

Chairperson's Annual Report – December 2008 – December 2009
Prepared and submitted by
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It's been a busy year for the Board and one with many challenges. First, I want to thank my fellow Trustees for their constant and unfailing commitment to public education. I also want to thank the Board for giving me the honour of serving in the role of Chairperson.

It seemed as if we were barely able to catch our breaths after being elected when we quickly found ourselves in the midst of a snowstorm, a computer virus and then in the middle of the FSA controversy and the need to make a decision about whether to stay open or close down during the Olympics. Then we were right into budget process and another round of very difficult cuts.

Once we passed our compliance and needs budgets, we began to plan to search for a new Superintendent of Schools, due to Chris Kelly's announcement of his retirement plans. Summer came to an abrupt end with a number of unexpected and damaging budget cuts, including the cancellation of the Annual Facilities Grant, the clawback of holdback funds that had been allocated to us in June, the halving of the PAC Gaming funds, increases to MSP premiums, costs of H1N1 prevention measures and the news of several significant increased costs coming our way from the provincial level with no commitment to fund them.

Here is what this Board did in response to those challenges:

- We responded to the January snowstorm and the difficulties it caused our schools with a review of equipment, procedures and general preparedness. Our Facilities staff came up with several **cost-effective measures to improve our ability to respond to future heavy snowfalls**.
- We took a positive and inclusive approach to the FSA controversy by inviting our stakeholders and the public into a discussion where we heard different points of view, concerns, and ideas. That discussion helped guide our course as we developed a **balanced response** that respected the points of view we had heard while fulfilling our responsibility to ensure the tests were administered.
- We were able to address the technology issues that came to our attention following the viral attack by supporting an innovative proposal from staff to purchase **new computers for all schools and every teacher**, despite our budget constraints. Those new computers were distributed and in use this Fall, thanks to our LIT staff, who consulted with all schools last spring and had the roll out carefully — and by all accounts, successfully — planned for school start up this September.

- Something that I feel this Board should be particularly proud of is that despite having to cut \$7.2 million from our current operating budget due to a shortfall in provincial funding, we **protected services to our most vulnerable students** and for the most part, we **kept reductions away from classrooms** and the school level. We achieved this only after a month-long series of meetings and discussions with the public, parents, stakeholder group representatives and our senior management team. The cuts were difficult and not without pain, particularly as they came on the heels of too many years of cuts. We also prepared, adopted and submitted a **Needs Budget**, outlining to the provincial government the funding that would be required to restore service levels to where they were at the beginning of this decade.

- At the end of June, when it appeared we would receive additional holdback funds, the Board voted to allocate additional funding to ensure that newly identified inner-city schools could **provide all-day-kindergarten classes to support student populations who were the least prepared to succeed in school**. In September, we also authorized **increased spending** from our Local Capital Reserve to ensure adequate support was in place for **students with special needs**.

- After hearing concerns from parents and school staff about classroom and timetable reorganization at the beginning of the school year, the Board took the step last Spring of directing staff to **release all “holdback” staffing** so that schools could be fully staffed and up and run as quickly as possible in the Fall. We also established a “drop dead date” for classroom reorganizations to ensure schools were organized and students **settled into classes as soon as possible** for the new learning year.

- At the end of June, we had the honour of signing onto the district’s Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. This historic document was the outcome of several years of work by staff and members of our Aboriginal Communities. The commitments made in the agreement are a top priority for this board and we will continue to provide resources and direction to ensure we **improve the learning conditions and outcomes for our Aboriginal students**.

- In keeping with our commitment to expanding access to childcare for school-aged children, the Board **changed district policy** to allow surplus classroom space to be considered as potential **childcare** space and in conjunction with the City and Park Board, restarted **Joint Childcare Task Force** in April 2009. We’ve worked with staff and childcare providers to identify and remove barriers that make it difficult for providers to access school board space and we were recently very pleased to attend the groundbreaking of the new childcare facility at Simon Fraser Elementary School. That facility is the outcome of many years of collaboration between the Mount Pleasant Community Association, The Park Board, the City of Vancouver, the provincial government and the school board.

