



September 28, 2024

Suzanne Hoffman  
Chief Executive Officer  
British Columbia School Trustees Association  
shoffman@bcsta.org

Dear Ms. Hoffman,

Thank you for your July 12, 2024, letter outlining the BCSTA's key priorities for public education in British Columbia. The Conservative Party of British Columbia shares your commitment to ensuring that every student across the province is given the opportunity to succeed, and we welcome the opportunity to address the issues you've raised.

We understand that inclusive education, capital and deferred maintenance funding, and recruitment and retention of staff are critical to the success of our public education system. Please find our initial responses to your specific questions below:

**Inclusive Education and Student Success**

1. The Conservative Party believes that every child, regardless of background or ability, should feel safe, respected, and supported in their learning environment. We will work to ensure that public schools promote values that unify our communities while respecting diverse perspectives.
2. We will prioritize accessibility by modernizing school infrastructure and working with districts to ensure that both physical and programmatic accessibility needs are met.
3. Mental health and addiction programs: Addressing mental health challenges is crucial. Our approach includes working with local communities to develop and/or integrate treatment, rehabilitation, and prevention programs that are tailored to students' specific mental health and addiction awareness needs.

4. Indigenous students must be equipped with the resources they need to succeed. This begins by listening to First Nations communities, addressing critical gaps in support, and ensuring rural school districts are able to deliver the opportunities to students that are available elsewhere.

### **Capital and Deferred Maintenance Funding**

1. Child care spaces: Our government will streamline approval processes and reduce red tape, ensuring that schools can quickly respond to community needs for additional child care spaces. We will also partner with school districts to unlock extra childcare space capacity within both existing and newly-built school properties.
2. Addressing capital funding shortfalls: Under the NDP, the Ministry of Education takes a reactive approach to capital funding - leaving parents hanging for years. It's unacceptable. School funding must be proactive, so spots are available for kids when needed. We will review the forecasting and budgeting practices at the Ministry so school capacity is delivered where needed, when needed. A Conservative government will prioritize a comprehensive review of school infrastructure funding. We will work with school districts to ensure that operational and inflation-driven costs are adequately managed while ensuring that necessary upgrades, including seismic retrofitting, are completed on time and within budget.
3. Climate change initiatives: Every dollar of education funding should be for the betterment of learning outcomes, and the wellbeing of students. This also applies to the design of school buildings. As some schools are rebuilt for seismic safety, the replacement buildings will have improved energy efficiency.

### **Recruitment and Retention of Staff**

1. Addressing staff shortages: We will reduce bureaucratic barriers and actively recruit educators, particularly in areas facing critical shortages. Programs to attract and retain Indigenous staff will be expanded, and we will work with post-secondary institutions to increase teacher training capacities.
2. Rural and urban district needs: Our plan includes targeted strategies to meet the distinct challenges of rural and northern school districts, ensuring that students in these regions receive the same quality of education as those in urban areas.

While we prepare the release of our education platform, we are grateful for the input provided by the BCSTA. Our party remains committed to building and maintaining a world-class public education system that serves the needs of all British Columbians, and we look forward to sharing more specific policy details as we approach the election.

Thank you again for your advocacy and for the work you do on behalf of BC's students and educators. We look forward to ongoing dialogue with the BCSTA and other stakeholders as we develop a comprehensive, common-sense education plan for British Columbia.

Sincerely,

Aisha Estey  
President, Conservative Party of British Columbia