Vancouver School Board SD39

A review of District Special Education Support Programs

undertaken as part of the 2021 Strategic Plan

REPORT

Prepared for the Superintendent of Schools

and The Board of Trustees

Dr. Julie R. Parker

in collaboration with Catherine Jamieson and Mette Hamaguchi

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Acknowledgement

Introduction

A review of Vancouver's K-12 Special Education District Programs was undertaken as part of the 2021 Strategic Plan. The plan's goals (VSB, 2016) are:

- To engage learners through innovative teaching and learning practices
- To build capacity through strengthening collective leadership
- To create a culture of care and shared social responsibility
- To provide effective leadership, governance and stewardship

The guiding principles of the strategic plan concern collaboration and engagement, excellence, inclusion and transparency. The review of District Programs arises from these guiding principles and the first specific objective of Goal 1 is: "to enhance support for students with specific needs."

As part of the Strategic Planning Process, reviews of Alternate and Choice Programs are also being undertaken. This is noted here since it is well known that many students with special needs (SWSN) attend Alternate Programs, and certain Choice Programs attract more or less than the typical number of particular types of SWSN. This report should thus be read in conjunction with these two other reports. Also to note are the 4,083 SWSN who do not attend District Programs but whose additional programming is outlined on Individual Education Plans (IEPs), at their local school (school level programming).

The aim of this review was to help build upon current strengths and to identify any gaps in services for students with special needs. This is part of the Board's commitment to encourage responsible innovation in meeting their students' and society's changing needs. The VSB Senior Management Team (SMT) and Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC Appendix 1) provided advice and feedback for the review. SMT are responsible for all developments pertaining to Special Education. Ongoing discussions with them shaped the review process and report findings. The review report is to be shared directly with Program staff and on the district web-site. It was written in preparation for the Spring Committee 3 and Board Meetings and the new school year September 2018.

The review parameters concern the service delivery specific to District Programs, not teaching practices, program evaluation, or special education more generally. It does however concern current best practices that maximize success for all students with special needs, as evidenced from the research literature. Both the review process findings and the associated research literature contribute to emerging themes that arise from the four key Appreciative Inquiry questions:

1. What is currently working well?
2. What challenges are limiting student success?
3. What suggestions are there for improvement?
4. What other particular successes/concerns should the review consider?

Review Methodology

The review process was shaped through ongoing discussions with former Associate Superintendent Nancy Brennan and both the previous and current Directors of Instruction: Catherine Jamieson and Mette Hamaguchi. Feedback from SEAC, staff and parent communities contributed to the process and at times influenced changes to the original plan. Specific inquiry approaches included:

- September 2017 – Meeting with Assistant Superintendent and Director of Instruction to agree review process, Terms of Reference and parameters. VSB background information collected and reviewed. SEAC meeting.
- October 2017 - Meeting with District Principals for Special Education to agree process including anonymous electronic survey administration, focus group questions and schedule, school observation/interview visits.
- November – Meeting with teachers' union, Elementary and Secondary administrators. Survey distributed to 2000 staff and parents, focus group meetings with program staff planned, district comparator data collected.
- December – Survey results summary presented to SEAC. Representative elementary and secondary District Programs visited, conversations with school and program administrators, teachers and support assistants.
- January 2018 – Further focus group meetings for staff and parents. Focus group meetings with program students to gain their perceptions. Meeting with Senior Management Team to agree upon next steps.
- February onwards – Further focus group meetings with administrators, staff and students to gain their feedback. Consider any immediate budget and/or staffing organization implications for September 2018.
- March 2018 – District Program Review interim report shared at SEAC meeting. Further program/school visits completed. HR department consulted for staffing and District Program transport cost/benefit analyses.
- April onwards - Final report with recommendations for future consideration prepared. DRAFT report shared with SEAC and SMT before finalizing and presenting FINAL report to Committee 3 and The Board.

For the purposes of this report a number of terms are used as follows:
District Programs – District Student Support Programs (VSB booklet 2017)
Program Teacher – Teacher of a District Program
School level program – Programming arrangements determined at the school level for all SWSN i.e. not subject to district screening
Resource Teacher (RT) – School special education teacher /IEP manager
Student Support Assistant (SSA) – SSA denotes all paraprofessionals
Professional Development (ProD) – All types of staff training, including workshops, conferences, collaboration, mentoring, coaching, co-teaching

Where quotes from the survey, 15 focus group meetings and 24 program visits are reported, they reflect multiple themed responses unless otherwise indicated i.e. 20+ similar responses from the survey, focus group and program visit data.

Context

It is important to undertake any review of Special Education Programs within the context of expectations as outlined in The School Act and The Special Education Services Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines.   Specific regulations related to District Program arrangements thus include reference to the following:

BC promotes an inclusive education system in which all students are fully participating members of a community of learners. Inclusion is not necessarily synonymous with integration… goes beyond placement to include meaningful participation and … interaction with others. Students may be placed in settings other than a neighbourhood school. This should only be done when the school board has made all reasonable efforts to integrate the student, and it is clear that a combination of education in such classes and supplementary support cannot meet their educational and social needs……To the maximum extent possible, special education services should be organized for delivery at the school level. However, a support system should be available at the district level to ensure that schools have access to expertise and services which are so specialized as to preclude their replication in each school…..When the resources available at the school level have been exhausted, a mechanism is in place to provide additional assistance to the school using district-level or community-based resources.
(Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines 2010 pp. 2, 3, 8)

School District 39 is British Columbia's (BC) second largest district with 52,000 students. The District is currently experiencing declining student enrolment and staffing shortages. As is typical of most provinces approximately 10% students (5,147) have identified Special Educational Needs. VSB is well known for its District Programs, but what is less typical is the number and type of Special Programs attended by 20% of SWSN. For example, Vancouver has more District Programs (72 District special education programs for 1046 students, exclusive of Alternate Program students) than the other 2 largest school districts combined (comparator districts Surrey and Coquitlam with 29 Programs serving 615 students inclusive of Alternate Program students). VSB's arrangements are subject to class size and composition regulations as outlined in the Teachers Collective Agreement (C.A.). Each district's C.A. is somewhat different.

In line with the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994), BC policy (2010) and VSB's 2021 Strategic Plan, inclusion is a guiding principle for all students/staff: "*we value and celebrate diversity by supporting the well-being of every individual, creating a sense of belonging.*" Inclusion is thus not simply a special education issue. The Strategic Plan also emphasizes: "*supporting professional networking, collaborative practices and professional development*" (Goal 2), "*collaborative relationships with community partners to enhance student learning and well-being*" (Goal 3), and "*effectively utilizing school district resources and facilities* (Goal 4). The review of District Special Education Programs is thus undertaken with particular reference to these strategic planning goals and objectives.

Emerging Themes

Question 1. What is currently working well?

The District Vision and Personnel
VSB is *"dedicated to the promotion of inclusion, which includes equitable and meaningful educational experiences for all students. The District offers a continuum of support for students, ranging from inclusive classroom settings to smaller self-contained classrooms. The Student Support team works collaboratively with school teams, parents and community partners to create engaging learning communities where all students can be successful."*
<div align="right">(VSB Learning Services website 2017)</div>

The District Support Services are outlined in a 2017 Booklet. The VSB Director of Instruction works with three District Principals to promote best practices. In addition to District Program teachers and program Student Support Assistants (SSA learning, behaviour, youth/family, child care), there is a large team of District staff to provide leadership and support to schools and students:

- Behaviour Consultants **3 FTE teachers and 12 SSBs** (SSW Behaviour)
- District Case Manager **1 FTE teacher**
- Gifted Education Mentor **0.8 FTE teacher**
- Inclusion Consultant (low Incidence categories) **3 FTE teachers**
- District Resource Teacher (RT early learning) **1 FTE teacher**
- Multi-interdisciplinary Support Team – includes **1** speech and language therapist, **2** counsellors, **2** psychologists, **3** district resource teachers
- District Resource Teacher social emotional learning (SEL) **1 FTE teacher**
- Diversity Mentor **0.8 FTE teacher**
- District Resource Teacher: Secondary Transition **0.8 FTE teacher + 1SSB**
- District teachers for Home Instruction **2 FTE teachers**
- Area Counsellors: **112 FTE**: **36.4 Elementary, 75.46 Secondary**
- District Resource Teachers – Deaf /Hard of Hearing **7.8FTE**, Vision **3 FTE**
- Speech and Language Pathologists **14.7 FTE** **+ 1.7 FTE Aug Com**
- School Psychologist **15 FTE plus CLBC psychologist 1 FTE**

In addition to VSB staff, joint arrangements with other agencies include:

- Vancouver Paediatrics – Nursing, Occupational and Physiotherapy
- BC Children's Hospitals – Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and links with
      11 Provincial Resource Centres e.g. PRCVI and SET BC

VSB and the District Team provide ongoing professional development both formally through workshops and informally through coaching and mentorship arrangements. Eight special education Resource Teacher (RT) modules have been developed and additional workshops are arranged as needs arise. The RT modules include assessment (levels A and B), IEPs, audit readiness, mental health, autism, behaviour, Crisis Prevention, curriculum differentiation and inclusion. Useful resources for staff can be accessed on the district website.

The Range of Programs and Services
All schools have assigned Resource Teachers (RT), SSAs **(currently 757 FTE)**, counsellors, psychologists and speech-language therapists. Access to additional services is through the School Based Team (SBT) that typically meets at least monthly. The District uses a Response to Intervention (RTI) model, requiring all staff/schools to access increasing levels of support, prior to moving a student to a District Program (Levels of Intervention VSB, 2015) using a screening process.

A summary of the 72 District Elementary and Secondary Programs is provided in Appendices 2 and 3. There are currently 26 Elementary Programs (8 types) and 47 Secondary Programs (11 types). Some Secondary schools have 4 or more District Programs, while others have none (Appendix 4).   District Programs potentially optimize access to limited staff expertise, but transportation costs and time rarely make these viable in rural areas. Program students have special needs outlined according to Ministry additionally funded categories as in Table 1.

