



Board of Education

School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)
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18 September 2024

Premier David Eby
Office of the Premier
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ATTENTION: Premier David Eby
Honourable Rachna Singh, Minister of Education and Child Care
Honourable Katrine Conroy, Minister of Finance

Dear Premier Eby, Minister Singh and Minister Conroy:

RE: Adequate Funding for Public Education

The Board of Education of School District No.61 (Greater Victoria) unanimously passed the following motion: *That the Board of Education of School District No.61 (Greater Victoria) direct the Board Chair to write to the Minister of Education and Child Care and Premier advocating for additional K-12 funding.*

Inflationary Costs

We appreciate that provincial governments have many competing priorities to consider when determining how best to allocate public funds across program areas. However, unfunded inflationary costs continue to effectively reduce our operating grant funding, directly impacting available program funding for the 2023-24 school year. In the Greater Victoria School District, unfunded inflationary costs will again effectively reduce program funding for the 2024-25 school year. Unfunded inflationary pressures include increased benefit costs associated with EI, WorkSafeBC, CPP, extended health and dental premiums. As a result of these unfunded inflationary cost increases, our school district had to allocate an additional \$1,990,458 to our 2024-25 preliminary budget compared to the 2023-24 preliminary budget.

Inflationary costs also include unavoidable cost pressures in services and supply budgets such as software licenses, fuel, and custodial supplies. Software licensing costs have increased by an average of 45% since 2018-19 without provincial funding to address these additional costs. Technology costs have again increased overall. For instance, the cost of a Chromebook has increased by 43% since 2018-19. The costs to respond to cyber security risks such as ransomware threats are unfunded. We estimate that recovery and retainer software alone will cost

approximately \$77,285 in 2024-25. Since 2018, fuel has increased by 43.1% in Victoria. While we saw a 300% increase in custodial supply costs for consumables like toilet paper and paper towel in 2023-24. To address escalating custodial supply budget shortfalls during the year, we were required to increase our custodial supply budget by a further \$100,000 in 2023-24.

We wish to emphasize that the overall decrease in purchasing power directly impacts our school district's ability to sustainably maintain facilities, renew technology and learning resources, and fund needed equipment and supplies to support student learning. We must further emphasize that in school districts such as ours it is not possible to fund inflationary costs through further reductions and continue to meet basic requirements including human resource management, facility maintenance, and managing risks such as those related to health and safety, cyber security, data protection and regulatory compliance. When funding does not keep pace with inflation, Boards of Education are left with few options to achieve a balanced budget and consequently much needed student programs and services are cut. In order to balance our 2024-25 budget, our Board of Education had to make significant cuts to staffing, supply and travel budgets. In total we implemented a series of one-time and permanent budget adjustments of \$4.1M to offset the \$6M structural deficit and balance the budget.

Student Programs and Services

We also wish to bring to your attention that the basic per pupil allocation for each Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) student enrolled has only increased by approximately 20% in seven years, from \$7,423 in 2018-19 to \$8,915 for 2024-25. In the same period the basic per pupil allocation for each FTE Indigenous student enrolled has only increased from \$1,230 in 2018-19 to \$1,770 for 2024-25. Further per pupil funding to support students with disabilities and diverse abilities which is reflected in the *Level 1-3 Special Needs* provincial funding categories has only increased by an average of 26% since 2018-19. These increases are not sufficient to meet the needs of all students. British Columbia is still investing less than the national average on education. We know that a strong public education system, where students graduate as "Educated Citizens", significantly improves the life chances and well-being of young people in British Columbia. We therefore sincerely hope to see our province take immediate steps to significantly increase funding for public education.

There are also a number of other unfunded program costs we wish to bring to your attention. StrongStart funding has been frozen since 2011-12 at \$32,000 per site, resulting in our school district having to subsidize StrongStart programs by redirecting funds from our K-12 Operating Budget to address StrongStart staffing and supply budget shortfalls. For 2024-25 we redirected \$68,282 from our K-12 Operating Budget to address inadequate StrongStart funding. Not only does the underfunding of StrongStart impact our ability to provide rich learning environments designed for early learning development, but it also directly impacts our ability to properly fund K-12 programs and student services.

Staff replacement costs during periods of absence have also increased significantly and these additional costs are unfunded. For example, teacher replacement costs have increased by 90% compared to 2018-19. Likewise, in 2023-24, Employment Standards Act (ESA) paid sick leave for teaching staff resulted in implementation costs of \$208,000 and our school district received no additional provincial funding.

We do acknowledge the cost-of-living allowance tied to wages negotiated in the context of provincial labour settlements. We are grateful for this support. However, we are keen to confirm that the full cost of exempt staff salary and benefit increases will be fully funded beyond the 2024-2025 school year.

