

Mike Murray

**School District 42 (Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows)  
2014/15 Preliminary Budget  
Board of Education Introductory Remarks – 2014 04 30**

This has been an agonizing process equal to any we have experienced in the past. We have heard the frustration and stress in the voices of our administrators, staff, students and parents. We respect and understand their concerns.

Members of this Board of Education who also served from 2008 to 2011 have shared how challenging it was to close two schools among other adjustments during that term of office. Last year the Board had to increase class sizes and school user fees, and reduce teacher librarian time in secondary schools, reduce the number of secondary school administrators and reduce Finance Department exempt salaries. That was challenging and was particularly poignant when we considered the potential loss of some of our younger teachers. Last year we budgeted for 44 fewer positions. Thankfully the number of staff affected was partially mitigated through attrition. We are hoping there will be some mitigation of job losses this year in the same fashion .

This year's budget includes further reductions including the loss of several positions and requiring parents to pay for school bussing.

One of the concerns we've heard is that the proposed reductions are not evenly distributed throughout the organization. But when we look at the history of budget cuts we see that all of our employee groups have been impacted over the past five years. We have shared this data on page 29 of the Preliminary Operating Budget document.

These are challenging times. Some of our staff have been able to negotiate agreements with government on salary and benefit improvements; others have not. Exempt wages have been frozen for several years and our teachers are continuing to seek an agreement. The current impasse is of great concern.

Government has said to us that we must fund the most recent settlements and benefit increases from within the existing funding envelope along with other inflationary increases like our building utilities. Without additional government funding, and since 89% of our operating budget is allocated to employee wages and benefits, the only way to meet our obligations is to include the reduction of staff time. We are hopeful we will not need to cover the cost of future labour agreements from within the existing funding envelope. Doing so would be impossible without even more significant negative impacts on the system.

We do wish to address the notion that the requirement for budget cuts could be avoided if this Board, along with every other Board of Education in British Columbia, would refuse to honor the oath they made upon taking office, not comply with the School Act and submit a deficit budget. One Board did

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that a few years ago and was promptly removed from office and replaced by a single Trustee appointed by the Minister of Education. The cuts which had been proposed to balance the budget prior to the Board being removed were implemented by the appointed Trustee less than two weeks after his appointment. The previous Board of Trustees lost their official status for the remainder of their term and any opportunity to lobby on behalf of their citizens . We are not aware of any other Boards of Education in the Province taking this step or the BCSTA encouraging Boards to do so.

The balanced budget we will submit does not include all the cuts that were originally proposed. Our ST will go over the details shortly. In order to make the final decisions the Board:

- a. reviewed all of the submissions carefully,
- b. asked for and received additional information,
- c. received reports from a number of follow up meetings with parents and the employee groups most impacted by the proposals,
- d. completed comparisons to other Districts, and finally,
- e. decided to follow through with adjustments in those areas which on balance, in the view of the Board, have the least negative impact on students.

It is with the complete understanding that the cuts we make will have an impact on students and will result in service reductions.

During the past week Trustees attended the annual general meeting of the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA). Board members spoke to the President of the Association, other BCSTA Board members and Ministry Staff about Education funding, urging the organization to work with government to complete a review of the current funding formula. They talked about the need for government to re-examine its policy on holding the line on taxes since increasing taxes commensurate with inflation may be needed to balance the provincial budget while addressing inflationary costs faced by the education sector. Parents and other citizens need to send a message to government that balanced provincial budgets can be achieved through reasonable, inflation based annual tax increases, just as every Municipal government has implemented to avoid cutting services their citizens have come to expect. As an example of the problem I recently asked the Maple Ridge Finance Department for copies of the last ten years of my family's property tax notices. What I discovered were increases in property taxes related to municipal government of almost 50% over that time while the portion of my taxes going to the province for school purposes declined by 16%. The same holds true for personal income taxes. We submit the Province needs to look carefully at this situation and education financing in total.

We will be meeting shortly with our MLAs so we can share our concerns and demonstrate the loss of service. We will be passing along all of the written submissions we received to them as well.

The Board wishes to thank everyone who participated in this process for their invaluable contributions. It is through this kind of dialogue that the best decisions are made.

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Finally our ST will review the alternatives the Board is putting on the table for final consideration along with the changes which have resulted from the follow up meetings of the past two weeks.

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Chair, Board of Education