



MEDIA RELEASE

Boards of Education Concerned Today's Budget Doesn't Cover Increased Education Costs

[Victoria, B.C. – April 20, 2021] Boards of education are pleased that K-12 education continues to be a priority for government but are concerned that funds announced today will only partially cover increased operating costs in school districts.

"We're pleased that education remains the second highest budget item in the provincial budget and the government remains committed to covering enrollment growth," said Stephanie Higginson, president of the BC School Trustees Association. "Unfortunately, funding announced today does not cover inflationary cost increases faced by school districts, nor are there any commitments to cover increased cost pressures related to the pandemic."

A large portion of the increased funds are directly linked to wage increases negotiated in the last round of provincial bargaining, along with enrollment growth across the province and there are no committed funds to sustain health and safety measures put in place to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. While operating funds essentially remain static, boards of education were happy to see increased funds for youth mental health and wellness programs funded through the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions. We welcome more integrated care teams and Foundry services and look forward to working with government to see this critical service in place this September. The COVID-19 response plan for the last school year was supported through a provincial grant of \$42.47 million and a federal grant of \$216.84 million. Boards of education were anticipating additional pandemic recovery funds however there are no committed COVID-19 funds in this budget, making planning for the next school year difficult.

"Ultimately, districts will have to look closely at their budgets and we may see some hard conversations occurring in preparation for next school year," said Higginson. "While the education budget did not get the bump we were hoping for, we note that other provincial initiatives, such as quality childcare, poverty reduction initiatives and youth mental health initiatives will provide critical services in areas that will support improved student outcomes in school."

The increase in capital funding demonstrates a strong commitment to ensuring student and staff safety in upgraded and new school facilities. Boards of education are pleased to see increases to capital programs that help fund overdue maintenance and upgrade costs to aging school infrastructure. We are also happy to see continued investment in new schools to cover enrolment growth, demonstrating a continued commitment to end the dependence on portables for growing school districts.

"We welcome the increase to the capital budget over the next three years and look forward to partnering with government to work on creating the safe, high-quality learning environments that students and staff deserve. Boards of education will continue to advocate for access to the \$3.25 billion dollar pandemic contingency fund to sustain health and safety measures necessary during the COVID-19 recovery stage," stated Higginson.

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