



Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council (DPAC)

March 15, 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to present on behalf of the parent community.

As the official stakeholder for parents in our district DPAC has had the opportunity to speak to many parents across Vancouver over the course of the school year, on a variety of issues impacting our schools and our children. In these conversations, we've repeatedly heard some general themes that we believe should guide all work in the district, including the budget. We have also surveyed PACs regarding specific proposals contained in the draft budget. We'd like to share both the general themes and the more specific feedback with you here.

Throughout the year, over various consultations, we have heard parents speak of the importance of equity and of the importance of support for our most vulnerable children. Parents believe the budget should be viewed through those lenses.

This budget has been presented as a status quo budget.

After years of cuts, the status quo is not equitable, nor does it provide sufficient supports for all of our children.

When DPAC was asked "what are your priorities for the budget", our first response was "everything that was taken out in the last 16 years". It was a good honest response. But still, we understood it as a joke. So, our second response was "resources for better consultation with communities, supports for diverse learners, supports for mental health, supports for marginalized communities... and if programs or budget items are added, please make sure they are added back equitably". These responses speak to the general themes we've heard from parents.

When we surveyed PACs regarding specific budget proposals, some of these themes also surfaced in their answers, as well as concerns for children and the supports in their educational environment.

The one-time funding proposals were all fairly strongly supported, with slightly less strong support for Peoplesoft and print shop equipment. We would like to see the trustees advocate the Ministry to fund menstrual product dispensers in all public schools across the province.

Most ongoing funding proposals were supported, with especially strong support for mental health and district anti-racism coordinator

Two ongoing funding proposals were not supported by PACs in their survey responses: digital communications coordinator, and an international education coordinator. International student education staffing increases and an additional vice principal at Britannia Secondary were only weakly supported.

We have also put some thought into proposals and areas we'd like to see more support.

When looking at graduation rates, VSB is doing very well for the majority (89% for 2017/18) of our children, but not all. Most notably, the completion rate of Indigenous youth in VSB (56% for 2017/18) and youth with diverse needs in VSB (70% for 2017/18). There are also worries that both rates contain skewed data from lowered expectations. (Data from: <https://studentsuccess.gov.bc.ca/school-district/039/report/completion-rates>)

From a budget perspective, we would like to see:

- **Funds set aside to implement recommendations coming from the Indigenous Focus School review completed this Spring;**
- **Resources to decrease wait times for assessments for all diverse learners, including for diverse needs that don't come with additional provincial funding; and**
- **Increased access to supports and resources for diverse learners and Indigenous-identifying students.**

As demonstrated in VSB's budget survey, mental health and wellness is the top priority of respondents (89%). We know it is also a top issue for VSB as in your presentation to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services last October you stated *"Vancouver has some of the poorest households in the entire country and the poverty that exists in areas of our District is fuel for special learning difficulties and mental health issues among children. The lack of personnel in the District who have specialized training to deal with mental issues is placing pressure on teachers and support staff.."*

While we support the proposals for a Mental Health, Wellbeing and Engagement Strategy and for an Anti-racism Diversity Resource Teacher, **we would like to see more trained professionals working in schools including more counsellors and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) specialists, and an expansion of SACY programs and initiatives.**

The Arts are essential to the intellectual and social emotional development of young children; are part of the BC curriculum and central to the core competencies; and are shown to significantly improve outcomes for disadvantaged children and youth. **We support proposals that will lead to equitable, specialized music programs in all elementary schools. We also support the expansion of programs like AIRS (Artist in Residence Studio program) that get teachers and students interacting and creating with professional artists.**

We appreciate the lengths VSB goes to reduce financial barriers for vulnerable families. We have recently learned that VSB's Students' Emergency Fund is unable to meet requests. **We would like to see District resources, either funds or requests for donor funds, be directed towards this account. We also support increasing school flex accounts and secondary school program accounts in order to reduce requests for parent and/or PAC funds.**

With the upcoming catchment boundary review, ongoing Long Range Facilities Plan with new guidelines, seismic projects, and other potential changes coming up, **we would like to ensure there is sufficient funds for robust consultation. This includes ensuring involved district staff are well trained in IAP2 consultation methods and reducing barriers to parent involvement**

While not part of our initial consultation, **we support proposals that fit with the City of Vancouver's Climate Emergency Report** including its 'Six Big Moves:' walkable complete communities; safe and convenient active transportation and transit; pollution free vehicles; zero emission space and water heating; lower carbon construction; and restored forests and coast.

Thank you for your time.