Since 2016, our school district has reallocated additional operating funds to address unfunded costs related to the restored class size and composition limits. In 2024-25, we estimate this cost to be \$1.75M related to a lack of Classroom Enhancement Fund - Overhead funding. In 2023-24 we also had a funding shortfall of \$412,668 related to the Labour Settlement Funding (LSF) we received. The preliminary LSF for Classroom Enhancement Funds we received in March 2023 was included in the operating fund, but the Ministry did not clearly identify this. As a result, we built it into our 2023-24 preliminary operating budget. When the September 30th operating grant was announced, \$412,668 in LSF was moved from the operating fund to Classroom Enhancement Funds, leaving us with a shortfall of \$412,668.

For your information, since 2020-21 our school district received only \$48,000 annually in provincial funding to support mental health in our school district. We supplement this funding by redirecting an additional \$48,000 from our operating funds. However, this is significantly less funding than is required to support universal mental health promotion and service delivery in a school district with 20,000 students. We also wish to highlight that students in our school district have been vocal about the lack of mental health support. Despite this clear and increasing need for mental health and counselling supports at all school levels, we do not receive sufficient provincial funding. Currently, our Board redirects operating funds to staff a minimum of .5 FTE elementary teacher counsellor positions at all 28 elementary schools in our school district at a cost of \$1.1M annually.

Finally, as you will be aware the purpose of CommunityLINK funding is to provide programs and services designed to support the academic achievement and social functioning of vulnerable students. We are seeing a significant increase in the number of vulnerable students in need of enhanced programs and services. Yet over the past 7 years the CommunityLINK funds we rely on to support the most vulnerable learners in our school district have only increased by 10%. This level of investment is simply not sufficient to meet the growing needs of vulnerable students.

Capital Funding

While we have seen a recent increase in Annual Facility Grant funding, the funding level is still not sufficient to address the estimated \$325M of deferred maintenance in our school district. At the same time, we continue to struggle to address increasing capital cost pressures associated with material and labour cost increases. Quotes and bids for services and supplies continue to come in well above anticipated costs. We trust you will agree it is critical that we adequately invest in the places and spaces that support children and youth learning in our province.

In terms of capital project funding, we are pleased to see the province make significant investments in much needed capital projects including funding seismic upgrades and new schools. Unfortunately, provincial capital project approvals do not account for projected student enrollment growth prior to project completion. This leaves school districts with new buildings that at completion will not accommodate the actual level of student enrollment. As a result, school districts end up separately funding the addition of portables on these sites along with the required on and off-site infrastructure costs. In addition, the provincial calculation of a school

district's capital project contribution is purported to be based on what a school district can afford to contribute. However, in Greater Victoria these provincial calculations will leave our Board with an even greater projected budgetary shortfall for many more years to come.

Like other school districts in our province, we know that 90% of our greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions come from our buildings. We hope you will agree that our province must revisit how capital funding for maintenance and repair is directed to school districts, so that we can fully capitalize on opportunities to invest in critical climate mitigation and adaptive measures such as introducing solar and geo-thermal technologies and electrifying our heating and cooling systems. This will go a long way toward supporting provincial plans to adapt to the changing climate and to respond to the needs of our communities in future. School districts are in a unique position to help our province reduce GHG emissions in line with our Climate Accountability Act obligations and CleanBC. However, we urgently need adequate provincial capital funding which is appropriately focused on climate mitigation and adaptive approval standards.

We are confident that by working together in partnership we can see urgently needed public funding directed to support student learning and well-being in our province. We know that a strong public education system significantly improves the life chances and well-being of young people in British Columbia. Young people are indeed the future and they each deserve our utmost care, attention, and financial support.

Yours sincerely,



Nicole Duncan
Chair, Board of Education
School District No. 61 (Greater Victoria)

cc: Board of Education, School District No. 61
Deb Whitten, Superintendent, School District No. 61
Katrina Stride, Secretary-Treasurer, School District No. 61
Kalie Dyer, Director of Education, Esquimalt Nation
Erin Olson, Director of Education, Songhees Nation President
Caitlin Bird, Métis Nation of Greater Victoria
Ron Rice, Urban Peoples' House Indigenous Advisory (UPHIA)
Shawna Abbott, President, CUPE 947, School District No. 61
Darren Reed, President, CUPE 382, School District No. 61
Carolyn Howe, President, Greater Victoria Teachers' Association
Braden Hutchins, President, Victoria Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils,
School District No. 61
Sarah Winkler, President, Victoria Principals and Vice-Principals Association,
School District No. 61
Carolyn Broady, President, British Columbia School Trustees Association
Janice Caton, Branch President, Vancouver Island School Trustees Association
Tracy Humphreys, Executive Director, BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils

Please see the attached Signature Page in support of this letter.



Kalie Dyer, Director of Education
Esquimalt Nation



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President, CUPE 947
School District No. 61



President Caitlin Bird
Métis Nation of Greater Victoria

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