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**SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 61 (GREATER VICTORIA)
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May 19, 2015

The Honourable Peter Fassbender
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045, STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Fassbender:

RE: School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria) Needs Budget

Each year School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria) engages in a broad based consultative process requesting input from our educational partner groups, school planning councils and the public. Each year through our process the groups involved reach the same conclusion: the Ministry of Education is not providing the level of funding required to meet the educational needs of our students.

The district spends its funds efficiently and effectively but the gap continues to grow each year between what the district receives in provincial government funding and what is required to provide the necessary programming and supports to ensure continued student success. In past years, the Greater Victoria Board of Education has made numerous challenging budget decisions that included closing eight schools, eliminating administrative positions and supplies, reducing facilities supplies budgets and relocating educational programs. The school district has been on the leading edge of participating in shared service initiatives in order to realize cost savings. Every effort has been made to maintain a focus on the best possible outcome for students.

As part of the process to allocate the Learning Improvement/Teacher Education Fund, principals, teachers and support staff engaged in a collaborative approach to identify the additional services needed to adequately meet the needs of their students. After allocating the Learning Improvement/Teacher Education Fund of \$3.0 million for teacher and educational assistant time to schools, **the unmet need identified by the schools to support students was 49 full time equivalent teachers and 118 hours per week of educational assistant time for a total cost of \$4.97 million** in the following areas:

- Special Education: teachers for learning support, special education and English Language Learning and educational assistants
- Specialist support such as an increase in speech language pathologist positions
- Extra teachers including an instructional focus on literacy, numeracy and technology
- Counselling and Teacher-Librarians

School Planning Councils and Education Partner Groups were asked the following question: "What areas should be given priority to support student achievement and district goals?" The input received indicated the most need for additional support in:

- Special education
- Extra teachers to reduce class size
- Technology integration into classrooms
- Counsellors
- Additional resources to support systemic and cultural change

The recommendations made by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services (2015) for the K-12 Public Education Sector included "Provide stable, predictable and adequate funding to enable school districts to fulfill their responsibility to provide continued equitable access to quality public education and to meet required repair and maintenance costs" and "Provide resources to identify and address the growing number of students with special needs and those with minimal English language skills" which are consistent with the needs identified by our school community.

Without appropriate funding, it is extremely difficult to create innovative programs, provide the technological and skills training, and personalized learning opportunities that keep students engaged and best prepares them for a world beyond the classroom. We urge the Government to embrace their obligation to fully fund public education to ensure that the diverse learning needs of our students are met.

Sincerely,

Edith Loring-Kuhanga, Board Chair
Greater Victoria School District

Chief Ron Sam
Songhees First Nation

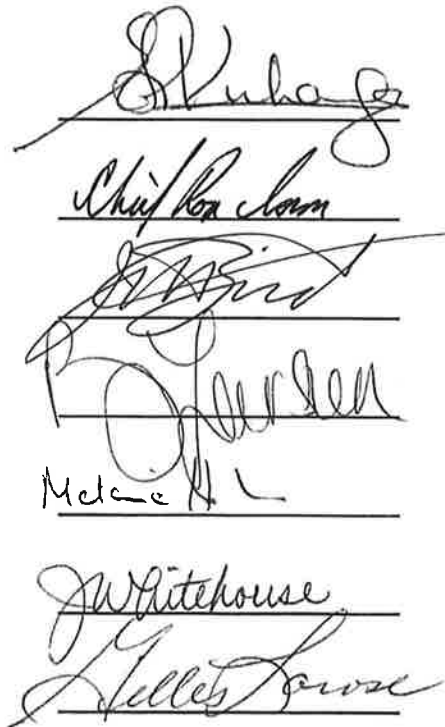
John Bird, Chair
Victoria Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils

Benula Larsen, President
Greater Victoria Teachers' Association

Melanie Houston, President
Allied Specialists' Association

Brad Hall, President
CUPE Local 947

Gilles Larose, President
CUPE Local 382



The image shows seven handwritten signatures, each written on a horizontal line. From top to bottom, the signatures are: Edith Loring-Kuhanga, Chief Ron Sam, John Bird, Benula Larsen, Melanie Houston, Brad Hall, and Gilles Larose.

cc: Board of Education
All BC School Boards, c/o BCSTA
GVSD Unions and Associations
Local Media
Sherri Bell, Superintendent of Schools
Debra Laser, Secretary-Treasurer