

## **School District 79 Board of Education Submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

The Board of Education for School District 79, Cowichan Valley, represents over 8000 learners, over 1300 employees, and provides educational excellence to 12 communities located on Vancouver Island and in the un-ceded territory of Hul'q'umi'num' people.

Our 8000 learners come from a diverse and complex population. A population with a high proportion of First Nations, as reflected in our school make up. A population where over 30% of learners live on, or below the poverty line, and a population with many learners who require supports for their complex and differing needs. These complex issues, coupled with aging and seismically unfit infrastructure, present unique challenges for the Board of Education.

Chief amongst these complex issues for the Standing Committee on Finance and Government to consider for Budget 2019 is the importance of fully funding Bill 28, and the restoration of class size and composition – so that learners and educators are adequately supported in and out of the classroom. Another issue of great importance is the need to provide capital funding for replacement schools, purchase portables, and renovate current classrooms to support our rapidly growing populations, and to ensure these spaces are also learner-centered and aligned with all of the learning opportunities the new curriculum provides. The Board also welcomes the review and revision to the K-12 funding formula and stresses the importance of a co-governance model focused on partnership and collaboration. There is a strong need for leadership from the government to ensure the proper resources are available for boards to deliver educational excellence for our learners for years to come.

### **BILL 28 FUNDING:**

The Board is encouraged to see that class size and composition language has been restored, and the district has been able to hire 79 new teachers under this funding. However, class size isn't the only issue to address in order to properly support our diverse learner population. One of the very significant unresolved issues from the implementation of Bill 28 was the removal of the Learning Improvement Fund (LIF).

The Learning Improvement Fund gave boards the flexibility to address issues like additional supports around the classroom teacher, or being able to support a learner with an educational assistant. It was a stunning model that made a big difference for learners and teachers.

The removal of LIF due to Bill 28 has had a significant impact on the Cowichan Valley School District. Restoring on-going funding, similar in nature to LIF, is crucial for support of learners and teachers across the province and would allow boards the freedom to allocate these funds to emergent needs.

Additionally, the Board is greatly concerned with the overhead component of Bill 28 Classroom Enhancement Funding. Currently, this component is not being fully funded, and districts are required to fund the additional associated costs of adding more classroom teachers and creating the spaces to facilitate meaningful learning.

A specific example of the added financial stressors placed on districts is that the overhead costs provided does not take into account the complexity of individual districts and their local collective agreements. Much of the district's overhead goes to covering sick leave for teachers instead of important supports like custodial, classroom set-up, clerical staff, education assistants, and others.

In the Cowichan Valley School District, almost half of the overhead component of the Bill 28 funds will go to supporting teacher sick leave. This is because the overhead does not correlate with the number of teachers hired. If the number of teachers a district is required to hire due to these factors increases, so too should the overhead costs – but with the current formula, this is not the case. This formula change leaves little money to purchase portables or renovate older spaces to support 73 additional classrooms, both of which were expenses previously borne by the province.

As a result, the Board finds that the funding does not cover actual costs for the district. Sick leave should not be treated as an overhead cost, it is an expense that should be fully funded within the primary Bill 28 funding envelope, and capital for teaching spaces such as portables and renovations should again be covered by the province to ensure appropriate spaces for our learners. This two-fold solution is what will truly make a difference in our district.

#### **CAPITAL FUNDING:**

Ensuring our learners have innovative and safe places to learn is another priority in our district. The Cowichan Valley School District's largest secondary school, Cowichan Secondary, is currently 69 years old, and, as of 2015, requires an estimated \$27 million in repairs to bring it up to current seismic safety requirement. That number is projected to be significantly higher with the new seismic assessment report.

Since 2014/15, the Cowichan Valley School District has been experiencing significant year after year increase in enrolment, after years of decreases. This rapid increase, which is predicted to continue as the Cowichan Valley grows, coupled with the restored class size and composition language, puts the need for a secondary school with increased learner capacity at the forefront of the district's capital planning.

Since 2004, the district has been working with local institutions like Vancouver Island University (VIU), and local governments including the City of Duncan and Municipality of North Cowichan, toward the realization of a common interest – Cowichan Place. A concept that will promote the long-term vitality and livability of the Cowichan Valley.

