

**Vancouver School District  
Preferred School Size Working Group  
Meeting #1**

**February 10, 2020  
DRAFT Meeting Summary**

**Facilitators**

Dorli Duffy  
Susan Rhodes

**In attendance:**

Matt Carruthers, VEPVPA  
John Dawson, VSB Director of Educational Planning and Student Information  
Megan Davies, VEPVPA  
Aaron Davis, VSB Director of Instruction – School Services  
Rosie Finch, VSB Director of HR  
Mette Hamaguchi, VSB Director of Instruction – Learning Service  
Angie Haverman, VASSA  
Amanda Hillis, DPAC Representative  
Ricky Huang, VDSC  
Anne Lee, VSB Educational Planning and Student Information  
Jim Meschino, VSB Director of Facilities  
Anne Miller, VESTA  
Michael Rossi, VSB District Principal – Educational Planning  
Shehzad Somji, VSB Assistant Secretary-Treasurer  
Bernie Soong, VASSA  
Terry Stanway, VSTA  
Karen Tsang, DPAC  
Chris Wong, VSB District Principal – Educational Planning

**Regrets:**

Carmen Batista, VSB Associate Superintendent – Employee Services  
Adrian Keough, VSB Director of Instruction – Educational Programs  
Treena Goolieff, VSTA  
Maggie Martens, DPAC  
Skye Richards, DPAC  
Jonathan Zhu, VDSC

# 1.0 Objectives

The Vancouver School Board Preferred School Size Working Group held their meeting at the School Board offices on February 10, 2020. The meeting objectives were to:

- Confirm context and terms of reference for Preferred School Size Working Group
- Confirm proposed PSS Working Group process/ approach
- Preliminary review and discussion of information gathered to-date
- Identify additional questions re: areas of consideration
- Clarify next steps including additional information needs, homework and subsequent meetings

This document provides a brief summary of discussions held during the meeting. A copy of the February 10 PowerPoint presentation is available on the dedicated PSSWG link at [Preferred School Size Working Group](#).

John Dawson, Chair of the Preferred School Size Working Group (PSSWG), welcomed participants and provided an Indigenous land acknowledgement. The meeting began with introductions of all Working Group members. The Preferred School Size Working Group is comprised of a diverse group of parents, teachers, administrators and partner organizations.

# 2.0 Context and Terms of Reference for Preferred School Size Working Group

The Vancouver School Board (VSB) is convening a Preferred School Size Working Group to review educational and fiscal criteria, examine current practices and draft guidelines for preferred school population sizes for VSB elementary and secondary schools. The meeting began with John Dawson, Chair of the PSSWG, providing a brief overview of the context for this work. The facilitator then reviewed the Terms of Reference for the PSSWG.

A question and answer session followed:

| Questions  | Answers  |
|--|--|
| Q1. Why are we only looking at Canadian research?  | A1. District staff have conducted a literature review of research related to school size and its impact on the student learning experience. The literature review is not limited to Canadian research. Education exists in a local context, so it will be important to consider the relevance of research conducted in other jurisdictions to inform our conversation about preferred school size ranges. Research is one of several key considerations in our conversation about preferred school size. |
| Q2. Topics scheduled for March (School Organization and Staffing, and Student Programs and Services) are big topics. What if we don't have enough time in March? | A2: We will continue our discussions as needed during subsequent meetings.   |

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| Q3: Should I attend all meetings?            | A3: Where possible, continuity of representatives attending meetings is desirable. Please keep your alternates informed of meeting discussions and developments so that they will be able to engage effectively if you are unable to attend. |
| Q4: Where are the secondary school teachers? | A4: Two VSTA representatives were scheduled to attend. One representative arrived during the break.  |

### 3.0 School Sizes in VSB – Current State

John Dawson provided an overview of the current state of issues and considerations related to school sizes in the VSB. A short Q&A session followed:

| Questions/ Comments   | Answers/ Response  |
|---|--|
| Q1: What is the relationship of this process to school closures or school consolidations?   | A1: As indicated in the Terms of Reference, the PSSWG process is intended to lead to guidelines and an educational rationale for preferred school size range. There are a variety of planning decisions where the availability of preferred school size guidelines would facilitate the decision-making process. At present the Board is not considering closing schools. In the future, school closure may be considered.   |
| Q2: Will we address mental health and its impact on student success/ drop-out rates?  | A2: We will be considering social and emotional learning and related research as well.   |
| Comment: Re: Seismic Mitigation Program – Sometimes the information contributing to the “lowest cost option” isn’t logical or valid. For example, if the cost of maintenance over time is included the option may be different. | Response: We will explore the SMP in more detail at a future gathering of the PSSWG. The concept of ‘lifecycle cost’ of a school is an important one for planning decisions. Lifecycle cost includes the initial capital cost of a building plus the ongoing operating costs such heating and lighting as well as maintenance and repairs. Total Lifecycle cost (assuming a 40-year lifespan for a building) is determined and presented in feasibility studies for Seismic Mitigation Projects. |

## 4.0 Proposed Approach

The facilitator provided an overview of the proposed PSSWG process.

