



Richmond Teachers' Association

210 - 7360 Westminster Hwy.

Richmond, BC

V6X 1A1

Tel: 604-278-2539

Fax: 604-278-4320

www.richmondteachersassociation.ca

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Via E-Mail

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

Dear Trustees,

On behalf of the Richmond Teachers' Association, we thank you for the opportunity to submit a budget brief for the 2021-2022 District budget. The RTA currently understands the District is now faced with a structural shortfall of \$7.6 million. The shortfall is a result of continued underfunding of Public Education that has not kept pace with inflationary pressures and, due to the 2020 Funding Model Changes that resulted in a \$2 million loss of revenue in Richmond, with the elimination of the Vulnerable Student Supplement, Carbon Tax Grant and reduced support for the Employer Health Tax. The RTA is dismayed that the Ministry of Education does not recognize the unique English Language Learning needs of learners in Richmond and does not provide additional funds to support English Language Learners beyond ELL Level 4. Educators in Richmond understand that language learning extends well beyond ELL Level 4 and requires additional funding to help support ELL learners as they progress through to graduation. The current Equity of Opportunity Supplement is insufficient to support the needs of all learners in Richmond.

In addition to changes in provincial funding, the pandemic has contributed to a decrease in anticipated student enrollment for 2021/22 (was projected to increase by 382 students and is now targeted to increase by 191 students) and a significant decrease in International Student Revenue (~\$3 million), which is not projected to rebound for several years. When combined, these two factors will result in a loss of opportunity for our International Students, who enjoy the opportunities provided by learning and being immersed in Richmond, and the rich cross-cultural and diverse experiences that the International Program makes possible. It is unfortunate that the District must rely on revenue from International Programs to support the General Operating Fund, but we know this is our current reality. All of these lower enrollment projections are adding significant pressure to the budget.

With the above in mind, the RTA is providing the Board with information that may be useful in helping determine priorities for the 2021-2022 District Budget.

As always, we encourage Trustees to keep their “focus on the learner” and ensure that contemplated financial reductions be kept as far away from the classroom as possible, so that they do not further affect student learning.

i. Pandemic Concerns

The RTA remains optimistic that we will be transitioning out of the worldwide pandemic when schools open in September. Unfortunately, news of variants is casting doubt that we will truly be at Stage 1 or back to normal in September. Even if we are in Stage 1, Richmond will need to maintain increased attention to Health & Safety as students return to schools. As well, many families will have kept their children out of school buildings for well over a year, and will likely remain concerned about safety, in addition to seeking additional learning supports that have not been fully accessible in a remote learning environment. It is vital the District is not welcoming families back with news of cuts to either teaching or support staff; this messaging will only serve to undermine confidence and push families away from Public to Private Education.

The Board must ensure the following pandemic budget improvements are maintained for the 2021/22 school year:

- Daytime Custodians for elementary schools.
- Portable sinks for handwashing. Ideally, these sinks become permanent for all learning spaces.
- Hand hygiene stations and additional cleaning supplies.
- FTE to provide learning assistance, learning resource and ELL staffing to support blended or cohort models of support, and to support students returning to school buildings.
- Noon Hour Supervisors to support schools who elect to maintain a “runch” schedule.
- Continued funding to support outdoor learning.
- Provision of PPE, including face masks.

ii. Addressing the \$7.6 million Structural Shortfall

The RTA recommends the Board use all avenues available to advocate for continued funding from the Federal Government and additional Provincial funding to maintain COVID-19 supports, in order to ensure a successful start to the school year in September, and a stable transition through to the end of the pandemic. The RTA also recommends the Board advocate for additional, one-time targeted ELL funding, which would ensure ELL learners at all levels receive support to target language acquisition difficulties that have been exaggerated by the pandemic, specifically in situations where ELL students have been learning remotely.

The RTA recommends the Board offset the anticipated structural shortfall by accessing \$5 million of surplus along with any remaining funds from the COVID Contingency Reserve.

The RTA makes this request due to the current shortfall, which has caused lower than expected enrollment by both Richmond residents and International Students.

It is important that families are attracted back to schools in the Richmond School District; this will be more difficult if the District is announcing funding cuts and layoffs. A greater amount of surplus will be needed to help Richmond transition back to pre-pandemic numbers.

iii. Classroom Enhancement Funding

The RTA recommends the Board encourage the District to ensure all possible funding is captured through the Classroom Enhancement Fund. For example, the recent Jackson Arbitration, relating to special education, has seen a loss of Classroom Enhancement Funds, both in terms of money available for teaching FTE (down 20 FTE from 2019/2020), release time funds, remedy and overhead funding. The loss of CEF overhead funding resulted in a loss of ~\$600,000, which has resulted in 12 FTE of Education Assistants no longer being funded through CEF rather by the General Operating Fund. The RTA recommends the new criteria for 1995 G and Q special education designations are once again reviewed to ensure the District is not exacerbating the funding loss with the criteria now being used.

