



# School District No. 60

## PEACE RIVER NORTH

**DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION OFFICE**

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY-TREASURER

June 19, 2019

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services  
Office of the Clerk of Committees  
Room 224, Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

*Attention: Chairperson and Honourable Committee Members*

**RE: Finance Consultations – Presentation Briefing – The Board of Education of School District No. 60 (Peace River North)**

Thank you for the opportunity to present our needs and recommendations. School District No. 60 (SD60) is a vast, diverse school district serving just over 6,000 students and their families in 22 schools ranging from small two room schools in rural communities to a large secondary school in the City of Fort St. John. The needs and interests of those students vary; meeting those needs is the Board of Education's highest priority.

The Board of Education, its management team, and its other employees are highly committed to the spirit of the district's motto which is "TOGETHER WE LEARN". Implicit in this motto, is a commitment to teamwork, a sense of shared responsibility, and a focus on learning for both students and adults in the system. Thus, the Board identifies its relationship with its highly competent and committed staff as the district's greatest asset. Students benefit daily from their efforts, as well as from the innovative partnerships the school district has created with industry, business, and community agencies.

Our presentation today consists of the top five challenges for SD60 that we identified in our last presentation to you in 2018 and still feel they are our top concerns that are affecting our ability to support and implement the goals of our Board, the Government of British Columbia and the Ministry of Education.

1. Capital Funding
2. Funding Formula Review
3. Contract Negotiations
4. Recruitment and Retention
5. Staff Compensation

### **Capital Funding**

SD60 provides educational programming utilizing 22 schools and 4 district support facilities. Our District has 13 Urban schools housing 81% of our students and 9 Rural schools providing service to the remaining 19% of our students.

Even with the opening of our brand new school, Margaret Ma Murray Community School, our urban schools are still 119% over-capacity. The Ministry has recognized our capital needs by announcing funding for another new elementary school creating another 505 spaces. However, our middle and high schools are still 141% over-capacity.

To add to our capital challenges, VFA Inc. last assessed our FCI index in 2010. At that time, 52 % of our facilities rated as very poor, 40 % rated as poor, 4 % rated average and 4 % rated good.

The definition of very poor and poor is "Does not meet requirements". So not only are the SD60 schools overcrowded, **all but 2** are labeled with significant building challenges and at end of life.

### **Capital: New Facilities**

District enrollment count at September 30, 2017 was an increase of another 235 FTE, 2018 indications are an increase of another 100 FTE. Going forward, our enrollment projections show a consistent increase of approximately 150 FTE per year. These enrollment estimates do not take into consideration exponential growth when a Liquefied Natural Gas project is announced. Regular enrollment growth combined with the Supreme Court of Canada decision regarding Classroom/Composition creates the need for additional new schools over the upcoming years, particularly the middle school and high school levels.

Currently, the district is advocating Capital Branch for advancement of a middle school project, which ideally should be open next year to meet our demand. However, in the 19/20 school year, we will need to add 4 portables to our middle schools, which is a short-term solution. If construction of a new middle school is not announced, SD60 will be 216% overcapacity by 2028.

### **Capital: Replacement Schools**

Two of our active elementary schools were built in 1945, yet are still required to be utilized beyond working capacity and are now at the point of requiring immediate attention to be replaced. Major work has recently been done at both schools to ensure basic health and safety of students and staff. The delay in replacing old schools has resulted in increased costs both for the district and the government to maintain these facilities. These two facilities have been on our capital plan for several years (one school has been on the capital plan for almost 10 years).

Given that SD60 is located in the Northeast corner of the province, we do not have access to Seismic and Building Envelope Capital Funding. Of the overall Capital Funding in 17/18 of 635 million, only 65 million is available to Districts through a School Enhancement Program (SEP). That is just 10% of the overall capital funding to address facilities and building systems improvement projects, including: • plumbing, boiler and other mechanical upgrades • heating and ventilation upgrades • roofing upgrades • window, lighting and electrical system upgrades • safety enhancements including fire protection • flooring upgrades • washroom upgrades.

The funding allocated to this program is simply not enough to address our needs when 92% of our facilities are rated poor or worse.

In addition, the Annual Facility Grant (AFG) for capital maintenance is insufficient for the growing demands of our aging infrastructure. We simply don't have enough funds to fully ensure proper maintenance of our buildings, therefore we triage based on emerging issues and greatest need, making us reactive instead of proactive in keeping our schools safe learning environments.

