

Submission to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Submitted by
Surrey Students Now

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Surrey Students Now is a grassroots organization comprised of parents who recognize the importance of advocacy for public education.

In this submission we will highlight key issues that affect our District.

Surrey Students Now feels like a broken record. We spoke to this Committee last year with very similar messaging to this year. While we are hopeful with a change in government, we will not relent in our advocacy for our Surrey School District.

To update you, if you aren't already aware, Surrey now has 325 portables, over 70,000 students, with more than 10% of them in portables (more than 7000 students). We grow at a rate of 1000 students per year. There is disconnect between what the City allows in growth and density and the school infrastructure provided by the Province. Portables are meant to be short-term structures for when schools are under seismic upgrades or when another school is under construction - not long-term solutions.

Build Schools Now.

It is clear government needs to get creative when it comes to building new schools, and fast. Surrey Students Now implore you to look at other provinces to see how they have built schools in an expedient manner. When meeting with the District to discuss an upcoming project, look at the priority list and bundle the schools in front of Treasury Board for approval. It is budgeted and accounted for. We have already proven need, it's time to start building.

Other ways to expedite is to create a streamlined communication channel with the City planning staff to ensure school related permits are approved as a top priority and reuse school building plans. We can no longer wait for schools in Surrey. We need you to approve the capital projects now.

Educational Programming.

The Ministry of Education needs to change its **policy** regarding capital expenditures. The Ministry of Education needs to rescind **Policy (2.3)** that states '*a district must adjust educational programming*' and create policy that protects the location and curricular approaches of existing programs, enshrines the individuality of learning, and simply recognizes a child needs a seat in a school building.

2.3 Due to Restoration of Collective Agreement Language Policy states:

"It is expected that school districts first implement changes within their control to address space needs, such as the remedies available within the agreement, reinstating classrooms which are

currently leased out to third-party non-educational tenants (excluding StrongStart BC), changing catchment areas (or restricting enrollment), and adjusting grade configurations and educational programming to make use of all available classroom space."

All available classroom space was already being utilized prior to the language coming back. The District was then further tasked with finding more instructional space, and to now consider non-instructional spaces including, not limited to the library, the stage, storage rooms, etc. In some extreme cases, instructional space such as music rooms and computer labs are being transformed into general instruction classrooms. This means the erosion of very valuable curriculum and teachers without classrooms to teach in. Not all schools had to make these concessions, but many did. Further, educational programming such as French Immersion, Traditional, Fine Arts, Montessori, Band, Inter-A, etc. has been eroded through this policy.

The provincial policy surrounding educational programming essentially dictates Surrey District Policy 9200 that states: "*Programs of choice will be offered only in space surplus to the needs of the neighbourhood school program.*" Surrey Students Now believes that every child needs a seat in a school, regardless of program. And that each of these choice programs are vital to meet the needs of the students in them. When the programs are reduced, eliminated, or moved, an unstable environment is created. When parents make an educational choice for their children, parents and children need to have the program remain stable. An example of misinformation that we keep hearing is that we have a shortage of French Immersion teachers, however, that's simply not the case. What we have is a large number of French Immersion teachers unwilling to stay within an instable program and they choose to teach in English classes instead. There needs to be policy created to protect the location and curricular approaches of existing programs and provide continuity for the individuality of learning as per the Diverse Student Needs statement: "*Every student is unique. One of the greatest strengths of education in B.C. is the widespread commitment to making sure all students' individual needs are met so that they can pursue their interests and reach their fullest potential.*

["/\(http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/diverse-student-needs\)](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/support/diverse-student-needs)

Communication.

It is unclear as to the communication channels the City and the Province have with one another. We have a huge development boom in Surrey, but not the school infrastructure to meet the demands. We ask the Province to take a leadership role in forming a better communication model and plan between the City, the District, and the Province. The unrelenting development without appropriate infrastructure has created chaos across our school system. Surrey has a large problem that has only come to light since Surrey Students Now pressed the issue of a lack of communication between the City, the District, and the Province. With the sheer number of children in portables, it's clear that the communication model between the City, District, and Province hasn't been fruitful. While development is important, without infrastructure, it's irresponsible to the citizens living here. Surrey Students Now asks the Province to take the lead and ensure there is appropriate communication and measures in place so that Surrey cannot end up here again in the future.

Portables and the Operating Budget.

To worsen the inadequate funding for capital, the Province charge Districts when the need arises for portables. Between the actual physical portable, to moving it, placing it, wiring it, and the carbon tax associated, this funding for portables is taken out of the operational budget. Create a new policy stating non-temporary portables will be funded through means other than the operating budget. That ~\$4m is better utilized within the school building, as intended. The purpose of operating budgets is to operate the inside of school buildings - teachers, library resources, balls for the gym, equipment for music, computers, etc. The purpose of capital budgets is to house the operations (i.e. the buildings themselves). Portables are indeed buildings that house the operations however the costs of these portables have been charged to the operating budgets. As a result, Surrey School District children are not receiving ~\$4m worth of resources each year. This policy needs to change immediately.

Project Contribution Policy.

