

Vancouver School District Preferred School Size Working Group Meeting #2

March 9, 2020

Meeting Summary

Facilitators

Dorli Duffy
Susan Rhodes

In attendance:

Carmen Batista, VSB Associate Superintendent – Employee Services
Matt Carruthers, VEPVPA
John Dawson, VSB Director of Educational Planning and Student Information
Megan Davies, VEPVPA
Aaron Davis, VSB Director of Instruction – School Services
Nick Depotakis, VASSA
Rosie Finch, VSB Director of HR
Treena Goolieff, VSTA
Mette Hamaguchi, VSB Director of Instruction – Learning Service
Angie Haverman, VASSA
Amanda Hillis, DPAC Representative
Ricky Huang, VDSC
Adrian Keough, VSB Director of Instruction – Educational Programs
Anne Lee, VSB Educational Planning and Student Information
Anne Miller, VESTA
Skye Richards, DPAC
Shehzad Somji, VSB Assistant Secretary-Treasurer
Terry Stanway, VSTA

Regrets:

Maggie Martens, DPAC
Jonathan Zhu, VDSC
Jim Meschino, VSB Director of Facilities
Michael Rossi, VSB District Principal – Educational Planning
Bernie Soong, VASSA
Karen Tsang, DPAC
Chris Wong, VSB District Principal – Educational Planning

1.0 Objectives

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

- Provide an update on progress and new information since Feb. 10

- Review and discuss information regarding School Organization and Staffing, and Student Programs and Services in relation to school size
- Identify key information from these areas of consideration to be included in guidelines on preferred school sizes
- Discuss additional consultation process (preliminary dates for survey/ focus groups)
- 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 March 9, 2020 PowerPoint presentation is available on the dedicated PSSWG link at [Preferred School Size Working Group](#).

John Dawson provided an update on new information since February 10. During a verbal presentation to the VSB Facilities Planning Committee on March 4, John explained that the PSSWG work will result in a report to the Board, and possibly recommendations as well. When the IOUE asked why they hadn't been invited to participate on the PSSWG, John replied that the PSSWG is focused on considering impacts of school size on education planning. The IOUE were invited to request a focus group to provide input to this process. Finally, John clarified our use of a consultative process as defined in the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation.

In response to requests from the February 10 meeting, paper copies were made available on March 9 of the following documents:

- French Immersion Program Review
- Special Education Program Review
- VDSC Budget Priority Survey 2019

These documents will also be posted to the PSSWG link at [Preferred School Size Working Group](#).

Question 1. What is the relationship between the PSSWG process and the VSB Built to Learn Survey?

Answer 1. The LRFP contains 17 recommendations which are approved Board motions. The PSSWG was convened in response to recommendation #1. This process is led and coordinated by District staff. The Build2Learn engagement process is a Board initiated process has been undertaken in response to recommendations #14 and 15 in the LRFP. The Build2Learn engagement process is a broader engagement process that focusses on other aspects of planning including school consolidation, and capital asset management. The reports from both the Build2Learn engagement and the PSSWG process will inform future LRFP development.

2.0 Overview of Areas of Consideration

District staff provided presentations on the following areas of consideration in relation to school size:

Student Programs & Services

- Adrian Keough – Elementary and Secondary Programming
- Mette Hamaguchi – Inclusion and Special Education (SPED) Programs
- Aaron Davis – Secondary Programming

School Organization & Staffing Considerations

- Aaron Davis – Secondary Staffing and School Organization
- Rosie Finch – Elementary Staffing and School Organization

A question and answer session followed the staff presentations:

Question 1. Is there a connection between school size and enhanced services – equity re: assigning staff

Answer 1. Schools in the VSB are designated as Tier 1, 2, and 3. Tier 1 schools are eligible for the most significant allocation of enhanced services available. A combination of the percentage of children in ministry care, families receiving social assistance and school enrolment are used to categorize schools into each of the tiers. Larger school size does not negatively impact the availability of enhanced services.

Question 2. Do schools that are part of the Seismic Mitigation Program receive additional staffing.

