



British Columbia
School Trustees
Association

Good afternoon,

My name is Gordon Swan, and I am the President of the BC School Trustees Association. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you this afternoon.

As I'm sure you appreciate, Boards of Education across BC have a vested interest in ensuring the funding provided to school districts is not only sufficient to deliver the programs and services we believe are critical for our students to meet the challenges of the decades ahead, but that the funding can also be directed effectively and efficiently to address identified needs and priorities. While additional funding would certainly be welcomed and well used, it is equally important that all of the monies provided to us are able to be spent in the best interest of students. That is not always the case at this time.

The ability of Boards of Education to allocate financial and other resources to meet the locally and provincially determined needs of students is currently significantly restricted by a variety of policies, targeted allocations, external restrictions and contract clauses. The result is that school districts are **not** free to spend the dollars they are provided by taxpayers in the most effective and efficient ways possible. In short, we are not getting the best value possible for the considerable dollars currently being allocated to the K-12 education system.

My first request to you is that Boards of Education be provided significantly more flexibility to assign the funding they are provided to better address local school district priorities based on student needs.

Likewise, we need to reduce the red tape that hinders the construction of new schools. There is no legitimate reason why it should take up to two years to obtain the approvals and permits necessary for a school to be built or rebuilt; this can be up to two years **after** the funding has been assigned. It is critical that school districts, municipalities and the provincial government, instead, work together to ensure projects can move ahead as quickly as possible. At present, there are simply too many procedural barriers to achieving our common goal of accelerating the pace of school construction.

My second request is that every effort be made to ensure school district capital construction projects can proceed as quickly and efficiently as possible.

At the start of the last school year, government provided a very sizable increase in the provincial K-12 education budget for the implementation of the settlement arising out of the Supreme Court of Canada decision on BCTF collective agreement language. The approximately 2800 additional teachers that money funded has provided BC students with reduced classes sizes and improved school services. What is important going forward, however, is stable, predictable funding that allows school districts to establish long-range strategic plans and sustainable programming that properly utilizes these additional teachers as well as our existing staff and learning resources. Whatever



funding you provide going forward, must be **stable, predictable and transparent** to school districts.

This must include **fully** funding the new collective agreements that will be signed over the coming months, the comparable compensation improvements that should be provided to our exempt staff, the costs of additional students in many communities around the province, the introduction of new initiatives on mental health and, perhaps most significantly, the planned establishment of pre-school child care and early learning centers in schools across BC. If we are to maintain our position as one of the best K-12 education systems in the world, there must be an ongoing commitment to fully fund all the costs of that system; both the system as it currently exists as well as the expanded system government envisions for the future. The current introduction of new provincial curriculum is an example of needed modernization, but it is an important initiative that must also be properly resourced. Failure to pay for increased costs and new initiatives simply means making cuts to existing programs or services. That would definitely be a step in the wrong direction.

The year ahead will almost certainly see the introduction of a new funding distribution model for the Ministry of Education. While BCSTA supports this initiative, we also maintain any changes made must address specific issues. We believe that:

- funding directed to the needs of Indigenous students must be protected;
- the way in which we categorize students with special needs for the purpose of allocating funding must be changed;
- school districts and communities with declining student enrollment must have their schools and programs protected; and
- boards of education must be provided greater flexibility to spend the money they are provided to meet locally determined needs and priorities.

While the primary responsibility for revamping the current funding model rests with the Ministry of Education, your support to ensure any new funding distribution formula respects important values and priorities will be important.

Finally, I would like to confirm for you that money directed to public education is money very well spent. Please consider the funding of our schools and the K-12 education programs as an investment in BC's future. There is no other commitment that is more important in our world today, and certainly nothing more important toward ensuring a successful future for our children in the world to come.

Thank you, and I would now be happy to answer any questions you might have for me.