



VSB STRATEGIC PLAN
Phase 1 Engagement Report



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Introduction

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Vancouver School Board is updating its Strategic Plan, as part of our ongoing efforts to meet the needs of our schools and ensure student achievement and well-being.

The previous Strategic Plan set goals and priorities for 2011 – 2016. As we approach the end of this period, it is an ideal time to start thinking ahead and set a clear new direction for the future.

The VSB2021 Strategic Plan update will focus on the Vancouver School Board’s core goals of teaching and learning to support student achievement and well-being. The new strategic plan will provide a clear framework for action over the next 5 years, taking the best practices of the previous plan and producing updates to reflect recent trends and new strategies. A broad range of voices and perspectives will help create a plan that reflects the diverse needs of the District.

The VSB2021 Strategic Plan is being developed in addition to our Long-Range Facilities Plan, which will be a framework for school facilities over the next 15 years. That plan focuses on delivering safe, seismically-upgraded schools as quickly as possible.

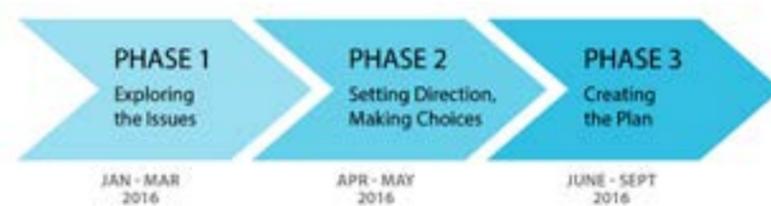


THE VSB2021 STRATEGIC PLAN PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

Over a six month period from January to June 2016, a wide range of students, families, teachers, staff and stakeholders will share their ideas for the future of our school district. There will be many opportunities to learn more, complete a survey, attend an event, and provide feedback throughout this process.

The process is guided by a Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG), which acts as a sounding board for initial ideas and helps raise awareness and encourage public participation among their networks. The SAG includes 12 representatives from various unions/associations as well as 2 student representatives from the Vancouver District School Council (VDSC) and 3 school board trustee liaisons.

The public engagement process is taking place in three stages.



PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT

From January through March 2016, the Vancouver School Board invited the public and stakeholders to get involved in Phase 1 of the Strategic Plan process, entitled “Exploring the Issues”. The goal was to ensure broad awareness of the process, to drive participation from a range of audiences, and to gather substantive input that would influence later stages of the VSB2021 Strategic Plan development.

Phase 1 engagement activities included an online survey, trustee workshops, Stakeholder Advisory Group workshops, and a public “Ideas Fair.” These activities were designed to identify and discuss:

- what’s working well in Vancouver schools,
- what the existing and emerging issues are,
- what people’s hopes are for the future of the Vancouver School District, and
- how people feel about specific broader issues that the review must address.

Target Audiences

The Vancouver School Board recognizes that there are many stakeholders who are affected by the VSB2021 plan and should be involved in the review process. During project planning, stakeholders were categorized into two categories: Public and Formal Groups.

- | | | |
|---------------|---|---|
| Public | { | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students Parents Community Members |
| Formal Groups | { | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Board of Education District Management Team Professional Administrative Staff Association (PASA) Vancouver Elementary School Teacher’s Association (VESTA) Vancouver Secondary Teacher’s Association (VSTA) Vancouver Association of Secondary School Administrators (VASSA) Vancouver Elementary Principals and Vice Principals’ Association (VEPVPA) IUOE IBEW CUPE 15 DPAC BC Insulators Student reps from Vancouver District Student Council (VDSC) |

Project Launch and Outreach

VSB2021 and Phase 1 engagement activities were promoted extensively to ensure broad awareness and encourage participation.

