

BUDGET 2021 CONSULTATION

SUBMISSION TO:

Select Standing Committee on
Finance and Government Services

SUBMITTED BY:

Board of Education of
School District No. 39 (Vancouver)

June 26, 2020



Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
Room 224, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C., V8V 1X4

Dear Committee Members:

The Vancouver Board of Education (“VBE”) is pleased to provide this submission for consideration by the Committee as it recommends funding and investment strategies to the Ministry of Finance for the development of the Government’s 2021 fiscal framework. While this submission is specifically presented on behalf of the students, staff, and stakeholders of the VBE, many of the considerations and recommendations in it have regional and provincial implications.

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) is one of the most diverse public school systems in Canada. We are home to some of the poorest and richest postal codes in the country and that creates a very significant challenge for us in providing equitable service to our students. We have an annual enrolment of approximately 49,000 students in Kindergarten to Grade 12 but also provide educational programs and services to 300 adult students and 1,800 international students. The VSB invests significant resources in a broad range of programs to meet our learners’ diverse needs in fulfillment of our vision to “inspire student success by providing an innovative, caring and responsive learning environment”.




**95 STUDENT
SUPPORT PROGRAMS**


110 SCHOOLS


49,000 STUDENTS


9,000 STAFF


**60 CHOICE
PROGRAMS**



Student Achievement

The Board of Education has a primary responsibility under the School Act to focus on improving the life chances of our students. The District therefore directs all its efforts on improving student achievement by focusing on the Board's VSB 2021 Strategic Plan goals of:

- Engaging our learners through innovative teaching and learning practices
- Building capacity in our community through strengthening collective leadership
- Creating a culture of care and shared social responsibility; and,
- Providing effective leadership, governance, and stewardship

To create equity and ensure that all students are included and can succeed, the VBE has a broad offering of specialty supports to address the diverse and unique learning needs of students. There is a clear focus on improving the graduation rates for all students, and in particular for Indigenous learners. This begins with an emphasis on providing supportive learning experiences and interventions as children transition into Kindergarten and in all subsequent transitions to Grade 12.

In delivering the provincial education mandate to the best of our ability, we face many challenges:

- Increased numbers of students entering Kindergarten with unique learning needs
- Increased awareness of mental health concerns and the impact that mental health has on student learning
- Evolving city demographics such that some schools cannot accommodate all catchment students

Some of these challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly around mental health concerns for our students and staff. The anxiety caused by the pandemic and the necessary remote learning environment will continue to be a major focus in the next school year. The impacts of the pandemic on families must also be taken into account as they may have experienced loss of or lower levels of income.

And with the heightened awareness of the impacts of racism, including systemic racism, districts are committed to addressing concerns raised by students who are Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour. Government has a societal role to play and districts are looking to the Ministry of Education to take a lead in providing districts with the funding and resources to support this necessary anti-racism work.



Accordingly, the VBE recommends that the Provincial Government, in the development of the Provincial Budget and specifically in relation to the Ministry of Education's budget:

1

Reviews and increases supplemental funding grants for students with special needs and students struggling with mental health issues.

The VBE, like most school districts, spends more in supporting students with special needs than is provided by the Province in special needs supplemental grants. In total, the VBE support provided to students with special needs was \$27.6 million in 2018-2019, approximately \$30.8 million in the current school year and the budgeted excess spending for 2020-2021 is \$32.1 million. When taking into account the basic per pupil allocation, the additional support provided to students with special needs in 2018-2019 was \$8.4 million, will be \$10.7 million in the current year and is budgeted to be \$11.6 million in 2020-2021.

The VBE has maintained non-enrolling teacher staffing levels much higher than those required in the Memorandum of Agreement, with approximately 60 FTEs with an annual cost of \$5.5 - \$6.0 million. With an increase in supplemental funding, this level of service would be sustainable and could be offered to more students.

The increase in the numbers of students in recent years with complex and diverse needs is putting increased pressure on districts' budgets. Provincially, there needs to be a recognition of the full costs of providing an inclusive education for all students with special and unique needs. We have concerns that the potential for increased levels of mental health challenges and higher poverty levels because of the pandemic will put significant pressure on the District's budget in the next school year and possibly beyond. While the Equity of Opportunity Supplement Grant in the 2020-2021 Ministry funding allocation is a welcome addition to help support student needs, it was partially funded by reducing the Supplement for the Education Grant. This will result in increased pressure on our budget to deliver the educational programming we have in place.

Given the Provincial Government's commitment to a mental health improvement strategy, providing funding to districts to hire those who have the necessary training would be welcomed.

2

Provides additional funding to address racism and discrimination.

There is a need to include Black history more fully in the K-12 curriculum, both in the general curriculum and in specific courses. This work would be most effectively achieved at a provincial level, informed by district contexts and contributions, and supported with instructional resources for teachers. In addition, it is important that anti-racism training be provided to all staff in the educational community and that there is the opportunity for the province to take a leadership role to ensure opportunities are provided province wide.

Recommendations

3

Ensures that the Ministry of Education's funding formula review for school districts results in stable, predictable, and adequate funding.

