



Richmond Teachers' Association

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September 14, 2022

Board of Education

School District No. 38 (Richmond)

7811 Granville Avenue

Richmond, BC V6Y 3E3

Dear Sandra,

Re: RTA Brief – Fall Concerns and Opportunities

On behalf of the Richmond Teachers' Association, we thank you for the opportunity to submit a brief to the Board to outline our reflections and concerns as we start the 2022/2023 school year. These include:

1. **Audited Financial Statements** – For the RTA, this is a yearly opportunity to reflect on the Supreme Court Win that restored our collective agreement language. This win and the resulting Classroom Enhancement Fund is pivotal to maintaining classroom supports in an era of chronic underfunding. The audited financial statements is an important reminder to the RTA of the structural shortfall, and the recurring theme of cuts in a system that is continually asked to do more.
2. **Foundation Skills Assessment** – FSA – will be administered in schools between October 3 and November 11. The RTA requests the District delay the writing of these tests until at least the middle of October. The focus in September and October should be on establishing learning communities and supports, rather than spending almost four hours on a test. We also request once again that the District honour parent requests to withdraw their children from writing the FSA, and further that the Board continue their advocacy to restrict access to FSA data. FSA data should only be available to appropriate ministries, districts, schools, teachers, parents, FNEESC and other services that depend on access for identifying ways to support learners.

- 3. Day to Day Staffing Shortages** – Public education has experienced staffing shortages for over five years, and in the last two years the shortages have been chronic and acute. Shortages of staff leave all schools scrambling to reassign teachers and staff. The day begins with immense stress as teachers and other staff are redeployed, and the effect often results in a reduction in service for the very students who need additional support. This creates daily conflict both externally between staff and internally as teachers and administrators struggle to maintain programs and supports for students. This is not sustainable and is impacting every person in a school.

Over the past few years there has been much attention and work by the District in consultation with the RTA to address recruitment and retention of employees. There is more to be done and the Board should ask management about using more unassigned contract positions to secure teachers-teaching-on-call to the District. We need to use more local solutions to help further alleviate provincial problems. Richmond cannot afford to lose or share TTOCs with other districts. Contracts secure teachers to Richmond and often lead to long-term commitments, where teachers establish strong roots and grow their professional careers. The ability to provide learning support, address workload for staff and reduce daily conflict in schools far outweighs any financial costs.

- 4. Staffing Shortages – Specialized teachers** – Richmond, and almost every District in BC is unable to secure sufficient staff to fill Learning Resource, English Language Learning, Counselling and other specialized vacancies. This means students and teachers do not have guaranteed access to teachers who are fully qualified in these specialities. In addition, specialist teachers will often give more to fill the gaps created by shortages. This means adding workload to a teacher, who is already stretched to support their assigned caseload. Given, the province is not doing enough to address recruitment and retention, the Board should advocate for specific bargaining items to address recruitment, including funds to reduce steps on the salary grid as well as funds to reduce salary differences across Canada. Retention initiatives should also include continued funds for mentoring, more support for professional learning, as well as creating a new Education Fund to support teachers who pursue specialist training.
- 5. Class Size, Composition, Best Efforts and Remedy** – In September, the District is required to make Best Efforts to see full compliance of our class size and composition language. This language allows students to have access to smaller class sizes and classrooms designed for educational success for all. During Human Resource updates, the Board should actively inquire about Best Efforts and compliance with the Collective Agreement.

Classes in non-compliance with our Collective Agreement are eligible for Remedy, which is generally provided through extra teaching time. Unfortunately, Remedy time is often cancelled due to staffing shortages. This means the additional support classroom teachers request is often denied. The RTA believes Remedy can provide schools with much needed support, but this cannot be done through day-to-day requests.

The District should consider bundling at least 80 % of the anticipated Remedy and hiring helping teachers that could be assigned to individual schools or groups of schools. Combining the use of Remedy with Board funds would allow the District to support initiatives such as hiring more contract Teachers-Teaching-on-Call (see #3). These teachers could be available to provide support to classrooms for Remedy, and when necessary, these helping teachers could be available to the school for redeployment during staffing shortages, IEP meetings, training initiatives and to support collaboration and planning between teachers. This may help in reducing the number of times LRT/ELL teachers are reassigned to a classroom and away from working with students who need additional learning support. The purpose of Remedy is to provide support for the classroom and this support needs to be accessed early in the year rather than May or June, or not at all. This is a local solution that could be implemented in Richmond.

6. **Workload** – With all the above and constant competing pressures, the Board should be asking management about ways to reduce workload across the system. Increasing workload creates conflict at the school level, but also for employees when they leave work and attempt to balance work and life commitments. Teachers are expected to be at our best each day, and with rising mental health and wellness challenges we must find ways to reduce workload. The desire to add more progressive ideas to the system comes at a cost and this must be acknowledged and mitigated.
7. **Municipal Elections** – The RTA is vested in School Board elections. Richmond schools need progressive candidates that are willing to advocate for Public Education and continue to work and meet with the RTA. We need a Board that remains committed to the current Strategic Plan, especially Equity and Inclusion – together we have started important work to support Truth & Reconciliation, SOGI, Anti-Racism and Diversity. The Richmond School District cannot afford to lose momentum – the learners and employees deserve to work and learn in an equitable and inclusive place. The District must maintain their focus on belonging and positive personal and cultural identity.

An election is an opportunity for candidates and current trustees to call greater attention to Public Education. Boards and Districts need funding that is tied to inflation and funding that supports the many progressive initiatives and values we support.

The RTA appreciates all our opportunities to provide feedback and to support our joint commitment to Public Education and the Richmond School District.

We wish each of you all the best as your term on the Richmond Board of Education concludes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Liz Baverstock", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

Liz Baverstock,
President, RTA

cc: Scott Robinson, Superintendent Of Schools
Cindy Wang, Secretary-Treasurer