



RE: Budget 2018 Update and Follow Up Information on Playgrounds, SMP, and Early Learning

On February 20th, BCCPAC participated in the Budget 2018 Lock Up, represented by President, Jen Mezei, and 2nd Vice President, Andrea Sinclair.

The budget included three announcements that could have significant impact on the K-12 Education system:

- \$1 billion toward universal childcare and inclusive early learning over three years
- Commitment to reducing portables and expediting the Seismic Mitigation Program (SMP)
- \$15 million dollars for an ongoing \$5 million Playground Equipment Program

Below you will find excerpts from the media releases we sent out Feb 20, and follow up information we have received from a meeting with Deputy Minister, Scott MacDonald, and conversations with Ministry of Education staff.

Media Release: Strong Commitment to Inclusive Early Learning Benefits All Families

The Budget released on February 20th included significant commitment to universal child care and early learning. These changes could bring about dramatic and significant benefits for families with vulnerable children who require additional support. By reducing waitlists for Supported Child Development and Aboriginal Supported Development, families and children would be able to access much needed supports sooner. The potential for cohesive early identification

and assessment is what parents of special needs children have been missing for decades.

“A strong commitment to inclusive early learning is better for all families,” says Jen Mezei, President of BCCPAC. “The investment and commitment to universal access to childcare and inclusive early learning is a positive indication that improved inter-ministerial cooperation could support the needs of children of all ages, especially those who require extra support.”

Universal access to quality early learning will enable all students entering Kindergarten to be better prepared and potentially better supported. The announced change to the Early Learning Framework to include children up to eight years old will enable more seamless transition between early learning and the K-12 system. Early intervention and supports will result in better student outcomes long term.

Follow Up Information on Inclusive Early Learning:

In addition to advocating with the Ministry of Education and participating on the Early Learning Framework committee, we have set up a meeting with Minister of State for Childcare, Katrina Chen in the coming weeks to discuss the importance of inclusion and support for parents of special needs children in early learning. The potential inter-ministerial cooperation to ensure that children are supported in early learning through the transition to the K-12 education system, would immensely help with early identification and earlier supports for students.

Media Release: Reducing Portables and Increasing Safe Buildings Key in Budget

This Budget includes funding to maintain, replace, upgrade and expand schools including new school space due to increasing enrollment in growth districts. The strengthened commitment to expedite the Seismic Mitigation Program (SMP) ensures all children

across the province will be learning in safe buildings. The reduced use and replacement of portables in fast-growing communities and crowded schools districts is welcome news to families.

“Parents have struggled to be heard in their demands for new safe, accessible schools and permanent buildings for their children’s learning; they are pleased to see accelerated seismic improvements to our schools and the capital funds allocated to continue this trend,” says Jen Mezei, President of BCCPAC.

More information on the acceleration of the Seismic Mitigation Program:

We asked the Ministry of Education for an explanation as to how projects can be accelerated if the capital funding amount in the 2018/19 budget is less than in the 2017/18 budget.

There are a number of stages that capital projects go through:

- Approval Stage
- Business case/Planning stage
- Tendering
- Construction

Projects are “announced” once they have passed the Approval Stage. The majority of capital spending happens when projects get to the construction stage. Without acceleration, there were not enough projects in the Business Case Stage to meet capital expenditure targets. By accelerating the SMP there will be more projects in the pipeline and ready for construction sooner.

Media Release: Capital Funding to School Playgrounds Recognizes Inequities in Parent Fundraising

For the first time, a new ongoing Playground Equipment Program recognizes the pressure on parents to fundraise. This new \$5 million annual capital expenditure will help to alleviate some of the inequities in parent fundraising and enable Parent Advisory Councils (PACs) to strengthen their advisory and advocacy roles.

“Parents have been advocating for funded playgrounds for over a decade; it’s long overdue for a government to finally recognize this,” says Jen Mezei, President of BCCPAC. *“Parents believe that safe and accessible playgrounds should not be dependent on a school community’s ability or inability to raise funds,”* she added.

Further information for BCCPAC members regarding the Playground Equipment Program:

The new \$5 million Playground Equipment Program announced in the 2018 Budget will be an annual ongoing capital expenditure.

District will be applying for a flat allocation amount of money for either “regular” playgrounds and/or “accessible” playgrounds. The Ministry standard allocation is meant to include the equipment and installation of a standard playground. Schools may opt for larger equipment if supplemental funds are found elsewhere. BCCPAC will continue conversations with the Ministry of Education and forward more details as they are communicated to us.

For the coming 2018/19 school year, school districts will be identifying priorities in consultation with DPACs and PACs. The Ministry of Education will be giving priority to schools with:

- No playground
- No community playground in close distance

In future years this will be part of the Capital Plan process where districts submit their priorities. BCCPAC will be working with the Ministry of Education to help develop guiding criteria. Once again, DPACs and PACs will be part of the process in determining local priorities. Each district consultation process will most likely be different. It is important that DPACs and PACs ask their district administration what the process will look like in their district and what roles parents will have in the process.

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