

August 19, 2020

The Honourable Rob Fleming  
Minister of Education  
PO Box 9045, Stn Provincial Government  
Victoria, BC. V8W 9E2

*via email*

Dear Minister Fleming,

We are writing to request your assistance. Over the past several weeks we have received many questions and concerns from our parent community and employees about the Ministry of Education's Return to School Plan. Although some have stated that they are pleased that students will have the opportunity to return to school in September, many more have expressed apprehensions to us.

We are concerned that the current return to school schedule is too rigid and may not result in the welcoming, calm and orderly experience for our students that we all want. Although our schools will be reaching out to our parent community to determine parents' tentative plans, it will be very challenging to have students placed in their final assigned class and cohort by Thursday, September 10<sup>th</sup>. Parents need time to assess the options available to them, to interact with teachers and principals, and to make informed decisions. Teachers and schools need time to properly prepare to welcome back their students. School districts need time to determine the number of students who will be returning, assign staff, and develop classes and cohorts that fall within the mandated maximum.

We appreciate that the Ministry has extended the start-date for students to September 10<sup>th</sup>. Our goal is to have as many students attending school in-person as soon as possible. However, we are hopeful that the Ministry will demonstrate further flexibility and consider a gradual entry process as districts re-open. We believe that this approach will provide the best possible start for our students, families and staff.

We are also hearing concerns from parents about program options. Parents are worried that they will lose their spot in their neighbourhood school or program of choice if they don't remain in that program. Our District is doing our best to promote a sense of calm and confidence. Our District is engaging in conversations with our stakeholders and being creative wherever possible in designing program options that will best meet the needs of our community. But many parents continue to express significant fear and anxiety about having their child attend in-person.

It would be our hope that students whose parents choose not to have their child immediately return to in-person instruction in September can be placed in the school, and hold a fully-funded spot, even if they register for home schooling or distributed learning. Our goal is to retain a strong connection between our schools and families regardless of the program they choose, so we can gradually welcome every one of our students back to their neighbourhood school. By allowing students to remain connected to their school and be fully funded, the district can be creative in providing a program that meets the needs of our families, and allows for the flexibility that we are seeking.

We fully understand that the return to school is a complex endeavour and we wish to do whatever we can to support a calm, smooth and welcoming experience for all our students.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and requests for flexibility.

Sincerely,



Ken Hamaguchi  
Chairperson, Richmond Board of Education

cc: Scott Robinson, Superintendent of Schools  
Liz Baverstock, President, Richmond Teachers' Association  
Ian Hillman, President, CUPE Local 716  
Mark Hoath, President, Richmond Association of School Administrators  
Dionne McFie, President, Richmond District Parents Association  
Kelly Gibson, Co-Chair, Richmond Management & Professional Staff