



SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

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

February 22, 2023

Rachna Singh, Minister of Education and Child Care
Room 124 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Singh,

RE: Gender-Neutral Washrooms

School District 5 (SD5), Southeast Kootenay Board of Education reviewed the letter of October 26, 2022 (Ref #282826) from the previous Minister of Education and Child Care, (MoECC) the Hon. Jennifer Whiteside, to Caroline Broady, President of the British Columbia School Trustees' Association (BCSTA) in response to Ms. Broady's letter of June 14, 2022, regarding universal washrooms and change rooms in public schools. Upon review of this letter, the Board carried the following motion at its February 14, 2023 public Board meeting:

That the Board write a letter expressing concern for the suggestion of allocating funds from the Annual Facilities Grant to upgrade current facilities with gender-neutral washrooms, in the Ministry of Education and Child Care's letter to the BCSTA, of October 26, 2022.

In Hon. Whiteside's response to Ms. Broady's letter requesting funding for universal washrooms and change rooms, Hon. Whiteside indicated that the Ministry provides funding through the Annual Facilities Grant (AFG) and School Enhancement Program (SEP) that can be used for washroom and change room upgrades.

In our District we struggle to adequately maintain our many ageing facilities with our limited AFG funds each year. For example, the largest school in our district (and in all of the East and West Kootenay) is in dire need of replacement –which our Board has been actively working toward since 2009. This school has a Facility Condition Index (FCI) of 0.46 and it is noted in our 2022 Long Range Facility Plan ("LRFP") that "The school does not meet current requirements.

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Attention is required to address some significant building systems, as they may be at the end of their life cycle, and at risk of failure.”.

This facility alone cost our District \$972,505 in maintenance/repairs in 2020/21 and another \$2.0M is estimated to be spent in 2023/24 (depending on which requests are approved by your Ministry). These monies include \$1.8M to update the fire suppression system that was noted as a **critical item** by our architects and which **is crucial to the safety of the over 900 staff and students who utilize that facility well in excess of 172 days per year.**

Given that the government is currently sitting on a \$5.7B surplus, our Board fails to understand why districts such as ours are expected to continually struggle to fund something as fundamental as safety for our students, whether from a catastrophic event such a fire or access to safe washrooms and change rooms.

We are requesting that you reconsider the Ministry’s position on this issue and look forward to a timely response. As you will note, Chris Brown, Assistant Deputy Minister, Resource Management Division, has also been copied on this letter, as it was suggested in the Hon. Whiteside’s letter to Ms. Broady that he be contacted with further questions.

Sincerely,



Doug McPhee, Board Chair

Cc*: Hon. David Eby, Premier, Province of BC
Kevin Falcon, Leader, BC Liberal Party
Sonia Furstenau, Leader, BC Green Party
Chris Brown, Assistant Deputy Minister, Resource Management Division
Tom Shypitka, MLA Kootenay East BC
Elenor Sturko, Critic for Education, BC Liberal Party
Karin Kirkpatrick, Critic for Child and Family Development & Childcare, BC Liberal Party
Carolyn Broady, President, BCSTA
BCSTA for distribution to member Boards of Education
Clint Johnston, President BC Teachers’ Federation
Chris Schultz-Lorentzen, President, BCCPAC
Shelley Balfour & Adrienne Demers, CFTA Co-Chairs
SD5 CUPE President
Lies Salvador, DPAC Chair
Aaron Thorn, President, SD5 Administrators’ Association
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Chris Walker/Corey Bullock, CBC Radio
Dennis Walker, 107.5 Today FM Radio
Wylie Henderson, Rewind Radio 102.9
Jeff Johnson, Wild B104 Radio
Josiah Spyker/Ryley McCormack, 107.5 Today FM
Barry Coulter/Trevor Crawley, Cranbrook Daily Townsman
Ian Cobb, e-know Online News
Joshua Fischlin, Fernie Free Press

*This correspondence is public and transparent. Please feel free to share and/or respond with comment.

Doug McPhee (Chair) • Trina Ayling • Bev Bellina • Irene Bischler • Alysha Clarke
• Nicole Heckendorf • Chris Johns • Sarah Madsen • Wendy Turner

940 Industrial Road #1, Cranbrook BC, V1C 4C6 • Tel: 250.417.2055 • Fax: 250.489.5460 • www.sd5.bc.ca