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Letters to the Editor
Commentary Editor
Shelley Fralic
Janet Steffenhagen
The Vancouver Sun
#1 - 200 Granville Street
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Dear Editors,

Re “When it comes to public schools, you get what you pay for” by Shelley Fralic, The Vancouver Sun, November 26, 2010

I cannot let Ms. Fralic’s article (Vancouver Sun, November 26, 2010) go without response. Her comments while misguided, ill informed and simply wrong have probably focused attention, good or bad on our public education system.

British Columbians should be extremely proud of our excellent public education system. Our graduation rates remain the highest in the country. Out of 57 participating jurisdictions, BC students have for the past decade consistently performed at or near the top in the world on international achievement assessments (OECD - PISA results) in Reading, Mathematics and Science. Each year thousands of BC students graduate and go on to post secondary education and the world of work. Ms. Fralic should visit some of our schools to gain a better understanding of the challenges and successes of our public system. Students in the public education system continue to excel in the arts, athletics and through scholastic achievement.

The insinuation in Fralic’s comment about times “a half-century or so ago” when there were “teachers who liked children, and their jobs” is an insult to every public school teacher in this great province. I think if Fralic was to really consider her comments about schooling then and now and consider societal challenges then and now, she would understand the greater complexity of today’s classroom.

As President of the BC School Superintendents Association and as a Superintendent of Schools, I work with my colleagues across the province. We face a great range of diversity, poverty and vulnerability and, I am constantly reminded of the wonderful teaching and learning that takes place every single day here and throughout the province.

Education is what creates society. It is what develops the citizens of the future. Free, accessible public education is the very foundation of democracy and our nation. As a system we attend to

the needs of all learners. Our teachers, support staff and school administrators are dedicated, committed employees who work tirelessly on behalf of our students.

Our education system is changing, whether we like it or not. The next generation of children and the ones after that will live in very different worlds to our own – much as we have enjoyed a very different learning experience to our parents and their parents. System redesign in education is on the agenda of almost every major jurisdiction around the world.

We need to help prepare our young learners for the ever-evolving global community. Our students need to be strong communicators, good problem solvers, and informed decision-makers. They must also have well-developed inquiry skills and be highly creative.

It is an honour and privilege to work with teachers, support staff, and principals and vice principals in this new brave new world, which contemplates students who are fully engaged and deeply involved in personalized learning experiences.

I will agree with Fralic on two points, the education system as a whole is undergoing some change and as she indicates, “What hasn't changed is how important to a child's development those first few years in school are.” What is not needed is Fralic’s melancholic lament for the yester years where, “Your toddler played in the backyard in the dirt, ...and learned to tie shoelaces.” If I am not mistaken, the vast majority of students in BC still attend public school. We have a long way to go to ensure that all of our students in BC, especially Aboriginal students, are able to enjoy equity of access and quality educational services. Investing in public education is an investment in our future. From a different point of view, perhaps, as Fralic contends, you do get what you pay for.

We must work harder, to share the positive attributes of this system, eliminate challenges that may exist and work together to ensure that our public education system continues to be forward-looking and the agenda moves us not from good to great, but from excellent to exemplary.

Sincerely,



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