

June 1, 2023

Select Standing Committee on Finance and
Government Services
c/o Parliamentary Committees Office
Room 224, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share the Richmond Board of Education's priorities for the upcoming provincial budget. As we have done in previous years, this letter is presented jointly by the Richmond Board of Education, Richmond Teachers' Association, CUPE Local 716, Richmond District Parents Association, Richmond Association of School Administrators, and Richmond Management and Professional Staff. We are proud of our collective commitment to support the educational journey of every student in the Richmond School District.

Our recommendations are focused on three key priorities: 1. capital funding for city centre school spaces; 2. capital funding for seismically safe schools; and 3. sustainable funding for ministry initiatives in K-12 education.

Key Priorities:

1. Capital Funding Request to Ease Richmond City Centre Enrolment Pressures

The Richmond School District is currently facing a critical need for capital funding to address the mounting enrolment pressures in the Richmond city centre. We strongly urge the province to allocate the necessary funds for the development of a new elementary school in the city centre, as well as provide financial support for essential additions to our existing schools.

In light of the recent enrolment trends, it is evident that immediate action is required. In 2022, the total enrolment in the four elementary schools serving the city centre experienced a staggering growth of 15.2 per cent. This significant increase prompted the deployment of eight portable classrooms to accommodate the resulting 215-seat shortfall. Additionally, the City of Richmond Official Community Plan (OCP) projects a substantial population growth in the city centre, from 40,000 in 2016 to an estimated 90,000 by 2031. To meet the demands of this anticipated growth, our district's Five-Year Capital Plan, already submitted for funding approval, includes plans for 23 additional classrooms in the existing schools and the development of two new elementary schools in the city centre.

Investing in the city centre is not only a crucial response to the challenges posed by population growth but also an opportunity to alleviate the mounting pressure on our educational infrastructure. By doing so, we can effectively reduce reliance on portable classrooms and, most importantly, ensure that every student in our district receives a high-quality education in their neighbourhood school.

2. Capital Funding Request for the Seismic Mitigation Program

The Richmond School District is currently facing an urgent need for capital funding to address our seismic mitigation program. We strongly appeal to the province to allocate the necessary funds for the remediation of the remaining 20 schools in our district that have been identified with a high seismic risk rating. The safety and well-being of our students and staff rely on timely funding to address this critical issue.

Recent seismic risk assessments have revealed that 31 elementary schools and five secondary schools in our district have identified blocks with a high seismic risk rating. Regrettably, 16 elementary and four secondary schools remain unsupported by the province for mitigation. This means that over 10,000 student seats are in dire need of seismic mitigation measures. Furthermore, 11 elementary schools and two secondary schools face a moderate or higher liquefaction risk, which poses a significant threat to the safety of these school communities.

Over the past number of years, the district has made significant financial contributions to upgrade and expand the scope of ministry-approved projects. We firmly believe that investing in the safety of our schools is not just a moral obligation but also a prudent economic decision. By prioritizing the safety of our schools today, we are investing in a brighter and more secure future for our province. We respectfully request the compassion and urgency of the province to take this matter seriously and ensure that all schools in the district are made seismically safe as soon as possible.

3. Sustainable Funding Request for Ministry Initiatives

The Richmond School District requests funding to effectively implement several new ministry initiatives, including the Indigenous Focused Graduation Requirement, the K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan, and Childcare and Early Learning initiatives. Additionally, we kindly request the continuation of the Student and Family Affordability funding.

The implementation of the Indigenous Focused Graduation Requirement represents a significant commitment in our journey toward truth and reconciliation. However, to ensure its successful integration, we appeal to the ministry for additional funding to support classroom resources, release time for professional development, and staffing support to effectively incorporate Indigenous-focused content and curriculum into our schools.

The K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan aligns strongly with the work the district has been doing to create safe and inclusive learning environments for all students. We request additional funding from the ministry for the effective implementation of the action plan. This funding will allow the district to add staff positions that build the professional capacity necessary for a foundational understanding of anti-racism.

The ministry has emphasized the importance of Childcare and Early Learning initiatives within the public education system, and our district has made significant strides in this regard. In the past year, the district has added two Just B4 sites running four preschool programs, and a Seamless Day Kindergarten Before and After School Care Program. Significant resources are required to launch and maintain these initiatives. Therefore, we seek additional funding to provide adequate support for students with disabilities and diverse abilities, offer professional development opportunities for staff, enhance administrative assistance, allocate additional custodial time, and address costs associated with staff

absences.

Financial hardship can have a detrimental impact on student performance, attendance, and mental health. Recognizing this, the Student and Family Affordability Fund played a crucial role by providing \$1.96 million to our district for the 2022-2023 school year. To ensure equitable access to education, we urgently request ongoing funding to support families experiencing financial hardship. These funds will help alleviate the burden of school-related expenses, such as fees, workbooks, supplies, field trips, and other associated costs, which can quickly accumulate and become overwhelming for financially struggling families. We urgently request ongoing funds to support families in financial hardship to ensure that every student has the resources they need to succeed.

Conclusion

We would like to take this opportunity to extend our sincere appreciation to the ministry for its ongoing commitment to supporting K-12 public education. Our students represent the future of our province, and we commend the ministry for recognizing the significance of investing in their education and overall well-being. By prioritizing and allocating resources to our schools, we are fostering an environment where our students can thrive, contributing to the success and prosperity of our communities. We remain dedicated to working collaboratively with the ministry to ensure the best possible educational opportunities for all students in our district. Together, we can build a brighter and more prosperous future for our province.

Sincerely,

Debbie Tablotney, Chairperson
On behalf of the Board of Education

Liz Baverstock, President
Richmond Teachers Association

Stacey Robinson, President
CUPE Local 716

Mike Murray, President
Richmond Association of School Administrators

Andrew Scallion, President
Richmond District Parents Association

Kelly Gibson, Representative
Richmond Management & Professional Staff

cc: Trustees
Superintendent of Schools
Stakeholder Presidents
Minister of Education

Secretary Treasurer
Richmond MLAs
House Leader, Official Opposition