



March 29, 2023

The Honourable John Aldag
Member of Parliament
Cloverdale – Langley City
#214, 6820 188 Street
Surrey, BC V3N 5J8

Via email: John.Aldag@parl.gc.ca

Dear Mr. Aldag:

Re: Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)

The Langley School District appreciates working with partners like you to continue our work in celebrating diversity and fostering an inclusive and nurturing culture to help ensure all learners can reach their full potential. The District is proud of our staff and the ongoing work being done to achieve this. On behalf of the Langley Board of Education, I am highlighting the exceptional work of our Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) Program staff, but I am also bringing to your attention some of the challenges they face in our District.

Langley School District's SWIS Program has been in place since 2008. In alignment with the District's vision, the SWIS program's goal is to foster an inclusive and nurturing culture. The program has 11 staff members who represent 11 languages but serve all clients with different languages. SWIS workers are a vital part of our education system as they support students and families in a variety of ways, including helping clients register for schools and connect with teachers, providing assistance and referrals for government services, supporting families with interpretation (translation services), facilitating conversation classes and workshops, among other activities. The District's SWIS program has supported 1,278 eligible clients from April 2022 to January 2023.

Many newcomers are from Korea, China, India, and other countries. It is important to note the District's SWIS program supports a growing number of non-eligible clients. The number of non-eligible clients makes up 40 percent (40%) of the individuals served, including temporary residents, refugee claimants, naturalized Canadian Citizens, and children born in Canada to immigrant parents. More recently, the District has welcomed an influx of families from the Ukraine who have arrived on a Canada Ukraine Authorization Emergency Travel status (CUAET). This situation comes with additional challenges. The Langley School District will continue to work together with our staff and partners to support our newcomers; students and their families but recognize that only so much can be done with limited resources.

Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) in BC is a comprehensive school-based settlement program that maximizes the integration and settlement of immigrant and refugee students and their families through a seamless and systemic delivery model, recognizing that schools are natural community hubs and often a first contact for newcomers.

The Langley School District is a member of the English Language Learners (ELL) Consortium, a group of 11 school districts that, in addition to professional collaboration, has taken on an advocacy role in creating an understanding of the needs of newcomers to Canada and the resources required by school districts to provide effective programs. In recent years, the Consortium has also become a strong advocate for settlement workers in schools.

Regardless of our differing service delivery models, Consortium member districts face similar challenges, such as the ineligibility of temporary residents for funding, misaligned district and federal fiscal years contributing to difficulty for staffing accordingly and challenges with a contribution agreement structure as opposed to a grant structure.

In April 2019, the Consortium appeared as a witness before the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration. Some of these challenges are included in the [Improving Settlement Services Across Canada Report](#). In February 2022, the [Evaluation of the Settlement Workers in School \(SWIS\) Initiative](#) report was conducted to fulfill the Treasury Board's Policy of Results requirements and states:

"The evaluation highlighted a clear and demonstrable need for SWIS. SWIS provides newcomer youth, children, and their parents/guardians with school-based settlement services essential for integrating into the Canadian society and the Canadian education system. Moreover, the Government of Canada has an evident role in providing SWIS, despite education being a provincial/territorial responsibility, as the Federal Government is responsible for newcomer integration.

SWIS uses unique delivery models that allow service providers to adapt their programming for regional, provincial/territorial, and local priorities. However, the evaluation found this flexibility creates challenges for reporting on initiative outcomes, comparing different service providers, and understanding what SWIS interventions work best for whom and under what conditions." (p.4)

The Evaluation Report included three recommendations, including *Recommendation 1: IRCC should confirm and implement a common definition of SWIS with core services/activities supported by clear policy guidelines.*

According to the report, IRCC has agreed with this recommendation and "will implement policy guidelines that allow for regional variation to meet the needs of diverse populations while prioritizing national coherence." (p.6)

To support school boards, policy changes should be developed with flexibility to be proactive and responsive to changes in client needs and demographics, allowing for the inclusion of all those needing settlement support, regardless of their immigration status. The Langley Board of Education is advocating for multi-year funding for SWIS, aligning with the school district's fiscal year, the ability to reallocate when needed, and the implementation of a grant-based pilot or model.

On behalf of the Langley Board of Education, I am writing this letter for your consideration in follow-up to a motion that was carried unanimously at the Board's Regular Meeting on February 21, 2023:

"That the Langley Board of Education write a letter to Langley's two Members of Parliament urging Immigrant, Refugee, Citizenship Canada (IRCC) to consider a grant funding model rather than a contribution agreement for the funding of the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) Program, to accommodate the unique needs of school districts to support families and students. In addition, the funding should be expanded to include "ineligible clients" including but not limited to; Refugee Claimants, those on Work Permits, and Naturalized Canadian Citizens (including Syrian and Karen Refugees), as they often require settlement support."

The Langley School District is one of the fastest-growing school districts in the province, and with growth comes increased needs. As mentioned in my introduction, 40 percent (40%) of the individuals we serve are non-eligible and, therefore, not federally funded. This makes it extremely challenging to support our students and families and ensure they experience success in a positive and welcoming environment. The District has identified a growing need and is advocating to expand funding to include "ineligible clients." To ensure student success and to help support the health, safety, and well-being of our families, there is an urgent need for a more sustainable system.

The Board of Education is hoping for your support in advocating for change to allow us to better serve our community. Thank you for your time and consideration. The Board looks forward to working with you to help ensure equity for our students and their families.

Sincerely,



Candy Ashdown, Chair
Board of Education