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## **BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Delivered via email to: [EDUC.Minister@gov.bc.ca](mailto:EDUC.Minister@gov.bc.ca)

January 20, 2017

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)**

Once again the Board of Education of School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) would like to raise our concerns with you regarding the criteria for the above funding.

We are pleased that you have changed the timing of the application process to recognize that schools must know the amount of resources available to them prior to hiring and final budgeting decisions in April. Although still a tight time frame, the February submission date at least makes this fund a possibility to consider and a part of the budget consultative process for the coming year.

Once again, however, we cannot in good conscience apply for these funds, although they are sorely needed for our most isolated schools. The insistence on the part of your Ministry that we must threaten to close a school, and at minimum, be in consultation about the impending closure, betrays the positive relationships we have worked for years to establish between the Board of Education and the parents in our small communities.

Closing a school is a traumatic and painful experience for any community. It must always be the last resort in a long series of difficult options before the local governing school board. We have committed to our school communities that we will not consider closing a school if any other options remain. Now for the second consecutive year, the Ministry has said there are funds available to support remote, small rural schools, but only if the threat of closure has been explored and closure is impending.

Our Board of Education, for the second year in a row, determined that the process of starting a closure discussion is too disruptive to the students and parents to begin, only to abort with the help of a new fund from the Ministry.

Our request to you, Minister, is to put these available funds in one of the other very effective, well established funding envelopes available to remote schools. If these funds were added to the Unique Geographic Features fund for example, we and other districts could apply without abdicating our moral responsibility to be truthful to our constituents. The REEF fund with the existing criteria requires that we backtrack on existing commitments to our communities. The Board of School District No 46 (Sunshine Coast) will not do that and as a result, the funding for rural schools is not available for our district and in that respect the criteria seems unfair.

We recognize that these funds have been beneficial to districts already in the process of painful closure consultation although requiring that consultation each year to qualify for the fund seems short sighted. We hope you will reconsider the criteria requiring threat of school closure and make funds available for the stability of rural schools and small rural communities.

Thanks you for your consideration and we welcome the opportunity for further discussion on any of the above at any time.

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  
Carolyn Smith, CUPE Local 801 President  
Nicholas Simons, MLA, Powell River-Sunshine Coast  
All Boards of Education, via BCSTA