

Below are Stepan Vdovine opening and closing comments at last night's Vision Vancouver Board of Education all-candidates meeting.

OPENING:

Good evening ladies and gentlemen, friends, supporters: I first run for public office because I felt that voice of young people have not been reflected or represented. I was elected and soon discovered that it wasn't just voices of youth that have been neglected, but also voices of parents and employee groups.

I know many of you can related to this. The NPA record at the school board level is a record of mistakes in judgment and lost opportunities. They have ignored voices of parents, employee groups. They neglected student safety concerns, they have shown no commitment for an open and transparent governance process. They've become cheerleaders for Shirley Bond and Gordon Campbell.

This election is our opportunity to make a change. You'll hear plenty of talk about 'change' in the next couple of months. Let me tell you that a change from Sum Sullivan to Peter Ladner doesn't amount to much of a change at all.

We need to make a real and meaningful difference for this city and for our public schools.

So how would this kind of change look like?

First, we need to elect trustees who will tackle the pockets of deep educational disadvantage. Highest child poverty rates in the country, at least one out of four children live below the poverty line. We must enable every child to fulfill their potential regardless of their background.

It is also imperative that we address issues of class size and composition. There is no doubt in my mind that

children thrive on individual attention.

I also know that if we are to create truly inclusive and safe neighbourhood schools there must be a quantum leap in the financial resources. We need trustees who will take local concerns to Victoria.

And finally we need trustees who will establish an atmosphere of genuine co-operation with all education partners. Our teachers and staff deserve nothing less than an atmosphere of trust, where work that they do is valued and appreciated. Our parents need to be recognized for the essential role that they play in making public education effective.

CLOSING:

Friends:

Vancouver School District needs a progressive voice, a voice of reason. It needs it urgently. It does not have it in the current board. That's why my colleagues and I are in front of you tonight. We realize we can't afford to continue to provide that voice from the margins.

And so in the two months to come, it is our task to launch a campaign, to work with COPE and convince the public to elect a progressive majority to the Vancouver Board of Education.

Together, I know we can build a public education system rooted in the commitment to students, to the inclusive governance process, committed to effective advocacy, to equity and to social justice.

I hope I can count on your support and I thank all of you for coming tonight, thanks to my colleagues on the panel.