



VSTA RESPONSE TO THE 2013/14 REVISED PRELIMINARY BUDGET PROPOSALS

On behalf of the Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association, we are here once again to provide feedback on the revised budget proposals while reiterating our "core" priorities. Please be assured that we recognize that there are no "easy" choices when faced with yet another significant budget shortfall and that any and all budget reductions negatively impact the overall well-being of the district.

To ensure "success for all students," the VSTA recommends the following:

1. Instructional staffing not be further eroded through cuts to teachers. To assert that cutting another 8.42 enrolling teachers will have minimal impact on schools is erroneous. The data is clear: as of October, 2012, there were over 2800 secondary classes in violation of class size/composition language that existed in 2001. Additionally, another 365 teachers have been issued a potential for layoff notice, this being the fourth consecutive year.

Furthermore, we reiterate the need for an increase to non-enrolling teachers: teacher-librarians, resource teachers and counsellors. Also, we formally request that the non-enrolling staffing entitlements for each school be *disaggregated*. It is critical that a base level of service exists in all of our schools.

2. The VSTA is firmly opposed to the creation of a Community Engagement Coordinator. The core mandate of the VSB is to provide service to K-12 students, to maintain a quality public education system. On December 10, 2012, a report entitled "Tracking Enrollment" was presented at Committee I. Under the subtitle *Independent School Enrolment*, the document states that "*although there are undoubtedly anecdotal examples of students leaving the public system to enroll in independent schools, an analysis of market share data indicates that the VSB has maintained its market share of students living in the City of Vancouver over the past ten years.*" More importantly, however, is the following quote: "*It is therefore important to recognize that by far the most significant reason for the district enrolment decline is demographic decline. There is an established relationship between school aged population and K-12 enrolment and the size of the school-aged population will continue to be the overriding factor in determining enrolment. Accordingly, the district cannot retain or regain students who don't exist in the first place.*"

In light of this report's findings, the VSTA is perplexed by both the rationale and the proposed value of such a position. We absolutely agree with the proposal's assertion that our "*schools are the heart of the community and soul of the neighbourhoods*"; therefore, we recommend that the \$120,000 be directed to classrooms, to improving the learning conditions for our students.

3. The VSTA is also concerned about the proposal (A2) to further reduce the services provided by the Media Library Services Department. Teachers have clearly stated that they value this service and that it provides much needed support to both classroom teachers and school libraries. While there has been a decrease for demand of this service, the data indicates, nonetheless, that over 7800 physical items have been circulated between September and March of this school year! The volume of teacher feedback, in addition to concerns related to band width, a general lack of appropriate technology, and the overall lack of a clear transitional plan and timeline, make it clear that the VSTA cannot support this proposal.

4. The VSTA remains opposed to the proposal to create a Wellness and Attendance Support Program. We assert that a well-defined plan with workable timelines be further developed before moving forward with this proposal. The VSTA recommends that the Board conduct an in-depth analysis of the root causes of employee wellness concerns prior to implementing a program under the guise of *"fostering a healthier environment for students and staff,"* particularly as the VTF is already experiencing unprecedented difficulties in relation to documentation and medical leaves.
5. The VSTA is has several concerns related to the proposal on "Printing Strategy" (A3) which anticipates a cost savings of \$70,000. While this proposal has the potential to profoundly impact the working conditions of teachers across this district, there has been a complete absence of consultation with the VTF. The preliminary budget document (page 14) makes reference to the *"endorsement by Senior Management of a document outlining the District's Goals, Strategy and Guidelines released February 2013."* The VSTA did not respond to this item at the April 16 meeting simply because we had no knowledge of the document and/or the printing "goals" of the VBE. While the VSTA fully supports the principles of reducing electricity and resource consumption, we are extremely concerned that this "cost saving" will be realized at the expense of our members and their workloads. Given the lack of information and consultation, the VSTA is opposed to proposal A3 at this time. It is imperative that more information be forthcoming before the VSTA can support this district direction.
6. The VSTA remains firmly opposed to the non-teaching related expenditures related to the expansion of the International Education Program. As the VSTA highlighted in a detailed chart that was presented (on April 16), the "real/actual" number of secondary based administrators has actually increased since 2007/08, despite the fact that all other employee groups have experienced a significant reduction. Surely, there is enough expertise within the district's current, fulsome organizational structure to oversee an increase of 125 students for 2013/14! Additionally, the proposed change of .3 to teacher counselling time is woefully inadequate. To state that a full-time principal is needed to *"assist with overseas promotional trips"*; and, yet at the same time, provide only .3 counselling time for these children seems inconsistent with the Board's professed mandate of *"success for all students,"* regardless of their country of origin and/or the status of their official citizenship.

On behalf of our members, I would like to conclude by thanking and commending the Board for reinstating the peer to peer teacher mentors, a decision that has been lauded by countless individuals. As was stated at the outset, we recognize that this Board is facing a significant challenge in developing a balanced budget for 2013/14. We wholeheartedly agree that schools are the *"heart of the community"*; therefore, we implore this Board to direct resources and staffing directly to the children within them.

Thank you.

Debbie Pawluk
President