**Key Question: Thinking about enrolment (number of students) at elementary and secondary schools, what range of preferred school size (enrolment) would enhance the student learning experience?**

Beginning in February, meetings will be topic-based. Each topic will be explored in depth and relevant information which informs the development of school guidelines will be summarized. Discussion will occur during Elementary and Secondary sub-groups sessions and also as a large group.

Topics to be addressed through this process include:

- March – School Organization & Staffing Considerations, Student Programs & Services
- April – Seismic Mitigation Program Considerations
- May – Financial and other considerations

In late May and early June, focus groups and/or a survey will be conducted to support stakeholder engagement regarding preliminary findings.

We will “build our report as we go” and Working Group findings will be confirmed at the June meeting.

## 5.0 Elementary and Secondary Sub-Group Discussions

The Working Group engaged in Elementary and Secondary Sub-Group discussions to address the following questions:

- What other considerations do we need to explore?
  - Are there any topics missing?
  - Are there topics that you want to know more about?
- Other questions or concerns?
- Looking ahead to March 9
  - What else do you want to know about ***School Organization & Staffing Considerations, Student Programs & Services***
  - Think of questions to be explored in preparation for this session.

### 5.1 Elementary Sub-Group Findings

**What other considerations do we need to explore?**

| Input on Considerations to Explore -Elementary            | Comments, Examples, Questions  |
|---|--|
| Benefits of Annexes in relation to preferred school sizes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Value of a K-5 annex</li> <li>• How do we use grade configuration as a tool to deal with population growth?</li> <li>• Is there a minimum size to run an Annex?</li> </ul>  |
| Grade groups  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Example of a K-4 Annex with 44 students at the start of the year</li> <li>• What does this look like for young students?</li> <li>• What are the opportunities for students in grade groups?</li> <li>• Opportunities for after school programs as well</li> <li>• Implications for PAC groups – equity? Capacity? Is there an independent PAC or do they work with the main school PAC?</li> </ul> |

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| Importance of neighbourhood schools (especially in primary years)     |  |
| Students leaving schools to participate in programs (e.g., grade 6/7) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During later elementary grades (e.g., Grades 6 &amp; 7) some students leave to attend Intensive French. This creates other shifts.</li> </ul>   |
| When/ how to re-evaluate the need for programs?                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is our process to check for program effectiveness?</li> <li>• We start programs but don't end them</li> </ul>  |
| District Program Reviews  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do other Program Reviews inform the work of the PSSWG?</li> <li>• How do they impact school size and population?</li> </ul>   |
| Diversity and equity  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can our work/ our findings reflect diversity present in the District?</li> <li>• Should the preferred school size be different in different areas of the District?</li> <li>• Will this process inform decisions around equity?</li> <li>• E.g., Services/ programming/ PAC/ funding</li> </ul> |
| Question re: PSS Working Group decision-making and consensus          | Our findings will be included in the report  |

#### Looking ahead to March 9

- What else do you want to know about ***School Organization & Staffing Considerations, Student Programs & Services***
- Think of questions to be explored in preparation for this session.

| Input on Considerations to Explore for Mar 9 | Comments, Examples, Questions   |
|--|---|
| Program relocation                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hope this process informs program location for District Programs such as Special Ed</li> </ul>   |
| Enhanced Services                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will this process impact decisions re: "Enhanced Services" (formerly Inner City schools)?</li> <li>• How much will we venture into this?</li> </ul>  |
| Flexible Space                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Re: numbers and range <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Schools need flexible space</li> <li>-E.g. sensory rooms – can be a tight squeeze</li> <li>-Flexibility/ area standards</li> </ul> </li> </ul>   |
| Densification of Vancouver                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vancouver is redefining itself --- e.g., densification<br/>Densification in relation to enrolment</li> </ul>   |
| Best learning environment                    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to make the best learning environment?</li> <li>• Programs and services</li> <li>• These drive staffing requirements</li> <li>• Administrative considerations (in addition to other staffing)</li> <li>• Student support workers – depends on student needs</li> </ul> |
| Capacity (# of seats) vs. utilization        |   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| School size in relation to sense of community and opportunities for bonding | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Also, opportunities to participate on sports teams (when schools get too small or too big)</li> </ul>   |
| Some staffing decisions are not informed by the Collective Agreement        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Will we talk about those?</li> </ul>  |
| Equity lens – diversity   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does that apply in different schools / circumstances (because of diversity) – in relation to School organization and staffing</li> </ul>          |
| How do we design the future?  |  |
| Administration  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of turnover</li> <li>• Administrative support at 400 students</li> <li>• Want administrators with experience to support those roles</li> </ul> |
| After school care and childcare   |  |

