

Martha's Monthly
June 2006
(Martha's Second Anniversary)
Martha falls victim to the dreaded *Snack Mom Syndrome*

This month Martha has spent a lot of time cutting, gluing and tracing her ABCs. Yes, she has returned to kindergarten with five year olds who can pronounce complicated dinosaur names but not unbutton their little Gap jeans when they need to go pee.

Why, might you ask, on the second anniversary of Martha's Monthly, might Martha make her way to a kindergarten? A good question, but one she has no time to answer now that the provincial government has systematically under funded the education system forcing local school boards to cut the budget by cutting the aides in kindergarten.

School boards cut the aides but the kids still need to cut, paste, and pee. So somebody has to be there. So parents, mostly mothers, trudge to class on their "snack day" with a plate of treats, an armful of younger siblings, and one thought: "must write letter to local MLA to protest funding shortfall." But it becomes hard to find a chance to write that letter, what with all that gluing, cutting and peeing. Martha has termed this the "snack mom syndrome". She can spot a case of it a mile away.

Martha believes that the Alberta government may even be relying on the spread of Snack Mom Syndrome in order to cope with the latest under-funding. Here is how it works. The Alberta government, knowing full well that gas prices are on the increase (I mean they are making a fortune from those prices) provides budget estimates to locally elected school boards that reflect a 3% increase over last year. Anyone with a calculator and a car knows that gas prices have not gone up just 3% this year so the school boards, who heat schools, run the school busses, and pay the electrical bills that are all higher than last year, have to meet the budget. They cannot, except under bizarre circumstances, run a deficit.

School boards are all short money to operate. They must cut. And staff wages and salaries are the largest expense they face. So they cut staff. Every school board in the province is in need of more money to operate.

But the Education Minister says there weren't funding cuts and lays the blame on the school boards who have to budget better. The school boards and the [union](#) say that it is **systematic under funding**. (see details: [Calgary Catholic Bd](#), [Rocky View SD](#), [Edmonton](#))

Premier Klein, who is obviously getting a lot of letters and phone calls from upset Albertans, sounded like a whining five-year-old himself as he blasted people for wanting "[more of more, of more, of more](#)"

Martha thinks that the Klein government figures kindergarten aides can be cut because parents will step in to fill the gap. Parents will not stand by as their child's kindergarten class drops to a 1 adult per 24 children ratio. Parents will come to the rescue and provide volunteer labour. And you know what? We do provide the volunteer labour to make schools work. Whether it is gluing in kindergarten or fundraising for library books you can be sure that parents step forward. But should we really rely on coerced parental volunteerism to meet funding shortfalls?

Wouldn't a better way be to properly fund schools so that they can meet the cost of living increases and not rely on Snack Moms to provide classroom assistance and instruction? Wouldn't it be reasonable for parents to provide support to their child's school when they can, in ways that they can, instead of sitting Martha down with a hot glue gun? (I can't go into detail on that one except to say it was bad, really bad!)

The only way we are going to stop the spread of Snack Mom Syndrome is to stand up and be heard. Put **down** your glue gun (just temporarily) and write the Minister of Education a letter. Use the one below and add your story. Or better yet, write your own letter. **Send a copy to your MLA and all the names below. (Go [here](#) for your MLA's contact info) Include your name and address so it gets counted as correspondence.** And send this email to every Albertan you have ever heard of. We must stop the debilitating Snack Mom Syndrome. Mothers deserve to volunteer in a way that is appropriate for them and Martha must not be handed another glue gun!!

Send to premier@gov.ab.ca, edmonton.millcreek@assembly.ab.ca,
st.albert@assembly.ab.ca, edmonton.beverlyclareview@assembly.ab.ca,
edmonton.riverview@assembly.ab.ca,
edmonton.highlandsNorwood@assembly.ab.ca, marthasmnthly@yahoo.ca

June 8, 2006

Dear Premier Klein:

I am a Martha of Martha's Monthly and I am even madder than you were when you said you were madder than hell at critics of your government's education funding scheme.

I am mad because I am a citizen of Alberta and I believe in public education that does not rely on the coerced voluntarism of parents to fundraise, assist, and provide essential instruction in class. I want teachers and educational assistants to be paid to do what I am routinely asked to do for my child's school. I want my tax dollars to go to public education and I am tired of you saying that people ask for too much.

Albertans have every reason to demand quality schools that are not crumbling. Albertans have every right to demand that kindergartens have an aide to help one teacher manage 20-24 five-year-olds. Albertans have every right to demand that funding increases to school boards meet inflation costs so that school boards are not put in impossible situations and must cut staff to balance an unworkable budget.

Please provide sustainable funding to school boards. I am a voter and I will remember this when I mark my ballot.

Your name and full address
(or else it gets treated like junk mail!!)