

**J. Routledge (Chair):** Our next presenter is Carolyn Broady, representing B.C. School Trustees Association. Welcome.

## B.C. SCHOOL TRUSTEES ASSOCIATION

**C. Broady:** I'm surrounded by a few people I know, which is really nice.

Good morning. My name is Carolyn Broady. I'm president of the B.C. School Trustees Association, which represents all 60 of B.C.'s publicly funded boards of education.

As I begin, I would like to acknowledge that we're gathered together on the traditional and unceded territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Nations.

BCSTA canvassed our 60 board chairs to identify their funding concerns and their priorities in ensuring that financial decisions are made in the best way to support the students and staff they serve. Our three recommendations for Budget 2023 are as follows: a need for increased capital funding, funding to offset unfunded and underfunded increases and increased funding to support inclusive education.

[11:25 a.m.]

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B.C.'s schools face chronic and continued underfunding for capital projects and deferred maintenance. Seismic upgrades are desperately needed throughout much of the province to ensure that our schools remain safe and welcoming places for our staff and our students. Additional funds for deferred maintenance, which includes replacing and upgrading inefficient infrastructure in support of the government's environmental targets, is also needed.

The majority of B.C. public schools were built in the years following World War II and have reached the end of their life cycle, which has led to increased maintenance costs to maintain the schools and ensure that they're safe. These older buildings also require funds to address accessibility and equity concerns.

More capital funding is also needed for new projects. This extends beyond land acquisition and new buildings as districts incur increasing inflationary costs while waiting for schools to be completed. In the Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows school district, the estimated cost to build a new elementary school in 2020 was \$29 million. The latest cost update estimates the same build to be close to \$50 million. This is in less than three years. This is extremely concerning, as the project is not yet approved or tendered.

Adding to these cost pressures is the need to purchase or lease portables in districts where student population is growing — funding which must be found within current budgets. Districts also require support to offset unfunded cost increases, forming the basis of our second recommendation. These costs include absorbing the cost of administrative and exempt staff pay raises, which will be necessary once negotiations conclude for teachers and support staff and which, in a medium-sized school district, could cost around \$175,000 a year.

Districts are also extremely concerned about the increased cost pressures due to the necessity of funding the provincially mandated five sick days. For example, in my school district the financial impact is expected to be in the range of \$300,000. As boards of education work to balance their budgets, districts have had to make cuts to budgets that directly impact the classroom and have been forced to pull significant funds from their reserves.

This month I actually went out to canvass all 60 of our board chairs, and I've spoken to 31 of them so far. Without exception, they've shared with me that their approved budgets have either, in some cases, contained substantial cuts or have structural deficits and are draining down their reserves. We have a minimum threshold that we should be meeting, of about 2 percent, and we're well under that now. This is amplified by inflation, and we've cited specific examples, in our written submission, that illustrate the impact of increasing cost pressures that affect districts.

Securing increased funding to support inclusive education is our final recommendation for Budget 2023. Boards of education have prioritized inclusive education for decades, but the current funding formula — and the collective agreement language, which is outdated and doesn't meet the needs of today's neurodiverse students — has prevented boards from best supporting some of our most vulnerable. For example, when a child requires a full-time support worker, the school district is responsible for all wages and benefit costs, and they are not sufficiently funded using the current formula.

In conclusion, fulfilling these three funding requests would make schools safer, allow boards to ensure that funding goes to the classroom and directly to support students and their access, and address the shared priorities that we have with government, which include reconciliation through improved educational outcomes for Indigenous people, CleanBC initiatives, improving inclusivity and accessibility, and addressing the gender-based analysis plus process.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

**J. Routledge (Chair):** Thank you, Carolyn. I'll invite members of the committee to ask questions.

**M. Dykeman:** It's wonderful to see you here. Thank you for your presentation.

**C. Broady:** Nice to see you too.

**M. Dykeman:** On recommendation No. 1, one of the things that I recall — at the end of being a trustee, before coming here — was that the BCSTA had quite a large capital working group that was looking at innovative ways, and which I had been a part of. I'm wondering what the status of those conversations is and, sort of re-examining capital funding in partnership with the government, where that's sitting with BCSTA right now. Is that group still going?

**C. Broady:** They are. Interestingly enough, we set our strategic plan, for the next year, last month. That was one of the major areas: the capital concerns, which I shared with you today. In that group, Mike Murray, who's a trustee in Maple Ridge–Pitt Meadows, is leading that work still.

We have submitted three reports to the Ministry of Education, quite extensive, around area standards, around life cycle and the needs for capital and seismic upgrades. We are working with the ADM in the ministry now to bring those concerns forward. That group is coming together again this year and has been resurrected to continue this important work.

[11:30 a.m.]

**M. Dykeman:** Can I just ask a very brief follow-up on that? From the first three reports, have there been meetings that have accompanied those also?

**C. Broady:** We have had meetings with the ministry. I'm happy to share the reports with this group, if you're interested.

**M. Dykeman:** That'd be great. Thank you.

**J. Routledge (Chair):** Other questions?

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from the first three reports. Have there been meetings that have accompanied those also?

**C. Broady:** We have had meetings with the ministry. I'm happy to share the reports with this group, if you're interested.

