

Vancouver Secondary Schools Tracking Survey 2004 – 2005

© British Columbia Society for Public Education, 2005

We encourage the reproduction and use of this report for the purpose of education or research with appropriate citation.

Contact: information@bcspe.ca

Website: www.bcspe.ca

Researchers:

Patti Bacchus
Julianne Doctor
Catherine Evans
Helesia Luke
Patricia Fahrni

Writers:

Catherine Evans
Helesia Luke

Public education is the primary foundation in any civilized democracy... Any weakening of universal public education can only be a weakening of democracy.

John Ralston Saul, In Defense of Public Education
Horizons, Fall 2002

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Who We Are	1
The Funding Environment	2
Methodology	2
Student Enrollment	4
Total Enrollment	4
Enrollment by Program.....	4
District Student Composition.....	5
Staff Complement	5
Courses.....	7
Optional courses.....	7
Modern Languages.....	7
Class Size	8
English Classes	8
Largest Classes.....	8
Libraries	9
Resources	9
Teacher-Librarians	10
Interpreters	11
Fundraising	12
Parent Fundraising Trend.....	12
Portable Classrooms.....	15
Course Fees	15
Conclusion	16

Acknowledgements

BCSPE would like to acknowledge the assistance of the many parents and administrators at Vancouver's secondary schools who participated in this first survey. The extra work involved in retrieving information from prior years is particularly appreciated.

We are also very grateful to the senior administrators at the Vancouver School Board who made information available to us from their centralized records and to Vancouver's Secondary School Teacher-Librarians. Using these resources both reduced the administrative burden of the survey on individual schools and ensured that we received consistent and comparable statistics for all schools.

Finally we wish to acknowledge the helpful comments provided by Dr. Frank Echols, Associate Dean of Education at the University of British Columbia in reviewing the draft survey questionnaire, and the assistance of Ms. Beverly Seed, Principal of Point Grey Secondary School in submitting patiently to an early test run of the questions.

Introduction

Who We Are

The British Columbia Society for Public Education (BCSPE) was formed in early 2005 by a group of parents committed to protecting and improving public education in British Columbia. The members of BCSPE had been active participants in the Vancouver Save our Schools network and most had been involved in the initial SOS letter writing campaign in April 2002. This campaign, led by representatives of parent advisory councils from across the city as well as the District Parent Advisory Council, gathered, in just two weeks, over 13,000 letters expressing concern about impending cuts to school programs brought about by provincial decision-making. This and subsequent experiences with education funding decisions over the next three years made it clear to BCSPE members that an on-going effort by parents to defend public education in British Columbia was necessary.

The goal of BCSPE in carrying out this first survey of Vancouver's secondary schools was to make accurate and accessible information about the state of affairs in Vancouver's secondary schools available to students, parents, the general public and decision-makers at all levels of government. Elementary schools were not surveyed because of a similar survey being undertaken by the British Columbia Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils. Although BCSPE is concerned about public education in all parts of British Columbia, the limited resources of volunteer parents meant a limited start to the survey. It is hoped that parents and others in other school districts will find the information in this report has some relevance to their experience as well.

The Funding Environment

The upcoming 2005/06 school year will be the first year in many that provincial funding for Vancouver's public schools has exceeded the projected costs of maintaining the status quo. The pattern for most of the past 10 years and more has been a slow erosion in available resources as the costs of running existing programs have risen faster than the funds provided to schools.

The funding shortfall was thrown into stark relief in the spring of 2002 when the slow erosion suddenly accelerated and the Vancouver School Board was faced with a \$21 million shortfall for the 2002/03 year. Most of the shortfall stemmed from the provincial government's decision to raise the salary of teachers but not to raise the funds provided to school boards by a corresponding figure. As teachers' salaries make up most of the operating costs of schools, paying for the salary increase meant making proportionally larger cuts in other budget areas, as well as laying-off staff.

In the two years after 2002/03, the funding shortfalls continued but at a lesser pace. The shortfall for 2003/04 was \$3.5 million and for 2004/05 the figure was \$11 million. One-time additional funding provided late in the 2002/03 and 2003/04 years helped to keep these figures this low as the school board was able to carry forward most of these funds into the next budget cycle.

Ideally this survey would have a baseline of 30 years ago. This would have given today's parents a clearer picture of how schools today compare to what they experienced as high school students. As it is we must begin in the present, in what we hope will be the bottom of the barrel for Vancouver's secondary schools. In future years we hope our survey will paint a happier picture of reinvestment in public schools. Investing in public education is the smartest thing we can do for our collective future.

Methodology

BCSPE was inspired to take on this survey by work done by People for Education, a parent group in Ontario that supports public education. For the past five years People for Education has conducted a secondary school survey in Ontario aimed at keeping track of the local effects of provincial policy and funding changes. While the majority of questions we asked in Vancouver are different from the Ontario survey, we aimed for comparability on some key issues such as parent fundraising and class size.

The survey contained 45 questions. To the greatest extent possible, we aimed for information that was readily available to school administrators and/or involved parents. In addition, in an effort to reduce the administrative burden of completing the entire survey on individual schools, senior administrators at the school board made some of the information that they routinely collect from schools available to us. In addition, the school board was coincidentally conducting its own study of school fees and we were able to draw on this research for some of our questions. Using centralized information had the benefit of ensuring that we had complete and consistent data from all 18 Vancouver secondary schools on a broad range of subjects, but it also meant that we had

to adjust retroactively or abandon some questions when it turned out that the school board could not provide the information in the form we initially sought.

