



# Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association

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## **2016-2017 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS**

Vancouver Board of Education  
Committee III / V



**April 11, 2016**



## **VSTA RESPONSE TO 2016-2017 BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS**

It is with utter sadness that the VSTA responds to the VSB preliminary budget proposals for the 2016-17 school year. The VSTA feels that in this proposed budget, the social contract of public education is in jeopardy in this district. For over 120 years, public education has been the solution to the questions asked regarding the education of children in Vancouver. With this proposed budget, the sustainability of what we know as our education system is threatened. As has been pointed out in previous budget recommendations from the VSTA and other stakeholders, the proposals outlined in this budget set out a dismantling of services for all students, particularly the most vulnerable. In round dollars the provincial government has increased Education Funding by \$1.1 billion since 2002. However, in today's dollars (inflation added for 12 years), provincial spending on the Public Education system has decreased from 19.67% of the provincial budget to just 15.14% of the budget. If 2001-02 funding were restored to public education, an additional 1.6 billion dollars minimum would be available to school boards. British Columbia has the 2<sup>nd</sup> lowest per student funding in Canada and it is this decrease that has come to live in the classrooms of Vancouver schools. The myth of mismanagement and the cult of efficiency furthered by some voices of narrow view must be clearly refuted. All employees in the Vancouver system have unfortunately learned, in the last 12 years, to work on a shoestring. To suggest, as some do, that mismanagement of resources has contributed to the current budgetary situation, is at best unhelpful and at worst, reckless and false. BC Hydro increases, inflation on supplies, resources and equipment, staff salary increases, the Next Generation Network and M.S.P. premium increases are all examples of unfunded liabilities that have been passed to school districts. Teachers in Vancouver Secondary schools take great pride in their programs and with just cause, our education outcomes are outstanding and our schools are lively and successful -- but it is important to know that they are not what they once were. Although the VSTA recognizes that effort has been taken by senior staff to distribute cuts across the system and to be conscious of services that immediately and directly affect student outcomes, all proposals in this budget directly impact the work that all employees do to contribute to all students' success. Given this, the VSTA requests that the board consider the following recommendations to the preliminary proposals. This list is far too long and yet incomplete. Many of the budget proposals not listed are also equally distasteful and destructive.

### **E1. Field trip EOC costs.**

The VSTA is opposed to this most unfortunate cut to enrichment possibilities for students across the district. Many students in poverty have some of their only opportunities to travel beyond their neighbourhoods and enrich their vulnerable educational experience through field study. This proposed budget reduction would eliminate several field trips for Vancouver students that take place both in the city and out of town. For most field trips, a fee is charged to students and this money is often used to cover EOC costs. This system sets up structural inequities that offend the nature of equal access to opportunity — a pillar of our system.

### **E.2. DLS Release Time.**

This release time allows District Learning Services team members to engage with teachers who require support, are providing enrichment to classes and sites other than their home school, and engaging their expertise in the cause of collaboration. This proposal hamstringing many educational supports and initiatives that bring great value to students in the system. It is an unfortunate and crippling cut.

### **E.3. School Flex Budgets.**

Flexible Purchasing budgets are used extensively by all schools to purchase consumables and equipment essential for teaching and learning. This budget has been cut to a fraction of its historical amounts. Examples that this line item is used for in Secondary Schools include classroom and lab supplies for Science, Technology, P.E., Fine Arts, Home Ec. and learning resources for Math, Humanities and Languages. This proposed cutback reduces to a pittance the materials necessary to even demonstrate processes and hands-on techniques let alone have each student participate fully, and makes the purchase of new texts and software largely impossible.

### **E.5. International Education.**

Although the proposed addition of one Counselling position to the service of International Students and their families is welcome, the VSTA feels that the service these students require outstrips the resources that one additional Counsellor is able to provide. As is pointed out in the VSB Budget Proposal, International Students often have increased complexities with home-life support and language that require a commensurate increase in service. The ratio of students to counsellors in the International Program is ludicrous and irresponsible. In light of the proposal to increase the number of International Education students, the VSTA proposes even further additional Counselling support be provided.

