

DATE:

Premier Clark  
Room 310  
Parliament Buildings  
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Re: Families First and Current Education Funding

Dear Premier Clark,

We would like to ask when the promised increases to funding in our K to 12 public education system will be forth coming? What we are speaking about comes directly from the current government's platform:

1. Commit significant funds to address classroom size and composition challenges across the province.
2. Introduce a back-to-school tax credit for parents of children in grades K-12 of up to \$250 per child.
3. Provide on-line textbooks for selected elementary, middle and high school courses to ensure parents have access to textbooks to help their children study at home.
4. Recognize the time, money and effort teachers contribute to their school community and the students they teach by creating a tax credit of \$500 per year for teachers who coach sports/arts.
5. Introduce a children's fitness equipment tax credit that will provide a tax credit of up to \$250 per child per year.

We are not clear where these items are in the current education budget. Can you also please explain how your government can continue to claim that "families come first" and "A strong economy starts with a strong workforce and that means investing in education"(both direct quotes from our government and Premier) when your public education funding promises are missing from the budget and the overall K-12 education budget is frozen for the next three years?

As a parent you must know first-hand the amount we parents invest in time, energy and increasingly our household budgets to support our children in the public education system. We are not satisfied with the current direction our government is taking towards ensuring that the next generation of British Columbians are educated properly to sustain our great province.

Parents and families work very hard to model behaviours for our children. We expect that you and your government will model the behaviour we expect from our elected officials and honour your promises. "Invest in our Children NOW. They are the Future" banners are appearing all across Vancouver, as you know, and are spreading across the province. This slogan represents the view of parents and families that a fully and sustainably funded public education system is the right of every child.

Premier, you are hearing from your families.

Please listen now.

Thank you,

A very concerned parent:



Statement to the Vancouver Board of Education  
April 16, 2014

Thank you for this opportunity to defend the Band and Strings Programs in the Vancouver Schools.

You have already heard eloquent testimony last night, from a wide range of stakeholders and supporters — people of extraordinary commitment who have invested their lives in making music education broadly available as a source of joy and affirmation for young people from all strata of society, and for their families and friends.

Most moving, powerful, and eloquent of all were the testimonies from students: despite their youth, they could articulate vividly all the benefits of their music programs, including enhanced teamwork, leadership skills, fine motor skills, better concentration, memory, listening, motivation, inspiration, and lifelong commitment. Is there any other subject that brings together such an assortment of fundamentally important experiences and transferable life skills in such a wonderfully cohesive bundle? Is there any other subject that empowers its students to express so clearly and comprehensively such a wide range of benefits? Music programs are a priceless nexus of multi-modal learning and teamwork. They help the entire educational experience to function and cohere, and they offer benefits that should be available to all students.

I know you have a very difficult budgetary and educational puzzle to solve. But the puzzle pieces can never form a satisfactory picture if you lose key pieces. Your challenge is to find better ways to make all the essential pieces fit together. Now music is a refined art of combination and coordination, and this is why it is so relevant to your problem, and essential to the present and future health of our educational system. If you remove thriving music programs, you will hurt the coherence and efficacy of the entire system in countless other ways. The collateral damage must be factored into the equation.

Let's not forget, for instance, that the strings and band programs give the regular classroom teachers a short but much-needed quiet period when they can do preparation and marking, when they can reflect on ways to enhance student learning, or speak to counselors about students with special needs or unusual challenges of all kinds. The students return from their music class energized, focused, and happy, after a period of fun, coordinated physical and mental activity and teamwork. They are refreshed, and ready once again to concentrate on other subjects, and apply their teamwork skills. In these ways, and many others, the band and strings programs enhance the quality of learning and teaching for the entire school. Remove those programs, and the entire system will decline further. The negative effects of classroom overcrowding forced on you by the provincial government will become even more pronounced. It's not only the huge inherent value of learning music that is at stake; you need the band and strings programs desperately, because they help maintain order, morale, and enthusiasm in the schools. Indeed, you need to extend these programs to all schools, so that no child and no school community is deprived of the power of music to make the school day both more fun and more productive.

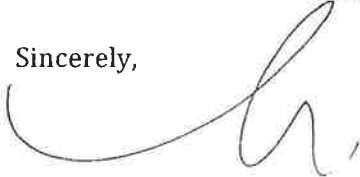
Teaching music is difficult. It requires extensive knowledge, training, diverse skills, and immense passion and energy. Music programs will only be successful and vibrant when taught by teachers with specific knowledge, experience, and training in music education. You cannot download the music curriculum to general teachers and hope for meaningful results. Designated and qualified music teachers ensure a dynamic and successful music program and facilitate the success of all other teachers in their areas of strength.

Music is a universal phenomenon, and a force that connects us. It facilitates individual and collective expression and it is the essence of collaboration. *It tunes us*, in every sense: it brings us into harmony and helps us work together; and it fills us with the energy and positive impulses of rhythm and melody that keep us moving forward.

Don't squander the immense investment that has been achieved over many decades — the investment of funding by the Board, the investment of energy, expertise, and commitment by music teachers building their programs, and the investment of talent and joy by students. The achievements to date are enormous. I hope you are aware, for instance, that the Lord Byng String Orchestra recently won Grand Champion in all categories at a national competition at Lincoln Center in New York City, the lone Canadian participant, rising above top school orchestras from across the U.S. It's not about winning; it's about affirmation. Can you imagine the unforgettable impact on our students: months of teamwork culminating with the amazing experience of stepping on stage at Alice Tully Hall and playing together with a sense of collective concentration and passion like never before? These lucky students from Vancouver could never have "owned the podium" without the elementary band and strings programs that form the base of the pyramid. All the local school concerts and events that showcase young players, inspire school spirit, and fill the community with joy, are smaller but essential steps towards bigger things. And for all these students, music is something you *do*, not just something you consume.

We cannot afford to lose the educational and societal benefits of music programs taught by expert music teachers. Don't squander the huge investment that has already been made, and that can never be recreated from scratch. You won't be saving money, you will be wasting it, and you will be losing priceless programs that have energized students in all walks of our society. It is madness to throw this away. This is an investment that you must treasure, nurture, and grow. I urge you to retain these truly essential programs, and to partner with the expert music teachers already in the system, and with talented new music teachers now in training, to find ways to bring the benefits of learning music to all students in Vancouver. Music programs play an essential role in keeping the Vancouver school system viable. Don't let silence in the Band Room or Strings Room become part of the death knell of our schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Richard Kurth', written in a cursive style.

Richard Kurth  
Professor of Music  
Director, UBC School of Music

### Version 3

My name is Susan Duffy. I am the parent of 2 children who attend Annie B Jamieson Elementary School, and are avid members of the strings program representing the hopes of more than 280 children who participate there. It is the largest strings program in Canada in either elementary or high school.

I know you have decisions to make, difficult decisions.

You have had the courtesy to listen to many people concerned about many factors in order to balance your budget by the end of April.

Zero Point One-Two Percent. Yes, 0.12%

This is the figure we are talking about. A relatively inconsequential sum in your budget for a program that delivers so much value to our children.

A relatively insignificant amount of money which would be saved - yet it would create incalculable damage.

I had two speeches prepared for tonight. One focused on the value that learning to play music brings, in the way it enlightens the mind and opens it to critical thinking skills and more – but you all know that.

There is little more I can bring to your attention above the numerous studies that have shown the benefit of musical skills to a child's capacity and desire to learn.

And so, I want to bring your attention to other reasons why you should dig deep to find a way to maintain the strings and band programs.

There are many parents in this room, and we all try to instill values in our children, but we also know it is at times hypocritical.

We all know that, if as adults, we lived by the values we try to teach our children, then the world would be a far better place. “Think of Others” “Play Nice” “Work as a Team” the list goes on.

Why do adults not always live by these simple yet powerful rules? Because we never truly learnt them. We were taught the theory but not the practice.

Bands and orchestras are the only places where our children can truly live and learn these simple rules.

The family unit is too insular.

