



April 27, 2016

Public Board Meeting

Correspondence:

Elizabeth Condrotte, Chair, SD No. 50 (Haida Gwaii)

Mike Bernier, Minister of Education

Pascale Shaw, Save the Maple Ridge School Bus Group

ADDITIONAL HANDOUT



**BOARD OF EDUCATION
SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 50
HAIDA GWAI**

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April 1, 2016

Honourable Mike Bernier
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045 Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister Bernier,

The Board of Education of School District 50 (Haida Gwaii) would like to express its frustration at a funding peculiarity that has us, and all districts, in an unnecessary funding pressure. You are aware that the ministry requires all districts to find 'administrative savings' each year. While this may be well and good on paper, the reality is this strips districts of their ability to support everything from maintenance on aging buildings to food programming that supports our students learning every day. In our district, we have saved our funds through a variety of efforts, but these are zero return initiatives; that is, the reward for reducing supply budgets is making due with less paper, not making due with less paper but more microscopes. Meanwhile, the ministry has set districts up for another cost pressure by not paying for raises for our hard working principals. Our small school principals were making less money than some of our teachers, despite the extra challenges that come with taking on a leadership role on top of teaching students. We would also mention that the freeze on exempt district staff compensation will eventually have to lift, and the longer that takes, the greater the cost to districts to adjust budgets.

In our district, we have been tasked with saving \$60 000 per year in administrative savings. If we are to conform to the Exempt Staff Compensation Working Group proposal for principals, it will cost our district approximately \$60 000. The obvious conclusion we have is - if the government won't provide us with the funds for these raises, surely it is logical that these so-called administrative savings could be used on our administrators, who have to make do with fewer resources due to these cuts? The only other option is still further cuts. An interesting model implemented by the government of British Columbia we might remind you of is the Carbon Neutral system - after a first year of simply taking money from districts, we were able to access the money for green projects. In fact, Haida Gwaii has the largest solar panel array on a public school in the province thanks to this initiative!

We would welcome a visit from you to our fantastic district, and see the terrific work our staff - including principals and district personnel- do for our learners. Perhaps this up close view of our system would assure you that every available dollar is put to good use supporting the children of Haida Gwaii.

We hope you will give consideration to allowing districts to re-purpose the administrative savings, as was done with the Carbon Neutral initiative.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Condrotte
Board Chair

EC

BCSTA



April 25, 2016

Ref: 186424

Teresa Rezansoff, President, BCSTA
Sherry Elwood, President, BCSSA
Kelvin Stretch, President, BCASBO
Kevin Reimer, President, BCPVPA

Dear Ms. Rezansoff, Ms. Elwood, Mr. Stretch and Mr. Reimer:

Thank you for your letter of February 22, 2016, addressed to the Honourable Michael de Jong, Minister of Finance, and to me, following *Budget 2016* and your recognition of the many superior outcomes in British Columbia public education deserving celebration. I sincerely apologize for the delay in responding.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation to you for working to improve the financial performance of the public education sector. I understand this is the first time in decades that all 60 school districts started the school year with an accumulated surplus and all districts are on track to meet financial targets.

With Government's pledge to a balanced budget, the Ministry of Education was provided with a funding increase in *Budget 2016*, which delivered an additional \$221 million for public schools alone over the next three fiscal years.

As a result of your supportive efforts and constructive discussions since the March 15, 2016, operating grant announcement, for the 2016/17 school year the Ministry has also announced \$28 million in additional preliminary funding allocations to boards of education by allocating the holdback now and ensuring additional funds for enrolment growth are secured. Importantly, Government is committed to managing further enrolment risk outside the operating grant block if district actual enrolment exceeds estimates.

Overall, education funding is up \$110 million compared to last year's budget and the Ministry is investing a record of \$5.1 billion in public education this year. Annual education funding is \$1.2 billion higher than it was in 2000/01, and the average per student funding for public schools has increased by 42 percent over this same period.

