

# BUDGET 2020 CONSULTATION

**SUBMISSION TO:**

Select Standing Committee on  
Finance and Government Services

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Board of Education of  
School District No. 39 (Vancouver)

June 30, 2019



The Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) is pleased to provide this submission for consideration by the Select Standing Committee on Finance & Government Services as it recommends funding and investment strategies to the Ministry of Finance for the development of the Government’s 2019-2020 fiscal framework.

## About the Vancouver School Board


The Vancouver School Board (VSB) is one of the most diverse public school systems in Canada. It is home to some of the poorest and richest postal codes in the country, and that creates a very significant challenge in providing equitable service to students. The District’s annual enrolment is approximately 49,000 students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, and it also provides educational programs and services to 300 adult students and 1,800 international students. The VSB invests significant resources in a broad range of programs to meet the diverse learning needs of all students in fulfillment of the District’s vision to **“inspire student success by providing an innovative, caring and responsive learning environment.”**



95 STUDENT  
SUPPORT PROGRAMS



110 SCHOOLS



49,000 STUDENTS



9,000 STAFF



60 CHOICE  
PROGRAMS

## Student Achievement

The Board of Education has a primary responsibility under the School Act to focus on improving the life chances of students. VSB therefore directs all its efforts to improve student achievement by focusing on the Board's VSB 2021 Strategic Plan goals of:

- Engage our learners through innovative teaching and learning practices;
- Build capacity in our community through strengthening collective leadership;
- Create a culture of care and shared social responsibility; and,
- Provide effective leadership, governance and stewardship.

To create equity and ensure that all students are included and have the opportunity to succeed, VSB has a broad offering of neighbourhood and specialty programs. There is a clear focus on improving the graduation rates for all students, and in particular Indigenous learners. There is an emphasis on providing supportive learning experiences and interventions as children transition from pre-K into Kindergarten through to Grade 12 and beyond.

In delivering the provincial education mandate to Vancouver's public school system, the Board faces many challenges due to the diverse nature of the school district:

- increased numbers of students entering school with diverse learning needs;
- increased awareness of mental health concerns and the impact that mental health issues have in the classroom;
- demographic changes in Vancouver mean student enrolment creates space pressure at some schools while others have more capacity; and,
- affordability challenges in Vancouver also result in frequent school transitions for some students.



The provincial education mandate has expressly prioritized 21st Century Learning, supporting early learners and sustainability. It has also consistently stressed the importance of parental involvement in student learning and school communities. These priorities, coupled with the implementation of the new curriculum and the restoration of collective agreement language, create challenges for the District in delivering its mandate. Since the submission to the Standing Committee last October, the report of the Funding Model Review Panel, "Improving Equity and Accountability" was issued, funding for the 2019-2020 school year announced and provincial bargaining commenced. All of which add complexity to delivering the mandate and need to be considered when updating the eight recommendations previously submitted.

**Accordingly, the Provincial Government, in the development of the Provincial Budget and specifically in relation to the Ministry of Education's budget is asked to:**

**1**

**Ensure that the Ministry of Education's funding formula review for school districts results in stable, predictable and adequate funding to enable districts to fulfill their responsibility to assist all students to achieve their potential.**



In order to have a funding formula that provides stable and predictable funding, the resources necessary to support all students need to be identified. While certain components of the current funding formula work well to support students (e.g. targeted funding for Indigenous students), others are confusing (e.g. supplement for geographic factors). The new funding formula needs to be clearly understood as to how it relates to student achievement.

Rural and urban school districts differ in more than geography. The Funding Formula Review should address the unique realities of districts and avoid a have and have-not outcome. The VSB is concerned that the single Inclusive Education Supplement in the Review Panel report (Recommendation 6) and the proposed prevalence model will create inequities in the delivery of service to students.

## Recommendations

# 2

### Provides the necessary funding to fully implement the Memorandum of Agreement resulting from the Supreme Court Ruling.

