

Appendix B: Letter from Minister of Education (Dec. 10, 2015)



December 10, 2015

Ref: 184687/184685

Fraser Ballantyne, Chair
Board of Education
School District No. 39 (Vancouver)
Email: fraser.ballantyne@vsb.bc.ca

Dear Mr. Ballantyne:

I am writing to you and the Board of Education, as I am concerned about the pace of seismic upgrade investment being made in the schools in the City of Vancouver. Everyone who works and learns in a school deserves to do so in a seismically safe environment. We have a shared responsibility to ensure this is achieved in a timely manner.

I would personally like to acknowledge your efforts as Board Chair in building a constructive working relationship with me since I assumed my role as Minister. I am encouraged by our discussions to-date, in an effort to work together to solve the issues before us. However, I must stress the Board must fulfill the responsibility it has under the *School Act* (the *Act*) and manage schools, and school property in the best interest of the public using sound financial management practices.

In the October 28th and 30th letters sent from the Board to my Ministry, the Board requested the following:

- “immediate approval of funding to seismically upgrade MacDonald School”;
- “an increase to the Annual Facilities Grant (AFG)...of four – to six times the current funding”;
- and
- “an extension to the original timeline for the submission of the Board’s Long Range Facilities Plan (LRFP) from June 30, 2015, to early June 2016”.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), signed by both the Board and the Ministry on August 20, 2014, the Board committed to providing a “completed long-range facilities plan by June 30, 2015.” This commitment was included in the MOU, due to the critical importance of evidence-based, long-range facility planning in prioritizing seismic mitigation projects.

While I acknowledge the importance of public consultation relating to "how" you implement projects, an extension to June 2016 will unnecessarily delay further seismic mitigation in Vancouver schools. I want to reiterate the Ministry has dedicated funding to address seismic priorities and our government is committed to ensuring safe schools are available for students.

The requests outlined above, in addition to the November 2, 2015, Capital Plan submission are contradictory and incongruent with capital investment best practices.

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For instance, the November 2, 2015, Capital Plan submission does not include any of the school seismic mitigation priorities under development by District staff and the Vancouver Project Office, at the time of submission. As such, the Ministry has yet to accept the Board's Capital Plan and will require clarification of priorities.

Additionally, the request for the immediate investment in Sir William MacDonald Elementary, a school at 30 percent capacity, is not reflected as the number one capital priority in the Capital Plan, submitted on November 2, 2015. In fact, it is listed as tenth and would be further down in priority if the Board had included the projects under development by staff.

The request for additional Annual Facilities Grant money is not supported by the recommendations contained within the Ernst & Young Report released, June 9, 2015. The report demonstrated the Board currently spends approximately \$72M annually to heat and maintain the equivalent of 19 empty schools.

If the Board undertook a responsible consolidation of student spaces, as has been done by Boards across the province, these funds could be used to improve student programming across the district. The Long Range Facilities Plan is critical to reducing surplus capacity and wasteful overhead costs and ensuring schools are safe.

The Vancouver School Board has already been granted a six-month extension since the original deadline passed in June, and as such, a further extension should not be necessary. I expect the Board to submit a completed Long Range Facilities Plan by January 31, 2016, outlining the Board's priority capital investments where the greatest benefit will be returned for taxpayers and students. Proper fiscal planning and student safety are top priorities for the provincial government, and the Board's request to prolong decisions is not in line with those objectives.

Should you fail to complete your plan on time, the Ministry will consider using your Board approved Capital Plan submission from November 2, 2015, with incorporation of the priority projects identified by the Vancouver Project Office and approved by the Joint Steering Committee.

In closing, I would again like to thank you for your efforts in working with me to try and resolve this important issue, and hope your Board will provide the Ministry with a Long Range Facilities Plan by the end of January.

Sincerely,



Mike Bernier
Minister

pc: Trustees, School District No. 39 (Vancouver)
Scott Robinson, Superintendent, School District No. 39 (Vancouver)