



Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association

September 12, 2022

Hon. Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Education and Child Care
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria, BC V8W 9E2

Via Email and Mail:

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We are the union representing Elementary and Adult Educators in Vancouver, a district that we're sure you can appreciate is experiencing significant challenges regarding the implementation and, specifically, the delays and inadequacy of the Seismic Mitigation Program.

While we appreciate that the project is complex and has many layers, including technical, budget-related and the cooperation of levels of government, it's been our experience that the challenges resulting from the unreasonably long timeline and the delays that have dogged the program from the start have had a significant impact on the working lives of teachers and the learning of students.

I'm sure you can appreciate that in a district such as Vancouver, the geographic and historical challenges of being a coastal-facing, seismically vulnerable district with sites that were built, in the majority, early in the 20th century, that anxiety of families, staff and students are high. For those who work and learn in schools low on the list, that anxiety translates into compromised learning, struggles with staffing, and an undermining of the relationships between staff and the district. The latter point refers to the repetitive delays, changing timelines, and communications failures.

Teachers, school staff, and students deserve to work and learn in safe sites. Districts, such as ours, who are consistently extending timelines, and delaying implementation of the seismic mitigation project are not only undermining confidence in local and provincial government, but in the ability of our public education system to protect students and staff from dangers that we can anticipate and plan for. The sentiment among our members is that the lack of proactive efforts to expedite seismic mitigation results from apathy at best, and negligence, at worst.

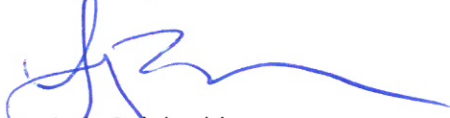
As teachers on the frontline throughout a global pandemic, teachers are being continually asked to do more with less, to protect themselves and their students with fewer and fewer resources, and to do so in a way that acknowledges and supports the trauma and mental health of students. The failure of the seismic mitigation project sends an ongoing and disrespectful message to teachers about the value of their work and the priority of schools in the view of the Ministry.

A well-funded and prioritized Seismic Mitigation Project would see resources being managed effectively and efficiently, disruption to school communities minimized, and increased workload addressed. The current reality is that, in efforts to cost-save, teachers are moving worksites multiple times, occupying multiple swing sites that alienate staff and students from one another, and the packing and moving of teachers falls almost exclusively on already overworked teaching staff.

It is our view that the Ministry ought to be prioritizing the Seismic Mitigation Project in Vancouver and other districts as part of the ongoing commitment to public education, and to students and staff who ensure that quality education is safe and sustainable. The Vancouver Elementary and Adult Educators' Society requests that the Ministry of Education and Childcare reviews the progress and efficacy of the Seismic Mitigation Project as related to public schools and then determines and implements steps to increase school-site safety and confidence in the public education system.

We are available to meet or discuss this matter with you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Jody Polukoshko
President