Sports - well yes, they talk about teamwork, but the reality is they also encourage the individual, the superstar ... but the child who is not quite so capable has a chance to come in last or to be blamed for losing the game – all in their own ways valuable lessons yes, but they do NOT necessarily teach the heady values of sharing and co-operation, of sacrificing oneself for the greater good.

Bands and orchestra's are quite the exception.

**THE GREAT LEVELER.**

The child who has private lessons and has played since a toddler, the virtuoso is asked to play violin 3. “But why” they ask “when I’m the best in the class?”

Because it is for the greater good. Because the team as a whole will sound better when we all play our part, big or small. Because we all need a chance to shine.

The child who never gets a private lesson plays a lead supported by those whom individually may be better. Isn’t this how we want to teach our future adults to treat others?

PAUSE

We know the reason we are even having these decisions to make lies with funding from the provincial government.

We have taken the time to read your reports but time is something we do not have today. We know you do not want to make this cut.

Jamieson PAC pledges their support to the VSB in your petitioning the provincial government, but we need time.

In the past week we have gathered over 1000 signatures of support ... imagine how many more we could get if we had more time.

Oscar Wilde said “a cynic is a man who knows the price of everything, but the value of nothing”.

Calling upon his incisive wisdom, I IMPLORE you to reconsider. 0.12% is an insignificant **price** relative to your budget, but cutting the band and strings program destroys an enormous amount of **value** - it’s hard not to be cynical.

Is this how this board which has fought so hard for funding over the past years wants to be remembered?

For those of you who may not run for re-election this year or those who do but are not be re-elected ... IS THIS to be **your** permanent record? Will you be the ones to explain to friends, neighbours, grandchildren why Vancouver is bereft of musical culture and education within our elementary schools.

Will you explain why the ability to play a musical instrument has become the **exclusive privilege of the elite**? And all for 0.12%.

I am here this evening to urge you to SAVE the Strings and Band Programs, not just at Jamieson but also at the other 51 elementary schools in the district. These programs bring children from all over the city to schools like Jamieson.

They even, and I know this is something we all like to hear, bring children out of private schools and into the public system, and in many cases I personally know of, keep parents from sending their children to private schools.

In your own email reply to me you told us about how the Premier - when she was Education Minister - entirely ignored you and 14,000 other parents who had joined you.

We are not able to effect change at the Provincial level in the time frame we have been given. However, we will willingly and gladly work with you to petition the Province.

On behalf of the Jamieson Elementary PAC I guarantee our full support – PLEASE retain the program long enough for us to help you find a more permanent solution.

In the short term you do indeed have options. We know most teachers are simply amazing, dedicated, industrious and conscientious.

However, there is a problem - employee absenteeism.

The Federal Government, facing this very same issue is looking at replacing sick days with a short-term disability plan. Is this a viable option for you to look at?

Please ensure those **very few** who exert this enormous cost are aware of the impact this has on the children's programs.

Ultimately though, today's decision rests in **your** hands, and I urge you to restrain yourselves from harming our children and less financially advantaged families in this process.

Retain the value you have built in our school system.

Retain **equal access** to these important string and band programs.

Retain these programs - not for those who can afford private instruction or private school but for the **majority** who would never, EVER, in their childhood come close to having a music lesson and being exposed to all the wonderful qualities a band or strings program brings to a child's life.

Retain the best way there is to teach our children the values of cooperation, sharing, and coming together for the greater good.



Please preserve our strings and band programs.

And it will only cost you 0.12% to do it.

In our family we would NEVER had had this kind of exposure to music – likely stumbling along with weekly piano lessons and struggling to have kids practice with any level of commitment ... my eldest daughter chooses to go to school for 8am every morning and plays with one of the most dedicated teachers EVER.

In the words of my passionate violin playing daughter –  
**SAVE THE STRINGS ... DUMP THE MATH!!**

**RE: City School budget cuts**

budget 2014\_2015

Sent: Monday, April 14, 2014 2:43 PM

To: Steph Frolek

Thank you for your feedback on the 2014/2015 Budget proposals. Your feedback will be reviewed and taken into consideration with all other feedback received.

All submissions to the Board are considered to be public documents. The Board, therefore, reserves the right to make any submissions available to the public and placed on the website.

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From: Steph Frolek  
Sent: Monday, April 14, 2014 8:10 AM  
To: budget 2014\_2015  
Cc: Cherie Payne (VSB Trustee); Sal Robinson (City School)  
Subject: City School budget cuts

As a parent of a teenage daughter in City School I believe my role is to prepare my daughter for life by giving her access to the kind of education that I feel will serve her in a world that is rapidly changing and requires an innovative spirit. She must have a broad understanding of the real life challenges she faces so as to formulate a career path for herself, meet the challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that present themselves in the years to come.

As educators and parents it is not enough to talk about what students need to do to be successful, we also must lead by example. As a young child my daughter did not fit into the cookie cutter mold that public elementary school required. She was far ahead of some children in some subjects and slow to learn others. We asked for assistance from the school but budget restrictions did not allow for the kind of assistance that she needed. As a pragmatist I understand budgetary restrictions and so we chose to make sacrifices in our own lives in order to be able to put her into a private Montessori program during her elementary school years.

When it came time for high school I diligently researched the options and applied for positions in Mini Schools which seemed like the best route to take. Our first choice was City School but it was not available to her until grade 10 and we were hoping that she would be able to be at the same school throughout high school. Our second choice was the Montessori program on the east side as our daughter very much enjoyed the love of learning that was instilled in her by the Montessori system. Unfortunately that program was shut down for lack of funding before she could even apply. Next she applied and got into the Athena Arts program at Windemere which was to run until Grade 12. This was a program that she enjoyed and excelled in, making the honours roll twice and the Principles list once. This only lasted 2 years. At the end of Grade 9 Athena was cut back so it would only go to grade 10. As we didn't want to move Michael just before the her all important final two years of high school we decided to look for an alternative program at the end of grade nine.

As City School had been Michael's first choice she immediately applied and got into the program. They were flexible enough to allow her to finish Grade 9 there so she would start Grade 10 having already made that move. There never was a happier kid. She immediately made some friends and felt like she had come home. The program allows her to pursue the broad scope of her interests in an accepting and welcoming environment.

As a parent, I have tried to find innovative solutions to my child's educational needs. This has been in spite of the roadblocks that the Vancouver School Board has put in our way. But I ask you, what do you think your role is? Do you think by cutting this program you are modelling an innovative approach to education?

Are you leading by example? Or are you just trying to maintain the status quo? There should be more not less programs like City School. If you have ever gone to the circuit of program information nights for mini schools you will know that parents are looking for alternatives to traditional schooling in order to give their children a competitive edge when they graduate. If city school was given more help to promote the program I have no doubt the program would be full to capacity. I'm not sure why enrolment in mini schools has become a competitive sport not only between the parents but also between the programs but it shouldn't be. Does this make sense? If there are so many people who are interested in having their children attend these programs then why aren't the resources reallocated to accommodate the those interested?

Each child is promised an education and they deserve the best that we can give them. City School is the best option the VSB has to offer my child and I will be very disappointed should you decide that Michael does not warrant that kind of education. You have already taken several programs out of her grasp. I beg you to take a longer view in the decisions that you take.

Respectfully,  
Steph Frolek

## **Gifted Learning Disabled (GLD) Advocacy Group**

Submission to the Vancouver School Board Trustees

April 12, 2014

### **Index of Documents Included in this submission:**

- pp. 2 - 5      Written Submission Regarding the Proposed Budget 2014-2015
- Background Documents, including:
- pp. 6 - 12      Presentation to Committee III (November 13, 2013)  
                    Includes 2 maps that document the pattern of referrals to the GOLD  
                    program over the past 10 years
- pp. 13-15      Presentation to Board of Trustees Regarding Proposed Budget 2010-2011  
                    (April 20, 2010)
- pp. 16- 21      Presentation to Board of Trustees Regarding Proposed Budget 2007-2008  
                    (April 26, 2007)  
                    Includes tables documenting patterns of referrals by year, and  
                    across geographic region
- p.    22          One Parent's Story "My Son's Path to Gold"
- p.    23          Sample Parent Letter of Support for GOLD program

**Gifted Learning Disabled (GLD) Advocacy Group**

Written Submission to the Vancouver School Board Trustees

Regarding the Proposed Budget 2014-2015

April 12, 2014

On behalf of the Gifted Learning Disabled (GLD) Advocacy Group, please find attached several documents that we have presented in the past, that underline our current concern that vital services for Gifted and Gifted Learning Disabled (Twice Exceptional/2E) students are in jeopardy if the proposed Educational cuts to the Gifted Education Consultant, Educational Psychologist, and Area Counsellor positions are enacted.

