



SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

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

January 16, 2025

Hon. Lisa Beare, Minister of Education and Child Care
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Hon. Bowinn Ma, Minister of Infrastructure
Parliament Buildings
Victoria BC V8V 1X4

Dear Ministers Beare and Ma,

RE: Invitation to Visit School District 5 (SD5) Southeast Kootenay

At the School District 5 (SD5), Southeast Kootenay public Board Meeting of December 10th, 2024 the School District 5 (SD5), Southeast Kootenay Board of Education carried the following motion:

That the Board write a letter to Hon. Minister Lisa Beare and Hon. Minister Ma, with an invitation to visit our District.

And

At the School District 5 (SD5), Southeast Kootenay in-camera Board Meeting of January 14, 2025 the School District 5 (SD5), Southeast Kootenay Board of Education carried the following motion:

That the draft letter written by Trustee Ayling be approved as it stands.

Our Board wishes to extend this invitation to visit our District so that we may highlight some of our District's unique successes and challenges, as discussed with Minister Beare during our phone conversation of November 28th, 2024.

Unlike most districts, which identify as either "urban" or "rural" our district has the distinction of being both urban and rural. Our District is also the farthest east of

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any district from the lower mainland and the closest district to the BC/Alberta border. The Southeast Kootenay is resource and recreationally rich, disproportionately contributing more per capita to the GDP provincially than most areas of the province.

We struggle with many of the same urban issues as larger districts such as higher housing prices and shortages, too many students learning in portables, and a growing population of English Language Learners (ELLs). We also struggle with rural issues such as the growing cost of transportation, the stretching of resources across a large geographic area and equity challenges for dual credit opportunities, etc.

Competition to attract qualified teaching and support staff in our District is further exasperated by our proximity to Alberta as we attempt to compete with the higher teacher and support staff wages offered in that province. Our transportation and maintenance departments are similarly impacted by the generous industry wages paid by Elk Valley Resources.

In the urban community of Cranbrook, we are in dire need of replacement for Mount Baker Secondary School (MBSS). It 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.*" MBSS is a seventy-two (72) year-old, two-storey wooden structure with a tar roof. Studies and audits of the past 20 years continue to identify major deficiencies in structure, fabric, operation, function, code, compliance, and accessibility of the school.

There is no elevator to transport wheelchair-bound students up and down stairs. Instead, there is a lift that runs along stairwell rails. Not only is this undignified for the students who must use this mode of transport, it narrows access for other students' movements when in use, which is problematic if/when evacuation of the building becomes necessary.

MBSS resides in an area that is now at annual risk of forest fires, yet it was never built to withstand a threat of this magnitude. In fact, MBSS cannot even be considered as fire-resistant. It does not have provisional firewalls aside from two staircases which do not provide direct evacuation to the outside. The fire suppression system is no longer up to code and is in the process of a three-part, three-year replacement plan, as government declined our request to fund the entire upgrade in a single budget year.

MBSS is the largest daily gathering place in the East and West Kootenays, housing 900+ students and staff 173 days of the year. If a fire or some other calamity were to occur, our District has no suitable alternative to house students.

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This school is also used extensively by the community, including use of the attached Key City Theatre (KCT), which provides considerable opportunities for our students. The KCT plumbing, HVAC etc. is integrated into the MBSS structure.

These compounding inefficiencies are now to the point where renovation is no longer a viable option. Year over year these inefficiencies become more costly to the District (and taxpayers), reduce our carbon offset opportunities and increase safety concerns for our students.

Our Board has expended considerable and concerted effort since 2008 to secure the replacement of MBSS including (but not limited to) public consultations, funding facility reports and securing partnerships. We continue to provide yearly submissions to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services (SSCFGS) in the hope that our needs will finally come to the attention of Government.

We are hopeful that you will take the time to visit our District, so that you can better understand that there are legitimately urgent capital replacement and upgrade needs spread equally across the province and that not all districts face only urban or only rural challenges. Districts such as ours require more flexibility on the part of government when making decisions, and more consideration for financial priority if parity among districts is to be achieved.

Given the geographic size and diversity of our District, we would strongly recommend that you plan an overnight stay when you visit SD5. We look forward to touring you around our District to share the amazing educational opportunities our dedicated teachers, support staff and administrators continue to provide for our students, despite the restrictions that limited and inadequate building infrastructure poses to twenty-first century education, the implementation of the province's revised curriculum and embedded principles of Indigenous learning.

We look forward to receiving your response to our invitation, and to arranging for your upcoming visit to our District in the very near future.

Sincerely,



Doug McPhee, Board Chair

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