



July 25, 2016

Ref: 188180

Parent Advocacy Network

Email: parentadvocacynetwork@gmail.com

Dear Parents:

Thank you for your email and statement with many signatures sent May 10, 2016, to the Honourable Christy Clark, Premier and me, regarding the Vancouver School Board (VSB) budget. Also, thank you for your additional emails sent May 31 and June 14, 2016; unfortunately, I am unable to meet at this time.

Overall, education funding is up \$110 million compared to last year's budget, and the Ministry of Education is investing a record of \$5.1 billion in public education this year. Annual education funding is \$1.2 billion higher than it was in 2000/01, and the average per student funding for public schools has increased by 42 percent over this same period.

For the 2015/16 school year, the Vancouver School Board is estimated to receive nearly \$440 million in operating funds. This is more than a \$47 million increase over what the District received 10 years ago, despite a decrease of nearly 4,900 students in the same period.

For the 2016/17 school year, the Ministry has also recently announced \$28 million in additional preliminary funding allocations to boards of education by allocating the holdback now and ensuring additional funds for enrolment growth are secured. In Vancouver, this provided more than \$2.6 million for the District.

Further, I announced an additional \$25 million for the 2016/17 school year that will benefit districts through decreased operating charges, for items like Internet and insurance costs. This will free up funds for every board of education in British Columbia, which can be used in any area the district chooses. For the Vancouver School District in particular, this means an additional \$2.25 million is available to invest in local priorities in 2016/17. Importantly, government has made a pledge this \$25 million will be an ongoing commitment for the education sector.

To assist VSB in balancing their 2016/17 budget, the Ministry presented in good faith an agreement to reach an amicable solution to balance the budget. At the Board's request, government was prepared to help the Board sell, in whole or in part, the Kingsgate Mall. We delivered upon this request by submitting a proposal, developed in cooperation with VSB senior staff, to the Board for consideration. Unfortunately, the Board rejected the proposal. VSB would rather spend \$37 million on empty classrooms in under-capacity schools.

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Despite the legal requirement under the *School Act* to pass a balanced budget, VSB did not pass a balanced budget by the June 30, 2016 deadline. As a result, I have appointed a special advisor to conduct a forensic audit and complete review of the Vancouver School Board. A full, in-depth forensic audit will look at both the financial situation and Board operations at VSB to ensure nearly half a billion taxpayer dollars invested in the District is going to support students.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact George Farkas, Assistant Deputy Minister, Resource Management and Corporate Services Division, by email at George.Farkas@gov.bc.ca or by phone at (250) 356-1883.

Again, thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bernier", with a small dot at the end.

Mike Bernier
Minister

pc: Honourable Christy Clark, Premier
Honourable Michael de Jong, Minister of Finance