

To:  
The Minister of Education  
Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid  
PO Box 9045  
STN PROV GOVT  
Victoria BC  
V8W 9E2  
Fax: 250-387-3200  
Email: [Margaret.macdiarmid.mla@leg.bc.ca](mailto:Margaret.macdiarmid.mla@leg.bc.ca)

CC: North Van MLAs, BCCPAC, [Robin.Austin.MLA@leg.bc.ca](mailto:Robin.Austin.MLA@leg.bc.ca) (NDP critic for Education, Early Learning and Literacy)

Dear Minister MacDiarmid

As the executive of the North Van Parent Advisory Council, representing about 8,000 parents of some 16,000 students in the North Vancouver School District, we are compelled to respond to the irresponsible timing and degree of funding cuts to our public schools hidden in the recent 2009 provincial budget update's elimination of the Annual Facilities Grants.

What is needed for our schools to succeed is for our boards to receive stable, predictable funding that lets them plan and invest for the future with confidence that the funds they expect to be there, will be there. But as we start this new school year we return once again to a school system in disarray as a result of the ad-hoc education funding regime established by our Provincial government.

School districts need the government to provide better stability in two specific ways. First, the timing of budgets has to respect the reality of the school year and second, the government-set requirements for programs and accountability must respect the available budget. Neither of these is true today.

As such the North Van PAC is asking the Province to commit to the following:

- \* The immediate restoration of the 2009/2010 capital maintenance budget to the 2008/2009 levels upon which this year's school district budgets were based.

\* A public commitment to respect the reality of the school year and the school boards' annual budgetary process by promising to only apply budget changes in subsequent rather than the current school year.

\* A public commitment to a review of the level of red-tape, restrictions, requirements and reporting demanded by the Ministry. This should identify opportunities to reduce the cost burden from the Ministry on school districts and increase the school boards' flexibility to respond to budget changes and efficiently deliver primary and secondary education.

We ask for these changes because for schools to succeed, school boards need to be able to predictably manage their finances and the government is not currently enabling that to happen.

#### Restoration of 2009/2010 Annual Facilities Grant

---

This year we return to face mid-year cuts to capital maintenance budgets caused by the elimination of the Annual Facilities Grants. These budgets have already been submitted, approved by the ministry and have largely been spent or committed by school districts. The only way for a school district to respond to these changes in maintenance funding is to make cuts to classroom funding, possibly even rushed closures of schools with all the disruption to education that would entail.

In past years our district has been forced to cut plans in response to mid-year changes to funding caused by changes in the secondary funding model. In other years it has been the elimination of the ability to charge cost-recovery fees for programs or the change to per-student funding. These ongoing mid-year changes have to stop. Cuts are never easy but cuts mid-stream in an existing plan are both more difficult and far less efficient in generating actual savings.

In North Vancouver the district cut \$3.1 million from their 2009/2010 budget and it hurt our school programs. Now, based on these new cuts the district must cut another \$3 million from the 2009/2010 budget. No matter where the cuts are made, the cuts always hurt the classroom. The only way to avoid massive disruption of education province-wide is to respect established budgets for the school year and restore the capital maintenance funding to 2008/2009 levels.

## Commitment to Stable School Year Funding

---

While we fully recognize the government's need to respond to changes in the economy, the best way the government can help manage these difficult times is to support the stable environment needed for long-term investments to grow. This is true in all areas of our economy including education, business, health, sports and the arts.

The Province needs to provide for an education system that can predictably and efficiently manage its finances in the long term, based on the reality of the school year rather than the Province's fiscal year. Schools set their budgets in June and manage to the cycle of the school year. The government needs to support that model by applying funding changes to the next budget cycle rather than mid-year or whenever it conveniences the ministry.

Similarly, the province needs to eliminate the distinction of operating, program and maintenance budgets. For a school board these are all annual operating expenses and money spent in one area means less for the others.

## Reduction of Ministry Cost Burdens on School Districts

---

Adding to the school district's challenge are the ever-increasing and under-funded demands from the Ministry for boards to provide more services with more reporting, accountability and oversight. In addition to that already heavy load, this year we see the rapid introduction of all-day Kindergarten.

Estimates last year suggested all-day Kindergarten would cost the province \$600 million and yet this year we see the program imposed on boards whilst only funded for \$150 million. While all-day Kindergarten would be worthwhile, adding it as an extra requirement to an already under-funded system is inappropriate.

At the same time increasing demands from the Ministry limit how funds may be raised, increase the reporting required, and limit flexibility in what education needs to be delivered and how. The result is that boards and districts lack the flexibility needed to re-allocate funds appropriately in response to changes to funding. Cuts to funding need to come with cuts to the red-tape and demands on schools to ensure the money that is available flows as much as possible into the classrooms.

When looking for potential cost savings, rather than looking for more efficiencies at the board level where repeated rounds of cuts have already forced out much of the potential savings, the Ministry needs to examine the burden it places on the school districts and find ways to cut that burden. How many reports are really needed, what is actually done with the reports, could we achieve their goals in less expensive ways? Reduced demands from the Ministry for reports and new programs would give schools and school boards the freedom and flexibility to focus on their primary purpose, delivering education.

In closing we shall repeat ourselves and ask the government to commit to managing the education budget to ensure that the timing of school funding changes respects the realities of the school year and work to ensure the Ministry requirements and burden on the school districts respect the funding provided.

With respect

David Whitehead & Leslie Uhlenbruck -  
Co-chairs - The North Van PAC Executive 2009/2010