



District Parent Advisory Council

Representing 110 PACs with over 40,000 Parents

Vancouver DPAC - 1580 West Broadway - Vancouver, BC, V6J 5K8 - 604 215-8621 or 604 657-0154

CITY-WIDE PAC Meeting – October 11, 2012 – Hosted by the Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council at the Vancouver School Board Education Centre – Room 400.

The following notes are a reflection of the comments, questions and answers provided at the October 11, 2012 City Wide Parent Advisor Council meeting. The notes and comments do not reflect the opinion of DPAC, the Vancouver School Board or Parent Advisory Councils. The comments are taken as individuals who have an individual opinion, concern or comment based on their experience. The exact wording is not necessarily what was precisely said and, as such, discretion of who said what should not be reliant on this summary.

Notes from October 11, 2012 City Wide PAC meeting with 38 schools represented. The topic of discussion: PAC fundraising, should parents be fundraising and if we do, how can we make it more equitable.

Question from John Oliver high school to VSB Chair

After 10 years of funding cuts – do you see a connection with those who have now experienced a decade of cuts?

Answer from Patti Bacchus – We do know that kids are under stress. We see a real impact on child poverty, social media stress, and that in many cases we have children that are no longer connected to schools and we don't have the capacity to track those kids. Our ongoing challenge is making cuts that hurt the least. We keep trying to patch over the gaps but there is a cumulative effect, with fewer and fewer counsellors, they are booked solid for 3 weeks and I was thinking what happens if you are in a crisis and have to wait 3 weeks? This negatively impacts our vulnerable students disproportionately.

There has been a huge growth in tutoring systems. The whole purpose to provide equity of outcomes has been whittled away and we are coming to rely on fundraising to fill in the gaps. This is not okay. Having wish lists and requests for teacher supplies in class room was not the case a decade ago.

Question from Britannia high school: What pro-active steps should we be taking for articulating problems with leadership?

Answer from Patti: Regardless of your politics, we need education on the agenda and it wasn't on the agenda during the last election. Now we have an advocacy committee. Recently I make a submission to the Provincial Select Standing Committee for Finance, every year we talk about our needs and a number of themes that we repeat and they haven't changed from year to year. We added up the funding losses and looked at the same funding as ten years ago and found we have lost an additional \$80,000 million over the

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past decade. Staffing in this building has been quite diminished. We still have a high level of demand, but now even our superintendent has no assistant.

Question from St. Mary's: Why you are still making cuts with increased provincial funding?

Answer from Patti: All our budgets are on the website and explain this in detail. It is a combination of things such as an aging workforce which leads to higher incremental costs. It is increased costs on our budget such as; carbon taxes, which comes out of the same budget and a new insurance premium, which adds up to the cost of six special assistants, costs of MSP premiums and utilities. These all add up and are reported out publicly. We are similar to many districts. Almost every district in BC are seeing declining enrollments, so it is the in and out, it is like giving my son an allowance and making him pay for his own lunch.

Question from Beaconsfield Elementary: We have concerns about infrastructure in an aging building and a declining enrollment – in terms of capital infrastructure not sure how it is prioritized? The government has no problem building shiny new post-secondary buildings.

Answer from DPAC Chair: There is funding competition, with many separate silos that are interdependent in delivering services. In essence it is the politicization of funding with no clear funding streams for these things, which makes it confusing.

Answer from Patti: We have over 50 projects to complete but have made unprecedented progress. We are planning in five years increments; this is about \$850 million to bring all schools seismically safe by 2020. Priority is determined by the number of bodies in building in some cases. Kitsilano was our most expensive project – between \$50 and \$60 million – Schools with lower capacity and lower enrollment numbers don't get priority. I have been working on a decade to get them done and we have many to go. The Ministry is suggesting we should close some of them. We had packed full houses when we looked at closures and now we're trying to get community users into the schools. For our east side schools with lower enrollment this makes it a huge task.

Question from General Wolfe Elementary: Is there a national model we could follow? While PAC funding is necessary, it is obvious there is an inequity – the kids at risk are in the neighbourhoods where the funding is the least.

Answer from DPAC Chair: Property taxes are sent to the provinces and then some of it is sent back. The irony is that we are making this back by fundraising. I was looking at the model that hospitals use with professional fundraisers but our VSB Chair has pointed out that we had a foundation and parents didn't support it, they wanted to fund their own kids' schools.

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Question from General Wolfe: Could we consider central equalization payments so that those PACs who have smart boards could offset those in the city who don't? What you have said is that it is like telling taxpayers that it takes a village.

Answer from DPAC Chair: We have looked at the sister school concept where we have had one school adopting another, but they are only two schools doing it in the VSB system.