Table 1. Special Ed. Category	Incidence	Prevalence Note
Low incidence categories A-G *Dependent, Deaf, Blind, IQ <55, Autism, Chronic Health Conditions*	3.2% combined 7 categories	Not in every classroom / smaller schools. District Program more likely.
Behaviour categories R & H *Moderate/severe social emotional learning (SEL)/mental health issues*	2.0% combined 2 categories	SEL students in every school, many classrooms and secondary Alternate.
High Incidence categories Q,P & K *Learning Disability (LD) 3.8% Gifted 0.8%, intellect/IQ < 75 0.2%*	4.8% combined 3 categories	In almost every classroom and certainly every school.

The incidence of Vancouver students with special needs is typical of most school districts. Other Districts have significantly fewer District Programs (Appendix 5) as programming is available in all schools e.g. RT support for gifted, LD and intellectually challenged students, Counselling for those with social-emotional learning (SEL) and mental health issues. The larger the school, the greater the potential for grouping students e.g. a school of 1,000 has approximately 50 students with LD and 30 with low incidence needs. VSB has atypical systems as:
- There are 72 District Programs, significantly more than other districts.
- There are more High Incidence (42) than Low Incidence Programs (30).
- High Incidence District Programs, particularly Secondary Learning Support (13 LSP) are not organised as school level programming.
- There are more Secondary District Programs (46) than Elementary (26).
- All Secondary Programs are 2-5 years, Elementary have some part time.

Emerging Themes:
The district vision, range of programs and staff expertise is invaluable. However, the organisation of High Incidence District Programs and low incidence

programming in Secondary Schools and large Elementary Schools in particular may benefit from a more inclusive and flexible service delivery model.
Question 2. What challenges are limiting student success?

The District Programs and School Level Programming Continuum
The review process revealed diverse opinions about District Programs. Some suggested a need for more Programs while one parent summarized: "from a business perspective 72 programs is insane…we need better co-ordination and balance with school level programming." A summary of focus group meeting comments is provided in Appendix 6 and school visit observations/discussions in Appendix 7. Elementary Programs and schools are generally perceived as: "more inclusive…better student outcomes…more part time placements…more in-class support. A few Secondary Programs had reportedly: "changed little in 30 years...no real curriculum...students are with the same teacher for 5 years."

Survey respondents (Appendix 8) indicated that increasing teacher caseloads, service gaps, decreased mainstream inclusion opportunities, the shifting nature of program populations/descriptions and access to programs across the district, are equally important barriers to students achieving success. Some teachers suggested changing arrangements to provide more immediate resolutions: "students need a resource hub in their own school not a program elsewhere … more in class support … RTs to help classroom teachers adapt the curriculum … students can be misplaced in programs limiting success for all…the flow between schools and district programs is restricted with current model."

Due to student and schools' demographic changes, some Programs have changed name, school location, grade and student type, causing some confusion for staff. There are perceived inequities in staffing ratios and case-management e.g. Program Teachers typically case-manage 10-14 students, while Secondary RTs case-manage up to 120 students. Staff also commented: "program students are not given access to Secondary elective classes for course credits…there is a large regression in these numbers since the new rules around Class Size and Composition… students have more limited opportunity to get a Dogwood… due to a lack of flexibility between District Program and school level programming."

The District's 112 counsellors reportedly work differently: "some counsellors/ RTs/program teachers are very involved with classroom teachers and programs, in other schools not at all ….unlike other districts, few counsellors write IEPs for SEL students (VSB has 977 students in categories R/H)…some programs do not span Grades 8-12, so students must move schools, damaging their sense of belonging …we need more understanding of SEL and mental health issues."

As research (Katz 2012) indicates and respondents suggested: "if all schools were more inclusive there would be a better use of limited funds…more communication and professional learning between special and regular education staff…more flexible grouping arrangements for students to access the continuum of supports

….students and staff belong to their local school community…all staff and students need to develop skills in living with diversity."

Professional development for all staff that reflects inclusive practices

When asked which aspects of the District Programs contributed most to student success (77%) of survey respondents and most focus group respondents prioritized high quality staffing: "teacher attitudes are important … their creativity, flexibility and willingness to support these students…consistent staffing … hiring trained and experienced RTs… administration having special education knowledge." As several noted: "the classroom teacher is the most important, their ability to teach to diversity using Response to Intervention (RTI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approaches… understand Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) …it is critical to support all teachers with this."

65% of survey respondents and focus groups prioritized staff training (teacher and SSA). As was noted, "the class teacher is key… lots of kids need extra support but staff also need a huge culture shift …we need to work with enrolling staff…have well trained RTs and SSWs…help them be less program oriented…build capacity...co-teaching and mentoring not just workshops…use the time at the end of August." The Ministry confirms: "*ongoing staff development is essential for all staff so they can more successfully meet the special needs of students. Districts should ensure that all personnel have access to relevant in-service training…to foster evidence-informed practice."* (Ministry Manual p.6)

When asked about ways to enhance current arrangements, most identified the need for more professional development and the hiring of experienced teachers and SSAs with a diverse skill set. Many noted the need to avoid placing newly qualified teachers in RT positions as these require the ability to coach, mentor and support classroom teachers. There were also many parent and staff comments about ways to develop inclusive practices in regular classrooms and access to more qualified SSA/RT support prior to considering District Programs.

A synthesis of research on inclusive schools (Indicators of Inclusive Schools, Alberta 2013), confirms the need to support all classrooms to enhance both student and staff learning, rather than moving students' schools or programs:
-   Differentiated instruction is an integral part of all classroom practice.
-   Positive behaviour supports are embedded in the classroom and school.
-   School routines and practices provide a level of structure and consistency that creates a safe, positive and supportive learning environment for all.
-   Professional learning activities help staff value/respond to student diversity
-   Teachers have opportunities to engage in collaborative problem solving.
-   Ongoing assessment identifies when students need additional services.
-   Teachers access support from specialists to help them meet the diverse needs of all students as removing students reduces learning opportunities.

Emerging Themes: The district programs benefit from smaller classes and centralized management promoting best practices. Program and District staff

expertise could be used to further develop a more flexible and inclusive continuum of programming and professional development planning.

Question 3. What suggestions are there for improvement?

Further developing all schools' Inclusive Practices
Staff respondents noted the need for "proper resource rooms, calm down spaces in all schools." They also questioned some inconsistencies and processes that appeared difficult to understand: "the mini program applications do not involve SBT…resulting in staff triaging 500 plus applications for 30 places…not all gifted students get a place…so they go to a District Program…why do these students not attend their neighbourhood school?" Both parents and staff noted: "some schools offer all students inclusion opportunities while others offer none."

Two survey questions concerned VSBs guiding principles and the Ministry of Education Inclusion Policy as requirements for successful inclusive learning.
- What services are needed for the successful inclusion of all students?
- Given the Ministry of Education policy, what changes would you like to see so program students participate meaningfully in their school community?

Staff reported different understandings about inclusion. While the BCTF notes: "SWSN have a right to an inclusionary public education system which prepares them for full citizenship in a democratic society," staff and parents commented: "some teachers see these programs as a box for these types of kids to fit into …so they do not have to deal with them…too many are not in their home school … program students and staff could be part of our school numbers…less student travel…could get other teachers more involved with co-teaching and shared assignments.… all secondary and large elementary schools have the full student range, so a greater school level programming focus makes sense."

However, many student, parent and Program Teacher responses were also a reminder that Program experiences are reportedly often better than some school experiences: "being with a smaller group of like-minded peers… having friends and sense of belonging to a community… having the right help ….right level/type of curriculum is important….that doesn't consistently happen in all schools."

It is important to note that the Ministry (pp.6, 23) "*does not expect services and programs to be organized or delivered along categorical lines…rather match the students' needs with services. Some schools combine special education services to create a 'Resource Teacher' model… one RT works with a number of classroom teachers to provide support for all students in their classrooms… high and low incidence groups…those with mild learning difficulties…needing enrichment; and in some cases, English language learners… no territorial lines in service delivery."*
*VS*B's District Programs are currently based on categorical criteria. Research generally suggests (Ontario 2015) School Based Teams organize and support flexible school programming based on students' functional and changing needs

e.g. students with Autism, LD and ADHD may equally benefit from small group literacy instruction using e.g. Orton Gillingham methods.

Using the Language of Inclusion and UDL to promote success

As noted throughout the review process, inconsistently applied vision and language may be limiting success for some students. As one teacher summarized: "to begin with let's be clear on the definitions… inclusion is a philosophy that all people matter and are valued… integration is a strategy about placement in mainstream that may (or may not) promote inclusion … the terms are not synonymous… we need a change in our thinking and our model….less program thinking…more collaboration about differentiated instruction …more knowledge sharing…research based, consistently applied assessments and interventions…some programs are excellent but totally segregated life skills programs demonstrate a glaring misconception about what inclusion means…Program and RTs need time to support students and their teachers in class...to talk more about programming than district programs...to discuss individual student needs …and not use labels such as "G kids" and "lifers".

There are very helpful Teaching to Diversity resources on the Ministry of Education and BCTF websites promoting the use of UDL, RTI, and Positive Behaviour Supports (PBS). While district staff and many District Programs are already using such approaches these are not always evident in school practices. As with student learning, some schools and staff will need more support with this than others, particularly from their school based administrators. Unfortunately some contextual challenges appear to have arisen from BC's 2015 Class Size and Composition Court Decision returning VSB's Collective Agreement to its 2002 status. Past systemic practices do not necessarily align easily with current best practices arising from recent changes to the BC Curriculum, Special Education categories and the increasing use of paraprofessional support. Some staff reported increasing difficulties for some students in accessing appropriate curricula based on UDL principles e.g. Secondary elective classes.

Schools that Learn (Senge, 2012), Ontario's Education for All (2015) and The Three Block Model for UDL *(Katz J; 2012 and 2013),* synthesize decades of research to provide suggestions for change. Finland *(2016)* has abolished separate special education curricula and like BC uses a revised curriculum individualized for SWSN by individual education plans. Their systems involve:

- Development of inclusion through, district, school and student-level planning, organisation and implementation as systemic change matters.
- Projects to develop inclusive school approaches for special, aboriginal, and other minority groups involving private, public and university sectors.
- The prevention of student exclusion and marginalization achieved through developing collaborative learning models to support all students and staff.

Emerging Themes:
VSB has a clear vision and knowledge of Inclusive Education among District Staff that appears to be inconsistently applied to school programming. Further

development of school programming that reflects current language and more consistent UDL practices is indicated.

