

July 8, 2021

Honourable Jennifer Whiteside

Ministry of Education
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2
E: educ.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister Whiteside,

At the June 21, 2021 public Board meeting the Vancouver Board of Education passed the following motion:

The Vancouver Board of Education requests to immediately meet with the Minister of Education, as cogovernors, to advance approvals for major capital expansion and seismic projects. Specifically, to seek clarification of a unilaterally imposed requirement of a ten-year investment plan, that only pertains to the Vancouver School District. Moreover, to copy all Vancouver MLAs, MPs and Councillors.

Our Board appreciates the Ministry's commitment to the Seismic Mitigation Program and is thankful for past major capital project approvals. We are however, concerned that no major capital projects have been advanced further in the approval process for two consecutive years. In a letter received by the Board (Ref. 226620) from Minister Fleming in July last year, the following guidance was provided:

'As noted in the Capital Plan Response Letter, an up-to-date Long-Range Facilities Plan (LRFP) to support school District capital plan submissions will enable the Ministry to prioritize future capital investments in your school District.'

On January 25, 2021, the Board approved the District's Long-Range Facilities Plan (LRFP). The LRFP was developed in alignment with updated LRFP guidelines released in April 2019. To guide the development of the LRFP the Board concluded an extensive two-phase community engagement process in 2020 that received feedback from over 4000 participants in Phase 1. The findings in Phase 1 were expanded on in Phase 2 through an inclusive focus group process. A key strategic focus of the LRFP is to detail future scenarios by which the District can move towards the long-range planning goal of accommodating all VSB students at seismically safe schools.

As mentioned previously, the Board is very appreciative of the large number of Project Approvals in response to our 2017/18 and 2018/19 Capital Plan Submissions. Considering the significant advancement of the SMP during this timeframe, the District reviewed and updated the methodology used to prioritize capital projects for the 2020-21 Capital Plan Submission, adopting a zonal approach in alignment with Ministry planning methodology, and ensuring that the business cases for priorities identified in the Capital Plan were supported by the LRFP.

Board of Education Trustees:

Carmen Cho – Board Chair,
Estrellita Gonzalez – Vice-Chair,
Fraser Ballantyne, Lois Chan-Pedley,
Janet Fraser, Oliver Hanson, Barb Parrott,
Jennifer Reddy, Allan Wong

With the above context in mind, we were disappointed that the Amended Capital Response Letter received on May 13, 2021 no new project approvals were indicated, and an additional planning process – a ‘Long Term Investment Plan’ – was introduced as a mechanism to prioritize and sequence future capital investments in Vancouver. We feel that the information communicated through the LRFP and the priorities set out in the Capital Plan provide the necessary rationale for advancing the Seismic Mitigation Program and School Expansion Program in Vancouver. In accordance with the June 21, 2021 Board motion, I am requesting an immediate meeting to discuss advancing approvals for major capital expansion and seismic projects as well as clarification on the ten-year investment plan.

Sincerely,



Carmen Cho
Board Chair

cc: Vancouver MLAs
Vancouver MPs
City of Vancouver Mayor & Councillors
VBE Trustees
Suzanne Hoffman, Superintendent
J. David Green, Secretary-Treasurer