1.8 Project Contribution Policy states:

"All major projects, other than the least cost option for a seismic mitigation project, require school districts to contribute a 50 percent cost share, including: • Site Acquisition • School Addition • New School • School Replacement • Seismic Mitigation Project (where a school district chooses to advance a different project scope that is not the least cost option)

The required contribution will be assessed by Government on a case-by-case basis, whereby a lesser proportion may be accepted dependent on financial justification by the school district. The value of the contribution should be determined during the development of the Project Definition Report (PDR). Confirmation of a school district's contribution will be required prior to the Ministry seeking a project funding decision from Government."

This policy is a reasonable policy for districts with minimal growth or no growth projections, however, in districts like Surrey, cost-sharing with the Provincial government for the number of projects that Surrey requires is not achievable and slows the process of building new schools exponentially. This policy needs to be revised for districts that are in a high growth pattern, such as Surrey. Currently, districts are expected to fund up to 50% of the cost of building, and acquiring land for, a school through their own revenue streams.

School Site Acquisition Charge (SSAC).

The School Site Acquisition Charge is defined as "a charge, per dwelling unit, that is paid by residential developers". The money, collected by the City, is used to help pay for new school sites needed as a result of new residential development. The SSAC funding model has not increased since 2000 even though land values have more than doubled. The current maximum is only \$1000 per dwelling unit and only for low density areas, a designation that no longer applies to Surrey. The [Site Acquisition Charge policy](#) needs to move to a percentage-based value to stay current to fair market land value, so as land value increases or decreases, the charge is an appropriate amount for the District to use towards land acquisition for schools.

Inclusion and Equitable Education.

Policy change is required to encourage equality among programming and furthering the initiative for inclusiveness for children with special needs. The Supreme Court Ruling was only a starting point. It's time to make inclusion a reality.

In 2002, the class size and composition language was stripped from the collective agreement. Teachers were bargaining for better language surrounding children with special needs to build from this language, but instead, the government at the time, unlawfully removed the language all together. Now that districts have reverted back to the 2002 language and stipulations, parents and educators know many additional changes need to be made towards true inclusion for children with special needs.

Surrey Students Now has been informed from numerous sources that not all children with special needs are having their needs met, that the specialist teachers are being asked to take on regular classrooms in a 'teacher on call' capacity, that there are not enough education assistants to meet the needs of children with special needs, and that early intervention is not taking place. Many children are not assessed, and do not get a designation that would qualify them for much needed supports and resources.

Accommodations and resources are the vehicle to attaining equal education and must be funded adequately and without cumbersome process. Districts have a responsibility to accommodate. Parents should not have to make it their full-time job to advocate for their children, when the School Act is clear that "*the purpose of the British Columbia school system is to enable all learners to become literate, to develop their individual potential and to acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to contribute to a healthy, democratic and pluralistic society and a prosperous and sustainable economy.*" Surrey Students Now implores this government to work closely with parents and educators to get to true inclusion.

Select Standing Committee on Education.

With the current crisis in education in this Province, we feel it imperative that there be a call for the Select Standing Committee on Education to receive a Terms of Reference. This Committee has not met since 2007. Issues that need to be addressed include growing from the class composition and size win, school size, education supports, choice programs, maintenance scheduling, and more. There are so many areas that need investigation and recommendations made regarding education and public policy. When the Province continues to keep this Committee dormant, it shows that the Province does not care about education.

The Future.

The Province needs to look at education as the long-term investment that it is. Education is the one single investment that permeates across everything in society. School is the one place that students of varying backgrounds and home life should be able to come for stability and receive

the attachment and security one needs to be successful¹. As education is chronically underfunded, we are seeing the negative draw on our resources. When we pack our schools beyond their capacities, and do not adequately fund resources and supports, children will fall through the cracks. Research supports that there is an increase in untoward behaviour later on. This is cyclical and not only fails the child as they grow, but also puts a larger economic burden on society through increased need for welfare and an increased level of homelessness, criminal activity, and incarceration. We can stop this cycle in its tracks by funding education as an investment instead of an expense. When education is adequately invested in, we see higher graduation rates which turns into economic and social prosperity for society.

Surrey students deserve better. All children in this Province deserve better.

Summary

In summary, we ask the Select Standing Committee to recommend, and follow through, on the following:

1. To expedite the building of schools in the Surrey School District.
2. To change the way the Province count students that are in a Choice program for the purposes of capital costs.
3. To commit to coming up with a different process and communication channel with the City and/or District to ensure school infrastructure is in place for growth.
4. To rescind the Project Contribution Policy for Districts in a growth pattern.
5. To no longer charge Districts for portables out of their operating budgets, but to recognize these as capital expenses.
6. Update the policy for the school site acquisition charges to continually reflect land values.
7. Make inclusion and equitable education a reality.
8. To put forth a motion to the Legislative Assembly to give a Terms of Reference for the Select Standing Committee for Education.
9. To put forth a motion or policy that invests in education over the long term, rather than year to year or short terms.

At the end of the day, we need far more funding in this District. Equally important, we need better policies, processes, and communication channels that meet the needs of ALL students in the public education system. We simply cannot afford to not invest in our children. Our children deserve better.

¹ <http://www.bathspa.ac.uk/Media/Education/attachment-and-the-implications-for-learning-and-behaviour.pdf>