

# Vancouver School District Preferred School Size Working Group Meeting #5

December 10, 2020

## **Draft Meeting Summary**

### **Facilitators**

Dorli Duffy  
Susan Rhodes

### **In attendance:**

John Dawson, VSB Director of Educational Planning and Student Information  
Nancy Bourque, VEPVPA  
Nick Despotakis, VASSA  
Bernie Soong, VASSA  
Anne Miller, VESTA  
Sara McGarry -VSTA  
Amanda Hillis, DPAC  
Skye Richards, DPAC  
Carmen Batista, VSB Associate Superintendent – Employee Services  
Shehzad Somji, VSB Assistant Secretary-Treasurer  
Aaron Davis, VSB Director of Instruction – School Services  
Rosie Finch, VSB Director Instruction – Learning Services  
Chris Stanger, VSB Director of Instruction – School Services  
Michael Rossi, VSB District Principal – Educational Planning  
Chris Wong, VSB District Principal – Education Planning  
Anne Lee, VSB Educational Planning and Student Information

### **Regrets:**

Megan Davies, VEPVPA  
Angie Haverman, VASSA  
Terry Stanway, VSTA  
Treena Goolieff, VSTA  
Dameun Kim, VSB Facilities Planner  
Hayden O'Connor, VSB Facilities Planner

## **1.0 Objectives**

The Vancouver School Board Preferred School Size Working Group held their fifth meeting virtually via Zoom on December 10, 2020. The meeting objectives were to:

- Review summary of findings from Focus Group sessions

- Confirm proposed preliminary school size guidelines for VSB elementary and secondary schools, and
- Confirm next steps

This document provides a brief summary of discussions held during the meeting. A copy of the December 10, 2020 PowerPoint presentation is available on the dedicated PSSWG link at [Preferred School Size Working Group](#).

## 2.0 Focus Group Findings

Five focus groups sessions were held with stakeholder groups between November 19 and 25, 2020. The purpose of the focus groups was to review and provide feedback on PSSWG findings and preliminary draft guidelines on preferred school sizes in the VSB. Groups consulted included DPAC, IUOE/CUPE, VSTA, VEPVPA, and VASSA. VESTA provided feedback through their Working Group representative.

Guidelines discussed during the focus groups included the following:

### **Preliminary Guidelines for Preferred School Size (all factors considered)\***

**Elementary School Size Guidelines** = range of 300 – 550 enrolled students

**Secondary School Size Guidelines** = range of 1100 – 1750 enrolled students

*\*Note: this includes consideration of the guideline implications developed on March 9 (school organization, staffing, student services/programs) and Oct 8 (financial considerations)*

Other factors to be considered include:

- Student travel to school
- Creating community hubs
- Future growth areas in relation to City of Vancouver planning
- Ensuring connectedness for all students
- Sufficient play space (inside and out)
- A feeling of support, community and cohesion in schools
- Future review of guidelines in relation to best practices for infectious diseases/ viruses, etc.

Please see the December 10, 2020 PowerPoint presentation posted on the dedicated PSSWG link at [Preferred School Size Working Group](#) for a summary of focus group findings.

## 3.0 Elementary and Secondary Sub-Group Discussions

PSSWG participants engaged in Elementary and Secondary Sub-Group discussions to discuss feedback from the focus groups and to answer the question:

- What does focus group feedback mean for these preliminary guidelines for preferred school size?

### 3.1 Elementary Sub-Group Findings

The Elementary Discussion Group reiterated a number of concerns raised throughout the PSSWG process including:

- Appreciation and support for annexes
  - Concern about potential closure of annexes
  - Desire to consider K-3 annexes differently than regular K-7 schools since class sizes are smaller in annexes
  - Acknowledgement that some parents want a smaller, cozier space for their children
- Acknowledgement of challenges in for annexes
  - Difficulty providing range of services to students
  - Reduced options for class organization
  - Lack of specialty spaces
- Desire for more administrative support at preferred size (300 – 550)
  - Mid-range of 350 – 450 seems to be a “sweet spot” in terms of opportunities for staff collaboration, flexibility for school organization, size of school community, etc.
  - Query re: potential to lower the current vice principal position threshold from 400 to 350
    - Provide more administrative support and educational leadership
    - Strengthens student and community engagement opportunities and connectedness
    - Consider for schools based on needs
    - This would be a district budgetary decision
- Dual and triple track schools may be larger than the preferred elementary student size guideline range
  - Guidelines apply to the school as a whole and not to the individual tracks, streams or programs
  - Need guidelines for the range of schools offered in this District
  - Acknowledged dual/multi track schools may end up being larger than the upper end of size range

### 3.2 Secondary Sub-Group Findings

- Query whether private schools are attracting students due to providing a different range of school size, and whether this is a strength of Vancouver as well (i.e., having a range of school sizes as a choice)
- Query whether existing schools might be closed as not within the size range
  - There is no plan to apply these guidelines to existing schools and do a blanket closure for any school not within the guidelines; it is acknowledged that there will be schools that continue to be outside of these guidelines

- The purpose of the guidelines is to be used for planning purposes in the future, as needed, in conjunction with other planning factors
- Discussion about the lower end of the guidelines at 1200 students
  - Is this just an issue when there are Choice programs, or other programs – i.e., would less than 1200 work at that point?
  - A single track school can work at 1000 students, but schools with choice programs don't work as well at that number
  - Agreement that < 1000 students doesn't work as well, as lose the ability to provide choice of courses, field sports teams, provide extra-curricular opportunities
- Discussion about the wording for the range being 1200-1750
  - One suggestion was to provide a "confidence interval" to allow people to know it could be higher or lower; group discussed this and thought it still provided a "number" – so the wording needed to emphasize that these are guidelines and that given a certain context it may make sense to have 1000 students (e.g., a single track school), or more than 1750.
- **Unanimous agreement to the guidelines remaining as 1200-1750, with wording associated to indicate that this is a range and that a particular school may be planned slightly higher or lower than this range if other planning factors suggest this is appropriate**
  - Examples of other factors include whether the school is single or dual/multiple track, walking distance/transportation distance, vulnerable student requirements, etc.

## 4.0 Report Back and Large Group Discussion

### Elementary Report Back

The Elementary Discussion Group discussed the issues and concerns included above. No formal changes were proposed to the preliminary guidelines for preferred school sizes in VSB elementary schools: minimum 300 to maximum 550 enrolled students.

### Secondary Report Back

The Secondary Discussion Group unanimously agreed to the guidelines remaining as 1200-1750, with wording associated to indicate that this is a range and that a particular school may be planned slightly higher or lower than this range if other planning factors suggest this is appropriate. Examples of other factors include whether the school is single or dual/multiple track, walking distance/transportation distance, vulnerable student requirements, etc.

## 5.0 Summary of Next Steps and Homework

- Meeting summary and PowerPoint presentation from December 10, 2020 Meeting #5 to be posted on the Working Group link: [Preferred School Size Working Group](#).
- **Working Group** to review and circulate meeting notes within their organizations
- **Consultants** to draft Final PSSWG Report
- Draft PSSWG Report to be circulated to PSSWG by mid-January
- **Next Meeting #5** – January 21, 2021 – 3:30- 4:45 via Zoom

- An additional PSSWG meeting has been scheduled to discuss PSSWG comments on Draft Report
  - Key question: Is the report accurate to the process?
- Final PSSWG Report submitted to FPC and senior management in 2021 (TBD)
- **Working Group** requested to complete post-meeting evaluations.
  
- 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.