



SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

S O U T H E A S T K O O T E N A Y

May 11th, 2016

Honourable Mike Bernier
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045 Stn. Prov. Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Bernier:

RE: SD69 Board Letter of March 11, 2016 to Minister Bernier re: Minister's interview of February 23rd, 2016 on CBC's *Early Edition*

During our monthly Advocacy meeting in April, our Board reviewed a March 11, 2016, letter written to you by SD69, Qualicum.

Upon review of that letter and the February 23rd interview, our Advocacy Committee recommended the following motions to our Board, which were carried at last night's Board meeting:

That the Board of Education write a letter of thanks to SD69 for their letter of March 11, 2016 to Minister Bernier re: Minister's interview of February 23rd, 2016 on CBC's Early Edition, with cc's to the usual stakeholders and to Rick Cluff, host of the Early Edition on CBC Radio and that the Board express our own deep dissatisfaction with the comments of Minister Bernier during this interview.

And

That the Board of Education write a letter to Minister Bernier, with cc's to the usual stakeholders and to Rick Cluff, host of the Early Edition on CBC Radio echoing our own deep dissatisfaction with his comment referencing stakeholders of public education as "a few groups" as well as other comments regarding funding of public education in the province.

Our Board agrees unanimously that your characterization of 75,000 public school employees, the parents of over 550 thousand students and 416 School Board Trustees who --as *elected officials*--represent the **majority concerns** of their District's constituents --and therefore the majority concerns of **ALL BC**

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constituents— was both inappropriate and inaccurate. We echo SD69 in requesting that you provide a public apology for this outrageous statement. Additionally, our Board takes exception to many of the assertions made by you during your interview with CBC's *Early Edition* host, Rick Cluff.

Comparing Vancouver School Board (VSB)'s 2016 budget to their 2001 budget and inferring it is a \$70 million increase despite declining enrolment defies basic math.

During the interview you state that the VSB budget currently sits at \$450+ million (according to *their* documents it is \$479,990 million) and you say they've received a \$70 million increase over their 2001 budget (of \$365 million, according to Tracy Sherlock's article of March 6th, 2016, "*Do the Math on Vancouver School Funding*").

You allege that Cluff's assertion that *inflation outstrips funding* is incorrect. However, according to the calculations of the *Bank of Canada's* "inflation calendar", today's VSB funding dollars should equal \$480,777,550 just to *meet inflation*. This is not an increase of \$70 million –it is a slight *decrease* in funding of around \$1 million.

And while government has staunchly reiterated that you have put more money into education funding despite "declining enrolment" for over a decade, government continues to ignore the most basic of financial realities for Boards of Education:

- According to Government's own documents and projections, education funding is *decreasing* both as a percentage of the provincial budget and as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In GDP terms, this will equal a *reduction* in government spending on education of \$850 million over the next three years.
- A decline in enrolment does *not* equal automatic savings to a District. A school may lose a number of students but these students will not all come out of the same classroom or ride the same bus route; they will not necessarily cost the district less in teachers' salary, bussing, or other fixed costs a District continues to incur. The only certainty a District faces regarding declining enrolment is the reduction of \$7,166 for *every student* a District loses to declining enrolment.
- Downloading by government –onto School Districts— additional costs such as the legislated Carbon Tax and the mandated responsibilities (that go beyond traditional K – 12 undertakings) for initiatives like Early Learning and Community Literacy, of which additional financial and administrative resources from School Districts are required to cover and for which government *does not provide additional funding*.
- The salary freeze that has been in place for exempt staff employees since 2009 has now been lifted. As a result, Boards –not government—are expected to find the 2%/2% raises approved for Principals/Vice Principals by the BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA). Additional exempt staff position salaries are expected to be un-frozen in the near future and

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there has been zero indication by government that these expected raises will be funded with additional monies *from government*.

- The *exponential rate* at which teachers must rely on technology to prepare students for the 21st Century –and the *enormous cost* of providing up-to-date technology for students—remains unfunded by government.
- This is particularly evident with, but not exclusive to, the new Next Generation Network (NGN) which government has required of Boards and had originally agreed to fund but for which government has recently reneged financial responsibility.
- The increased class sizes and number of special needs students per District –and classroom—is not adequately covered by government’s Learning Improvement Fund (LIF) and does not address all of a District’s concerns. Your assertion that Boards of Education are “okay” with this situation is extremely misleading. Boards are simply trying to make the best decisions possible given the funding shortfall that is continuously perpetrated on public education year over year. This is simply one more example of Boards making decisions that are the least harmful to students given our mandate to produce balanced budgets each year –a feat the government doesn’t always require of itself.

These so-called funding “choices” reflect the financial realities faced by Boards, administrators, teachers, support staff, parents and students each and every day. They do not always reflect the educational needs of these same education stakeholders.

The “difficult” choices Districts currently face are not the fault of poor decision-making –by VSB or any other Board of Education. They are the product of a consistent policy of underfunding by government and cannot not be remedied by a paltry \$45 million reduction to the cost of the Teachers’ Pension Plan. A “savings” which, incidentally translates into approximately \$600,000 for our District –roughly the same amount our District has had to give back to government in the form of the “administrative savings” demanded by government to reduce our so-called “low-hanging fruit”.

Nor can it be remedied by government’s alleged “new money” of \$110 million put into education this year. This is simply money which government is required to pay to honour their commitment to the recently signed Teachers’ Contract and the per-student funding of nearly 7000 new students province-wide.

Yes, it is true that BC still has some of the “best outcomes” across the country. The citizens of BC have dedicated Boards, administrators, teachers, support staff, parents and students to thank for that. Over the years these people have worked hard to build a strong foundation for public education.

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As with any good foundation, constant external pressure inevitably produces cracks and fissures that do, over time, begin to create cracks in the house itself. Those “cracks” are now beginning to show in the form of large District deficits, the rash of school closures and the laying off of vital teaching and support staff –all at the expense of student learning—regardless of how government spins their numbers to infer otherwise.

Our Board urges you to rely less on the information you are being provided internally and have an honest look at the information and feedback your constituents –Boards, administrators, teachers, support staff, parents and students— have and continue to provide you.

Sincerely,



Frank Lento, Board Chair,
SD5

Cc: Mike Bernier, Minister of Education
Bill Bennett, MLA Kootenay East BC
John Horgan, Leader, BC New Democratic Party
Rob Fleming, Education Critic, BC New Democratic Party
Teresa Rezasnoff, President, BCSTA
BCSTA for distribution to member Boards of Education
Mike Lombardi, Chair, Vancouver School Board
Jim Iker, President BC Teachers' Federation
Nicole Makohoniuk, President, BCCPAC
Shelley Balfour & Christina Smith, CFTA Co-Chairs
Debbie Therrien, DPAC Chair
Aaron Thorn, President, SD5 Administrators' Association
Rick Cluff, Host, Early Edition, CBC Radio
Catherine Shaw, FACE BC Vancouver
Other Media

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