



# Vancouver Board of Education

School District No. 39

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

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## **A brief to the BC Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services from the Vancouver Board of Education, School District 39 regarding the 2011 Budget Consultation Process September 2010**

The Vancouver School District 39 is a large, urban and multicultural school district that includes some of the most affluent and impoverished urban neighbourhoods in the country. This setting provides wonderful opportunities as well as serious challenges.

The district is among the most diverse public school systems in Canada with an annual enrolment of approximately 56,000 students in Kindergarten to grade 12. In addition, the Vancouver School District provides educational programs and services to full-time Adult Education and Continuing Education students.

Our programs and services address the extraordinary and complex challenges associated with a diverse district. Our goal is to serve the needs and tap the potential of each of our students so that they may achieve their unique potential.

The Board has five recommendations for the 2011 committee:

- 1. The province must provide stable, predictable and adequate funding to enable school districts to fulfill their responsibility to provide continued equitable access to quality public education.**

Unpredictable funding and unfunded cost increases require school districts to spend significant time and resources on balancing budgets each year instead of strategically planning the most effective use of funding to support student success. This chronic underfunding also makes it increasingly difficult to fully support success for students as valuable programs and staff positions are further reduced in order to balance budgets.

- 2. At a minimum, all negotiated or provincially mandated increases, including salary, benefits, pension contributions, medical premiums and new requirements such as carbon emission calculation and carbon offset purchases, must be fully funded by the province.**

The province does not currently provide funding for net cost increases of employee salary increments (for teachers, administrators and excluded staff as they progress through the steps on their pay scales) or increased costs of benefits such as CPP, EI, WCB, extended health and MSP. In addition, inflationary costs for goods and services and new costs imposed by the province, such as the requirement to calculate and report carbon emissions and to purchase carbon offsets, are also not funded.

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These unfunded costs represent a significant portion of the accumulated \$68 million in operating spending reductions in the district since 2002/03. These unfunded costs are projected to increase for our district in 2011/2012 by \$5.93 million and by \$6 million in 2012/2013. In order to meet their spending obligations on these items, districts must divert spending from other important areas such as the budgets that support children in the classrooms. We simply cannot afford to take more funding from our operating budget to cover these costs without further reductions to support for students.

**3. The province needs to review and increase supplemental funding grants for students with special needs.**

Grant amounts should be based on functional assessments of learning needs — in other words, based on what specific supports a student needs to successfully access education. The current model, which is based on medical assessments, does not consistently reflect students' individual needs for support.

The VSB allocates more than twice as much to supporting students with special needs than the province provides in supplementary funding and despite that service levels continue to be inadequate for providing for each student's learning needs.

**4. Need to provide funding for increased maintenance and upgrades to address needs of aging school facilities.** The province should also increase funding for ongoing maintenance using industry maintenance standards as a guide. Funding for school building maintenance levels has generally been at approximately 25 per cent of industry standards (Building Owner and Managers Association) and the VSB's aging stock of buildings is at risk of accelerated deterioration due to minimal maintenance levels. The district's ability to carry out necessary and preventive work has been hampered not only by insufficient funding, but from last year's abrupt cancellation of the Annual Facilities Grant and the subsequent only partial restoration. Levels must be increased and must also be stable and predictable.

**5. We must have a real plan to eliminate child poverty in BC and ensure all families have access to affordable, quality child care.** The correlation between child poverty and failure to succeed in school is strong and despite the VSB's allocation of additional resources through our inner-city schools programs and CommunityLINK, the needs of our students far outstrip our available funding to provide support. A comprehensive provincial plan to address child poverty and to make quality child care accessible and affordable would enable increased numbers of students to succeed in school.

On behalf of the Vancouver Board of School Trustees, thank you for this opportunity to provide our recommendations.

Submitted by,



Patti Bacchus  
Chairperson, Vancouver Board of Education