

Presentation by PAN founding member Heather Legal
on April 12, 2016 at Vancouver Technical Secondary, Vancouver
at the VSB Committee of the Whole: Public Budget Consultations



WE CALL FOR UNITY

"VSB's preliminary budget proposal - We have reviewed, We must reject it "

I'm Heather Legal, and I'm representing PAN this evening; a grassroots collaborative of parents from 50+ schools in the Vancouver District. Our belief is that ALL children have a right to publically-funded, high quality education in their own neighbourhoods, in educationally appropriate and seismically safe buildings with the resources and staff necessary to meet their learning needs. These budget cuts are a direct result of chronic structural underfunding by the BC Government, who has repeatedly rejected the recommendations of its own standing committee and the priorities of BC citizens who support increasing funding to public education. While the Ministry of Education talks about the "unprecedented funding increases to school boards" we know that today in Vancouver, even accounting for the drop in enrollment, 82 million dollars in funding would be required to restore educational services and supports to the level that existed in 2002.

We have reviewed all 85 pages of this preliminary budget and it's amendments- and **we must reject it**. These sweeping cuts affect ALL areas of our education system, which is already operating under barely sustainable conditions. We are NOT willing to participate in an exercise of pitting schools and communities against each other; forcing them to vie for programs, resources and staff that are all important in helping children learn. We are proud to be in the company of passionate groups and parents who have dedicated a lot of time and effort to advocating for endangered programs. Their commitment is an indication of the degree of impact that these cuts will have on children and families. As individuals, many of us, myself included, echo their cries. **As a group, our role as PAN must be to advocate for ALL children in our schools, for their equitable access to education regardless of their race, gender, economic background, or their ability to advocate for it.** When balancing a budget targets foundational supports for some of our most vulnerable students, we are witnessing the dissolution of our public education system and everything that it stands for. I am talking about non-enrolling teachers of special needs students, English language learners, aboriginal programs and library programs; I am talking about early intervention literacy teachers at inner city schools; I am talking about student support workers...to name a few.

While the unique challenges and complexities inherent within the Vancouver school district have exacerbated the magnitude of this shortfall.....**we are not alone**. Right at this very moment, communities all across BC are being devastated by cuts and forced closures, recreating the cycle of competition over and over again. We as parents have had enough! **We call for UNITY** in our district. We call for UNITY in our Province....in rejecting the budget cuts being felt everywhere. Together we must work to show we are not going to stand for the divisiveness this creates at every level in our public education system. **We demand that government restore adequate and sustainable funding to meet the learning needs of all students according to their legal obligation under the School Act.** BC's budget may be in the black...but public education is in the red. **#BCEDINRED. Join us in wearing red the day the provincial budget is voted on in legislature!**