

June 12, 2014

The Honourable Mike de Jong
Minister of Finance and Government House Leader
P.O. Box 9048, STN Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister De Jong,

Subject: Capital Project and Seismic Funding

At the May 27, 2014 Public Board Meeting, the Board of Education passed the following motion related to the Provincial Government's change in capital project and seismic funding.

that the Board of Education communicate to the Minister of Finance, the serious impact and concerns created by the policy requiring Boards to contribute up to 50% of the cost of the seismic or capital projects, and;

that in the interest of the safety of students and staff, the Minister of Finance rescind this policy.

This policy direction is a significant change from the provincial government's commitment to fully fund seismic projects and is the source of serious concern for our School District and school districts across the province.

The Provincial Government's new seismic/capital funding policy creates an extreme disincentive to municipal governments, across the province, to support the disposition of surplus school district lands. Requiring financial contributions to seismic upgrades, rather than towards replacement buildings, impacts the lifespan and quality of school facilities and sites, as well as restricting the potential, future community amenities within a municipality. These factors will directly impact the effectiveness and viability of the Release of Assets for Economic Generation (REAG) program as municipal governments and community members become disinclined to support rezoning applications.

The proceeds from the disposition of surplus school sites are identified by Boards of Education to address high priority issues, such as, full replacement projects, land assembly for new schools, or enhancements to seismic projects. Boards have a deep, intimate knowledge and understanding of the needs of the communities they serve. Yet, Boards of Education are now being told that they may need to "change their priorities". This change in policy direction has been characterized by members of our community as downloading the cost of seismic upgrades onto school districts.

The costs to maintain aging infrastructure that is seismically upgraded, rather than fully replaced, places a significant future economic burden on both school districts and the Provincial Government. This is not a responsible approach to long-term capital investment or facilities management. Boards of Education understand that they may be required to fund the difference between a seismic upgrade and the full replacement cost, and are fully prepared to do so.

On behalf of our Board, I would ask that you, as the Minister of Finance, act to rescind this policy and to fulfill the Provincial Government's commitment to fully fund seismic projects so that we may continue our partnership in creating safe, 21st century schools for our students, staff, and the communities we collectively serve.

Sincerely,

NORTH VANCOUVER BOARD OF EDUCATION

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Franci Stratton', is written over a light grey rectangular background.

Franci Stratton
Chair

FWS/mg

cc: Honourable Peter Fassbender, Minister of Education
Hon. Naomi Yamamoto, Minister of State for Small Business, MLA North Vancouver-Lonsdale
Ralph Sultan, MLA West Vancouver-Capilano
Jane Thornthwaite, MLA North Vancouver-Seymour
Board of Education, School District No. 44 (North Vancouver)
John Lewis, Superintendent of Schools
Georgia Allison, Secretary Treasurer
All Boards of Education