

Hon. MP Name
Title/Riding
Street Address
City, BC, Postal Code

RE: Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) Initiative

Dear Hon. MP Name:

On behalf of the XXX School Board, I am writing to you with a request to better support new immigrant and refugee students and their families as they arrive and settle into our cities via school districts and specifically through the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program that is based within school districts.

Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) in BC is a program funded by the federal government (Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada) to welcome and settle newcomers by providing comprehensive school-based settlement programming that maximizes the integration and settlement of immigrant and refugee students and their families through a seamless and systemic delivery model, recognizing that schools are natural community hubs and often a first contact for newcomers. Workers within the SWIS program are highly qualified and supported within the school system accessing a suite of professionals and inputs such as meeting spaces for families throughout the school district and city, modern technology, and educational materials.

The XXX School District is a member of the English Language Learners (ELL) Consortium, a group of 11 school districts that support 80% of the ELL students in BC public schools. In addition to professional collaboration, the ELL Consortium has taken on an advocacy role in creating an understanding of the needs of newcomers to Canada and the resources required by school districts to provide effective programs. In recent years, the Consortium has also become a strong advocate for settlement services in schools and represents school districts providing the greatest settlement supports in the province.

In the past few years, the number of newcomer students and families who received settlement services and supports through SWIS has grown significantly. [PARAGRAPH ON LOCAL SWIS/DEMOGRAPHICS/OTHER]

Regardless of our differing service delivery models, ELL Consortium member districts face similar challenges such as the ineligibility of temporary residents for funding, and inflexible fiscal terms contributing to inefficiencies in supporting immigrants and refugees. The ELL Consortium is asking the Federal Government to improve its partnership with SWIS programs that are based within school districts to better address the settlement and integration needs of immigrant and refugee students and families by:

- 1) Offering funding through a multi-year grant rather than contribution agreement
 - a) Currently, the contribution agreement model does not allow for carrying over slippages to the next fiscal year to better serve changing demographic of immigrant and refugee students and families. Slippages can only be utilized within the same fiscal, after a detailed plan is presented

and approved by the Program Officer. The administrative burden and delays caused by processing slippages in one fiscal, and then additional funding requests in the fiscal year right after result in funding loss and inadequate services lagging the needs.

- b) It is proposed that multi-year grant funding will allow for greater flexibility of SWIS programs within school districts to quickly and efficiently reallocate and carry over resources where needed to support the settlement needs of newcomers.
- 2) Authorization to use grant funding for projects with budgets of over \$1million to better reflect SWIS program funding stream and secure ability to access multi-year grant funding for larger districts
 - a) Currently, SWIS is not able to access multi-year grant funding if the program budgets are above \$1million.
 - b) It is proposed that consideration is given to SWIS funding to be a multi-year grant rather than a multi-year Contribution Agreement
- 3) Appoint ELL Consortium representatives to the SWIS-TEE Working group to inform program-policy development, liaise and coordinate between federal and provincial levels of governments to better facilitate and support integration of newcomer students in BC schools.

In April 2019, the Consortium appeared as a witness before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, and some of these challenges are included in the [Improving Settlement Services Across Canada Report](#). In February 2022, the [Evaluation of the Settlement Workers in School \(SWIS\) Initiative](#) report was conducted to fulfill the Treasury Board's Policy of Results requirements and states:

"The evaluation highlighted a clear and demonstrable need for SWIS. SWIS provides newcomer youth, children and their parents/guardians with school-based settlement services that are essential for integrating into Canadian society, and the Canadian education system. Moreover, the Government of Canada has an evident role in providing SWIS, despite education being a provincial/territorial responsibility, as the Federal Government is responsible for newcomer integration.

SWIS makes use of unique delivery models which allow service providers to adapt their programming for regional, provincial/territorial and local priorities. However, the evaluation found this flexibility creates challenges for reporting on initiative outcomes, comparing different service providers, and understanding what SWIS interventions work best for whom, and under what conditions."(p.4)

The Evaluation Report included three recommendations including *Recommendation 1: IRCC should confirm and implement a common definition of SWIS with core services/activities, supported by clear policy guidelines.*

According to the report, IRCC has agreed with this recommendation and "will implement policy guidelines that allow for regional variation to meet the needs of diverse populations while prioritizing national coherence".(p.6)

To support school boards, policy changes should be developed with flexibility in order to be proactive and responsive to changes in client needs and demographics, allowing for inclusion of all those needing settlement support, regardless of their immigration status.

[ADDITIONAL PARAGRAPH WITH EXAMPLE OF LOCAL CHALLENGE/PRIORITY. Growing numbers of temporary residents with settlement needs translates into significant additional workload for the school-based settlement workers, that in turn inhibits all aspects of SWIS program delivery, affects its effectiveness and efficiency overall. It is worth noting that IRCC has already authorized settlement support through SWIS and LINC to Ukrainian newcomers, who are temporary residents with work and study permits. In our view, an equitable approach should be exercised towards all temporary residents, regardless of their country of origin.

[APPENDIX OF STATS/DATA]

The XXX School board requests a meeting with you, to discuss the challenges facing our district in the current model, and how we can best communicate our local priorities and context to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Enclosure