### **E.14., E.16. Special Education Staffing and International Education Staffing.**

These proposals further erode services to the most vulnerable learners in our school communities. Schools like Kitsilano and Templeton that chose to fully integrate Special Education students into mainstream programs with this extra support a number of years ago will be punished for their progressive choices by this proposal. Students that would normally be able to feel successful with this modicum of extra support could flounder with the loss. Likewise, the change in staffing ratio for International student staffing from 22 to 24 will impact the service available to International students, a vulnerable and needy portion of the school population with considerable language and home-life challenges as stated above. It is worth noting that with approximately 1700 International students, this cohort now forms what amounts to one of Vancouver's largest fee-for-service high schools.

### **E.12.1, E.12.3, E.12.6, E.12.10. Teacher Mentors — Peer to Peer, Learning Technology, Modern Languages, Anti-Racism / Anti-Homophobia, Teacher-Librarian.**

The proposal to eliminate many of the Teacher Mentors in the Vancouver system is unfortunate and destructive to the good work that occurs in these areas. Stating it generally, eliminating many of these positions is truly a “penny-wise, pound-foolish” prospect, as Teacher Mentors are effective in providing support and curricular expertise at the nascent stages of challenging situations. The structure of district-based Teacher Mentors has been reduced almost out of existence. Teacher Mentors are an efficient and small cost for the service they provide, a service that benefits students and teachers across the entire district.

### **E13. School based Vice Principals.**

Given the synchronized schedule of Schools in Vancouver, and the brutal context of this budget season, there is no reason that a School Vice Principal couldn't be Day 1 at one school and Day 2 at a second school. Vice Principal assignments could be consolidated and amalgamated. Another similar proposal and barring contractual reasons preventing this, Vice Principals could work at a Secondary School on one day and an Elementary school on the other day thus helping to bridge the gulf between the two. The VSTA has long advocated for the allotment of school based administration to be examined carefully and annotated as actually spent. Some savings generated by sharing administration in areas of the city are possible.

### **District-based Principals and Vice Principals.**

The VSTA feels that the current allotment of District-based Principals and Vice Principals has come through the 2016-17 process relatively unscathed. Sadly, much of the supervisory and organizational work that is done by several of these staff members at the Board office has been eliminated or is proposed to be eliminated through current or past budget processes. The VSTA feels that a close examination of the number and work of these staff members is warranted at this time and that a reduction in the number of District Principals and Vice-Principals would be appropriate given the contemplation of other reductions.

### **Human Resources. Attendance Management Program.**


Despite the VSTA's and other Unionized Stakeholder's questions in this regard, there have been no answers forthcoming to questions on the actual cost / benefit analysis of the Attendance Management Program. As the program is aggregated with Disability Management and Wellness Initiatives, it seems impossible to get answers from the VSB on how much the AMP portion costs the district and how much it is saving. The VSTA is opposed to the manner in which the Attendance Support Program is conducted and to the infringement on rights to the VTF Collective Agreement that the program commits. Considering the number of employees that the AMP has targeted thus far, it seems impossible that the increased costs justified in the name of the Attendance Management Program are commensurate with any savings. Additionally and as Unionized Stakeholders have pointed out in the past, the intangible and qualitative measurements of the program's success indicate a program that is seen as regressive and punitive. The VSTA recommends that the Attendance Management portion of the Wellness and Attendance Support Program be eliminated.

### **E.15. Secondary Teacher Staffing.**

The proposal to willfully increase Secondary class size in Vancouver schools beyond the provincially mandated class size limit of 30 students is an astounding, unconscionable and destructive measure. Members of the VSTA and BCTF undertook multiple job actions and years of advocacy to ensure that classes would not pass this line. Indeed as the union has often stated, learning conditions in many Vancouver Secondary classes become unworkable and unproductive at even a lower number than 30 students. To contemplate regular classes of over 30 students is shocking and irresponsible. To suggest, as this proposal does, that payment of what amounts to a fine for oversized classes as a solution that is viable is to disregard even the insufficient regulations that currently exist in the School Act. Surely, the VSB as a public and democratic institution should not engage in a cynical, deliberate violation of the spirit, if not the word, of the School Act.

The VSTA thanks the Vancouver Board of Trustees for considering the proposals and revisions suggested in our submission and urges trustees to consider carefully the impact to students, teachers, families and the community when voting on this budget.

Respectfully,



Rory Brown  
President