In essence, cuts to these positions will be tantamount to cutting the GOLD program.

**Introduction**

It is generally estimated that 5% to 7% of students are gifted (depending on the definition); and 2% to 5% of gifted students also have learning disabilities.

As we have outlined previously (see attached documents and presentations), the gifted and gifted learning disabled (GLD), or twice exceptional (2E) students comprise a vulnerable population. It is a myth that, as a whole, gifted students are resilient, resourceful and will manage to thrive on their own, regardless of their environment. While this is true for some gifted students, a subset of gifted students experience stress, both internal and external. They can be intense, exquisitely sensitive, emotionally fragile. They may be pressured to be perfect and may have unrealistic expectations of themselves. Because they cannot be perfect, gifted children may experience anxiety, depression and discouragement that contribute to academic underachievement. The emotional and psychological distress generated by the discrepancy between capacity and output is further heightened among students who are both gifted and learning disabled (2E). GLD/2E students are often hidden in the school system as their learning disabilities 'cancel out' their giftedness, or their emotional difficulties, manifested in anxiety, frustration, distractibility, or avoidance, draw attention and they are seen as "behaviour problems".

In summary:

These students are at risk of emotional and psychological difficulties, school failure and underachievement, if they are not appropriately supported in the school system.

**The GOLD program:**

The GOLD program has been running at Prince of Wales (PW) for 20 years and David Thompson (DT) for 6 years and has meant the difference for many students between

failing or dropping out of high school, and developing the skills to succeed in school. Many students are able to go on to post secondary education and attain their academic goals. In a dedicated classroom, with a teacher and a SSW, the program at PW follows the best practices model of teaching to students' strengths, providing needed accommodations and support and helping students develop advocacy skills. The program also allows students to find a cohort, a peer group that is so essential in their emotional/psychological development. It should be noted that the program at DT has not had a SSW and dedicated classroom; we see the need for these essential components to be added to the DT program.

The Gifted Education Consultant and the Educational Psychologist positions are also essential parts of the GOLD recruitment process, as access to GOLD is by referral only, with a psycho-educational assessment. If students are not identified as GLD/2E, if they are not referred for assessment, they will not find their way to GOLD. There is also an inequity between families who can and cannot afford private assessments. This inequity seems to maintain the west side/east side division of access to appropriate services for students.

In summary:

The Consultant and Educational Psychologist serve a vital function in identification and referral to the GOLD program.

#### **The Role of the Gifted Education Consultant:**

The Consultant's role involves a large outreach component at this time, serving as a vital link between classroom teachers, gifted contacts at schools, parents and students. The Consultant screens students and assists in identifying students who are appropriate candidates for pullout programs and psycho-educational assessments, (required for referral to GOLD program); she provides information to parents and teachers about programs at elementary and high school levels. In our experience, parents have not been provided with sufficient information about available programs and how to access them. As noted on the maps provided in the background material, some schools have not referred a student to the GOLD program in the past 10 years (schools marked in red), suggesting that they do not have sufficient information to know about the program. This stands in contrast to schools (marked in green) that have made multiple referrals over the past 10 years. The maps' referral pattern highlights the distribution of referrals predominately from west side schools. The lack of referrals from east side schools is especially troubling, given that there is a GOLD program on the east side of the city. We are concerned that there are gifted/GLD students who are 'hidden' in these schools and we see a vital role for the Consultant in focusing education/screening/referral efforts to these east side schools.

In the past, the outreach component was conducted more by the Gifted Learning Disabled/Gifted Emotionally Fragile Resource Teacher. We have indicated previously in our submissions the clear relationship between the availability of the Resource Teacher to do outreach, the identification of GLD students, and referrals to the GOLD program. When the outreach work is not done, GLD/2E students remain hidden, and

they are not able to access appropriate programs such as GOLD. For example, in 2005 when the position was not funded and in 2012 when the position was vacant for a substantial period of time, referrals to GOLD significantly diminished.

In summary:

Reductions to the Gifted Education Consultant's time will severely impact the identification and referral of gifted and GLD/2E students to appropriate programs and essentially will be a cut to the GOLD program.

Our fear is that fewer students will be referred to the program, GOLD will be underutilized, the program will be seen as non-essential and down the road, it will also be cut.

### **The Role of the Educational Psychologist and Area Counsellor:**

The Psychologist plays a vital role in identification of gifted and GLD/2E students. Also, a psycho-educational assessment is required for referral to the GOLD program.

There is an inequity between families that can and those that cannot afford to obtain psycho-educational assessments privately. This highlights the ongoing inequality of access to services and programs between east side and west side families and further contributes to the lack of access for east side children to the GOLD program.

Families that cannot afford a private assessment have their children placed on the school's waitlist. However, the waitlists are so lengthy that students are graduating from elementary school before receiving an assessment. Without an assessment, these children are not eligible for the GOLD program. Also, students in the GOLD program typically need to be re-assessed during their high school years to focusing on their need for accommodations in classes and provincial exams (assessments for elementary students are only considered valid for five years). But many students don't receive assessments in high school either, due to lengthy waitlists. Moreover, when students move forward to post-secondary education and need accommodations, a valid psycho-educational assessment documenting their needs is required. Without an assessment in high school, they face another level of educational challenges and hurdles. Psycho-educational assessment for GLD/2E students during high school should be an essential part of the GOLD program.

The If gifted and GLD/2E students are not appropriately identified and placed in programs that support their learning needs, there is a likelihood they will experience increasing levels of anxiety, depression, frustration and 'acting out' behaviours. They will likely be directed to special support workers and area counsellors, which will place an added burden on caseloads that are already significantly overburdened. Again, there will be an inequity in access to services such as counselling between families that can and cannot afford private services to help support and assist their children.

In summary:

The reduction of a Psychologist position will add to already excessively long waitlists, and will further erode the process of identifying GLD and gifted students. Because the GOLD program is by referral only, and that referral only comes after significant screening and testing, to cut the availability of testing increases the inequality of access to GOLD between east side and west side students (based on financial resources).

Gifted and GLD/2E students will remain hidden in the system and will not be referred to appropriate programs that support their educational needs. They are at risk of ongoing, increasing emotional, psychological and behavioural challenges which will place an added burden on Area Counsellors and support workers, whose capacities are already overtaxed.

**In Conclusion:**

We know there are students in the school system in need of gifted and GLD/2E programming and support. We know that the Gifted Education Consultant and the Educational Psychologist play vital roles in identifying and matching students with appropriate programs that can be, in some cases, life saving, not just academically rewarding.

We urge the Board of Trustees to consider the impact of the proposed cuts on students' access to appropriate, necessary programming, especially the GOLD program. If the cuts are enacted, they will, in essence, lead to the dismantling of the GOLD program.



**Presentation to Committee III**

**Vancouver School Board**

**by the**

**Gifted Learning Disabled (GLD) Advocacy Group**

November 13, 2013

We appreciate the opportunity to meet with you today. We met with Ms. Bacchus in the spring, and recently with Ms. Rosemary Burd, the Gifted Consultant. Also, Ms. Burd and Ms. Marielle Simone-Weisinger attended our most recent group meeting; we appreciated the opportunity to dialogue with them directly about the services for GLD students.

