



Comox Valley Schools

A Community of Learners

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Comox Valley Schools

School District No. 71

Office of the Secretary-Treasurer

607 Cumberland Road
Courtenay, B.C. V9N 7G5

Fax (250) 334 5552

Telephone (250) 334 5500

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

May 31, 2023

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

Re: Budget 2024 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 our Facilities and a request for funding to help meet costs related to meeting BC's Carbon Reduction targets, operating dollars for Child Care, and requests related to the cost pressures of a growing District.

Firstly, we want to say thank you for the Government's continued recognition of the importance of 0-12 Education. We have noted the increases to capital funding, per-student funding, and the additional mental health, food and affordability grants. These increases certainly help the 0-12 sector achieve the Education Minister's mandate however, what we need is long-term, predictable, sustained funding. The 0-12 system is tasked with a broad mandate which now includes Child Care and often crosses ministries with Health, Food Security, Transportation, and Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation. Smaller, one-time grants can be utilized for resources, but often personnel is needed to make a significant impact and Districts are cautious to expand staffing if the fiscal support is likely not ongoing.

During the February 8, 2022 BC Throne Speech, the Province announced its plans to move childcare into the Ministry of Education. The transfer went into effect on April 1, 2022. The K-12 system demonstrated great resilience, flexibility, and innovation to meet school, community, and student needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, reduced revenues, increased costs and higher student needs have placed significant pressure on existing school district budgets. Most Districts had difficulty balancing their 23/24 Preliminary Annual Budget requiring drawing down of scarce reserves to balance. Since then, there have been continued increases in fuel costs, inflation, and construction costs.

However, in the March 15th 2023 funding announcement, while per student funding rates were adjusted for negotiated labour settlements there was no specific funds for operating cost escalation or operating funding for child care centers.

With the addition of child care to our Education mandate, the Ministry of Education and Child Care is asking Districts to take on an unfunded mandate which is a barrier to creating much needed childcare spaces as Districts just cannot stretch the current K-12 funding any further to include 0 - 12.

Recommendation #1: That the Ministry of Education and Childcare engage Districts in a collaborative conversation discussing operational challenges associated with Child Care facilities within the education sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic, global cost escalations and a demographic outflow from major metro and in-migration to BC has put additional budget pressure on our growing District. Our schools were already nearing capacity with over 50 portables in service holding current students let alone the significant growth projected in the next 10 years. The cost of each new portable is now \$350,000 which are only be funded from Operating dollars. With 30% increases in construction costs already impacting the Facility portions of our budgets, it is very difficult to fund portables. Especially on the magnitude we are facing. The projected additional 2000 students means 80 portables at a cost of \$28,000,000 million dollars. We either need 5 additional elementary schools and a high school or access to funding for modulars.


Recommendation #2: Consider adding a new Capital fund for Portable classrooms similar to the Bus Purchase program.

The Board of Education's current strategic plan includes the Goal of Fostering environmental stewardship and an Action of Reducing carbon emissions and the district's environmental footprint. As you know in 2 years, the BC target is a GHG reduction of 16%, in 7 years the target is 40%. Despite careful management, our emissions still need a reduction of 1572 tCO₂e to meet the 2030 targets. We are working on reducing our paper consumption, electrifying our white and bus fleets, however we have a gap of over 1100 tCO₂e in our buildings. The district has many older schools built pre-1970. Districts need help electrifying and switching to heat pumps. Unless we can find the funds to reduce our emissions, our annual carbon offset will increase to \$333,711, again out of operating dollars.

Recommendation #3: Consider funding additional resources in Districts to support operationalizing this provincial government mandate by increasing the available envelope for projects in the Carbon Neutral Capital Plan.

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to consult and advocate for the students serviced in our District and throughout the province. Our sector sincerely appreciates the ongoing commitment to Education and recognizes that the investment in students is at record levels. We know that we add our requests to other competing demands for limited resources however further investments in Early Learning and K-12 Education will assist in meeting multiple other BC Government mandates and commitments.

Respectfully,



Michelle Waite
Board Chair
School District No. 71 (Comox Valley)

MW:bh

CC: BCSTA