

From: Anita Brierley [<mailto:anitabrierley@hotmail.com>]

Sent: June-23-15 11:26 AM

To: Eleanor Palis; Lisa Beare; Susan Carr; Korleen Carreras; Ken Clarkson; David Rempel; Sylvia Russell; Laurie Meston

Subject: We need our school buses!

Living in the most rural areas of Maple Ridge, many in Whonnock, Albion North Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows we rely on school buses to get our children to both elementary and secondary schools. This is for many reasons including that: the distance to schools is too great to walk; transit is either non-existent, unreliable, too infrequent, and lacking capacity, there are no sidewalks or safe walking paths; and there are many wild animals. Learning that the school buses have been eliminated in the 2016/2017 school year is of enormous concern for families who live in these rural areas of Whonnock, East, North Maple Ridge and rural Pitt Meadows.

The decision to eliminate the buses all happened very quickly with little time to gather out thoughts. April 8th was the public presentation, April 15th the budget committee of the whole, April 22nd was the transportation meeting and May 13th was the adoption of the preliminary budget. In just over 4 weeks we went from the school buses being in jeopardy to being cancelled. Many of us did not even find out until after the decision was made and some, who have children in elementary school who may not currently use the bus, but who will require the bus for high school, still don't know. Some of us attended the transportation meeting that was held last year, where we reluctantly accepted that if we were going to be able to continue to have a school bus, there would be a fee to ride. Never at anytime at that meeting was there even a hint that the school buses would be eliminated.

In the school district 42 preliminary budget it states that there is no specific requirement to provide transportation in the School ACT. It also notes that the provincial government recommended looking at transportation as an administrative savings area to be considered by school districts to meet the provincially established administrative savings targets. We are not clear how school buses can be considered administrative savings as it represents an essential service for many. We believe that when the provincial government said to look at transportation savings, it did not mean to cut all transportation and leave the students in the most remote parts of the district and those without access to transit to fend for themselves. A few years ago and after some school in East Maple Ridge were bursting at the seams even with portables, the school board changed the catchments meaning many families, once their children became school aged, would have to travel a great distances to get to school. The school board made a commitment to bus these kids to school that had space but that required them to travel long distances to get there. Now, with the decision to cancel the buses, these families, and those that will be moving into these areas, are forced to come up with a way to get their children to a school that is in some case more than 10 kilometers away from where they live. In regards to there not being a specific requirement to provide transportation, it has been provided for many years and is the only means of transportation for many.

The School Boards Policy #5400 states that “the Board of Education believes it is their responsibility to ensure appropriate transportation for eligible students to their catchments area school” What is the point of a policy, if, with the stroke of a pen, it can be eliminated. When this policy was made it

was the belief of the Board. Those beliefs have not changed, why the policy? How can it just be stricken, like it never existed? And why?

As Maple Ridge has grown and more schools in some parts of east Maple Ridge have been built and transit has become available to more areas, the school bus routes have been understandably reduced. This is not the case for Whonnock, East Maple Ridge, North Maple Ridge and rural Pitt Meadows. When families in these affected communities moved here, many researched the bus routes to ensure there would be a way for their children to get to school. We have lived in these rural areas for years or have moved here knowing that school buses would pick up and drop off our kids from school. Now this service is in jeopardy.

The school buses may not affect a large percentage of the families in district 42, only about 262 families, in fact, but they provide an invaluable service to those 370 students. Children with special needs are not discounted just because they are low in number. We are a special needs community because of our unique challenges as discussed and Whonnock, East Maple Ridge, North Maple Ridge and rural Pitt Meadows families deserve the same sort of support from our school district. After all, we practice inclusion in the classroom, why not on the school buses as well?

After attending the information session at Garibaldi, we are more knowledgeable on some of the issues facing the board. We believe that there are some options available that could reduce the cost to the board, and still allow the bus service to be maintained. Some of our ideas include:

