than simply making the statement that more funding is needed.

To summarize, we have been faced with making over nine million dollars of service level reductions from our operating budget during the past three budget cycles. Since so much of our operating budget is comprised of labour costs, we have had to reduce our labour force by 60 positions beyond the reductions necessitated through declining enrollment. Our class sizes have increased considerably and our administrative, secretarial, principal/vice principal, career counselling, librarian, maintenance and other positions have decreased significantly in number. All of this means that far less attention is available for students and fewer new teachers are entering the system. While we have enjoyed some success with student achievement in the form of increasing graduation rates, it will not be long before that achievement begins to decline as the students who are entering the system now experience the impacts of these reduced resources over all of the years of their K to 12 education.

Last year we expected funding would be provided to meet the commitments made in the settlement brokered by the province with teachers. Unfortunately, the announcement that Boards of Education would be required to reduce spending and services to achieve additional savings amounting to \$54M over two years forced our Board to make even more cuts and pass significant costs along to parents. We had to eliminate regular school bussing to rural areas starting in September 2016, and moved to a bring your own device model for students. This is on top of the staffing cuts we made during previous budget cycles.

This summer, we learned we are being asked to fund the implementation of the Next Generation (Internet) Network, the anticipated annual costs of which for our district will amount to \$456,972 per year. We are also being asked to fund a long overdue increase in exempt staff salaries (salaries that have not increased since 2009) without additional funding from the Ministry of Education. Our implementation of these changes will demand further service level cuts.

The government argues educational expenditures have increased since 2002. Labour settlements negotiated by government account for most (if not all) of the increased expenditures described by government. Those increases have not kept pace with the cost pressures over which Boards of Education have no control, including pension plan contribution increases, utility cost increases, MSP premiums, inflation on general supplies and purchased services, the Next Generation Network, etc. The latest requirement that Boards find further savings of \$54M effectively reverses the government's commitment to fully fund the last support staff and teacher settlements. The chart attached to our June 2015 letter to MLAs Marc Dalton and Doug Bing illustrates the impact of government decision making over the past several years. This graph shows that per pupil funding has actually decreased significantly over time.

We acknowledge and support the recommendations from last year's select standing committee that sufficient funding for the K-12 education system be provided in support of student achievement and that the cost increases being experienced by school districts be fully addressed.

We believe there is a significant problem in the disconnect between those delivering services (Boards of Education) and those setting the overall education budget (provincial government). An enhanced level of communication and collaborative decision-making needs to be considered to bring those two groups together. Those who set budgets at levels requiring continuing service cuts need to take responsibility for the consequences and not be completely buffered by local Boards of Education who have no say in setting the budget envelope. Better yet, Boards of Education should have some meaningful degree of involvement in making recommendations to government on the annual education budget for the province.

We submit there is a need for government to work more closely with

- Boards of Education through the BCSTA,
- the BC Association of School Business Officials, and
- the BC School Superintendents Association

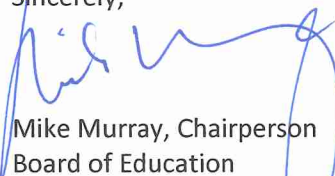
to build an education budget from the ground up that truly reflects the needs of the system. We proposed a resolution to that effect to the BCSTA AGM last spring, and this resolution was adopted. It is our genuine hope that some progress can be made along those lines in the upcoming budget deliberations.

In our view, the select committee should reinforce that resolution by recommending the establishment of an education financing task force involving the aforementioned parties, the purpose of which would be to examine such matters in detail, including:

- what level of funding the k-12 sector needs in order to bring stability to the system and achieve the desired progress identified in forward thinking education planning,
- taxation recommendations related to school property taxes and other taxation necessary to provide the required level of funding,
- the management of Ministry of Education holdback funding,
- the funding formula by which the Ministry's resources are distributed to school districts throughout the province, and
- how those responsible for the day to day delivery of public education can have a meaningful and ongoing role in identifying the requirements for and setting the provincial education budget.

We thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Mike Murray, Chairperson  
Board of Education

Encls.

cc:

The Honourable Mike Bernier, Minister of Education  
The Honourable Mike DeJong, Minister of Finance  
Mr. Doug Bing, MLA  
Mr. Marc Dalton MLA  
Mr. Rob Fleming, MLA  
Ms. Teresa Rezanoff, President, BCSTA  
Mr. Kelvin Stretch, President, BCASBO  
Ms. Sherry Elwood, President, BCSSA  
Board of Education, School District No. 42 (Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows)  
Ms. Sylvia Russell, Superintendent of Schools  
Ms. Flavia Coughlan, Secretary Treasurer  
Ms. Catharine Watkins, President, Maple Ridge Principals' and Vice Principals' Association  
Mr. George Serra, President, Maple Ridge Teachers' Association  
Ms. Leslie Franklin, President, CUPE Local 703  
Ms. Kim Dumore, Chair, District Parent Advisory Council  
District Student Advisory Council