



Richmond Teachers' Association

210 - 7360 Westminster Hwy.

Richmond, BC

V6X 1A1

Tel: 604-278-2539

Fax: 604-278-4320

www.richmondteachersassociation.ca

December 1, 2023

Board of Education
School District No. 38 (Richmond)
7811 Granville Avenue
Richmond, BC V6Y 3E3

Dear Heather,

Re: RTA Brief – Enrollment Growth and Elementary Space and Facilities

On behalf of the Richmond Teachers' Association, we thank you for the opportunity to submit a brief to the Board to outline the challenges facing elementary schools as enrollment increases and schools greatly exceed their capacity.

The RTA recognizes and appreciates the advocacy and decisions made by Trustees to prioritize Richmond school facilities. Recently, this has included a \$12 million investment into ventilation upgrades for all elementary schools and portables that lacked mechanical ventilation. This investment draws in more fresh air, which is then filtered to provide healthier schools for learners and staff. The Board has consistently advocated for seismic upgrades using a variety of avenues available, including joint meetings with MLAs and submissions to the Select Standing Committee of Finance and Government Services. Each year, Richmond's needs are recognized in recommendations for the Provincial Budget. The Report on Budget 2024 Consultation released in August 2023 includes:

“School districts along with parent and teachers’ associations advocated for additional capital funding for the seismic mitigation program. School District No. 38 (Richmond) noted that currently 16 elementary schools and four secondary schools in the district remain unsupported for mitigation.”

“Regarding funding for new schools, recommendations addressed issues of population growth and capacity. School District No. 38 (Richmond) noted that a 15.2 percent growth in total enrolment across elementary schools in Richmond City Centre led to the deployment of eight portable classrooms and that investment will be needed for two new elementary schools, 23 additional classrooms, and additions to existing schools to accommodate the projected population growth.”

In 2018, your advocacy, with the support of district management, brought us the Richmond Project Team, which has been invaluable to moving forward with and completing seismic projects. Each project that has been completed has addressed seismic mitigation and has provided additional upgrades, including new flooring, upgraded electrical and exterior finishes that make schools more welcoming to staff, learners, and the community.

As part of your advocacy for Richmond schools, you continue to make City Center enrollment a priority. This has included working with the City of Richmond and the Ministry of Education and Childcare to secure land and funding for a much-needed elementary school. We acknowledge and appreciate your continued commitment to this long-term goal for the Richmond School District. We also recognize there are many Boards of Education across BC that are demanding new schools to accommodate their enrollment growth. Within this context you have also explored medium and short-term solutions to address enrollment growth in City Center.

The RTA congratulates the Board on securing provincial funding for modular classrooms at Brighthouse and Cook. This recent announcement provides a medium-term solution to help address enrollment growth in City Center, and will be in place for the 2024/2025 school year. It is our understanding these modular classrooms will come complete with plumbing, which will help alleviate the challenges of limited bathroom space for both students and staff. We recognize this as a medium-term solution, but one that will endure for the lifetime of these two school communities. Moreover, it is good news that funding for modular classrooms will be provided by the province rather than from local capital because enrollment growth should never be downloaded onto school districts. Unfortunately, that has been our experience when the province will not fund the cost of portables.

Despite these much-needed modular additions, this will not address the wider stress on physical space at our large elementary schools. Currently, at least five elementary schools are now larger in population than Cambie Secondary School. None of these elementary schools were built for the population that now exists in their buildings, which is creating significant challenges, including insufficient:

- Washrooms to accommodate the number of staff and students; this creates large line ups in hallways and staffrooms.
- Access to gym time as most elementary schools only have one gym. This results in students only having access to a maximum of one block (40 minutes) of gym time per week and schools are unable to have whole school assemblies. Requiring two school assemblies does impact costs when a school is bringing external groups and may lead to less opportunities for some schools.
- Library space, which also results in students only having access to a maximum of one block (40 minutes) of library time per week. Elementary libraries are too small to accommodate more than one division of students at a time. At the same time, students are accessing resources in greater numbers, and yet these schools are not provided a Library Technician to help Teacher-Librarians manage resources.

- Space for Learning Resource Teachers and ELL Teachers to work. This means there is little or no space for small group learning or for students who need time and quiet space for self-regulation. This also impacts the ability for ELL teachers to work with small groups of ELL learners to support their language learning. Schools require pull out space to support the diverse abilities of learners.
- Meeting space for district itinerant staff to meet with students or teachers during the school day. District staff often have overlapping schedules and require private space for their confidential work with students and families. In many cases, Area Counsellors, SLPs, SWIS workers, Inclusion Support teachers and School Psychologists are sharing space with Learning Resource and ELL teachers, working in storage/small spaces, or using Principal/Vice-Principal offices.
- Staffroom space to accommodate large numbers of staff to eat together and to connect. This impacts the school community and reduces informal opportunities to collaborate and mentor others.
- Playground space, as they are not built to support the growing numbers of students. Loss of outdoor learning or play spaces as they are required for portables.
- Multi-purpose space that is too small for the size of the school and is often used as a prep or band spaces, additional classrooms or to support before and after school care. It is important to note that not all elementary schools have multi-purpose spaces.
- No daytime custodians despite being as large as some secondary schools.
- Hallways that are narrow, making it difficult for students and staff to move through the school or to use the hallway for small group activities or support.

As you continue your advocacy to secure land and funding for a new city center school, the RTA requests additional attention is given to the whole school facility and, where possible, solutions are put in place to address these space pressures.

We also request Trustees prioritize visiting each of our large elementary schools during the school day, ensuring your time overlaps with recess. We also recommend increased communication to staff at these sites to acknowledge the physical space challenges and your plans to address these concerns in the short, medium, and long term. Teachers often ask:

- “Do trustees understand what we are experiencing in schools?”
- “What are trustees doing to help address enrollment growth?”
- “Do trustees know that we only have one gym for 625 students?”
- “Do trustees know that we have no space to support small group instruction?”
- “Do trustees know that we only have 5 toilets for over 75 staff?”

These are not questions for the RTA to answer, as we don't speak for the Board of Education. However, RTA Members working in these elementary schools want to know their concerns are being seen and heard by Trustees.

The RTA appreciates this opportunity to provide our feedback and to advocate for Richmond schools and the pressures facing Richmond teachers. We recognize the value you place on stakeholder relationships, and we welcome any chance to work with the Board to support our joint commitment to Public Education and the Richmond School District.

Once again, we thank you for your continued advocacy and commitments to prioritize Richmond school facilities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Liz Baverstock', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Liz Baverstock
President, RTA

cc: Christopher Usih, Superintendent of Schools
Cindy Wang, Secretary-Treasurer
Steve Wenglowksi, 1st Vice President, RTA