## 5.2 Secondary Sub-Group Findings

**What are the topics/areas of consideration that you feel we need to include/consider?**

| Input on Considerations to Explore - Secondary  | Comments, Examples, Questions  |
|---|--|
| School size and student well-being – what is too big and what is too small?   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health (amongst students)</li> <li>• Sports teams – not enough students to field a team; too many students and difficult to get on one</li> <li>• Electives – not enough choice</li> <li>• Implications for staff such as number of preps, etc.</li> <li>• Need to include enrolling and non-enrolling components (e.g. counsellors, resource blocks, skills based, etc.)</li> </ul> |
| Perhaps look at high school model (elementary, middle school, high school)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the model impact school size?</li> </ul>   |
| Model for student programs and services   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current is 4 blocks with off time</li> <li>• Should we look at other models and how that impacts sizing guidelines?</li> </ul>  |
| What is the % of ESL students in a school which optimizes language acquisition; optimizes feeling part of the community, etc.   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• May not be research on this (will look) but can tap into the wisdom of the group to highlight thoughts on this</li> </ul>   |
| Consider use of other services in space (e.g. School may only need to be x, but is x+y; possibility of doing seismic upgrading and sharing space with public library for example rather than losing the building) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noted this was not specifically on topic for developing guidelines for school sizing</li> </ul>   |
| Does providing comprehensive schools impact school sizing?  |  |
| Current distribution of programs is focused on the East (vs the West). How does this factor into the discussion re: school sizing?  |  |

### Implications for Design of Next Session

- Need to design the session to examine the extremes – What are the implications of schools that are too small or too big for students (social emotional learning, elective choice, co-curricular and extra-curricular opportunities, etc.) and staff?
- Once we've identified the difficulties at both ends, can look at what those words mean to people (i.e. what is too big; what is too small in terms of numbers)

### Implications for Information Needs for Next Session

- A student survey was completed (n=180) entitled **Student Voice** which identified what is important to students
  - Review this report for relevant info to feed into this process
- Would like a definition of “comprehensive schools”
  - Does this necessarily mean a full tech program (limited by availability of qualified teachers and space) – or is this something that can be “shared” across schools
  - How this does or does not relate to school sizing discussion

## 5 Summary of decisions and action items

**Terms of Reference** – Working Group members confirmed their support for the Terms of Reference. The approved Terms of Reference are posted on the Working Group link: [Preferred School Size Working Group](#).

**Meeting start time** – The group confirmed that a 3:45 PM start time is doable and agreed to arrive on time for future meetings to permit a firm 3:45 meeting start.

**Handouts** – In an effort to minimize paper use at meetings, only a few paper handouts of PowerPoint content will be provided at future meetings. Most Working Group members are content to wait until the PowerPoint is circulated after the meeting.

**Research and Literature Review** – A literature review carried out by the VSB regarding schools sizes has been posted on the Working Group link: [Preferred School Size Working Group](#). Working Group members are invited to share research or literature regarding school sizes before the next meeting by sending it to John Dawson at [jdawson@vsb.bc.ca](mailto:jdawson@vsb.bc.ca).

## 6 Summary of Next Steps and Homework

- Meeting summary and PowerPoint presentation from February 10 meeting #1 to be posted on the Working Group link: [Preferred School Size Working Group](#).
- Working Group to review and circulate meeting notes within their organizations
- **Next Meeting** – March 9, 2020, 3:45 – 7:15 PM
- Working Group members are reminded that you have been asked to serve as representatives of your schools, group or organization. Please strive to be inclusive of the array of perspectives within your constituency when circulating information and participating in working group discussions.

Please contact Dorli Duffy at [dorli@dorliduffy.ca](mailto:dorli@dorliduffy.ca) if you have any questions or requests regarding this meeting summary.