At the same time as we were assembling centralized data from the school board, we sent a set of 14 questions that could only be answered at the local school level to individual schools. In most cases, a parent took the lead in gathering the responses, but some principals also played this role. The responses we received to these 14 questions were not as consistent or complete, but we were pleased to receive replies from 17 of the 18 schools.

Unlike some other research published on schools, this survey was not designed as a tool for comparing schools. Rather it aims to give parents and others information that they might find helpful in understanding the overall state of Vancouver's secondary schools. To ensure that schools are not individually identified, school names and other potentially identifying characteristics were shielded during the analysis of the data and do not form part of this report.

Student Enrollment

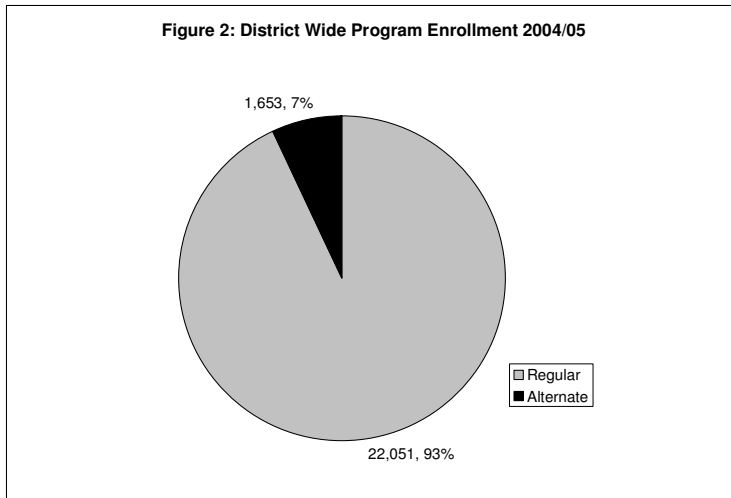
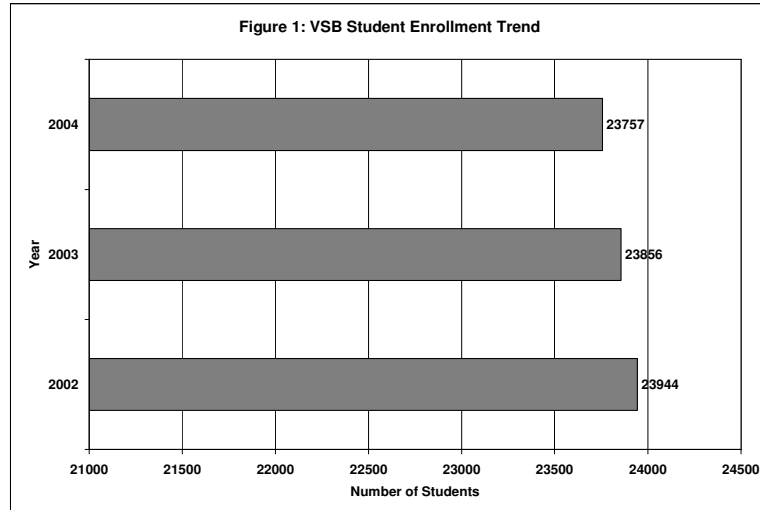
Total Enrollment

Enrollment in Vancouver secondary schools has been stable for the past three years, declining by less than one-half of one percent per year from a total of 23,944 students in 2002/03 to 23,757 students in 2004/05.

Enrollment by Program

In 2004/05, there were alternate or special education programs offered in every school. Enrollment varied from a low of 1 student at one school to a high of 193 students at another. These programs offer a special curriculum that does not lead to graduation with a

diploma, though students may receive a school leaving certificate. Overall, 1,653 students were enrolled in alternate or special education programs across the 18 schools. Statistics from prior years were not gathered as part of the survey.



Programs that are sometimes called alternate programs, such as the district mini school programs, and special education students who are “integrated” within programs that lead towards graduation are not counted as being enrolled in “alternate and special education programs.” These are all considered to be regular programs. In 2004/05, there were 22,051 students enrolled in regular programs. BCSPE was

unable to obtain statistics about how many of the students enrolled in regular programs were in an “alternate regular program.”

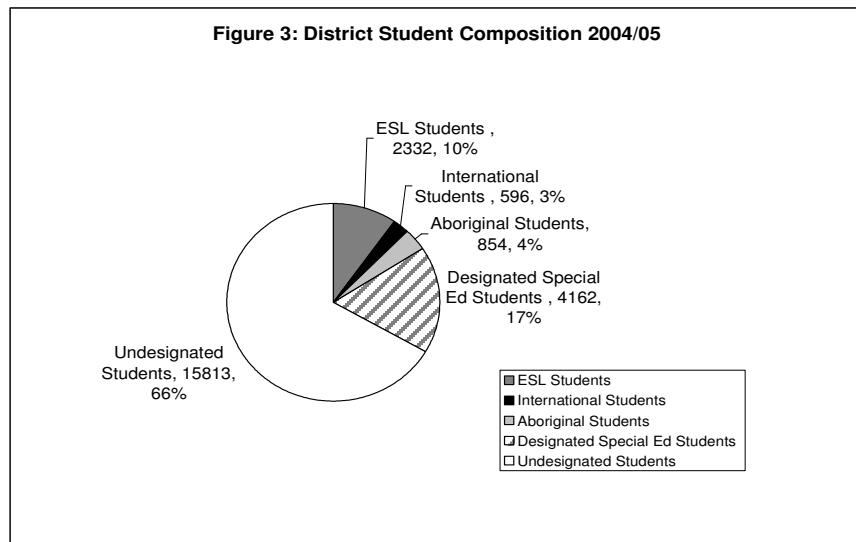
District Student Composition

In 2004/05, Vancouver secondary schools were made up of the following five student groups:

