



BOARD OF EDUCATION

Delivered via email to: educ.minister@gov.bc.ca

March 23, 2015

The Honourable Peter Fassbender
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Fassbender:

The “administrative savings” of 54 million dollars that the provincial budget has required of the school districts will put extreme hardship on the students and families of British Columbia.

Our district is small and every dollar is significant to us. I will not detail the many cuts we have made as they are no different from those well articulated to you in the past few weeks by many school districts. We have had to find approximately half a million dollars in each of the last two years just to keep our schools able to offer the same programs. These savings have been necessitated due to rising costs that have been mandated by your administration and include increases in hydro rates, MSP premiums, WorkSafeBC premiums and the unfunded CUPE agreement of two years ago. We also have a rising number of students with unique needs and the costs of serving these students are greater than the funding provided by government. These costs are not a one-time strain and continue to stress our budget year after year.

In our district, we made an extraordinary effort the past year to reduce our energy use and have tracked the savings. We estimate that we have saved the equivalent of a teacher’s salary. We have committed to get those funds back into student support. Now you have insisted we send that and more back to you as a claw back in this year’s budget.

The stress of constant reductions in budget is extremely hard on our staff, as many don’t know if it will be their pay cheques that will be lost or reduced. Yet in the media they read about increases and renewals to contracts for consultation and the premier’s ever-increasing communication staff. Where are your efforts at belt-tightening in your ministry?

Minister, I must ask some personal questions of you, not only on behalf of trustees but on behalf of parents who are constantly fund-raising so their children can have a field trip or a guest speaker at their school. I ask also on behalf of our teachers who bring their own materials to school because we can no longer supply them adequately and on behalf of principals who work unspeakably long hours ensuring schools are excellent on ever shrinking budgets.

How can you talk of support of education in British Columbia and refuse to treat the school districts with respect?

I witnessed you sign a memorandum of understanding with the BCSTA in early December. In that document, you agreed to communicate and collaborate with districts. Twice since then, with cuts to adult education program funds and with February's budget requirements, you have delivered blows to the operations of BC's school districts without any discussion or notice. Your approach clearly demonstrates a lack of respect.

Why did you sign that Memorandum of Understanding if you can't or won't abide by it?

I ask these questions on behalf of many in our communities, but most of all on behalf of the children and families who need our school system to deliver healthy, positive educational opportunities. I urge you to reverse these cuts and increase education funding so the students of our province can grow up with good basic skills to enter jobs and careers that government claims to be creating for them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Betty Baxter
Chair, Board of Education
School District No 46 (Sunshine Coast)

p.c. Board of Education of School District No. 46 (Sunshine Coast)
Patrick Bocking, Superintendent of Schools
Nicholas Weswick, Secretary-Treasurer
Louise Herle, SCTA President
Carolyn Smith, CUPE Local 801 President
Nicholas Simons, MLA, Powell River-Sunshine Coast
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