

July 2, 2016

## THE FALLACY OF BALANCED BUDGETS – PARENTS DEMAND STABLE, SUSTAINABLE, AND ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

### *Parent Advocacy Network Responds to Minister of Education on VSB Budget*

**VANCOUVER** — The Parent Advocacy Network (PAN) continues to support the Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) Trustees' rejection of a budget requiring severe cuts to educational services and resources as the result of inadequate funding allocated to public education by the provincial government. All cuts, direct and indirect, will have significant and detrimental impacts on student learning.

PAN also supports the Trustees' rejection of the Minister of Education's offer to partially offset the Board's \$21.8 million budget shortfall with a small percentage of proceeds from the sale of the Vancouver School Board's (VSB) own assets. Liquidating assets to address an operating deficit does not address the root problem of the shortfall, which is the failure of government to provide stable, sustainable, and adequate funding for public education to all school districts.

We are surprised that the Hon. Mike Bernier is sending in a forensic audit team to conduct a full review of the VSB given that last year's audit, conducted by EY, found no room for administrative savings outside of closing schools. If this new audit costs taxpayers the same as the prior one, a total of \$750,000 will have gone to auditors rather than into our children's classrooms.

As the Minister of Education is aware, the VSB has submitted a Long Range Facilities Plan to meet the arbitrary and educationally unfounded target of 95% capacity utilization mandated by the government as a precondition for funding to seismically upgrade schools. To meet this target, the VSB is considering a list of twelve schools for closure in June 2017. This would be an unprecedented level of simultaneous school closures in BC and would displace 3,188 children currently attending these so called 'empty' schools. Sadly, even if the savings from this degree of closures were realized this year, they would only amount to \$8.8 million — not even half of the VSB's current shortfall.

A balanced budget is neither evidence of sufficient funding nor indicative of the ability of school boards to provide equitable access to quality public education for all children. We respectfully remind the Minister that for over a decade, structural underfunding has forced school boards across this province to balance their budgets every year on the backs of students, by stripping educational services, increasing class sizes, reducing staffing and closing neighbourhood and community schools. A total of 252 schools across BC have closed since 2002, with a further 22 shuttering this year. Balanced education budgets in this province come at an unacceptable cost to the very students the Minister of Education is sworn to serve.

The Hon. Mike Bernier is correct when he says that "parents and students in Vancouver need certainty that every available dollar is going to services and students." Instead of auditing the VSB's accounts, we strongly urge the Minister of Education to look to the findings and recommendations of his government's own all-party Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services to find a long-term, sustainable solution to the ongoing budget crisis faced by every school district in BC.

The Select Standing Committee on Finance & Government Services recommendations:

1. Provide adequate capital funding to school districts for facility improvements/seismic upgrades/additional schools.
2. Provide stable, sustainable and adequate funding to enable school districts to fulfill responsibilities to continue to provide access to quality public education, with recognition of the increased costs school districts have incurred.
3. Review the Ministry of Education funding formula for programs and services, as well as administrative staff compensation levels to ensure adequate and competitive compensation.

The only accounts a forensic audit team needs to examine is the Ministry's deeply flawed per-pupil funding formula that has proved wholly insufficient to provide the children of BC with the facilities and resources they need.

PAN calls on the Minister of Education to stop "playing politics" and provide the "stable, sustainable, and adequate funding" necessary to ensure that all children in BC, regardless of race, gender, economic background or ability, have the opportunity to meet their full potential. It is, after all, his legal obligation and duty to do so under the BC School Act.

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### Supporting Resources

**#BCEDINRED** - <http://www.panvancouver.ca/bcedinred.html>

 <http://www.panvancouver.ca>

 [PAN Vancouver@PAN\\_Vancouver](https://twitter.com/PAN_Vancouver)

 [www.facebook.com/PANVancouver](https://www.facebook.com/PANVancouver)

 [parentadvocacynetwork@gmail.com](mailto:parentadvocacynetwork@gmail.com)

### About the Parent Advocacy Network

The Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education (PAN), formed in 2015, is a grassroots collective of parents and community members who want to address the chronic underfunding and cuts to education services in Vancouver and across British Columbia. Our mission is to create a strong network of parents across schools and to support one another in our advocacy. Our network enables us to share information and experiences, and to stand together in protecting public education.

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