- Renegotiating the contract with the bus company so that we have more flexibility regarding rider ship versus bus commitment. Schedule routes to run all of the buses at full capacity. There is no reason for buses to be running half empty. Get rid of the late bus to Garibaldi. It is a luxury we cannot afford.
- Charge a bit more to parents. We realize the bus fees were not happily received by some, but the alternative of no buses would be a much heavier burden. By our calculations the \$215 fee equated to \$1 a day to ride the bus. Parents pay more than that to drive around the corner.
- Consider corporate sponsorship of our buses. Maybe our bus contractor would agree to allow the buses to be wrapped (at the sponsors expense) to cover part of the cost of the buses. The company's considered would of course need to be a positive influence on our youth.
- A significant part of the bus expenses (on a per pupil basis) is being spent on Special Needs busing. Whether a child is special needs in Whonnock, East Maple Ridge, North Maple Ridge or rural Pitt Meadows or not, neither can walk the distance from Whonnock or East and North Maple Ridge to Garibaldi or from rural Pitt Meadows to either high school or elementary school. Inclusion is one of the Boards mandates in regards to Special Needs kids. Can we consider inclusion for bussing as well?
- Both the Province and the School Board talk about green initiatives and using transit instead of the single car approach. It appears that getting rid of the busing, where no transit exists, goes completely against any green initiatives and is a huge step in the wrong direction.

In closing, we believe we have come up with many creative ideas on how to better manage our transportation expenditures without canceling this essential bus service. We look forward to talking with you.

ITEM 1 – ATTACHMENT E

From: Dorothy Green [<mailto:dorth5green@gmail.com>]

Sent: Monday, June 22, 2015 7:30 PM

To: Mike Murray; Eleanor Palis; Lisa Beare; Susan Carr; Korleen Carreras; Ken Clarkson; David Rempel; superintendent - sylvia_russell@sd42.ca; deputy superintendent - laurie_meston@sd42.ca; director of instruction - shannon_derinzy@sd42.ca; director of instruction - David_Vandergugten@sd42.ca

Subject: We need our school bus!

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Dorothy Green

June 24, 2015

We would like to begin by saying that both this Board and school district staff understand the anger and frustration expressed by parents and guardians at the cancellation of regular student busing services beginning September 2016. We know that families in our more remote communities have been relying on this service for years. The responses we collected through our online survey and in person at the district transportation meeting have clearly shown us that the removal of this service will be a great hardship for many of our families. Before this decision was made, trustees considered all the input received, including the feedback that was given to us at the public meeting on student transportation. We deeply regret that our financial circumstances have forced us to make this difficult decision.

Like other school boards across the province, our Board has struggled with the significant cuts it has had to make every year as a result of inadequate provincial funding. We have closed six schools, eliminated resource and administrative positions, increased class sizes, reduced secondary teacher librarian positions by 38%, cut clerical support to schools by 26%, increased rental fees for community use of our facilities, and introduced fees for student busing. The salaries of our principals, vice-principals and exempt staff have been frozen since 2009. Every year, additional cuts and additional "savings" are required to make ends meet. In the past two years alone, our Board had to implement \$8 million in painful service level cuts.

This Board's decision to cancel regular school busing services was extremely difficult. We had heard your stories and we understood what this decision would mean for you. You told us regular school busing was an essential service for your families. We agree. All administrative district services are essential and support the core business of our school district, which is to provide K-12 education to children in our community. School districts across the province, however, have been directed to find substantial "administrative savings," and our provincial government has specifically identified transportation as one area in which these savings may be found.

The amount of "administrative savings" the Maple Ridge – Pitt Meadows School District was directed to find amounted to \$1.3 million. After years of deep cuts, there is no way to achieve such "savings" without cutting into services that are essential. The equally unpalatable alternative to the discontinuation of regular student busing services would have been to once again increase class sizes across our district. While just a few years ago our school district had some of the best average class-sizes in the province, today we are very close to the maximum allowable levels set by the province. The Board agreed that increasing class sizes in our district above current levels would be detrimental to all our students, and was not prepared to make that decision.

Although we realize these measures will not replace the important service some of the families in our communities have come to rely on, school district staff will work hard to provide these families with as many options as possible. They will liaise with daycare providers and others to enhance before and after school care in affected areas, and will also work with TransLink to explore public transportation alternatives for SD42 students. For 2016/17, eligible low income families that currently use SD42 regular busing will be able to apply for a transportation subsidy equivalent to the busing fees the district currently charges, and will be able to use this subsidy towards public bus, taxi, mileage, or neighbourhood carpooling.

ITEM 1 – ATTACHMENT F

We know all this will still not be enough and we will try to do more. The Board has and will continue to petition the provincial government for adequate education funding, and it has and will continue to inform local MLAs about the detrimental consequences of ongoing budget cuts. We will share your stories so that government understands the impact that the chronic underfunding of education has on the families in our community.

Sincerely,

Mike Murray, Chair
Board of Education

Cc:

All Trustees
Sylvia Russell, Superintendent
Flavia Coughlan, Secretary Treasurer
Laurie Meston, Deputy Superintendent
Shannon Derinzy, Director of Instruction
David Vandergugten, Director of Instruction