



April 11, 2015

Honourable Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia

Honourable Peter Fassbender
Minister of Education

PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2
E-mail: educ.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Premier and Minister,

I am writing again on behalf of the parents, voters and tax payers at Queen Mary Elementary School in Vancouver, through the Parent Advisory Council. I wrote a letter to the Honourable Minister for Education on December 23, 2014 and I have not yet received a reply which is why I am sending this to both of you this time.

We are very concerned about a number of items that impact our school today and will impact it in the future and we would greatly appreciate a response from the Provincial Government on the concerns outlined in December which remain concerns today. I have appended our letter to you dated December 23rd to this letter for your reference.

As you may be aware, Queen Mary Elementary School is currently undergoing a seismic upgrade which commenced in 2013 and is scheduled for completion in 2016. The parents at Queen Mary Elementary School are very concerned about a number of items related to our seismic project which we would like to bring to your attention, and with respect to which we are seeking assistance from the Provincial government. These items are summarized in detail in a separate letters sent to the Vancouver School Board dated December 12, 2014 and January 25, 2015 and also presented at a Committee meeting at the Vancouver School Board on January 21st. Although there seems to be some interest in helping us address some of these serious concern, we have heard very little with respect to finding any solutions to address these very serious concerns.

Again briefly, some of the key items are as follows:

1. It appears that the cost of construction is much higher than what was originally budgeted. Whomever was responsible for the Queen Mary Seismic budget greatly underestimated what is required to upgrade a historic building over building new. We applaud the Provincial Government for caring enough about the history of British Columbia to want to retain some of our most valuable heritage buildings however to follow through with this we have to also commit enough funds to do it.

A new build for Queen Mary was budgeted initially at \$19 million and a Hybrid (1/2 new 1/2 heritage) was budgeted at \$19.3 million. A 100% heritage upgrade at Strathcona is budgeted at \$29.9 million. Although the Queen Mary number (with all contingencies included) has been increased to \$20.3 million it seems like a number closer to \$23-25 million is what should have been considered as everyone knows that you cannot renovate heritage buildings for anywhere near the cost of a new build.

In our view it is the responsibility of government to ensure that the history of our Country through our most valuable heritage buildings is retained and we support it whole heartedly however we have to be able to then follow-through with the funding of it.

Queen Mary Elementary PAC

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2. There have been long delays between first approval and construction which have resulted in increasing costs of construction from the date of the original budget submission compared with when the project went to tender and began construction. In our view, increased costs due to delay were not adequately addressed in the original budget with the construction contingency, nor was the fact that construction costs in Vancouver tend to increase significantly each year.
3. Due to the significant cost overruns, the current construction plan is very different from the originally approved plan and seems to be a moving target due to cost-related cuts. Of particular concern is the fact that the footprint of our school has now been reduced from what was originally planned. We are very concerned about how this will impact not only the existing children within the catchment but whatever growth is planned for the area, especially in light of the new development that will be happening just down the hill from the school in the Queen Mary catchment
4. Also due to the cost overruns, many other items that were originally planned for our project have been eliminated or changed, including the relocation of the music room to a space originally deemed not suitable for a classroom, millwork to enable the classrooms to operate efficiently and safely and the possible loss of significant handicap access, specifically off of 6th Ave.
5. The Neighbourhoods of Learning Pilot project announced by the Provincial Government on September 3, 2008 promised \$30 million dollars from the provincial government (Press Release appended to the end of this letter). Queen Mary was one of the three schools selected. Our understanding is that the funds committed by the Premier at the time have not been used towards providing our school with the Neighbourhoods of Learning spaces promised. Instead any additional space we are getting that is being labeled as NLC is coming out of our Seismic budget.
6. We are very concerned that there is no funding to replace windows in the main heritage building, even though 50% of the windows have been broken and the fragile state of the glass and the rotting frames on the remaining windows would represent a significant danger to students in a seismic event.



7. We understand the change back from HST to a PST/GST system has had a significant impact on the amount of funds available for our project because we now have to pay PST on almost everything which was originally exempt. We have been told that the amount that this impacted our budget by is \$512,687. We believe that a change in taxation by the Province should not be detrimental to our children and therefore our project and would ask that the Province help us by providing relief from this tax in the form of additional project funding.

