



Comox Valley Schools

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Comox Valley Schools

School District No. 71
Office of the Secretary-Treasurer

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VIA E-MAIL ONLY: FinanceCommittee@leg.bc.ca

May 25, 2022

Select Standing Finance and Government Services
c/o Parliamentary Committees Office
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Re: Budget 2023 Consultation Presentation

Dear Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services;

The Board of Education for School District No. 71 (Comox Valley) sincerely appreciates the opportunity to present to the committee. We bring requests before you for consideration centering on cost escalations, our Facilities and Capital needs, and childcare.

Firstly, we want to say thank you for the Government's continued recognition of the importance of K-12 Education. However, the sector was disappointed that per student funding remained static. In the face of significant inflation and rising costs, this is in effect a funding decrease. This pressure highlights the need for long-term, predictable, sustained funding. The K-12 system is tasked with a broad mandate which often crosses ministries with Health, Food Security, Transportation, and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. Unexpected cost pressures will result in staff layoffs and reduced services for kids which are very difficult to pivot mid-year.

For example, the Employment Standards Act was recently amended to mandate 5 sick days for all employees retroactive to January 1st 2022. This immediately impacted our current fiscal situation and re-negotiated our collective agreements by providing new benefits to Teacher's on Call and Casual Support Staff. In addition, our sector was advised that these significant additional costs would not be funded. Staffing costs already account for 87% of our budget so the unexpected increase will need to come from direct services for students.

Recommendation #1: When legislation changes are implemented, sectors that are unionized and rely on provincial funding be fully funded for the impacts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has challenged our sector in numerous ways that have at times stretched our staff to the breaking point. One area of lasting impact is on our ability to provided new and modernized learning spaces for students.

Our District has experienced significant unforeseen growth gaining over 1200 students in the last 4 years making us one of the fastest growing Districts in the province and bringing us to 113% capacity across the District. Yet, we have not been approved for a capital expansion project.

In a District of 10,000 students, we already have 54 portables in use, meaning 14% of our existing students are already in temporary classrooms. The cost of each portable is \$350,000 dollars which is not funded through Capital dollars but from Operating dollars. If we were approved tomorrow for a major capital project, it would be 5 years before classes could start in that building. Our projected growth in those 5 years is another 1,200 students. That means 48 additional classrooms will soon be needed which if portables, means additional operating cost of \$16,800,000 million that we don't have.

In addition, the skyrocketing costs of building supplies due to the impact of the pandemic are putting further pressure on scarce annual facility grant resources. Costs of some materials are up 60% but on average have increased 25%, with no sign of dropping as we emerge from the pandemic. Increased funding is absolutely required to address rising costs let alone the accumulated deferred maintenance.

The sector recognizes the Ministry did not previously have enough capital funding to address the expansion, seismic and deferred maintenance need province wide let alone fund the construction escalation we are experiencing. However, this has become an urgent issue in our District as with many others.

Recommendation #2: The Ministry of Education must have an increase in its capital fund budget. K-12 Capital demands need an in-depth review and additional funding to meet current needs let alone projected growth.

The Ministry of Education absorbed Childcare into its mandate effective April 1, 2022. Yet as a sector we have been given no policy, funding, or indication of the implications of the change. This has created angst within the current childcare providers in the sector and more questions than answers. Questions like: How will this expectation be funded? Where will the staff come from? Who will pay the difference for \$10 per day childcare? Is there an expectation of allocating a portion our existing operating funds? If so, what current programs or services in K-12 are okay to drop? Districts need clarity sooner rather than later and recognition that this is not the kind of transition that will be successful if it's done of the side of someone's desk.

Recommendation #3: Consider an initial, start-up investment that would assist Districts to absorb Childcare into its purview. Then going forward, please ensure that this additional mandate is fully funded.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to consult and advocate for the students serviced in our District and throughout the Province.

Respectfully,



Tonia Frawley
Chair of the Board
School District No. 71 (Comox Valley)

TF:bh

CC: BCSTA

