



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 a significant sum between five hundred thousand to a million dollars. We feel that a change in taxation by the Province should not be detrimental to 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. 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