Question 4. Other comments about particular success/ concerns?

Resource and Staffing Considerations

50% of survey respondents reported dissatisfaction with current resource allocations: "we don't have enough trained and qualified staff... caseloads are too large …RTs cover for staff absences…need more equitable distribution of funds." There are also some district practices that take considerable staff time e.g. Program applications and screening, which then result in spending $3 million on transporting 964 Program students; significantly more than comparator districts.

The C.A. staffing ratios are based on class/school size and ministry funding categories (Table 2). However, as more recent knowledge and review of class size and composition data suggest, classrooms and schools can have between 3% and 20% SWSN. Therefore RT allocation arguably needs to be greater for the 20% schools. Since student populations also change over time, many districts use annually revised "needs based" staffing allocations. VSB does this to allocate SSWs and Elementary School staffing. However, the use of Secondary non-enrolling staff ratios (librarians, counsellors, skills and RTs etc.) reportedly results in some significant variability as a school's own priorities may be to maintain current staff rather than respond to changing student needs.

Table 2: Staffing	Surrey SD36	VSB SD39	Coquitlam SD43
C.A. Class size/composition "Mainstreaming"	"resource rooms". 3 SWSN – reduce class by 2	"district programs" -ratio by 1 for 1/2 & 2 for 3rd SWSN	"accommodate" SWSN in classes + Prod, resources
LA/RT teachers Combined RTs –now often used	1:504(HI)1:218(LI) 1:410 (Elem) 1:550 (SG8-10)	1:504(HI)1:232(LI) *District Program staffing limit 1:15*	1:504(HI)1:273(LI) *Emphasis on L/RT SBT collaboration*
Counsellor(R/H)	1:965 (E)1:380(S)	1:535 Elem & Sec	1:523 Elem & Sec
District Service e.g. consultants	Few references as created after 2002	Few references as created after 2002	Few references as created after 2002

Inspection of comparator district financial reports indicates no significant differences in special education spending. Given the greater level of school programming in Surrey and Coquitlam, this supports research that school level programming is not cheaper but provides longer term benefits (Toronto School Board 2013). More typically at least the 565 "high incidence" students being transported across the District would be receiving programming at local schools.

Research (Katz 2013) suggests this is better for students as long as any accrued transport costs are used for staffing and professional development purposes.

The most important resource is staff (Senge 2012). A district's hiring practices, organisation, distributed leadership and ProD support staff in achieving its vision and goals. Current staff shortages are inextricably linked to Vancouver's cost of living and beyond school district control. Given this context it is even more critical to consider arrangements that encourage staff to work, learn and live locally.

System Clarity, Communication, Consistency and Collaboration (The 4 Cs)
Survey, focus group and school visit comments noted repeated references to systemic clarity, communication, consistency and collaboration. Given the number of district programs and variety of district personnel, it is perhaps not surprising: "it is sometimes unclear who to contact for what purposes…the system is complex …some mixed messages…service overlaps." District Staff "need to be consistent … have time to collaborate… to develop the trusted relationships necessary for staff and school capacity building… not be viewed as outsiders or welcome in some schools and some SBTs but not in others."

While District Program documentation is clear and regularly updated, some parents report that information about school programming arrangements is not always accessible, especially at the Secondary level. This is perhaps partly due to students being bussed to District Programs, thus reducing opportunities for direct contact with parents. Some parents reported being unaware, that every school has a SBT, RT and Counsellor who share responsibility with classroom teachers for additional programming and for assigning additional support staff.

Clarity, communication and consistency of student assessment, intervention and transition processes were commented on by parents, community partners and staff: "we need common and consistent use of research based assessments e.g. JJohns, KTEA, Brigance, ABLLS, DESSA…supports moved quickly to where the student is … clearly defined transition arrangements for students....decision making by school staff who know their students best …instead of numerous programs and district staff working across many schools, develop a Family of Schools (FOS)model so a smaller staff group collaborate as a school/FOS team."

The FOS model is based on Professional Learning Communities (PLC) research (Ontario 2007) and considered essential to Katz' (2012) Three Blocks of UDL:
> Block 1: Social Emotional Learning (SEL) - valuing diversity
> Block 2: Inclusive Instructional Practices - flexible student groupings
> Block 3: Systems and Structures – collaborative and inclusive systems

Senge (2012) also proposes schools and districts engage in "Systems Learning." Based on organisational learning research, this involves all three levels of the organisation (classrooms, schools and district/larger community) focussed on:
- each staff member having a clear vision and goals - Personal Mastery
- staff teams collaborating to achieve collective purpose - Shared Vision

- staff reflection and inquiry about different approaches - Mental Models
- aligning energies to achieve common/consistent goals - Team Learning
- finding ways to achieve/communicate effective change - Systems Thinking

Emerging Themes: School and District staffing, resources and organisational arrangements impact student learning. This could be enhanced through staff capacity building and systemic changes that better reflect the district's vision statement, guiding principles and goals.

Discussion referencing associated Research Literature

Vancouver has a clear vision and strategic plan that aims to promote inclusion and equitable learning for all students. However, from the review survey, focus group and school visit feedback it is suggested that VSB practices and language inconsistently reflect the vision. For example, while District Programs have skilled staff and incentives associated with small groups and student transport, other school staff have few incentives or resources to develop the necessary teaching to diversity skills. Paradoxically, removing so many students from local schools may have reduced staffs' need to develop the skills, and without these skills and resources there is a continued demand for District Programs. Systemic changes are required as summarized in Fig.1 below. A Learning Services action plan with ongoing review of skills, incentives and resources will be needed to address this.

Vision +	Skills +	Incentives +	Resources +	Action Plan =	**Change**
? vision	Skills +	Incentives +	Resources +	Action Plan =	*Confusion*
Vision	*? skills*	Incentives +	Resources +	Action Plan =	*Anxiety*
Vision	Skills +	*? incentives*	Resources +	Action Plan =	*Resistance*
Vision	Skills +	Incentives +	*? resources*	Action Plan =	*Frustration*
Vision	Skills +	Incentives +	Resources +	*? action plan*	*Treadmill*

Fig. 1 Change: Inclusion and School Improvement (Based on Senge, 2012)

Schools in rural districts typically have a longer history of teaching to diversity as District Programs were never an option. Further developing Vancouver's historical practices based on integration to more inclusive practices is no easy task as it requires undoing and relearning some strongly held beliefs. Some evolving practices demonstrate a shifting of resources towards more inclusive practice e.g. elementary co-teaching and part time programs. Others such as secondary RT and counsellor allocations and responsibilities based on whole school needs analyses are yet to be developed. There are changing roles for Program and Resource Teachers as practice develops from District Programs and integration towards school programming and inclusion as reflected in Fig.2.

District Programs and Integration	School Programming & Inclusion
Labelling focussed on student deficits e.g. Lifers, ARC, LSP, SSA, G/D/LD	Labelling focussed on learning for all e.g. resources, learning differences
Student Services (student focus)	Learning Services (staff and students)

Student Support Assistant (SSA)	Teacher/Education Assistant (TA/EA)
District Consults, Program Teachers, Continued use of district programs	All Resource Teachers/staff/schools. Increasing school level programming
Working in separate settings with opportunities for integration of groups/ individuals and "reverse integration"	Collaborating in inclusive settings with individuals/small groups/in classrooms as appropriate in all local schools
Old Curriculum: focus on knowledge acquisition, facts, content coverage	Revised curriculum: core competencies, personalized & real life learning for all

Fig.2: VSB Development: From Integration to Inclusion (Based on Katz 2012) Vancouver's District Programs cannot be reviewed in isolation from district level services, schools' and classroom programming arrangements. This must include the 579 Secondary Alternate Program students, 348 or nearly 80% of whom are reported in special education funding categories. The characteristics of each are associated with a systems continuum as summarized in Fig.3 below. Research has shown, as staff, parents and schools develop more inclusive thinking, skills and neighbourhood school practices, the need for District Programs reduces.

Integration – 1970s *A Strategy*	Inclusion – 1990s *A Philosophy*
Special students bussed from hospital class /school to mainstream/ special class	Social inclusion for all in neighbourhood schools: Teaching to Diversity values
Key question *Where* are special students educated? Near others but segregated most of the time. Limits role models and sense of belonging development.	**Key question** *What* does each student need? To be with local peers and receive some individual/small group instruction in separate settings as appropriate.
Focus on individuals Needs of special students with deficits – group by "special ness" locations	**Focus on learning for all** Rights of all students included in local communities – adult/student learning
Start with students in special schools/ classes/programs – move some to local schools – focus on their "specialness"	***Start with students in neighbourhood schools*** – move "special" staff to local schools, focus on both specialness and commonalities
Special Curriculum with adaptation, modification, differentiation for some	**Common curriculum** using UDL, PBS, RTI, core competencies for all
Application Group "like" students with special needs – goal is mainstream "readiness" *Change students* to fit current system	**Application** Celebrate diversity of all students – goal is to respect/accept all differences *Change the schools* to fit all students
Professionals	**Professionals**

Specialists support individual students in separate contexts – benefits individual students/few staff	Specialists support students and staff to build capacity of mainstream staff/ students – benefits all staff & students

Fig.3: Systems Continuum: District Programs & School Level Programming

In order to support systemic change many school districts promote Professional Learning Communities as the most effective form of ProD. The characteristics of PLCs include collective teamwork and shared responsibility for student learning. *Education for All* (Ontario 2005) indicates PLC characteristics as follows:

- Shared vision and values with collective staff commitment to best practice
- Working teams cooperate to achieve common goals
- Encouragement of experimentation as an opportunity to learn
- Questioning of the status quo, leading to ongoing professional learning
- Continuous improvement based on evaluation of outcomes
- Reflection in order to study the operation and impacts of actions taken

The development of PLCs appears to be a strategy that could also effectively be used beyond the Learning Services Department as it is more generally aligned with VSB's Strategic plan goals:

- To engage learners through innovative teaching and learning practices
- To build capacity through strengthening collective leadership
- To create a culture of care and shared social responsibility
- To provide effective leadership, governance and stewardship

