

Maple Ridge Teachers' Association

Board Budget Presentation

April 16, 2014

Re: Public School Board Meeting Presentation on Budget 14/15

My name is Todd Patrick and I am currently the First Vice-President of the MRTA. I appreciate this opportunity to address the budget publicly on behalf of the teachers in Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows.

I struggled a bit with what to say about our local budget because there are so many angles to this revolving door problem we find ourselves in today knowing that we were here last year and will be again in the future.

I have heard what the parents, our students, my CUPE colleagues and of course, my fellow teachers have had to say so I won't repeat their frustrations and concerns but I do empathize. I have also had many discussions with my elected trustees and senior team and understand their struggle.

What I will talk about instead is the bigger picture and hope that my words will resonate enough to draw out the leaders we need at this time to make the changes necessary to rectify this underfunding of our children's future.

What I want to make perfectly clear to everyone here is that this meeting is being held so that SD42 employees and the public can fight over the scraps offered up by the lack of funding provided by the provincial government. This Liberal 'starve the system strategy' which is causing infighting and distraction across the province is the first truth everyone in this room must come to understand. From understanding this truth, we can achieve change if we have the leadership to take us in the right direction.

Since I was a child I have always been interested in the natural world and how humans interact and affect that world which we often forget is our own. Fortunately there is a significant minority of people who are willing to stand up to protect the environment and its inhabitants. For example, they put themselves and their boats in front of whaling ships to stop the slaughter, they tie themselves to trees and equipment to protect the forests and the spotted owl, they lie on the ground to stop construction to save salamander habitat. What all these people have in common is a desire to protect those less able than themselves and they see the laws of the land as inadequate to that end. They put themselves at personal risk physically and financially, not to mention legally, to protect what cannot protect itself.

The question everyone in this room should be asking is where are the leaders that will put at risk their positions, their jobs, and their financial well being when it

comes to our children? Surely our children are as important as a frog or an endangered species.

We need a new strategy. If we were to reach the stats Canada average per student funding in BC there would be at least \$14 million more education dollars here in Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows to educate our children. Teachers have been pushing for years for this one simple change to the funding formula. BC teachers went on strike for ten days in 05/06 that resulted in two weeks of lost pay to us and our CUPE colleagues and we paid a \$500,000 fine to fight, in part, the inadequacies of the funding formula. We put our finances, our constitutional rights, and ourselves at risk every time we stand up to this government.

What we need now are other local leaders to step up, change their tactics and unite this group of people for change. We need everyone in this room to stand up and turn their collective voices to Victoria and tell the Liberal government that enough is enough. We need everyone in this room to put themselves in jeopardy to affect change. What important change hasn't come from breaking the rules? In fact everyone on this side of the room is already facing Victoria. We are waiting for our educational leaders to stand up and do the same. Unite us and walk with us.

Last week our local MLA Marc Dalton said that there is no poverty reduction plan necessary in Maple Ridge because there is access to free food, thrift store clothes, free education and health care and the fact that we have good water. He also said he has never seen a starving child in his 50 years nor has he seen a child living on the streets. He also said that we live in a very wealthy country. This disconnect and ignorance is what we are dealing with when our own local provincial representative doesn't understand the problems we face daily in our community and in our schools.

It will be an upward battle fighting an adversary that has an ideology and value system that doesn't meet the needs of the most vulnerable in our society. I know everyone agrees that our children are worth the fight. We need the educational leadership in this community to stand up, step up and organize a collective fight. Those elected and non-elected leaders need to convince all our local stakeholders to climb on board and work collectively. They need to put themselves at risk and convince their counter-parts province wide to take the same risks.

Isn't the fight for the future of our children worth as much as the fight for an old growth forest?

Todd Patrick
1st VP, MRTA

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Board Budget/HD