

DPAC Statement to Joint Plenary III/V Committee

April 10, 2017

We would like to begin with the survey, and in particular the question about priorities. The survey asks us to identify up to 7 out of 15 given programs and services as priorities, with an additional option provided for a write-in response. I, and others, provided a single response using the write-in option: "All of the above". The message being propagated by the survey is: a robust education system should contain all of the programs and services listed, but we've being constrained into only being able to offer less than half of them, so start fighting amongst yourselves to determine which ones we're going forward with and which ones your kids are never going to get. It's ugly and it's divisive. It's taking a responsibility that the provincial government has downloaded on school boards and downloaded it again on parents and the community at large and we won't participate in it. If you don't believe that there is sufficient funding to offer all the programs and services listed, then you need to vigorously advocate for that funding from within the school board. (We'll come back to this point when we take note of the proposal to have the VSB rejoin the BCSTA.) But please: don't ask parents and members of the community to do the government's dirty work of selecting programs and services to cut. We therefore ask if consideration has been made to pull the survey effective immediately and disregard any results obtained to date.

The presentation last Thursday used the phrase "Non K-12 Mandate items" in a list of "Future Areas to Consider". This comes across as rather ominous, especially given the cuts to adult education being proposed. The implication is that adult education, and very likely other services, will be completely eliminated by the end of the 5-year budget cycle that begins with this proposal. What other "Non K-12 Mandate items" are under consideration for elimination? The idea of focusing on *just* K-12 services was debated and defeated by the previous board; at the very least there should be a public conversation and justification if there is to be a narrowing of the scope of the VSB's activities.

With regards to the proposed cuts to adult education, while we understand the potential financial savings from consolidation, we question whether this meets the purpose of retaining 3 sites when adult education was cut in the previous budget, namely that it preserves access to the service for individuals who are otherwise already disadvantaged.

It was noted in the presentation last Thursday that “VSB has significantly more space per student FTE than the Subset”. First, let me state that I think we can handle real numbers rather than rounded ones. The EY report lists Vancouver’s square footage per student at 157.1 sq ft as opposed to the 160 sq ft given last week, and the EY report lists the subset square footage per student at 122.7 (as opposed to 120) sq ft, for a differential of 34.4 (not 40) sq ft. So while there is a differential, it doesn’t need to be inflated; the EY report, in fact, chose to represent the differential conservatively as “more than 30 square feet above the Subset Districts average” rather than 40 sq ft. The EY report states that “under the terms of collective agreements, the number of VBE maintenance staff is directly correlated with the square footage of school space” which clearly ties the physical space to the budget. However, the question that parents have been asking for at least the last two years is: how much physical space *should* there be to appropriately implement the curriculum? The constant implication is that more physical space is anathema to children receiving a better education.

Concerns have been raised by parents about the elimination of career advisors. While the proposal states, “If these positions were eliminated, their responsibilities would be reassigned”, it is not identified to whom they would be reassigned and what priority those responsibilities would be given. This statement seems euphemistic for “we won’t provide this service any more”, so some specificity is required, please.

The proposed cut to the supplemental Aboriginal education budget is also of concern. When asked last Thursday, it was stated that the funds were to be used to hire additional staff but that the VSB has been unable to find qualified applicants. We would like to ask what the VSB is doing to improve their outcomes in this regard and whether the hiring of skill-specific staff represents the only possible use of these funds.

The proposal to rejoin the BCSTA raises several questions. It was stated last Thursday that a pros-and-cons list was constructed which indicated that rejoining would provide a net benefit. Can this “cost benefit analysis” (also mentioned in the budget proposal) be transparently enumerated? Can the benefits that would be received (e.g., legal counsel, professional development, governance training) be obtained without rejoining BCSTA? Has the BCSTA *really* been an effective advocate, and, more importantly, can it advocate for issues that are

Vancouver-centric more accurately and effectively than local advocates, e.g., trustees? Given that this was a specific recommendation in the Milburn report, this proposal is being met with a certain level of cynicism.

The proposal overview notes that “overall costs are increasing due to salary increments, employee benefits increases and inflation on utilities costs”. Is the Ministry not obligated to provide full funding to cover these costs, and, if so, how is the VSB currently advocating for the full funding of these costs and others?

Finally, we would like to make a request for more information. We would like to know how well schools and students are coping with the cuts from last year, i.e. the loss of admin staff for some choice programs, the loss of mentors, the loss of the majority of career information assistants, the reduction of school flex budgets, the reduction in maintenance. We would further like to know if positions that were only retained in the last budget for a single year, such as the Anti-Homophobia Teacher Mentor position, are being retained in the current budget, and also whether the nearly \$2.1m that was borrowed from school balances last year and promised to be returned this year will indeed be returned.