

May 20, 2022

The Honourable Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Education
Room 306, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Delivered via email

Dear Minister Whiteside,

On behalf of the Richmond Board of Education, I appreciate the opportunity to write to you to advocate for sustainable funding for public education. The Board would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and Richmond NDP MLAs to discuss our concerns.

The Board of Education appreciates the provincial support for K-12 education. However, the Ministry operating grants are neither adequate nor sustainable to support school districts in maintaining appropriate service levels in the classrooms and meet our students' needs.

For the upcoming 2022/2023 school year, Richmond School District is facing a \$3.9 million structural budget shortfall and has been forced to consider significant reductions to staffing across the District. This is following a \$7.2 million budget shortfall in 2021/2022, which was addressed by operating budget reductions, including staffing reductions, and use of reserves.

The budget shortfalls are caused by a combination of chronic underfunding and the lasting impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry is the main funding source for the District. It is disappointing that there are no increases to the per-student grant rates in the 2022/2023 funding structure, which will result in many unfunded cost pressures including staff salary increments, employee benefit increases, and inflationary costs. The unfunded inflationary costs and staffing increments are estimated to be over \$1.0 million for the District.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative impact on the District's financial position due to lower international tuition revenue and rental revenue. International Education revenues support enhanced staffing and programming that benefit all students in the District. It will likely take a few years for the program to fully recovery to the pre-pandemic level. Further, funding has not been provided to cover additional COVID-19 related costs. The District will face a number of cost pressures such as enhanced ventilation and filters, enhanced hand hygiene and upgrades to improve ventilation.

The Board of Education recognizes that classrooms are becoming increasingly complex especially given the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Staff are required to provide additional support to students for a wide range of learning, behavioral, physical and mental health needs. Transportation for students with complex needs also requires increased support from the District's operating budget. The District allocates far more resources to support students with additional needs than the special education funding received.

The recent Employment Standards Act change that provides five (5) days of paid illness leave for casual employees is welcome news. However, this change has introduced a new and unfunded cost pressure that could result in a maximum cost exposure of \$0.8 million to the District, if all casual staff take the allowable maximum five day paid illness leaves.

In addition to the opportunity to meet with you and the NDP MLAs to discuss these and other issues, the Board of Education also requests that the Ministry provide additional funding to school districts by increasing the operating grant rates to keep pace with annual inflation. By working together with our communities, we have identified the needs to support students and the solutions required. Sustainable funding is essential in our ability to meet our students' needs as well as to continue to embed indigenous reconciliation into teaching and learning.

Thank you for considering our requests.

Sincerely,

Sandra Nixon, Chairperson
On Behalf of the Board of Education (Richmond)

cc: The Honourable John Horgan, Premier of BC
Aman Singh, MLA - Richmond-Queensborough; Kelly Greene, MLA - Richmond-Steveston; MLA Henry Yao, Richmond South Centre
President of BCSTA
Trustees, School District 38 Richmond
Superintendent of Schools, School District 38 Richmond
Secretary Treasurer, School District 38 Richmond
Stakeholder Presidents, Richmond