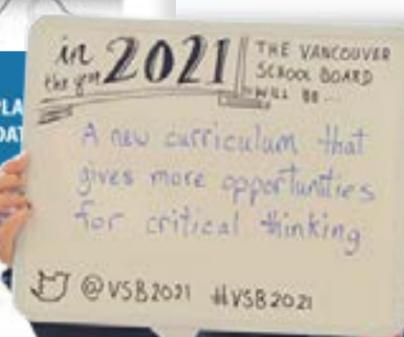
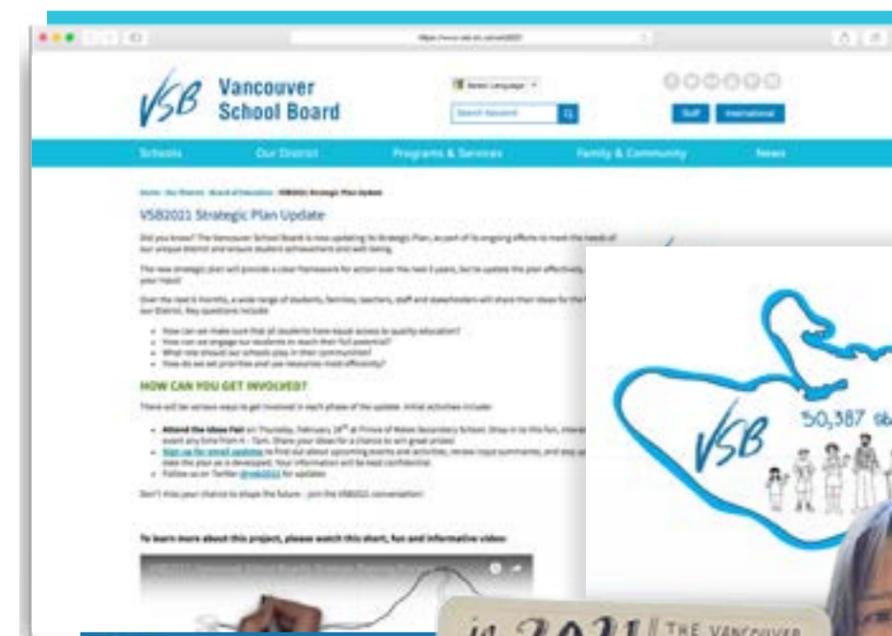
- Project officially launched at the Superintendent's Area Meeting on January 27th, 2016.
- A project website and mailing list have been created at www.vsb.bc.ca/VSB2021 to act as a central hub for project information and engagement.
- A [short animated video](#) shared through the project website, Twitter and YouTube.
- Social media postings on Twitter (#VSB2021 and @VSB2021)
- Posters and handouts distributed throughout schools and stakeholder networks.
- Event ads in online community calendars and event listings.

Phase 1 Engagement Activities

A mixture of digital and in-person activities were used to reach the diverse range of stakeholders:

- Interviews:
A series of face-to-face interviews were held with key stakeholders early on in the process to identify important issues, trends, and big moves for the future. A total of 10 interviews were held with a range of stakeholder representatives.
- Questionnaire:
A public questionnaire (online and paper formats) was used to collect ideas on the future vision for the District to identify what's working well now as well as the key issues to address. Roughly 1000 questionnaires were completed.
- Ideas Fair:
A public event was held on February 18th, 2016, from 4–7 pm at Prince of Wales Secondary School. The interactive drop-in format allowed participants to learn more about the project and provide feedback through a range of interactive activities. A total of 63 people attended.
- Stakeholder Engagement:
A number of unions/associations collected input from their members and shared this with the School Board as a collective voice.

Two prizes, gift cards to Chapters, were used to encourage participation in both online and in-person activities.



Phase 1 Results

PHASE 1 METHODOLOGY

Opportunities for input featured broad and open-ended questions, chosen to match the openness and exploratory nature of this stage of the strategic planning process. For the questionnaire, we asked:

- What's your vision for VSB in 2021?
- What are the current issues?
- What is currently working well?

These open-ended questions encouraged participants to feel uninhibited in their responses so that VSB could gather as much qualitative data as possible.

During the "Ideas Fair" public event, we used a structured feedback form to go a little deeper. We gave people an opportunity to respond to specific questions such as:

- How can we make sure that all students have equal access to quality education?
- How can we engage our students to reach their full potential?
- What role should our schools play in their communities?
- How do we set priorities and use resources most effectively?