We appreciate the programs that have been put in place for Gifted/Learning Disabled (GLD), or Twice Exceptional (2E), students, especially the GOLD programs at Prince of Wales (PW) (20 years) and David Thompson (DT) (since 2008). For GLD students, attendance in GOLD has meant the difference between failing or dropping out of high school, and developing the skills to succeed in school. Many go on to attend post-secondary school. To be in a class with other kids just like them, with bright ideas and quirky senses of humour, and challenges, gives them the opportunity to thrive, to belong somewhere, and to find their peer group.

**Our Reason for Meeting with Committee III (Concern About Low Referrals to GOLD Program):**

We are greatly concerned that there were insufficient referrals to the GOLD programs last spring (2013). The information nights were poorly attended and only 11 appropriate referrals were received for the 15 available grade eight spaces in the two GOLD programs. Only 8 students actually enrolled – all of whom were placed in PW GOLD with DT receiving none.

This was the lowest number of referrals the programs have ever received. In 2012, there were 24 referrals and historically the information night attendance has been strong and referrals have been between 20 and 24 with all available spaces being filled.

Consequently the GOLD teacher at DT left the position and a new teacher, with other teaching responsibilities, is now there. Not only does she not have dedicated GOLD teaching, there is no dedicated GOLD classroom as there is at PW – which serves as a haven, and a space for students needing

to do work or tests in a quieter space – and there is no School and Student Support Worker (SSSW) attached to the program at DT. These elements – full time teacher, dedicated classroom, and SSSW all seem to be crucial ingredients in the success of the GOLD program at PW – yet they have not been installed at DT, or are being dismantled.

We are deeply concerned there will be insufficient referrals again this spring, which might lead to the conclusion that two GOLD programs are unnecessary. We think that would be an extremely unfortunate interpretation of the situation.

### **Background:**

In the spring (2013) we raised our concern about the lack of referrals to the program with District Learning Services (DLS). We requested, but were not given an opportunity to discuss our concerns directly with staff; we met with Ms. Patti Bacchus, VSB Chair, in June to present our concerns. We eventually heard via email from the DLS that they were unsure why the referrals were low for this year, given that the usual recruitment procedures had been followed.

However, from our perspective, there was a significant difference. The Resource Teacher position that had been held by Megan Thrift was vacant for 18 months. We believe this was a major factor in the drop off of referrals, given that the same situation occurred in 2005. At that time, the position was cut, and the referrals to GOLD dropped off as well – down to 12.

### **The Role of the Resource Teacher in Identifying GLD Students:**

We believe it's not just the filling of the position that makes a difference. It's the function the Resource Teacher served in the system. Historically, the position has always had an outreach/consultative component. The Resource Teacher would meet with potentially G/LD students, their teachers, and their parents, at their elementary schools, to provide person-to person help in identifying them and informing both teachers and parents of available resources and programs such as mentorship, Challenge programs, and strategies for enriched and supported learning at home and in the classroom. She brought about the majority of referrals to the high school GOLD Program.

By meeting directly with teachers, the Resource Teacher increased the likelihood that the classroom teacher would understand the profile and recognize the characteristics in their students who potentially are GLD, thus leading to referrals for further assessment and identification. This

recognition in the classroom is crucial because it can be very challenging to identify GLD kids. They present with a challenging mix of passion, intensity, strong verbal skills, and great ideas coupled with written output difficulties, attention problems, and emotional difficulties including anxiety, depression, fragility and low self-esteem. To teachers, (and parents too) they can look like very bright kids who are unmotivated, lazy or obstinate. In short, in the classroom they can look like, and are often labeled as, "behaviour problems". Their giftedness, and their learning disabilities can easily be missed. Sometimes their learning disabilities are evident, but the giftedness continues to be missed.

The Resource Teacher position has now been filled, but it is our understanding that much of the Resource Teacher's work currently involves providing pull-in programs at the Challenge Centre, and the Gifted Consultant conducts a significant number of screenings of children for programming. Attending Challenge Centre programs is great for students but, in reality, often translates into only a few weeks of enrichment for a student over their entire elementary education. We understand there is contact between the Gifted Consultant and Gifted Contacts at schools (and students are now being tracked through the system, which we think is a very good idea). But we are concerned that these designations make no reference to GLD (instead of being included in the Gifted nomenclature, awareness of GLD issues may get lost) and the focus of the work is shifting away from that direct connection between the Resource Teacher, classroom teachers, children and their parents, to the detriment of identification, longer term planning and referrals to appropriate resources and programs. If classroom teachers don't know the GLD profile, or don't see students as potentially being GLD, they are not likely to refer the students for assessment, or enrichment opportunities.

### **The Need for Early Identification of GLD Students (The Waitlist Problem):**

Early identification of these kids is essential because these kids require a psycho-educational assessment for access to GOLD. The waitlists for psychology services within the VSB are so long in some schools that children on the list may graduate from elementary school before ever getting assessed and thus not be able to apply to GOLD. Not surprisingly, students whose families have the means to obtain private assessments fare better in this process. We see that more students in the GOLD program have had private assessments than school based assessments. This inequality of access concerns us, especially as it may contribute to the traditional east - west division of referrals and utilization of the GOLD programs.

### **Mapping of Referrals to the GOLD Program:**

We recently mapped out the history of referrals to the GOLD programs over the past 10 years (see Attachments). Two patterns emerged that appear to support our concerns. First, more referrals came from West Side schools than East Side schools. Second, there are schools that have referred multiple students to GOLD over multiple years (e.g., Hudson, Bayview, Kerrisdale, Kitchener) and there are a number of schools, especially East Side schools, that have not referred ANY students to GOLD in the past 10 years. This pattern of multiple referrals from one school suggests that when someone in the school knows about the GLD profile, they recognize it in more than one student and referrals ensue. We have provided these maps to Ms. Burd and Ms. Simone-Weisinger as well. We think it is essential to maintain the direct contact between consultant and resource teacher with classroom teachers who work with the students.

### **Recommendations to Increase the Profile of GLD Resources:**

In terms of disseminating information to parents about programs, especially at the secondary level, we would suggest a more streamlined approach that reflects the continuum of gifted and enriched programs, including the GOLD program. For example, we would like to see alterations to the website so that the GOLD program is included in "Secondary Programs" along with other programs such as City School, Hamber Challenge Academy, and DT Odyssey *etc. (as well as being located in the "Special Education" section)*. There are hints of GLD in the description of the Challenge Academy, and the possibility of getting accommodations to write the Mini entrance test, for written output difficulties, a common feature among GLD kids, for example, suggesting that parents might reasonably be looking at those programs for their kids – and might not ever know about the GOLD program. For the same reasons, we would also request that the GOLD program be included in the Options brochure. Including GOLD among these programs (even with a line that says 'see further under special education....' would indicate that there is a program that bridges between large high schools – where GLD students might fall through the cracks, and high achievement programs like mini schools where GLD kids may fail to thrive.

As we have in the past, we encourage the VSB to continue developing programs, such as an elementary GOLD class, or other direct service for elementary kids whose anxiety, depression, frustration etc puts them at risk of avoidance, school refusal, and failure (and whose parents, if they have the means, will seek out more specialized private options to help their children – note recent "Private School Expo" in Vancouver), and at the secondary level, a mentorship program. We think there may be some opportunities, perhaps in partnership with UBC or SFU education or

psychology departments, to develop the Gifted and GLD programs a vibrant, innovative, cohesive continuum of Enriched Education from K to 12. The various programs and positions are there, even into the University Transition program, but there seems to be a lack of communication among the various layers and levels of the education system.

To contribute to improvements, we would propose to do a survey of administrators, and teachers, especially at the elementary level, to clarify what they do know about GLD and available programs and resources. We would also like to provide an in-service workshop for elementary staff regarding the characteristics and needs of this population.

**Summary:**

In summary, we support a collaborative team of the GLD community (including students, teachers, and parents) working more creatively in partnership with the VSB. Our goal is to improve services, resources, and communication. As part of reaching that goal, we hope the GOLD programs at both PW and DT can continue to thrive.

