



RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SELECT STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

June 13, 2019



British Columbia
School Trustees
Association

THE BRITISH COLUMBIA SCHOOL TRUSTEES ASSOCIATION (BCSTA) REPRESENTS ALL 60 BOARDS OF EDUCATION ACROSS OUR PROVINCE. ONE OF BCSTA'S ROLE IS TO ADVOCATE ON BEHALF OF THESE MEMBER BOARDS AND THE HUNDREDS OF DIVERSE COMMUNITIES AND HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF STUDENTS THEY REPRESENT.

No matter where our members live in BC, each believes in both the immense power of a properly funded public education system that meets the needs of individual students regardless of their location, background or goals in life as well as and the value of local decision making.

This submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services is based on these beliefs. That being said, we are putting forward specific recommendations that we believe would significantly improve the ability of school districts to provide the best educational opportunities for the students they serve. We say to you that:

- Funding for BC school districts must be stable, predictable and adequate in order to provide the educational programs, services, resources and buildings needed to maintain a strong and responsive public education system that meets the needs of all students.
- The current funding distribution model must be modernized to ensure funding can be effectively and efficiently directed to locally established priorities.
- Greater flexibility must be provided to boards of education so that they may direct funding to the resources needed to best meet the needs of students.
- The need for school districts to create and hold appropriate financial reserves must be acknowledged and supported if long-range goals are to be met.

While we strongly believe that the allocation of a significant portion of the provincial budget to K-12 public education is a wise investment of taxpayer dollars, we also note the need for changes in the way these resources are distributed and utilized.





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 local and provincial priorities.

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.

To move ahead, we believe that:

- There must be equity of funding across all school districts in order to ensure equal opportunity for all students across BC.
- Funding directed to the needs of Indigenous students must be protected.
- The way in which we currently allocate funding to students with special needs must be updated to be reflective of current provincial and local policies related to inclusive education.
- School districts and communities with declining student enrollment must have their schools and programs protected.
- School districts with growing student populations must see their increasing needs adequately addressed.
- Boards of education must be provided with greater flexibility to spend the money they are provided to meet locally determined needs and priorities.

At present, the distribution of funding to school districts includes several prescriptive requirements. Some of these allocations, such as the provision of funding to support Indigenous students, are appropriate. Others are arbitrary or based on historical perspectives that are long out of date. BCSTA supports the current Ministry of Education initiative to review the funding distribution formula, and calls on the members of this committee also support this process and the implementation of a new formula that recognizes the new landscape for providing educational services to students in 2020 and beyond.

While considerable work remains to be completed before the sector can determine the most appropriate changes to implement, we need your leadership in supporting a new funding distribution model. Funding to school districts must not only be adequate, it must be equitable, effective and as efficient as possible to ensure the greatest positive impact possible.

Our first request to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services is that you publicly support the need for the K-12 education sector to collaboratively modernize the current Ministry of Education funding distribution formula to better meet the needs of students.

One of the primary functions of boards of education is to allocate resources, including funding, staffing and time, to functions or processes that support student learning and success to the greatest extent possible. In short, boards are responsible for ensuring their local school district gets the greatest value possible (in terms of student learning) from every resource provided to them. This means boards must have control over the financial resources, staffing and policies of their school district.

At present, there are a number of provincial barriers that do not allow boards the flexibility required to ensure the distribution of resources in their school district are allocated as effectively and efficiently as possible. These barriers are ultimately items under the control of the provincial government.

Our second request to you is that boards of education be provided significantly more flexibility to assign the funds they are provided in order to better address local school district priorities based on student needs. If we want the use of public funds to be both as effective and efficient as possible, we must reduce current limitations on local decision making and allocation.

In recent years, boards of education and the school districts they oversee have taken on a number of new or growing responsibilities. The student mental health crisis, in particular, has become a major concern for every school district in the province, and boards must add new staff and programs to address this growing need. We cannot do this alone.

As our third request, we ask that government develop a province-wide mental health strategy that incorporates the needs of school boards as well as the students they represent, and provide the funding necessary to implement an integrated program across the education, health and social services sectors.

Technology is now a part of every student's curriculum and requires constant upgrading of both hardware and software. The planning and purchase of such large infrastructure projects must be dealt with through a multi-year plan.

Building and grounds maintenance has not been adequately funded in recent years, and now necessitates a significant investment by school districts to ensure the future safety and comfort of students and staff. This cannot happen without long-range planning and the amassing of substantial fiscal resources to address this issue.



Likewise, part of the planning and preparation process for constructing new schools or the implementation of new educational programs is the need for school districts to establish and maintain appropriate capital reserves. In just the way families need to save money in order to purchase a new home, or plan for their children's post-secondary education, boards of education need to set aside appropriate financial reserves in order to achieve long-term goals. These fiscally prudent reserves have been unfairly labeled as 'surpluses', and are wrongly characterized 'extra' monies that boards have left-over after paying for current programs and services.

These funds are, in fact, required longer-term fiscal reserves that are needed if we are to effectively plan for new facilities, additional programs and equipment as well as the current growth in student numbers.

Our fourth request to you is for your support in promoting understanding of why school districts maintain prudent fiscal reserves as part of a well-planned strategic direction to achieve important long-term goals.

Your support toward ensuring proper financial management and planning is not overtaken by expediency or opportunism is critical to school districts.



Finally, we call on you to confirm that the money directed to public education is money well spent, and to, therefore, ensure that the K-12 public education system receives stable, predictable and adequate funding each and every year.

The provincial government should consider the funding of our schools and the K-12 education programs as a key investment in BC's future. There is no other commitment that is more important in our communities today, and certainly nothing more important toward ensuring a successful future for our children and their families in years to come. While we recognize the limitations of public spending and taxation, funding a broad-reaching, effective public education system is truly an investment in our future that will pay back many times over.

The BC School Trustees Association believes, and strives to ensure, the following:

- A high-quality public education system is the foundation of a democratic society.
- Improving student achievement is the key work of locally elected boards of education.
- The interests of BC students are best met through local decision-making with an engaged community.

We now call on you and your fellow MLA's to implement the funding and related policy decisions necessary to ensure we not only maintain, but continually improve, a high-quality public education system that aims to meet the needs and ambitions of every child in BC.