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## PUBLIC BOARD MEETING – FEBRUARY 28, 2012

The following letter was recently penned by Jen Mezei, Chair of our Burnaby District Parent Advisory Committee. As part of our celebration of “Pink Shirt Day”, I felt that it was such a good way of demonstrating how positive and caring our Burnaby school community really is. This is just one example in one school in our District ... but actions like this are happening in many schools:

*“It has been a challenging year for public education in BC - full of uncertainty as we see our children stuck in the middle of another labour dispute and as we read the stories of how far apart the BCTF and BCPSEA are.*

*But...There are still good things happening. As Pink Shirt Day approaches, I would like to tell you about a success story that has unfolded this year at Seaforth School regardless of job action; a story where parents have made a difference not by fundraising, but by working with teachers and the principal to help create a better learning community for students.*

*It started with an idea. In February 2011, the Seaforth PAC executive went through a period of self reflection and started asking the questions: How do you build a community? If you could spend your energy on a project – and it wasn’t fundraising - what would it be? One of the suggestions was to stop bullying.*

*Bullying. The ‘B word’ of public education. Such a loaded word for educators and parents, full of implied accusations and judgments. Working with the PAC executive, the principal suggested focusing on positive goals rather than ones that begin with ‘anti’. After all, we strive for success, not ‘anti-failure’. What did the parents want to achieve? The PAC Executive wanted to help foster a safe environment free from bullying, and to give kids the courage, the tools and the language to be more than just a passive bystander. So, the Safe Schools Committee was formed, with MaryAnn Giardini as the Chair.*

*And then came job action. As the planned student peer conflict-resolution program was postponed, the committee focused on its other two goals for the year: Student Education, and Pink Shirt Day.*

*The PAC paid for a speaker to give an interactive magic show in October. The intermediate presentation was about bullying, its definition and how students could intervene, but the primary students were taught how to have respect for the school and how to be a friend.*

*And then the committee geared up for February. Why is Pink Shirt Day just one day? What would happen if we had a month dedicated to Kindness?*

*MaryAnn and PAC Chair, Rhylin Bailie, shared their vision of Kindness Month with teachers who embraced the idea, and agreed to try to incorporate the theme into their teaching and activities for the month. MaryAnn and Rhylin also consulted with the principal on PAC activities, but with the challenges of the year, consultation was erratic and never with everyone in the same room.*

*Kindness Month was a huge undertaking. The PAC organized assemblies, published a newsletter, tie-dyed 150 pink T-shirts with kids at lunchtime, and held a Kindness contest, in which students portrayed what Kindness means to them by poster, video, poem, story, or multi-media presentation. And it was a huge success. There were over 50 individual and group entries.*

*But, that was only half of the story. I did not appreciate the full impact of Kindness month until I walked the hallways and saw how teachers had woven respect, kindness and friendship into classroom projects. Until I saw the power of the kindness message as seen through a child's eyes. Until parents told me the stories of how their kids spent hours working on a contest entry with their friends – hours they spent talking about what kindness means to them with the common language that was introduced by the Magic Show, and reinforced and expanded with lessons taught in the classroom. And until I heard about a primary student who had the courage to be more than a bystander and tell her teacher when something unkind was done to a classmate.*

*And it made me hopeful that once job action is done, we will be able to pick up momentum and work towards improving our education system together.*

*Collaboration is still happening regardless of job action. Collaboration is not about consultation at scheduled meetings – it is about a common goal, a sharing of ideas, and a mutual trust and respectful working relationship between committed partners. But mostly, it is doing what is best for our kids.”*

*Sincerely,*

*Jen Mezei  
Burnaby DPAC Chair*

Thank you for sharing and caring, Jen ... and thank you to all who work toward making Burnaby schools such accepting and welcoming places for all.

Larry Hayes  
Board Chair / Trustee  
Burnaby Board of Education SD41