



BOARD OF EDUCATION

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April 17, 2014

Hon. Minister Peter Fassbender
Ministry of Education
Po Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Fassbender:

RE: Cost Sharing of Capital Projects

It is with great concern that we write to you regarding your letter of March 31st to BCSTA regarding the proposed cost sharing of seismic upgrades and other capital projects.

On April 8th, 2014, the Board of Education of School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) passed a motion to write a letter expressing our extreme distress at your direction. School districts across the province are making difficult decisions every day to deliver high quality educational programs in an environment of rising costs and neutral funding. Trustees' decisions always put students first and on those occasions where there are any surplus funds, those funds are assigned back into priorities that enable the safety of students and the stability of essential programs to continue.

Deputy Minister Wood's letter of April 2nd to Superintendents on this matter is alarming to trustees and all of our community when he states: "Where boards of education may have previously designated funds for operating or capital priorities, these priorities will need to be reassessed. This may result in a board having to shift funds from a previously approved school district priority to a major capital project to be cost shared with government."

Minister, part of the long-standing agreement with government to co-govern the school system with local elected boards is that we stand by our commitments to each other. In a time of fiscal restraint, it is not respectful co-governance to change the rules in such a major way with no consultation or discussion. School districts had no knowledge of your intention to proceed with a policy change like this. The clearest way to express this is as a broken promise of the commitment to fund capital projects.

Many times you have referred to your government's commitment to balance the budget. We hope that you will be an advocate for education and co-governance at Treasury Board discussions. As you work toward the goal of a balanced budget, we are certain that no parent in any community wants the provincial budget to be balanced by putting their children at risk. Delaying seismic upgrades or reassigning board priorities is a cost borne by students, not the government.

Your new policy will weaken the strong education system in our province. It will bring greater instability in learning opportunities. We endorse all efforts by BCSTA to discourage you from proceeding in this way and want you to hear our collective voices on behalf of students and their families urging you to rescind this damaging policy.

Sincerely,



Betty Baxter
Board Chair

p.c. Board of Education of School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast)
Patrick Bocking, Superintendent of Schools
Nicholas Weswick, Secretary-Treasurer
Nicholas Simons, MLA, Powell River-Sunshine Coast
All Boards of Education, via BCSTA