- After many years of advocacy work by students, parents, community members, staff and trustees, we were very pleased to sign — alongside the provincial government —

project agreements for the new UBC schools and the five major elementary seismic projects: Jules Quesnel, Douglas, Kitchener, Sexsmith and Secord, along with seeing significant progress on the Neighbourhood Centres of Learning pilots.

- In keeping with the Board's priority of success for all students, we recently allocated an additional \$500,000 from our Local Capital Reserve to address our most serious **class size and composition challenges**. And when we approved the Superintendent's report on CSC this Fall, we also informed the Ministry that it is this Board's opinion that current funding levels do not allow Boards to provide optimal learning conditions.

- **Advocacy** for public education is a key commitment of this Board. We've reconvened the Advocacy Committee and we developed and carried out a comprehensive communications and advocacy plan during the budget process. In addition to public and stakeholder consultations, we met with Vancouver MLAs, including the Finance Minister and Premier, to outline our financial challenges. We also met with the new Education Minister over the summer to share our financial information and concerns.

We've sent letters to parents and employees outlining our goals, our financial situation and forecasted challenges, and we continue to work to effectively get our messages out through the news media. I've spoken to four local chapters of the Rotary Club about the success and value of Vancouver schools and what is at risk due to underfunding. On behalf of this Board, I also addressed City Council this Fall regarding our budget situation and potential impacts on our city and I presented a submission to the Provincial Select Standing Committee on Finance outlining the need for provincial reinvestment in our public schools.

In addition to our financial advocacy initiatives, this Board:

- Publicly articulated our opposition to the use of FSA data by the Fraser Institute to rank schools
- Continues to work to find solution to the Carleton outbuilding challenge through our staff's early learning proposal to the Ministry of Education
- Worked effectively with Trustees from other districts to encourage BCSTA leadership to take a strong advocacy position on funding issues. Most recently we initiated the formation of an Advocacy subcommittee of the Metro BCSTA boards tasked with coming up for recommendations for joint advocacy initiatives.

- As 2009 draws to a close, we were able to end the year with the news of the appointment of our **new Superintendent of Schools, Steve Cardwell**. Mr. Cardwell's appointment came after an extensive hiring process, which began with consultation with stakeholders to develop the candidate profile and to guide trustees in finding the best candidate for the position. After a national search and further consultations with stakeholder regarding shortlisted candidates, we are very pleased that Mr. Cardwell has accepted the position and we look forward to welcoming him into his new role in January.

In addition to these highlights, the Trustees have been busy representing the district on a number of local and provincial committees and organizations, and spending time in schools, talking with students, staff and parents about what is working and where we can make improvements.

And finally, I have some important thank you(s) to make.

I want to thank my fellow Trustees for the work and collegiality we share as we focus on finding the best solutions we can for this district. We spend a lot of time together and having that shared focus and working in a respectful environment has made our work productive and positive, despite its challenging nature. You each bring specific qualities and areas of interest and expertise to our discussions, strengthening the whole of this Board and I appreciate and value the contributions of each of you.

I want to thank our District Management Team members for their support, long hours and professional expertise and advice. Thank you also to the staff in our schools who work daily with the students we're all here to serve. Thank you to all the other VSB staff members who work in this building and throughout the district. Thank you to the parents who support us and our schools, and thank you to all the many stakeholders who participate in our decision-making processes.

Something I learned quickly this year is that few of the issues that come to this Board are simple, and many, if not most, have implications beyond what we might initially assume. Having the consistent and meaningful participation and input from our communities and stakeholders helps us in making our decisions in an informed way, allowing us to consider all potential impacts. Your participation helps us make better decisions that are in the best interests of our students. So thank you – all of you.