

Trustees Must Vote “NO” on Ford’s Austerity School Board Budget *Backgrounder and Frequently Asked Questions*

As parents, families, and education workers, we call on all TDSB Trustees to refuse to implement budget cuts handed down by the Ford government. Trustees are elected to represent the best interests of students and their communities. Budgets should be determined based on the needs of students in Toronto classrooms, not on the demands of a government bent on [cutting public services](#) in the interests of their [corporate friends](#).

Each spring, local school boards rely on funding received from the Provincial government to determine their annual budgets. In spring of 2019, the Ford government passed legislation that cut province-wide school board funding by more than [\\$375 per student](#). In Toronto this amounted to [\\$67 million worth of cuts](#), resulting in the loss of course offerings, mental health supports, guidance counsellors, speech pathologists, outdoor education, second language and music programming, school maintenance and repair, professional development, and more.

Balancing the budget will hurt students already marginalized by economic, racial and other forms of inequality. The TDSB, quite rightly, is proud and protective of its efforts to create equity within the system. However, we all know that real success in closing achievement gaps requires major investment in an underfunded system. A vote to balance a cuts-based budget is a vote against the TDSB’s Five Year Plan which includes equity of access to high quality schooling for all of our kids. We refuse to fight amongst ourselves over scraps of funding. All kids deserve access to special education services *and* outdoor education, vibrant arts programs *and* free and accessible food programs.

In spring of 2020, Trustees must make clear that they serve students and their constituents, not Ford’s austerity agenda. According to the Education Act, when a school board is unable to produce a balanced budget, the province can install a supervisor to take over the budget process and other board functions, as occurred in Toronto in 2003. The time has come for Trustees to unequivocally refuse funding cuts and force the Ford government to take singular responsibility for its attacks on our public schools.

Trustees must join an historic and growing movement. Students, families, and education workers have worked tirelessly since Ford’s election, writing letters, making phone calls, organizing walk-ins, walk-outs, and strikes. We see through the Ford government’s campaign of misinformation and we know that [Ontario can afford](#) strong, comprehensive public services.

It is time that TDSB Trustees side with the vast majority of their constituents to put forward a needs-based budget. Letters from the Chair are no longer enough. Trustees must demonstrate their commitment to high quality publicly funded education by refusing to implement any more cuts. Together we can win the funding our students deserve.

Frequently Asked Questions

- 1. In 2002/3 TDSB Trustees rejected the austerity agenda of Mike Harris. This led to the downfall of his government and a decade of funding improvements. Can it work again?**

Parents and the general public are much more engaged in and supportive of the fight to save public education than they were in 2002. [Polling consistently demonstrates public support](#) with a minimum of 57% in support of the no-cuts stance of education workers, and only 30% supporting Ford's cuts. Fully 22% of Ford supporters are against the cuts! Parents and education workers have worked together to organize hundreds of rallies and walk-ins across the province. These networks are stronger than they've ever been. We intend to continue this fight right up until the next election to ensure Ford and his cronies are a one-term government. Now is the time for Trustees to join the fight.

- 2. What was the impact when school boards voted "No" in 2002?**

The immediate impact was that the Conservative government appointed a supervisor to impose a budget on the board. That supervisor was not able to find the kind of 'fat' Harris insisted was available for cutting from the system. The public outcry over the decision to take over the board forced that same Conservative government to [pledge an increase in education funding in the next election](#). They were defeated by a party that largely ran on a pledge to bring peace and stability to Ontario's education system.

- 1. Don't we have to do our part to help with Ontario's deficit? Where will the money come from?**

It's more than clear that Ontario does not have a spending problem but a revenue problem. By reversing tax-cuts for the wealthy, and increasing corporate tax rates to the Canadian provincial average, [Ontario can increase annual spending and expand programs](#). This is a problem of the Government's making and our kids and schools shouldn't have to make up the difference.

- 3. If we vote "No", isn't the province going to take over the board and cut all our locally developed programs that aim to close equity and achievement gaps? If we lose control over the board don't we lose our chance to protect the most vulnerable students?**

History shows that Government-appointed supervisors are not given latitude to make program changes. They are only given the ability to review spending to find savings. Fighting to protect successful programs here and there in the midst of massive cuts is like rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. Increased class sizes and reduced services are core equity issues that will impact students who face systemic inequities

the hardest. We must fight for the schools and services our students need, not settle for band-aids.

4. How will voting “No Cuts” help our students?

Accepting a harmful austerity budget requires sacrificing some students in the interests of keeping corporate taxes low. In this context, voting “No” is an act of care, sending the clearest message possible that Trustees value children and the schools that provide them with high quality publicly funded education. It will set an example for every student in each of your schools about democracy, and fighting for what is right. Voting no will ensure that the provincial government takes full responsibility for cuts to education and thus increases the political stakes for a very unpopular government. The last time school boards voted “No” it helped bring down a government and increase education funding for Ontario students.

5. Does the budget have to pass? Isn’t voting “No” breaking the law? What are the legal consequences?

Voting no to a cuts-based budget is an act of conscience, and an act of civil disobedience. Sometimes it is difficult to stand up for what one believes in, but now is the time to make that difficult decision, and to be counted among those who are fighting to protect our students and our schools. Notably, the last person who led a “Vote No” campaign as a Trustee went on to become Premier of Ontario.

6. Doesn’t Ford want to get rid of local school boards anyways? Wouldn’t allowing the province to take over the school help them facilitate that process?

Parents and education workers across Ontario are demanding that their Trustees refuse cuts-based budgets. Trustees must reach out to each other across the province and do this together. When Trustees take decisive action, students, parents and education workers will rally around them to oppose Ford’s cuts. This government’s attacks on education have already made it one of the most unpopular governments in recent memory, and a politically toxic attack on locally elected school boards would only make that worse. Even if Ford is reckless enough to try that, unless we stop them here, this government will continue to unilaterally slash funding and cause immense damage to our schools.

7. The Ford government claims that they increased funding to education for the 2019-2020 school year with the historic spending. How can this be true?

Ford and Lecce’s claims that they have increased education funding by \$1.2 Billion are deeply and intentionally [misleading](#). The government’s new child-care tax credit accounts for the majority of the increase in the overall education budget. Spending for elementary and secondary programs increased by only \$133 million, which far from covers the costs of inflation and rising student enrollment. As students, parents and education workers experience the impacts of funding cuts first hand in the form

increasing class sizes and disappearing course offerings, special education supports and more, we cannot be fooled into believing that the Ford government has made a historic investment in education. [If it looks like a cut, and feels like a cut, it probably is a cut.](#)