

March 2, 2006

To the Chair and Members of the Vancouver School Board,

The British Columbia Society for Public Education (BCSPE) is pleased to submit its *Vancouver Secondary Schools Tracking Survey 2004 – 2005*, for consideration by members of the Vancouver School Board during the 2006 – 2007 budget process.

BCSPE is a registered society of parents committed to protecting and improving public education in British Columbia. BCSPE carries out research and other activities aimed at providing accurate and accessible information to students, parents, the general public and decision-makers at all levels of government.

Although BCSPE provided the Vancouver School Board with a copy of the *Tracking Survey* at the time of its release in September 2005, further consideration of the survey's findings in the context of budget deliberations is appropriate given the focus of the *Tracking Survey* on the level of resources available within individual secondary schools in the Vancouver school district.

Below are selected key survey findings:

Fundraising

- Fundraising is taking place at all Vancouver secondary schools, the amounts raised on a school and per student basis vary significantly. The 17 schools that responded to this question expected to raise in excess of \$680,000 in the 2004 – 2005 school year.
- Nine schools reported anticipating between \$20,000 – \$40,000 in parent fundraised revenue. Three schools anticipated receiving \$40,000 – \$60,000, 2 schools expected \$20,000 – \$40,000 and an additional 2 schools expected \$60,000 – \$80,000.
- There appears to be no direct correlation between student population and fundraising estimates.
- The majority of schools (11) are raising between \$20 – \$40 per student. Four schools report raising \$40– \$60 per student and three schools anticipated raising over \$60 per student in the 2004 – 2005 school year.
- Computers and software top the list of purchases made with funds raised. Physical education and shop equipment were second, followed by classroom and reference materials. It is clear from the kinds of things schools are spending money on that fundraising activities are contributing significantly to the delivery of core curriculum.

Counselors and Librarians

- The percentage loss between 2003/04 and 2004/05 of 2.6% for counselors and 4.5% for librarians is in excess of the 0.4% loss in student enrollment in the same year.
- The number of students per librarian was holding at 900 in the 02-03 and 03-04 schools years but jumped to 936 in 04-05.

Research Standard Computers

- One school reported having only 3 research standard computers compared to 31 computers available at another school. In addition, there was no relationship between the number of students at a particular school and the number of computers available for their use.

Largest classes

- 2 schools reported tied responses so that there are a total of 22 courses listed as the largest. Of the 22 courses, 17 are in math and science, 2 are modern languages and 3 are social science. Three of these classes had 31 students each, 1 had 32, 11 had 33, 3 had 34, 1 had 35 and 3 had 36.

Interpreters

- Two schools reported up to 7 days to access an interpreter for a parent-teacher or parent-administrator meeting. Five schools reported a 1 – 3 day wait, 3 schools reported a 1- 2 day wait, one school reported a 2 – 3 day wait and two schools said they could get an interpreter within 1 day.

Portables

- Of 51 portables in use, 40 are older than 10 years. Expressed as a percentage, 78% of portables are older than 10 years.

Course Fees

- All secondary schools report charging course fees. The courses for which fees are most frequently charged are, in descending order, hospitality and foods, French, math, and art.

On a related note, the BCSPE is concerned that years of underfunding have caused some schools to consider corporate sponsorship and advertising revenue as a means to generate desperately needed funds to support school programs. We caution that the integrity of our public education system must be protected from corporate and market forces that seek to exploit our children captive audiences while at school. Our students are now facing unprecedented pressure from the advertising and marketing industry, pressure that seeks to not only influence buying habits, but to shape values, relationships, goals and self esteem. The revised advertising policy passed by the trustees last year is an strong starting position from which we can ensure the learning needs of children come first and foremost in schools, and the marketplace stays outside the school gates. We ask that as you determine the district's spending priorities, you do so in such a way that the

needs of schools are met without going hat and hand to those who seeks to profit from our kids.

In future years we hope our survey will paint a happier picture of reinvestment in public schools. BCSPE believes that investing in public education is the smartest thing we can do for our collective future.

Yours truly,

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