Answer 2. Staffing needs for schools are determined on a case by case basis. When school student populations are divided into subgroups in order to be accommodated at more the one temporary accommodation site, additional staffing is often provided.

Question 3. School size recommended by Aaron Davis for secondary schools?

Answer 4. A comprehensive choice of course programming options is desirable for students, staff, and parents. Alignment between course programming and enhanced co-curricular and extracurricular opportunities is evident in secondary schools. The lower end of school size that enables comprehensive course programming choices is about 1100 students.

Question 4. Implications for schools with/considering an Academy

Answer 4. There is no direct connection between school size and the potential for locating a specialty academy at a school. The academy model usually draws students to a specialized program from many jurisdictions. The size of the academy in relation to the existing school population is a consideration, as a large academy in a smaller school may cause concerns.

3.0 Elementary and Secondary Sub-Group Discussions

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

- What are the implications for students and staff when elementary or secondary schools are TOO small or TOO big?
- When a school was TOO small or TOO big, how small/big was it (numbers of students)?

3.1 Elementary Sub-Group Findings

Review of statements from experts

- Agree with statements from experts

Other comments re: implications of TOO small

- Tensions and dynamics occur when a small cohort is together for 8 years (with same students each year)
 - Can experience tensions due to peer dynamics and parent dynamics
 - Small groups support special needs
- Stress on staff and parents
 - Demand for time and energy for teams, committees, extracurricular
 - All are involved or none are involved
 - Can be location specific

- Larger schools will not necessarily have more teachers being involved
- Competing demands (PAC)
 - Raising money for school vs. for a program
- Difficult to balance dual track schools
 - E.g., French Immersion vs. non-French Immersion balance
 - If a school has 300-400 students, how many FI students, how many English students?
 - Silos between groups
- Pressures on capacity of staff and teachers
 - Greater demands on staff and teachers
- No gym or very small gym (activity room) and may need to double for other uses as well
 - Gym may also be the lunchroom
 - Requires time for set-up and clean up
- Not enough money generated in a small school
 - Usually requires that PAC/ funding efforts get pulled into the larger school
- Sometimes need to share/ loan SSAs, resource teachers
 - Sometimes need to buffer needs of very small schools

Other considerations for school size and enrolment guidelines

- E.g., Enhanced Learning Services for students at risk
 - Ensure that there is connectedness for all students/ all backgrounds
- What is optimization?
 - What would students say about student success and happiness in relation to school size?
 - This is a separate question than asking about optimization in terms of operational efficiency
- Play space (inside and outside)
 - Is there sufficient space for students to be separated/ play away from away from each other?
 - Can do this with optimal space
- Efficiency in decision-making
 - E.g., installing/ removing gym equipment – less bureaucratic process with fewer teachers
- Feeling of support/ community/ cohesion

What is too small? Too big?

When Elementary Sub-Group participants spoke about ideal school sizes, they offered the following ranges:

450-500, 425-550, 400-500, 350-500, 200-400, 350-450, 300-400

Lower end – 200-300

Upper end – 400-550

Positive comments re: schools in the range of 400-550

- Enough momentum and engagement but no struggle
- Lots of experience and success at this size
- Optimizes building (maximum building area for smallest number of students)
- Typically, all rooms are full

- Fewer options for more flexible spaces (e.g., project rooms)
- Enough variety of classes (2 per grade)
- Small enough to know all students
- Sufficient momentum for initiatives
- Implications for custodial staff and other related opportunities

Positive comments re: schools in the range of 200 - 300

- Smaller school – can know each other
 - Easier for those with special and other learning needs

Other Discussion

- Programming
 - District Choice programs
 - Demand for District Choice programs will continue to grow
 - Should District Choice programs continue to grow to meet demand or should a cap be put in place given limited space to meet demand?
 - We need to ask if an additional program or cohort is sustainable/ viable
 - E.g., Norquay – Mandarin Program
 - Language/ District programs don't generally have a diverse range of learning needs and challenges
 - What are the implications for enrolment guidelines of a dual or triple track school?
 - To have a healthy dual track school, would need 650 students (325 each)
 - Secord is a triple track school (650) with third track starting in Grade 6

