



October 2, 2024

Dear Ms. Josie Osborne,

I am writing to you, on behalf of the Board of Education, and as the Chair of Pacific Rim School District. As we approach the 2024 elections, we wish to highlight three critical areas of advocacy that are pivotal to enhancing the learning and working conditions for children and staff in our community. We respectfully request, that as you enter into the provincial election campaign, you support and prioritize the needs of our public education system. We have determined three priority issues and are looking for your advocacy in these areas:

Recruitment and Retention of Staff

The recruitment and retention of staff remains a fundamental challenge in the Pacific Rim School District. To address this, the Pacific Rim Board of Education calls for the elimination of barriers to hiring, increased support for northern and rural districts, targeted funding to recruit and retain Indigenous staff and the expansion of teacher training programs. BC's dedicated teachers and support staff are essential in delivering quality education to every learner. A well-supported workforce is vital for learners so they can realize success in their educational journeys.

The challenges faced by rural and remote districts in BC are significant and deserve particular attention. Rural and remote areas experience intensified recruitment pressures, with many districts relying on Letters of Permission (LOP) for staffing. The costs and effort associated with supporting LOP staff are substantial and often unrecognized. Addressing these challenges is crucial for improving educational outcomes for learners in these regions.

Additionally, the scarcity of affordable housing in rural and remote areas exacerbates the difficulties of recruiting and retaining teaching staff. Many potential educators are deterred by the limited housing options, or in some cases the cost, which undermines efforts to establish a stable and committed workforce in these communities. By prioritizing solutions to this housing challenge, we can better support our teachers and, in turn, improve educational outcomes in our most underserved regions.

Furthermore, rural and remote districts call for pre-employment incentives and bursaries. It is essential to continue pre-employment incentives beyond the 2024/25 school year and establish educational bursaries tied to teaching in rural, remote, and isolated districts for a minimum of three years. Data indicates that rural learners' educational outcomes are generally lower than those of their urban counterparts. Increased focus on recruitment and retention strategies, along with support for longer-term retention of staff, is needed to bridge this gap for students in rural and remote communities, while also building stronger relationships between staff and the classroom, creating a more positive, stable environment for all.

Capital and Deferred Maintenance Funding

Schools are more than mere buildings; they are the environments where future generations embark on their educational journeys. Many of BC's schools are in urgent need of repairs, updates and seismic upgrades. To ensure that our learning environments are safe and reflect the needs of 21st century learning adequate capital

and deferred maintenance funding is needed. Furthermore, rural and remote districts face infrastructure challenges, higher construction costs and have limited availability of workers. There is a need for recognition of these challenges and adjustments to project timelines and budgeting for rural and remote districts. We urge you to advocate for the necessary investments to support the infrastructure of BC's schools.

Schools in rural and remote communities often have a duality of purpose by being a place where community events, meetings, clubs and athletics take place. Due to inadequate funding for school building repairs and updates, community use is mitigated. This lack of upgrades significantly downgrades the educational environment and community space contributing to a diminished experience.

Inclusive Education and Student Success

Inclusive education ensures that every learner, irrespective of their background or ability, has the opportunity to succeed. This includes providing opportunities for academic success, social and emotional safety and culturally responsive learning environments. We must push for policies that support inclusive education and ensure that every learner can thrive with tailored support, resources and programs that address diverse needs.

Moreover, rural and remote areas often face significant barriers to experiential and land-based learning due to inadequate access to cost-effective transportation. Ensuring that learners in these regions have reliable transportation is crucial for their participation in and out of school activities. By improving transportation infrastructure, and the availability of drivers, we can ensure that all learners, regardless of their geographic location, have equal opportunities to engage fully in their educational experiences.

Public education is the cornerstone of our democratic society, equipping learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to become informed and engaged citizens. As we approach the 2024 elections, it is imperative that candidates prioritize these essential issues within public education.

Pacific Rim School District calls for increased advocacy efforts from candidates to understand rural and remote issues, push for change and maintain momentum on these critical issues and urges MLA candidates to actively represent their communities. Together, we can drive meaningful change in our education system and ensure that all learners, regardless of their location, background or ability, have the tools they need to succeed.

Thank you for your attention and support on these vital matters.

Sincerely,



Pam Craig, Board Chair
Pacific Rim Board of Education