

May 30, 2025

Member of Parliament for Richmond Centre – Marpole
165-7031 Westminster Highway
Richmond, British Columbia
V6X 1A3

Dear Mr. Chak Au, M.P.,

Re: Education Priorities in the Richmond School District

Congratulations on your recent election as Member of Parliament. On behalf of the Board of Education of the Richmond School District (No. 38), I extend our warmest wishes for your continued success.

We are reaching out to renew and strengthen the dialogue between our board and Members of Parliament, with the shared goal of supporting programs that benefit students and families in Richmond's diverse learning community.

We would like to bring to your attention several pressing concerns affecting the well-being of newcomer families and the ability of our schools to meet their needs. These challenges are growing and require coordinated support at the federal level. We respectfully seek your support in addressing these issues to ensure all students in Richmond can thrive.

1. Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)

Richmond has one of the highest concentrations of newcomer families in the region. As we know, student success relies not only on what happens in classrooms, but also on the strength and well-being of their families. The Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program has been instrumental in helping newcomer families integrate into the school system and broader Canadian society. SWIS staff provide critical supports including one-on-one and family orientations, information workshops, referrals to community services, and engagement opportunities—all in multiple languages such as Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Punjabi and more.

Recently, however, SWIS workers have been directed to limit their support strictly to school and education-related matters. This policy shift undermines the core function of the program: empowering families so students can thrive. By narrowing their scope, we are seeing serious consequences — growing waitlists for external referrals, increased stress on families and frustration among both staff and school personnel. Restricting SWIS support diminishes our collective ability to help children succeed. Supporting families is not ancillary to education — it is foundational to it.

In Richmond, only one federally funded agency (SUCCESS) provides general settlement support, making timely access to resources increasingly difficult. These changes have also strained the collaborative relationships between SWIS staff and school teams, as workers are no longer able to fully meet community needs or maintain their vital role within schools.

We are not alone in expressing concern — school districts across the region are reporting similar challenges. To address this, we respectfully call for:

- A broader, integrated SWIS service model that reflects the real and holistic needs of newcomer families;
- Increased federal investment to support a multi-faceted settlement service model; and
- Meaningful consultation with school districts in the design and delivery of settlement services.

2. National School Food Program

On behalf of the Board of Education, we express our support for the federal government's recent announcement in the National School Food Program. This initiative marks a critical step toward addressing food insecurity among students across Canada.

While we welcome this important investment, we are concerned by the current funding allocation model, which relies primarily on socio-economic status (SES) indices. This approach does not reflect the complexity of student needs in diverse communities such as Richmond. SES alone is an insufficient proxy for identifying food insecurity, particularly among newcomer families, who often face overlapping challenges that are not captured in these indices. These include local cost of living pressures, language barriers, limited access to settlement services, and a lack of access to culturally appropriate foods.

The Richmond School District currently receives \$2.4 million in funding through the provincial Feeding Futures Program. By contrast, the newly announced federal funding allocation provides \$39,097 to our district, a reduction of 98.4 per cent in food security funding. This significant shortfall undermines our ability to meet the basic nutritional needs of our students and puts additional pressure on schools and communities.

We strongly urge the federal government to revisit the funding allocation model and engage in meaningful collaboration with local school districts to develop a more inclusive and effective approach. A holistic and community-informed model should reflect the realities of local context, including student population, local demographics, housing costs, settlement challenges and cultural diversity. This is essential to ensure that no student is left behind due to narrow or incomplete eligibility criteria.

3. Early Learning and Child Care

We commend the federal government's support in early learning and childcare and respectfully call for sustained and expanded funding to improve access and affordability for families in Richmond. Targeted support for communities with high numbers of newcomer families is particularly important, as early learning services play a foundational role in successful integration and long-term educational outcome. Continued support is also needed to expand access to affordable, high-quality child care that meets the evolving needs of our growing community.

Lastly, the Board of Education would be pleased to host a meeting at your convenience to discuss these matters and explore how we can collaborate to ensure that federal programs and policies are meeting the needs of our diverse and growing community.

Thank you for your continued commitment to public education and to the well-being of children and families in Richmond.

Sincerely,

Ken Hamaguchi, Chairperson
On behalf of the Board of Education (Richmond)

cc: Trustees, School District No. 38 Richmond
Superintendent of Schools, School District No. 38 Richmond
Secretary Treasurer, School District No. 38 Richmond