

April 2, 2013

The Honourable Christy Clark
Premier of British Columbia
Box 9041, Station PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Clark:

Re: 2013/14 Public Education Budget

The public education system in British Columbia is the envy of many countries around the world. We should all be very proud of that stature and achievement. For the sake of our children and the future well-being of this Province we need to make adequate investments in education, to ensure we can continue to achieve that standard, providing the kind of public education British Columbia families have come to expect.

We are concerned our ability to meet that expectation is being seriously eroded with the adoption of the Provincial Budget and advice from the Minister of Education that sufficient funding is not being provided to cover approximately \$134 Million in cost pressures over which Boards of Education have no control. Of course these cost pressures do not include whatever wage settlement may be reached in the current labour negotiations, nor do they include the reductions in funding resulting from declining enrollments.

The Board of Education for School District No. 42 (Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows), the MRPM District Parent Advisory Council, CUPE local 703 and the Maple Ridge Teachers' Association are all concerned that our collective ability to provide the kind of education we want for our children is being significantly compromised and, despite our best efforts to communicate the concern through various organizations including the BC School Trustees Association, it seems that government isn't listening.

We are not the only Board of Education that is concerned. All of the Boards we have had the opportunity to speak with in the lower mainland are equally concerned and are sharing similar stories, having to make cuts which will have a negative impact on our children's education. In a recent report to regional BCSTA Branches, Vice President Teresa Rezansoff is quoted as having

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said the following to the media during the budget lock up, "Programs and choice for students will be sacrificed as school districts struggle to meet these cost pressures". She was referring to the approximately \$134M calculated by the BC Association of School Business Officials. As we wrestle with the process of finding ways to submit a balanced budget in this District we know Ms. Rezansoff's statement is absolutely accurate.

To illustrate the point School District No. 42 has closed five schools and reduced staff in many operational areas over the past several years. We have had a decline in enrollment and acknowledge that reducing our resources in response to that decline is fiscally prudent and responsible. If that was the only funding shortfall we were facing we could handle that. However, the \$2M in cost pressures we have no control over (pension contribution adjustments, HST to PST, Inflation on utilities, supplies and services) on top of the funding reduction that comes with the decline in enrollment coupled with our need to replace the contribution to our 2012/13 budget that came from contingencies (now very close to being depleted) amounts to an overall 2013/14 budget shortfall of \$6M or five percent. Again, this does not include any wage settlements which may be reached in the current labour negotiations.

All of this is challenging however, it is having to address the \$2M in cost pressures noted above without any Government assistance which is particularly galling given our continuing struggles to manage the other shortfalls. Of course we couldn't possibly cover any wage settlements within the existing funding envelope even though we believe modest wage increases are appropriate in an inflationary environment.

In light of this situation and similar situations in most School Districts throughout the Province we request that the Province revisit its budget priorities to adequately fund one of government's most important areas of service. To be more specific we are hoping government will fund the cost pressures noted above and any settlements which are the result of the current labour negotiations.

To quote from the 2002/03 Charter for Public Education;

"Public Education is a sacred trust. As a community we promise to prepare learners for a socially responsible life in a free and democratic society, to participate in a world which each generation will shape and build. We promise a public education system which provides learners with knowledge and wisdom, protects and nurtures their natural joy of learning, encourages them to become persons of character, strength and integrity, infuses them with hope and with spirit and guides them to resolute and thoughtful action."

We cannot possibly honour this commitment with continually diminishing resources. Just to be clear a hold the line budget in the face of inflation and other significant cost increases over which

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we have no control represents a budget cut. Budget cuts represent reductions in programs and choice for students. All of the trimming has been done over many years of austerity. As one of our partners so aptly described it we've already cut the fat....we're now moving into bone and muscle and it hurts a great deal. All of the undersigned are asking for your help.

Sincerely,



Eleanor Palis, Vice-Chairperson
Board of Education



Leslie Franklin, President
Canadian Union of Public Employees



George Serra, President
Maple Ridge Teachers' Association



Kellie Marquet, Chairperson
District Parent Advisory Council

cc: Board of Education
Jan Unwin, Superintendent of Schools
Flavia Coughlan, Secretary Treasurer
Honourable Minister, Don McRae, Minister of Education
Marc Dalton, Member of Legislative Assembly
Michael Sather, Member of Legislative Assembly

MM/to