For Vancouver, this requires alignment of the Strategic Plan goals and objectives to ensure that efforts are maximized. For the Learning Services Department, the challenge will be maintaining and adequately resourcing some District Programs in the short term while at the same time promoting school level practices. Some schools are already responsive to the full range of student diversity and rarely need to refer students to District Programs, while for others this may take some time. There will need to be ongoing joint planning with other departments and agencies. For example, while VSB's vision and guiding principle of inclusion require development of programming at every neighbourhood school, this is not a special education issue alone. It requires joint planning between:

- the facilities department to ensure resource room(s) space(s) in every school and potential "resource hubs" with a Family of schools (FOS)
- the human resources department to promote best practices hiring and allocation of appropriate staff time to schools
- the associate superintendents and directors responsible for curriculum to plan for common curricular, assessment and reporting approaches
- community partners: parents, health, social services, aboriginal and other agencies to collaborate and share practice developments

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- others as appropriate but likely includes local universities and colleges for research and professional development

Of critical importance is consistent communication to promote a shared understanding by all students, parents and staff. The review recommendations aim to promote the phased development of special education programming, not simply to close district programs. The difference between the approaches taken by District Programs and School Programming, need to be understood. Research and evidence from the majority of classrooms and schools in the current context suggests that IEP programming based at all local neighbour-hood schools is the most effective means of supporting diverse students. This will require District Program Staff to share their expertise in ways already being promoted by Programs offering flexible part-time placements, ProD and collaboration. At times this may also include individual and small group teaching arrangements that extend beyond the local school e.g. part-time placements, cluster classes/camps, community swimming/sport, work experience. The following prioritized review recommendations below relate to Goal 1, Objective 1:

"to enhance support for all students with specific needs"

Recommendations

Recommendations arise from contextual information gathering, successes and challenges raised by stakeholders and current research. The recommendations prioritized from the review's emerging themes, provide a starting point from which an action plan may be developed. This is ideally determined by a steering group of administrators, program, district and school based staff, students and parents, reporting to the Senior Management Team. Their work is to develop and support:

A 5 year action plan with short, medium and long term measurable goals with clear objectives, strategies and expected annual outcomes.

Emerging Theme 1 – District Vision, Range of Programs and Staff.
The district vision, range of programs and staff expertise is invaluable. However, the organisation of High Incidence District Programs and low incidence programming in Secondary Schools and large Elementary Schools in particular, may benefit from a more inclusive and flexible service delivery model.

1. Pilot Secondary Learning Support Programs (LSP) as school programming. Suggest secondary schools self-identify. Provide incentives to include enhanced staffing and ProD. Begin with the September 2018 Grade 8 cohort and allow programming to extend through Grade 12 as necessary. Pilot school staff, students and parents involved are ideally part of the steering/working group whose longer term responsibilities would include the sharing of best practices and replication of successes to other schools.

2. Pilot fully inclusive Secondary Schools as above. Begin with September 2019 Grade 8 cohorts. Promote flexible groupings of like-minded peers in local

neighbourhood schools. Develop appropriate courses for the full range of students to maximize graduation rates and reduce segregated programs, especially for students identified in high incidence categories.

3. Further develop elementary programming using the part-time, flexible and collaborative models already in place. Support students in local schools with part time programming as necessary and with "extra" timetabling e.g. afternoon/ 3pm/summer classes. This likely involves development of classroom teacher, RT, counsellor and SSW roles and responsibilities.

In the longer term, review arrangements for all students, especially when programs need to be moved or the student population changes. Build on current elementary and secondary pilot successes to promote inclusive neighbourhood schools. Fully inclusive pilot Secondary School programming could simply be developed as school level programming using their current Program staff expertise. This requires co-ordination with the human resources and facilities departments. Always ask first: "what is needed for each student to be successful at their local school, rather than which district program should this student go to?"

Emerging Theme 2 – Service Delivery Continuum and Professional Development
The district programs benefit from smaller classes and centralized management promoting best practices. Program and District staff expertise could be used to further develop a more flexible and inclusive continuum of programming and professional development planning.

4. Update all documents/website outlining a continuum of both school and district level programming, staff roles and responsibilities to reflect consistent use of the district's vision statement. Use electronic formats that are easily accessed and updated e.g. North Vancouver 2014. Documentation should include guidelines for School Based Teams and a district wide list of SBT meeting times to promote district staff attendance, collaboration and capacity building. Promote transparency and consistency by making documents accessible to parents, staff and the broader community.

5. Develop the counsellor role and responsibilities to include case-management, and IEP writing for students identified in the R and H categories. Their expertise in the area of social-emotional learning is as yet an underutilized resource. Their work ideally includes the full continuum of both preventative whole class approaches e.g. Anti-Bullying, as well as targeted work with smaller groups and individual casework for students with IEPs. They are well placed to lead Integrated Case-Management meetings for students receiving community or alternate program services. Pilot secondary schools could have their counsellors trained by their school RTs for September 2018, and others trained during the fall 2018.

6. Prioritize a professional development plan that focuses on every level:

parents, SSWs, teachers, administrators. Encourage the use of PLCs and team/whole staff ProD incorporating mentoring, co-teaching and collaboration. Provide training and support to develop effective SBT practices, particularly for school based administrators and RTs. Consider a VSB Masters' program for aspiring RTs and links with local colleges to provide SSW training. Prioritize Secondary and pilot school access for professional development as above and for specific work e.g. J. Katz.

In the longer term, each school plan ideally includes a teaching to diversity goal. This in turn informs the District's Professional Development plan. Staff completing professional growth plans should be encouraged to align their efforts to include a teaching to diversity goal. Every secondary school and particularly pilot schools will benefit from an experienced Special Education Department Head to assist administrators with the implementation of developments. It will likely be helpful to clarify District Program and school programming labels that are consistent with both Elementary and Secondary inclusive practices.   The need is to promote transparency and consistency by simplifying labels and using terms that reflect the District's inclusive education vision and strategic plan.

Emerging Theme 3 – Developing Inclusive Education.
VSB has a clear vision and knowledge of Inclusive Education among District Staff that appears to be inconsistently applied to school programming. Further development of school programming that reflects current language and more consistent UDL practices is indicated.

7. Focus on neighbourhood schools' development and UDL using a classroom teacher focus that also improves equality and accessibility e.g. supporting classroom teachers with ProD, co-teaching and SSW time. Align what historically have been segregated systems: regular and special education, District Programs and school programming. This shift in focus is complex, requiring all staff to assume somewhat different roles e.g. it is more about co-teaching and collaboration than a single teacher assigned to a numerically limited group of similar aged/type of students.

8. When planning for the use of Learning Services and non -enrolling personnel, it is generally best to think in terms of creating effective classroom environments with equality of student access, rather than attempting to meet the needs of each student by assigning resources individually or by funding category. This is because students within different funding categories likely benefit from small group learning using similar approaches based on their functional needs e.g. social skills and friendship groups for students with Autism, ADHD and language disorders.

9. Prioritize the consistent use of RTI, UDL and PBS. Promote a shared VSB vision and understanding of the inter-relationships between social-emotional (SEL) and academic leaning. Formulate curriculum school/FOS teams to support development and use of UDL rubrics for sharing among

all staff. Align the tiered (RTI) supports for both SEL and academic learning in support of students who more typically struggle at times with both aspects e.g. students with a learning disability may have low self-esteem and gifted students may struggle to fit in socially.

In the longer term the Learning Services Department will need to work more closely with facilities, human resources and curriculum departments. There is a need to plan for every school to have adequate space to meet the needs of diverse learners and for the FOS distribution of district staff to local schools. The language of integration should be replaced with the language of RTI, UDL and PBS. This will require joint planning and ProD opportunities co-delivered and modelled by classroom teachers and special educators working together e.g. reading recovery teachers with classroom teachers and RTs. There is considerable expertise among District Learning Services and Program staff to provide ongoing support within their schools. These staff will need to share their skills, to help build capacity of the entire school team of classroom teachers, non-enrolling staff and administrators.

Emerging Theme 4: Resourcing Equality and Systems Learning.
School and District staffing, resources and organisational arrangements impact student learning.   This could be enhanced through staff capacity building and systemic changes that better reflect the district's vision statement, guiding principles and goals.

10. Develop the FOS model to share staff/resources by geographic area and to promote Professional Learning Communities (Ontario 2007) and reduce travel time (staff and students). Locate district staff in "school hubs" to help build school staff capacity. Promote the use of full time experienced and trained RTs (Diploma/Masters). The aim is to prioritize District staff time with staff and students in schools. Some school based administrators may need guidance and support in using the FOS and PLC models.

11. Develop a needs based formula for Resource Teacher and counsellor allocation to schools, similar to that already used for SSW allocation. This could also be informed by the Ministry planning tools (mild, moderate, complex needs) and must be reviewed each year to reflect the changing school populations. Use SBT and FOS processes for ongoing learning, inquiry, reflection and adaptation to ensure that classroom practice and service supports are equitable and effective for all students.

12. Focus on learning services, program and school staff working together. Their collective focus on student learning via whole staff and SBT meetings should include consideration of RT, counselling and SSW allocations. Flexible, adaptive and collaborative school based approaches maximize resources as they can be reorganized quickly in response to changing circumstances. District staff are well placed to support this developing

SBT role. Any future District Program applications should consistently begin with SBT ensuring all possible supports have been accessed. At this likely includes full time SSA and co-teaching arrangements or part time placement in a separate setting.

In the longer term, use a systems approach in addition to the student centred approach to promote effective and efficient use of resources. Effective academic and behaviour support involves the development of a series of interrelated systems which include district and school-wide, classroom and individual student support systems. Reduce centralized decision making once guidelines as outlined in a handbook are in place and School/FOS teams are able to take on further responsibility for all SWSNs, supported by a District Team of professionals who are well known by the schools they serve. This likely requires District Staff to have a broader range of skills than previously expected and the ability to collaborate with colleagues in order to enhance their professional learning. Jennifer Katz' 2012 and 2013 handbooks provide excellent coverage of what is required and could be used by all schools to guide future developments.

