



# SCHOOL DISTRICT 5

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

November 21, 2023

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

Dear Minister Singh,

RE: Child Care Initiative Challenges

At the School District 5 (SD5), Southeast Kootenay public Board Meeting October 10, 2023, the Board carried the following motion:

*THAT the Board of Education write a letter to the Ministry of Education and Child Care regarding the limitations that districts across the province are experiencing as they try to implement the provincial mandate for child care. Limitations cited in this letter will include lack of staffing for child care providers. A copy of this letter will be sent to the Premier, BCSTA and to all districts in the province.*

In your mandate letter from Premier Eby of December 7, 2022, the importance of continuing to roll out **affordable, accessible and inclusive universal child care** was cited and the following was stated; *“The initial successes have raised public expectations and hopes for expanded child care services, including before and after school spaces”*. Premier Eby also committed, in partnership with the federal government, *“to expand these vital services as quickly as possible to support families and reduce their costs.”*

Our District is both urban and rural, with approximately 36,000 people living in our communities. Many families in our smaller communities of Elkford and Sparwood work shiftwork in the mining industry, making child care for these families particularly challenging.

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Another challenge in our rural communities is transportation. We have a single elementary school in each of our four (4) rural communities, making many of our students bus students. We anticipate that a number of our families will be unable to take their children to and from the school for child care, which would require the District to provide child care bussing. In order to ensure child care is cost neutral to the District, this additional service will naturally increase the cost of child care for these parents.

Currently, we are in discussion with our CUPE employee group to see if they are willing/able to provide child care in some or all our schools. This would require agreeing to an LOU which would then require approval from BCPSEA. While we understand that bargaining requires a give-and-take from both parties, in our experience, BCPSEA does not always understand that some benefits smaller districts such as ours receive in bargaining cannot be reduced to a dollar and cent valuation.

While we continue to explore the LOU option, we are also cognizant that, at present, approximately 40% of our educational assistants are unqualified, and we are concerned that, even if an LOU were in place, CUPE may still not be able to accommodate our child care needs.

An additional challenge is limited space in some of our schools. While we are currently holding public consultations around possible boundary changes in Cranbrook to alleviate some of this concern, in our rural communities this option is not available given that, as previously stated, these communities have a single elementary school.

We appreciate that the ChildCareBC New Spaces Fund provides funding to create new licensed child care. However, given the lack of qualified child care professionals available to us, **the requirement to commit to continuing any child care operation for a minimum of five (5) years** for the nominal funding of \$50,000 **is a serious roadblock** for our District.

Given that failure to meet this commitment may result in a demand to repay some –or all— new spaces funding received, our Board finds that **it would be fiscally imprudent, and therefore irresponsible, to pursue government funding for new spaces.**

While we realize recruitment and retention is a challenge across the province, these challenges appear to be more pronounced in smaller and/or rural districts. Larger districts, such as those in metro Vancouver and the Island are not only in an advantaged position to attract and hire qualified staff based on their populations, their budgets are in the **hundreds** rather than **tens** of millions of

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dollars, affording them latitude to pay back new spaces loans if, despite their advantaged position, they are unable to hire staff for a new child care space.

We would like to remind the Minister of a keystone principle in public education; **equity and equality are not synonymous**. Equality means a person or group is provided the same resources or opportunities. **Equity recognizes that each person or group has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.**

We ask you to consider some of the unique challenges –such as those outlined above—that smaller and/or rural districts face when considering new initiatives and to adapt existing initiatives –like funding for new spaces— to provide **true equity** among districts and to the children and families they serve.

Further, we are requesting that you and Hon. Premier David Eby engage with our Board Chair, Doug McPhee, Superintendent, Viveka Johnson, Secretary-Treasurer Nick Taylor and District Principal, Early Learning and Child Care, Laura-Lee Phillips at your earliest possible availability.

Sincerely,



Doug McPhee, Board Chair

Cc\*: Hon. David Eby, Premier, Province of BC  
Carolyn Broady, President, BCSTA for distribution to member Boards of Education  
Dawn Lang, President, Kootenay Boundary Branch (KBB), for distribution to KBB members

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