Since our FCI was last assessed, we have dealt with leaking roofs, water ingress, mould, structural failures, sewer system failures, failed electrical/HVAC systems and crumbling exterior envelopes.

SD60 cannot overstate how significant our capital requirements are. We maximize the funding we receive and do our best to maintain safe facilities for students but the funding available is woefully inadequate.

SD60 respectfully requests a review of capital allocations, particularly the AFG and SEP allocations.

### **Funding Formula Review**

The Ministry of Education is currently undertaking the momentous task of a review of the funding formula for K-12 Education in an effort to create funding that is:

Responsive, Equitable, Stable & Predictable, Flexible, Transparent and Accountable

SD60 supports this effort however, the funding review creates angst given our recent experience when the previous transportation funding was replaced with a new funding model called the "student location factor".

In 2011, the change in how transportation funding was calculated causing an immediate reduction in SD60 funding of \$541,000, despite the fact that providing the service was already costing the district more than the transportation funding prior to the change.

On August 10, 2016, the former government announced additional student transportation funding of \$14.7 million and while the additional funding is welcome, we still have a funding shortfall of \$300,000 per annum. SD60 has been advocating for a correction since the new formula was implemented but to no avail.

Our valid concern is that the new funding model will not adequately address the challenges of rural and remote districts. Additionally, SD60 is concerned that, should the new model have unintended consequences, there will not be a mechanism to have those concerns heard and addressed.

We respectfully request that the Standing Finance Committee provide their support to ensure that the funding formula review process achieves its objectives and that the new model is truly flexible if there are immediate, significant negative consequences to districts.

### **Contract Negotiations**

Teaching and Support Collective Agreements expire in 2019. Negotiations are conducted at the provincial level through BCPSEA. In 2019, SD60 requests that BCPSEA is adequately funded for these important negotiations on our behalf. Specifically, the Board hopes for a negotiated settlement rather than job action and that the interim Classroom Enhancement Fund can be incorporated into the funding envelope. The current measures to address the Supreme Court of Canada decision are difficult to implement, come with significant restrictions impeding the Board from truly applying the funds to the highest student needs and place an extensive accountability burden on district staff.

### **Recruitment and Retention**

Every year we struggle to fill all of our vacant teaching positions (ie. particularly specialty teachers and teachers in the rural settings). Now with the recent Supreme Court of Canada decision regarding class size and composition, we are having even more challenges finding certified staff to meet our students' needs. In September 2018, our schools opened with 22 unfilled teaching positions. This necessitates placing uncertified instructors in front of children on letters of permission.

SD60 asks that a concept of incentives such as forgivable student loans or supplemental housing compensation be considered to assist in recruiting teachers to rural communities. Cost of living in our communities is reflective of the available energy sector wages/compensation, which can make it difficult for our district to be competitive.

Similar issues relate to support staff positions especially tradespersons, bus drivers and educational assistants, often resulting in the inability to hire these crucial support positions. For example, tradespersons wages in the public school sector were last reviewed provincially three bargaining rounds ago. Locally, the discrepancy began in the 1980's when the district was able to bargain lower CUPE rates matching a downturn in the local industry. At the time, this made financial sense, however, when the local contracts moved to the provincial system for monetary items, our lower wages were also locked into the CUPE grids. Local market wages have now increased considerably, while we are confined the current grid. The significant discrepancy between existing CUPE salary grids and current market rates continues to widen.

SD60 requests a review of CUPE local market rates and mechanisms to address recruitment and retention issues.

**Staff Compensation & Funding**

The district has fully implemented the allowed Public Sector Employers' Council increases to our exempt staff, principals, and vice-principals, however, these increases are not funded and require school districts to pay increases through their general operating funds. As the new compensation guidelines and the approval for any compensation increases for exempt staff, principals and vice principals are provided by the PSEC, we believe the wage increases should be fully funded by the government in the same manner as unionized staff collective agreement increases.

Additionally, there is currently no mechanism for increases to our exempt employee group beyond this current increase. We request flexibility at the local level to compensate staff appropriately. Specifically, the restrictions make it impossible to adequately compensate existing district staff based on performance. These wage restrictions are not just applied to Senior Managers but also to HR, Payroll, Facilities and IT staff. These restrictions exacerbate our retention and recruitment issues. Thus, SD60 has experienced almost 100% turnover in the Board office, at the levels of exempt staff below our senior team. We have the ability to place new staff along the grids appropriate to candidate experience and potential yet we are still restricted with existing staff. This creates an inequity for existing staff that must be addressed.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin Evans, Vice Chair  
Board of Education  
School District #60 (Peace River North)