



October 17, 2014

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

Dear Committee Members,

RE: Budget 2015 Consultations

The Board of Education for School District 42 Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows wish to join the BC School Trustees Association and other Boards of Education in expressing our serious concern about the state of education funding in British Columbia. Our June 23rd letter to the Minister of Education detailed the impacts of insufficient funding following our adoption of an extremely challenging budget for the current year. We have attached that letter and our 2014/15 budget report 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. We were faced with cutting over five million dollars from our operating budget during this budget cycle, which followed a similar reduction in the prior year. Since so much of our operating budget is comprised of labour costs, we have had to reduce our labour force by 70 positions beyond the reductions necessitated through declining enrollment. All of this means less attention available for students and fewer new teachers entering the system. While we have enjoyed some success with student achievement reported in the form of increasing graduation rates and other assessments, 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.

A few of the shortfalls we experienced in our budget will be offset by funding provided to meet the commitments made in the settlement with teachers. Despite that additional funding, we are still experiencing many more classes with over 30 students than we had in the past.

We anticipate needing to make additional cuts in the 2015/16 budget unless additional funding is provided and literally do not know where additional cuts can be made.

In the June 23rd letter to Minister Fassbender, we outlined our concern that school property taxes appear not to have been raised for ten years while Municipal taxation has risen considerably during that period. It is certainly the case in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

Municipal governments have long understood that zero percent property tax increases in an inflationary environment means reducing services. Even inflationary increases to school property taxes over that ten year period would have made a significant difference to our current position.

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 addressed. We submit there is a need to consider reasonable increases to school property taxation as one means by which additional funding could be provided to education, and that regular inflationary increase should be considered on an ongoing basis.

At one time in the province's history, boards of education could set school property tax rates at a level sufficient to meet their needs and did so in a local forum where they were accountable to the public and heard directly from their constituents. The move away from that system has meant more consistency across the province but it has also eliminated the ability to link levels of service to levels of taxation in discussions with constituents. We also believe there is a significant problem in the disconnect between those delivering services (boards of education) and those setting the overall education budget (the provincial government). An enhanced level of communication and decision making needs to be considered to bring those two groups together. Those that 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 establishing the annual education budget for the province.

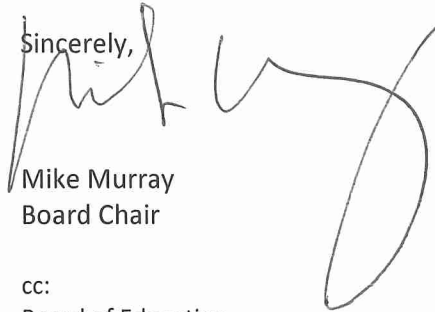
We recognize school property taxes only account for 33% of the total education budget. Some level of detailed work needs to be done to explore how that funding is used and how increases should be determined.

One of the recommendations the select committee could consider is the establishment of an education financing task force, 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 plans
- the use of school property taxes and how increases should be determined
- the management of Ministry of Education holdback funding
- the funding formula by which the Ministry's resources are distributed to districts throughout the province and
- how those responsible for the day to day delivery of public education can have a meaningful role in identifying the requirements for and setting the provincial education budget.

We thank you for your attention.

Sincerely,



Mike Murray
Board Chair

cc:

Board of Education

The Honourable Peter Fassbender, Minister of Education

Mr. Doug Bing, MLA

Mr. Marc Dalton, MLA

Ms. Laurie Meston, Acting Superintendent of Schools

Ms. Flavia Coughlan, Secretary Treasurer

Ms. Sylvia Russell

Ms. Catherine 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. Kellie Marquet, Chair, District Parent Advisory Council

District Student Advisory Council

All Boards of Education via BC School Trustees Association