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PUBLIC BOARD MEETING – FEBRUARY 14, 2012

Last week, Education Minister George Abbott made a number of outlandish comments to the local media that had many of us scratching our heads in disbelief. A few of these remarks seemed so out-of-touch with what's actually happening in our School District that someone who didn't know otherwise may have wondered whether Minister Abbott had actually been to Burnaby at all.

The fact that the Minister has visited us on a number of occasions just makes his comments sound too much like the political "spin" that we're seeing from so many other Government politicians ... from an administration that is so sadly lacking in credibility on numerous fronts. In Minister Abbott, though, we all thought that we had better than that.

Fact ... Burnaby gets the lowest per-student funding in the Province ... and it's NOT because we have the least need as Minister Abbott contests. Certainly there are numerous mitigating factors that complicate funding formulas amongst various districts ... but let's get out on the streets of Burnaby and see what's really going on. There are over 4,700 ESL learners in our School District, representing 20% of the entire Burnaby school age student population ... and almost twice the Provincial average. Upwards of 25% of all Government assisted refugees settled in Burnaby in 2011. Recent statistics show that Burnaby has the second highest rate of child poverty in the Metro Vancouver area and the third highest in the Province. Enough for you Mr. Minister?

We gladly invite you back to Burnaby, Mr. Abbott. Come walk down the halls of some of our schools and see OUR real world. Come visit Byrne Creek and hear for yourself many of the 75 different languages that our teachers are facing every day. Come and sit down with Principal David Starr at Edmonds Community School and hear some of the stories that he's chronicled in his book "From Bombs to Books" ... and see how our teachers and administrators face the daily challenges of our refugee students.

We know we're doing great work in Burnaby, Mr. Minister, but minimizing our need through the rose coloured glasses of political rhetoric just doesn't do any of us proper justice.

Larry Hayes
Board Chair / Trustee
Burnaby Board of Education SD41