Endnote

This review has used an Appreciative Inquiry Process (Fig. 4, Cooperrider et al 2008), a process which is as yet incomplete.   The aim has been to "Discover" the current reality, and investigate VSB's "Dream" through its vision and strategic planning goals and objectives. Recommendations made suggest some "Design" revisions specific to the continuum of special education programs and programming. To this end I trust the review has achieved its goals.
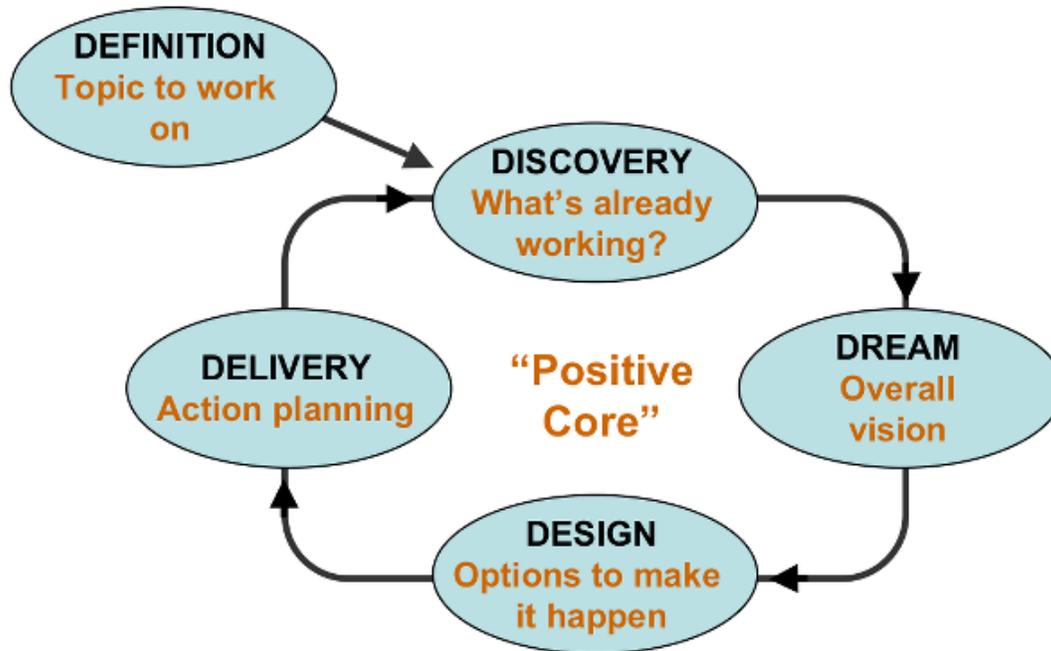
Fig. 4: The Appreciative Inquiry Process – from Review to Action Plan

The process must now continue as it is the "Delivery" of an agreed action plan that must follow. Who will be the champions of this work? How does the district align their efforts to further develop more inclusive education for the benefit of all students and staff? To this end it will likely be helpful to meet with both District and School based staff to share the review findings and involve them in the action planning, prior to the new school year. The action plan should then guide future directions and provide the means by which ongoing review becomes part of the development process.

As the review suggests, Diversity and Inclusion are the cultural transformation that touch upon every aspect of our current education system and student learning, particularly for students with special needs. VSB has laid some sound foundations for its future work.

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APPENDICES: VSB District Special Education Programs Review

Appendix 1 - Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC)

Chair and Director of Instruction: Catherine Jamieson – now Mette Hamaguchi

Adrian Keough	VSB
Alivia Maric	GLD Advocacy Group

Andrea Davidson	VSB
Angela Haveman	VASSA
Deanne Ziebart	Director, Vocational and Community Services Developmental Disabilities Association
Douglas L. Matear	VSB
Erin Arnold	DPAC
Erin Gibbs	VEPVPA
Susan Kurbis	VESTA
Joy Alexander	Trustee
Ingrid Kusnierczyk	Vancouver Coastal Health
Kate Raven	LDAV
Lara McNaughton	BCCFA
Lisa McKay	CLBC
Mike Borason	VSTA
Perveen Joy Engineer	CUPE 15
Ruth Anne Lesar	Ministry of Children and Family Development CYSN (Child and Youth with Special Needs)
Selma Smith	VSB

Appendix 2 - VSB District Elementary Special Education Program Types

#	Name	Grade	#students	SpEd Category	Program Duration	School Base	Staffing Teach/SSA
1L	TEIR	2	8	Q /BRA<6	5 months	Collingwood	1/1
2L	ELSP	4-7	15	Q	?	Queen Eliza.	1/1
3L	ELSP	4-7	15	Q	?	Dickens	1/1
4L	ELSP	4-7	15	Q	?	Nootka	1/1
5L	ELSP	4-7	15	Q	?	Brock	1/1
6L	ELSP	4-7	15	Q	?	Moberly	1/1

7L	ELSP	4-7	15	Q	?	Kingsford	1/1
8L	ELSP	4-7	15	Q	?	Norquay	1/1
9 B	SELC	1-3	8	?R	4 months	Norquay	1/2
10B	SELC	1-3	8	?R	4 months	Brock	1/2
11B	ExSEL	1-7	10	R/H	1 year	McBride	1/2
12B	ExSEL	1-7	10	R/H/D/G	1 year	Hastings	1/2
13B	ExSEL	1-7	10	R/H/D/G	1 year	Bayview	1/2
14B	ExSEL	1-7	10	R/H/D/G	1 year	Carleton	1/2
15B	ExSEL	1-7	10	R/H/D/G	1 year	Nightingale	1/2
16B	ExSEL	1-7	10	R/H/D/G	1 year	Beaconsfield	1/2
17B	ExSEL	1-7	10	R/H/D/G	1 year	Henderson	1/2
18B	ExSEL	1-7	10	R/H/D/G	1 year	Waverley	1/2
19B	ExSEL	1-7	10	R/H/D/G	1 year	Renfrew	1/2
20B	Alder'	1-7	16	R/H/D	I year	Alderwood	2/2
21L	MACC	4-7	21	P?	?	Kerrisdale(f)	1
22L	MACC	4-7	21	P?	?	Osler	1
23L	MACC	4-7	21	P?	?	Tecumseh	1
24A	LI -life	4-7	?	C/G	?	Mackenzie	1/?
25A	LIASD	K-7	?	G	?	Cunningham	1/?
26A	LIASD	K-3	?	G	?	Lord Nelson	1/?
*	**Total 8 types**	**K-7**	**298 + LI students attend programs** *? indicates intake varies*	**14 high incidence 8low/high incidence 3 low incidence programs**	4 mth to 1 yr intervention ? longer than a year (previously for life now under review)	**24 different schools host 25 programs**	**27 Teachers 31 SSAs + ?LI SSA**

*Notes * L denotes learning focus, B denotes behaviour focus, A denotes all round focus.*
VSBs 2017 SSP booklet shows 8 elementary program types in 26 programs.
In September 2017, 301 students in total were registered in district programs (36 primary and 265 intermediate students)
The actual students and program types do not always match what is outlined in the District Student Support Programs Booklet e.g. LIASD classes currently have only have Grades K-4 students, Renfrew "Special Remedial" class has 5 students.

Appendix 3 – VSB District Secondary Special Education Program Types

#	Name	Grade	#students	SpEd Category	Program Duration	School Base	Staffing Teach/SSA
1	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Brittania	1
2	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Churchill	1
3	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	DavidThom	1
4	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Gladstone	1

5	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	John Oliver	1
6	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Killarney	1
7	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Magee	1
8	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Point Grey	1
9	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Princewales	1
10	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Tupper	1
11	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	VanTechnic	1
12	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Windermere	1
13	LSP	8-9	15	Q	2 years	Templeton	1
13	LAC	8-12	15	K	?	EricHamber	1/1
14	LAC	8-12	15	K	?	John Oliver	1/1
15	LAC	8-12	15	K	?	Killarney	1/1
16	LAC	8-12	15	K	?	Vantechlink	1/1
17	GOLD	8-9	?	PQ/GRH	?	DavidThom	1/1
18	GOLD	8-9	?	PQ/GRH	?	Princewales	1/1
19	Kitsm	10-12	45 (15x3)	?	3 years	Kitsilano	3
20	STEP	10-12	45 (15x3)	?	3 years	Gladstone	3/1SSA
21	SACY	7-12	?	?	4 months	?Gladstone	?
22	PASE	10-12	15	?	2 years	Windermere	1
23	SecStr	8-12	15	?D	?	University H	1/2
24	BSsoc	8-9	14	R/H	?	Brittania	1/2
25	BSsco	8-9	14	R/H	?	DavidThom	1/2
26	LIARC	?	15	G	?	Churchill	1/1
27	LIARC	?	15	G	?	DavidThom	1/1
28	LA/LS	8-12	15	K (g,d?)	5 years	8 secondary	½ - 8/16
29	LI life	8-12	15	CGD	5 years	9 secondary (11 classes)	9/? 11/?
30	SecTr	12	10	A-G & K	1 year	VCC p time GTE Tupper	1/1Wex
13 prog types	**Total 30+ 17* =47**	**18 Gr8-9 25 G8-12 3**	**718 students + ?Gold**	**20 high incidence 6low/high**	**2-5+ years with electives**	**All secondary schools host at least one program**	**51 teachers 30 plus? SSA**

		10-12	**attend programs**	**21 low incidence programs**	**inclusion for some**		

Note: LA/LS and/or LA/life skills programs are available in 17 Secondary Schools.
This does not include the 22 Alternate Program sites – mainly serving students with R/H designations.

Appendix 4 - VSB Summary Secondary Special Education Programs by School

18 Schools 13 prog. types	LSP	Sec str	GOLD	ARC	Li/La	LI/Lif	LAC	Bsp SD	PREEM	PASE	STEP	Gateway	Alt	SACY
Brittania	x							x					2	.
Churchill	x			x										.
David Thompson	x		x	x				x						.
Gladstone	x				x	x						x		.
John Oliver	x				x	x	x						1	.
Killarney	x				x		x						3	.
Point Grey	x				x	x								.
Magee	x				x									.
Templeton	x					x							1	.
Prince of Wales	x		x											.
Tupper	x					x						X (reg)	2	.
Vancouver Technical	x				x	x	x							.
Windermere	x					x				x				.
Eric Hamber					x	x	x						1	.
Lord Byng					x									.
Kitsilano						x				x			1	.