Designated ESL Students	2,332
Designated Aboriginal Students	854
Designated Special Ed Students	4,162
International Students	596
Undesignated Students:	15,813

Total District Enrollment: 23,757

It should be noted that the students who are “designated” are not exhaustive of the population of students who need help with English or who have special education needs. They are, rather, those who have met the particular criteria that gives them official



“designated status.” Schools with designated students receive a small additional per pupil grant recognizing the higher costs of their programs. International students also bring additional funds to a school, but this is revenue for the school and is not aimed at offsetting higher program costs. Recent changes to the criteria used for designating some students prevents a full comparison with prior years

Staff Complement

Staffing statistics were gathered for two years: 2003/04 and 2004/05. In contrast to student enrollment figures that declined by less than half of one percent in the same period, staff numbers declined by over 2 percent. With the exception of enrolling teachers and building operations, there was a loss in each of the 6 other staff categories (see Figure 4).

Among teachers, there was an increase of 0.77 percent of classroom teachers (enrolling and international enrolling combined). While this increase is positive, it is not enough to affect average class size between 2003/04 and 2004/05. By contrast, non-enrolling teachers, made up of both resource and district allocated teachers declined by 10.2

percent. These teachers include counselors, librarians and teachers who provide special programs for a wide variety of students.

These figures bear out the stated efforts of the elected Vancouver School Board members to protect the classroom experience for students. They also suggest that there is less ability within schools to meet individual student needs and to provide outside support to teachers in the classroom.

During budget consultations related to the development of the Vancouver District budget since 2002, parents have been particularly concerned about erosion in the number of counselors and librarians in Vancouver's secondary schools. Both counselors and librarians are part of the Resource (non-enrolling) teacher category in Figure 4.

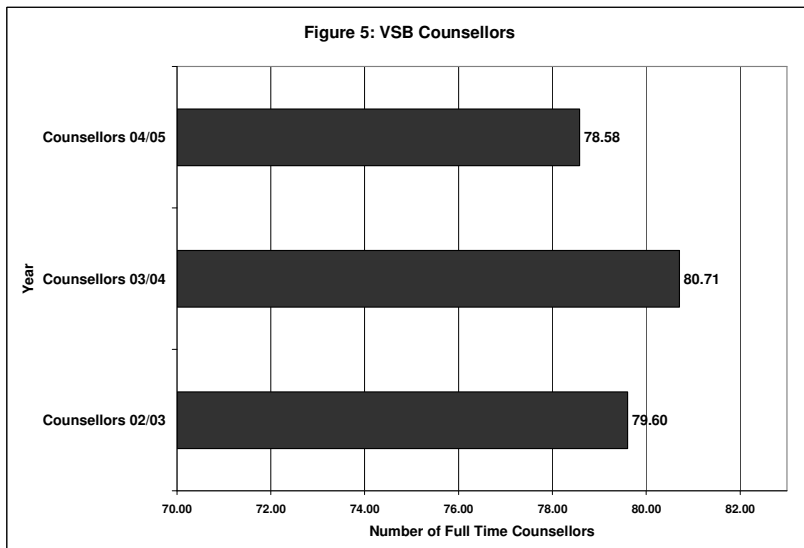
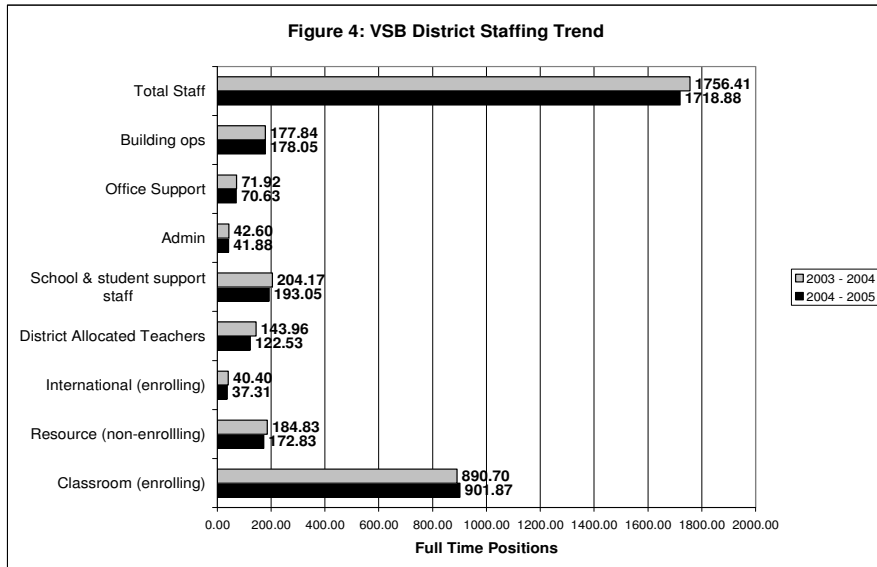


Figure 5 for counselors and Figure 10 for librarians on page 10 show that while the numbers of teachers in each group seems to be fairly stable, the percentage loss between 2003/04 and 2004/05 of 2.6% for counselors and 4.5% for librarians is in excess of the 0.4% loss in student enrollment in the same year. It should also be noted

that in such small but highly visible groups within the school community, any diminution in staff is clearly seen by everyone connected to the school. This helps explain the parent focus on these two teacher groups.

