

Friday, February 13, 2015

Dear Vancouver Parents:

Today, when I brought my children to school, they were eager to distribute Valentines to their classmates and teachers. They made sure to deliver Valentines to the school principal and office administrator, too. Every day, I am grateful that they are part of a warm and welcoming school community, and today has given us another opportunity to show our appreciation for that community, the teachers which nourish their growing minds, the friendships that enrich their lives.

I am thankful that our public schools provide an excellent education for our children, but I'm deeply concerned that never-ending budget cuts have compromised the capacity of BC's public education system to maintain that excellence. Each year, the budget gets tighter, the cuts deeper. This year, VSB anticipates a budget shortfall of about \$15 million.

\$15,000,000.

That's in addition to the belt-tightening that has already happened.

Each year, the board of trustees is presented with an estimate of how much funding it will have for the coming year (and that figure has been shrinking every year since 2006) and are required to balance the budget. The provincial government will bring down its annual budget next week, and this will kick off an intense period of increasingly tough decisions within Vancouver's board of education. On Thursday, February 26, we will be hosting an evening with VSB's Secretary-Treasurer, Rick Krowchuk, who will provide an overview of VSB's financial situation. After years of provincially-mandated cuts, the situation is grim; this will be your opportunity to get to know the facts at play as VSB prepares its budget for the 2015-2016 school year.

VSB's budget will be released in March, and a series of consultation meetings will follow. We will be sure to post the dates/times on our website, www.vancouverdpac.org.

Speaking of budgets, I wish to thank everyone who attended our advocacy event at the end of January! A letter, addressed to the Premier, the Minister of Education, and the Minister of Finance, has come out of that meeting, and is available on our website at <http://www.vancouverdpac.org/citizen-letter.html>. Please consider using this letter as inspiration for your own, or add your signature to it as written. A petition is also available, at www.thepetitionsite.com/624/591/280/premier-clark-listen-to-public-consultations-and-increase-education-funding-in-2015/, and you may of course make your views known to the provincial government through both the letter and the petition. Please also share these widely. A strong public education system benefits the whole province, now and in the future.

Advocating for all of our children is a priority for DPAC, and that advocacy takes many forms, from lobbying for adequate and sustainable funding for public education to speaking up at the school level. This work never ends, and I am proud to announce that DPAC's executive has three new members: Jennifer Stewart, Morgane Oger, and John Lin. Welcome to the team!

Unfortunately, a different kind of advocacy came up during our January event: parking at the education centre. In the fall, the school board changed providers for its parking facilities, and there have been a few glitches – yup, parking tickets. I've had one myself. The office of the Secretary-Treasurer has been sympathetic to this, and has advised the following:

DPAC meetings and VSB meetings with DPAC representatives are often held at the VSB Education Centre (1580 West Broadway).

Parents attending DPAC meetings or representing DPAC can park in the Education Centre's underground parking (entrance on Fir St) at no cost, but please see details below. For active transportation options, the Education Centre is close to bus routes 9, 99, 14, 16 and 10, and is adjacent to the 10th Avenue bikeway.

Bicycle parking is available in the bicycle cage located on P1 of the parkade to the right of the entrance booth from 7:00 am to 7:00 pm or outside at the bike rack under the roof overhang in front of the cafeteria off 10th Ave.

Daytime Meetings - up to 5 pm

The VSB Education Centre can be accessed from Broadway, the south entrance across from 10th Avenue, or via the parking lot elevators. If parking underground, there are 13 free visitor parking stalls on the first level. If these are full, attendees should find a suitable parking space and pay for their parking. The parking costs can be claimed by submitting the receipt via the DPAC expense account.

Evening Meetings - after 5 pm

The VSB Education Centre can only be accessed from Broadway, or via the parking lot elevators. The south entrance is locked after hours. If entering from Broadway the stairs will be closed off so please use the elevators to access the Ground floor. If parking underground, there are 13 free visitor parking stalls on the first level. If these are full, attendees should find a suitable parking space but not pay for their parking. Attendees should sign the parking book on the Ground floor, recording their name and license plate number.

If you receive a parking ticket while parked for DPAC business, please contact Easy Park at 604-717-7352 and request a cancellation.

I apologise to anyone who received a parking ticket during our advocacy event, and ask that you contact Easy Park at the number given above if you have not already had the ticket cancelled.

February brings us Valentine's Day, and at my children's school it is a day to celebrate friendship and the importance of those connections. Feeling safe and accepted at school is essential for every child, every day. On February 25, Vancouver schools will be marking Pink Day, a day which reminds us that everyone has the power to fight bullying and harassment. Just as Valentine's Day is a great reminder to tell others how much they matter to us throughout the year, the message of Pink Day needs to be part of every day.

The poster features the VSB logo at the top left, followed by the text "Together We Can Stop Bullying and Discrimination". Below this is the large, bold text "THINK PINK" in a pink-to-white gradient. Underneath is a pink banner with the date "On Wednesday, February 25, 2015". The central graphic consists of five circular icons: "That's so gay!" (crossed out), "Be Yourself! Inspire Change! Celebrate Diversity" (with a rainbow circle), "Boys can't" (crossed out), "Girls can't" (crossed out), and "Name-calling and discrimination" (crossed out). Below the icons is a paragraph of text explaining the origin of Pink Day and listing activities for kids. At the bottom, it provides contact information for Stephanie Lofquist and includes the rainbow and transgender flags.

Together We Can Stop
Bullying and Discrimination

THINK PINK

On Wednesday, February 25, 2015

That's so gay!

Be Yourself! Inspire Change!
Celebrate Diversity

Boys can't

Girls can't

Name-calling and discrimination

PINK DAY STARTED IN 2007 WHEN TWO NOVA SCOTIA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS DECIDED TO CREATE A "SEA OF PINK" TO SUPPORT A GRADE 9 BOY WHO WAS CALLED HOMOPHOBIC NAMES WHEN HE WORE A PINK SHIRT TO SCHOOL. THE ORIGINAL DAY WAS A HUGE SUCCESS WITH PEOPLE AT THEIR SCHOOL WEARING ALL KINDS OF PINK CLOTHING, FACE PAINTING, AND EVEN A PINK BIKE!
(For the original story go to <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/buffed-student-ticked-pink-by-schoolmates-1.682221>)

KIDS CAN...

- PLAY WITH ANY TOY OR PLAY ANY SPORT OR GAME
- PLAY WITH WHO THEY WANT TO
- WEAR ANY COLOUR AND STYLE OF CLOTHES OR HAIR
- BE WHO THEY ARE AND HELP OTHERS DO THE SAME
- SAY NO TO NAME-CALLING AND DISCRIMINATION
- STUDENTS HAVE THE POWER TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!

For more information contact Stephanie Lofquist
by email: pride@vsb.bc.ca

Finally, in December, the province announced that graduated adults will no longer qualify for fee-free basic education courses. This means that, if your child graduates from high school but needs additional courses or upgraded marks to get into a post-secondary programme, tuition will be charged on those courses. It also means that any adult with a high school diploma who wants to change careers but requires additional secondary school courses to do so will need to pay for those basic courses. The tuition fee may be as much as \$1,000 per course. The impact of these cuts are broad; on March 5, at the Croatian Cultural Centre, there will be a forum to discuss this policy change and the fall-out. More information is available at

<https://adultlearningmatters.wordpress.com/> and
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1582625275283620/>.

As always, I wish you and your families well. I hope to see you at the budget forum on February 26!

Melanie