

**VSB**

**Submission to:**

**Select Standing Committee on Finance and  
Government Services**

**Budget 2014 Consultation**

**Submitted by: Patti Bacchus, Chairperson  
on behalf of the  
Board of Education of School District No. 39  
(Vancouver)**

**September 20, 2013**

## Introduction

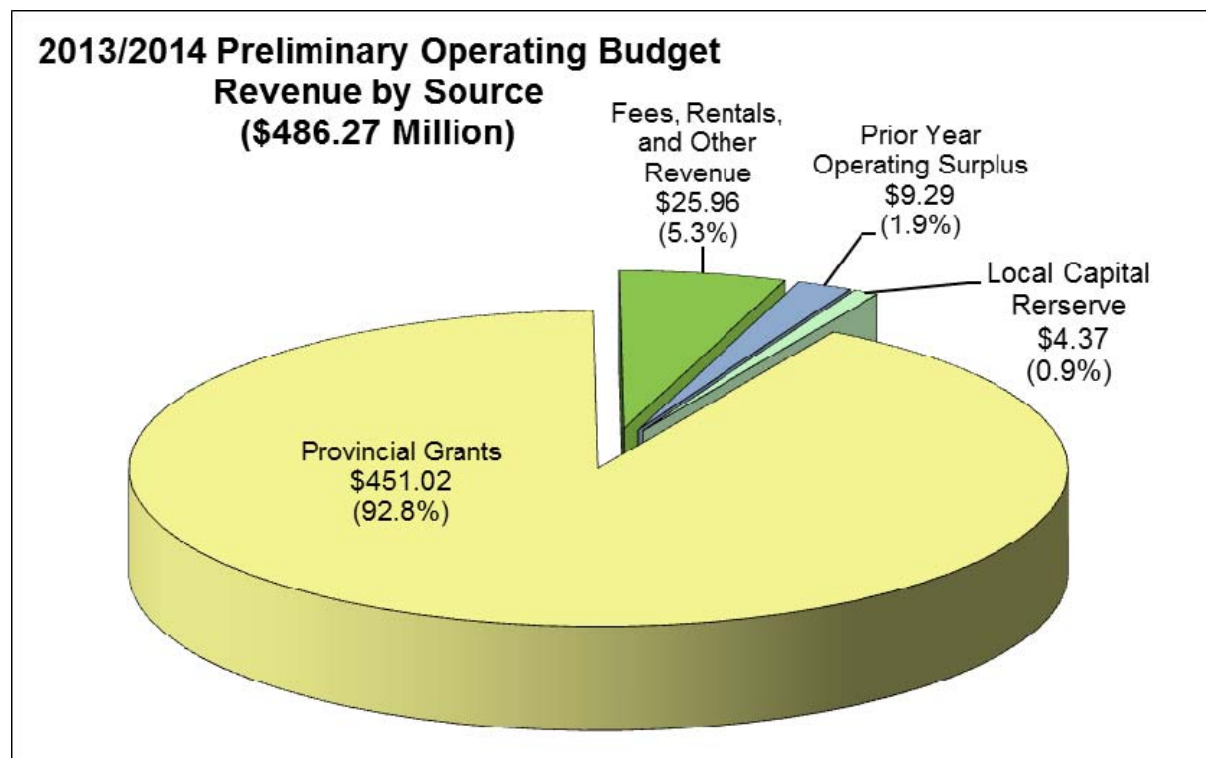
The Vancouver School District is a large, urban and multicultural school district that includes some of the most affluent and impoverished urban neighbourhoods in the country. This setting provides wonderful opportunities as well as serious challenges.

The district is one of the most diverse public school system in Canada with an annual enrolment of over 50,000 students in Kindergarten to grade 12. In addition, the Vancouver School District provides educational programs and services to 600 adult students and has 7,500 registrations in Continuing Education courses annually.