Third-party researchers analyzed the response data. This ensured the anonymity of participants during the coding process, and that the analysis was as objective as possible. The data was manually coded to identify common themes and relationships, and, as such, is subject to some human error due to the nature of interpretation.

THEMES

The themes that arose from Phase 1 cover a variety of topics and have been categorized into major categories with subthemes. It is important to recognize that the themes are highly interrelated (i.e. issues are embedded in a complex context, meaning they can't be understood in isolation) and do not necessarily stand alone (i.e. themes may overlap). As a result, some subthemes were identified in each category.

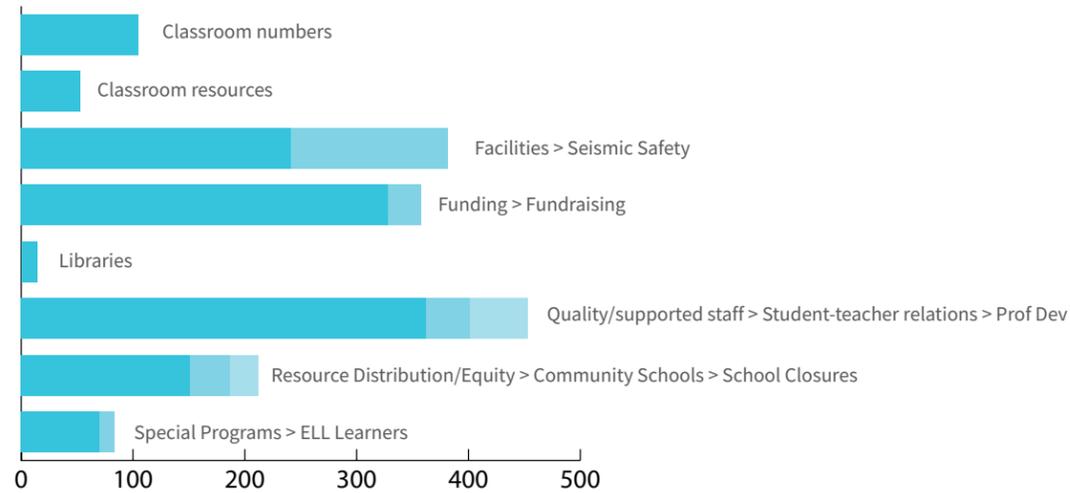
Figure 1.0 shows the main themes and their relationship to other themes. Themes connected by dotted lines indicate general relationships, and themes located within overlapping areas of the venn-diagram indicate more direct cause and effect relationships.

The following pages explore these themes and relationships further.



RESOURCING

Resourcing (i.e. funding and support for classrooms, schools, staff, etc.) emerged as a dominant theme, and was identified as a common root cause affecting issues identified in several other themes. There were roughly 1370 references to resourcing and related sub-themes, which are described below.



The lack of funding is seen to impact staff. There is recognition that the VSB has well-rounded and dedicated staff, but also sentiment that more work is needed on this issue. Consistent hiring and support of staff could provide a more optimal educational experience. The ideal vision includes ensuring that classroom numbers are balanced and that quality teachers and staff are supported through access to resources and continual training/professional development. This includes development in areas such as working with youth, special needs and English Language Learners (ELL) so that teachers are well-equipped to work with these groups.

“[VSB] has great teachers doing what they can with very little”.

Funding + Resource Distribution

The issue of funding and resource distribution has a large impact on the the rest of the sub-themes. It was repeatedly flagged as an existing issue in that there is a strong perception that there is not enough funding to effectively resource and run the VSB to meet its future goals for 2021.

Participants made several references for the need for continual and increased pressure by the VSB on the Provincial Government for increased funding. Particularly of note are references to inequities and competition in the education system that are creating a 2-tier system, whether real or perceived, because of the following:

- Provincial funds being used to finance private schools, thus creating a private vs. public equity issue;
- Concern about losing students to the private school system;
- Demographic disparities of rich and poor affecting equal education;
- Variance in a community’s abilities to fundraise, impacting the level of resourcing available to schools and a call for the stop to fundraising all together because of the inequities it causes and because of the belief that public education should be publicly funded; and
- Social stratification exacerbated by potential school closures, cross boundary enrollment, population shifts and demographic difference.

