

## **Vancouver Inner City Parents Group**

Formed in 1997 out of the recognition that there are many problems and concerns unique to inner city schools in Vancouver. We meet monthly to share information, discuss problems affecting children and parents in schools and to plan and implement action to help resolve these problems.

### **Budget input for Vancouver School Board 2006-2007**

In 1997 a group of parents whose children attended either fully or partially funded inner city schools met to discuss the unique needs of inner city schools, identify common areas of need and find the best ways to advocate for our children. The value of this meeting was recognized and the Vancouver Inner City Parents Group was formed. Our group meets regularly and also has representatives on the VSB Inner City Advisory Committee.

The recent changes in how CommunityLink funding is distributed in Vancouver have had a very significant impact on Vancouver Inner City schools. Previously, MCFD funded 10 individual community schools and 23 schools with the most vulnerable children also received funds that they could use at their discretion for staffing, program support, field trips, supplies etc. With the new Hub model, the same amount of money is distributed throughout the district. Our group believes this to be a very good model, but the dilution of funding has been devastating to our schools. Funds are desperately needed to provide crucial supports to very vulnerable children whose needs are not being met elsewhere.

Many families in the Inner City are already struggling to get by from day to day. These families do not have the resources to advocate for or help their children. They are coping with extreme poverty, substance abuse, illiteracy, lack of education, mental illness, language barriers, family violence, transience, etc. They don't have the resources to enrol their children in music classes, sports programs, swimming lessons etc., send them to counsellors or to summer camp. Many children encounter drug addicts and prostitutes on their way to and from school and even where they live and many come to school tired, hungry, and discouraged - not a situation that is conducive to learning.

Inner City Schools face much more than social problems. There is a higher proportion of children with learning difficulties and behaviour problems, children who often lack literacy skills, have poor nutrition, and foetal alcohol syndrome. All supports provided by schools help these kids and their families deal with the things going on in their lives. They help alleviate problems before they become too big.

Everyone in the classroom, including the teacher and the "regular" kids, benefits from the help the programs provide. The programs mean less disruptive behaviour, one-on-one help where it is needed, counselling, and crisis intervention.

Inner City School PACs are often not able to raise funds within their communities to cover costs of textbooks, computers, field trips, band instruments, sports equipment, and other "extras".

It is a well documented fact that addressing the needs of children at risk at a young age pays off in their later years. Without giving our neediest kids the support and tools to learn how to cope in society, many will become gang members, drop out of school, get involved with drugs, or turn to prostitution. Stability in staffing and support programs, including counsellors and multicultural workers who work closely with families, is crucial to ensure good educational outcomes. By giving them as solid a foundation as possible at a young age, they have a chance to grow up to be productive and contributing members of our community.

We are providing copies of our 2005/6 budget brief, sadly very little has changed. The Vancouver Inner City Parents Group recognizes that there are difficult decisions to be made but we hope that the board will take all of these facts into consideration when allocating funding for the next school year. We are requesting that the board ensure the following for Inner City schools:

- Continue to provide all day kindergarten for all children in the 12 Inner City Project schools, not just those that fit the criteria for MOE funding.
- Increase counselling time in the most vulnerable schools including both elementary and secondary schools
- Provide increased discretionary funds for all schools with high numbers of vulnerable children
- Increase ESL support by providing more access to multicultural home school workers

## Vancouver Inner City Parents Group

Formed in 1997 out of the recognition that there are many problems and concerns unique to inner city schools in Vancouver. We meet monthly to share information, discuss problems affecting children and parents in schools and to plan and implement action to help resolve these problems.

Brief to the Vancouver School Board February 22, 2005

Vancouver Inner City Parents applaud the Vancouver School Board for demonstrating strong **leadership** and **commitment** to Inner City children over the past 17 years, by first establishing the VSB "Inner City Project" in 1988, and later persuading the B.C. government to establish provincial funding for Inner City Schools in 1992. We thank the Trustees for your continuing support to the 12 neediest schools in the Vancouver school district, particularly in the face of reductions in provincial funding to the Vancouver school district, and district-wide budget cuts in recent years. This designated Inner City schools funding is crucial in that it provides the additional supports necessary to assist the neediest children in achieving equity within our public education system.

**We ask that the Vancouver School Board continue to maintain your commitment to the "Inner City Project" funding .**

This designated funding provides the 12 neediest schools in our city with a team of Inner City Staff to address the needs of their most at-risk students, including one-on-one help, academic supports, counselling and crisis intervention that lead to less disruptive behaviour and greater student achievement.

**We ask that the Vancouver School Board provide adequate support to the new "Community School Teams" concept**

The needs of Inner City children are growing and Vancouver School Board has identified that there are a growing number of schools with Inner City needs, including schools that do not have the designation, but still serve a significant number of vulnerable children.

In order to meet these needs, the "community school" concept has been expanded into a "community team" model, to include vulnerable children in all the schools in the district. CommunityLINK funding has been redistributed within the Vancouver district to reflect this need of children throughout the district and the amount of funding for individual schools has changed to help address this need. With the dilution of inner city funding to address district-wide needs, and the dismantling of 10 functioning community schools to extend the community school concept to the whole district, the east side has lost significant resources. The impact on the school communities has been huge.

The community hubs are in place to "implement evidence-based strategies to improve the educational performance, both academic and social functioning of vulnerable students."

It has been identified that 17,000 – 22,000 students are vulnerable within the VSB, and these vulnerable kids are found all over the district. We need funding to continue in order to support the most vulnerable in our community through the community hubs.

Funding to provide essential help to our most vulnerable families should be directed to the community teams, so individual school communities can decide where it can do the most good. They have made the choice to deal with getting the programs up and running first, but good programs require adequate support to develop into something useful.