After numerous conversation with individuals familiar with seismic upgrades, we feel that we as parents need to do more to try to secure additional funding for our school. **We are parents, tax payers and voters and our voices need to be hear by our government** and we believe we deserve a substantive response to our inquiries.

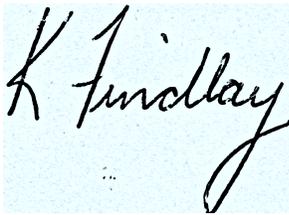
There are other schools in the VSB who have been able to secure more funding for their projects and we are concerned that our silence could be detrimental to a successful completion of the Queen Mary seismic project. We believe our school's project should be completed as closely to the original plan as possible as this was a process that started over ten years ago and engaged the entire Point Grey community and all stakeholders.

It is a widely known fact that our Country and our Province is not producing enough innovatively thinking graduates. So much more investment is needed into our public school education system if we want to be able to produce a work force in Canada that is globally competitive and produces global leaders today and in the future. Why is it that we have to import so many skilled workers in this province and country? We should be able to produce them here in British Columbia.

This investment starts in our schools at all levels and needs to be encouraged, supported and funded if we are to be able to produce a work force that will be employable and not obsolete in today's and tomorrow's marketplace.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns. Please feel free to contact me at any time. We look forward to your response. Thank you!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light blue rectangular background. The signature reads "K Findlay" in a cursive, flowing script.

Kathy Findlay, PAC Chair
Queen Mary Elementary School
604 897-8905



December 23, 2014

Honourable Peter Fassbender
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2
E-mail: educ.minister@gov.bc.ca

Dear Minister,

I am writing on behalf of the parents at Queen Mary Elementary School in Vancouver, through the Parent Advisory Council.

As you may be aware, Queen Mary Elementary School is currently undergoing a seismic upgrade which commenced in 2013 and is scheduled for completion in 2016. The parents at Queen Mary Elementary School are very concerned about a number of items related to our seismic project which we would like to bring to your attention, and with respect to which we are seeking assistance from the Provincial government. These items are summarized in detail in a separate letter to the Vancouver School Board dated December 12, 2014 (which is attached to this letter). Briefly, some of the key items are as follows:

1. It appears that the cost of construction is much higher than what was originally budgeted. We have also been told that 100% of our contingency has already been spent even though we are not even a year into construction. This concerns us greatly.
2. There have been long delays between first approval and construction which have resulted in increasing costs of construction from the date of the original budget submission compared with when the project went to tender and began construction. In our view, increased costs due to delay were not adequately addressed in the original budget, nor was the fact that construction costs in Vancouver tend to increase significantly each year.
3. Due to the significant cost overruns, the current construction plan is very different from the originally approved plan and seems to be a moving target due to cost-related cuts. Of particular concern is the fact that the footprint of our school has now been reduced from what was originally planned. We are very concerned about how this will impact not only the existing children within the catchment but whatever growth is planned for the area, especially in light of the development that will be happening just down the hill from the school in the Queen Mary catchment. We do not believe this is consistent with other schools with seismic projects and we believe the footprint of the school should not be altered from the original Ministry approved plan. We ask that consideration be made to restore the phase 1 and phase 2 building plan to their original footprint.
4. Also due to the cost overruns, many other items that were originally planned for our project have been eliminated or changed, including the elimination of a neighborhood (early) learning space, the relocation of the music room to a space originally deemed not suitable for a classroom and the possible loss of significant handicap access. We are concerned as well that there is no funding to replace windows in the main building, even though 50% of the windows have been broken and the fragile state of the glass on the remaining windows would represent a significant danger to students in a seismic event.
5. We understand the change back from HST to a PST/GST system has had a significant impact on the amount of funds available for our project because we now have to pay PST on almost everything which was originally exempt. Although we do not know the exact number we are advised that the impact on the construction budget may represent between \$500,000 to a million dollars. We feel that a change in taxation by the Province should not be detrimental to our

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project and would ask that the Province help us by providing relief from this tax in the form of additional project funding.