University Hill	x													.
King George														.
Program Total	13	1	2	2	8	9	4	1	1	1	1	1	11	

Notes: SACY can be accessed by any student – short term substance use initiative. In September 2017, 721 students were registered at Secondary District Programs. LSP, Sec Strategies, GOLD and ARC all have students on Dogwood programs. Some alternate programs are at/near secondary school sites. 11 Secondary based Alternate and 12 VASS programs (total 579 students) are under separate review.

Appendix 5 – VSB Special Education Program Review: Comparator SD Data

District Variable	Surrey SD36	Vancouver SD39	Coquitlam SD43
Total # Students	72,000	52,000	33,000
Total Sp.Ed. Students **#High Incidence K,P,Q** **# Behaviour Categories** **#Low Incidence A-G**	7,433 2,429 2,302 2,702	5,147 2,394 (420) 977 (150) 1,776 (305) (bracketed student # in District Programs)	5,001 3,509 585 907
6 year graduation % **Sp.Ed. graduation %**	89% 68%	88% 71%	90% 79%
Total # Schools **Elementary** **Middle** **Secondary**	120 101 - 19	110 92 - 18	70 45 14 11
Schools Capacity Rate	106%	81%	90%
Total # District Progs. (programs not at all schools) **# High incidence K,P,Q** **# Behaviour Categories** **# Low Incidence A-G**	*20 10 (all Elementary) 5 5	72 37 (12 Elementary) 14 21	9 5 (4 Elementary) 3 1
District Program Types **Elementary** **Middle** **Secondary**	11 4 - 7	21 8 - 13	9 4 4 1
Total # SpEd students attending district programs	**321** (167 elem; 154 sec.)	**1064** (304 elem; 760 sec.) Plus 579 Alternate	**164**

	No Type 3 Alternate (5 types secondary SEL programs)	Total 1643 students	(50 elem; 84 middle; 30 secondary) Plus 160 Alternate Total 324 students

Notes: The comparator school districts are the three largest in the Province of BC.
* Surrey has some "district" programs based at all schools e.g. all Secondary Schools have Bases programs for Low Incidence students who are unable to achieve Dogwood graduation. Some programs are in the process of being school based. This is different from VSB where e.g. not all secondary schools have such programs. Some "Programs" are part time - students remain enrolled at their home school and attend part days or part of the year. Thus direct comparisons between district programs is difficult as this is also dependent on school based staffing arrangements and itinerant support services available to all schools. Note also that many secondary students reported in the behaviour categories R and H attend Secondary Alternate Schools and Programs (please refer to separate VSB Alternate School Review).

Appendix 6: Focus Group Staff, Parent, Student, Community Partner Summary

STAFF 1. What is currently working well for students to achieve success?
Program *(note: all comments ordered by response frequency: first being most frequent)*
Consistent team of experienced, qualified, open-minded, willing to learn staff (some)
Small setting /class size, no more than 2 grade groups, structured program, good space
Time to talk about students, goals, programming, behaviour plans, resources (some)
Communication – between admin, teachers and programs – Blog for families/staff
School
Integration adds value – some (not all teachers and admin) are willing to include
Space – pull out space, central/accessible, sensory room for regulation (some schools)
Having administration that will listen/advocate for staff and students, include program
RTI – assessment driven levelled/tiered intervention (some schools)
Some schools are able to support more students in their community/local school
District
Staff hiring/selection for special education, with additional training/experience
Professional development opportunities - relevant for all staff – recent improvements
Early screening of students, ongoing assessments
TEIR and ELSP program models (short term, with support in mainstream and ProD)
District LS staff are accessible/provide good support, program resources e.g. STIBS

2. What challenges are limiting the success achieved by ALL SWSNs?
Program
Program may not be the best for student – do they have adequate support in mainstream?
Program Stigma. Number of children with violent/same behaviour/disability in one classroom (role model?). Access to technology, curriculum resources, staff burnout
School
Classroom teachers not understanding or taking responsibility for SWSN; left to program
Unclear roles between teacher and SSA, school level RTs high caseload, inconsistency
Lack of collegiality – not being part of school community, lack of understanding

Understanding of what inclusion means - Elementary more inclusive than secondary
Regular teachers overwhelmed – need simple approaches e.g. single page adaptations
SSAs need better guidance on how to support academics (rather than "busy work"),
access to regular teacher curriculum expertise, better understanding of SEL/mental
health
District
Hiring enough qualified teachers, SSAs and district staff, lack of substitute teachers/
SSA access to specialist/therapists, BCBA trained staff, clarity/consistency of
roles/programs and who does the teacher go to for management decisions (school
admin or district?)
Placing incompatible students in same program, Transition planning – limited
integration,
Collaboration time – all levels (SSA and teacher, teacher and principals, district staff)
Time for resource/program teachers to work alongside classroom teachers
Staffing allocation seems to vary across schools – annually review needs based
formula?
Lack of support in the home schools vs busing to them to "programs" revisit model
Admin should not be able to move the SpEd time away from SpEd
Is program setting or is main stream with 100% support better for the student?
1 to 2 year full time model—disconnects students into a bubble for too long – but some
need longer than e.g. grade8/9 program. Lack of fluidity- kids can do well in
mainstream

**3. What suggestions do you have for improvement so all students to achieve
success?**
Program
Consultation with teachers and support staff around learning resources that will work
More collaboration time for programming/ debriefing, time with consultants/parents
School
Consistency across all schools with regard to early screening and intervention
SSAs – with additional expertise e.g. Orton Gillingham, in every elementary school
Avoid totally segregated Resource Rooms– ideally place in the centre of the school
Referrals shouldn't result from unskilled teacher or insufficient support staff.
Offering parents support groups/in-services/development at school level, parents to
observe their students at school in discrete way. More collaborative placement
decisions.
Access to counsellors who have clear and consistent roles/expectations (write IEPs)
Access to school psych and SLP consultative support to each program/school
District
ProD for ALL includes modelling, mentoring, collaboration, experiences workshops.
Mentoring available for new teachers and SSA's in district programs – for class
teachers.
Consider compatibility of classroom environment before placing new students.
Review program structures e.g. separate junior/senior groups, program size, staffing
Paperwork requirements – need to streamline/minimize, so more student time
Access to appropriate technology – laptops, ipads, electronic forms (IEPs)

Only teachers who know/teach the student should case-manage/write IEPs – and once they start with a student in Grade 8 they ideally case-manage until Grade 12
Gradual entries (and transitions) model to reflect the need for connections to home school
DRTs to provide "SELC like" in-service and mentoring for home schools/ families.
More District support to homeschool teachers to keep kids in their home schools.
Access/consistency of assessments (school level, psych eds, OT, SLP) mental health.
A portal that is easy to navigate and has all the needed resources that are up to date
More consistency across the district for all requirements. "Special on call staff pool"
Educating families – more opportunities for parents/families to learn.
More fluid/flexibility between programs/schools e.g. Finnish, Surrey, North Van models with programs integrated into all schools- no need for high incidence district programs.

4. Any further comments/successes /concerns that the review should consider?
Program
Treat the kids like they're safe, valued, respected - build trust, more school level decision making. Share best practice – underlying philosophies need consistency of recommended curricula e.g. ABLLS, AFFLS - Opportunities to share resources and curriculum.
School
More use of the home school with support. Larger schools organised as "schools within a school" with junior and senior sectors. Admin with flexibility/management responsibility
Everyone needs a better attitude about inclusion – this applies to all staff/students – class teachers should be able to "pass the buck." Grade 8/9 programs – then what in Grade 10?
New administration need awareness of programs and support needed e.g. minibus share
District
Sharing resources - system for bulk ordering books and teaching materials – for all staff
District staff who know their schools well – better collaboration (assign fewer schools?)
Bus service- expensive luxury, organisational efficiencies: district/school/program.

PARENTS: 3 focus groups summary ordered with 1st item being most commented
1. What is currently working well for students to achieve success?
Staff consistency (some schools), teamwork, experienced and skilled teachers, program teachers have training, program success varies- is very teacher dependent
Smaller class size (15:2), students being with like-minded peers (gifted)
Integration with mainstream (some schools)
Curriculum e.g. gifted mentorship, motivating programs, teach self-advocacy
Parents can visit programs before making a decision but cannot visit regular schools
2. What challenges are limiting the success achieved by ALL SWSNs?

Lack of trained and qualified teachers and SSAs, staffing inconsistency, staff say "there is nothing we can do for your child here" (go to program implied) – little shared knowledge of programs. Responsibility confusion between teachers & SSAs.
Lack of "real" inclusion opportunities, students leaving established peer group to attend a program, program criteria fits square pegs (students) in round holes.
If mainstream classes were better supported, local schools would be a real choice.
Silo effect of Programs, responsibility/ accountability? More systemic flexibility needed
IEP quality (some schools), staff not knowing difference between adapted/modified.
Access to more electives in secondary. "**Clarity** on the roadmap" for transitions.
Consistency between home and school programs. **Communication**: who, when, how?