**M. Dykeman:** That would be great. Thank you.

**J. Routledge (Chair):** Other questions?

**B. Stewart:** Carolyn, thanks very much.

We've heard quite a bit about this at the Legislature. Is this across school districts throughout British Columbia? It's not just a one-off — areas where the reserves are being drawn down. I mean, I understand the cost pressures and the things that you mentioned. Are most districts in a situation where they're...? I don't know if I'd call it collapsed, but they're close to the line.

**C. Broady:** I'll give you an example in my school district. We have that minimum threshold of 2 to 3 percent that we really want for healthy reserves. We were able to build that up over the last few years, partially with the help of the extra funding that the provincial government provided for COVID and pandemic funding and the federal government.

We have a \$72 million budget. At this point in time, the budget we approved on Tuesday, we have \$177,000 in reserve. That's it. We say: "One windstorm and we're done."

This is what I'm hearing across the province, big districts and small. It's different, in each case, how much they've gone in.

It's the slow cost pressures that continue. A lot of our costs are set, with wages and benefits, but we still have inflationary pressures around fuel right now. Transportation and things like that. And hydro increases. When you aren't able to generate much revenue, it really does eat into those budgets.

What I'm very proud of is... Boards across the province have tried to keep any cuts that have taken place away from the classroom. I'm just not sure if that's sustainable.

**B. Stewart:** Okay. Thank you.

**R. Merrifield:** Thank you so much for the presentation. I really appreciate hearing from someone who has experience across all of the different boards within the province.

I'm not sure if you're planning an additional written submission to what's already been submitted here. One of the things that I would find helpful is on recommendation No. 2. Those are funds... Yeah. If we don't address, it could be really devastating. That is on the operational costs and the unfunded cost increases. We know inflation is a reality. There have been unfunded employment costs added, etc.

I know that you can't really ascertain how that affects every single budget but even just an average. What is the percentage that we're asking for? I know, for my own school district, what they were asking for. We've heard from another couple. If there was a percentage that you could give us. "We need this percentage increase to address this."

**C. Broady:** I certainly can get that. We reach out to our school officials, our secretary-treasurers. I probably could give an example of, say, a large urban district, a smaller rural district and a medium-sized district. That will give you an idea. I'm happy to do that.

**R. Merrifield:** Perfect. It seems that some of the... I mean, some of the impact in the rural is on fuel. Some of the impact in the urban could be something different.

**C. Broady:** Yeah. Exactly. I'm happy to give you some examples.

**R. Merrifield:** Great. Thank you.

**K. Kirkpatrick (Deputy Chair):** Thank you very much. Nice to see you. You live in a wonderful school district.

The inflationary costs... Talk about the deferred maintenance. With the lack of capital investment... I believe you've said to me that because you've done such a good job on maintaining your schools and keeping things in good condition, in some ways, you've actually not benefited from further capital investments. That's a challenge. That's more common.

The second piece is... You've costed out the cost of the five sick days. I presume you have to wait until bargaining before you can cost out the cost of the exempt staff, if you're trying to... Okay.

**C. Broady:** Yeah. All of the contractual obligations are covered by government. The admin increases or exempt staff increases are not covered and have to come out of our current funding

allocations.

**K. Kirkpatrick (Deputy Chair):** Okay. Thank you very much.

**J. Routledge (Chair):** I'm not seeing any other questions.

With that, I'd like to thank you for coming and presenting on behalf of all school districts so we can see the big picture and the big pattern.

[11:35 a.m.]

I'm struck with the thought... Part of the implication of so many of our schools being so old is... They were built at a time when the expectations on schools were quite different. Today we expect a lot more from our school system, in terms of what our future will look like. We need to make sure that we resource our school system in such a way that it can meet the challenge of all working together to create a better future.

Thank you for reminding us. You're not the only one.

**C. Broady:** I'm sure I'm not.

**J. Routledge (Chair):** It is a part of an important pattern.

**C. Broady:** Thank you very much for your time.

**J. Routledge (Chair):** Thank you

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make sure that we resource our school system in such a way that it can meet the challenge of all working together to create a better future. So thank you for reminding us. And you're not the only one who has....

**C. Broady:** I'm sure I'm not.

**J. Routledge (Chair):** It is part of an important pattern.

**C. Broady:** Thank you very much for your time.

**J. Routledge (Chair):** Thank you.

Our final presenter for the morning is Nathan Davidowicz. Please come and join us. You've been there. You know the drill. You've got five minutes, and then we have five minutes for questions.

NATHAN DAVIDOWICZ

**N. Davidowicz:** Thank you very much, MLAs of the committee. I've been here before. I'd like to thank all your staff for the technical problems that we've had this week trying to send the materials and the recommendations. You have my three recommendations. They're somewhat similar to last year.

The first one is to immediately order 1,000 extra electric buses to be delivered over the next three years. There have been very few buses ordered in B.C. over the last 20, 30 years. There are buses being ordered to replace buses that are retiring, but we need extra buses in order to catch up, because there haven't been too many ordered. And if CleanBC has targets that they expect everybody, all the regional districts, cities, B.C. Transit and TransLink to abide by for 2030, unless we start now we'll never achieve the targets for 2030. So it's nice for CleanBC to set up the targets, but if there's no funding, where do we go?

So that's a very important recommendation, because B.C. is way behind Ontario and Quebec in public transit per capita, whichever statistics you take. You could look up the statistics on Statistics Canada and see that.

The second recommendation is proper transit governance together with proper, equitable financing. Again, B.C. is different than the rest of the provinces, the way we govern transit, the way we fund