In the first week of November community teams had 440 programs, with 11,000 kids. 11,000 kids and only 14.5 FTE Youth and Family Workers city-wide. Not nearly enough.

The community teams are looking at quality programs such as sex abuse/sex ed. Some programs are higher quality than others and some hubs are slower than others to get individual programs going. Community resources are not necessarily located where they are needed. This is a fledgling concept and can become more successful, but only with a sufficient investment in the whole system. We need the models that we have in place to be supported with adequate funding.

Inner City schools have been negatively affected by the continued underfunding from the Ministry of Education. Poverty in Vancouver is growing, and the needs of students are also growing. We rely on the skills of our Youth and Family Workers. These workers help students and their families in many ways to meet their challenges and alleviate problems before they become too big. We know that addressing the needs of children at risk when they are young pays off in later years, so support programs are crucial to ensure good academic outcomes.

### **Inner City Schools need staff stability**

Inner City schools have large populations of “at-risk” children whose learning and behavioural needs require consistent and caring support from adults with whom they have been able to establish trust. Inner City school staffing needs some protection from district-wide budget cuts, so that staff-student relationships that have taken time to build are not jeopardized, and so that Inner City positions are filled by staff dedicated to working in this demanding environment.

### **Inner City schools need their administrators**

Due to the frequency of abuse disclosures, family violence, substance abuse, and child apprehensions within Inner City families, administrators spend hours each week dealing with police, social workers, and outside agencies. Incidents of neighbourhood crime, intruders, gang recruitment and prostitution on school grounds, necessitates greater vigilance in Inner city schools to ensure the safety of students and staff. We need Principal and Vice-Principal time at Inner City schools to ensure school safety and the coordination between school and community services which is so essential to the success of Inner City students.

## **Inner City schools need support staff**

Inner City schools have a larger proportion of children who are coping with learning difficulties, behaviour problems, low literacy skills, poor nutrition, foetal alcohol spectrum, and other challenges. Because of the extensive learning and behavioural needs of our students, we rely on the skills of our Special Education Assistants, Youth and Family, Multicultural and First Nations Workers. Through reorganization and cuts from the Ministry of Children and Family Development, many Inner City schools lost their Family Advancement Workers who have been in our schools through a partnership with Family Services of Greater Vancouver since 1988. These workers help students and their families in many ways to meet their challenges and alleviate problems before they become too big. We know that addressing the needs of children at risk when they are young pays off in later years, so these losses are devastating. Stability in staffing and support programs is crucial to ensure good academic outcomes.

## **Inner City schools need Specialty Teachers and School Librarians**

We know from research, and our own experience, that many Inner City students do not participate in art, music, physical education, and library services outside of their schools. Inner City families are generally low-income, private music or art classes are not possible, and many can't afford art materials in the home. Many families live in small apartments or basement suites, and the children don't have access to outdoor play areas. Many parents who speak a first language other than English, or who are not strong readers themselves, don't use public libraries. Budget cuts in such areas as specialty teachers or school librarians would have a devastating effect on Inner City students because they don't access these services outside the school environment.

## **Inner City Schools need good food and before after school and holiday programs.**

Many families in the Inner City are headed by single parents: some are coping with extreme poverty, substance abuse, illiteracy, lack of education, mental illness, language barriers, family violence and transience. Children come to school tired, hungry, and discouraged – not a situation that is conducive to learning. These families don't have the resources to enrol their children in music classes, sports programs, swimming lessons, or to send them to counsellors or to summer camp. Inner City PACs are often not able to raise funds within their communities to cover costs of textbooks, computers, field trips, band instruments and sports equipment

## **We are committed to work with the VSB to advocate for additional resources to meet the needs of Inner City Children and their Families.**

As Parents at Inner City schools, we commit ourselves to work with you to lobby the Provincial and Federal governments to maintain the crucial programs we have in place, and for additional resources to better meet the needs of Inner City children and their families.

- **English as a Second Language funding** – Inner City schools have a high proportion of refugees among their ESL families and these families often cope with poverty, trauma from their home country, and other issues, which can impede the progress of their children in school. We need clear plans for how children requiring more than 5 years of ESL support will be identified and supported.
- **Special Education funding** – This is a particular concern to Inner City schools. Lack of funding, or competition for funding, puts our students at a tremendous disadvantage because so many require Special Education services. Inner city families are often unable to afford to access psych ed testing and other services outside of those offered through the school.
- **Family Support programs** - Community schools, Youth and Family and Multicultural Workers all provide important support for parents, helping them to liaise with the school and the community.
- **Support programs in Secondary Schools** – We need additional counselling, teaching and support staff for Secondary students including: transition programs at the grade 7/8 level, stay-in-school and re-entry school programs.
- **Kindergarten and Junior Kindergarten programs** – The Early Development Instrument results and Community Mapping done by UBC under the direction of Dr. Clyde Hertzman graphically show the inequities in "Readiness to Learn" of Vancouver kindergarten students, revealing the higher density of students in the Inner City areas of Vancouver with low school readiness and literacy levels. Funding is needed to provide All Day Kindergarten for the few children who do not fall into the categories (ESL, First Nations and special needs) currently funded by the ministry. The needs of children living in poverty can be as great or worse than those in the funded categories and segregating them is detrimental to the school climate and fosters exclusion

### **We are pleased that the VSB is addressing the needs of all vulnerable children**

We are committed to work with the VSB and the province to advocate for additional resources to meet the needs of Inner City Children and their Families. As parents at Inner City schools, we commit ourselves to work with you to lobby the Provincial government to maintain the crucial programs we have in place, and for additional resources to better meet the needs of Inner City children and their families