



PORT MCNEILL
ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS
PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL

PO BOX 160
250-956-4960



Wednesday February 1, 2012

To:

The Honourable George Abbott, Minister of Education

MS Susan Lambert, President BC Teachers Federation

Ms Melanie Joy, Chair BC Public Schools Employers Association

The Port McNeill Elementary School Parent Advisory Council, on behalf of the parents of elementary students in Port McNeill, wish to express our dissatisfaction and concern with the lack of progress of the negotiations between the British Columbia Teachers' Federation and the British Columbia Public School Employers Association thus far. We, as a parent body, are concerned about how the current job action is affecting our children's education through impacts on our school community (report cards, staff dynamics, intra-school communication, etc.) and the functionality of our Parent Advisory Councils. We are curious as to how further job action will affect the BC Education Plan and we'd like to impress upon you how a walk-out may impact our small North Island Community.

We were disappointed in the content, and frustrated with the exercise of district staff producing First Term report cards. Parents are very concerned about the success of all our students and the lack of graded report cards make our jobs as parents more difficult. Many students, and their parents, are becoming more anxious as the majority of our students and parents are being left in the dark as to how our students are performing in their classes and we are also finding many younger students are confused and somewhat angry about lack of grades on their report cards this term. Many parents are annoyed with the waste of effort and paper and the cost incurred by sending home blank report cards. Report cards are a vital instrument for many parents to determine whether or not they need to access outside help for their children, such as tutoring, in order for their children to be successful at school. This applies to all parents, but particularly parents of children that are at risk due to learning difference, disabilities, illness, etc. Also many have lost the opportunity for parent teacher conferences, which is most helpful after report cards are sent home, where discussion regarding students' progress takes place. Granted most teachers are willing to schedule meetings with parents to discuss their child's progress, but parents are feeling uncertain and/or uncomfortable in asking this of teachers. Parents respect the position teachers are in with respect to balancing their allegiance to their union and their commitment to parent-teacher partnerships.

The current job action is also having a toll on district staff. Here in Port McNeill we are working with a limited amount of district staff and with them putting in many additional hours of supervision and extra-curricular activities each week at school sites it leaves very little available time for anything outside their regular job duties. Locally, our school administrators have become coaches and Christmas concert directors, to ensure our children have continued access to these opportunities. There is a real potential for us to burn out our district staff. We need the finance staff to be able to do their jobs effectively, without interruption, and we need the educational staff to be able to concentrate on fulfilling



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their responsibilities so that students in Port McNeill will have both the structural and educational resources that they need. Although our local school administration continues to have a good and respectful relationship with teaching staff, parents and students are aware of the tension this is creating, a tension that is escalating as the potential for further strike action looms large. Any functional workplace relies on effective communication; currently, that communication is restricted. We are also concerned about lasting effects that this strike action will have on the “team dynamics” in the schools.

As with Parent Advisory Councils across the province, our PAC has also been negatively impacted by the job action. The ability for PACs to fundraise, etc. is greatly impeded by the Teachers' job action, which requires that teachers not take part in coordination of any fundraising projects. PAC's regularly bridge the gap between what the Ministry can fund and what the children actually need to achieve a balanced education. PAC's regularly fund such items as library and classroom books, field trips, gym equipment, music and musical instruments, computers, other forms of technology, playgrounds, etc. to just to name a few. Within School District 85 we are hearing repeatedly about the struggles that PACs are going through to fundraise because of the teachers' job action and if these obstacles remain in place both students and teachers will lose out on valuable educational resources.

Our PAC is following with interest the launch of the BC Education Plan, as parents we have reviewed the initial documents and are following the discussions on the Ministry website. We are encouraged to see the consultation process for the plan in action but we are also concerned that the successful implementation of such a plan would require the support and input of the very group that will be delivering the plan, the teachers. We encourage you to actively engage with the teachers and other partners in education to ensure the success of BC's students now and in the future.

In our small town (of 3,500), having the teachers walk out would have additional impact, on the many families with union association. The employees of the largest daycare in Port McNeill are members of CUPE, the daycare is located on school district property. Any teacher's strike would have a ripple effect in our community that would affect both public and private sector, if parents cannot attend work.

We thank you for your time to consider our concerns. We strongly encourage you to expedite the dialogue with a view to swiftly ending the current teacher strike action. Parents have concerns about the student numbers and composition of individual classrooms at present, they are worried about the impact they have on student outcomes locally and provincially. Many parents are also hoping to see more dedicated funding for children with special needs, behavioural needs and/or giftedness when these students are supported in the classroom all children have the opportunity to access their teachers equally and to have an equal opportunity to succeed. We hope to hear from you in the very near future.

Yours Sincerely,



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A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Cyndy Grant".

Cyndy Grant

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Penny Mills".

Penny Mills

Co Chairs of and on behalf of the Port McNeill Elementary Schools Parent Advisory Council

cc: Chair Board of Directors SD85, VINTA, BCCPAC, DPACs across BC, Claire Trevena, MLA.