



# **Maple Ridge Teachers' Association**

**Monthly Communication with School Board – October 2020 –  
from MRTA Communications Committee**

*Thanks for the ongoing willingness to share and communicate through monthly bulletins to our school trustees and our membership of shared concerns.*

Thank you for the opportunity to share with you some of what is happening in the district, from the perspective of the teachers. We hope these ongoing communications will facilitate a positive working relationship between the Maple Ridge Teachers' Association and the District #42 School Trustees (Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows).

## **1. Appreciation for further communications with our Trustees**

The willingness of our School Trustees to engage with the MRTA in ongoing discussions is most appreciated. We are encouraged that some of our trustees have reached out to us and have offered to meet. The MRTA has been impressed by the cooperation at many levels during this most trying time. It is our wish to further this cooperation.

## **2. Appreciation for Resolution of First Aid Attendant Grievance**

The MRTA would like to thank all those involved, including representatives of the School Board and MRTA release officers, both past and present, in rectifying the School First Aid Attendant Grievance. The resolution was an agreement to pay one (1) year back retroactively from the time the error was first established. Considering the importance of having First-Aid Attendants in our school communities, it is good to see proper recognition of this hard work through the agreed correction.

## **3. An update on Teacher Medical Accommodations in SD42**

With the injection of federal funding and the School Board's passing of the amended budget, the district addressed the needs of families and provided medical accommodations for many of our teachers.

We recognize that for some of our members, health and safety issues remain. We look forward to addressing these on-going concerns in a spirit of cooperation.

#### **4. Vigilance with Health & Safety Protocols in our schools**

This year, health and safety concerns have been a high priority. Firstly, the district has, with some delays, provided all teachers and students the PPE they required. Unfortunately, some of the government mandated supplies are prone to failure or difficult to wear. Similarly, some plexiglass barriers had delays but are now fully installed.

The return to work for many members was a highly anxious time. Updates to Provincial Health, BCCDC and district safety documents, put protocols in flux, becoming an additional stressor. Of particular concern was the BCCDC update to the symptoms list. The lack of clarity on whom it applied to led to District policy regarding Covid-like symptoms changing multiple times.

Teachers with Covid-like symptoms have been diligent in taking time off, and getting testing done. This has taxed our district's TTOC list heavily, and presently the demand is far outstripping the supply. The frequency in teacher absences going unfilled is on the rise. Once more, our Support teachers and other non-enrolling teachers, as well as Administrators are having to cover classes. We are currently working hard to try our best to support District efforts to hire more TTOCs.

Vigilance in taking time off for Covid-like symptoms is adding anxiety to our members with little to no current sick days. This is exacerbated for teachers who are also parents when they need to make arrangements for children when they get sick with Covid-like symptoms. While a teacher may be able to recoup some of lost wages through their Salary Indemnity Plan, this extends only partial coverage.

Also increasing nervousness is the mingling of students from different cohorts while outside for breaks. As long as students avoid touching one another, it does conform with Provincial Health & Safety Guidelines, but knowing this is a cold comfort.

Throughout September, staff attempted to learn the new cleaning protocols. There was, and remains some confusion surrounding cleaning, some of which is expected to be done by teachers.

There were no cleaning products or communicated protocols in place when the school year started for the disinfecting of class items.

While most teachers now have received direction on proper protocols, the MRTA recommends a core reference document that highlights cleaning protocols for learning manipulatives, toys, electronic devices (laptops & tablets), books and gym equipment.

The MRTA is worried that without clear direction, many teachers and other staff members may avoid using or accidentally damaging important teaching tools which enrich student learning.

Teachers also have ongoing concerns regarding staff meetings that request mandatory attendance in one room with no virtual option. The MRTA feels that many of these meetings breach the following direction in the Provincial Ministry of Education Covid-19 Health & Safety Guidelines for K-12:

*“Staff meetings involving staff from different learning groups should preferably occur through virtual means. Where a virtual alternative is not possible, staff meetings can happen in person if participants maintain physical distance”* (pg 13).

It should be noted though, that teachers in our School District are highly appreciative of the fact that our Staff, many who have signed up for Virtual Learning Opportunities on the Oct. 23rd Professional Development day, have been afforded the choice to work from home. This is a year in which many families struggle to coordinate child care and other issues that make attendance on a school site far more difficult than years in the past. We recognize the numerous ways the District shows it can be flexible, acting in a thoughtful manner during a Pandemic.

## **5. Gradual Entry & Remote Learning Options for students in SD42**

On August 26th, Minister Fleming announced our Province's back to school plans, which included an online option. This was in contrast to the message sent at the end of last school year and through the summer, which emphasized two options for students: a full return to school or full distributed learning / homeschool. Our district was left very little time to plan for the roles and responsibilities of both gradual entry and remote learning options. The BCTF and MRTA stand clear on the position that teachers cannot assume the added responsibility of both in class teaching and remote learning as this created an unmanageable workload.

Originally, the district had set out to allocate 12 Full Time and Permanent Contract TTOCs to assist with gradual entry students to help teachers manage the demands of providing online learning opportunities for these students. As of October, the responsibility of teaching gradual entry students has since shifted towards school based classroom and support teachers. The MRTA understood when the district decided that a dramatically reduced TTOC pool and a shrinking percentage of gradual entry students had resulted in the change. Supports that are now in place for gradual entry students include online assignments prepared and distributed by District Helping Teachers, topped-up FTE for part-time teachers, additional TTOC time when requested, and an increase of forty (40) minutes for full-time EA staff to assist with gradual entry students.

The week of October 23rd, most Gradual return students are expected to be fully returned. The MRTA understanding is that a minority of Gradual Entry students may continue, if there are medical reasons and vulnerabilities that exist within the families. This is of great relief to many of our teachers, as we've heard from many of our colleagues that managing support for students at home is not something that can be sustainably done at the current level for the rest of the year. There is a worry however that not all families at our various schools will return when asked to do so, with continuing support in place after the deadline. At schools that continue to manage large amounts of gradual return students there is a very real worry of teacher burn-out if additional resources from the District do not persist.

In addition to supporting gradual return students, our teachers are supporting in two other key ways: with remote learning and Katzie on-reserve classrooms programs. Firstly, we'd like to acknowledge the efforts of our School District in maintaining the planned divisions at all our Elementary Schools when bringing Remote learning opportunities "online". While other districts have negatively impacted school culture by collapsing classes, ours have been maintained. This means that while remote classrooms were created, with over ten (10) at Elementary when you count remote French Immersion options, spots for those students remain open for them at their "home" schools. A further two (2) remote classrooms were created for our Junior Secondary students, and additional growth was seen in our already existing Connected Learning Communities for Senior Secondary. In efforts to keep our Katzie elders safe, and less exposed to Covid-19, our District has additionally added staffing on site at the Katzie Reserve. Overall the MRTA recognizes, while there have been bumps in how the district plan has rolled out, overall it has gone quite well.

## **6. Inequities in Education Opportunities to Women in Corrections**

While staffing equity remains an issue at Alouette Correctional Centre for Women, [see June 2020 bulletin], the issue is for the present moot. At present, SD 42 Adult Education Teachers do not have face to face access with students. On a positive note, BC Corrections is keeping inmates safe.

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