The last point includes conflicting perspectives where some advocate for school closures of low-enrollment schools to free up resources, yet many desire the retention of neighbourhood schools because of the perceived role they play as hubs for community development. The latter sentiments are not directly related to the conversation about resource equity but rather imply that a lack of funding is causing school closures. Examples of public feedback on this issue include the following:

“We feel that the current funding model is unsustainable and driven largely by ideology. This ideology includes private schools that are partially funded by the Ministry of Education—[it is] a system that... [is] inequitable and socially stratifying.”

“Fundraising for basic resources and programs are creating two tier schools.”

“Resources across [the] district [should] NOT [be] dependent on PAC fundraising ability.”

INNOVATION

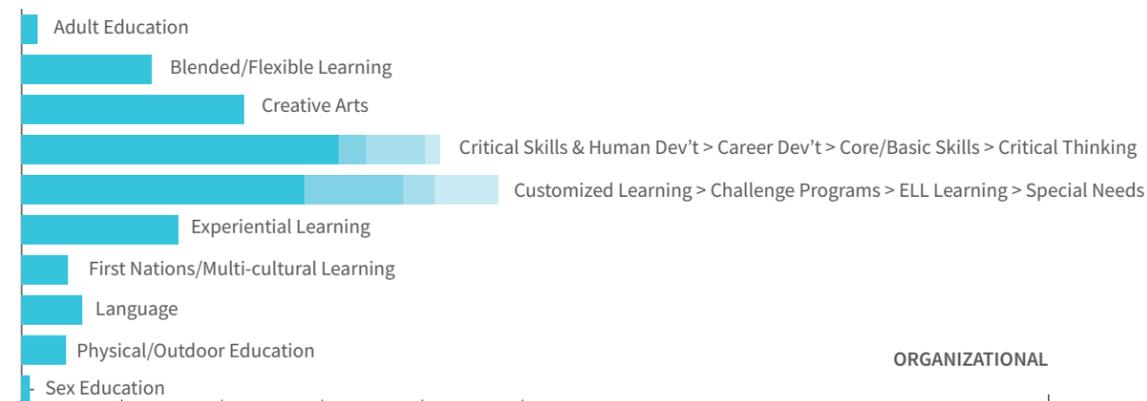
Innovation is a broad theme that speaks to the way in which VSB is managed and the programming it offers. Sentiments regarding VSB's innovation capacity are varied, but VSB was generally regarded as good or adequate considering the challenges it faces. Most commenters hope that with effort and support, the future will be brighter. There were particular accolades for the VSB's effort to be open, collaborative and engaging with the population at large. Examples of public feedback on this issue include the following:

“Initiatives like this one are exactly what’s needed at this critical time in education in Canada!”

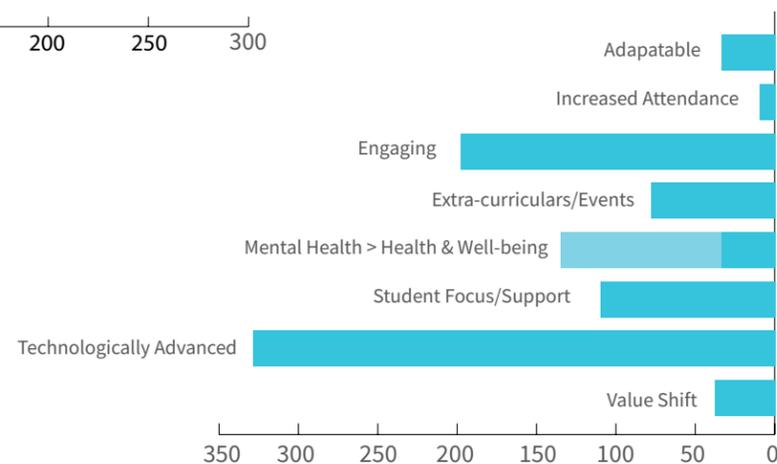
“[What’s working well is the] communication dissemination and keeping the dialogue transparent and clear”

There is a desire for governance and programming that creates a more engaging educational experience by being flexible, supportive and modern with some alignment to contemporary society and social justice. Over 1500 comments were related to innovation--subthemes are listed below with further details where relevant.

