

April 28, 2016

Hon. Mike Bernier  
Minister of Education, MLA Peace River South

Dear Minister Bernier:

RE: Vancouver School Board 2016 Budget Deficit

We are writing to you today regarding the 2016 Vancouver School Board budget deficit of \$24 million. At our meeting on April 14<sup>th</sup>, the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee unanimously passed a motion to write to our local representatives and share our concerns about the state of public education in Vancouver. The Committee believes that every child must have access to a well-funded education system that supports their needs. Committee Members have noticed that over the past decade, education in B.C has been subject to continuous cuts to services that support students in their success. This year's budget deficit in Vancouver exemplifies the difficulties this district faces in delivering quality education to students.

Particularly, the Committee is concerned about the well-being of students attending public schools in Vancouver. Compared with the rest of the country, B.C has the second lowest funding per student and teachers are among the lowest paid in Canada. The process of seismically upgrading schools has already been pushed back from 2020 to 2030 in turn endangering the lives of students in at risk schools in the event of an earthquake. In 2015, the Committee wrote to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services about public education. The recommendations of the Standing Committee included "sustainable and adequate funding" for school districts (see attachments). Currently, the Committee sees the current service level and budget deficit as a failure of the Government to follow through on its own recommendations from a bipartisan committee.

With respect to the new government requirement of achieving a 95% utilization ratio in order to receive further funding for projects, the Committee does not agree that this is the best path for the support of a community learning environment. The Committee stands firm on its belief that critical childcare space and resource rooms should not be counted as empty space as they serve students in support of their educational goals. As the Vancouver school district looks at closing schools to meet this requirement, we see this both as a loss of vital community spaces and service accessibility for disabled and special needs children. Students deserve to stay in the schools that they call home and work in a space that is safe and seismically sound.

The lack of funding over the past decade is continuously putting British Columbia's strong education system at risk with many valued programs on the list of budget cuts. Once again, the Committee reaffirms its support for the arts and specialty education programs. We believe that every child in public schools should have access to programs that allows them to foster their potential and empower students to pursue their interests. Committee Members attended one of the budget consultations, and heard from citizens in the LGBTQ community that the Anti-Racism and Anti-Homophobia Teacher Mentor position, which is eliminated from this year's budget, saves lives. This is just one example of the real-world impacts to the well-being of students. Every year this district attempts to save programs for the benefit of students. But this year's deficit of \$24 million will most likely require cuts to cherished programs such as mini school and elementary school music programs. We ask that the B.C Government properly fund the education system, not only in Vancouver, but also throughout British Columbia so that students can continue to access imperative programs that meet their educational needs and ensures their safety.

If you are in Vancouver, Committee Members would appreciate a meeting with you in the coming weeks to discuss our concerns. We look forward to your reply and will be following up on our request.

Best regards,



Yasmin Ali  
Committee Chairperson  
(604) 319-9334  
yasmin.aliya03@gmail.com



Aaron Leung  
Committee Vice-Chair  
(604) 970-7818  
aaronchrisleung@gmail.com

Copies to: All Vancouver Board of Education Trustees and Student Trustee  
Hon. Suzanne Anton, Minister of Justice, MLA for Vancouver-Fraserview  
Hon. Stephanie Cadieux, Minister of Children and Family Development  
Spencer Chandra Herbert, MLA for Vancouver-West End  
Hon. Michael de Jong, Minister of Finance  
Adrian Dix, MLA Vancouver-Kingsway  
Doug Donaldson, Children and Family Development Critic  
David Eby, MLA Vancouver-Point Grey  
Mable Elmore, MLA Vancouver-Kensington  
Rob Fleming, Education Critic, MLA Victoria-Swan Lake  
George Heyman, MLA Vancouver-Fairview  
Carole James, Finance Critic, MLA Victoria-Beacon Hill  
Melanie Mark, MLA Vancouver-Mount Pleasant  
Shane Simpson, MLA Vancouver-Hastings  
Moirra Stilwell, MLA Vancouver-Langara  
Sam Sullivan, MLA Vancouver-False Creek  
Hon. Andrew Wilkinson, Minister of Advanced Education, MLA Vancouver-Quilchena

## Approval of Minutes

MOVED by Frank Yan  
SECONDED by Joy Zhou

THAT the minutes of the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee meeting held on February 18, 2015, be approved.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY  
(Lena Hozaima and Tasha Nijjar absent for the vote)

## VARY AGENDA

MOVED by Aaron Leung

THAT Item 6 be dealt with following the completion of Item 2.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY AND  
BY THE REQUIRED MAJORITY

*Note: For clarity, the minutes are recorded in chronological order.*

### 1. Long Range Facilities Plan

Amanda Gibbs, Principal, Public Assembly and Kelly Isford-Saxon, Manager of Planning, Vancouver School Board, provided a presentation on this matter and responded to questions.

MOVED by Aaron Leung  
SECONDED by Joy Fan

THAT the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee form an Education Subcommittee.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

MOVED by Aaron Leung  
SECONDED by Mab Oloman

THAT the Children, Youth and Families Advisory Committee send a letter to the Minister of Education, Vancouver MLAs, and Board Trustees, regarding the budget deficit and Long Range Facilities Plan no later than April 28, 2016.

CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY

### 2. Future City and Committee Projects

Robyn Newton, Social Planner, Social Policy and Projects, provided an overview of the City's Healthy City Strategy and noted current and upcoming projects associated with the initiative.