

# P.G. News

## SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

### 'I was in tears'

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"The law is not meant to be discriminatory; we're just saying everyone needs to be looked after and supported in our schools," said Cousins. "Bill 33 is our only way of a grievance process."

Cousins says some of the teachers facing difficult classroom composition issues are first-year teachers. She's becoming increasingly concerned teachers are expected to build lesson plans around special-needs students who have designated individualized education plans (IEPs), but are not getting enough staff in the classroom to support them. She said teachers are also expected to deal with "gray area" students who might have behavioural problems who do not meet the IEP criteria, which adds to teachers' stress and limits the amount of material they can cover in each class.

"Hearing the comments from the teachers – 'I'm worried about safety.' 'I only have one set of eyes.' and 'I was in tears when I found out I have to teach this class.' – it's disheartening to say the least," said Cousins.

Cousins was a teacher at two elementary schools that were closed permanently – Haldi Road in 2002 and Meadow in 2003 – and that was followed in 2005 by the teachers' strike.

"That was the worst of times, certainly, and now we're seeing it creeping back to the worst of times with us being in job action and these situations still happening," Cousins said.

"Teachers can only teach so much, and I feel for our new members.

"They have big concerns and it's not fair."



CITIZEN PHOTO BY BRENT BRAATEN

**ALL TOGETHER** — Sisters Chloe Bialuski, 5, Sadie Bialuski, 9, and Sage Bialuski, 13, play a trio at the Prince George Council of Seniors Golden Age Social at the Civic Centre Wednesday afternoon. Over 200 seniors enjoyed some entertainment and tea and refreshments. This month's tea was sponsored by St. Andrews United Church.

## Heather Park courtesy buses cut

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Now that a request for courtesy busing service until the end of June has been quashed by the school board, Heather Wozney is resigned to the fact her son and at least 10 other Heather Park elementary school students will be riding to school in private vehicles.

Trustees voted 6-1 at Tuesday's public meeting to support the September decision that ended bus service for those students who live near the Chief Lake Road area within the catchment area of Nukko Lake elementary school, but have chosen to attend Heather Park.

The Heather Park parents wanted the same extension until the end of the school year that Miworth parents received, which allowed 11 students to be bused to their choice school, Heritage elementary, despite the fact Miworth is in Quinson elementary's catchment area.

"I really feel a precedent was set with Miworth and I don't see how it's going to cost \$20,000 more to reroute the buses – the buses

are already stopping at these stops," Wozney. "There are already other buses out there, so the supervision is there.

"We were told if they drop them at Kelly Road they have to provide supervision to walk them over to Heather Park. Why do they have to walk the kids over? There are kids that walk there to go home for lunch or home after school.

"The best fit for my child is Heather Park. It's half the distance to travel and there is so much more opportunity at the school he's at."

School District 57 secretary treasurer Bryan Mix told the board there would be a cost of \$20,000 (\$216 per school day) to change the bus routes, as well as a \$2,400 cost for supervision of those students if the Heather Park service was extended until the end of June. The board has already overspent its transportation budget by \$500,000.

Board chair Sharel Warrington said she sympathizes with the Heather Park parents but the additional cost was enough to sway trustees to deny the parents' proposal. "There are differences between the Heather Park-Nukko Lake

situation and the Miworth situation," said board chair Sharel Warrington.

"In this case, the Nukko Lake situation does not fit the requirements. Cost factors were definitely implicated and in our case, courtesy busing is provided at no additional cost or if there are no necessary changes to routes. That was part of the issue for some trustees, including myself."

Trish Bella was the only trustee who supported the Heather Park request.

"I just felt when we made the decision to reinstate Miworth, all the families should have been reconsidered," said Bella. "They all received the same letter at the same time [telling them the bus service would be dropped in September] and so if we were going to do it for one, we should do it for everyone in the group."

Bella said the board still doesn't know what the government's new funding formula for transportation will look like and that has created more uncertainty as the district negotiates a new busing contract with Diversified Transportation.

## MUNICIPAL POLITICS

### Library granted budget reprieve by council

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City council closed the books on the Prince George Public Library's 2012 budget Wednesday, but not before approving a \$50,000 budget increase for the year.

In 2010 and 2011, the city provided the library \$3.62 million per year in funding. After filing its budget in November for 2012, the library was informed by the city in January that the budget would again remain frozen at 2010 levels.

Library board chairperson Anne George said the library's request for a \$50,457 budget increase was critical in order to maintain existing service levels.

"These funds will provide an absolute bare minimum to meet our service agreements," George said. "These deferrals come at a risk. Aging furniture and sagging shelves have to be replaced for the safety of customers and staff."

The budget is still \$127,909 short of the board's initial budget proposal, George said.

"The board has canceled all staff raises, restricted travel and professional development, deferred furniture and shelving costs, and made internal adjustments to accommodate council's initiatives ... to address fiscal issues," she wrote in her report to council. "Despite these cost-cutting measures, there are a number of technical expenditures beyond our control."

Unlike the City of Prince George's

unionized staff, who will receive contracted raises this year, George said, library staff will receive no wage increases, "which is really a decrease in take-home pay."

The Prince George library has over 53,000 library card holders and many more who use the library's free services, she said.

"We're a very well-used library," George said. "Other libraries are being funded at a per capita basis higher than Prince George. We're providing incredible service for a low cost."

Since 2009, the library has loaned over 800,000 items per year. The library draws over 20,000 participants in approximately 1,000 different programs.

"Our core business is not books, it's people and information,"

George said.

Chief librarian Allen Wilson said the provincial government's contribution to library's in B.C. is the lowest in Canada at \$1.89 per capita.

"We're bumped up to \$2.20 with a northern allowance," Wilson said. "Saskatchewan is \$8 per capita. Ontario is \$6 [per capita]."

Coun. Dave Wilbur, who is city council's representative on the library board, said the Regional District of Fraser-Fort George approved a \$50,000 increase in its contribution to the library budget. That money is provided to the city to fund the library.

"In my view that contribution should not be going anywhere but the library," Wilbur said.

Coun. Cameron Stolz said the

city would risk damaging its relationship with the regional district if the money it approved for the library were, instead, put into the city's budget.

However, Mayor Shari Green and Coun. Albert Koehler disagreed with the Stolz, Wilbur and the rest of city council on the issue.

Green said the regional district approved the additional funding to address underfunding in previous years.

"We have been overpaying our share," Green said.

Councillors Stolz, Wilbur, Frizzell, Brian Skakun, Lyn Hall and Murry Krause voted in favour of the budget increase. Green and Koehler voted against it.

Councillor Frank Everitt was absent from the meeting.

## Citizen managing editor moves on

Citizen staff

Citizen managing editor Sylvie Paillard is saying goodbye to Prince George for a return to reporting as the newest member of the editorial team at a Glacier Media sister paper, The Kamloops Daily News.

"Thank you to everyone who made my year and a half in Prince George a pleasure," said Paillard. "I leave with some great memories and more than a few very



PAILLARD

meaningful new friendships."

The Citizen will soon begin the search for a new managing editor.

### ATTENTION ALL PATIENTS OF DR. ENNIO A. TAM

Effective February 14, 2012, Dr. Tam's practice will be closed permanently.

It is with great regret that he has had to retire due to illness.

All files of Dr. Tam's patients have been transferred to the immediate care of **Dr. Caroline Zhang.**

Please phone the office of Dr. Zhang at **250-563-5111** to register with her as your new physician.

The office of Dr. Zhang is located in the **Phoenix Medical Building** at Suite 106 – 2511 10th Avenue, Prince George, BC

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