

February 3, 2021

Honourable Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Education
Government of British Columbia
Room 306 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Honourable Mike Farnworth
Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
Government of British Columbia
Room 128 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Honourable Whiteside and Honourable Farnworth,

The Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District provides BC curriculum programming to inmates at the Alouette Corrections Centre for Women (ACCW) and the Fraser Regional Corrections Centre (FRCC). The programming is delivered by incredibly talented teachers who are dedicated to their work and committed to fully supporting their students.

The funding for the program is currently allocated based on the funding model for continuing education. This model, however, prevents school districts from maintaining a consistent level of staffing and from providing the required educational services. Enrolment in this unique program is generally low at the end of September, since it typically takes more than a couple of weeks for vulnerable inmates to rebuild their faith in a system that may have failed them in the past. Additionally, the prison population in provincial corrections is itself continually in flux, which also results in unpredictable enrolment patterns and unfunded enrolment for inmates who have to leave the program before they meet the activation criteria for funding purposes.

We recognize that there is a documented direct link between low literacy rates and high incidents of crime. As such, we know that partnerships between boards of education and BC Corrections have great value in that they not only provide struggling individuals with the skills they need to succeed, but can also have a measurable impact on crime reduction in communities.

As you prepare the 2021/2022 provincial budget to be tabled on April 20, **we ask that you consider special purpose funding to school districts to provide stable, year-round educational services in provincial correctional facilities based on the level of service required in each community.** A commitment from government to provide year-round educational services would make it possible for us to continue to provide potential life-changing educational opportunities. The BCSTA Provincial Council, which includes representatives from all BC school districts, supported this request in October 2020.

As evidence of the positive impact this program has on the individuals who participate in it, I have included the following brief testimonial from a former student in this program:

"I'm writing to let you know my experience with school at ACCW and how much the chance to go to school has impacted my life. First, hats off to the teacher who was very understanding and patient with my insecurity to doing school work. I am so grateful for the opportunity to get my grade 12 and the confidence that I was not stupid like I was told my whole life. I took that new confidence and went to college after I was released what I would never have done without the schooling inside the prison. Today I have my Bachelor's degree in social work and am planning to do my Master's next year. Education for most people inside prison is more than books and tests, it's a chance to build up our self-esteem and find our true ability that most people lost from childhood abuse and violence. These programs change lives." - M.K.

I appreciate your time in reading this letter and look forward to your response. Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Sincerely,



Korleen Carreras, Chairperson
Board of Education

Cc:

The Board of Education, School District No. 42 (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows)
Mr. Harry Dhillon, Superintendent of Schools
Ms. Flavia Coughlan, Secretary Treasurer
The Honourable Lisa Beare, Minister of Citizens' Services
Mr. Bob D'Eith, MLA Maple Ridge-Mission
All Boards of Education c/o BC School Trustees Association