

Chilliwack District Parents Advisory Council  
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May 19, 2016

John Martin, MLA 1 – 45953 Airport Road Chilliwack, BC V2P 1A2	Laurie Throness, MLA 10 - 7300 Vedder Road Chilliwack, BC V2R 4G6
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Re: Parent advocacy for increased funding to public education in BC

Dear Mr. Martin and Mr. Throness,

At our April 21st meeting, the Chilliwack District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC) voted unanimously in favour of initiating a district wide parent advocacy project. Our membership has grown significantly, and we have committed to spreading awareness regarding the negative impacts underfunding has had on the public school system in Chilliwack and throughout the province. Please accept this open letter as official notice that the Chilliwack DPAC is looking to you for support, as you represent the views of your constituents. Parents of public school students in Chilliwack make up a great portion of your constituents, and we are exceedingly dissatisfied.

Many DPAC discussions throughout the year focus on the amount of time and effort PACs spend fundraising. Cuts to public education funding in BC have been on-going for more than a decade and PACs are expected by school administration and school board staff to simply fill the gaps. It is our belief that this is causing parents to disassociate from their school's PAC, and ultimately be less involved in their children's education. This is detrimental to students, parents, and the operation of the PAC, and will have long-term negative effects on society.

The Chilliwack DPAC is the legislated voice of parents at the district level consisting of representatives from the individual school PACs in School District (SD) 33. One of several purposes of the DPAC is to promote the interests of public education and, in particular, the interests of SD 33. Currently, the DPAC believes that it is in the best interest of SD 33 and public education province wide, to speak out against the chronic underfunding of our public education system, and highlight the negative impacts this has had on our students and their families. This includes, but is certainly not limited to the following:

- Since districts were required by the provincial government to make "administrative cuts" in 2014/15 and again in 2015/16, Chilliwack operates with \$1.3M less per year, increasing the pressure on parents to subsidize public education.
- Technology upgrade costs, specifically the Next Generation Network which was formally funded by the provincial government, have been downloaded onto the district. This cost the district \$563,000 in the 2015/16 school year, \$115,000 for the 2016/17 school year, and will become a regular line item, coming out of the already stripped operating budget.

- Bussing fees ranging from \$215 - \$350/student have been downloaded onto parents.
- Per pupil funding for students enrolled full-time is a paltry \$7,158. It will increase by \$8 for the 2016/17 school year; however, a \$64 increase would be necessary to simply cover collective agreement increases. Thus, students will actually receive less.
- Custodial services have been drastically reduced; square footage of schools has increased by 78% since 1992, yet maintenance and custodial manpower has decreased. The only area of any school in the district that still gets cleaned as thoroughly and as frequently, are washrooms. No other areas can be kept up to previous standards. At the elementary level primary desks are only cleaned every second day and intermediate desks are only cleaned once a week. These desks double as eating tables for students, creating an opportune breeding ground for germs and bacteria.
- Learning Assistance/Resource Teacher hours have been reduced. As a cost saving measure, the responsibilities of these positions have been downloaded onto administrative staff despite the fact that this goes against the recommendations made in the Special Education Report by Dr. Carter in 2013.  
SOURCE <http://ssc.sd33.bc.ca/sites/default/files/Special%20Education%20Review%20Report%202012.pdf>
- In 2014/15, staff replacement costs were upwards of \$500,000. The district experienced a significant increase in absenteeism, particularly of support staff employees, likely due to low workplace morale and an ever increasing workload for those whose hours weren't reduced. In anticipation of continued high absenteeism, it will be necessary to increase the replacement staff budget. When support staff employees are absent, the most vulnerable students go without support, negatively affecting the entire classroom.

In addition to all of this, while BC is spending less on public education and communities are forced to close schools, \$358M is going to fund private, independent schools. This is a gross misuse of public funds as these schools are exclusive and not accountable to the public.

Clearly, underfunding of BC's public education system is not a myth, and the low-hanging fruit has long been picked. School District 33 already saves money by participating in shared services, and they have reduced district staff personnel. Parents are asked to fundraise for playgrounds, library books, on-line math and reading programs, sports equipment, and even text books. Some PACs have even been asked to pay for water fountains, classroom fixtures, and carpet. Parent fundraising has gone way beyond enhancing students' educational experiences, and in some cases is necessary to keep the school operational. This is unacceptable, especially to students attending schools in less affluent neighbourhoods where parents may be unable to contribute financially to fundraising. This creates a gap between have and have-not schools and means some students are not provided with the same resources and opportunities as their peers in neighbouring schools.

The British Columbia School Act states that:

*...it is the goal of a democratic society to ensure that all its members receive an education that enables them to become literate, personally fulfilled and publicly useful, thereby increasing the strength and contributions to the health and stability of that society.*

If the government continues to reduce the amount allocated to public education in BC's budget, it will soon become impossible to fulfill the British Columbia School Act mandate stated above. In addition, the School Act states that the PAC's legislated purpose is to advise the board, principal and staff on any matter relating to the school. PAC constitutional duties include promoting parent involvement, educating parents on their rights within the school system, organizing community-building events, and contributing to the overall effectiveness of the school. However, the role of the PAC has shifted and because the focus is fundraising, the legislated purpose and constitutional duties of the PAC can no longer be fulfilled. Thus, the Chilliwack District Parent Advisory Council will continue to speak out against the chronic and unacceptable underfunding of public education in BC.

It is time for public education funding to increase so that all students have access to quality education, and so that parents can return to their roles assisting and supporting students, and promoting the interests of public education. We ask that you join us in advocating for the public school students in Chilliwack, and lobby the provincial government for increased funding in order to provide an equitable education for all students in SD 33, and across the province.

We thank you in advance for your much needed assistance in this important matter.

Sincerely,

Justine Hodge  
President of the District Parent Advisory Council  
SD 33, Chilliwack

cc: Mike Bernier, Minister of Education; Evelyn Novak, Superintendent of Schools; Silvia Dyck, Board Chair and DPAC Liaison