



BOARD OF EDUCATION

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Via e-mail: bcsta@bcsta.org

April 12, 2016

BC School Trustees Association
4th Floor - 1580 West Broadway
Vancouver, BC
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Dear BC School Trustees Association:

This letter is further to the request for Board feedback on the Co-governance MOU between BCSTA and the Province.

This letter reflects the general comments of the Board as discussed at our meeting of March 29, 2016.

I would like to start by expressing our appreciation for the opportunity to comment on the MOU as Boards were not given an opportunity to even assist in drafting the MOU. I am hopeful that our comments will be taken seriously in future discussions between BCTSA and the Province.

I will provide the Board's comment with respect to each principle in turn.

Public Confidence

The Board shares the commitment to ensuring public confidence in our public education system.

We have significant concerns, however, with respect to this aspect of the MOU. We believe that there have been instances where the Province has undermined public confidence in significant and meaningful ways.

Our first concern is related to communication. The Board believes that the Province has not properly communicated with the BCTSA and Boards. For instance, the Province recently commented on how there is significant administrative savings in Districts. The specific comment related to "low hanging fruit". This comment, while not only false, denigrated the incredible work that our administrative employees do. Further, even if there were savings, we would expect our co-governors would be able to discuss the matter in a more respectful fashion with Boards and not with the media.

Our second concern is related to funding. We believe that the funding that the Province has provided is insufficient to effectively meet the needs of public education. Again, while we are extremely proud of the level of service and commitment provided by our employees we are concerned that the level of funding has not kept pace with the incredibly complex needs of our system nor has it kept pace with the downloaded costs that the Province has put on Boards, without consultation. This issue significantly undermines public confidence.

Commitment to Action

We believe that there is little action on the part of the Province with respect to this aspect of the MOU.

The continued appointment of a public administrator to replace the Board of BCPSEA is the most immediate and glaring example. Boards are the employer of our unionized staff, yet we have no specific control over the Board's bargaining agent. Moreover, there has simply been no explanation why this situation has been in place for multiple years.

Our Board is clear that we are committed to action in our areas of jurisdiction. This includes having our voice heard in bargaining.

Partnership

Our Board expressed confusion over this aspect of the MOU. On one hand, the parties agree to develop "policies, programs, projects and funding options". On the other hand we also commit to the "clear division of responsibilities". We feel that this is somewhat contradictory.

Nevertheless, we have failed to see either in action. The Board has not seen the Province seek to develop funding options in a spirit of partnership and cooperation. For instance, initially for 2016/2017 the government did not fully fund the labour settlement costs they had committed to. It was only through pressure that further funds were released. The Board believes that this manner of budgetary planning does not represent the spirit of partnership intended in the MOU.

Further, we have also failed to see the clear division of responsibilities enumerated. For instance, shared services are being mandated in deeper and more invasive ways. While the Board is not inherently opposed to shared services they have been unilaterally imposed on Boards. We would also highlight the lack of Board (e.g. employer) oversight of our bargaining agent.

Consultation and Notification

This is another area where we have concerns. We feel that Boards are often the last to know the actions of the Province.

The announcement of the implementation of the new curriculum and the introduction of new professional development days is an example. Boards had no input on the agreement between the Province and the BCTF on the new professional development days. In fact, we became aware of the days the same day as the announcement.

Similarly to other points, the Board is not suggesting that professional development should not have been provided, we are concerned about the lack of the consultation in the circumstances. The changes and planning required by the announcement were significant. A Board should not be informed of a major initiative the day of the announcement.

Flexibility

The Board did not comment specifically on this principle.

Future Priorities

The future priorities, particularly the focus on aboriginal students as well as the mental health of students, are areas that we as a Board are committed to as well and are looking forward to positive results stemming from the MOU.

Nevertheless, the concerns noted above, continue to be the aspects that we feel that the MOU must address:

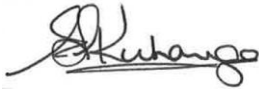
1. Fully fund public education so that it meets the needs of the increasingly complex learning environment;
2. A true commitment to communication, consultation, and respectful dialogue; and
3. Respect for the co-governance model including a return of BCPSEA to the Boards that are statutorily the employer.

Conclusion

The Board appreciates the principles laid out in the MOU. Further, we appreciate BCSTA's attempts to ensure that the principles are adhered to. We truly hope that our concerns are addressed in a meaningful manner

True co-governance involves respectful dialogue from all parties. It also requires the openness of the parties to adjust when reasonable concerns are raised. We feel that our concerns are both reasonable and apparent to most stakeholders in our system. Our Board looks forward to moving forward as co-governors of public education in BC

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Edith Loring-Kuhanga', written over a horizontal line.

Edith Loring-Kuhanga
Board Chair
Board of Education of School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)