**Attachments:**

Map 1 – Vancouver Elementary Schools – GOLD Referral History

Gifted Learning Disabled (GLD) Advocacy Group VSB Budget Proposal for the 2007-2008 Year (April 26, 2007)

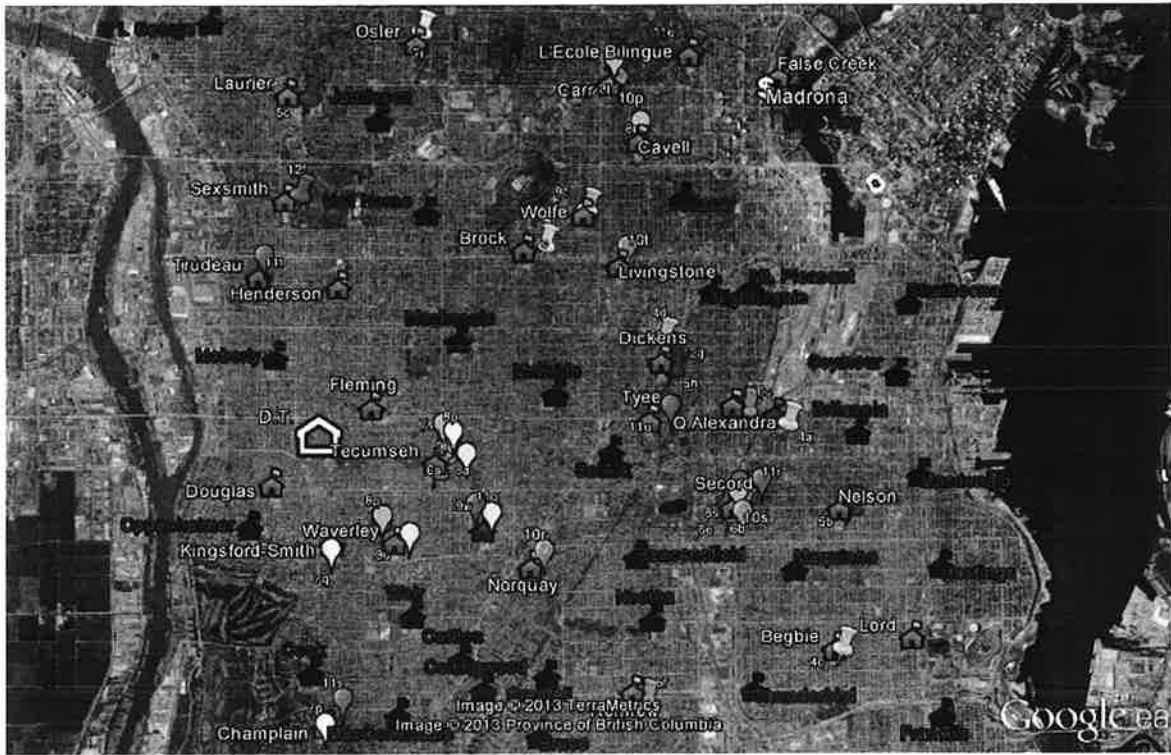
One Parent's Story

Parent Letter

Attachment 1 :

Map 1 - GOLD Referral History of Vancouver Elementary Schools





Legend

- |       |   |         |  |
|-------|---|---------|--|
| Green | - have referred in the past ten years     | Pushpin | = referral to PW. (number indicates year referred) |
| Red   | - have not referred in the past ten years | Balloon | = referral to DT. (letters are not applicable)     |

Attachment 2:

## Budget Proposal for the 2010-2011 Year

Presentation to the Vancouver School Board

by the

Gifted Learning Disabled (GLD) Advocacy Group

April 20, 2010

My name is Dr. Alivia Maric; I am a parent of a gifted learning disabled child in the GOLD program at Prince of Wales Secondary School.

My name is Drew Thompson; I am gifted and learning disabled, and was fortunate enough to be a student in the GOLD program at PW for all five years of high school. We represent the Gifted Learning Disabled Advocacy Group of Vancouver, a group of parents, former GOLD students and educators in the field.

We're here to talk about GLD students, to thank you for the excellent, innovative, effective programs and staffing currently in place, and to express our view that it is imperative to preserve these programs given that they are identifying and serving only a portion of the GLD students in the school system.

GLD students have been assessed by educational psychologists as "gifted", but their gifts are masked by their learning and/or emotional problems. Their gifts create high expectations of performance, but their learning disabilities make presenting their gifts and reaching their potential at best challenging, and at worst, almost impossible. They are at risk of dropping out of school, despite their high potential. Their school experience is overshadowed by a constant sense of failure and struggle driving many GLD students to often crippling levels of anxiety and depression. (For example, about ¼ of current GOLD students have been treated medically for anxiety or depression.) It is not uncommon for GLD students to be emotionally fragile and they should be understood as an "at risk" population with needs that require specifically tailored assistance.



At the secondary school level, the GOLD program only requires a .8 FTE teacher and a .8 FTE SSA (Student Support Assistant) They provide support for the unique needs of GLD students:

1. by teaching to their strengths rather than their deficits (helping them to acknowledge and develop their strengths and talents);
2. by providing a nurturing, homogeneous environment - a place where these students feel they belong, and are valued (for their individual differences, opposed to feeling alienated and frustrated by their output difficulties despite intellect);
3. by helping students learn to self-advocate and negotiate accommodations (so parents, teachers and resource teachers won't have to do so much) - (and I can certainly say that parenting a GLD child in the school system was a steep learning curve in advocacy);
4. and helping students learn appropriate compensation and coping skills so they face their challenges rather than avoid, deny or even lie about them.

Addressing the three diagnoses of gifted, learning disabled, and emotionally fragile, the GOLD program keeps students in regular classes most of the time to maintain integration, while providing a space for uniquely like-minded students to give and receive crucial peer support. This highly successful program, in operation since 1989, was helpful for me, and continues to be so. For example, despite being in the 6th percentile for spelling, GOLD has given me the skills and strategies to graduate from UBC and move on to be the United Nations researcher I am today. Please see the Appendix of the transcription of this presentation that you have been given for a list of anecdotes in support of the GOLD program.

In 2007 we petitioned the VSB to create a second GOLD program at David Thompson high school, which has successfully created more spaces and geographic balance to support the substantial population of GLD students. Tonight we have a number of David Thompson (DT) GOLD program students and parents here in support and appreciation for the board's implementation of our proposal.

However, our greatest concern focuses on the elementary level, regarding the need for early identification and support of GLD students. When unidentified they may be treated as lazy, unmotivated, or as behavior problems, setting them on a negative, discouraged, frustrated path in the school system. We know that GLD kids benefit greatly from access to

programming that addresses their complex strengths and challenges, and allows them to interact with their peers. The proposed loss of one FTE position from the Challenge Centre will limit opportunities for enriched learning with peers. We urge you to maintain current staffing levels and programs for GLD students in the Challenge Centre and Mentorship programs, which both serve a substantial number of GLD students. They are part of the family of programs from Kindergarten through Grade 12 that support the GLD community.

We greatly appreciate that you recognize the significance of the Gifted Consultant and Elementary District Resource Teacher for GLD/EF (Twice Exceptional), tasked with not only identifying potential GLD students, but also facilitating necessary resources to parents, students, and teachers alike, about program and support options. Our concern is that without these District-level positions, students will be left unidentified, leaving the programs with fewer applicants, and giving the false impression that the need for such programming is diminishing--when in fact it is not.

In conclusion, we thank you for recognizing the needs of this vulnerable population in these challenging fiscal times. We know that many GLD students remain unidentified or under-serviced. To preserve the success of those who are being serviced, it is imperative to keep Gifted and GLD programs and staffing at current levels.

Attachment 2:

## **Budget Proposal for the 2007-2008 Year**

**Presented to the  
Vancouver School Board**

**By the  
Gifted Learning Disabled (GLD) Advocacy Group  
April 26, 2007**

We appreciate the opportunity to present again our concerns about services for Gifted Learning Disabled students in Vancouver. We were heartened to hear on Tuesday that there are some funds available and would again like to propose that some of that funding be directed to GLD programming, in particular a second GOLD program for high school students. We would like to acknowledge your decisions thus far to maintain current programming and resources for all gifted students, and to redirect funds into increasing psychological services that will reduce caseloads and facilitate more psycho educational assessments.

