

BC CONFEDERATION OF PARENT ADVISORY COUNCILS

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31 October 2003

The Honourable Gordon Campbell, Premier of British Columbia

Fax: 250 387-0087

The Honourable Christy Clark, Minister of Education and Deputy Premier

Fax: 250 387-3200

The Honourable Gary Collins, Minister of Finance

Fax: 250 387-5594

The Honourable Colin Hansen, Minister of Health Services

Fax: 250 356-9587

COPY
FAXED OCT 31, 03

Dear Premier and Ministers,

Re: Slow Pace of Seismic Upgrading

The BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils is writing to inform you of our recently passed resolution on the slow pace of seismic upgrading of the province's schools. This is an issue that affects many areas in our province. There are 2.8 million British Columbians living in the zones of highest seismic risk in our country. These zones extend from the Queen Charlotte Islands and Prince Rupert to Comox, and Courtney as well as the large urban population centers of Victoria and the Lower Mainland. We speak together, as one province, on the urgency of addressing this issue.

The resolution passed was as follows:

Resolution 2003.6 - Slow Pace of Seismic Upgrading –

BE IT RESOLVED that BCCPAC will stress to the provincial government that the current slow pace of structural seismic upgrading of our public schools greatly increases the risks of death or serious injury to tens of thousands of BC students and that BCCPAC will therefore urge the BC government to explore all possible avenues to expedite structural seismic upgrading of our public schools as a priority.

At the current pace, it will be many decades before the required structural seismic upgrading of schools will be completed. There is widespread agreement in the broader and school communities that this is unacceptably slow, given the grave risks involved to students and others. You may recall that BCCPAC has approved three other resolutions since 1998 (Please see attachment) BCCPAC has passed resolutions to support structural seismic upgrading of BC schools in the past, and other community and education partners have also repeatedly called for more urgent action in this regard. Tens of thousands of BC students are at risk of death or serious injury from a major earthquake which scientists agree will happen – it's just a question of when. It is therefore incumbent on all concerned to keep this issue on the "front burner" and to encourage the provincial government to examine all possible avenues to expedite a solution.

We are aware that you have met with members of Families for School Seismic Safety (FSSS). We wish to support the proposals presented by this group as an effective way to expedite

seismic upgrading of our schools. We agree that a new risk assessment of school building infrastructure must be undertaken in all the areas of the province at seismic risk. We applaud the recent announcement by Minister Clark to conduct a comprehensive seismic assessment of B.C.'s public schools during the next 12 months. A standardised, peer-reviewed methodology must be used to both assess and address seismic risk to all schools in the province.

We believe that the time frame for completion of structural upgrading on all school buildings that represent a serious risk to life safety in a moderate to severe earthquake should be 10-15 years from today. Funding should be in place to see this work completed within that time.

We emphasize that this work should be funded with new dollars so as not to further constrain other educational budget concerns. We believe that the province should take the leadership role in exploring all possible avenues to secure and provide the necessary funding, including working with the federal government to make this work part of the National Disaster Mitigation Strategy. This is not an educational issue; it is a safety and infrastructure issue.

Seismic upgrades already approved and/or funded across the province must go ahead as planned. When the new risk assessment of school building infrastructure is completed, 1 year from now, we ask government to bring together school boards and engineers and parent groups as well as other potential stakeholders to agree on a rapid implementation strategy, as well as the necessary budget, to address seismic upgrading of schools not already slated for upgrades within 10 to 15 years.

We believe that if there has been complacency about this issue in the past, it is because the public has not understood the magnitude of the increased risk posed to these buildings. As a provincial organization, we will do our part to keep our membership updated on your actions on this important issue.

We are not keeping pace with other jurisdictions in North America in protecting our school children from seismic hazard. Structural seismic upgrading of school buildings has not kept pace with upgrading of other essential infrastructure in the province, and we therefore urge the province to take the lead in exploring all possible avenues to expedite structural seismic upgrading of our public schools as a priority. We will not be able to live with it as a society if our inaction today results in tragedy tomorrow. After the deaths of 26 school children, parents in Italy mourned that school should have been the safest building in town – instead it was the only one to collapse.

We look forward to a response confirming the progress of the government's provincial assessment and further plans. We assure you of our full support for efforts to respond to the above resolution. Help us to keep our children safe.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerri Watson". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above the printed name.

President

Attachment

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Slow Pace of Seismic Upgrading

BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils members are school Parent Advisory Councils and District Parent Advisory Councils in public schools in British Columbia. The PACs and DPACs annually chose to join BCCPAC and join the voices of parents throughout the province. Our two purposes are to advance the public school education and well-being of the students in British Columbia and to carry on activities to promote and enhance meaningful parent participation in an advisory capacity at the school, district and provincial levels.

At the annual general meetings, member PACs regularly vote on motions that demonstrate their concern for safety and for adequate funds to support education facilities, services and resources.

Members approved these resolutions specifically relating to seismic safety:

2003.6 Slow Pace of Seismic Upgrading

That BCCPAC will stress to the provincial government that the current slow pace of structural seismic upgrading of our public schools greatly increases the risks of death or serious injury to tens of thousands of BC students and that BCCPAC will therefore urge the BC government to explore all possible avenues to expedite structural seismic upgrading of our public schools as a priority.

2002.8 Earthquake Preparedness Funding

That BCCPAC lobby the government for funding to safely equip schools in those districts designated as high-risk earthquake zones.

1998.12 Earthquake Preparedness

That the BCCPAC lobby on behalf of all British Columbia students who reside in an earthquake zone to insure that all schools built from this point on be built to withstand an earthquake that BC could expect. If schools are undergoing major renovation, structural upgrading for earthquake preparedness should be part of the renovation. The MoE should be held accountable for these upgrades. Such upgrades should have an enhancement of the seismic safety factor of 50% which is currently the requirement for public buildings such as fire halls.

1998.13 Earthquake Preparedness

That the BCCPAC lobby on behalf of all BC students who reside in an earthquake zone to improve the safety of our schools by taking measures to insure that our children will be protected from flying glass in the event of an earthquake. Each school should be inspected by persons who have experience in the effects of seismic activity on buildings to outline a course of action to upgrade all windows of the potentially affected schools. the MoE should be held accountable for these upgrades