



Vancouver Board of Education

School District No. 39

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

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June 17, 2010

Hon. Dr. Margaret MacDiarmid, MLA
Minister of Education
PO Box 9045 STN PROV GOVT
Victoria, BC
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Dear Dr. MacDiarmid:

Please find attached to this letter a copy of the Vancouver Board of Education's Revised Preliminary Budget Proposal final draft balanced budget for the 2010-2011 fiscal year, which has been prepared by our District Management Team (DMT).

Our professional staff have advised us to use their calculation of our funding shortfall (\$17.23 million) as a basis for the budget, as they believe the number provided by the Comptroller General would put us in a position of budgeting the same funds twice, potentially putting us in a debt position next year. Having not yet received any clarification in your response to our letter of June 15, 2010 asking if you believe our balanced budget should be based on a different number, we will accept the advice of our professional staff unless otherwise directed by you.

Trustees would, of course, prefer to work with the \$11.8 million shortfall and will be pleased to revise this budget draft accordingly if the issue can be resolved between our professional staff, the Comptroller General, and Ministry staff in the coming weeks. I will also contact the Auditor General of BC today and request that he intervene and attempt to resolve this outstanding question so we can have confidence that we are indeed working with the correct shortfall figure.

As you ordered in your June 10, 2010 Directive to the Vancouver Board of Education, this budget is both balanced and reflective of a thorough and professional review by our staff of all options left to us in light of what we believe is an ongoing and extremely serious lack of funding from the provincial government.

Trustees note, however, that your directive is contradictory, in our opinion, as the cuts required to balance the budget as recommended by both Ms. Wenezenki-Yolland and our DMT will not be in the best interests of students, student achievement and parents. What we have asked our DMT to do, rather, is to balance the budget within the inadequate funding envelope provided, with the key considerations being the best interests of students, student achievement and parents.

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Board of School Trustees:

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That review – as your Directive instructed – included carefully examining and fully considering the review of the Vancouver Board of Education’s fiscal situation – which specifically excluded the critical issue of provincial funding – conducted by B.C. Comptroller General Cheryl Wenezenki-Yolland.

The Vancouver Board of Education has either implemented or will implement shortly some of Ms. Wenezenki-Yolland’s suggestions, which were underway prior to her review. I have included in the package a staff report that notes the budget impact of each of Ms. Wenezenki-Yolland’s recommendations. It notes that 26 recommendations have no budget impact and eight would require the board to commit unbudgeted funds to engage additional expertise or staff, which would increase the size of our budget shortfall and require even deeper cuts to our school programs and services.

If the board votes on June 23, 2010 to adopt this budget proposal, the Vancouver Board of Education will have met both its ongoing obligations by legislation to balance its budget and your specific Directive.

Minister, when you read this draft budget you will see that the consequences of the Vancouver Board of Education’s funding crisis are extreme.

The results of implementation of this budget will inevitably cause great distress to Vancouver students, parents, school staff and the general public as programs are eliminated, teachers, administrators and support staff lose their jobs and the high quality of education is regrettably harmed.

What’s more, the clear implications of your government’s education funding plans for future years means the Vancouver Board of Education must now begin preparing for the closure of several Vancouver Schools effective over the coming school year.

Our staff will present to the public, as required by policy, a list of those potential school closures on June 23, 2010.

Lastly, were the Vancouver Board of Education to increase rental rates charged to non-profit child care by up to 700%, as the Comptroller-General suggests, we believe that, except for those located in the very wealthiest of neighbourhoods, all those child care facilities would close their doors.

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That would result in a significant crisis for children and parents and dramatically reduce enrolment for those schools in which child care facilities are located, as experience demonstrates that child care facilities are a drawing card for the schools in which they are located. This would worsen our financial situation, not improve it as we would lose enrolment and the funding that accompanies it.

Minister, this funding crisis is serious, damaging and yet still avoidable.

I personally implore you, as Minister, to review this draft budget and do everything in your power to convince your government that more funds be allocated so that we can reduce at least some of the significant cuts that our lack of provincial funding necessitates.

This is not a budget that the Vancouver Board of Education wants to be forced to pass – but we will be obliged to do so unless your government provides sufficient funds to avoid these negative consequences.

Notwithstanding comments we have both made to the media that may have unfortunately heightened tensions, I am willing to speak to you privately at any time before the final Vancouver Board of Education vote on June 23, 2010 to try and reduce the negative impact this budget will inevitably have on Vancouver students.

We await your response and direction on how you wish for us to proceed on next steps, prior to the Board making a final decision regarding its 2010/2011 budget.

Yours truly,



Patti Bacchus
Chairperson

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