In our first proposal we expressed concerns about the lack of consistent programming and services for GLD students. We continue to see a great need for the VSB to develop a comprehensive, equitable and integrated model of service for GLD students from K to 12. We identified several gaps and inequities of access in the current services provided to GLD students. To best support these students we felt there were several points that should be addressed including:

- **Capacity of GOLD Program to meet need:** The intake process for the GOLD program typically generates applications from 20 to 30 students who meet the criteria for the program and demonstrate clear need for its supports. Of these candidates, the program's capacity limits access to 6 to 8 new students. Furthermore, due to the number of GLD students who do not get accurately identified and the geographical limitations of the current program, there is strong reason to believe the number of applicants is well below the actual incidence of GLD in the population.
- **Equitable access to GOLD Program for GLD students across the District:** Currently, the GOLD Program is provided at a single location on the far West Side of the city. This represents considerable hardship for students who are obliged to travel throughout the district to PW, sometimes commuting up to 2 or 3 hours a day on public transportation. This commute time impedes their ability to participate in extracurricular activities (e.g., sports teams that practice at 7am) and contributes to their fatigue which is already exacerbated by the high level of stress they typically experience at school.
- **GLD Program at the elementary level:** It is widely accepted that early intervention is cost-effective and represents best practices. There is currently, however, no integrated program to meet the specific needs of elementary GLD students for an environment that both fosters their gifts and provides supports to strengthen areas of weakness. These students typically begin to struggle in the school system from an early age, falling soon into a cycle of anxiety, frustration and often behavioural problems.

- **Resources to support and develop areas of giftedness in secondary GLD students:** There are virtually no resources for the GOLD program to offer mentorship or enrichment to students; its focus is on helping students develop skills to overcome their learning challenges and to build self advocacy skills. While these are essential skills for GLD students to master, a general principle found throughout the research in this field is to focus primary attention on developing and nurturing areas of giftedness.
- **GLD-specific supports for GLD secondary students unable to access the GOLD Program:** As GLD secondary students are known to be at high risk of anxiety, depression and dropping out, it is clear that resources and support are required for GLD students who do not receive the specialized services of the GOLD Program.

We would like to address several points to clarify our proposal for additional GLD services.

**IS THERE A NEED FOR ADDITIONAL SECONDARY PROGRAMMING?**

It is clear to us that there is an URGENT, IMMEDIATE, and DEMONSTRABLE need for additional GLD programming.

As we have noted, the GOLD program turns away **2 of every 3** applicants who meet the criteria for the program.

**Table #1: Number of Applicants to PW GOLD Program vs. Number Accepted 2001-2006**

Year	Referrals to Elementary District GLD Resource Teacher	# of students identified as GLD/EF	Applied to GOLD	Placed in GOLD
2001	219	74	?	7
2004	163	52	21	12*
2005	NONE (position cut)	unknown	13	7
2006	Unknown	Unknown	22 (19 met criteria)	8

(8 likely candidates missed deadline\*\*)

\*A very unsuccessful experiment, never to be repeated.

\*\*Deadline for applications was December 15.

**IS THERE A NEED FOR A MORE EQUITABLE GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF PROGRAMMING?**

**Table #2: Geographic Distribution of PW GOLD Applicants for 2007/8 & Enrolled Students 2006/7**

Status	West	North	East
--------	------	-------	------

(Downtown & False Creek)			
Currently Enrolled	15 (incl. 1 who moved across town)	2	10
Grade 7s who applied on-time	13		6
Missed deadline	5		3

Any additional spaces for secondary GLD programming should be located in a position to better serve students traveling from the Eastern half of Vancouver.

### IS THERE A FINANCIAL BARRIER TO BECOMING IDENTIFIED AS GIFTED, LD?

**Table #3:** Source of Psychoeducational Assessments of PW GOLD Applicants for 2007/8.

Private	VSB
12	7

With psychoeducational assessments running anywhere from \$2000 to \$3500, and VSB waitlists for assessments running anywhere from 1 to 4 years, families with more disposable income are more likely to receive appropriate identification.

### ARE THERE MORE GLD STUDENTS OUT THERE WHO WOULD BENEFIT FROM ACCESS TO A SECONDARY GLD/GLDEF PROGRAM?

Yes. The numbers in Table #1 clearly show that there is a need for more GOLD-like spaces in the District.

In addition, we have received many anecdotal reports of students who weren't identified in elementary school because

- they became labeled as "behaviour problems"
- were labeled as "lazy" "unmotivated" or "underachiever"
- parent(s) couldn't afford early psychoeducational assessment
- symptoms of child's anxiety (depression, school refusal, frustration) masked real issues of being intellectually gifted & learning disabled

Even when students are identified, many parents experience difficulties in gaining access to appropriate programming. Parents have told us that:

- educators were unaware of the GOLD program
- educators were unaware of the DRT for GLD/EF Elementary

- educators discouraged some qualified applicants from applying to GOLD because “it is so difficult to get in”
  - the deadline is too early in the year—many parents haven’t finished getting their child acclimatized to Grade 7 by the time they must encourage their school to get the application/referral process launched for their child
  - knowing how to access VSB programs and services is much more difficult if your child is in a private school in Grade 7 (there were 5 families from private schools interested in applying for GOLD this year)
  - distance from Prince of Wales is a barrier for some east-side families
- 

Parenthetically, there is a clear need for tracking these kids – we know from research, and we know from parents’ stories that these kids are at high risk of school failure, dropping out, anxiety, depression, but the numbers of what happens to these kids as they struggle through the educational system are hard to come by.

### **IS THE GOLD PROGRAM SUCCESSFUL?**

We think the answer to this question is yes, whether we are referring to academic success or other forms of success including social, emotional, psychological or behavioural indices. For example,

- Students find a cohort, a peer group of students who share common thinking and learning styles and often, a quirky sense of humour. Some children, following an information session during which they hear GOLD students describe the program, have said “I’m home” or “I’ve found my oasis”
- Students learn valuable skills including study and organization skills, as well as self-awareness, self-acceptance and advocacy
- Students who have been at risk of failure or dropping out, continue in school, succeed in getting closer to their potential

In terms of academic success, there are many examples:

- one particular student went from elementary classes in which all of their grades were ‘asterisked’ – in other words, the student met none of the prescribed learning outcomes to achieving C’s & B’s and even an A in Grade 8 GOLD
- GOLD students have won drama and writing prizes
- GOLD students have gained entry to university programs
- PW’s Valedictorian last year was a GOLD student

As one parent of a GOLD graduate says “the GOLD program was when my son’s ship finally came in. He had many highly-skilled, super-kind people working with him in elementary school but the whole experience was still really tough. Finally in Grade 8 he had a peer group, that is to say a support group of like-minded learners as well as highly-skilled, super-kind adults with expertise in this area. Being gifted and learning disabled is a double challenge and can create its own anxieties. He learned so much about being his own advocate and about looking out for others, as well. My son has so much to offer this world and

our family is so grateful for this program and for our son's success as a learner. He is taking a little longer than four years to complete his degree at the University of Victoria and frankly, I think just about everyone would benefit from extra time at university. He is an amazing man and the GOLD program contributed greatly to his skills and self-esteem."

.As Drew Thompson, a GOLD Alumni said in our initial presentation, "My gifts created great expectations of my abilities, and my disabilities prevented me from ever expressing, or getting credit for, my talents. Mounting frustration caused by consistent failures and crushed expectations lead to a youth marked by anxiety and suicidal thoughts.

I was placed in many remedial programs in elementary school that were poorly suited. Not until high school, when I entered the GOLD program, did I feel I was in a place where I belonged. Other remedial programs failed to grapple with my unique condition of being gifted as well as learning-disabled. Remediation never seemed to meet the needs of both conditions.

The GOLD program helped me understand what my learning needs are. More than extra help on assignments, the GOLD program created a safe environment that allowed me to understand my abilities and disabilities. With this knowledge, I was able to reconstruct a more realistic picture of myself and reorient my expectations. I no longer view myself as a failure.

