



SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

S O U T H E A S T K O O T E N A Y

May 26th, 2016

SD5 Board Tells Education Minister Funding Concerns Not Just “Noise” From a “Few Groups”

The School District 5 (SD5) Board of Education recently shared their “deep dissatisfaction” regarding comments made by Education Minister, Mike Bernier on the February 23rd, 2016 edition of CBC Radio’s *Early Edition*.

During the interview, *Early Edition* Host, Rick Cluff asked Bernier why he thought so many people are unhappy about education funding, to which the Minister responded, “We constantly hear from a few groups that it’s [education] underfunded and unfortunately when you hear that noise coming from a few groups all the time that’s what people start to believe”.

According to Board Chair, Frank Lento, the SD5 Board of Education was not aware of the interview until the Board’s April Advocacy Committee meeting where they reviewed a copy of a letter sent to the Minister by School District 69 (SD69) Qualicum, expressing concern with the Minister’s comment.

Lento says Trustees listened to the interview and were stunned by the Minister’s characterization of the concern over public education funding as ‘noise’ from a few groups’ given there are over one million students and parents and more than 400 School Board Trustees who –as elected officials –represent all constituents province-wide.

“There’s definitely noise”, says Lento, “but I wouldn’t describe the majority of the Province as ‘a few groups’.”

The Board’s “deep dissatisfaction” was not limited to the one comment. In a May 11th, 2016 letter written to the Minister by the Board, Trustees state that they took exception to a number of assertions made by Bernier during his interview, saying that government continues to ignore “the most basic” of financial realities for Boards of Education.

“According to Government’s own documents and projections, education funding is *decreasing* both as a percentage of the provincial budget and as a percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In GDP terms, this will equal a *reduction* in government spending on education of \$850 million over the next three years”, says

Lento. "As for the "new money" of \$110 million this year, this is simply money which government committed to during teacher contract negotiations along with the per-student funding of nearly 7000 new students province-wide."

Government's assertion that Districts need less money because of declining enrolment was also a point of contention for the Board. "A decline in enrolment doesn't necessarily cost a District less in teachers' salary, bussing, or other fixed costs. The only absolute between funding and enrolment is the automatic budget reduction for a District of \$7,166 for every student by which the District's enrolment numbers decline."

Other "financial realities" outlined in the letter cite inflation, downloaded, legislated expenses like the Carbon Tax, added responsibilities outside the traditional K – 12 envelope such as Early Learning and Community Literacy initiatives, ongoing (and expensive) technology updates and the wage freeze to exempt staff that government lifted after seven years –none of which are or have been funded by government.

"All of these additional costs need to come from somewhere and since close to 90% of our budget goes to salaries, it doesn't leave Boards with a lot of choice", says Lento.

"When Minister Bernier described the increase in class size and number of special-needs students per classroom across the province as a "local choice" we felt it was extremely misleading. These so-called funding "choices" reflect the financial realities faced by Boards, administrators, teachers, support staff, parents and students each and every day. They offer the best-case scenario for the student *based on what a District is capable of offering.*"

To listen to the February 23rd, 2016 CBC Early Edition interview of Minister Bernier go to <http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/2684238768>. For more information on the advocacy work of the SD5 Board of Education, visit <http://www.sd5.bc.ca/Board/advocacy/Pages/default.aspx>

Contact:

Frank Lento, Chairperson, SD5 Board of Education
Trina Ayling, SD5 Media/Communications Committee

250-430-7175
250-489-1006