



Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council

Recommendations to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services - June 26, 2020

The Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council represents the parents and guardians of the approximately 60,000 students in the public schools of School District 39 (Vancouver), and carries out its work on the unceded traditional territories of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh Coast Salish Peoples.

The Vancouver DPAC executive thanks the members of the Select Standing Committee for the opportunity to provide input to the public consultation process regarding priorities for the 2021 BC provincial budget. We acknowledge that this work is being done during a time when citizens and governments are all called upon to use our collective resources most effectively in response to the major challenges of global warming, the COVID-19 pandemic, and long-standing structural social inequities unjustly favouring dominant cultural groups.

To address all these challenges, we need an informed, creative and engaged public. Both the developing response to the pandemic and efforts to shift towards sustainability show the need for technical innovation, as well as good policy decisions understood and supported by an educated citizenry. Our public education system plays an essential role in creating and maintaining the latter. We need to equip the coming generation to think globally and apply holistic and interdisciplinary approaches to complex problems. British Columbia's new curriculum is founded on such long-term thinking and needs appropriate financial support to ensure student success.

Even viewed through a narrowly economic lens, stronger investment in public education has long term benefits. Numerous studies support the conclusion that present expenditures supporting quality public education reduce long-term expenses in health, social services and justice. (For example, see [The Economic Case for Investing in Education](#), a June 2019 Conference Board of Canada paper, and [Public education – it's the best investment we can make | People for Education](#), which references recent work by the OECD on the longer term social benefits of spending on education.) In British Columbia we need to do a better job of overcoming short term financial thinking as it is doubly negative - it costs taxpayers more in the long term and does injustice to our children.

We therefore call upon the Committee to recommend reprioritizing public education by increasing the level of investment in education to at least the 2001 level of 3.3% of the provincial GDP, and ensuring that per-student funding at least matches the average level across Canadian provinces and territories.

This to provide sufficient ongoing resources for a robust system which:

- 1) Provides equitable learning opportunities for all students regardless of socio-economic status, individual learning needs, or location in the province;
- 2) Allows for new construction and seismic upgrades on the basis of revised Area Standards providing sufficient space for individualized learning based on the new curriculum, in elementary schools for

non-enrolling classroom space for arts, music, science and resource teacher needs, and in secondary schools for a range of technical and arts electives and trades opportunities; and
3) Reduces the expectation for parent fundraising for basic educational needs (such as technology) and the resulting inequities between and within school districts.

Vancouver DPAC fully supports the more detailed recommendations on how these goals can be achieved that have been put forward in the submissions by the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils, and by the Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education.

We are aware that one argument raised by provincial officials against a return to previous higher funding levels is that BC scores well on the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test results at the current level of expenditures. We suggest that as a snapshot of the system taken every three years, based on a test that does not include any students identified as needing additional supports, PISA results provide an incomplete and infrequent measure of the health of the system and are thus an inadequate rationale for not increasing resources. A better set of questions to guide the determination of what resources are required for consistently excellent learning outcomes would be:

- How can we better serve our children with special needs?
- How can we further improve graduation rates, overall and for specific groups, including Indigenous-identifying students?
- How can we plan for modern facilities and reduce our facilities condition index?
- How can we do the best for our students' well-being and make it a measurable priority? (We consider sufficient funding for anti-racism supports and training to be one vital element of any answer to this question.)

Almost without exception in its annual reports over the past decade, the Select Standing Committee has recommended a higher priority and increased funding for public education. Vancouver DPAC requests that the current committee include the same recommendation as a highlight of its report for the next provincial budget. The current situation creates a unique opportunity to revitalize both our education system and our economy through thoughtfully applied stimulus. The time is now!

Thank you for your consideration.

Alan Patola Moosmann

Alan Patola Moosmann, Executive Member-at-large
alan.patola.moosmann@vancouverdpac.org

Submitted on behalf of the Vancouver DPAC Executive, June 26, 2020