In addition, effective July 1, 2016, the employer contribution rate for the Teachers' Pension Plan drops, creating an estimated \$45 million in savings across all school districts which can be used to offset any pressures.

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If you have any further questions about the 2016/17 funding allocations, please contact George Farkas, Assistant Deputy Minister, Resource Management Division, at George.Farkas@gov.bc.ca or by phone at (250) 356-1883.

Thank you again for continuing to champion the effective management and operations of our public schools in BC to support student achievement.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bernier", with a small dot at the end.

Mike Bernier
Minister

Subject: Save the School bus plea

April 26th, 2016-04-26

Plea to Save the School Bus

Dear School Board Trustees;

As the day to approve the budget, Wednesday April 27th, fast approaches, I would like to remind you that as of right now, some of the 370 children in the most rural areas of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows will have no access to education in September because of the cancellation of the school buses.

Since making the decision to cancel the school buses last year, the reason given was that there was no money and therefore you had to pick between cancelling the buses or increasing class sizes, many things have changed such as:

- We had a budget surplus this year
- We received an additional 3.8 million dollars due to additional enrolment
- You have a solid and out spoken group of parents fighting to both keep the bus and bring attention to the under funding of education, which has caused this cancellation..

Late last week we send you a list of 11 recommendations as to how we feel you could “Save the School Buses”. Paula and I had an opportunity to sit down and discuss some of these items with Mrs. Coughlan and Mrs. Russell. The items were:

1. Increase the cost to ride the bus
2. Review the way in which you register for the school bus
3. Review the bus routes
4. Perform some competitive pricing comparisons for the school bus services we require.
5. Review bus routes for children with special needs
6. Review catchments boundaries
7. .Review how grades 8's are placed into high school:
8. Address the delicate problem of lying about where a family actually lives in order to get into their school of choice.
9. Find a way to collect education taxes on homes with secondary suites that have kids attending school.
10. 10. Raise the school tax portion of the property taxes
11. Work together with the City of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows

Although we did not discuss each item in detail, it should be noted that if all of these items were reviewed and or implemented (items 2 and 4 were or area already in place) the district would have more money, a more balanced enrolment in the high schools and school buses for those in the rural areas of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows.

You should also know that due to the change in catchments for the SRT and GSS high schools last years there are now MORE families that require transportation for lengthy distances. Where there used to only be one family who had to travel a great distance to get to high school, now there are two families. Clearly item #6 should be addressed, along with many of the other items. In regards to high schools, the enrolment numbers at Garibaldi continue to be alarmingly low

with the smallest number of kids selecting GSS as their first choice school of any of the high schools. This is after all the most eastern school and the one that over 200 kids (2014/2015) took the school bus to. Many of the kids, who would have gladly attended GSS if the school buses were running, have been forced to select other schools. Is this the last nail in the coffin for Garibaldi?

There is no safety net for the 370 children who currently use the bus or for those parents with children entering grade 8 in the fall. It is imperative that the school board trustees go back and have the school board find money, surplus from this year or contingency, to re-instate the buses for next year. This will give the group of us time to continue to lobby the government for more funding, the city for help with the developments in areas with no available school near by, Translink and the community for more support in our fight to have a better funded education system.

No solution has yet been made that solves the problem of long distance to education for some of our families in school district 42. With more houses being build and the new elementary school still years away, many more families will need to rely on the school bus to get to school. It is hoped that in time Trans link will be able to provide some transportation in the Rock Ridge and Silver Valley areas, where houses continue to be built, but the rural areas of both Pitt Meadows and Maple Ridge will need help for some time.

In summary education is a right, not a privilege and should be regardless of where you live. The fact that only just over 400 student (special needs and typical) take the bus and that this is a very small percentage of the entire district student population does not make their need for transportation any less.

Thank you for your consideration
Save the Maple Ridge School Bus group
(Pascale Shaw)