Comment from Britannia: At my school we have no ability to fundraise at all, even if it were the will. The students do well for fundraising for things they need to do, but our parents have no interest. They would not necessarily embrace being charity. This is not the answer to the problem as to whether we have safe playgrounds and smart boards. We should not be dependent on charity, it is demeaning. It takes away from autonomy of the school. Putting funding for schools at the whim of a body of parents is not sustainable.

Comment for St Mary: There is equalization to a certain extent through the PAC gaming funds. Property taxes are only 30% of the budget. Lord Bing and St Mary are wealthy schools but we don't do a lot of fundraising. The province kicks in \$7-10,500 per student. If any one of our PACs is raising more than 3% of the budget I would be very surprised.

DPAC Chair notes that the VSB advocacy committee has struck a sub-committee struck to look at the issue of parent fundraising.

Comment from John Oliver: We shouldn't be doing bake sales or casinos for public education. We're digging into our pockets to help them out and we shouldn't need to equalize. We have 3,500 less kids in the system. Cross boundary schools hurt our communities when kids leave. Notes in case of emergencies, everyone goes to schools so the point is we need those schools to be the community place for people to rally during an emergency and we're not prepared for it.

Question about the structure of the new sub-committee of the VSB Advocacy committee: Answer by Patti: It is all of our committee. We identified this as an issue last year and we are looking at not just fundraising, but the background of the issue. We are looking at a shadow budget created by fundraising such as; adopting a school and teachers wish lists. We want to identify the shadow budget. We can track tax receipted donations to schools. There is not a big difference in tax receipted donations through elementary schools. We've had high levels of charitable donations, especially in response to a Seymour school teacher's plea for money. Fundraising and charitable donations vary from school to school. We want to get a sense of what the total dollars coming in are.

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This sub-committee will be chaired by Trustees Mike Lombardi. We will come up with some surveys so we know where schools are at with fundraising. We've stopped collecting fees and that is tightening up things up. The new sub-committee is to give the public and stakeholders an idea where we are – will be coming to the PACs to ask where they are in fundraising to give us an idea of how much is coming in and how we are tracking.

Comment from Edith Cavell: One idea is last year our school gathered a lot of items for one school (Laura Secord) and the parents wanted to know why isn't there a list of schools that have identified the basic needs of the children that are impoverished, such as; socks, breakfast items and things teachers shouldn't have to pay for. Parents were happy to do this so we are wondering if we can get a list of items needed by the higher risk population schools.

DPAC Chair commented about a discussion among DPAC executives about creating a district wide Craig's List for items such as clothes.

Comments and questions from Queen Victoria Annex: Our PAC raised 2.3% of our school budget. The PAC paid for a playground and the school board has told us we have to take it out and they have given us a list of four companies we have the pleasure to fundraise for. Where we are at, we've done a lot of things, met the teachers' wish list for smart boards and tumbling mats. Should we be replacing infrastructure, and if so, why does it fall to the parents? We are spending so much of our time fundraising are we moving away from the advisory role? We are so taken up with bake sales we're not doing advising, we're doing fundraising. Gaming funds can't be used for curriculum so there is a gap that we have to fill. Questioning some of the empty schools, do they have to have that kind of heritage upgrade? We are leery of the twinning schools concept? What are the priorities? We're not clear that central fundraising would work because people are attached to their school.

Comment from Prince of Wales: We have found that with parent engagement it is dangerous to stereotype where you are. 30% of our parents just made a donation.

General Wolfe: 100% of our parents just made a donation as an example for bike shelter funding.

DPAC executive summarizes the discussion, capturing the thoughts shared at this meeting. We are deeply compassionate but we're coming up with Band-Aids. The question is what do we want to do about it? We need to look at our options. Because we receive requests what are we going to do about it? Should we focus as PACs on something other than fundraising?

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Comment from Britannia; we could be drawing attention to the fact that for 8 years we have had the highest level of poverty in the country and talk about root of the problem.

Comment from David Thompson: On the subject of technology for the schools – our secondary school is being upgraded to Wi-Fi and we are now doing a direct drive to raise funds for iPads and LCD projectors and the gaming grant doesn't cover it. Not sure how a direct drive will do and we don't have time to wait for another year. Technology in our schools is unequal – how about corporate sponsors to fund computer labs? Why can't we do corporate sponsors?

For anyone wanting more information or want to provide additional comment to our District Parent Advisory Council, please send an email to Steve Baker at steve@vsbdpac.ca. Alternatively you may go onto our website at vsbdpac.ca and provide comments under "Contact Us".

Please continue the discussion with your schools in regard to fundraising vs funding and keep our DPAC informed as well.

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