3.2 Secondary Sub-Group Findings

Review of statements from experts:

- Agree with statements from the experts
- Wish for clarification from Adrian re: meaning of program fatigue when a school is too large

Additions to statements re: Organization/staffing

- Too small:
 - Greater number of “preps” related to a higher number of different classes
 - Leads to fatigue
 - May also reduce the availability of the teachers for extracurricular activities
 - Teachers are fearful of losing jobs when working in schools where there is declining enrollment

Additions to statements re: Programs

- Too small:
 - Programs (e.g. mini schools, etc.) impact the timetable for others
 - Timetable for the mini school is built first as this is a cohort; and then the others are slotted around this
 - Example given was Britannia where there are 2 programs (IB and a mini school), which leaves less than 300 outside of these programs

- There are student composition impacts as well; children with IEP/other needs are in the smaller remaining population

Discussion re: Student Experience

- Overarching – students in high school are learning about themselves and differentiating from the adults around them
- Given the above, the assumption is that students benefit from a range of experiences within which to learn about themselves and to expand their thinking
 - Develop their interests
 - Encourage exploration through course options
- The above two points suggest that smaller schools are limiting in terms of:
 - Social interaction: students benefit from being exposed to new people to be able to expand their view of behaviour – their own and more generally
 - They benefit from a broader choice of courses to expand their thinking
- Possible that without a range of choices in programming that kids will be more likely to take a “spare”
 - Even if there are a range of offerings, may be able to offer “wood” but only at the same time as “auto” due to limited numbers of teachers (and only 1 of each)
- Small schools may be able to “keep tabs” on students as they will be well known; however there will not be the number of adults (more adults assigned to classrooms not out walking about)
- Large schools may have to resort to more bureaucratic means to keep track of students and address absences in order to deal with the volume of students (i.e., no other choice when numbers get too high)

What is “Too Small”

- Range of 1000-1250 described as “too small”; grade cohort of less than 200 is too small
 - All agreed anything below 1000 is too small; with 600-700 being extremely small and difficult
- At the “too small” range we see
 - Reduced ability to offer course options to kids (including academic and non-academic courses)
 - E.g. Magee student raised the inability to have honours stats or pre calculus A/P/Honours at his school
 - Teachers carrying a broader range of courses and therefore being consumed with a higher number of “preps” and “splits” on top of that
 - E.g., noted that at Prince of Wales, this year, French 11 and 12 are being offered as a combined course – this was done to try to offer two times in the timetable where it could be offered so all students who want to take the course are able to fit it in their schedule

What is “Too Large”

- Range of responses from 1750, 1800 and 2100
 - General comment that “too big” is better than “too small” given the impact on students and teachers
 - With “too large” impact is:
 - Sense of community is lower
 - Don’t know all the students (teachers/administrators)
 - Can be overcrowded if school is too small too

- Described the “too large” further
 - Grade cohort of 350 or more
 - Better cohort is around 280
 - Anything less than 200 is “too small”

4.0 Report Back and Large Group Discussion

Elementary Report Back

- Dual track would have more students than the ranges discussed above

Secondary Report Back

- Non-enrolling component
 - E.g., counsellors at <900
- Is it possible to have a neighbourhood school at 2000?

Preparation for April 20 meeting – Questions re: Seismic Mitigation Program

- What are the true costs, long term?
 - i.e., Life cycle costing?
- Role of Area Standards?
- Impact of political advocacy on SMP decision-making?

5.0 Proposed additional consultation process (Focus Groups and/or survey)

Focus groups and/or a survey will be conducted between May 21 and June 4 to support stakeholder engagement regarding preliminary findings. Participants were invited to consider if/when they would like their organization to participate in a focus group or a survey during this time period. Groups were invited to check with their constituencies and confirm their interest and preferred date(s) as soon as possible.

E.g., DPAC – Thursday meetings – May 21 or May 28

6.0 Summary of Next Steps and Homework

- Meeting summary and PowerPoint presentation from March 9, 2020 Meeting #2 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** – April 20, 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 if you have any questions or requests regarding this meeting summary.