Courses

Optional courses

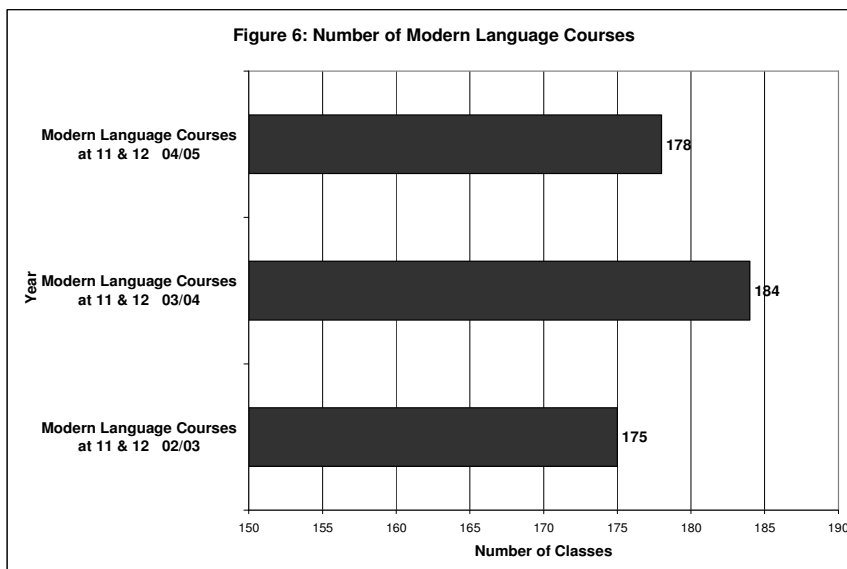
The survey asked schools to identify what courses were dropped from the school calendar between 2003/04 and 2004/05 and what courses were added. The focus of the question was on elective courses, that is, courses chosen by upper year students out of interest or to satisfy a graduation requirement. The Planning 10 course, newly required at all secondary schools in 2004/05 to replace the former Career and Personal Planning curriculum, is not included in the reported figures.

Responses can be tabulated from 16 schools as two schools did not respond to the question. In the 16 responding schools, three reported that no courses were dropped; and 1 reported dropping a program, but no courses. In the remaining 12 schools, 32 elective courses were dropped along with one bridge program. The dropped courses were made up of 11 courses in the computer and information technology area, 5 in math and science, 2 modern languages, 7 applied skills and fine arts, 6 English and social sciences, and one physical education.

Three of the 16 responding schools did not add new electives, though one increased the number of courses available to students by offering split or half-year electives. In the remaining 12 schools, 28 courses were added as well as one new program. The added courses were made up of 5 leadership/peer counseling courses, 4 math and science, 5 applied skills and fine arts, 7 English and social sciences, 5 physical education, 1 information technology, and 1 business.

Modern Languages

The survey asked schools to report how many separate classes of modern languages were taught at the Grade 11 and 12 level in each of the past three years 2002/03, 2003/04 and 2004/05.



Only 12 schools were able to provide data for all three years. In these 12 schools there were 175 modern language classes taught in 2002/03, 184 in 2003/04 and 178 in 2004/05 at the Grade 11 and 12 level.

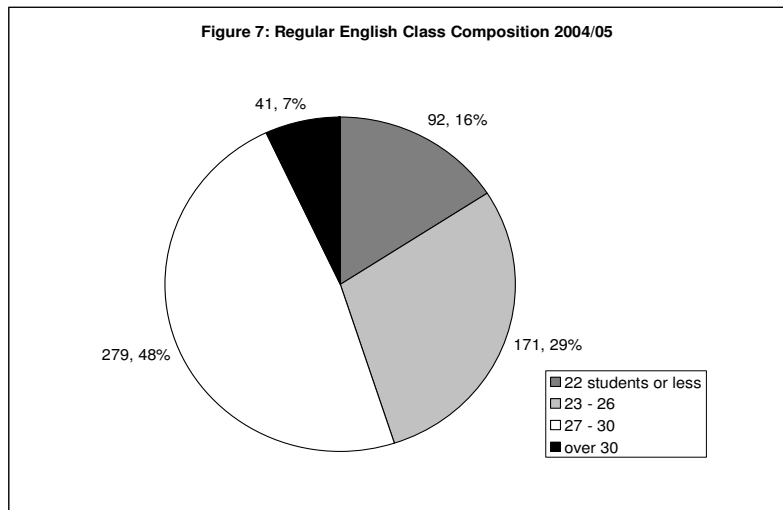
Class Size

The BC Schools Act currently requires school districts to maintain an average maximum class size of 30 students for intermediate and secondary grades. Across the country these figures vary: Ontario's current average class size requirement is 21 students at the secondary level; Alberta is moving towards a maximum of 25 for grades 7 to 9, and 27 for grades 10 to 12.

