



# BRUCE HEALEY

October 31, 2008

## TEACHERS PAY

I have always believed that there are three public professional categories to which the taxpayer can never begrudge a decent salary, nor decent consideration to pay increases. These are our firefighters, police and teachers.

Any person whose job entails helping me in my hour of utmost need, and indeed, is willing to place his or her life on the line for me, my family or my property, will never hear this writer complain of their wages. The proof that many people agree with me is the fact that we almost never hear of citizens complaining about the salaries of these individuals, and their pay is rarely, if ever, the subject of open public debate and endless public requests for “more information” and comparisons to “state averages”.

Then there are the teachers; someone to whom we have given the sacred trust of passing knowledge to our children. Someone whose life is dedicated to ensuring that those in their charge are given the tools to ensure that they prosper, become intellectually active and productive members of our society. You are reading these lines because of your teachers! Indeed, teachers provide a significant part of the foundation for an open and democratic society. They impart the knowledge of our societal values. They have a huge responsibility. And yet we bicker and fuss about their salary at every turn. Do they not deserve the same public consideration as our police and firefighters?

Teachers pay is something that we clearly want to know about, and ensure that it is always competitive. We need to know that we are getting the very best teachers for our children. I have been appalled that some readers have responded to the recent pay package in a manner that implies they are being paid excessive wages. The implicit message from them is that there is either (1) some sort of collusion between the teacher’s union and the board of education to overpay our educators or (2) everyone on the school board involved in the negotiation of teacher’s salary is hamstrung and incompetent. We know that neither of these messages is true, so why are they being perpetuated?

Every few years, we have a storm of protest and misgivings when teachers’ salaries are negotiated. Do we begrudge the fact that they are able to negotiate their salary? Do we not live in a capitalist society? Are wages not an issue of supply and demand? If demand for good teachers declines, so will their salaries. I personally hope that never happens, because when we give our children’s education – and indeed the very foundations of our society, along with our values – away to the lowest bidder, we are indeed lost.