

The Editor
Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows Times



Re: Maple Ridge Mission MLA addresses bus concerns

I write on behalf of the Board of Education to express concern with MLA Marc Dalton's recent letter on education funding.

Our board has met with both of our local MLAs numerous times to discuss the difficult budget decisions we have had to make as a result of provincial underfunding. We believed MLA Dalton fully understood the impact that provincial underfunding has had on services to students in our school district; we are dismayed to discover that he does not.

While provincial grants for 2016/17 may be higher than the funding we received in previous years, this change covers only increased costs for provincially negotiated collective agreements and higher student enrolment; it does not address other ongoing cost pressures.

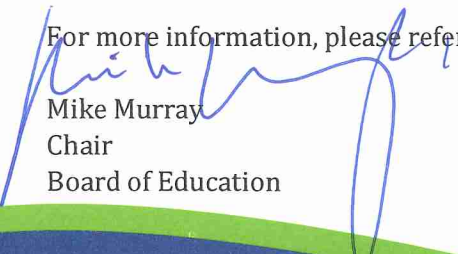
As we have shared with MLA Dalton in the past, since 2012/13 our district has addressed the following increased unfunded costs:

- Provincially mandated "administrative savings" in the amount of \$1.35 million;
- Provincially negotiated "cooperative gains" collective agreement with CUPE in the amount of \$0.82 million;
- The return to PST, which cost the district \$0.45 million;
- Provincially mandated transition to and maintenance of the Next Generation Network internet service in the amount of \$0.65 million;
- Salary increases for exempt staff whose wages have been frozen since 2009. The amount is yet to be determined, but will be based on provincially developed salary grids;
- Benefit costs increases for Extended Health, Dental, CPP, EI, Life Insurance, WCB, and MPP. (The one exception is TPP, which increased in 2013/14 by \$0.93 million and will decrease in 2016/17 by \$1.21 million.)
- Annual MSP increases of 4%;
- Annual BC Hydro increases ranging from 4% to 9%;
- Other inflationary costs.

News media throughout the province are documenting school closures and deep cuts to school district programs and services. In the Maple Ridge - Pitt Meadows School District, provincial underfunding has led to cuts in excess of \$10 million from the annual operating budget over the past three years. As one direct result, we now have the third highest secondary class size averages in the province. Unless something changes, three-year projections for our school district suggest the need for additional cuts in 2017 and 2018.

We entirely appreciate the frustration of parents and the 300 eligible users of our regular school bus service who are concerned about losing the bus service they have had in the past in the rural areas of our community. Please know this significant change would not be required if the costs outlined above had been fully funded by the provincial government.

For more information, please refer to our budget process page at <http://www.sd42.ca/budget-process>


Mike Murray
Chair
Board of Education