In Vancouver's previous written submissions to the Select Standing Committee, the District provided this statement related to the implementation of the MOA: "The recruitment and retention of teachers, the shortage of teachers teaching on call, the cost of remedy provisions, and the need for facility renovations are challenges that will place pressure on the funding that has been provided and will need to be addressed to ensure the implementation fully complies with the MOA." It is essential that this Memorandum be fully funded now, and, in the future to ensure that individual districts' costs are fully funded. It is also administratively complex to maintain the structures necessary to provide the reporting required. Recommendation 8 in the report of the Review Panel calls for the elimination of the Classroom Enhancement Fund and the allocation of that funding as part of the operating grants to districts. This would provide greater accountability and transparency for districts in the development of their budgets.

# 3

### Provide funding to ensure the new curriculum implementation is complete and successful.



As stated in October, a commitment to provide professional development for educators and educational leaders is necessary to ensure successful implementation of the new curriculum. There also needs to be sufficient funding to enable the acquisition of resources to implement the changes in the Graduation Program. In addition, the restored collective agreement language provides for increased teacher librarian staffing. School libraries, also known as learning commons, will play an increasingly important role in the personalized learning agenda and need to be supported, particularly in the area of funding for technology upgrades.

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# 4

## Fully fund cost pressures to sustain current services to students, including past and new unfunded cost pressures.

For many years, school districts have experienced erosion in their budgets due to the Province not providing funding for cost increases in the areas of exempt compensation, employee benefits, utility costs, the Employer Health Tax (EHT) and inflation. The relief that was intended to offset impacts the new EHT is not sufficient. The VSB has an additional cost over the past two years of \$115,000. BC Association of School Business Officials (BCASBO) now estimates the accumulated unfunded cost pressures in the system for 2018-2019 to be \$421 million, and for 2019-2020 to be \$441 million. Unfunded cost increases require school districts to spend significant time and resources to balance budgets each year instead of strategically planning the most effective use of funding to support student success. The VBE recently completed a “Needs Budget” exercise that had major themes of equity and advocacy. The needs that could be specifically identified as unfunded cost pressures totalled \$26.2 million.

Recommendation 18 in the Funding Formula Review Panel report “that the Ministry of Education should identify net cost pressures and new program expenditures and bring them forward to Treasury Board as part of the provincial budgeting process” should be implemented to put school districts in a better position to more fully forecast program spending.

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# 5

## Review and increase supplemental funding grants for students with special needs and students struggling with mental health issues.

The VSB, like most school districts, spends more in supporting students with special needs than is provided by the Province in special needs supplemental grants. Setting aside the basic per pupil allocation the District receives for every student, the amount of support provided to students with special needs in 2017-2018 was \$27 million in excess of the supplemental grants. That excess spending is estimated to be approximately \$31 million in the current school year and is forecast to be \$28 million in 2019-2020. Even when taking the basic per pupil allocation into account, the additional support provided to students with special needs in 2017-2018 was \$9 million and will be \$10 million in the current year. The VSB has maintained staffing levels for supporting students with special needs in excess of the provincial ratios in the MOA. This amounts to approximately 50 FTEs with an annual cost of \$4.5 - \$5.0 million.

The increase in the numbers of students in recent years with complex and diverse needs places increased pressure on districts’ budgets. Provincially, there needs to be a recognition of the full costs of providing an inclusive education for all students with special and unique needs.

As stated previously, the District also has concerns about Recommendation 6 in the Review Panel report, particularly around the proposed prevalence model, as the factors identified for determining the allocation of funding do not include a mental health consideration.

