



British Columbia
School Trustees
Association

November 5, 2019

The Honourable Adrian Dix

Minister of Health

PO Box 9050, Stn Prov Govt

Victoria, BC

V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Dix,

Re: Delay of implementation of Medical Services Plan requirement for international students attending BC school districts

At the October 26, 2019 meeting of the BCSTA Provincial Council (representing all 60 Boards of Education in our province), members passed the following motion:

“That BCSTA request the Provincial Ministers of Finance, Health and Education delay the requirement for international students to register in the Medical Services Plan (MSP) program until the 2020/2021 school year.”

While most school trustees, and the school districts they represent, do not have a concern with fee paying international students being required to have and pay for medical services plan (MSP) coverage, the timing of the announcement of this policy change is highly problematic for the education sector.

With the encouragement of your government, BC school districts each spring recruit thousands of fee-paying overseas students to attend public schools across our province. The parents of these students sign contracts with school districts for the provision of educational services, home stays and other related services, including emergency medical coverage. Pricing, dependency and the quality of program are key considerations for them and us in this highly competitive market. In almost every case, contracts were signed and arrangements were put in place before the end of the last school year (i.e. before June 30, 2019).

Your announcement of required MSP coverage and the payment of fees for all international students on August 1, 2019 put school districts in a very awkward and expensive position as they had no reasonable means of charging parents to recover this significant new cost. It simply is not possible to amend previously signed contracts and payments, leaving school districts to pay the required MSP premiums.

The direct consequence of implementing the MSP fee requirement on short notice is that BC school districts now have to pay \$37.50 per month for every international student they have enrolled until December 31, 2019, and \$75.00 per month for each student through to the end of the school year. For school districts such as Coquitlam, Vancouver, Victoria, West Vancouver, Burnaby and the Central Okanagan this amounts to an unfunded cost totalling hundreds of thousands of dollars.



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If the objective was for international students to pay their own way, this has not been accomplished for this school year. Due to the late timing of this policy announcement, we are instead forced to take money out of local school district budgets to pay the cost of providing medical services plan coverage to students from other countries. These same school districts must also continue to pay the cost of previously contracted private insurance coverage.

Significant concerns regarding gaps in coverage and eligibility have also been brought forward. Time will also be needed to fully understand and address these issues.

We ask that you delay the implementation of the MSP requirement for international students until September 1, 2020. This will give school districts the time needed to rewrite contracts, update pricing and search out solutions to insurance coverage concerns before recruiting for the 2020/2021 school year begins. It would also allow school districts to retain hundreds of thousands of dollars of their budgets to serve the needs of their students.

Thank you for considering my request on behalf of our member boards of education, and the students of BC that they serve. I understand what you are trying to accomplish but ask that you do so without unfairly penalizing publicly funded school districts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "S. Higginson", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Stephanie Higginson

President

British Columbia School Trustees Association

Motion Reference: P120199.1

CC: Rob Fleming, Minister of Education
Carole James, Minister of Finance
Stephen Brown, Deputy Minister of Health
Scott MacDonald, Deputy Minister of Education
Lori Wanamaker, Deputy Minister of Finance