CURRICULA



ORGANIZATIONAL



Based on reviewing the various responses gathered, an innovative VSB encompasses a system that is engaging and responsive. There was also an expressed desire for student-centric education, providing an environment and programming where students enjoy school because they are inspired, passionate and motivated. The benefits of engaged students has a trickle-down effect that increases attendance numbers, improves health and performance and ultimately sets up children to be successful and valuable members of society.

The results indicate that most people feel the VSB is doing an adequate job in ensuring that students are engaged. This includes the introduction of special programming, such as mini-schools, social-emotional learning and the use of technology. Some comments expressed on this issue include:

“[There are] very nice teachers [and] the mini school programs are very...knowledge expanding.”

“There has been a push for social-emotional learning in our schools, and I can see the difference in students and families.”

“The gradual implementation of technology to classrooms to improve learning [is working well].”

“New website [is] more user friendly”

In addition to this positive feedback, results indicate that there is also existing discontent, specifically with considerations to demographic and socioeconomic shifts in the city. For example:

“As demographics [shift], we should utilize all space[s] available and [create] learning spaces where all Vancouver Children can access specialized programs.”

“Keeping up with innovation and the challenges of a very competitive city [is key]. Both students and teachers feel the pressure of having to succeed in this very expensive city, and both need support in order to make the changes necessary for this to be an innovative District.”

With respect to educational programming, the results indicate that there is a desire for a fundamental value shift toward creating a learning environment that is enjoyable, healthy and instills a love for learning. This means a break from a traditional approach to education which focus on educating the child in core courses and encouraging performance by grade.

Essentially, feedback on this issue expressed an interest in creating more diverse programming that is flexible, customized and which better prepares students to become healthy, intellectual, passionate and productive members of society.

“At the senior level, I would love to see “mark chasing” and “system gaming” disappear. I would like my own kids to enjoy school and recognize its value...”

“Get rid of mandatory courses. Let students pursue their interests without restraint.”

“[VSB needs to] understand and communicate the real true meaning of education.”

“All the research shows that an increase in physical stimulation and outdoor play, at all ages, is very beneficial. We’d like to see initiatives that increase the opportunity for this in our school.”

There was a substantial amount of support for teaching and learning that increases students’ ability to think critically, enabling their social responsibility and career development.

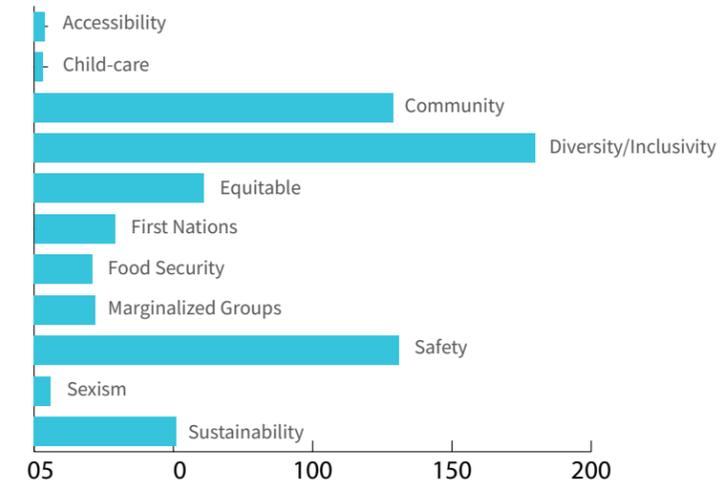
Of particular note is the desire for a focus on Aboriginal issues, including history and reconciliation.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

“[We need] community cohesiveness [and] social responsibility. The public schools must focus on ensuring [that] children are educated for the future of our nation, not just academically...[and] to ensure [that] all children are able to see that they belong in this world [as] part of a greater community”.