English Classes

Schools were asked to identify the number of regular English classes taught in 2004/05 and the number of students in each. English was chosen as the subject to survey because it is a mandatory course for students in all years. It should be noted, however, that one would expect to find a somewhat smaller average class size for English than for elective courses as schools must provide enough English classes to accommodate all students even though the classes may not be full.

15 schools responded to this question. Six of the schools reported keeping all their English classes at 30 or fewer students. Overall 7 percent of English classes had over 30 students. Approximately half – 48 percent – had from 27 to 30 students; 29 percent had from 23 to 26 students; and 16 percent had 22 or fewer students.



Largest Classes

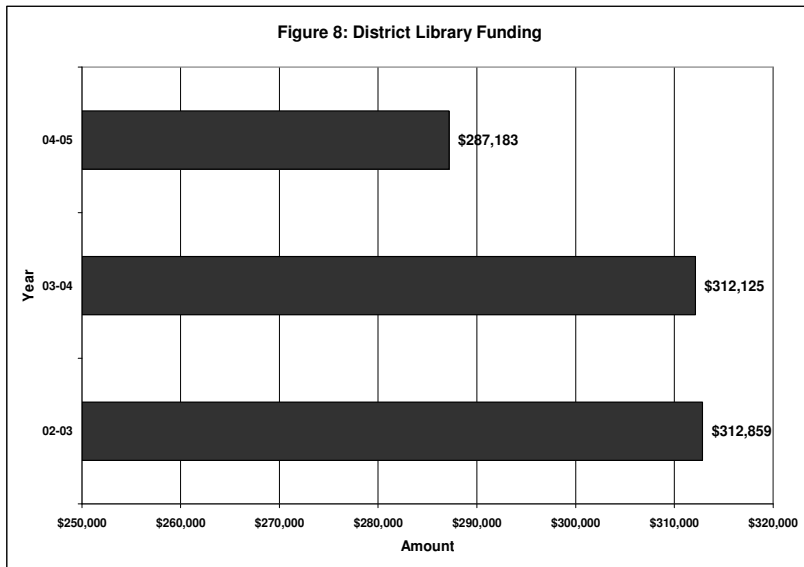
Schools were asked what was the largest single class in the school during 2004/05.

17 schools responded to this question. Two schools reported they had more than one course tied for the largest with the result 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. The number of students schools report having in these largest classes range from 31 to 36. There were 3 classes with 31 students each, 1 with 32, 11 with 33, 3 with 34, 1 with 35 and 3 with 36.

Libraries

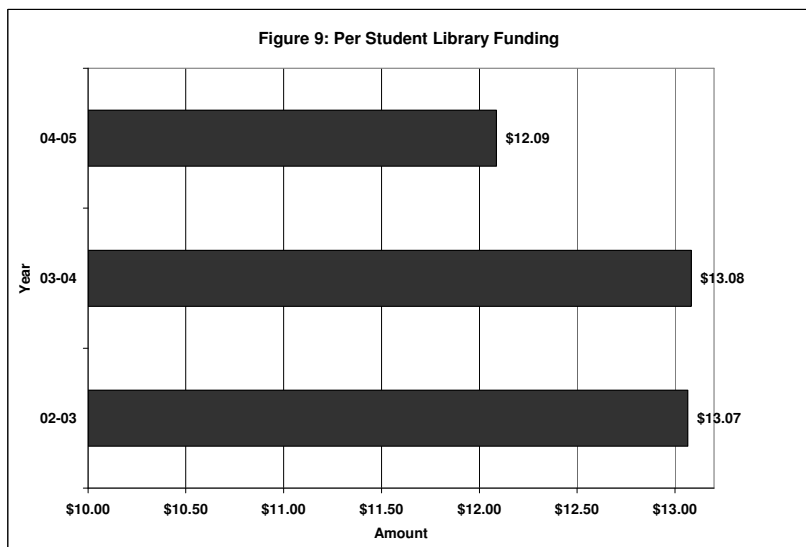
Resources

School libraries are allotted funds for the purchase of resources according to a funding formula set out by the school board. This formula is a combination of flat grant and per pupil grant. In 2002/03 and 2003/04 the flat grant portion of the allocation was \$6,287.00 per school and the per pupil grant was \$8.34 per student. In 2004/05 the flat grant portion was reduced to \$5,000.00 and the per pupil grant to \$8.30.



Adding up the allocations across the district gives a total expenditure on library resources in all Vancouver secondary schools of \$287,183.00 in 2004/05; \$312,125.00 in 2003/04 and \$312,858.00 in 2002/03. See Figure 8.

Averaging out these figures on a per student basis across the district (understanding that this is not how the funds are actually allocated) gives an amount of \$12.09 in 2004/05; \$13.08 in 2003/04 and \$13.07 in 2002/03. See Figure 9.



Teacher-Librarians

As noted above in the discussion of staffing, librarians fall into the category of non-enrolling teachers.

Figure 10 sets out the total number of librarians across all 18 secondary school libraries.

