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## BOARD OF EDUCATION

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July 15, 2016

The Honourable Mike Bernier  
Minister of Education  
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Bernier:

**RE: Rural Education Enhancement Fund (REEF)**

The Board of Education for School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) was very concerned about both the timing and the content of your announcement regarding the Rural Education Enhancement Fund and passed the following motion at our special meeting on July 5, 2016.

*“THAT the Board of Education of School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) send a letter to the minister, with copies to all boards via BCSTA and to local press, outlining the many ways the creation of the Rural Education Enhancement Fund is not supported by our school district.”*

There are many alarming elements of this announcement that illustrate poor public policy but I will list just a few:

- An announcement on June 15 with an application deadline of June 24 and a June 30 decision date was irresponsible. As you know, staffing and budgets are completed in April and May to meet the June deadline set by your ministry. New funds announced in June undermine the consultation and trust of the community and create uncertainty regarding schools and programs available to serve students in September. Enhancement in March of existing funds with long held accountability and processes in place would have been much appreciated.
- The announcement listed specific schools targeted to be closed that might be “saved” by such funding. This listing separates school districts by who can qualify and who may not and sets up divisions within school districts and between rural and urban districts. The lack of transparency regarding this list and its purpose only led to confusion and resentment across the province.
- The implication that the schools must be “at risk” of closing to be eligible for funding is a dangerous precedent. This is the opposite message to what our local school district is aiming to do. We work to keep schools open and to keep flexible programs available to

students from every school and from every community. Naming schools “at risk” as required by your announcement would undermine the confidence parents rightly have in our district’s value of ensuring stable, quality public education in every community.

- The limited amount of funding specified in the REEF was not enough to ensure enhanced delivery in small schools and would only serve to delay financial crisis again for a year, or at best two. Although a few districts may have been able to scramble to keep some of these schools open (and were even grateful for the last minute opportunity), some have returned funds granted as the funds were insufficient to actually create a safe, predictable learning space for children. This is further evidence that the benefit of the fund is uneven and not addressing the real needs of rural districts in the long term.

Minister, we have asked time and time again for stable secure funding to meet the education needs of British Columbia’s students. More specifically we have asked for announcements of funding or policy changes to fit with the calendar of budget submissions that your ministry requires from districts. A recent example was the announcement of 10 hours of curriculum development time in fall of 2015 requiring a change of school calendar well into the school year. That example was very disruptive to the families in our district. Respectful communication and stable secure funding will enhance collaboration and build confidence in public education.

Your predecessor signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the BCSTA in December 2014 committing to consult and collaborate with the elected boards of education in British Columbia. Since that time you have proudly referenced that document as proof of your intention to truly co-govern with elected school trustees. Statements of intention are all we have heard to date. The Rural Education Enhancement Fund announcement and implementation, for reasons I have cited, is one more example of how you and your ministry have betrayed that Memorandum with short term, ill thought-out announcements that create greater work and less trust at the local level.

Our board chose not to apply for the REEF funds as we believed the damage to trust and uncertainty about on-going programs would have a negative affect in our community and far outweigh any funds received. Once again we ask that you put the education of students first in your policy decisions and consult with school boards throughout the province on the provision of adequate, stable long-term funding for public education.

Our communities and families deserve a more thoughtful and considerate approach.

Sincerely,



Betty Baxter  
Chair, Board of Education  
School District No 46 (Sunshine Coast)

p.c. Board of Education of School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast)  
Patrick Bocking, Superintendent of Schools

Nicholas Weswick, Secretary-Treasurer  
Louise Herle, SCTA President  
Marnie Baba, CUPE Local 801 Acting President  
Nicholas Simons, MLA, Powell River-Sunshine Coast  
All Boards of Education, via BCSTA  
Editor, Coast Reporter  
Editor, The Local Weekly