After numerous conversation with individuals familiar with seismic upgrades, we feel that we as parents need to do more to try to secure additional funding for our school. There are other schools in the VSB who have been able to secure more funding for their projects and we are concerned that our silence could be detrimental to a successful completion of the Queen Mary seismic project. We believe our school's project should be completed as closely to the original plan as possible without a reduction in the size of our school and with new, safe, energy efficient windows.

Although we have addressed our concerns to the construction project team and to the VSB trustees, these concerns have not been addressed to date. Accordingly, we respectfully ask for assistance from the Provincial government with respect to these concerns, including the provision of additional funding that will be necessary to complete the project as originally planned.

Thank you for your time and consideration of our concerns. Please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sincerely,

Kathy Findlay, PAC Chair
Queen Mary Elementary School
604 897-8905

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
2008OTP0216-001326
Sept. 3, 2008

Office of the Premier
Ministry of Education

NEIGHBOURHOODS OF LEARNING MAP NEW FUTURE FOR SCHOOLS

VANCOUVER – The future of B.C. schools is changing with the \$30-million Neighbourhoods of Learning pilot project, which will see education and community services brought together in a single neighbourhood hub, Premier Gordon Campbell announced today.

“This government has a vision for education in B.C. – one where schools and community organizations can create Neighbourhoods of Learning where people can access educational and community services under one roof,” said Premier Campbell. “Schools throughout the province will be able to adopt this model in the future to best meet the needs of their students and communities.”

Three school districts will be participating in the Neighbourhoods of Learning pilot project. Vancouver school district will be the first to create three Neighbourhoods of Learning Model Schools by partnering with the Province. Queen Mary Elementary, General Gordon Elementary and Lord Strathcona Elementary – Vancouver’s oldest school – will undergo renovations to restore their historical buildings or replacement, and include services on site that will benefit students and the community.

Lord Strathcona Elementary is already home to a branch of the Vancouver Public Library and the district will consult with the community and local groups to determine what other services to incorporate in their Neighbourhoods of Learning.

“This initiative gives the Vancouver Board of Education an extraordinary opportunity to further engage our community and schools in a common focus on learning and development at all ages,” said Clarence Hansen, chair of the Vancouver Board of Education.

The other two participating districts will be in rural areas and will be announced shortly. In one of the rural districts, a new school or one scheduled for replacement will be designed and built from the ground up as a Neighbourhoods of Learning Model school.

“The Vancouver school district is being innovative and working with community organizations to use extra space in schools to meet the needs of the community,” said Premier Campbell. “The district is developing Neighbourhoods of Learning in order to create places where people have better access to educational and community services, and we expect all school districts to move towards a more inclusive approach when planning the use of school space in the future.”

The Neighbourhoods of Learning pilot project also includes the ministry and school districts working together to incorporate elements of the other Neighbourhoods of Learning Model schools into their existing capital projects.

Neighbourhood of Learning schools can be used for educational or community services, such as early learning or child-care programs, office or meeting rooms for non-profit organizations, health clinics, sports programs, family resource or seniors' centres, industry training, or branch libraries.

“As I've visited school districts throughout the province, I've seen first hand how other schools are using models similar to the Neighbourhoods of Learning by providing community services in underutilized school spaces,” said Education Minister Shirley Bond. “This pilot project is an opportunity for us to formalize the process of including communities in the consultation process to decide how school space should be used.”

In order to support the Neighbourhoods of Learning concept, the School Building Closure and Disposal policy has been created. School districts will no longer be able to dispose of school properties except on a case-by-case basis and with government approval.

The policy also requires boards of education to:

- Consider the needs of all students in the district, including francophone students and students attending independent schools; and
- Broadly consult with education and community partners about the best use of surplus school space.

The policy supports a 2007 throne speech commitment to ensure that schools or school lands are used for maximum public benefit. In addition, a cornerstone of the Province's Pacific Leadership Agenda is vibrant, connected communities that are socially responsive and are environmentally sustainable.

Since 2001, the Province has spent \$1.3 billion to complete 67 new and replacement schools, 147 additions and 25 renovation projects. By the end of 2008/09, the Province will have invested more than \$3.1 billion in school capital and maintenance projects across the province.

1 backgrounder(s) attached.

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