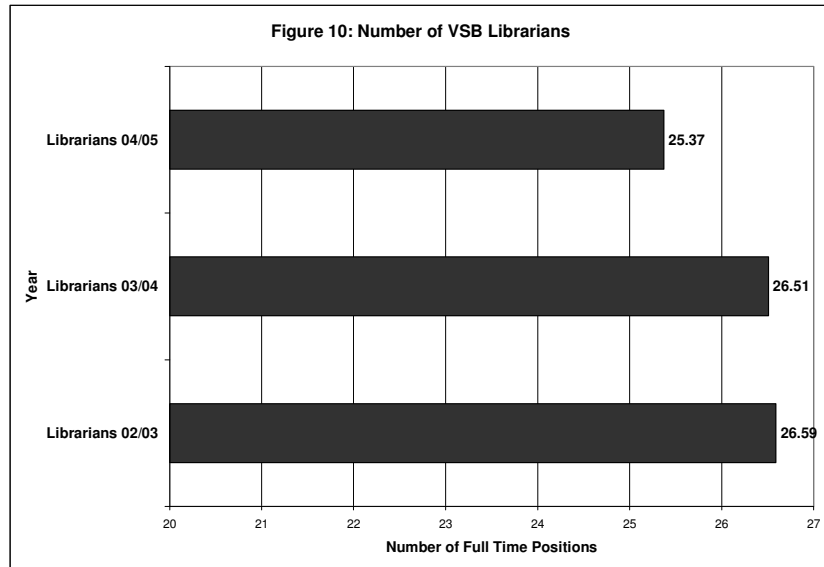
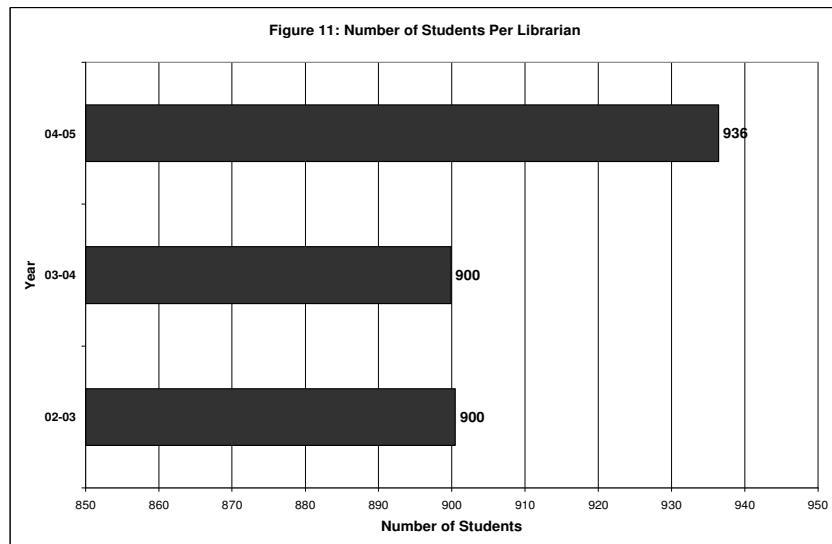
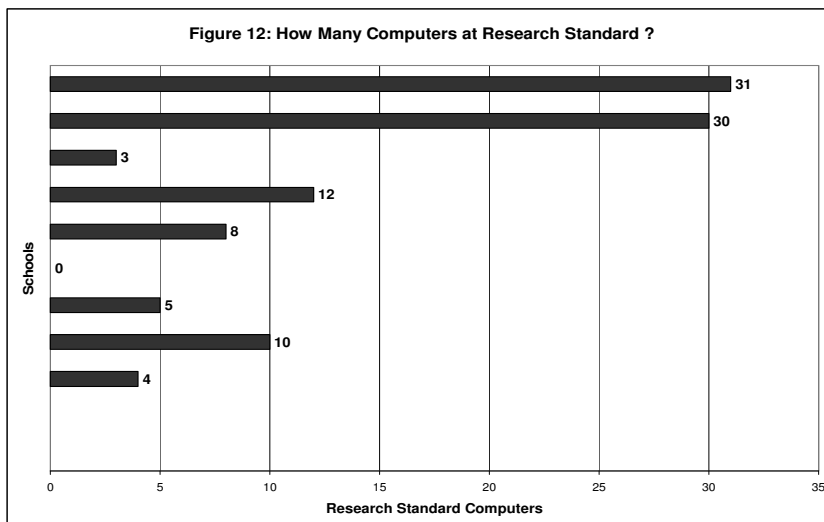


Figure 11 shows the average number of students there are per teacher-librarian in the school district. In Vancouver, the ratio of students to teacher-librarian jumped from 900 to 936 between 2003/04 and 2004/05. This ratio compares unfavourably to other parts of Canada, for example Ontario, which allocates funds for librarians on a ratio of one teacher-librarian for 909 students.



Research Standard Computers

Although information in response to this question was available from only half of Vancouver secondary schools, we have included the data as the range of results is surprising. 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.



Interpreters

The VSB provides interpreters on request to schools in order to facilitate communication between parents and educators. We asked schools to indicate how long the average wait time is for an interpreter after the request is made. Two schools said the wait time for a Chinese language interpreter was a matter of minutes. One school reported no wait time for a Punjabi translator. These statements suggest that these schools have someone on staff able to provide translation services.

Two schools reported up to 7 days wait for an interpreter. Five schools reported a 1 – 3 day wait, 3 schools reported a 1- 2 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. Two schools indicated the wait time varied and one said it was not an issue.

