

J. Routledge (Chair): Our next presenter is Chris Johns, representing school district No. 5, Southeast Kootenay. Chris, you've got five minutes to make your presentation, and then we'll ask you some questions.

**SCHOOL DISTRICT 5,
SOUTHEAST KOOTENAY**

C. Johns: Thank you very much for the opportunity to present to the select standing committee. I'm bringing you greetings from the homelands of the Ktunaxa peoples on the eve of National Indigenous Peoples Day. The school district No. 5, Southeast Kootenay, includes the areas of Cranbrook, Fernie, Elkford and Sparwood, along with Jaffray and South Country.

We have two specific recommendations that we're going forward with to the select standing committee. The first one is focusing on special education funding. You all have a copy of our presentation, and I'm going to highlight a few of the aspects of it. We're looking at the need for additional funding required to meet the supports and services to increase our 91 percent, six-year graduation completion rate for all SD 5 students. Specifically, we're looking at counselling, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, school psychology and speech language therapy specialists, as we have a recruitment and retention issue that compounds the issue that we have with the funding for the special education groups.

We have some information in the presentation. The BCTF conducted a study and found that 65 percent of actual special education operating expenses were covered by the grants. In the SD 5, we've got the information in there that we received \$9.6 million. We spent in excess of \$16 million, so we were short \$6.327 million. In other words, 60.5 percent of all the expenditures were covered by the basic allocation that we have.

We have approximately 900 students that are in that special education group, and we've broken down the levels 1, 2 and 3. Part of the conundrum we have is we're unable to provide learning assistance to students that require a minor amount of support, because the funding is insufficient.

One of our biggest concerns coming out of the pandemic is the mental illness that we're facing with respect to our student population. It has not been identified that that funding is going to be ongoing for 2022, 2023. We urgently urge the government to put that funding in place so we can work with those students and address those issues that come out of the pandemic.

The second recommendation has to do with school life-cycle funding. One of our concerns continues to be the fact that we have schools that are badly in need of ongoing maintenance and repairs and significant replacement. The learning environment for students and the health and safety of our employees suffers as a result of our aging facilities.

There is the facility condition index that we've included in there for your information as to how they are calculated across the province. Some significant building systems are at the end of their life cycle. Parts may no longer be in stock or exceedingly difficult to obtain, and that elevates the risk of failure of some of our systems.

In SD 5, 15 of the 17 schools fall within this unacceptable range, and the average age of our facilities is 49.4 years. Mount Baker, at the other end of the average, is 72 years of age. It was opened in April, 1951. The building repair costs become more and more significant in terms of trying to prolong the life of these buildings.

For example, we need a new elevator in the building, \$400,000. A desk (*sic "dust"*) collection system for the tech ed shops — that's another \$500,000. Fire safety system upgrades, \$1½ million — and that's after we've been lobbying to get the school replaced for the last 20 years.

[2:50 p.m.]

Three years ago we asked for specific funding from the then Minister of Education, Mr. Fleming, of \$382,000 for repairs to the roof over the band and music rooms. So the maintenance is a

Draft Segment 077

lobbying to get the school replaced for the last 20 years. Three years ago, we asked for specific funding from the then Minister of Education, Mr. Fleming, of \$382,000 for repairs to the roof over the band and music rooms. Maintenance is a short-sighted solution to a long-term problem.

On a positive note, we have been approved to submit a business case for our new Fernie middle school. However, this has been deferred, now, until 2023. The Southeast Kootenay school district requires immediate attention for funding of new schools and also for the replacement of a warrior school that is 72 years old — way past its best before date. Thank you for your time.

J. Routledge (Chair): I'll now invite members of the committee to ask questions.

K. Kirkpatrick (Deputy Chair): Thank you very much, Chris. I just wanted to clarify two things here. Did you say that it's a 91 percent six-year graduation completion rate? I'm not completely sure I understand that. Then, I'm curious: if there was a \$6 million shortfall in special ed funding, how did you fund that?

C. Johns: The \$6 million came out of general operating, so that's why we had to find the money to do that work. The other — our graduation rate — 91 percent is our six-year graduation rate for all SD5 students.

H. Yao: Thank you so much for the presentation. I just have a quick question based upon a comment you made earlier. You mentioned something about a student with — I won't use the term minor — less significant mental health concerns often get left behind, because of a lack of funding. Funding is going straight to.... I assume the funding is going to be supporting more obvious and more individual requests, direct intervention for support in a learning environment. Am I making this correct? Is that what I heard?

C. Johns: I'm not quite sure that I heard your whole question, because I was talking about the provision for mental illness. Is that what you're talking about?

H. Yao: I think, based upon your writeups: "We are unable to provide learning assistants to students that require a minor amount of support, due to this lack of funding, as we already significantly supplement special education provided for our students with the highest needs."

C. Johns: Yes, now I understand what you're getting at here.

H. Yao: I do apologize. I should be more clear about that. Does that mean you are observing a student with minor needs and it's slowly progressing into high needs due to the lack of early intervention?

C. Johns: Yes. Basically, we funnel off over \$6 million. That's the difference between what we were funded and then what we had to use, right? There has to be a limit to what you can do. In terms of other kids — we call them the gray area kids — they're the kids that will need a couple of weeks of tutorial work on math or language arts or that kind of thing. They get left behind in terms of having their specific learning needs, when we've already dipped into over \$6 million of our basic operating.

H. Yao: May I have a follow-up?

Budget 2023 Consultation Session

Presenter: Trustee Chris Johns

Date: June 20, 2022

When you're talking about students in this gray area, I assume.... Students: are they the ones with different diagnoses, or do they actually show different signs of needs that require early intervention?

C. Johns: Correct. They require early intervention. In some cases, as a former teacher myself, as soon as you are able to address those issues, the bulk of the other issues go by the side.

J. Routledge (Chair): Do we have other questions from the committee?

Well, Chris, it looks like you've given us a very full, complete explanation of your recommendations. There are no further questions. On behalf of the committee, I would like to thank you for taking the time to make this presentation. We are now — what? — four weeks into hearings. The problem that you're identifying is not new. Others in other parts of the province have identified the same things that need to be addressed. Thank you for bringing it to our attention so we can grapple with how we can address it.

Okay. Thanks for your time.

C. Johns: Thanks very much for the opportunity.