



Wednesday July 26, 2017

The Honourable Rob Fleming, Minister of Education

via email

Re: Pressing Concerns within Vancouver School District #39

Dear Mr Fleming,

The Parent Advocacy Network (PAN) would like to extend our formal congratulations to you on your appointment as Minister of Education within the new NDP cabinet. Your long service as opposition spokesperson, your knowledge of the complexity of the issues, and your demonstrated commitment to a strong, fully-funded and equitable public education system inspires confidence in parents. You bring to this portfolio the strong, decisive leadership needed to address the problems that have accumulated over the past 16 years and restore public confidence in a government committed to providing predictable, sustainable funding to meet the learning needs of all BC children.

PAN and parents would like to draw your attention to two critical public education issues that require urgent and immediate attention:

1) Concerns arising from the implementation of the Supreme Court ruling

We are concerned that full funding be allocated to all school boards, including Vancouver, to allow districts to fully implement and comply with the restored class size and composition language as stipulated in the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the BCTF. However, as you also know, this will not address some of the unintentional consequences of the restored language, and the short timeline for implementation that have serious implications for children in Vancouver and other districts.

In Vancouver, many schools have been unable to fill vacancies in the first round of job postings with further vacancies opening up as teachers move to preferred positions in other districts. Given the current lack of TOCs (teachers on call) within the VSB, and the situation in which resource and support workers have been seconded to cover teaching staff absences, we are concerned there will not be sufficient teachers to fill the required positions. This is creating legitimate concerns that there are insufficient qualified teachers available to fill these positions for September which may result in classes without teachers. Vancouver, with its high cost of living, is in urgent need of financial assistance in providing incentives to attract qualified professional teachers from out of province to address this hiring problem.

PAN is also concerned that the implementation of the restored language does not address the needs of student populations equitably. Inner city schools are not perceiving any benefit from the restored class size, and composition language even where large numbers of designated special needs students would warrant this and space is available. In fact, these schools, are losing their additional resource supports through the Learning Improvement Fund (LIF), as funds shift from a needs-based criteria to one that is formula-driven and based on formal special needs designations. Counselors are still allocated based on school population rather than the degree of need within the student body. Furthermore, cutbacks to school psychologists over the last 16 years and the long wait times for school based psych ed. assessments, means that less affluent schools whose families cannot afford private assessments have larger numbers of students with "undesigned" behavioural issues that do not factor within the composition language.

2) VSB-Specific Concerns

PAN firmly believes that the VSB should have a publicly accountable, democratically elected school board of trustees. We are glad you have publicly indicated that you will retain Ms. Turner until an elected, fully-functioning, Board of Trustees is in place. This will ensure stability and continuity within the VSB while it continues to work, in consultation with stakeholders, to restore and rebuild a full and cohesive senior management team; this includes the active search for a replacement superintendent, anticipation of the planned November departure of Acting Superintendent John Lewis and a recently hired secretary-treasurer.

Parents would prefer to see less partisanship within the Board in order to enable elected trustees to deliberate and act for the best interests of student learning, first and foremost. In the long term, this can only be achieved within the context of stable, predictable and adequate funding that will enable each school district to ensure that all children have the opportunity to access a quality education that meets their learning needs. As you are well aware, even with the additional funding as a result of the Supreme Court ruling, the VSB is anticipating a \$25 million dollar shortfall over the next five years.

We hope that you and Ms. Turner will work together to address these issues as quickly as possible.

Thank you once again for your commitment to work for the provision of a quality and equitable public education system for the benefit of all children in BC.

We look forward to continued conversation with you around public education.

Sincerely yours,
Parent Advocacy Network

CC:

Scott MacDonald, Deputy Minister of Education

Suzanne Hoffman, Chief Educator

Dianne Turner, Official Trustee, VSB

Gordon Swan, President, BCSTA

Hon Adrian Dix, MLA

Hon Andrew Wilkinson, MLA

Hon David Eby, MLA

Hon George Chow, MLA

Hon George Heyman, MLA

Hon Mable Elmore, MLA

Hon Melanie Mark, MLA

Hon Michael Lee, MLA

Hon Sam Sullivan, MLA

Hon Shane Simpson, MLA

Hon Spencer Chandra Herbert, MLA