Had I been one of the two thirds of applicants who did not make it into the GOLD program, I would not have the self-knowledge of my abilities and disabilities, that gives me the confidence to cope with my anxieties, even to this day.

The strategies the GOLD program helped me develop, have brought me from a position on the verge of dropping out of school, alienated highly depressed, and endlessly frustrated, to where I am now—finishing up my third year at UBC. School continues to be challenging but not impossible, and not beyond my reach. I simply would not have graduated high school, if I was one of the two thirds of applicants turned away by the GOLD program due to its limited space. The GOLD program was the difference between being an at risk delinquent, to being a successful, contributing member of society."

## **IMPLEMENTATION OF A SECOND GOLD PROGRAM**

We continue to believe a second high school program for GLD students is easy to implement. There is a model in place in the existing GOLD program, it is successful, and it is relatively inexpensive.

A new secondary program could be implemented incrementally, as it was initially done in the PW GOLD program. In the first year, the program could consist of 3 blocks, comprising a Grade 8 English block and a Skills block, and a Grade 9 block of Skills/Support. Each year, a new Grade 8 class would be brought in, and the program is expanded as the original cohort moves up through the grades.

Some desirable aspects of a high school hosting a second GLD program are:

- a central or eastern location in the district
- a student culture that values academic achievement and intellectual development (so GLD kids won't be bullied or targeted for being smart)
- A vibrant arts community such as theatre, film, arts, computer design (e.g., at PW GOLD kids form the majority of the stagecraft crew with their interest in technology, design, creativity etc.)

A second GOLD program would offer these benefits:

- improved equity of access for students throughout the district;
- Service for twice as many secondary students in the district (with fewer GLD students liable to “fall through the cracks” in other schools without a GOLD program);
- A significant number of students who are now using other resources of the school system, such as Skill blocks, inappropriate Special Education services and counselling services would have their needs more efficiently and appropriately met;
- The addition of another GLD teacher in the district would provide a larger professional community and mutual support and inspiration to current GLD staff.

## **SUMMARY**

There is an urgent, immediate, demonstrable need for a second high school program, in an eastern or central location. Students attending the GOLD program, as well as those applying to the program, come from across the district, and the majority of students eligible for the program are currently not being serviced by the public school system. A second program, in a more central or eastern location, would be a big step toward improving accessibility and meeting the needs of these students.

We greatly appreciate the work of the Elementary Gifted staff at the Challenge Centres and Mentorship programs, the Elementary GLD/EF District Resource Teacher, and the Gifted Advisory Committee. We strongly support their continued efforts to identify and propose services to address the learning needs of all gifted children, including gifted learning disabled students.



## Attachment 4:

### **My Son's Path to Gold**

My son is gifted in most areas but with written output difficulties, anxiety, emotional fragility and perfectionism. In grade three he was assessed by VSB and initially the psychologist was going to give him a straight gifted designation. Before finishing her report she reconsidered because his the disparity between his weakest area, which was low but still in the normal range, was so great that she believed that put him at risk of behavior problems due to increasing frustration in the future.

In grade six he was in the Tecumseh MAAC program (he was struggling there) where Megan Thrift the GLD consultant teacher met him and she suggested that we should consider the GOLD program as his high school destination. Although he wouldn't be applying to high school programs that year we took our son to the GOLD information night that December and he immediately identified with the students who were representing the program at the meeting. During grade seven I had him apply to four minischool programs as well as applying to GOLD. He was accepted to three minischools but there was no question in his mind and he accepted the offered place at DT GOLD.

The difference was apparent immediately – he came home and talked about his classmates and the interesting things that older students were doing, he usually hung out in the GOLD room (which was almost always open at that time) for an hour after school and he was no longer late to school in the mornings because his stress level had dropped so much.

He has now graduated from DT having had progressively greater academic success. This year he is working on a portfolio of game designs and taking physics 12 at a learning centre so he can enter computer science or engineering at SFU or UBC next year followed by taking game design at one of the private colleges.

The one sad note is that over the final two years at DT the GOLD room became less and less accessible and we heard that the very good teacher who was a boon to him left for another position when faced with the having even more additional other courses to handle when no new grade eight students were placed in the DT GOLD program for 2013.

This is the merest outline of the value of this program to him – what he got was a place in the school world and with that a place in a group and the help he needed with output, organization and advocating for himself. He is so much more confident coming out of high school than when he went in that he is able to cope much better and a rewarding adulthood is much less of a question.

Attachment 5:

**RE: Committee III Presentation November 13, 2013**

Dear Committee III - Vancouver School Board

I am a parent of a new grade 8 GOLD student at PW. We live close to DT, however, and were told that there was no GOLD grade 8 program at DT this year due to low enrolment (which I understand now is indicative of low GOLD referrals, which subsequently, most likely also indicates low numbers of VSB- sponsored G/LD assessments). Thus, my son was referred to the PW GOLD Program for the 2013/2014 school year.

My son is extremely happy at PW in this critical program resource, despite the extra distance to travel. My son was fortunate to have been assessed G/LD in Grade Two. I am deeply concerned, however, and hence this is my sincere inquiry about what steps are being made towards ensuring an increase in GOLD referrals that accurately reflects the G/LD population in Vancouver, and that ensures a healthy, thriving future of the GOLD program at both PW and DT.

Sincerely,

Heather Duff, Parent, (G/LD) Advocacy Group

PhD candidate, Dept. of Language and Literacy  
Education, UBC & Artistic Director, Vancouver  
Youth Theatre

**Public Education is for Everyone**  
*Melanie Antweiler, PhD, and DPAC Executive Member-at-Large*

I thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. ~~I will split my five minutes into two sections, first bringing forth concerns from a PAC which was unable to attend these consultations, and secondly speaking as a parent.~~

~~[Letters from Henderson's PAC]~~

Now, I'd like to speak as a parent of young children. Last night we heard from a number of well-spoken students and their parents. You've heard how they've benefitted from the programmes that are now under threat. I am speaking from the perspective of a parent of children early in their school years.

My oldest child is in grade two, my youngest will start kindergarten in September. When I listened to the passionate presentations about the wonderful programmes which have supported students and their families over the past years, my heart broke for my children and others who will never have those opportunities.

Instrumental music programmes are particularly important to me. I did not attend school in BC, nevertheless, when I was in grade 7, I was handed a flute. At that point, I was in a single parent family and money was extremely tight. I would not have had the opportunity to learn an instrument if not for the publicly-funded school music programme that was mandatory. I went on to learn several instruments, and complete many Royal Conservatory exams and qualifications, all because of a dedicated school music teacher. You've heard about how music aids cognitive development, provides an opportunity for expression and communication, develops the whole student. I agree with every single point, and I'd like to add this: the discipline and the appreciation of incremental improvement through hard work gave me the skills I needed to complete my doctorate. I recently wrote to my school music teacher and thanked him for the gift he gave me. It enriched my life in ways I may never fully understand.

Music needs to be in schools. Please don't take away this programme. If anything, you should be finding ways so that all of your elementary schools can provide instrumental music, that all students will benefit.

I'm deeply concerned about other cuts, too. Some of them are affecting my young children already. My eldest has been flagged for gifted testing since the start of grade one, but hasn't been able to have it yet. You propose to cut the educational psychology programme and the gifted education consultant, which will further delay his testing. He's been fortunate so far to have teachers who have found creative ways to keep him interested, but he is at risk of becoming one of those kids who is bored at school if not given the educational challenges he needs.

My younger child needs speech therapy. He has been bounced around through VCH's waitlists, and finally is about to start therapy. But I've been told that, since he will be enrolled in school come September, he will be discharged from VCH's programme in June and referred to VSB's. But, of course, you will be cutting funding for that service, too. His educational opportunities and outcomes will be restricted if he cannot make himself understood.

Parents of young children must arrange care for their children each time there is a district closure. You are off-loading your costs onto us. The extra minutes added to each day will deny primary children the regular repetition needed to master new literacy, numeracy, social, and physical skills. Children learn through repeated exposure and practise; five extra minutes every day for a week is not of the same value as an additional uninterrupted 25 minute block once a week.

