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Legislative Assembly**

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June 10, 2016

Open letter to Minister of Education Mike Bernier

Dear Minister Bernier,

We are writing to bring your attention to the financial struggle rural school districts face in this province. In our constituencies of Nelson-Creston and Kootenay West, rural schools are facing closure and districts are charging parents for basic services such as busing. School districts are scrambling as a result of provincial government underfunding in the face of rising mandatory expenses including utilities and wages.

In School District (SD) 8, six schools are currently being considered for closure. SD 8's share of the \$20 million administrative savings claw back that they no longer have to return is \$252,000. This is not enough to stop schools from closing. It is the equivalent of 2.5 teachers, or a small drop in the \$85 million bucket of deferred maintenance needed in our schools.

If Jewett elementary school is closed, children as young as 5 will be on a bus for up to two hours travelling to school each day. This is over dangerous roads that are frequently closed in bad winter weather. No one finds this acceptable.

Winlaw Elementary is a growing rural school that is the heart of this small community, but lack of provincial funding for deferred maintenance means it is high on the list of potential school closures.

In SD 20, lack of proper funding over many years has meant that parents will need to pay to bus their children to school starting this September. SD 20 wrote you directly on May 4<sup>th</sup> to clearly state how the chronic underfunding of public education in BC has created a situation where SD 20 faces a \$750,000 deficit this year even if all costs and revenues are the same. The \$178,204 in administrative savings that will no longer be clawed back from SD 20 comes nowhere near covering that deficit. The result is that fees for basic services such as bussing are now being passed on to families.

SD 20 sent you a balanced budget, but they also sent a needs budget which shows that an additional

\$5,947,487 is needed to provide basic supports for the students, staff and facilities. This is not a wish list; it is what SD20 has had to reduce over the last 10 years of underfunding.

Your Ministry recently announced that it would not carry out its plan to claw back \$20 million from School Districts. Your suggestion that this money is enough to keep schools open and address cost pressure is misleading at best. The truth is that the amount each district is getting is simply not enough to cover the cost of mandatory technology improvements such as the Next Generation IT network.

School districts across BC have been underfunded and have had to make cuts for many years. As the MLAs for the West Kootenay area we see the implications this has had for local schools, students and their families. If the provincial government wishes to continue to ensure the excellence of public education within the Province of British Columbia, it must provide school districts with appropriate funding.

Sincerely,



Michelle Mungall  
MLA Nelson – Creston



Katrine Conroy  
MLA Kootenay West

CC: Kootenay Lake District Parents' Advisory Council  
Kootenay –Columbia District Parents' Advisory Council  
School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake) Board of Education Trustees  
School District No. 20 (Kootenay- Columbia) Board of Education Trustees  
Nelson District Teachers' Association  
Creston Valley Teachers' Association  
Kootenay Lake Teachers' Association  
Arrow Lakes Teachers' Association  
Kootenay Columbia Teachers' Union  
Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 748  
Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 1285