



Vancouver Board of Education

School District No. 39

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

1580 West Broadway

Vancouver, B.C. V6J 5K8

Telephone: 604-713-5000

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2010 August 30

Hon. Dr. Margaret MacDiarmid, MLA
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC
V8W 9E2

Dear Minister MacDiarmid:

With another school year fast approaching, I would like to invite you to meet with our Board and Superintendent of Schools to allow us to share with you and discuss some exciting initiatives and new areas of focus for the Vancouver School District.

As you know, I have also written to the Premier requesting a similar meeting. The topics described in my 2010 July 27 letter to the Premier, which we would also like to share with you, include many innovative directions for positive exchange.

We are very excited to focus attention on creative and critical thinking, problem-based/project-based learning, personalizing learning and the opportunities for enhanced student engagement, which are becoming central themes for 21st century learning and system redesign on a national and global level. We welcome such directions in Vancouver, and wish to take a prominent lead in supporting any such initiatives. Our robotics program at Gladstone, 'Silver LEED' designation at Dickens, the recent Top-10 initiatives recognition from BC Hydro and our various school garden projects (including the Earth School model being initiated at Grandview) are examples of such innovations, which are already underway.

In keeping with a 21st Century Learning agenda, the district is entering into a dialogue about a balanced school year. We are hoping other neighbouring school districts will take a similar lead. This calendar would have natural breaks placed during the school year. The summer would then be somewhat shorter, becoming another semester - as you know, many students already access this possibility. Flexible timetabling will be another avenue for us to explore in order to provide greater choice and opportunity for individual learners so that their pathway to graduation can become more customized to their individual needs.

Last week, the school district held a two-day mini-conference for our school administrators with one of the key educators from the State of Maine (where the State, through then Governor Angus King, supported one-to-one laptops for every student). Over 140 educational leaders attended this hands-on Leadership and Learning with

Board of School Trustees:

Patti Bacchus - Chairperson

Jane Bouey - Vice-Chairperson

Allan Blakey Ken Clement Ken Denike

Carol Gibson Sharon Gregson Mike Lombardi

Allan Wong

Technology event. We recognize that today's students are connected students. As such, within our limited abilities, we are actively exploring ways to improve our student's educational opportunities through greater access to technology and begin to model this with our educational leadership. Our goal in this area, in support of 21st Century Learning, is to be able to have every student and teacher access web-based resources and utilize technology as seamless and necessary tools for teaching and learning. Our first steps will be to build fully wireless environments so that our staff and students can access the Internet anytime and anywhere. The next will be to provide the tools needed to take full advantage of the global learning community. To this end, our schools also need to be environments, where students can access both face-to-face learning as well as on-line distributed learning. This will involve a redistribution of several aspects of our current centralized models of delivery within the system to attend to individual student needs at every location in our district.

As you will be aware, we are considering all areas of our facility assets and where opportunity arises, moving towards the development of modern schools, which better meet the needs of the 21st Century Learner. In considering our facilities, a new view of what constitutes "School" needs to be considered - one that includes learning spaces for all ages, affordable housing, services and other community resources. Such physical plants may differ from traditional notions of schools and may contemplate vertical development without compromising surrounding green space. These facilities will combine school and community assets and may rise vertically in order to preserve the valuable green footprint on the overall properties. As we move ahead in developing Urban Neighbourhoods for Learning, we would like to explore some innovative ideas with you. Such ideas might be unique for an urban setting such as Vancouver and might need flexibility and open-mindedness from all levels of government.

We have proposed an Aboriginal-focused mini-school to be located at Britannia. This school-within-a-school will be an opportunity to build on our many community partnerships to support the relationships we have made through our Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement. It will further our strong commitment to improving our graduation rates by providing greater engagement and connections to schooling for all students, but especially for our Aboriginal students.

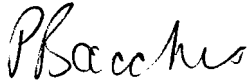
We also intend to explore the possibility of reconfiguring Britannia to become a K through 12 school as a way to support multi-graded opportunities, with greater flexibility for our learners wishing to have a more personalized learning experience, and at the same time, fostering increased connections with the local community.

In June, the district committed to implementing a Mandarin Bilingual Program to be opened in September 2011. We believe this will provide our students with an opportunity to acquire Mandarin language skills that will enhance their lifetime social and economic opportunities. This is an exciting opportunity to build upon our Pacific Rim connections and further strengthen our international relationships, particularly with China.

As you know, we are rebuilding an exciting senior leadership team and have brought in the expertise needed to move many of these initiatives forward. We believe these are just a few of the many outstanding opportunities to enhance, expand and personalize the educational services for our students, support greater engagement and improve student success, in particular, our graduation rates - and especially for our Aboriginal learners.

We look forward to working with your Ministry and others to highlight and further develop the practices, possibilities and potential that Vancouver School District has to offer for our public school students. I am hopeful that you will take us up on this offer to meet to discuss these exciting new directions and to seek your support in making many more become realities for the students in Vancouver.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "P Bacchus". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Patti Bacchus

Chairperson

cc: Trustees
Steve Cardwell, Superintendent of Schools
Brenda Ng, Secretary Treasurer

Encl.