3. What suggestions do you have for improvement so all students to achieve success?
Staff: hiring professional, trained and experienced staff (not 1st year teachers), more creative recruitment/retention strategies, sabbaticals, housing support, seniority does not work when staffing sped, consistency e.g. case-managers with student for several years
Inclusion: *"from a business perspective 72 programs is insane – resulting in a silo effect – needs better co-ordination, assimilation and balance with school level programming"* Working in a silo creates a non-developmental mentality – system is "stuck" in 70s, too complex. Need programs/programming/accessibility/more RTs in all schools.
More ProD – for everyone – teachers, admin and SSAs – also parents.
Modernize **language** used, (not retarded, handicapped, lifers), community partners welcome in schools – clear mandates for this to happen, teaching all students about diversity, acceptance of difference, not designations ("hierarchies of shame"). Model good Elementary practices at Secondary. Increase use of mentoring, co-teaching.
More assessments including psych ed – so we know our child is learning
Communication between block and home-room teachers. Website information.
More **leadership**/oversight – who at district do parents talk to if school not helpful

4. Any further comments about issues that you feel the review should consider?
Who makes the various program "boxes", including those in mainstream? Can the entire system strive to be more individual student centred? Rationalize/optimize the number of programs and programming at local schools – use FOS model to rationalise.
Class size and composition – stop talking about Sped kids as if they are a burden
What can we learn from other districts/places e.g. use UDL – reduce silos and isolation
Transportation review – especially given "forced" cross border placement
Review to have clear recommendations with a follow up plan to monitor progress with transparent and accessible data for all stakeholders
Corporate sponsorship acceptance e.g. sell land only if developer builds new school
Community Partner, Speech Language Pathologist *and STUDENT* Feedback
1. What is working well?
Staffing: consistent, committed and knowledgeable (some schools, district staff)
Inclusion: Student right to be part of the school community (some schools)-more teachers buy into inclusion more than in past/is already evident in other districts
IEPs: done well with community staff involved (some schools)

STUDENTS: Friends, small groups, like minded peers, computers, Wednesday half days, field trips, integrated classes, electives, learning things that help in real life, access to mentors, choice, projects, teachers who "get" us, longer periods of self-directed work

2. What are the Challenges?

Staffing: inconsistency, turnover, low capacity, secondary staff unwilling to teach to diversity, student success highly dependent on particular teachers/SSAs
Resource teachers unsure of their role and competency, Secondary caseload to high
Inclusion: Students not in their community school – resistance to change
IEP goals need to be SMARTER and in line with student needs
VPs being assigned case-management of low incident students when not skilled
STUDENTS: too many distractions, the work is hard/not at right level, when it is boring or too noisy, worrying about my future, no /not enough help, old technology, stigma /stereotypes – makes it hard to socialize (distance from other student's homes)

3. What could be improved?

Staff training – release time for admin teachers and SSAs – curriculum for support orientation, mentoring – performance monitoring of program teachers/ SSAs
Inclusion – especially at Secondary – guidelines/accountability of how to work
IEPs - Programming that prepares student for real life, improved curriculum design – including PE for life skills students, use of Ministry guidelines e.g. SMART goals, being case-managed and written by school based teachers (not SSA or district staff)
Transition planning: parent support and longer term plans. Better communication.
Collaboration between school teams, parents and health partners, Program clarity,
Consistent resources for all programs e.g. washers/dryers, swim pool access
Consistency, clarity, communication (4Cs) e.g. co-ordinate who, what, when, where
District Program placements – clear criteria? How it is decided and communicated?
Specialist teams are too compartmentalized – need to connect (FOS model?)
STUDENTS: teachers helping me learn, understanding Gifted/LD/ASD, more staff/help, more electives, computers that work, someone to talk to when I am stressed, more work experience, help to make friends

4. Further comments

Continue to develop relationships with community partners, new model of service – with guidelines for collaboration that are consistent across all schools
Review SSA roles and responsibilities – communicate this to teachers/parents
Lack of responsibility is evident in many secondary life skills classes – no evidence of providing anything other than basic needs/"filling time" (some programs)
STUDENTS: I like and don't like this class, because sometimes there is bad behaviour and not enough help, hard to socialize with other people. Like to be with like-minded

Appendix 7 - VSB Review: School Visit Observation/Interviews Summary

1. What are the main reasons for students attending the program?

Elementary Behaviour Programs: SEB. ExSEL students have greater needs than SELC? Need more student assessment before program as unsure about academic and behaviour needs. Most go into a Secondary SEL program. SELC – connection with the home school. District identifies students for 16 week program (half at SELC half at own school) - if more of these then reduces need for ExSEL as it helps change teachers lenses due to home school connections/PROD…..share skills with others. ExSEL needs more of that but hard when students are bussed. Have 2 year model (G 6/7) before had 4 grades…students learn how to be with other teachers/staff. Lack of staff skills/RT time/"entrenched" culture in some schools (refer more kids)

Elementary Learning Programs: LSP Grades 5/6/7 has Literacy centre model – all schools have these kids – the ones who get here have a psych ed and Q and have self-esteem issues but we see these in all schools. Most go to Secondary LSP. LSP – used to be a communications class – now G4-7 able Q students – observed as being independent learners (doing art in LSP why not regular? not enough "reverse integration." (dated concept) 2 year grade span better. Need to cluster "like" students and some schools refuse to group e.g. in same class (not with "like" peers)

2. What is the learning focus for these students?

Elementary Behaviour Programs – before they stayed with us until they were "ready" – now aim for one year but we have 2 students in 2nd year – they learn strategies so they can manage mainstream –one student needs OT assessment (obvious) – one student on reduced days. SEL skills development – but also academics – we prepare them to fit better into regular school – have some integration. At secondary transition we plan from January – narrow choices, joint decision with parents and District consult – parents accompanied on visits to secondary program. Teach Zones, PBS, PATHS, Mindfulness- also teach staff.

Elementary Learning Programs: LSP – CS& Composition issues effecting reverse integration – these students are not really that different from some the RT has – just less. Little time for liaison with school based RT more with other LSPs as we meet.

3. What additional supports/services does the program offer?

Elementary Behaviour Programs: 10 students: 3 staff – connect with a 3-4 class for buddy program – had STIBS worker. Consistency in program but transitions into and out of program? Do visit schools but unlike SELC no ongoing communication /staff training for home school. Students bussed – can come and go between 8.40 and 3.30 so fluid start/finish. Teamwork important. SSA and Youth worker part of team. Collaboration time with staff is key – sharing professional expertise – need time with Resource teacher but not always possible

– have monthly in-service and follow up with schools – model is well received....staff feel supported/are interested in learning new approaches - engage home school/reduce referrals.

Elementary Learning Programs: LSP – teachers select assessments and interventions – 4 year range of grades – students know they are in a program not a regular school – not good? Most students go onto the LSP at local school. Some schools seem to refer more than other schools. Need common district assessments.

4. Physical location and student access observed/discussed?

Elementary Behaviour Programs: Good space with main classroom, office, pull out room and kitchen, outside access – need computers/ipads that work!
At least one student appeared very able (behaviour and academics – why here?) "ASD student...would be better placed in mainstream with support, but he is already placed here for year....the behaviours he sees/strategies we use not appropriate." PBS and Mindfulness approaches used. Have basic classroom in centre of corridor – no pull out space is not ideal (one location) – new leadership is very supportive – wants more inclusion for all students " in my other school many of the kids I see in this program would just be regular kids – so why are they here?"

Learning Programs: Good spaces – centre of school LSP – outstanding experienced staff team – worked previous models – "TIER and SELC are best models"

5. Learning and behaviour approaches observed/discussed?

Behaviour Programs: Good visuals, structure, routines calming atmosphere (lighting and staff approaches) good materials and approaches – calm environment even with one student screaming**.** PBIS evident – fidget toys used – every opportunity taken for SEL e.g. no making fun and kicking reflection on PE lesson. Mainstream integration encouraged for all students – can access a cooking program at the local community centre – one student should not be placed here – would be better in mainstream with support- but he is a program student so?

Learning Programs: LSP has little contact with RT – RT has to cover absence of SELC teacher and LSP – so RT students loose out time – RTs need their own space not smaller spaces (as in new school designs) – at this school there is also a challenge class (in house not MACC) so they need space too. Need district consistency of assessment and intervention and inclusion – get kids from many schools and it is difficult to know each student profile – all schools could use e.g. Jerry Johns, KTEA, Academy of reading/math – otherwise how can you teach well?

6. Additional Comments – Observed and Discussed

Consistency of staffing is important – need more contact with local schools and parents of students. Too many kids not in home school – students listed with multiple codes e.g. HDK, DQP. "We have the model flipped on its head –what is our goal for each student – then move the background, resources etc to make this happen – not move the child - if we did not have programs we could have the students registered and part of our school numbers – so we can better manage the

CS&C ...this is just a regular group of kids that most schools have anyway.... there are better ways." RTs have too many kids – program teachers have only 10-14.
1. Need more support for mainstream – before moving students. Hire trained RTs.
2. More ProD for ALL staff – regular teachers and program staff – shared understanding of behaviour as learning (emotional/fragile/explosive/gifted/LD)
3. Recognise that every school has a different culture and thresholds are different.
4. We are supporting kids in these programs....but...are we supporting staff? Principals appear to be moved frequently - suggested typically 2-3 years in one school – has implications for potential school development purposes (need longer).
Difference between "Student" Support Services and "Learning" Services for students and staff (also semantics of SSA student support assistant and Ed. assistant EA/TA)

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1. What are the main reasons for students attending the program?
Secondary High Incidence: as per booklet criteria – but district and school staff do not always agree – central screening is the "clearing house" – file does not always match the kids - disconnect between district and school staff. Goal is to provide additional support, then mainstream integration – not on preparing mainstream to adapt better to the kids they have. Students in program due to "perceived level of need by elementary schools that programs better manage kids who cannot deal with 8 block rotation...more need than students who get RT. Systemic issues – re trained RTs
Secondary Low Incidence: Some schools have several programs (LI/LAC/Life) – these ebb and flow as student population changes and district changes program names/focus. Some programs/students are with same teacher for 6 years (lifers) others move to different programs/different schools... stigma for kids in programs.

2. Secondary Programs: What is the learning focus for these students?
High Incidence: Learning and behaviour – these are intertwined so need all basic skills – BSoc program has youth worker and can access community supports – need more computers and ipads - students at Grade3/4 level in Grade8/9. Focus left to program and teacher autonomy. Generally poor tech access – use of on line programs (Kurzweil, google read/write, successmaker, academy of reading). *S*elf-esteem and academics impacted. Need to plan transitions into/out of a program. Offer apprenticeship math, circles (sex health), zones of regulation – but need more consistency/continuity with these (elementary and secondary and schools/programs).
Low Incidence: Some programs have outstanding long term staff - access to e.g. swim/ weights /wex programming. One program is G8-9 – then students have to move (not good). Referrals from district – no program name should be "life skills" – that is everything we all teach – demeaning name, district language is not helpful.

3. Secondary: What additional supports/services does the program offer?
High Incidence: Good staff student ratio (14: 3 or 4)   Separate program space – SSA/YFW. LSP – separate skills blocks with integrated electives (PE, music, Shop)

1 resource teacher in school writes up to 120 IEPS – program teachers write 14 or so IEPs – not equitable. Provide additional support – help is available in a program all the time not just in a specific block. Principal adds RT staffing internally as they can (one RT for school this size is not enough). District central screening for grades 8 and 9 – but then what? Transitions after that unclear. Some can access counselling. Counsellors can assist but do not currently write IEPs for H /R students – but why not? **Low Incidence:** LA/LS programs get 2 SSAs and low ration (14:1) – but school has 140 other designated students and only one resource teacher and 2 SSAs for them – need to do a better needs assessment for the school as a whole – not just focus on programs.

