



SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

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

March 29, 2023

Hon. Rachna Singh, Minister of Education and Child Care
Room 124 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Hon. Adrian Dix, Minister of Health & Minister responsible for Francophone Affairs
Room 337 Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Carolyn Broady, President, BCSTA
300-2889 East 12th Avenue
Vancouver, BC V5M 4T5

Dear Ministers Singh and Dix and Ms. Broady,

RE: Speech Language Pathologist Deficit

At the School District 5 (SD5), Southeast Kootenay public Board Meeting of March 14, 2023, the Board carried the following motion:

That the Board write a letter to the provincial authorities and BCPSEA expressing concerns about the deficit of Speech Language Pathologists in rural areas.

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) are needed throughout Canada (including BC) and according to Statistics Canada, “the labour shortage conditions seen in recent years is expected to persist into the 2022-2031 period”.

While this shortage impacts all of BC, employers outside of the Lower Mainland and southern Vancouver Island regions have greater difficulties finding staff than employers on the west coast.

Our Board appreciates that government has offered loan forgiveness to speech-language pathology graduates who commit to work in underserved regions of the province, and while this is a positive step toward recruiting and retaining SLP

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professionals, it does little to address the lack of training space available for this profession. The University of British Columbia is the only educational facility in BC that offers this program and of the 36 students who graduate each year, only some have specialized in pediatric therapy, and not all will choose to be employed with a school district or choose to live in a rural community.

Despite the overwhelming shortage of qualified SLPs, we did not see this category listed in the January 2023 Provincial Nominee Program (PNP) for professionals immigrating to BC, nor can we find any information on-line regarding a BC recruitment and retention strategy for SLPs.

Early struggles with speech can have an immense impact on a child's ability to do well in school. According to a 2015 interview by the *Globe and Mail* with Anila Punnoose, a director of *Speech-Language and Audiology Canada*, "A lot of speech problems carry over to literacy, because a knowledge of speech sounds is crucial when learning to read. It's all about what you hear in those sounds. ...A child who doesn't have good phonological awareness doesn't understand any of that."

Punnoose also identifies children with language deficits as being more likely to experience academic challenges, social difficulties, including interacting with peers, and issues with mental health.

Our Board would like to know what strategies government is/will be employing to improve the recruitment and retention of SLPs in BC –specifically rural BC. We look forward to your timely response regarding this pressing issue.

Sincerely,



Doug McPhee, Board Chair

Cc*: Hon. David Eby, Premier, Province of BC
Kevin Falcon, Leader, BC Liberal Party
Sonia Furstenu, Leader, BC Green Party
Tom Shypitka, MLA Kootenay East BC
Elenor Sturko, Critic for Education, BC Liberal Party
Karin Kirkpatrick, Critic for Child and Family Development & Childcare, BC Liberal Party
BCSTA for distribution to member Boards of Education
Clint Johnston, President BC Teachers' Federation
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Chris Walker/Corey Bullock, CBC Radio
Dennis Walker, 107.5 Today FM Radio
Wylie Henerson, Rewind Radio 102.9
Jeff Johnson, Wild B104 Radio
Josiah Spyker/Ryley McCormack, 107.5 Today FM
Barry Coulter/Trevor Crawley, Cranbrook Daily Townsman
Ian Cobb, e-know Online News
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