

School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)
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March 12, 2020

The Honourable Rob Fleming
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045, STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, B.C. V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Fleming:

The Greater Victoria School District recognizes the substantial commitment to fully fund the collective agreement language restored by the Supreme Court of Canada and that this funding has translated into an increase in per student funding. While it is important to take the time to celebrate our successes, as advocates for the students in our District, we write this letter to draw to your attention to five significant financial pressures, as follows:

1. Increase resourcing of StrongStart Centres

Our School District operates six StrongStart Centres. We appreciate the recent, one-time transfer of funds to support our Centres. However, the yearly operating grant has not increased. The cost of operating these early learning programs has increased over the last decade (i.e. ECE salaries, benefits, groceries, supplies) yet the funding from the Ministry has remained the same. Many pieces of equipment that were originally purchased when the StrongStart programs were created twelve years ago are showing their age and need to be replaced. We endeavour to find other funds to help support these valuable early learning programs; however, an increase in the yearly operating grant would be welcomed. The families who live in our area would benefit from having access to additional StrongStart Centres; sometimes our educators need to turn families away because they have reached room capacity. The District continues to be willing to host more StrongStart Centres if there is assistance to fund spaces in our schools.

2. Support new curriculum implementation through one-time funding for instructional supplies

We are excited by the recent changes to the K to 12 curriculum and recognize the value of the increased focus on developing student competencies. We appreciated the provision of the Curriculum Implementation Days which afforded the opportunity for staff to become familiar with adaptations to the curriculum and to become more proficient in competency-based instruction. We believe that the final phase in the process of fully embracing the "revised" curriculum is the financial support of more learning resources that better support teaching strategies that align with revised instructional outcomes. While our current operating funds allow for the gradual acquisition of the desired resources, a "one-time"

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injection of targeted funding for new learning resources, on a per pupil basis, would immediately increase our capacity to deliver enhanced learning experiences for students.

3. Fund compensation increases for exempt staff approved by BCPSEA

Exempt employee compensation in the K-12 public education sector is established and administered by British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) and Public Sector Employers Secretariat (PSEC). Salary grids for exempt staff have been increased in alignment with the teachers' general wage increases to ensure that Districts do not experience future issues with salary compression or inversion. Teacher wage increases are currently funded by the Ministry, but any increases to exempt salaries must be funded by the District. If the Ministry provided the District with funding for exempt salary increases as approved by BCPSEA and PSEC, it would allow the District to allocate more funding to initiatives that support learner success.

4. Further support student mental health initiatives

Promoting positive student mental health continues to be a focus for our District. According to the results of the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey, youth in our District between 12 and 19 years of age, self-report that they have experienced an anxiety disorder or panic attack (22%) or struggle with depression (19%). As well, only 11% report that they did not feel stress at all in the past month while 89% indicate some level of stress. Given this data, mental health resources, professional development opportunities for staff and tools such as the MDI to measure our progress, require significantly more funding than the \$24,500 grant our district received to support mental health initiatives for the 2019/20 school year. Increased funding would enable the District to build our leadership capacity to implement system-wide approaches to improving our students' mental health and well-being.

5. Provide targeted monies to fund initiatives to increase the success of Children in Care

We believe that Children in Care must be a priority. In September 2018, the Ministry of Education released a document "How are We Doing? Children and Youth in Government Care and Youth on Youth Agreements" in response to the 2017 report "Room for Improvement: Toward Better Education Outcomes for Children in Care" by the Representative for Children and Youth. The Ministry of Education's report indicates that in 2016/17, the six-year completion rate for non-CYIC without diverse needs was 88% whereas for CYIC without diverse needs was 62%. The six-year completion rate for Indigenous CYIC, with a diverse need, drops to 32%. Our most vulnerable learners are not experiencing the success they should be and targeted funding and resources for Children in Care will make a difference in their learning and their lives.

We respectfully request that you consider additional funding to meet these pressures to enable us to better meet the needs and expectations of the communities we serve.

Yours sincerely,



Ann Whiteaker
Vice-Chair, Board of Education

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One *Learning* Community