4. Secondary: Physical location and student access observed/discussed?
High Incidence: Good spaces – have vacant spaces – some programs in centre of school, one in basement. Majority of kids in LA/LS programs live in catchment – parents like the bussing they get if their child is in a program. LSP does not mix well with rest of staff– if it was more school based than district directed, there could be more integration into electives – manage Class Size and Composition challenges).
Low Incidence: Good spaces with kitchen and laundry in Life skills – 2 classes do not work together (one class has staffing turnover issues) – need more tech access

5. Learning and behaviour approaches observed/discussed?
Secondary High Incidence: Outdated and inconsistent assessments - student files do not always provide current literacy and numeracy skills data – old psych eds
Students engaged and well behaved – interesting programming includes dance, skateboarding, bee keeping. Depends on program type – appears to be teacher autonomous – district wide consistency by program? 5 years with same teacher not good – need junior and senior groups in same school – not students changing school.
Goal posts seem to be moved this year –told we cannot "stream" kids – kids understand the difference between Dogwood and School Completion – need to get more Dogwood – Class size and Composition ruling has not helped – A school of 1700 with 2 FTE resource teachers results in RTs writing 120 IEPs – no time left to teach, just doing administrivia. Use adaptations checklists (not real IEPs)– need to reduce the paperwork.
Low Incidence: No kitchen in one space – and kids cannot access foods block (NOTE CS&C issues this year). Little district direction – left to teacher autonomy – and historical approaches. Teachers want to do their best but not always sure what to do – need support for teachers not just students. Need a life skills curriculum.

Additional comments observed and discussed?
 "1950s model." Feels like too many cooks in the kitchen. Need 8-12 program not just 8-9 otherwise G10 kids lost at a time when really fragile ones need support. District semantics/program names? School could easily be a full service school. Some staff see programs as a box for these types of kids to fit into – so they do not have to deal with them. School programming means we could change things up e.g. get teachers more involved – co-teaching and shared assignments. The only

reason this is a district program is so the district can control who goes in. *"We have lots of kids who need extra support and staff who need a huge culture shift"* need to work with enrolling staff – be less program oriented – teacher support – must have the staffing – the new contract language has not helped us to be inclusive. District and Resource teachers need time so they can support students and staff…talk more about programming ….more flow between district and school programs. All secondary schools and large elementary schools have a full range of students – programming for all their neighbourhood students makes sense – why ask so many students to attend schools beyond their catchment school? We need program stability at all schools – building whole staff team skills (ProD) to service their own students not those from other schools. LAC has negative connotations- change this.

1. Need common and consistent use of assessments e.g. JJ, KTEA, Brigance, ABLLS
2. Need supports moved quickly to student – not expect student to move.
3. Trade bussing and taxi $$ and time for in school support model – move staff.
4. Having district programs is tricky because we are "outsiders" – need to use the expertise as "insiders" (change that is bottom up and from inside)- focus on ProD.
5. District- school divide in some schools is adversarial – schools that really need district support avoid/pay lip service to district staff e.g. cannot attend SBT meeting
6. Some schools refer to programs more than others – not based on student need.
7. "Clarify how many kids are given access that supports them getting a Dogowod or even course credits – large regression in these numbers this year since the CS& C ruling – very few LAC kids now get the opportunity, despite them being capable."

Appendix 8 - VSB Special Education Programs Review: Survey Summary

An anonymous electronic survey was undertaken during a 2 week period ending 1 December 2017, to help identify current program strengths and challenges. 152 of the 1990 recipients (8%) completed the survey: 38% parents, 23% program teachers, 18 % administrators, 9% district staff, 6 % school based teachers, 6% student support assistants (SSA) and community partners. 52% respondents were associated with Secondary Schools and 48% Elementary Schools. This may be a reflection of the current 71 District Programs in total as there are 25 programs (8 types) at 23 Elementary Schools and 46 programs (13 types) available across all 18 Secondary Schools. Some schools host more than one program. As was noted, "the proliferation of VSB's segregated district programs is unusual." Introductory comments revealed diverse opinions about the number and type of programs, some suggesting there are too many while others suggest there are not enough programs.

Programs
The survey used a 4 point likert scale (very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, very dissatisfied) for some questions. 64% of respondents reported very/satisfied that the programs meet the needs of their learners. Follow up comments indicated no

clear correlation between satisfaction levels and program or respondent type i.e. both positive and negative comments for all programs. Recurring comments were particularly associated with staffing and inclusion arrangements. "The program itself is great … quality program staff is the key to success … some are becoming a place to train and then send students back to their home school … but… the kids have limited opportunities to be part of the school community… there is a lack of consistency and accountability in some… we need to support more students and teachers in regular classes." Particular secondary program insights included: "the need for more supported work experience … programs are like any other secondary school with a skills block and more SSAs … would be more useful to have one of these programs in every secondary school and not be a district program."

69% of respondents reported very/satisfied with program accessibility. Several comments referred to bussing challenges: "the day is too long… students may arrive 30 minutes before or after the beginning and ending of the school day." Other comments referenced both staff and parents having too little knowledge of the programs and the application process being too vague. There were more secondary related negative comments. One teacher indicated, "students expressed surprise and disappointment that they were placed in a separate program in Grade 8… the transition arrangements and communication with parents needs to be improved." A specific question about student transitions revealed the need for more staff support during transition periods, for all staff and students to welcome diversity and for improved communication between programs and schools. Suggestions made included: "better to have a resource centre model at every school…it would be better for students to attend Learning Support Programs (LSP) at their catchment school … we need more qualified teachers and SSAs… moving students outside their neighbourhood is difficult in terms of friendships and commuting."
Given finite resources 51% of respondents reported very/satisfied with current resource allocation arrangements. Several noted the importance of programs and resource rooms not being in basements, having access to appropriate spaces and district staff support, opportunities for communication with other program staff and technology. Dissatisfied comments mainly concerned staffing and inclusion arrangements, for example: "we still do not have a permanent teacher and this is not in the best interests of students or the rest of the staff…if all schools were inclusive learning environments, there would be a better use of limited funds ….not spending money on transporting students across the district. … students attending neighbourhood schools can then be involved in their local community… programs need to provide the best of both worlds offering both a specialized supportive environment and opportunities to meaningfully participate in school." If more resources were available most respondents (64%) would prioritize staff training, with somewhat fewer preferring to prioritize additional SSA or teacher support.

When asked about ways to enhance current program arrangements, most identified the need for more appropriately trained and qualified teachers and SSAs. There were also many comments about more inclusion in regular classes and access to full time SSA support prior to considering program placement. Some reported the need

for "proper resource rooms, calm down spaces …work spaces … with appropriate technology access." Particular challenges for secondary schools included: "no real curriculum for life skills programming… some schools offer all students regular inclusion opportunities while others offer none… because some programs do not span Grades 8-12, students may have to move schools 2 or 3 times, damaging their sense of belonging … secondary resource and regular education teachers need joint professional development opportunities …more understanding of behaviour/ social learning and mental health issues." Consistency across schools and between programs could be improved: "in some schools counsellors/resource/program teachers are very involved with classroom teachers, in other schools, not at all."

Student Achievement
When asked which aspects of the program contributed most to student success most (77%) prioritized high quality staffing: "the attitude of the teacher is most important … their creativity, flexibility and willingness of mainstream teachers to support these students is critical… consistency of staffing … adequately trained staff… administration having the knowledge about district programs and making a concerted effort to include program students." Class size and composition of similarly diverse students were prioritized more frequently than program location or access to material resources. However, there were some conflicting comments: "I don't think it is a good idea to put a group of students together who have similar behaviour and communication needs… the need to 'program' students varies according to their unique student learning profiles … can occur (does occur in other districts)in all schools." As several commented: "the classroom teacher is the most important, their ability to teach to diversity… use Response to Intervention (RTI) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approaches… understanding the behaviour and learning connection … it is critical to support all teachers with this."
Survey respondents indicated that increasing teacher caseloads, service gaps, decreased mainstream inclusion opportunities, the shifting nature of program populations that do not match program descriptions and the balance of access to programs across the district, were equally important barriers to students achieving success with their Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals. Reported caseloads of up to 60 students and writing Individual Education Plans (IEP), "takes away from the valuable time with students … we need earlier and better assessments … to reduce the time lag between identifying a problem and getting the needed interventions." Some respondents suggested changing arrangements to provide more immediate resolutions: more programs are not better… students need a "resource hub" in their own school not a program elsewhere … more in class support … resource teachers in each school to help mainstream teachers adapt the curriculum and support learning … students can be misplaced in programs because others are full or there isn't anywhere else for students to fit and this can reduce success for all students."

Two specific questions concerned the Ministry of Education Inclusion Policy and what is needed for the successful inclusion of all students. One respondent noted: "to begin with let's be clear on the definitions – inclusion is a philosophy that all people matter and are valued – integration is a strategy about placement in

mainstream that may (or may not) promote inclusion - the terms are not synonymous – sadly some students are integrated but not accepted/valued and their unique learning profiles are not effectively addressed." Others indicated: "first we need a change in our thinking and our model….less program thinking…more collaboration about differentiated instruction…perhaps having some staff crossover with part time working in programs and the regular classroom to allow for more knowledge sharing and ease student transitions…more specialized staff at every school… research based district wide/consistently used assessments and interventions… release time to support these developments." Such strategies are important to avoid some reported negative experiences: "my daughter is lonely, she is not involved or made welcome at any extra-curricular activities….in Elementary school there was inclusion but in Secondary there is none … segregated life skills rooms are contradictory to my special education training … they demonstrate either a wilful ignorance or a glaring misconception about what inclusion means."

Next Steps
The survey information provides initial insights with regard to both the benefits and challenges of current arrangements and potential future directions. The information gathered will be synthesized with that gained from background research, BC school district comparisons, several planned focus group meetings and direct observations of programs. At this time there is also a need to ensure regular classroom teacher, mainstream school resource teacher and student feedback is obtained. A final report with recommendations will be prepared for SEAC and The Board by June 2018.