

Advocating for Education 101- By Ray Hudson

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Cindy Dalglish of Surrey Students Now.

Surrey: While other cities and communities across the province are struggling to maintain enrolment and keep schools open, Surrey is one of the few school districts in the province where the student population has exploded. This has brought its own problems from dealing with a lack of classroom space through the use of hundreds of portable classrooms, and in some case actually shifting class times for students.

The government is building new facilities. Construction is already underway at the new Clayton North Secondary School and at Adams Road, Morgan and Rosemary Heights Elementary schools 16 new classroom space for 1,870 students. Never-the-less, the playgrounds and parking lots of Surrey schools still house hundreds of portables.

Cindy Dalglish is a parent of a child attending Ecole Woodward Hill Elementary, where huge residential developments in the area have resulted in the dramatic rise of English speaking students to the point that the School District wishes to reverse the two-thirds French Immersion, one-third English classes to accommodate the rising demand for English instruction.

"Not our school" was the rallying cry by Dalglish and other parents who actively advocated for a moratorium on development until appropriate school resources were also provided.

As a result of those efforts, they have now turned their attention to teaching parents and community members how to effectively advocate for their issues.

"The goal is to show the importance of education and how to advocate for it," said Dalglish. "In the past months that we have navigated the processes and policies, we found ourselves reaching multiple roadblocks because we didn't know how to navigate the processes. We want to take the work out of that and simplify it and make less daunting for the average person to engage and advocate."

The result is a seminar designed to background people on the issues, and what advocacy entails. Alex Hemingway, a Public Policy Analyst from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives will provide a higher level overview of education and funding comparisons from previous years to the current year. Dalglish will also speak about the experiences of her group over the last year.

"We don't want people thinking advocating means getting in front of the media," said Dalglish, "it could be as simple as writing a letter to the right person. We don't want to put a political slant on this either. We'll provide facts of who is responsible for what and how best to reach them."

Some of the questions they want people to think about include;

- What are the true costs of having children learn in portables? Is my child's school over capacity? Do portables affect children even if they are in the main building? How is my child's school accommodating and managing over-capacity? How much playground, library or gym time does my child get each week? Are my child's needs (social, developmental or academic) being sufficiently supported?

The meeting is at Ecole Woodward Hill School 6082-142 Street in Surrey, Tuesday October 11 from 6:30 to 8 pm. Admission and child minding are free, but they ask people to register at www.surreystudentsnow.com

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