

Prince Rupert School District Layoffs: 8% Cut in Teaching Staff Will Impact Student Learning

Members of the Prince Rupert District Teachers' Union (PRDTU) are deeply concerned by this week's decision by the SD52 Board of Trustees to cut teaching staff by over 8% next year. The layoffs are unnecessary, will not solve the problem that the school district is trying to solve, and take resources away from students. The PRDTU calls on the Board of Trustees to maintain core instructional programs, cutting wasteful spending and expensive overhead instead of cutting teachers.

"Make no mistake about it," said PRDTU president Gabriel Bureau, "these cuts will impact student learning. The School Board is taking resources away from students and undermining the morale of their staff and retention of teachers in the process. An 8% reduction in teachers is the wrong priority for Prince Rupert students. These cuts are deeply impacting the laid off employees, who have started to build their lives in Prince Rupert and who have few options to remain in town without the job security promised to them when they were recruited to work for SD52. Trust has been broken and this impacts all teachers, not only the 8% of our membership who will be laid off at end of this school year."

The PRDTU continues to call on the School Board to balance the budget by reducing administrative costs, travel, and overhead. The union also questions the true magnitude of the fiscal shortfall, pointing to overly conservative enrolment estimates and other assumptions in the budget that don't stand up under scrutiny.

"From what we've been told," said Bureau, "the bulk of these cuts will end up simply shifting expenses from full-time teachers, who already know students and have a place in their school community, to on call teachers. These cuts will likely result in teacher shortages next year. That means classes will go without a teacher, learning resource teachers will be pulled out of student supports to cover absences, and other learning services to students will be impacted."

The PRDTU points out that teacher shortages won't save the level of funding the School District claims it needs to balance its books. These shortages will have huge costs in terms of reducing student supports but will produce little in actual savings.

"Increasing teacher shortfalls and removing teachers from classrooms is never the way to save money in a school district," said Bureau. "Student services, core teaching, and other learning programs should be the top priority of the school district."

The PRDTU is calling for the laid off teaching positions to be restored and is asking the School District to commit to doing this if the enrolment estimates and other budget assumptions prove incorrect. "There's time to fix this," said Bureau. "Even if that means recalling the laid off teachers in September. That won't be ideal, but it's better than going through an entire school year with teacher shortages due to an ill-advised budget for the year."