Figure 13: Interpreter Wait Time

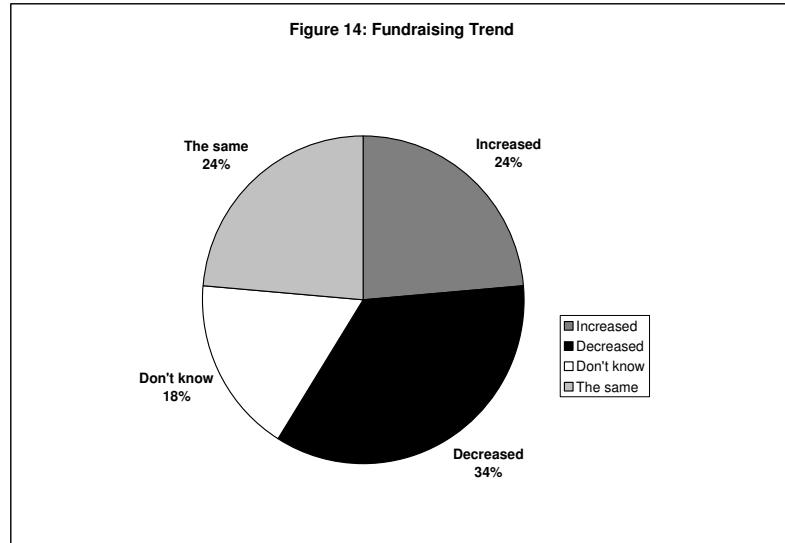
Schools	Wait time (in days)
2	1
3	1-2
5	1-3
1	2-3
2	5 – 7
2	Varies
1	Not an issue

Fundraising

Fundraising is taking place at all Vancouver secondary schools though the amounts raised vary significantly. Overall it is estimated that parents raised in excess of \$680,000 during 2004/05 at the 17 schools that responded to the survey (calculated using the mid-point of the reported fundraising range, see Figure 15 below). This is equivalent to the annual amount provided by the provincial government to cover the cost of educating over 120 students.

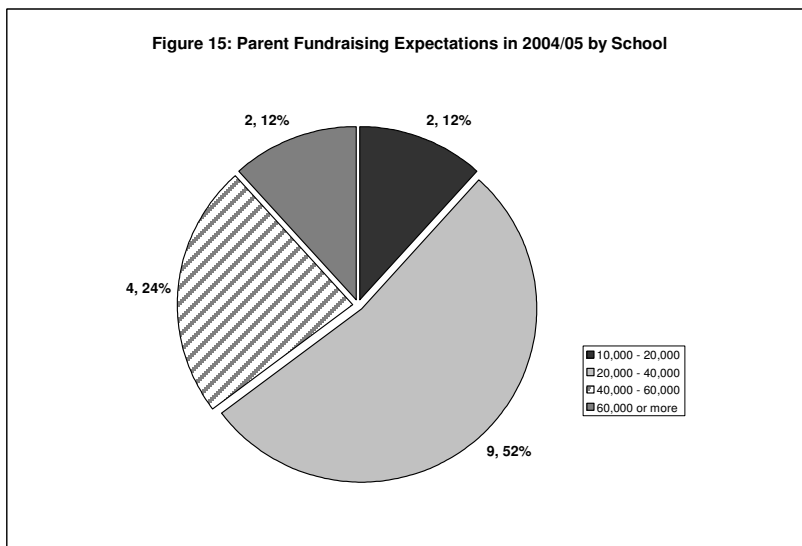
Parent Fundraising Trend

The survey asked whether the amount of money raised by parents has changed from the prior year. Four schools reported fundraising revenue had increased, six said it had decreased, three reported they didn't know and four said it had stayed the same.



Parent Fundraising Expectations:

The survey asked schools to estimate the amount of money parents expect to fundraise during the 2004/05 school year. 17 schools returned a response to this question. Two schools reported that they expected to raise between \$10,000 – \$20,000, nine schools anticipate raising \$20,000 – \$40,000, four expect receiving \$40,000 – \$60,000, and two schools expected over \$60,000.



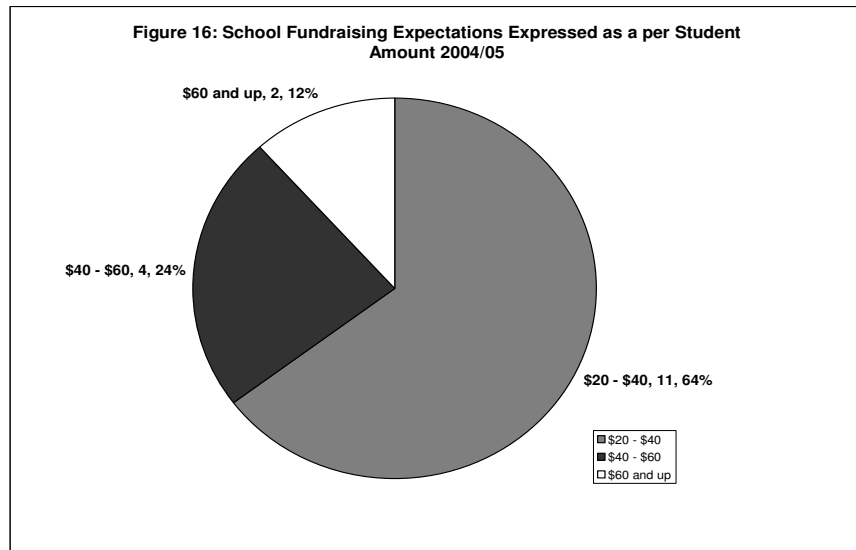
It is important to keep in mind this reporting is likely a conservative estimate as not all parent fundraising activities are coordinated by the PACs and the respondents were asked for their best estimate. In addition, these figures do not capture the amounts being raised by students, teachers, administrators and others.