“[We need to] work [on] closing [the] gap between Aboriginal students and families.”

Social responsibility emerged as a major theme in Phase 1. This refers to ensuring that students are learning about social responsibility (i.e. being a caring member of society), but also that the school system itself is run in a socially responsible manner. It is a theme that is related to other themes, such as innovation and is impacted by resourcing. The subthemes that were drawn referencing to social responsibility include:



The most substantial sub-theme linked to Social Responsibility is “Community”. Schools are seen as integral hubs for a vibrant community that are safe, equal, diverse and inclusive. Schools are encouraged to collaborate with other organizations and with one another to create a more cohesive network across the city.

“[There is] poor utilization of valuable public facilities. Schools should be the centre of the community, but cannot be when the doors are locked...”

“[I hope for] a community of schools that are closely connected and feel like part of a whole group instead of separate schools.”

“The sense of community at our school makes our entire neighbourhood seem a safer, more welcoming place for our kids to grow. I love the integration of school and community.”

In addition to this, there were frequent references to advocacy for the maintenance of community schools.

“Schools set the tone for a neighbourhood. If the school is doing well, a lot of people will care about other aspects.”

“[I hope for] an inclusive community for students, staff and all members of the community.”

Other notable sub-themes that related to the Social Responsibility theme are: diversity, inclusivity, equity, and recognition and action to address issues faced by marginalized groups. Marginalized groups are described in the comments to include groups such as Aboriginal youth and families, students with special needs, ELL learners, low-income families and those on the LGBTQ spectrum. Perspectives on the VSB’s success at diversity, inclusion and equity fall on a spectrum ranging from “doing well” to “needs work”. An example comment follows:

“Multi-age classrooms encourage diversity [within] students and abilities and foster authentic community.”

The gathered feedback includes recommendations such as continued advocacy and engagement to promote diversity in schools and communities, special programming and training.

The issue of diversity, inclusion and equity is directly impacted by resourcing. Many of the recommendations to reconcile the issues that face these groups require a certain amount of resource allocation.

“Teachers [need] more educat[ion] on how to support their transgender students.”

“[We need to] continue to provide opportunities for VSB staff to increase their own knowledge of Aboriginal culture and traditional knowledge to decrease racism within the schools.”

“[I hope for an] inclusive atmosphere, coupled with the direction of scarce resources towards students most in need.”

GOVERNANCE

Finally, “governance” also presents as a theme that describes the various formal bodies that guide how schools are run in Vancouver. This includes the Provincial Government, the Vancouver School Board, Trustees, teachers and other staff. Many comments received on this theme expressed appreciation for the efforts of staff and trustees, particularly in trying to be as open and collaborative as possible.

“In these trying times, the district’s teachers, administrators and support staff have been the glue holding [the system] together. Under incredibly challenging conditions, their collective will has been tireless in ensuring that the institution that is public education, continues to set the standard for what is possible.”

“Our kids’ teacher have been amazing, and resourceful in dealing with ever increasing funding shortfalls. We also appreciate the advocacy that some VSB trustees have been doing for appropriate funding, seismic upgrades and [the] maintenance of neighbourhood schools.”

“Parent communication from the VSB has improved since 2013 - would love to see this continue and see that parent voice is heard during this process.”

The major concerns about governance are centered around accountability, lack of recognition, organizational inertia and the politicized relationship with the Province. Feedback shows that while initiatives are open and collaborative, there is still work to be done to continue to build the relationship between governance and the public.

“There has always been a small number of incredibly dedicated teachers who give many extra hours after school and in the evenings...these self-sacrificing “super” teachers should be recognized much more...most of their impact was made in their “volunteer” capacity, not their paid professional capacity. Please find ways to recognize these special teachers make their stories (and impact) known.”

NOTABLE THEMES BY FORMAL STAKEHOLDER GROUPS

Several dominant themes arose from the engagement with the various formal stakeholder groups and are summarized as such and described further below in detail.

