

Saanich Schools

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November 5, 2009

The Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, British Columbia
V8W 9E2

Dear Minister MacDiarmid:

Re: Joint Letter Concerning Education Funding

School District No. 63 (Saanich) takes pride in offering successful education programs and services. In 2007/08, the Board of Education held a public commission on public education which resulted in the District adopting the following core beliefs:

1. Public education is fundamental to our democratic society and is a key institution which provides equal opportunity for all children. Public schools have the responsibility to prepare young people as citizens contributing to a cohesive, socially responsible society.
2. Public education is the responsibility of the whole community, and that policy decisions made locally by elected school boards and provincially by government reflect community values and aspirations.
3. Healthy relationships are the foundation of a successful public education system.

These beliefs underpin all of the District's planning processes.

We utilize long term planning in both our operating budget and capital budget processes. After establishing a budget plan for the 2009/10 school year, a number of changes were implemented by the Province. The Annual Facilities Grant cancellation resulted in a deficit of \$554,000 due to summer work and caused cancellation of \$800,000 of planned maintenance to buildings. The cancellation of grants to arts groups, sports groups, and Parent Advisory Councils affects students, schools and families. A unique situation for Saanich was the cancellation of contractual debt service grants. All of these mid year changes challenge districts and result in a lesser ability to plan for the longer term and ensure that budget plans result in effective, efficient public education services for our students.

Saanich spends 84.5% of its budget on instructional programs which is 2% above the provincial average. Our student educator ratio in regular programs is at 16.78 compared with the provincial average of 16.46. The Board believes in prioritizing their spending in student educational areas. In 2009/10, the Board reduced programs and services by \$3.6 million which included administrative reductions of \$315,000 or 4.3% of the administrative budget and increasing local revenues by \$945,000.

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Unfortunately the size of the 2009/10 reduction also meant the largest reduction in teaching staff in our history which increased the number of classes over 30 students from 54 in 2008/09 to 82 in 2009/10 and classes with greater than 3 designated students rose from 142 in 2008/09 to 189 in 2009/10. It is expected that class sizes will increase in a similar manner in the second semester at our secondary schools.


All school districts face further challenges in 2010/11 to fund the July 2010 teacher salary increase, teacher pension contribution increases, medical premium increases, the cost of implementation of HST and carbon offsets.

We call upon Government to reprioritize provincial resources to ensure public education can provide programs and services that reflect the expectations of our communities.

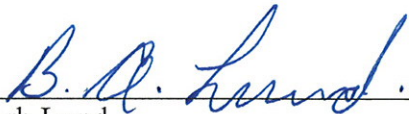
1. Provide appropriate public education funding to address government's mandates and goals for public education and realistically cover the increasing costs of the July 2010 teacher salary settlement, medical services premiums, fuel costs, carbon tax and offsets, and teacher pension contributions
2. Provide Boards of Education with an HST exemption or rebates similar to municipal governments
3. Restore the Annual Facility Grant to ensure safe and appropriate schools
4. Fully fund the costs of the full day kindergarten initiative

On behalf of the Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils of Saanich, Saanich Teachers' Association, Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 441, Saanich Indian School Board, and School District No. 63 (Saanich) Board of Education we urge you to seriously consider our recommendations to ensure a high quality public education system that results in improved student achievement and meets the needs of our diverse student population.


Yours truly,



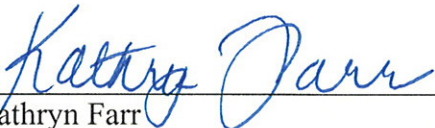
MaryLynne Rimer
Board Chair, School District No. 63 (Saanich)




Barb Lund
President, Confederation of Parent Advisory
Councils of Saanich (COPACS)



Sean Hayes
President, Saanich Teachers' Association



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Bruce Underwood
Chair, Saanich Indian School Board