



SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

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

September 23, 2021

The Honourable Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045 Stn. Prov. Govt.
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2
educ.minister@gov.bc.ca

The Honourable Anne Kang
Minister of Advance Education & Skills Training
PO Box 9080 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2
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Dear Ministers,

RE: Trades Funding Beyond Graduation – Elk Valley Communities of SD#5

School District #5 (Southeast Kootenay) has a long and proud history of offering dual credit opportunities to many of our students. Within the past few years, however, we have seen funding and program decisions made which have made it increasingly difficult for some of our students to practically enter these dual credit programs before their K-12 experience has finished. We acknowledge that School District #42 and other districts have written similar letters expressing concern about trades funding for students beyond graduation and we have likeminded concerns, albeit in a localized context.

All our dual credit opportunities are currently available only through the main campus of The College of the Rockies (COTR), located in Cranbrook. We have an excellent working partnership with COTR and value the programs that we have been able to co-develop and coordinate with this fine post-secondary partner.

As you are aware, School District #5 encompasses much of the East Kootenay region. Our district is made up of five distinct communities all situated within the stunning Kootenay Rockies. This beautiful and sometimes remote region does make travel between communities, especially in the winter, a difficult enterprise. For students who live in Cranbrook, the ability to participate in on campus activities at COTR is relatively convenient. For students who live in our Elk Valley communities, however, the distances are problematic. From Fernie, it is 100 kilometers to Cranbrook. From Sparwood, 135 km and from Elkford, 170 km. These distances on winter roads are unacceptable for most families who would consider having youth enrolled in dual credit programs.

Currently, the options for students living in these Elk Valley communities who wish to enroll in Youth Train in Trades programs are limited to moving temporarily to Cranbrook or to wait

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until after graduation to start their program. To have 16- or 17-year-old students billeted out with families or to live in student residence is simply not acceptable to many families. To drive up to two hours each way daily is simply not an option. We feel that students who have clearly laid out plans, prior to graduation, to apply to a Youth Train in Trades program should be funded as Youth Train in Trades students to start their programs at College of the Rockies in the fall after graduation.

Regarding the *Post Secondary Transition Programs for Funding Purposes Policy*, we acknowledge that there is an exceptional circumstances clause. The fact that we have students who currently need to fund the cost of living away from their homes or risk driving multiple hours a day to attend the Cranbrook campus or risk not being funded as Youth Train in Trades students is unacceptable to us. This is compounded by the fact that within our smaller secondary schools, it is much harder for students to finish all necessary prerequisites before Grade 12. We feel that students who need to travel within District to attend a Youth Train in Trades program should easily fall within this Exceptional Circumstances clause and should be funded beyond graduation.

Currently there are no dual credit opportunities based in any of our Elk Valley communities. There are not currently College of the Rockies campuses located in either Elkford or Sparwood. Another option for our Elk Valley students who wish to enrol in Youth Train in Trades programs is to have options within their community, or in a neighbouring community. There is a track record of dual credit programs successfully being run in secondary schools, within district and within the province. We would welcome the opportunity to be part of a dialogue with the Ministry, with the Industry Training Authority and with College of the Rockies about offering dual credit opportunities within the communities of Elkford, Sparwood and Fernie.

Thank you very much for considering our requests.

Sincerely,



Frank Lento, Board Chair

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