The Cowichan Place concept includes a new secondary school, which would be located next to the VIU Cowichan Campus and the Cowichan Valley Regional District (CVRD) recreation complex, on land that the school district already acquired with the approval and funding of the Ministry of Education. The concept includes a Trades Training Centre of Excellence, which will be jointly operated by School District 79 and VIU and highly endorsed by the Cowichan Tribes First Nation. The facility will offer current and relevant trades training opportunities for learners and adults, which will add much-needed skilled labour to the BC economy.

The fundamental anchor of our local government's local area planning is the replacement of Cowichan Secondary School, which was built in 1949 and is in urgent need of seismic and building systems upgrades. As of 2015, five out of six blocks of the school have been assessed as being seismically high risk. That risk is not acceptable for the learners, educators, or the community, who are in urgent need of a safe and functional place to learn.

After examining several options for upgrading or replacing this school, the Board has developed a strong business case that demonstrates that a new 1,500 capacity secondary school on the new Cowichan Place site is the best option. This option also contributes to an incredible community vision, supported by our local government partners and the community at large. Cowichan Place will benefit future generations of citizens in the Cowichan Valley.

Realizing this plan requires the current government to make a large investment into capital infrastructure for BC schools. With the exciting new curriculum that focuses on the personalization of learning, the Board finds that the aging schools in the district don't align with the innovative learning environments our students and teachers need to truly bring this curriculum to life.

The Cowichan Valley School District is already being innovative with where students learn, and with how we make the spaces currently available work in a way that provides our learners with an optimal learning environment. However, this is becoming increasingly difficult to do, particularly with class size and composition challenges, and ever-increasing enrolment.

The District currently has 36 portables being used as learning environments for students. Our kids, and our communities, deserve better. They deserve safe schools that are built to reflect a modern, innovative way of learning. They deserve a school that inspires them, and gives them every opportunity they need to succeed in their learning journey. The Board asks the government to please focus on investments into capital projects, specifically the replacement of aging and unsafe infrastructures that no longer meet the needs of learners.

## **REVIEW AND REVISION OF THE K – 12 FUNDING FORMULA**

Finally, the Board would like to support the review of the K-12 funding, formula which is an important request that the British Columbia School Trustees Association (BCSTA) continues to bring to the table. This review must be more than just a technical review and should include the establishment of important guiding principles that ensure the funding districts receive are aligned with the unique needs of their learners.

## **CO-GOVERNANCE OF THE K-12 EDUCATION SYSTEM**

The Board of Education would also like to support the BCSTA in their quest for ongoing collaboration and partnership as new policies and programs are developed that will directly impact the K-12 education system in BC. We would also like to support BCSTA feedback that:

- Our Board 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
- Capital construction projects proceed as quickly and efficiently as possible.
- Adequate, predictable and sustainable funding must form the base of any funding distribution model.
- Our Board of Education for you that the money directed to public education is money very well spent for the future as the foundation to a democratic society.

In 2014, the former Minister of Education signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the BCSTA that focused on a stronger co-governance relationship and a commitment to working as partners as policies, programs, projects, and funding options are developed. The Cowichan Valley School District Board of Education strongly encourages the government to continue to honour this MOU, and to recognize and respect the experience and knowledge that each Board of Education holds regarding their respective districts and the capacity and challenges within them.

## **CONCLUSION**

This is a very exciting time to work in the K-12 education system in BC. However, there are some very real challenges that continue to go unaddressed in government budgets, and these challenges are continuing to impact our learners. The Board urgently asks the government to consider the factors laid out above as the next budget is developed. Education is the key to the future, and boards must be able to adequately support children in their learning journey. Thank you for your time, and for the opportunity to contribute to this conversation. The Cowichan Valley School District Board of Education looks forward to continuing our work with your government in the years to come.

Respectfully Submitted,

School District 79 Board of Education

Candace Spilsbury – Chair

Barb de Groot – Co-Chair

Elizabeth Croft – Trustee

Randy Doman – Trustee

Rob Hutchins – Trustee

Cathy Schmidt – Trustee

Joe Thorne – Trustee