

DPAC Statement

VANCOUVER DPAC SUPPORTS ENGAGED LEARNERS, INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS, CARING COMMUNITIES AND CALLS FOR A REVERSAL OF THE DEEP CUTS TO PUBLIC EDUCATION IN THIS RECENT BUDGET



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Thank you to VSB's trustees and senior staff for preparing yet another difficult budget. This proposed budget erodes public education as a core value in a democratic society. We strongly believe that fault for disintegrating these values lies not with the VSB but with the provincial government's failure to properly fund public education over the past many years.

We recognize that we are operating within a broken system--one in which we do not know the amount of funds that we have to plan our education system every year. So we wait for the news every winter, then plan in March and implement in the fall--each year with less resources. We now have a skeletal school system. All the flesh and fat has been lost.

While it is true that enrolment is declining, partly related to the cost of housing, Vancouver is home to a student population which has complex needs and requires specialized services; many of these services have been provided by the public education system. Citizens in the inner city are often unable to afford these

services in the private sector so they go without. In the future, our society pays more for neglected childhood needs, in the health, social services and justice systems.

The province is insistent on underfunding public education, blaming the VSB for poorly managing funds. The reality is that the VSB has worked hard to try and keep specialized and sometimes complex levels of service that are in step with the large and diverse urban population that is our district. Programs and services in Vancouver have not been developed on a whim. They have been developed to address very real challenges that students face in their endeavour to successfully complete school, and the challenges families face to support them.



The extremely serious impact of proposed cuts on children and youth, particularly those most vulnerable, will be felt in every sector of the district. Proposed cuts will curtail important programs/personnel which support Indigenous students, anti-racism, anti-homophobia, students with disabilities, new immigrants, literacy, music programs, distance learning, SACY, SSW, fine and performing arts, home instruction, adult education, field trips, maintenance of facilities and ease of communication between students, families and the district, by the cuts to administrative support and supplies.

The cuts to optional band and strings programs affects 44 elementary schools; this kind of music education allows students of all socio-economic backgrounds the ability to benefit from the intellectual, emotional, social and other advantages of music. Private music lessons cost thousands of dollars.

The reduction of enhanced services literacy teachers will have long term detrimental effects; research has shown the vital importance of literacy in society. Children with low literacy skills tend to grow into adults who face multiple barriers. Field trips will be reduced as teachers and support staff replacements for staff accompanying students on field trips are also on the proposed chopping block; field trips assist student learning in many ways and this proposed cut will make a sharp impact on education. The extra cost will be downloaded to families, placing one more barrier to participation for students who may benefit the most from them.

Gifted learners, mini schools and other district programs may be closed as a result of proposed cuts to support staff and planning blocks. These specialized programs are highly celebrated as they provide safe spaces for like-minded students to thrive. Mini schools offer vulnerable students who may have been bullied elsewhere a safe learning space. Losing district programming of this nature is a serious loss to hundreds and hundreds of families in Vancouver. Demand for mini schools is extremely high. Most mini schools have at least twice the applicants that they can accept. If mini schools are closed, some families may migrate to the private system. For the others? Opportunity lost, a path to succeed blocked. Furthermore, proposed cuts to adult education will deprive some adult learners the vital opportunity to access public education.



These are just some of the losses that the families of Vancouver will experience as a result of these proposed budget cuts to be implemented in September 2016. In a year when the provincial government is suggesting it will post a surplus, public education ought to be receiving full funding to support the success of every student. Instead we are receiving barely enough funding to achieve educational standards that were considered adequate in a previous century. In this century, times have changed. Rightfully included in Public Education are all learners. With the inclusion that we celebrate, come costs. With the expectation that every student will succeed according to their ability come costs. With the mandate that 21st century learning reflect the complex, rapidly changing landscape where technology has created a world that our students, right now, must be equipped to navigate,

come costs. If these costs are not supported, public education, a celebrated cornerstone of democracy, will falter and die.

On April 4th the provincial government announced an additional \$28 million in funding to the school districts of which VSB's share is around \$2.625 million. In the updated preliminary budget presented here today, we see it, and the funds saved by having no students at Henderson Annex next year, will decrease or eliminate 10 of the proposed cuts including keeping the district coordinators for athletics and arts plus the SACY youth worker and reducing the cuts on literacy teachers, special education staff, high school teachers, and the gifted program. We are pleased to see more funding in the system and hope that another \$24M is sent this week.

The Ministry of Education must fund collective agreement increases for teachers, administrators, support staff and fund the Next Generation Network. The provincial government must pay for all costs related to inflation, MSP and other related items. Constant downloading of costs such as these from Victoria to Vancouver over the past several years has created a crisis in our school system. Vancouver DPAC is categorically opposed to public tax dollars funding elite private schools.

Robust sustainable public education is one of the most vital mechanisms for our society to build a meritocracy. Educated citizens create more democratic institutions. Better education helps graduates to get better jobs and helps build a stronger economy. A strong public education system promotes better population health. In short, well-funded public education which focuses on the intellectual, social and emotional development of children is the great equalizer.

If left to stand, these cuts will destroy the soul of public education in Vancouver and beyond. The Vancouver DPAC believes that our tax dollars ought to be spent on supporting strong public education and calls for a complete reversal of these cuts.

For more information please contact Vancouver DPAC Vice Chair Farah Shroff at fmcshroff@gmail.com or 604 682 3269 x 6169