

May 5, 2016

Kevin Waugh, MP - Saskatoon-Grasswood
Suite 5 - 2720 8th Street East
Saskatoon SK S7H 0V8

Dear Kevin Waugh:

I am writing to you on behalf of the Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools' Board of Education with respect to the pending second reading of Private Members' Bill C-241 that seeks to have the GST paid by school authorities refunded from the federal government at a rate of 100 per cent, rather than the current 68 per cent.

Our school board is very supportive of this bill, and I ask for you to support it as well. As you know, all school boards are funded through provincial tax dollars, paid by citizens for the betterment of society by educating our youth. Using public funds to pay another tax is both counterintuitive and administratively wasteful. There appears to be consensus that GST should not apply to school board purchases and activities by virtue that we currently receive a partial rebate. So, fundamentally, the rebate makes sense. On principle alone, the 100 per cent refund should be supported, especially considering municipalities currently enjoy the full 100 per cent rebate.

Should Bill C-241 pass, our school division would have an additional \$677,000 annually available to increase supports to children in the classroom (based on 2015 tax figures). With that \$677,000, we could hire nine more teachers or 21 more educational assistants—or some combination therein—to respond to the needs of our students. These funds could drop our pupil-teacher ratio in our elementary schools by almost 0.5, which is significant for our almost 17,000 students.

Our enrolment has increased an average of two per cent in each of the last five years. Much of that growth includes serving families who are new to Canada. The funds received through a 100 per cent GST rebate could pay for increasing English as an Additional Language support, as well as other classroom supports that put mounting pressure on our existing resources.

Additionally, one must also consider the administrative costs to both the boards and the Government of Canada associated with collecting the tax, applying for the rebate and processing the rebates. It is difficult to quantify the costs; however, they must be significant. We are always looking for ways to be more efficient with our financial resources, but efficiency with the tasks of our human resources is equally important. We would expect some degree of administrative efficiencies could also be realized through this bill.

In conclusion, our board applauds the efforts made thus far by K. Waugh M.P. (Saskatoon-Grasswood) to raise this issue for public debate in Canada. Our board sees this as a significant step towards addressing some of the funding challenges that we face in our quest to continue offering a world-class education to our students. We know that we are not alone in this struggle and believe that this is truly a national issue. We ask that you support this bill. In doing so, know that you are supporting, in a fundamental manner, the education of tomorrow's leaders, both within your constituency and across the nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Diane Boyko". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

Diane Boyko, Chair
Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools
Board of Education