



July 4, 2013

Ref: 20224

The Honourable Jason Kenney
Minister for Citizenship, Immigration
and Multiculturalism
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Kenney,

As the Representative for Children and Youth, an independent officer of the British Columbia Legislature, my mandate is to improve services and outcomes for children in B.C. through advocacy, accountability and review. My Office works to ensure that the voices and views of young people are heard and that their rights and interests are respected and upheld in decisions that are being made about them.

In October 2011, in partnership with the Vancouver Foundation, my office held a youth summit, Fresh Voices from Long Journeys, focused on immigrant and refugee youth. During the summit we heard about a wide range of immigrant and refugee experiences and significant impacts on children and youth as a result. They spoke of the importance of Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) and community programs such as My Circle that in some cases are delivered through school communities.

Coming out of the summit, I specifically committed to working with youth to encourage federal policy- and decision-makers to consider the impact on refugee and immigrant youth when considering policies and practices specific to immigration issues. While I am fully cognizant that immigration matters are under federal jurisdiction, and my legislated mandate relates to provincial matters, I wish to add my voice to the frustration regarding the change in delivering services to immigrant and refugee families, specifically the SWIS and related services and programs.

Currently, 21 school districts across B.C. receive funds to support SWIS and associated programs. SWIS has been operating effectively since 2007, however the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration Canada has determined that it will now grant funds through a competitive Call for Proposals rather than direct award to individual school districts. This means that school districts are required to compete for funds and, if they are not successful, districts will be unable to provide immediate, effective settlement services for their immigrant and refugee students and families.

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Having SWIS programs as part of school districts is advantageous for a number of reasons:

- Because SWIS are present in neighbourhood schools, they are more accessible to students and families and able to establish and maintain positive relationships.
- School district staff are able to share information about students/families and work collaboratively with SWIS to respond to needs in a coordinated, proactive, and timely manner.
- The 21 school districts with SWIS programs work together and share best practice in order to better facilitate the students' integration into schools and the families' integration into the community. During the last year, these school districts developed a SWIS Service Standard Charter to ensure that SWIS services are delivered in a qualitative and consistent manner across B.C.

The change in federal funding means the dollars for the programs are now subject to a competitive approach that by its very nature does not nurture collaboration or an integrated service approach. As well, the grant application is a time-consuming and onerous process that consumes energy and time better spent on actual services to immigrant and refugee students and families.

On behalf of the students and families that are supported by the services as they are currently provided, I would respectfully ask that you reconsider your decision to call for proposals and instead acknowledge the successful Immigrant Settlement Support Services already in place and allow for a direct award of funding to those school districts.

Sincerely,



Mary Ellen Turpel-Lafond
Representative for Children and Youth

pc: Honourable Christy Clark, Premier
Honourable Shirley Bond, Jobs, Tourism and Skills Training
Steve Cardwell, Superintendent, Vancouver School Board
Tom Grant, Superintendent, Coquitlam School District
Mike McKay, Superintendent, Surrey School District