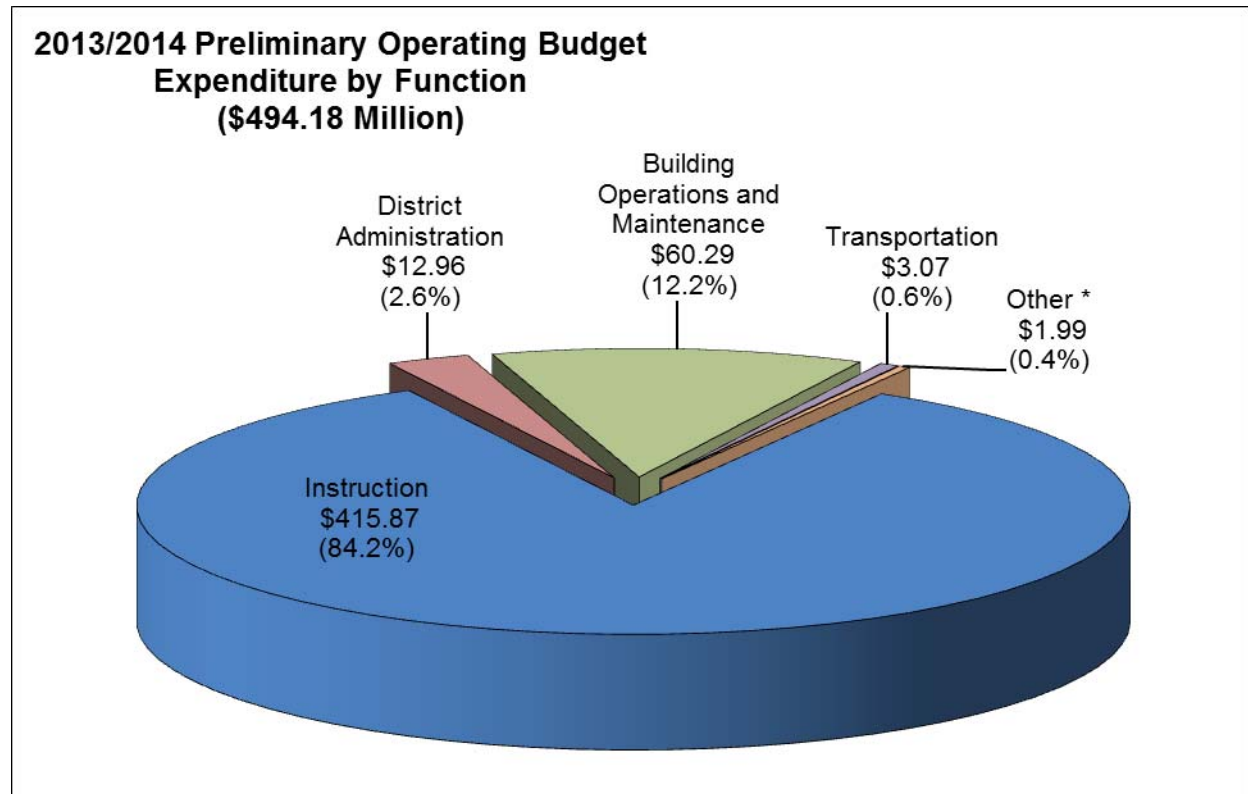
Our programs and services address the extraordinary and complex challenges associated with a diverse district. Our goal is to serve the needs and tap the potential of each of our students so that they may achieve their unique potential.

## Fiscal Framework

Like most other school districts in the Province, the Vancouver Board of Education (VBE) relies on provincial funding to provide nearly 93% of the annual revenues. This means that the education services and programs that are provided to students are significantly dependent on the level of provincial funding provided to school boards.



In terms of expenditures, over 84% of VBE expenditures are directly related to providing instruction to students. Most of these expenditures are for salaries and employee benefits for school-based staff.



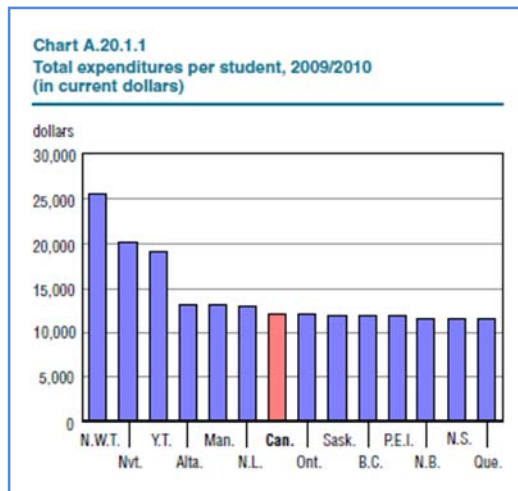
The VBE, like other school boards in the province, has faced significant funding shortfalls over the past decade. As a result of these funding shortfalls, school districts have had to make reductions to the level of services provided in order to achieve balanced budgets as required by the *School Act*. Attachment A to this submission provides a sample of the budget cuts made by the VBE since 2002/2003.

