

Vote No to the TDSB Budget Campaign

As parents, teachers 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 school board funding which resulted in more than \$67 million in cuts for the TDSB. This led to a loss of course offerings, mental health supports, guidance counselors, speech pathologists, outdoor education, second language and music programming, school maintenance and repair, professional development, and more.

For example:

- Guidance positions reduced from 84 to 69
- Outdoor Education centre fees and bussing increased, and Etobicoke Centre closed, \$4.4 million cut
- IB Program fees charged
- Psychology staff reduced from 138 to 128
- Social Workers reduced from 111.5 to 107
- Centrally assigned core team: Art and Music reduced from 16.5 to 9
- Itinerant Music Instructors: Budget reduced by 24%
- Facilities staff: Budget cut of 4.61
- Lunchroom staff: Cut by 11.5%

Trustees must make it clear that they serve students and their constituents, not Ford's austerity agenda. According to the Education Act, if local school boards are 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 2002. The time has come for Trustees to take this risk and force the Ford government to take full responsibility for their attacks on our public schools.

We urge our elected Trustees to act with courage and craft a budget that genuinely supports the TDSB's commitments to equity, well-being and achievement. We know that class size increases and funding cuts will have a disproportionate impact on students already marginalized by economic, racial and other forms of inequality. Any strategic plan that aims to close achievement-gaps requires investment in our already underfunded system. All kids deserve access to special education services *and* outdoor education, vibrant arts programs *and* enriched academic opportunities. **We refuse to fight amongst ourselves over scraps of funding.**

Trustees must join an historic and growing solidarity. Students, parents, 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 if we prioritize education funding over tax cuts that disproportionately benefit the wealthy. It is time that TDSB Trustees side with the vast majority of their constituents to put forward a needs-based budget. Together, we vastly outnumber Ford Nation and we can win the funding our students deserve.

Q&A

1. 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, essentially removing any Trustee oversight. However, that supervisor was not able to impose all the cuts the government had asked for and 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 dramatically increase education funding.

2. Can we actually get people to mobilize around this? Just because it worked in the Harris years, doesn't mean it's going to work now.

Parents and the general public are arguably much more engaged in and supportive of the fight to save public education than they were even in 2002. Polling demonstrates public support with 57% supporting education workers and only 30% supporting Ford's cuts. Even 22% of Ford supporters are against the cuts.

3. Where would 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.

4. If we vote no, the province is going to take over the Board and we lose the ability to prioritize programs that are important to us and that we have developed locally.

Equity programs are already being slashed, or at serious risk. The class size changes, e-learning mandate, and other budget line cuts already made, have done serious harm to local programs (e.g. instituting fees for IB, no more funding for arts schools, the loss of hundreds of education workers like social workers, psychologists, etc.) The government made all these changes unilaterally anyway, so passing a slashed budget is akin to rearranging chairs on the Titanic. The TDSB would simply be implementing cuts imposed on them by the Ford government.

5. How will voting No help our students?

Voting No will make it clear that the Trustees are opposed to the cuts, increasing pressure on the Ford government, and forcing their hand. It also shows a commitment to refuse to entrench the cuts moving forward.

6. Does the budget have to pass? Isn't voting No breaking the law? What are the legal consequences?

Technically it is breaking the law. One of the main strategies of the government has been to lie. Voting no to the budget would force the government's hand. They would have to step in and make the cuts themselves and would expose their hypocrisy.

7. 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?

While there was talk of merging some regional school boards under Lisa Thompson, that topic has not come up again, likely because it is politically toxic. Regardless, the province has, and will likely continue to, act unilaterally to implement their agenda, unless we keep throwing wrenches in the gears.