



Vancouver Board of Education

School District No. 39

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

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December 8, 2017

The Honourable Rob Fleming
Minister of Education
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, British Columbia V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Fleming:

As VSB trustees, we are concerned about the impact that recruitment and retention challenges are having on our students, and the important support they require.

Members of the Vancouver Board of Education and district staff met recently with a focus group comprised of representatives from several of our district stakeholder groups, including Vancouver teachers, CUPE 15, and district parents, to discuss ways to address the critical shortage of both teaching and student-support staff. Since the spring of 2017 the VSB has seen over 320 teachers retire or resign. At the same time, the district received funding to add the equivalent of 342 additional teaching positions as part of the Memorandum of Agreement and Classroom Enhancement Fund.

Vancouver has already implemented many initiatives in an attempt to address the unprecedented recruitment and retention challenges. These include contracting retired administrators to support recruitment efforts, actively collaborating with BCPSEA, streamlining screening and hiring practices, targeting out-of-province teachers, interviewing and hiring SFU and UBC practicum students, and offering moving allowances to out-of-province teachers.

The following suggestions are for consideration by your Teacher Recruitment and Retention Task Force:

- **Increased Graduation of Teachers and Education Assistants.** The current number of teacher graduates is not sufficient to address the needs within British Columbia schools. In addition, we believe that there are not enough specialized training programs to meet the demand for Education Assistant (EA) support. We encourage the Ministry of Education to work with post-secondary institutions in order to expand opportunities for interested individuals to enroll in teacher and EA training programs.
- **Supporting New Teachers:** Teachers who are new to the profession, new to their role or new to a school district can at times feel overwhelmed and may feel that they do not have the necessary support or resources to guide them through these transition periods. Sometimes heavier workloads can arise from the teacher shortages, and this can negatively impact even the most experienced staff. We feel that additional government funding to support teachers new to their role would enable teachers to develop their craft and support retention.
- **Teacher Resignations:** The Vancouver School District is experiencing a significant number of teacher resignations as some employees are choosing to take this opportunity to seek work in other districts. In many cases, no notice is provided, leaving classrooms without a fulltime permanent teacher. While the collective agreement language requires 30 days' notice, there is no mechanism in place to enforce this language. We believe that the government's assistance in developing processes to obligate departing employees and receiving school districts to honour the negotiated notice periods would serve the best interests of all school districts.

Board of School Trustees:

Janet Fraser – Chairperson

Joy Alexander – Vice-Chairperson

Carrie Bercic Fraser Ballantyne Ken Clement

Lisa Dominato Estrellita Gonzalez

Allan Wong Judy Zaichkowsky

- **Housing Affordability:** The high cost of living in Vancouver is making it difficult for the VSB to both attract and retain staff. The district is currently exploring the creation of a temporary homestay program to support candidates, in the shorter term, in making the move to Vancouver. What is required is a creative, long-term strategy to address the discrepancy between wages and housing affordability in Vancouver. The district is open to engaging with both the Ministry and the City of Vancouver to develop ideas for longer-term housing options to aid recruitment and retention of staff.
- **Student Debt Relief:** In addition to offering a moving allowance, we encourage the Ministry of Education to explore the possibility of offering some form of student debt relief to teacher and EA program graduates as an incentive for working in expensive urban and remote rural areas. This approach has worked well in other professions in helping to attract graduates to work and live in both higher cost and remote locations.
- **Portability of Experience:** As part of 2019 contract talks the Ministry and the BCTF are encouraged to examine collective agreement language to ensure consistency across districts in regard to recognition of teacher experience for salary purposes.

As Chairperson of the Vancouver Board of Education, I want to thank and acknowledge the District's Employee Services staff who have done an incredible job and have worked many long hours to address the hiring and recruitment challenges. I would also like to thank all stakeholders for their ongoing commitment and support, and their contributions brought forward at our recent focus group meeting. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the dedicated staff working in the schools during this difficult time.

I also want to express our interest in working collaboratively with the Ministry of Education in order to identify timely ideas in order to address the very real teacher and EA recruitment and retention challenges facing Vancouver.

Thank you in advance for considering our suggestions as part of the task force. I would be happy to discuss the Vancouver situation with you at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Janet Fraser
Chairperson

- c John Lewis, Interim Superintendent
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 Roy Park, DPAC
 Julie Pearce – Associate Superintendent, School Services
 Katharine Shipley, VSTA
 Warren Williams, CUPE 15

Attachment: Status of Vancouver School Board Hiring

**Status of Vancouver School Board Hiring
Fact Sheet
December 6, 2017**

- The funding for up to 342.9 FTE teaching positions was added to the District as a result of the Memorandum of Agreement and Classroom Enhancement Fund.
- Since the spring of 2017, 470 teachers have been hired. An additional 30 teachers will start work for the District on December 4, 2017.
- Almost 200 teachers have resigned since the spring of 2017 and another 119 have retired. We are aware that many of the teachers resigning are leaving to work in other school districts closer to home.
- As of November 30, 2017, there are still 47 full and part time vacancies. However, this is down from the 280 vacancies that were posted in August 2017.
- The District employs 700 education assistant support staff. 156 permanent and 37 temporary SSA and SSB positions have been posted since July 1, 2017.
- There are 222 education support employees on the on-call list with an additional 12 starting in early December. The district normally has over 300 such employees on the on-call list.
- In October there was an average of 66 unfilled education assistant support absences each day. In November, there was an average of 81 of these unfilled absences.
- Some key recruitment strategies utilized:
 - District recruitment teams are being sent to Ontario, Quebec, Alberta and Saskatchewan between January and April 2018. A team of 10 went to Toronto for a national hiring fair in November. We are attending general career fairs and career fairs specific to teacher and student support positions.
 - The District is providing moving allowances to out of province teacher candidates.
 - Employee Services has been receiving support from BCPSEA to assist with the general recruitment efforts in BC and across Canada.
 - All unfilled assignments are being posted to Make a Future. Make a Future automatically links to Indeed.ca. This is one of the largest job boards in Canada.
 - Retired administrators and additional staff have been brought in to assist with interviews and reference checks, in an effort to speed up the recruitment cycle for teacher and student support positions.
 - A meeting was held with key stakeholders to attempt to identify new methods and approaches to recruitment for teacher and student support positions.

- Practicum placements have been organized for student teachers from UVIC and McGill (approximately 10) in addition to those already in place through our strong relationships with UBC and SFU. These new placements were secured at career fairs in an attempt to encourage practicum students to then want to stay on and become VSB employees. We continue to work closely with local university and college programs to place as many practicum students as possible for teacher and student support positions.