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2010 July 27

Honourable Premier Gordon Campbell
Province of British Columbia
PO Box 9041 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC V8W 9E1

Dear Premier Campbell:

I am writing in follow up to our meeting of April 8, 2009. While somewhat belated, this would be a good time for us to continue our conversation. We ended that meeting with an invitation from you to come back with positive initiatives that could potentially provide beneficial models for other districts.

I am very pleased to share with you a few topics that may be of interest and which, I hope, will serve as discussion topics in a follow up meeting with you.

Aboriginal-focused mini school

We will be commencing a public consultation in the fall regarding the potential development of an Aboriginal-focused mini school at Britannia school. This is an exciting concept that could bring together expertise, resources and partnerships to create an attractive school-within-a-school that would support and encourage learning through an Aboriginal lens. The school would be open to all students with an interest in the richness of our province's Aboriginal history, culture and traditions. Taking a cue from the outstanding Aboriginal Four Host Nations Pavilion at the 2010 Paralympic and Olympic Winter Games, we believe this could be an opportunity to build on our many community partnerships to support the commitments we have made through our Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement.

K-12 school in an urban setting

We are at the same time going to explore the concept of a K-12 school at Britannia that can support multi-graded opportunities, create greater flexibility for our learners wishing to have a more personalized learning experience and foster increased connections with the local community. The concept reduces the impact of school to school transitions and will potentially reduce some of our administrative and educational costs.

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Mandarin language skills

The VSB has committed to implementing an early (kindergarten and grade one) start Mandarin Bilingual Program for September 2011. We believe this district program will provide Vancouver students with an opportunity to acquire Mandarin language skills that will enhance their lifetime social and economic opportunities. We have some minor funding challenges in terms of acquiring initial learning resources and curriculum development, but we expect the program will not require additional funding over the long term. This is an exciting opportunity to enhance our Pacific Rim connections and further strengthen our international relationships, particularly with China.

Twenty-first Century Learning

We are very excited to endorse the concept of 21st Century Learning and what this can bring for our students. A renewed attention on creative and critical thinking, problem-based/project-based learning, personalizing learning and the opportunities for enhanced student engagement are becoming central themes for system redesign at the national and international levels, which we welcome in Vancouver, and wish to take a prominent lead in supporting. We already have several successful programs in Vancouver to build upon and share with other districts. Our green agenda focussing on sustainability adds to these possibilities. This includes the Silver LEED designation at Dickens, the recent Top-10 initiatives recognition from BC Hydro and our various school garden projects (of note is the Earth School model being contemplated at Grandview).

Year-round schooling

Many school districts, including our own, have sought to find savings through changes to the local school calendar. In keeping with a 21st Century Learning agenda, the district is moving forward with an exploration of a balanced school year. This calendar would have natural breaks placed during the school year and the summer would be somewhat shorter, becoming another semester (more and more students are taking courses in the summer anyway). Semestered schooling will be another avenue for us to explore in order to provide greater choice and flexibility for the individual learner.

Leadership and Learning with Technology

We recognize that today's students are connected students. As such, within our limited abilities, we are actively exploring ways to improve our student's educational opportunities through greater access to technology. Our goal in this area is to support 21st Century Learning to be able to have every student and teacher accessing web-based resources and utilizing technology as seamless and necessary tools for teaching and learning. Our first steps will be to build fully wireless environments so that our staff and students can access the Internet anytime and anywhere. The next will be to provide the hardware tools needed to take full advantage of the global learning community. To this end, our schools also need to be environments where students can access both face-to-face learning as well as on-line distributed learning. This will involve a reorganization of several aspects of our current models of delivery within the system to attend to individual student needs.

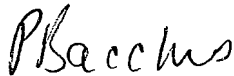
Neighbourhood Centres of Learning

We would also like an opportunity to update you regarding the continued progress that VSB is making with regard to the Neighbourhood Centres of Learning pilot projects and explore the potential for further development in this area. As you will be aware, we are considering all areas of our facility assets and where opportunity arises, moving towards the development of schools, which better meet the needs of the 21st Century Learner. In considering our facilities, a new view of what constitutes "School" needs to be considered. One that includes learning spaces for all ages, affordable housing, services and other community resources. Such physical plants may differ from traditional notions of schools and may contemplate vertical development without compromising green space.

As our district rebuilds our senior leadership team, we are also bringing in the expertise needed to move many of these initiatives forward. We believe these are just a few of the many outstanding opportunities to enhance, expand and personalize the educational services for our students, support greater engagement and improve student success, in particular, our graduation rates, and especially for our Aboriginal learners. We look forward to working with government to highlight and further develop the practices, possibilities and potential that Vancouver School District has to offer for our public school students.

We hope that you will be able to accept this invitation to meet and discuss the many positive attributes of the Vancouver School District. We look forward to finding a time that is convenient for you. This can be arranged through our Secretary Treasurer's Office at 604-713-5080.

Sincerely,



Patti Bacchus
Chairperson,
Vancouver Board of Education

cc: Honourable Dr. Margaret MacDiarmid, Minister of Education
Steve Cardwell, Superintendent of Schools
Brenda Ng, Secretary-Treasurer
VBE Trustees