Recommendation 19 of the Report of the Funding Model Review Panel (Improving Equity and Accountability) states that to support multi-year financial planning Government should issue three-year operating funding to Boards of Education, based on available funding and projected student enrolment. We strongly encourage that support to be forthcoming for districts to develop three-year financial plans.

The Ministry of Education announcement in March did not allow for effective financial planning for the development of budgets for the 2020-2021 school year. Districts were surprised that amounts that had been funded in previous years as separate grants (Employer Health Tax, Carbon Neutral Tax refunds and the Service Improvement allocation for CUPE) were rolled into the basic per student component of the overall grant. This put significant pressure on the ability of districts to balance their 2020-2021 budgets and, coupled with the increased risk factors associated with the pandemic, resulted in many districts having to appropriate surpluses from previous years to even maintain the same level of service as in the previous year. In our case, the VBE appropriated \$9.0 million to balance its budget for next year.

4

Addresses concerns about the impacts of COVID-19 on school district operations.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has changed the way we live, and the way districts provide educational programming. With the suspension of classes in March, the immediate need was to develop remote/online teaching and learning capabilities for students and staff. With the successful partial return of students to school buildings in June, districts now have experience with a hybrid model of education, a fundamental change in education delivery, which will likely continue in some form at least in the next school year. This creates challenges for districts and the Ministry of Education needs to be able to support this new educational reality:

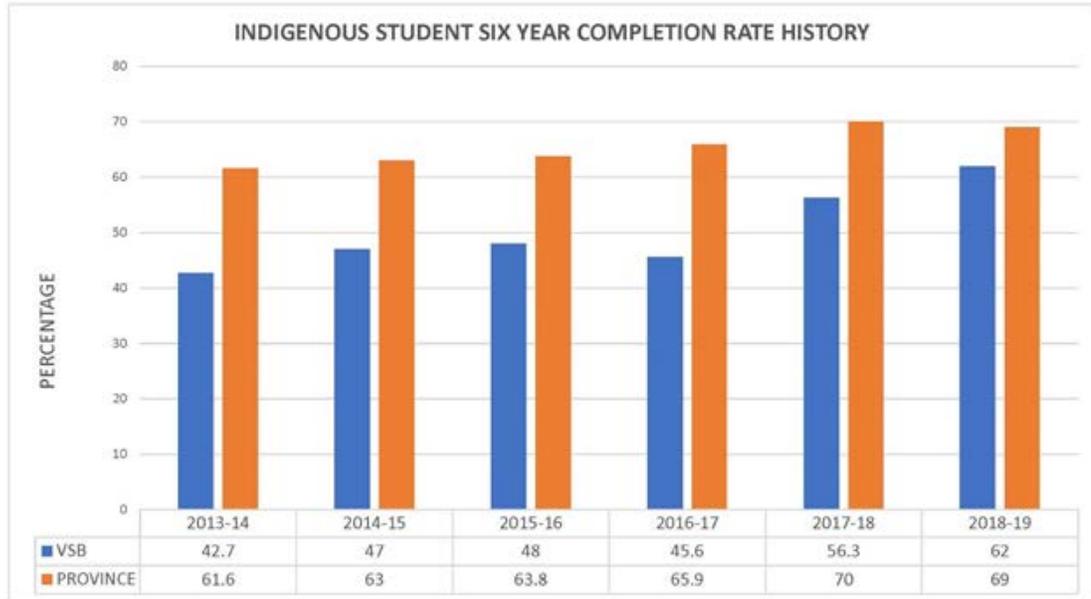
- A hybrid model requires districts and families to increase their reliance on technology and access to learning platforms. Families need to have access to high speed internet connections and districts need to be able to provide technology to families who cannot afford it.
- The Ministry of Education funding formula will need to be re-evaluated. It is likely that more students, and in particular secondary students, will choose to take more courses online. However, the funding for distributed learning is lower than that for in class learning, by \$1,560 per student, which would significantly reduce income for districts.
- It is anticipated there will be a significant reduction in international student programs because of the pandemic. The Premier has said that there would be no layoff of teaches due to reductions in international student program enrolment but there has been no additional information supplied to districts.

5

Increases funding to school districts to support Indigenous Learners

While significant improvement in educational outcomes for Indigenous students have been achieved over the past few years, more needs to be done to continue the progress.

The six-year completion rate for Indigenous students in Vancouver is significantly lower than the Provincial rate, a reality that exists in many districts.



However, there are districts where the completion rate for Indigenous students is higher than the Provincial average. Funding needs to be provided at a provincial level to identify the best practices that exist in those districts so that their strategies and pedagogy can be shared and implemented across the Province.

We are pleased that Recommendation 3 in the Review Panel report calls for the Ministry to work with the First Nations Education Steering Committee in that goal to support the continuous improvement of outcomes for Indigenous learners. We are also pleased to see that Recommendation 1 in the Review Panel report speaks to maintaining targeted funding for Indigenous students. The journey of Reconciliation needs to continue with a focus on eliminating the current discrepancy of educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.