## Recommendations

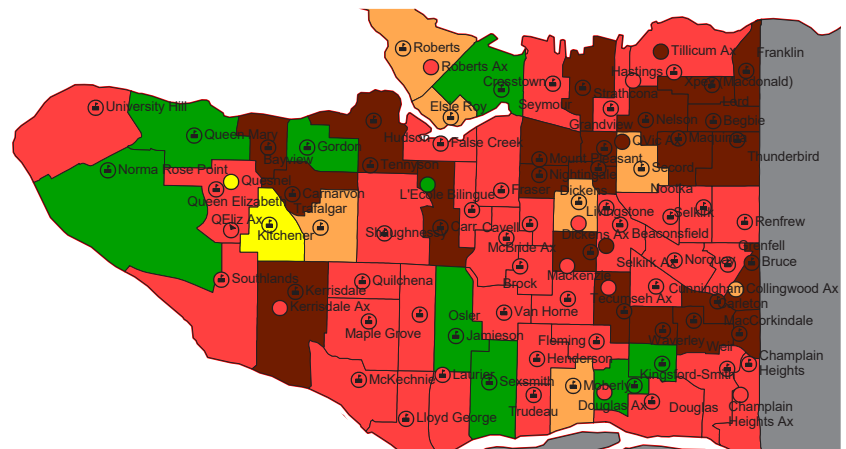
# 6

Provides funding for increased maintenance and upgrades to address needs of aging school facilities.

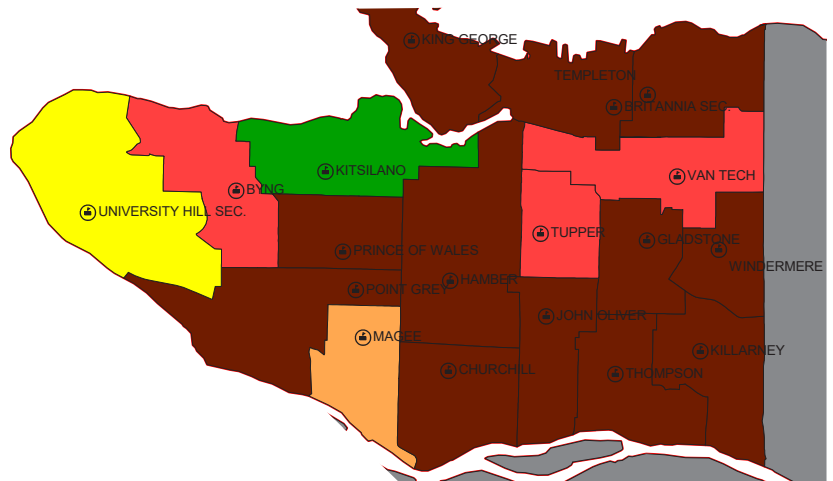
### Elementary Schools

#### Facility Condition Index

- Very Poor: over 0.6
- Poor: 0.3 to 0.6
- Fair: 0.1 to 0.3
- Good: 0.05 to 0.1
- Excellent: 0 to 0.05



### Secondary Schools



The Government has made a commitment to provide funding to improve infrastructure in school districts. Deferred maintenance has become a problem that erodes districts' abilities to maximize support for classrooms by diverting funds to emergent repairs to school buildings. The VSB has approximately \$750 million in deferred maintenance costs due in great part to the age of many of the school buildings. This amount reflects the cost it would take to bring mechanical, electrical, structural and life safety systems in schools up to the standards of today. Spending valuable operating fund resources maintaining and repairing old systems reduces the ability of the District to enhance the learning environments for students, especially with respect to implementing the new curriculum. The current Annual Facilities Grant allocations are not adequate to provide the maintenance required, as the VSB only receives \$11 million annually. The recently completed "Needs Budget" exercise specifically identified the deferred maintenance challenge and the need for more funding to address it.

To comply with the Ministry policy on the elimination of lead in water, districts redirect already scarce funds to install bottle filling stations or re-pipe buildings. There is no special funding for this work which results in further erosion of the limited AFG funds. Given that the presence of lead in water in schools is a health concern, the Province should provide funding to districts to address this.

# 7

## Provide sufficient capital funding to honour the provincial government's commitment to upgrade or replace high seismic risk schools.



