

June 7, 2021

Honourable Jennifer Whiteside

Ministry of Education
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Honourable Mitzi Dean

Ministry of Children and Family Development
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Dear Minister Whiteside and Minister Dean,

At the Board's April 26, 2021 public Board meeting, as part of the [motion regarding the School Liaison Program](#) the following motion was adopted:

THAT the VSB contact the Ministries of Education and Children and Family Development to seek funding to hire counsellors to respond to mental wellness needs;

Counsellors within the Vancouver School District are essential and provide support and resources to those most in need. Their work is extensive and is not only within the District but across other agencies such as the Ministry of Children and Family Development and Vancouver Coastal Health.

Currently, support for mental health in the VSB for students includes:

- counsellors at secondary and elementary
- curriculum in Physical and Health Education (PHE) and in the Core Competencies
- referrals to community agencies

To demonstrate the importance and need for additional counsellors, it is important to know their roles and responsibilities as they span a continuum that includes universal, targeted and intensive levels of support that may be provided on an individual basis or as part of a small group intervention. Counsellors also provide counselling services, address mental health issues and intervene during crises. They support students in a multiplicity of ways.

We are pleased to share some specific examples of a counsellor's role including:

- Helping to coordinate classroom-based and school wide preventative initiatives that promote mental health literacy, well-being and social responsibility.
- Teaching and/or supporting targeted classroom based social-emotional programs
- Identifying targeted areas of need within a school community
- Supporting students and families with difficult life transitions.
- Promoting respect for social and cultural diversity throughout the school community.
- Helping students develop personal insight to build meaningful relationships with others.
- Promoting healthy self-image and life balance.
- Collaborating with community agencies, completing risk assessments and documentation

Specific to secondary counsellors:

- Facilitating the goals of career education
- Guiding students through the course planning process
- Providing support and information related to post-secondary planning

Board of Education Trustees:

Carmen Cho – Board Chair,
Estrellita Gonzalez – Vice-Chair,
Fraser Ballantyne, Lois Chan-Pedley,
Janet Fraser, Oliver Hanson, Barb Parrott,
Jennifer Reddy, Allan Wong

The Mental Health and Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) District team support students and staff with professional development opportunities and curricular supports. Some examples include:

Professional development opportunities included:

- Building Compassionate Communities in a New Normal and Why This Is Important - A Conversation with Kim Schonert-Reichl and Chas Desjarlais
- Compassion, Connection, and Care for Self and Others with Paula Foran and Holly Vivier
- Compassionate Classrooms Webinar with Dr. Linda O’Neill and Monique Gray Smith
- When Anxiety goes to School with Dr Julianna Negreiros
- Building Resilience and Emotional Regulation with Dr. Gilbert Lam

Curricular Supports and Learning Resources include:

- Social Emotional Learning SharePoint site
- Mental Health Toolkits
- English Language Learner Connect Kits
- Sensory Kits to support diverse learners

In an unprecedented year, where the mental health of our students has been greatly strained due to changes from the pandemic, our counselling staff have been stretched to its limit.

The District is seeking support from the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Children and Family Development for additional funding to hire additional counsellors to meet the needs of our students. This request aligns with the government’s commitment as indicated in the mandate letters from Premier Horgan to both your portfolios:

Ministry of Education

Support the work of the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to provide dedicated mental health teams in school districts.

Ministry of Children and Family Development

Support the work of the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions to continue addressing mental health concerns early by rolling out new mental health and addictions care initiatives for children and youth, and ensure these programs are aligned with and support the work of the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions.

I look forward to working with both of your ministries to advance this important work forward.

Warm regards,



Carmen Cho
Board Chair

cc: VBE Trustees
Suzanne Hoffman, Superintendent
J. David Green, Secretary-Treasurer