The VBE completed an analysis in April, 2013 which indicated that the VBE would need \$47 million in additional annual funding in order to restore the same level of service as was delivered prior to 2002/2003 (see Attachment B). In addition, the VBE is facing a further projected funding shortfall of over \$20 million for 2014/2015. On top of all of this, the province has recently requested school boards to absorb the cost of any collective agreement increases negotiated by the province for K-12 support staff.

## Provincial Comparisons

BC is falling behind the rest of Canada in terms of spending per student, in the portion of provincial GDP allocated to education, and in terms of educators to students.

### 1. Spending per student lags the Canadian average



In the four year period 2005/2006 to 2009/2010, expenditure per student in Canada increased 24.2% during that four year period.

BC lagged at 18.9%.

The average expenditure per student nationally for 2009/2010 (the most recent Statistics Canada figures) was \$12,106. BC remains at \$11,820.

If BC matched the \$12,106 average national expenditure, it would translate to **\$166 million** more in funding for the province's 580,483 students.

Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 81-595-M No. 095

### 2. BC allocates less in provincial GDP than the rest of Canada.

Excerpts from Statistics Canada for 2009/2010

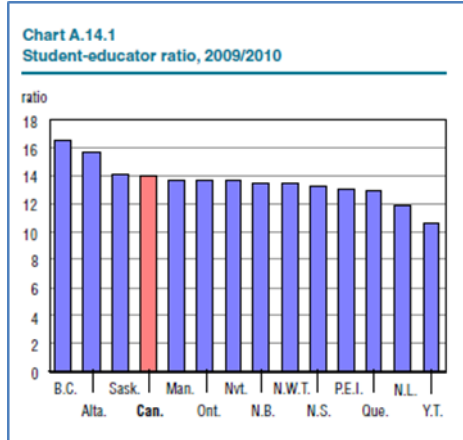
	Canada	BC
Expenditure on education as a total of GDP	3.6%	3.3%
GDP (\$millions)	1,576,797	197,505

Nationally, we spend 3.6% of gross domestic product (GDP) on education. The province of BC spends 3.3%

If BC allocated the same proportion of GDP to education as the national average, that would translate to **\$592 million** more in funding for the province's 580,483 students.

Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 81-595-M No. 095  
Excerpts Table A.31, A.33

3. BC has the most students allocated per educator of all the provinces.



Statistics Canada – Catalogue no. 81-595-M No. 095

‘Educator’ is defined by Statistics Canada as comprising teachers, administrators and pedagogical support.

The average educator in Canada supports 14.0 students. In BC, that figure is 16.6.

The number of students vying for educator attention is the highest in BC, of all the provinces.

## Summary of Recommendations

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 has recently asked school boards to absorb the cost of any provincially negotiated collective agreement increases for support staff in the K-12 sector. This could add up to \$40 million annually to school board expenditures.

The province also 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.

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 nearly 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 the cancellation of the Annual Facilities Grant in previous years and the subsequent only partial restoration. Levels must be increased and must also be stable and predictable.

**5. Sufficient capital funding needs to be provided by the Province to upgrade or replace schools that have a high seismic risk by 2020.**

The Vancouver School Board has over 40 of its 109 schools that are in need of seismic upgrading or replacement. All of these schools have high risk buildings (i.e. H1 or H2). This means that the risk of widespread damage and structural failure after a significant seismic event is high and the buildings would generally not be repairable afterwards.

In 2004/2005 the Province announced that all schools that required seismic upgrading would be completed by 2020. The Province needs to advance the pace of capital funding for the seismic program in order to ensure the safety of students and staff and to ensure the sustainability of school buildings in the case of a significant seismic event.

**6. 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.