

October 5, 2018

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
Legislative Assembly of British Columbia
Room 224, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C., V8V 1X4

Dear Committee Members:

Once again, thank you for giving us the opportunity to participate in the Budget 2019 consultation and share with you our views and priorities for the upcoming provincial budget.

As we have in previous years, this brief is presented to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services jointly by the Board of Education of School District No. 38 (Richmond), the Richmond District Parents Association, the Richmond Teachers Association, CUPE Local 716, the Richmond Association of School Administrators and the Richmond Management and Professional Staff. We are proud of our collective commitment in Richmond to cooperate and collaborate with all of our stakeholders to cultivate a safe, accepting and engaging community that inspires a passion for lifelong learning.

Our joint presentation advocates for needs of the K-12 public education system and the needs of our students in Richmond. Our recommendations that we are presenting are focused on four key messages; increased funding to support vulnerable students, increased funding to support new education curriculum changes, a fair and equitable funding formula and continued support and investment in safe schools.

Recommendations

1. Increased Funding to Support Vulnerable Students

Significant demands are being placed on school districts to provide adequate services to support vulnerable students. Enrolment of students with special needs continues to grow and increased funding is needed to support recruitment and retention of associated professionals such as Psychologists, Speech Language Pathologists and Community Mental Health professionals.

In addition, a significant proportion of students with special needs are dependent on Education Assistants (EA) to ensure they can attend school, are safe and have front line support. School districts across the province are experiencing shortages as demand for EAs far exceeds current supply. There are significant recruitment challenges in attracting qualified EAs due to current compensation levels and conditions of work. Funding is needed to support growth in EAs, EA training/resources and supporting increased compensation levels. In Richmond, we have created our own training program called the Richmond Education Assistant Program (REAP) that provides a certification training program for individuals wanting to become EAs with opportunities to be hired by the school district on program completion. This is one example of the innovative ways we are currently addressing the shortages of EAs and the challenges we face in recruitment and retention.

2. Increased Funding to Support New Education Curriculum Changes

The Ministry of Education introduced a new K-12 education curriculum with implementation for grades 11 and 12 to be fully completed by the 2019/2020 school year. Richmond is committed to delivering education programs that result in student success and achieving the highest possible outcomes. We have one of the highest graduation rates amongst BC school districts. Increased funding is needed to ensure the new curriculum will result in continued student success. Targeted funding is required to support the curriculum implementation, assessment changes and instructional delivery through increased teacher professional development, mentoring and training. Targeted funding to assist school districts in recruitment and retention of new teachers is required particularly for non-enrolling and specialized teachers where school districts are experiencing significant shortages. Additional funding to provide new learning resources and technology in the classroom is also needed.

3. Fair and Equitable Funding Formula

The Ministry of Education has undertaken a K-12 funding model review including the appointment of an independent review panel to receive input from education stakeholders and deliver a report and recommendation to the Minister of Education with a new funding allocation model to be implemented for the 2019/2020 school year. Richmond supports a funding allocation model that aims to provide funding that is responsive, equitable, stable, predictable, flexible, transparent and accountable.

Provincial funding for K-12 accounts for 90% of total school district budgeted revenues. Richmond believes that the new funding model for public education should cover all costs of delivering educational services including meeting all requirements under the Memorandum of Agreement that restored classroom learning conditions. The new funding model should also fully fund all costs related to negotiated collective agreements and exempt compensation increases which are not currently funded. Stable, predictable funding should cover all inflationary cost increases rather than downloading costs onto school districts.

4. Continued Support and Investment in Safe Schools

The Provincial Government has supported the need and investment in ensuring schools are seismically safe. In Richmond, due to unstable soil conditions, 34 of our 48 schools have been evaluated to be of high seismic risk. The Ministry of Education has established a Richmond Project Office to facilitate acceleration of seismic upgrading approval and funding for high risk schools in Richmond which we fully support and welcome. Additional funding targeted to accelerating the timeline will ensure our schools are seismically safe as soon as possible which is our number one priority.

In addition to creating safe learning spaces for our students, we are requesting the Provincial Government support school districts through targeted funding for emergency preparedness planning, training and resources that focus on response to critical incidents, natural disasters and emergency situations.

Conclusion

We would like to thank the Select Standing Committee for the opportunity to present our joint brief today. We appreciate the committee hearing our views and hope that the information provided will be given consideration as part of the 2019 provincial budget. Trustees, staff and parents in Richmond are committed to ensuring that we continue to have a strong public education system and that the Richmond School District is the best place to learn and lead.

Sincerely,

Original Signed

Eric Yung, Chairperson
On Behalf of the Board of Education
(Richmond)

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Liz Baverstock, President
Richmond Teachers' Association

Signed

Ian Hillman, President
CUPE Local 716

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Mark Hoath, President
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Dionne McFie, President
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Jose Pelayo, Co-Chair, Richmond
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Education Critic, Official Opposition

Secretary Treasurer
Richmond MLAs
House Leader, Official Opposition
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