

BC Society for Public Education

Protecting the Integrity of BC's Public Schools

www.bcspe.ca

January 2005

2005 – 2006 VSB Budget

Preliminary projections place next year's VSB budget shortfall at between \$2.6 and \$4.5 million. New information will be available in early February. Watch the VSB website: vsb.bc.ca, for details. A public meeting on the budget is scheduled for Tuesday, February 22nd, 7 pm at Mt. Pleasant Elementary School.

Secondary School Survey Coming

The initial project of the new BC Society for Public Education (BCSPE) is a survey of secondary schools to determine their level of resources in key areas. An elementary school survey is being led by BCCPAC.

The BCSPE survey will be distributed in mid-February to secondary schools in Vancouver. It will ask about resources for ESL, optional and elective courses, class sizes, fundraising, school fees, libraries, etc. The survey will include information about your school that is available publicly from the VSB and Ministry of Education. Answers to other questions can be obtained from various sources within the school – administration, librarian, counseling office, and PACs. In addition to providing useful information about resource levels across Vancouver, we expect that the information gathered in the survey can be used at the school level in preparing for the upcoming VSB budget process and in your school growth plan.

As the survey is designed to evaluate resources levels and not as a means of comparing schools, individual schools will not be identified in the survey results.

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The Trouble with Statistics

Education is important. It is key to our prosperity and our peaceful, stable society. It's what brought many Canadians to Canada. It also takes a healthy chunk of tax dollars, so it's an obvious target for fiscal restraint

Education funding is complex—like weather systems, many factors interact to produce storms or droughts. Stray education statistics are often cited to support dubious claims. Politicians bicker (Are budgets up, down or stable?), though this says little about what our children face in the classroom.

Key variables, like enrolment, affect how far education dollars go. More students? You need more dollars. Fewer students, however, don't necessarily produce equivalent savings. Schools still pay fixed overhead costs—like heating or a principal—for 200 students or 400. That's why the territories far outspend any province (per student). It's also a critical issue for our disappearing rural schools.

Inflation—especially salary hikes—affects how much teaching our dollars can buy. Expensive cities and remote schools must often pay more to attract teachers. When inflation outpaces budgets, something must go. Class-sizes may go up. We now have elementary class limits, so cuts must go elsewhere—e.g. larger secondary classes, program cuts, aides, librarians, ESL and learning assistance staff who help classroom teachers. Statistics Canada tracks the ratio of students to total educators as a better indicator. Their latest B.C. trends are worrying.

In a more complex world, we're asking schools to do more. The "3 R's" are still key, but this won't get our kids as far as it got our parents. Are we funding new demands?

Diverse student needs affect costs. A class where many students have language or special needs, poverty issues, etc., requires significantly more resources than a class without those challenges. Last year, the Select Committee on Finance and Government Services toured B.C. and agreed that more funding was a priority. What are the long-term costs of not meeting diverse needs?

As parents, we see statistics used to support wildly conflicting and politicized media messages about education funding. What to believe? We can see if needs are being met in our own schools or not. But are we helping all children achieve their potential and protecting the integrity of our public system? While there is cause to worry, there are ways to understand what the statistics tell us, just don't be deceived that the answers are simple.