The District promised that no support for special needs students would be lost. This may well be true, but the current position has come at the expense to the General Operating Fund, class size and teacher workload. A significant amount of non-enrolling staff is impacted by CEF funding. The RTA once again recommends the Ministry is approached to ensure ELL funding is bridged for ELL learners who learned remotely in 2020/21.

iv. Richmond School District's Strategic Plan

The RTA also recommends surplus is targeted for use in 2021/22 to support the Board's Strategic Plan. The RTA recommends the following spending to support the Board's Strategic Plan:

Priority 1: Inspired Learners

- Additional FTE for secondary and elementary counsellors to help support a culture of resilient learners with a continued focus on support for mental health, supported by early intervention strategies, which require ongoing sustainable funding.
- Funding is available to replace, replenish and enhance equipment in schools to foster physical and healthy living opportunities for students and staff.
- Authentic professional development opportunities to deepen understanding of Indigenous culture and history to ensure a rich ability to embed First Peoples' Principles across the District.
- Release time for teachers to engage in task forces to develop literacy, numeracy and digital literacy visions and frameworks for support and implementation.

Priority 2: Equity and Inclusion

- Additional FTE to address the individualized needs of learners. The pandemic has shown the inadequacy of technology for learning; rather, it is about relationships, the physical environment and the social and emotional connection to learning.
- Paid summer opportunities for Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) training. “SIOP encourages teachers to design and deliver student-centered lessons that maximize student opportunities to interact with the language, the content, and their peers in meaningful ways.” Richmond currently has one teacher trained to deliver SIOP and should invest in additional training to help support all teachers to ensure academic content is continually scaffolded to support learning.
- Paid summer opportunities to increase understanding of evidence-based practices to support inclusive learning communities.
- Funding to support the Equity in Action Plan to address systemic barriers impacting Indigenous student achievement. Including:
 - Targeted funding for First People’s courses and resources.
 - 1.0 FTE additional Aboriginal Success Teacher to support Aboriginal students and Indigenous Ways of Knowing.
 - 1.0 FTE Indigenous Equity Coordinator position.
- Anti-Racism, Diversity and SOGI training.

Priority 3: Optimized Facilities and Technology

- Funding for school photocopiers rather than printers. The pandemic has reinforced for all of us that moving to a fully digital environment is not reasonable and does not support the diversity of learners. It also adds to the equity gaps in the Richmond community, where some families have internet access and multiple electronic devices, while others do not.
- Funding to support environmental sustainability education for students and staff. Climate Action is important to students and teachers. There needs to be more awareness and learning opportunities available for teachers.

Priority 4: A Progressive Workplace

- Maintain vaccination programs for flu, shingles and pneumonia.
- Maintain access to additional counselling through EFAP.
- Add supports for healthy living, including fitness classes and weight training programs.

v. Spending Cuts

If the Board is considering budget reductions that will result in cuts, the RTA encourages the Board to keep these cuts away from learners. The RTA does not believe any teaching positions should be lost for 2021/22 because all teaching positions in the District either directly or indirectly support learners in Richmond. Many of the recent teaching positions added to Richmond resulted from the 2017 restoration of our Collective Agreement where more than 300 FTE of positions were added.

The RTA would like to note that there has been substantial growth in management positions within Richmond that was facilitated by the restoration of our Collective Agreement language, and if any cuts are necessary because of the current structural shortfall the District should look to attrition in management positions. The RTA recommends the District completes the Aspen Program review in order to determine if the 1.0 FTE of administration support for MacNeill must still be maintained. This was added as a temporary addition in 2019/2020 and continued for 2020/2021 pending a review of staffing and program needs.

The RTA also suggests the Board does not proceed with the following one-time spending initiatives from the from the 2019/2020 and 2020/2021 Budget.

- Video Surveillance
- District iPad refresh
- Technology infrastructure upgrades
- Staff Training and Development – should be moved to support Strategic Priorities outlined in this brief
- PHE Curriculum Support – should be allocated to support staffing for the Equity in Action Plan
- Learning Spaces Furniture and Equipment – review learnings from the pandemic

Some of these monies may have already been all spent, but the RTA believes some have not yet been spent due to the pandemic and should remain unspent for 2020/21.

The RTA recognizes the significant challenges presented to the Board and the ongoing commitment to ensure the District is ready to welcome students and staff for the 2021/22 school year, and to move the Board's Strategic Plan forward. More than ever, joint advocacy will be needed to address the many funding shortfalls that are both structural and those that are a result of the pandemic. The RTA welcomes the opportunity to continue to work with the Board and District on planning for the 2021/22 school year.

Sincerely,



Liz Baverstock
President, RTA

cc: Scott Robinson, Superintendent of Schools
Roy Uyeno, Secretary Treasurer
Tim McCracken, 1st VP, RTA
Steve Wenglowski, 2nd VP, RTA
JW Cho, 3rd VP, RTA