



BOARD OF EDUCATION

Delivered via email: FinanceCommittee@leg.bc.ca

October 7, 2014

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

Dear Chair Ashton and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit input for the 2015–16 provincial budget.

School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) includes coastal communities of Langdale and Gibsons northwest through Roberts Creek, Sechelt and Halfmoon Bay to Pender Harbour and Egmont. In recent years, with the exception of the Annual Facilities Grant cut in 2010, the provincial government has maintained consistency in the overall funding envelope, and has provided short-term support to districts with declining enrolment through the Funding Protection and Enrolment Decline grants. However, rising inflationary costs—especially those associated with provincially negotiated collective agreements— have required our board to make program reductions in recent years to balance our budget.

Funding Stability

Our primary concern in this upcoming year's budget is that these rising costs need to be addressed in funding increases for next year's budget. Cuts to cover rising costs, whether they be Hydro rates, MSP, WorkSafe BC premiums or collective agreements will hit the classroom level, which will have a detrimental effect on the education of children and youth in our community. Furthermore, our district faces the additional threat that the Ministry of Education will cease funding us for the benefits standardization costs we had to take on for the 2011–13 BCTF agreement. This provincially negotiated agreement raised the costs of teacher benefits in our school district substantially. We are appreciative that the Ministry was able to fund the difference for the term of the agreement with policy money, but we require that this funding be extended to avoid our district being stuck with a disproportionately dire financial situation, due to a provincially negotiated “net-zero” agreement, in relation to other regions in the province. With the recent negotiation of a new collective agreement with the teachers in BC for 2013 - 2019, it is paramount that all related cost increases are reflected in funding increases as there is no where to trim at the district level that will not have a drastic effect on students. There is no flexibility in our annual budget.

Trades and Apprenticeships

We understand that both the Ministers of Education and Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training have been tasked with the BC Jobs Plan goal of offering more apprenticeships and skills training through school districts. We share this goal as one of the main objectives of our Strategic Plan. We have successful carpentry/framing and culinary arts ACE-IT programs but we've found that in such a tight funding environment we cannot afford to run a deficit while establishing new programs. By focussed promotion in our community and good communication with partner groups we have managed to re-instate Automotive

Technician for the 2014/15 school year. We will need to find on-going funds to maintain it. In a region of the province that has few post-secondary trades training/apprenticeships opportunities, we are keen to offer such programs to adults as well but this will require funds to enable the initial promotion and administration of our programs to adult students.

Just as start-up funds for early childhood education were a tremendous investment by our provincial government over the past decade, funds associated with the BC Jobs Plan to build up apprenticeships and skills training programs in school districts should be a centrepiece. We recognize that job creation and skills training are key components of your mandate. Our school district is eager to help you fulfill this mandate, for the tremendous benefit of our students, our communities and our province's future.

Investment in “Non-Enrolling” Teachers/Special Needs

Due to the enrolment decline and funding levels over the past dozen years, districts across the province have had to reduce “non-enrolling” teachers including special education teachers, fine arts/music teachers and librarians. These positions are absolutely necessary to support the educational excellence and individualized learning advocated by your government. Many researchers support that the current international labour market, and indeed the future of our province, most desperately needs graduates with creativity, curiosity, perseverance and character to succeed in today's society.

In special education more generally, the most severe structural deficit in the K–12 funding formula is the targeted funding we receive compared to the costs of sufficiently supporting students with needs that cannot be met with a regular program. The Learning Improvement Fund does not cover the shortfall. While enrolment has declined provincially, the proportion of special needs, and vulnerable students, has been rising everywhere, including on the Sunshine Coast (confirmed by provincial audits and UBC's Early Development Indicator data). We recognize and support the Ministry of Education's study of self-regulation as an effective intervention for special needs students, but this approach should be adopted as a universal classroom practice rather than a panacea for special needs. To even consider the removal of targeted funds for testing, identifying and addressing the special, individual challenges of a growing proportion of children in our province would constitute a huge step backwards for BC.

Investment in International Student Enrolment

The Ministry has stated its goal of increasing international student enrolment. We share this goal as stated in our strategic plan for 2012-2015 but School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast) has yet to receive any additional support from the province either in recruitment assistance or in targeted funding. In small districts, a targeted program to support the enrolment of international students would be most welcome.

In challenging economic times, our province needs intelligent and visionary government investment in order to fuel economic comeback and to reap rewards in the future. The most effective tool to provide our province with this prosperous outcome is the education of our children.

Sincerely,



Betty Baxter
Board Chair

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