

Minutes from Parent Information Session: Tuesday, January 26, 2010

Guest speaker: Patti Bacchus-Chairperson of the Vancouver Board of Education

Topic: Upcoming Budget Cuts

- Patti explained to the group of parents about her role and the role of the trustees.
- The budget deficit for next year is unprecedented
- There has been an increase of government spending for education but it is not keeping up with the rising costs of education in BC, such as salary increases, building maintenance and expenses to run and maintain old buildings, etc.
- Children with special needs are more expensive to educate and the most vulnerable in society
- Funding for special education on a per student basis is not nearly adequate to support the needs of the students and the numbers of kids with special needs in the education system continues to grow.
- We are expecting a shortfall of anywhere between 17 and somewhere in the mid-\$30 million mark
- Legislation around class size and composition, as well as collective agreements will ensure that minimum staffing levels are maintained
- This leaves special education services especially vulnerable to cuts-non-enrolling staff, such as librarians, resource teachers, support staff (SSAs and SSBs), psychologists, SLPs, OTs/PTs, vice principals, special education consultants etc...

What can we as parents do to lobby for more funding as the school boards will do their best to support all students but they are being asked to do more with less \$\$\$\$.

We seemed to be all on the same page that strength in numbers is very important and ultimately if our children are affected in a negative way, it will affect all students in the educational system. It was discussed that we need to get support from everyone we know to lobby the provincial government to live up to their promise to adequately fund public education. The timing is particularly important as the budget deadline is the end of February so we need to put the wheels in motion before the budget is set.

The suggestions were to make phone calls, email, and try to have face to face meetings with local MLAs. Phone calls to the media to apply pressure to the premier. As well, get involved with your child's PAC committee and take a stand this way. Patti reminded us that the party line from the officials will be that they are spending more money than ever on education which may be true but again, their spending is not nearly keeping up with the costs of adequately covering the costs of education. It was suggested that we remind them that education was a priority for their election campaign and they are not living up to what they promised.

Dawn Steele has started a facebook group that you can join about BC education. Please email her to get on her listserve as she will also prepare a document that can be shared at PAC meetings. Her email is dawns@telus.net

All letters and emails that you send to the MLA should be copied to the premier and the minister of finance-Colin Hansen.

That is what was discussed and more will come soon as we try to collectively move forward to get more funding from the government. Please check the VSB website for upcoming public meetings on the budget crisis and try to get as many people on board to support putting pressure on the government to put more funding into education. What is good for the kids with special needs will benefit all the students in the education system. We can not let our children become the casualties of this budget crisis.