Sufficient capital funding is required to seismically upgrade or replace schools, particularly in Vancouver. The VSB has more than 60 schools with high seismic risk blocks (i.e. H1, H2 or H3). The Board is thankful that significant seismic funding has flowed into the VSB. However, when a replacement school is the lowest cost option, the provincial areas standards that are applied to new school construction result in schools with a smaller area – by up to 40 per cent. This reduction in area means there cannot be dedicated space for arts and music programs in elementary schools nor sufficient breakout space for collaboration. The new curriculum contemplates more personalized learning but the current area standards limit these possibilities. With the understanding that a review of area standards will take place, the VSB would be happy to engage with the Ministry of Education on this topic.

An additional concern of the Board relates to the escalation of construction costs experienced in Vancouver. The VSB would like to see the verified costs of projects fully funded when projects are approved and financial responsibility handed to school districts.



## Recommendations

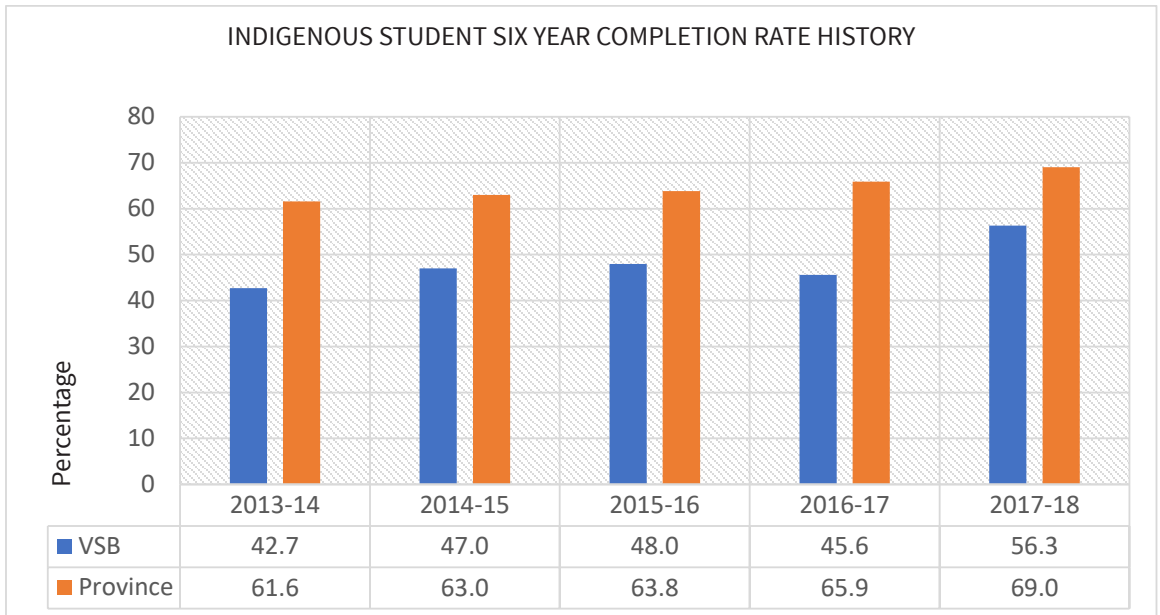
# 8

### Increase funding to school districts to support Indigenous learners.

While significant improvement in educational outcomes for Indigenous students have been achieved over the past few years, more needs to be done to continue that progress. The six-year completion rate of Indigenous students in the VSB has steadily increased in recent years but is significantly lower than the provincial average. Funding needs to be provided at a provincial level to identify the best practices so that these strategies and pedagogy can be shared and implemented across the province. We are pleased that Recommendation 3 in the Review Panel report calls for the Ministry to work with the First Nations Education Steering Committee to support the continuous improvement of outcomes for Indigenous learners. The District is pleased to see that Recommendation 1 in the Review Panel report speaks to maintaining targeted finding for Indigenous students.



*Indigenous Grade 7 Moving Ahead Ceremony*





## Summary

The Board greatly appreciates the opportunity to provide input to the Committee as it recommends funding and investment strategies to develop the 2019-2020 fiscal framework by the Ministry of Finance.

The implementation of the above recommendations will greatly enhance BC's K-12 public education and the District's vision of inspiring student success by providing an innovative, caring and responsive learning environment.