

## **Written Submission to the Board of Education**

### **Save the Maple Ridge School Bus Group**

#### **Subject: Save the School bus plea**

Plea to Save the School Bus

Dear School Board Trustees;

As the day to approve the budget, Wednesday April 27<sup>th</sup>, 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 highs 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)