

June 18, 2014

The Honourable Peter Fassbender  
Minister of Education  
PO Box 9045 Stn. Prov. Govt.  
Victoria, BC  
V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Fassbender:

The Board of Education of School District No. 63 (Saanich) passed all three readings of the 2014/2015 annual budget bylaw at a public meeting held on April 30th, 2014. In conjunction with the submission of this budget, the Board feels it is essential to provide the Minister with some additional information on the profound impacts of this, and previous, balanced budget submissions in School District No. 63.

The following reductions have been made in order to submit a balanced budget for 2014/15:

1. Teacher salaries \$1,410,500 – this will result in more than 14 FTE fewer teachers working with students in the upcoming year.
2. Teachers teaching on call \$120,000 – this will result in decreased teaching time during the summer for students enrolled in Distance Learning programs.
3. Support staff salaries and benefits \$314,000 – this will result in more than six FTE fewer support staff employees in school administration, human resources and the operations department.
4. Support staff relief salaries and benefits \$20,000 – this will result in a loss of replacement staff at the district board office when support staff are away sick or on leave.
5. School administration \$129,000 – this will result in one less vice-principal in our schools.
6. District administration \$20,000 – the district has reduced from a one FTE to a .4 FTE transportation manager and is now in partnership with School District No. 62 (Sooke) for this position.
7. Community Link program \$81,000 – the district will only provide program supports in the amount of specific Community Link funding received and will not supplement from operating grant revenue.

Saanich Schools



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8. Federal French program \$22,000 – the district will only provide program supports in the amount of specific Federal French funding received and will not supplement from operating grant revenue.
9. Supplies and services \$786,500 – this will result in \$345,500 less supplies and services in schools and \$441,000 less supplies and services in district support departments.
10. Bus transportation fees \$160,000 – this will result in an increase from \$20 per student per month to \$30 per student per month to ride the bus to school.
11. International tuition \$40,000 – International tuition fees have been increased by \$275 per student.

This list totals \$3,103,000 or 4.3% of the 2013/14 annual operating budget of the district.

The following are the impacts of these reductions:

1. With 14 fewer teachers in Saanich there will be a corresponding reduction of divisions or blocks offered to students. Classes may be slightly larger and closer to maximums. Specialist positions will be reduced slightly, having an impact on service to students.
2. SIDES will scale back their service to students this summer, due to changes in funding for distance learning. We believe an overall reorganization at SIDES was necessary due to these significant changes implemented recently by the Ministry, such as changes to the Education Guarantee.
3. Fewer support staff will be allocated to schools, reducing service levels to students with special needs to some degree. Saanich has supported students with special needs over the years as a high priority, but, while legal, this level cannot be sustained any longer.
4. Non replacement of clerical staff may result in overtime costs or reduced service to the public, including response time to phone calls, concerns and school incidents.
5. The loss of an elementary vice-principal results in less overall school supervision. As well the particular school affected houses a seniors' centre and will undergo a seismic upgrade, situations that require administrative oversight. While government promotes reductions in administration, at the same time it has increased statutory requirements. The loss of a vice-principal reduces the ability of the principal to attend to these or to the increasing expectations of continual communication with parents.
6. Saanich will now share a transportation manager. Due to this reduction in time, jobs have been downloaded on the Director of Facilities and other employees. Staff leadership will be impacted and communication with the public will be reduced.

7. Over the years, Saanich added funding to support Community Link. This causes a reduction in Youth and Family Counsellors, and a corresponding reduction of service to students with mental health challenges and other complex needs.
8. The District will lose two employees who provide assistance to teachers in the Core French area.
9. When the supplies and services budgets are reduced by close to \$800,000 in Saanich, there will be less professional development, fewer resources for classrooms and the district office, less ability to train with (or purchase) new technologies, fewer minor repairs, and more pressure on parent organizations to contribute to field trips, buy school supplies and contribute to other opportunities for students.
10. Parents will be impacted by an increase in bus fees. This may result in fewer students riding buses and more congestion around schools. More parents will ask for this fee to be waived due to financial hardship.
11. It is possible that Saanich will lose some International students to other districts, due to the higher tuition.

While the 2014/15 operating grant is \$6.2 million higher than in 2002/2003, this increase is not sufficient to cover rising salary and benefit costs as well as increasing inflationary pressures over the same period. Since 2002/2003, in order to balance the budget, School District No. 63 has made reductions totalling 49 FTE teachers and more than \$1.6 million in supplies and services. Mitigating initiatives in this period include:

- The closing of six schools and consolidating populations of two into one new elementary school resulting in five fewer elementary schools, with corresponding reductions in administration
- Introducing a significant district technology plan with local capital to reduce operating costs
- Utilizing shared services for purchasing, energy management, WorkSafe claims management and bus transportation
- Improving our facilities to make energy cost savings
- Curtailing the expansion of playground space
- Leasing unused space to the community
- Moving one location of the Individual Learning Centre from a neutral, easily accessible location to a closed school
- Instituting and increasing bus fees
- Significantly increasing International student numbers

Over the years, the provincial public education formula has forced the board to make some very tough decisions that undermine the quality and effectiveness of services to students in Saanich. Additionally, Saanich School District is one of the largest employers on the Saanich Peninsula and sources many of its supplies and services locally. Reductions in these areas impact the financial health of our local businesses and the true cost is impossible to calculate. The Board of School District No. 63 (Saanich) respectfully requests the Minister to acknowledge and remediate the compounding negative effects on students and families of a provincial education funding formula that does not reflect increases to cover government imposed inflationary costs or other costs of services downloaded to school districts.

Yours very truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Wayne Hunter', written over a horizontal line.

G. Wayne Hunter  
Chair, Saanich Board of Education

GWH:klg:rd

cc: BC School Trustees' Association  
Gary Holman, MLA, Saanich North & the Islands  
Lana Popham, MLA, Saanich South  
Saanich Teachers' Association  
CUPE Local 441  
Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils of Saanich