

## Safety Presentation to SD42 School Board Wednesday, April 16, 2014

### *Speaking Notes for Lori Champagne*

- Good evening. My name is Lori Champagne and I am the accountant at Pitt Meadows Secondary School, and I have been employed with School District 42 for the past 15 years.
- Like all of the speakers here tonight, I am proud so serve our community and passionate about the work that we do at the schools throughout School District 42.
- We're proud that we make a difference in the lives of the young adults that attend our schools, and this is the very important reason that we are here tonight - to urge you to re-explore the proposed budget cuts to clerical staff at our schools.
- Every day, parents trust that they are sending their children to a safe environment and that they will be safeguarded from harm. We strongly believe that further cuts to clerical support in School District 42 will be detrimental to the safety of students, to staff, and to visitors in our schools.
- The examples I am about to relate are real. They happened in our schools, in our community, to our children. They were dangerous and, in each case, a potentially devastating outcome was averted thanks to the actions of a clerical employee of our school district.

- As background, the Board adopted having one full time clerical employee working 35 hours per week in each school in 2002 because student safety was in jeopardy. A parent called a school and left a message that a child was not to get on the school bus because there was no one at home to greet them. The parent was en route to pick the student up but was delayed due to a motor vehicle accident. Because there was no clerical staff to answer the phone, the call went to voice mail. By the time the message had been retrieved, the bus had left with the student on board. That student was left waiting outside **a locked and empty house for what have must seemed like an eternity,** before their parents arrived home.
- On another occasion, a school secretary noticed a young student outside of the school waiting to be picked up as she was leaving for the day at 3:30 pm. When the secretary called home to the parent, there was no answer. The secretary waited with the student until a parent showed up at 4:00 pm. The parent was **so intoxicated** that the secretary refused to allow the child to leave with the parent and called the police. Had this happened when the proposed changes were in place in a school under 300, the secretary would have not been there to assist this student whose life - **and the lives of others** - would have been in jeopardy.
- In another instance, MCFD called an elementary school at 2:00 pm to warn of a credible threat to a family's safety. The children were to wait in the school office to be picked up. Had this been in a secondary school, where the calls are likely to go to voice mail, the students potentially **would have left the school property, and directly into a dangerous situation.**

- Sadly, for many of our students, protective orders against parents are a reality. School secretaries know our students. We know which students require extra attention - and protection - and we are always on guard, watching for threats to their safety and well-being.
- Many times, principals and vice principals must attend meetings before, during and after school. If a secretary 's weekly hours are cut to 30, they will be leaving school at 2:30. It would be impossible to know if any of the students were still on the school grounds at that time, and were not going to be picked up.
- When asking secretaries for feedback, I heard countless times how late parents can sometimes be to pick up their children. Sometimes it is work related, sometimes traffic, sometimes an emergency, sometimes neglect. Whatever the reason, children left waiting to be picked up is a sad and all too recurring theme.
- One secretary in a large school keeps an eye on children, answers the phones, pages students with important messages from parents, watches to see who is coming and going through the front doors. This is in addition to her regular duties.
- I have more examples. A secondary school student showed up at school with a weapon. Another student reported it at lunch hour and a partial evacuation/lockdown was initiated. If there is no general clerk and either the records clerk or accountant is sick and not to be replaced until the 6<sup>th</sup> day, there would be one person in the office during lunch breaks because office staff need to take their breaks as well.

- Had this situation happened under the proposed model, there would have been one person to alert admin - who during lunch are not in the office, but patrolling the school and grounds- to initiate lockdown procedures, and to contact police.
- Calls into secondary schools are going to voice mail more often than not. With even less clerical time, this dependence on voice mail **will increase**.
- Another time a call went to voice mail letting the secondary school know that a staff member had died. A receptionist **should have received this call** - to offer condolences to the family and to advise the appropriate staff.
- The office staff members are the front line of every school. We do more than type and count money. We are also called upon to administer first aid, to lend an ear to our students, to provide a shoulder to cry on, to provide support.
- We are the face of the school **and an integral part** of creating and maintaining the school culture and community.
- We are **not here** to plead for our jobs. To be honest, **and as we all know**, school clerical staff do not make a lot of money. We are not in this to get rich.
- We are parents ourselves. We **live in this community**, and our children **attend these schools**.

- We also know, **and appreciate**, that making cost cutting decisions is never easy, **never popular**, and can never please everyone.
- **However**, we encourage you to take another look at the budget and to explore other areas to economize, rather than chipping away at the front lines of our schools, **and the team that our children, and their parents, depend on.**
- Thank you.