- The need for developing common practice
- Financial responsibility/success
- Resourcing
 - » Funding shortages
 - » Ongoing scarcity of resources
 - » Effective use of resources and equal distribution
- District focus on teaching and learning and the BCED Plan
- Induction/succession
- Neighbourhood schools
- Technology

With roughly 100 references speaking to resourcing, there is a hope for future governance that supports staff by providing them with the resources and the training to be able to teach and run effectively. There is advocacy for increased pressure by VSB on the Provincial Government for increased or complete funding for education.

There is particular concern with student's best interest and a desire for a student-first approach that focuses on human development for students, such that they will be well prepared and equipped for their futures as adults. This includes a community school system that is equitable and engaging with social responsibility and stewardship as a guiding principle.

Finally, there were a couple of notable references pertaining to adult education and its relationship to equity, specifically around adults having access to life-long learning.

NOTABLE THEMES FROM THE PUBLIC

Community Members

Community members are most concerned with the maintenance and creation of community, and they maintain that the importance of community schools is an integral component of community hubs.

Diversity, inclusivity and equity are other dominant themes expressed by community members. These themes are all related to the emergent theme of access to resources. Whether real or perceived, resources are said to be distributed where there are demographic differences (such as socioeconomic lines) and this is creating a stratification of accessibility to quality education.

Parents

Parents are most concerned with the quality of education for their children. This comes out with references to how resourcing is affecting the education system in terms of distribution. There is an increased focus by parents on the type of education that their children are receiving, with recurrent references to innovative curricula that prepares students for the future through career development and critical thinking skills. As well, parents support a learning system that is flexible and customized

such that it meets the needs of their children. For example, programming based not only on needs (ie. special needs, challenge programs, etc), but also on learning styles and passions.

Students

Students are most concerned with the education that they are receiving, as well as the environment in which they are learning. They are appreciative of what currently exists within the VSB system but want more flexibility and diversity in what they are learning, and all of it in a safe, inclusive and stress-free environment so that they can actually enjoy learning.

There are particularly notable references by students to advocate for a value-shift that would move towards an education system that focuses less on grades and exams.

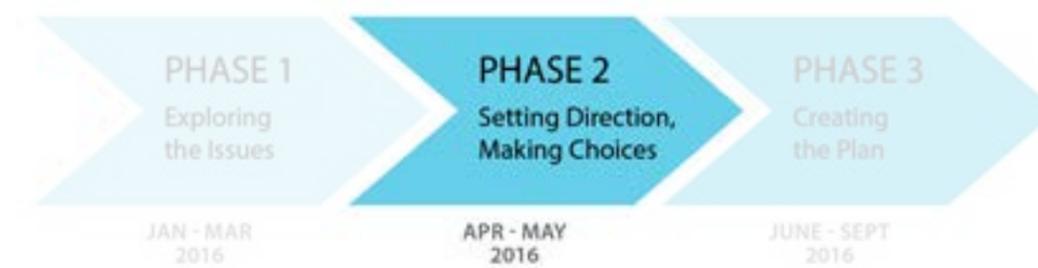
Sexism came up as issue within the student stakeholder group. In particular, describing the perceived sexism that females face when it comes to dress code and conduct.

Next Steps in Phase 2

The next steps will be to move into Phase 2 of the VSB2021 process. We will be taking the themes that emerged from the Phase 1 engagement and exploring them further, including the most relevant directions to focus on within the next 5 years and how we may get there.

The following engagement activities will be carried through:

- A second public survey to explore the themes
- A second public event on April 21 at Templeton School, 7:00–8:30 pm
- Workshops with stakeholder groups
- Focus groups with stakeholder groups
- One-on-one interviews with key stakeholders
- Trustee workshops



THANKS FOR
READING!



To stay engaged, look out for updates:

 vsb.bc.ca/vsb2021

 [@VSB2021](https://twitter.com/VSB2021)

 [/VancouverSchoolBoard](https://www.facebook.com/VancouverSchoolBoard)

