



Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association

2010 May 12

Mike Lombardi
 Chairperson – Committee I
 Vancouver Board of Education
 1580 West Broadway
 Vancouver, BC V6J 5K8

Dear Mike,

VESTA requests that the topic of “Climate Action Fund initiative” be placed on the next Committee I agenda.

We wish to propose that the Vancouver Board of Education and the relevant stakeholders work together to call for the amendment of the Greenhouse Gas Reductions Target Act (GGRTA) so that funds that are paid by the Vancouver Board of Education and other school districts to offset greenhouse gas emission levels be used to create a new Climate Action Fund to support actions aimed at reducing those emission levels within school districts.

The Greenhouse Gas Reduction Targets Act (GGRTA) was given Royal Assent on 2007 November 28, and brought into force on 2008 January 1. It legislates BC’s aggressive reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions, and the government’s commitment to a carbon-neutral public sector by 2010. The act puts into law BC’s target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 33 percent below 2007 levels by 2020. It also includes the long-term target of an 80 percent reduction below 2007 levels by 2050.

The GGRTA requires the public sector to make a public report available annually that details action taken toward carbon neutrality. The provincial government (including individual ministries and agencies), schools, colleges, universities, health authorities and Crown corporations are all included in this commitment. This report must list actions these bodies have taken to reduce carbon use, and their plans for continuing to minimize emissions. The first course of action will be to reduce emissions and the second to offset the remainder.

If it is done right, the GGTRA has a huge potential to educate and engage BC residents in climate change solutions. 1 in 6 people work in BC’s public sector, and BC’s student population in the K-12 sector totals over 650,2000, and post-secondary institutions currently have enrolment over 430,000 in this province. Schools, colleges and universities have the opportunity to play a key role in developing an educated culture of citizens that are equipped with the attitudes, behaviours, and skills to adapt to the future challenges that lay ahead due to climate change.

05-12 Lombardi re GGRTA.docx



As it currently stands, though, the GGRTA, takes more money away from public institutions already struggling for funds under budget cuts, penalizing them for the greenhouse gas emissions without giving them any direct financial support or incentives for reducing their carbon footprint. The funds paid by public sector organizations starting in 2010 are to go to the Pacific Carbon Trust, a provincial Crown corporation with a mandate to deliver BC-based greenhouse gas offsets, with the intention of cancelling out the emissions from the public sector organizations' operations by reducing or removing an equivalent amount of greenhouse gasses through an offset project, including controversial "run-of-the-river" private hydroelectric projects.

Employees, their unions, and those affected in public sector organizations are potentially huge allies in changing the current framework of the GGRTA to support institutional adaptation to climate change.

The GGRTA holds public sector organizations accountable in three areas: fuel usage, energy usage, and paper usage. However, it is known there are other major contributors that are not being recognized. Our diets, including food consumed in schools, are identified as significant contributors to carbon footprints, accounting for up to twice the amount of equivalent carbon dioxide emissions as driving in North America. Our food system is a very significant contributor to greenhouse gas emissions. If we are serious about addressing climate change, we also have to talk about food. It is evident that school food systems, and that of other public sector organizations, have the potential to drastically affect greenhouse gas emissions.

A Climate Action Fund, formed from the funds to be paid as offsets for greenhouse gas emissions of public sector organizations, could begin to provide the incentives necessary for these organizations to take action in reducing their greenhouse gas emissions and facilitate adaptations to climate change.

In schools, a Climate Action Fund could support actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the three areas that are being measured, and they can also be used for other projects that would support adaptation to climate change – school gardens to foster attitudes, behaviours and skills relevant to our changing climate; composting to reduce food waste; renovations and upgrades to school kitchens to allow for the purchase and prevention of food with a lower carbon footprint that is locally and sustainably grown without heavy processing and packaging. Standards could be developed to determine appropriate uses of such a Climate Action Fund that would need to be specific to each public sector organization affected by the GGRTA.

The Vancouver Board of Education and its stakeholders could play a key role in getting such an initiated started. Rather than allowing the GGRTA to continue to be rolled-out in its current configuration, we could work together, and potentially with other bodies, to call for the

amendment of the GGRTA to establish a Climate Action Fund that would support positive actions within schools.

We look forward to discussing this with you, and the other stakeholder representatives at Committee I.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Harris". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Chris" being more prominent than the last name "Harris".

Chris Harris
President

cc. Anne Guthrie Warman, VSTA
Paul Faoro, CUPE 15
Brent Boyd, CUPE 407
Tim Chester, IUOE Local 963
Steve Cardwell, Superintendent