

PAN PRESENTATION: BUDGET CONSULTATIONS APRIL 25, 2016

I stand before you tonight to speak on behalf of the Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education. With me are members of PAN and other parents from all over Vancouver. Tonight we are wearing red, to mark the fact that while the BC budget may be in the black, public education is in the red.

We live in a province of prosperity, or so we are told, but this prosperity comes at a price. That price is the quality of our children's education and the wellbeing of our future society.

This budget is a direct result of chronic underfunding by the provincial government—a government that has repeatedly disregarded the recommendations of its own standing committee on finance and therefore the priorities of the citizens of this province. At least 25 districts across the province are facing shortfalls this year, totaling over \$70 million, despite previous years of austerity cuts. Every year, structural under-funding forces students, schools and communities across BC to compete for increasingly scarce dollars. It forces school boards to make impossible choices over which vital program to save or to cut and it forces PACs to fundraise inordinate amounts of money to compensate for these losses, creating divisiveness and inequalities between schools.

ALL children, regardless of their economic background, race, or ability, have the right in this province to a quality education, that meets their learning needs and gives them the opportunity to achieve their full potential - for the health and benefit of our whole society - this is the goal of public education as set forth in the BC School Act.

Over the last decade, parents in Vancouver have watched the relentless depletion within our schools; we have lost teachers, counselors, specialists, learning supports and librarians (to name a few); school days, arts programs, and basic educational resources. Now we are being asked to absorb a further 24 million dollars worth of cuts (in addition to the forced closure of up to 21 schools) - all in the name of greater efficiency. These cuts will have very real, detrimental and permanent impacts on children and families - as you have heard throughout these consultations. When balancing a budget requires the removal of foundational supports for some of our most vulnerable students, we know we are witnessing the dissolution of our public education system and everything that it stands for.

The time has come to say enough!

The Parent Advocacy Network is here tonight *in support of the many voices of parents you've heard throughout the budget consultations* **to urge you, the board of trustees, to stand as one voice and reject this budget as contrary to the interests of the children of Vancouver and in violation of the democratic values upon which the School Act is founded.** Instead, we urge you to demand, with us, the immediate restoration of adequate and sustainable funding for public education.

We are fully aware of the gravity of what we are asking you to do, and the potential ramifications. However, We can no longer be complicit in the hollowing-out of our public education system, nor can we let fear and intimidation determine our course of action.

It is time take a stand for children and public education and say No!