I note that you intend to increase funding to employee wellness programmes. Yes, employee wellness is important, but isn't your first priority meant to be the children? Won't your employees benefit when their students are properly supported, when the students' needs are met, when the workplace is less stressful?

You've spoken of the \$47 million worth of cuts over the last years. I would love to see an alternate budget, one which would reflect the needs and priorities of the board. This would be a blue-sky budget, not balanced, but as a talking point. I agree that the Ministry of Education needs to provide adequate funding for public education; a framework budget of priorities would be useful to know how much more money is needed for a viably-funded educational system.

Society benefits when its citizens are educated. With these cuts, you are mortgaging the future of our children and our society.

Submitted Wednesday, April 16, 2014.

Dear School Trustees and VSB Management:

We are a group of South Asian parents from Henderson Annex & Henderson Elementary school. We are here to express our deepest concerns regarding the reduction of one position of South Asian Multicultural Liaison Workers of VSB. As far as our knowledge is concerned, we saw MCLW providing their services to not only the new immigrant families and their kids, but also the kids who are born in Canada. Even those are very ESL and require help when they come to school in kindergarten.

We would like to address the main issues of our South Asian population and how MCLW provides valuable services and support to our ESL families. In South Asian community, many hardworking parents require multiple jobs to offset the cost of living. As a result, many students have grandparents as primary caregivers who are unable to support the learning at home and school due to language and knowledge barriers. Our MCLW are an important communication link between the grandparents/caregivers and the school. Studies show that more and more families are experiencing stress and anxiety and they need a lot more social and emotional support and our MCLW fully understands the family dynamics and can deal with them in a much better way. They have not only given their cultural interpretation and linguistic services to the school but also helped many parents to be actively involved in their children's education.

I have my own example. Although my family did not face language barriers to that extent when we came to Canada, we went through a lot of difficulties e.g. lack of communication and less knowledge about cross culture. MCLW had been a great support for me and my child. She referred my son to the Area Counsellor, Speech and Language Pathologist and put him to different lunch and after school programs. She had introduced me to the PAC of the school and told me about the value of doing Volunteer work in the school. She is responsible for the success of my child in the school system. She has also assisted my family to participate in activities to foster our integration into the Canadian Society. Today my identity in this country is because of her.

As you all are aware that our community here in Vancouver has been facing many challenges with regards to the upbringing of our children. Many of our youth feels disconnected with their parents and seek support from outside of their home and many times have been making bad choices and putting them at risk. Another example is of a single mother working 6 days in a week left no time for her son. MCLW has been working with this single mother from last 5 years when her son was in grade 2. She put her son to different programs in the school like Reading Buddies, Summer Camp, Woodworking club, Boys for Real and Big Brother to support him who was at-risk. We parents strongly believe that MCLW not only provides linguistic services to our community but also equally services in the field of cultural, emotional and interpersonal communication. They are an integral part of our community in the schools.

MCLW's services <sup>have</sup> ~~has~~ been provided to Vancouver's immigrant and visible minority students as a means to bridge the gaps between schools, homes and communities. This service has assisted students to achieve success both academically and socially. MCLW are a great source of help, strength and guidance for families in Home School partnerships. We urge you to reconsider your decision about elimination of South Asian MCLW position. We are not just numbers but families who need cultural and emotional support in school system. Reduction in positions will not be able to provide proper quality of services. We sincerely request you to think about quality and not quantity. Please do not take away our essential need in schools. Elimination of such position would directly affect the quality of services provided by MCLW to our kids and their families. We all hope that you will consider our request. Thank you so much for listening to us and understanding our concerns.

Support for Designated Music Room at Charles Dickens Elementary  
Presentation to the Vancouver Board of Education, April 16, 2014

Charles Dickens Elementary is losing its dedicated music space in September due to the need for another enrolling classroom. We strongly believe that all kids in our catchment should be able to attend Dickens. We also believe that a strong and vibrant, professionally taught music program is essential to our children's education. One cannot come at the expense of another.

We have a prep teacher who is a music specialist, we have proven curriculum, we have the keen interest of hundreds of students and we have the instruments, but they will have no place to play them.

We urge you to find a permanent music space for the marimba orchestra program at Charles Dickens, with appropriate soundproofing and adequate space for instrument use, storage and year-round access. Without this, the marimba program cannot continue in its present form.

You have already heard about the strong research citing the positive effect of music on cognitive and social development. We think we can all agree that music education is important and should be included in our schools.

At Dickens, 300+ children a year directly benefit from the marimba program. It is not an elective program where kids are pulled from other teaching activities, but a core part of the school curriculum for those in grades 2/3/4 and above. K/1/2 kids and those coming from Dickens Annex eagerly await their turn to play these fun and compelling instruments.

Losing a space in which the current marimba program can be taught has a dramatic impact on every child in the school. Additionally, this program is offered at no cost to families, as the school owns the instruments, so there is not the need to rent or buy them.

The school also benefits from the positive reputation of this program. Many parents have said that the program was a big reason why they were drawn to Dickens in the first place and why our school risks over-population while neighbouring schools face declining enrollments.

Dickens was the first school in Canada to use marimbas and these instruments have been a central part of the music program at Dickens since 1998. This program has been a model for world music instruction at other schools and districts. Part of the reason for this success is that the marimba gels so perfectly with our school's culture, values and our multi-age learning environment where children in 3 grades make up one class.

The marimba is an easy-to-learn, collaborative, cooperative and accessible instrument. In a multi-age classroom like those at Dickens, there is a much wider range of skills and abilities than in a classroom with kids of a similar age. For example, a grade five student who has been playing the guitar since grade 3 will likely be much, much more advanced than a grade 3 student in the same class who is learning the instrument for the first time. Marimba allows these children to take music education together as a class, learn parts appropriate to their skill level, mentor each other and all play together in a fun and meaningful way.

Since teaching marimba is done orally, it is also more accessible to those who may not read English as a first language and to those without a background in Western musical theory. In a multilingual, multicultural, diverse community such as Vancouver, the importance of this cannot be overstated.

There is huge community support for saving a designated music space at Dickens. For example, early last week, we staffed a table in the main foyer of the school for 2 mornings before school and one day after school. and asked parents for letters of support. In that short time, we received 95 letters and many more were sent to the VSB via email. While these 95 letters represent over 1/4 of the school, you must also remember that the parents we reached with the tabling were only those who drop their children off inside the school and came through the main foyer to do so. Put another way, only two parents, of all the parents we spoke with, chose not to sign a letter. This type of almost universal support, unanimity of opinion and parent participation is rare in any school environment. It speaks to the importance of saving a music education space and, in particular, the marimba program at Dickens.

Additionally, parents fundraised over \$17,000 toward the purchase of the marimbas. They belong to Dickens and families do not want to lose the investment they have made into the program.

We were promised a portable for music education when old school was torn down. We had one on site which had previously been used for music but, when the new school opened, it was taken away. Music moved into the school itself because there was room but now that there is no more room, we ask you to honour that promise.

We have looked into many options. We have a multipurpose room but it is made of glass and cannot be adequately sound-proofed for marimbas, in addition to being the space where kids eat lunch and attend before and after school care.

On behalf of Charles Dickens Elementary, we have a modest budgetary request that is a one-time expense but will have a huge and positive impact on our school and every child in both Dickens Main and Dickens Annex, now and in the future.

We are asking you to find a used portable, such as those at University Hill or Prince of Wales schools which are closing this year, and move it to Dickens as our permanent designated music room. The cost of moving, setting up and cleaning a portable that the school board already owns will be much less than the cost of purchasing a new one.

We know there are significant financial constraints on the school board and that the provincial government's investment in education is insufficient, another issue we are working to address. We recognize this in our request to do more with less; to move and repurpose a resource that the VSB already owns and will be sitting empty. We don't care that the portable is old, just that our kids have a place in which they can continue their orchestra marimba program.

We are open to working with you to do whatever needs to be done to help save a designated music room at Dickens. Thank you.