What is clear from the survey results is the enormous range in fundraising expectations. Furthermore, there appears to be no direct correlation between student population and fundraising estimates. Several small schools reported higher expectations than several large secondary schools. This range is likely explained by a variety of factors including parent's attitudes toward fundraising, their ability to pay and the existence of specific programs that require significant support from parent fundraising activities.

Parent Fundraising Revenue on a Per Student Basis

The approximate sum that parents expect to raise in 2004/05 can be expressed as an amount per student. Using the mid-point of the range that parents at a school anticipate fundraising (for example the range from \$20,000 – \$40,000 yields a mid-point of \$30,000) and dividing this number by the student population at a school gives us an approximation of the amount of money parents raise in a school expressed as a per student amount.

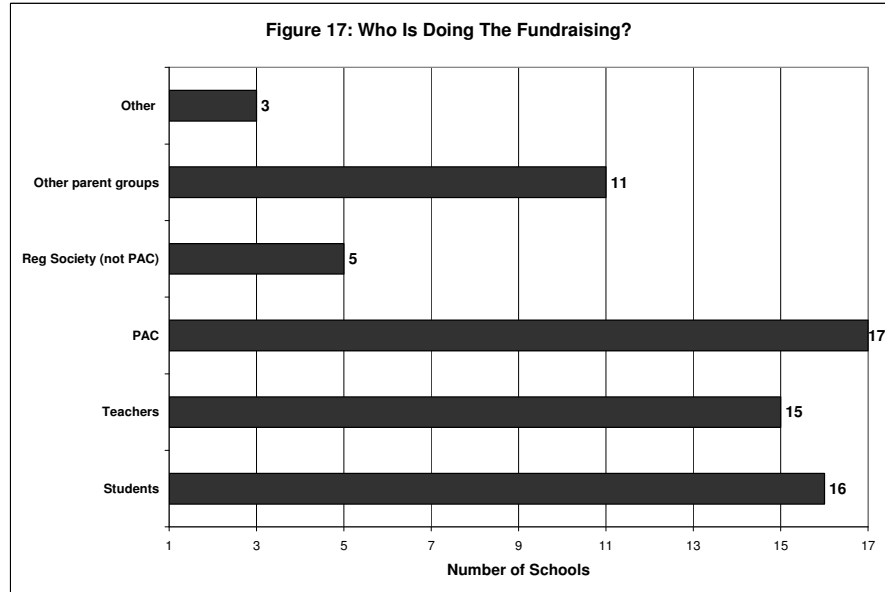
This calculation indicates that in the majority of schools (11), parents are raising between \$20.00 – \$40.00 per student. Four schools report raising \$40.00 – \$60.00 per student and three schools anticipated raising over \$60.00 per student (see Figure 13). It should be noted that these amounts include the Direct Access grants of \$20 per student that all Vancouver secondary PACs report receiving from the Gaming Commission.



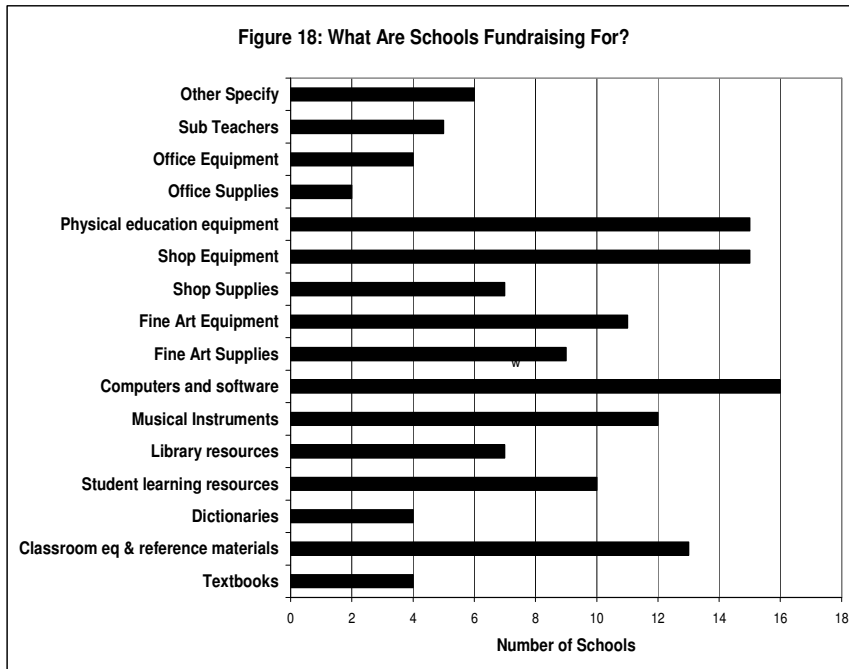
Who is Fundraising?

The survey asked schools to identify what groups are involved in fundraising at their school. 17 schools responded to this question. What was clear from the response is that while parent advisory councils are key fundraisers, many other groups are also directly involved in fundraising at all of Vancouver's secondary schools.

All 17 schools received funds raised by their PACs, though some of them indicated that all or most of these funds came from the Gaming Commission. At 16 schools students engaged in fundraising and at 15 schools teachers were fundraising. Other parents groups, such as Grad Committees were fundraising at 11 schools, registered societies such as music societies at 5 schools and other groups such as alumni organizations were fundraising at 3 schools. See Figure 17.



What Are Schools Fundraising For?

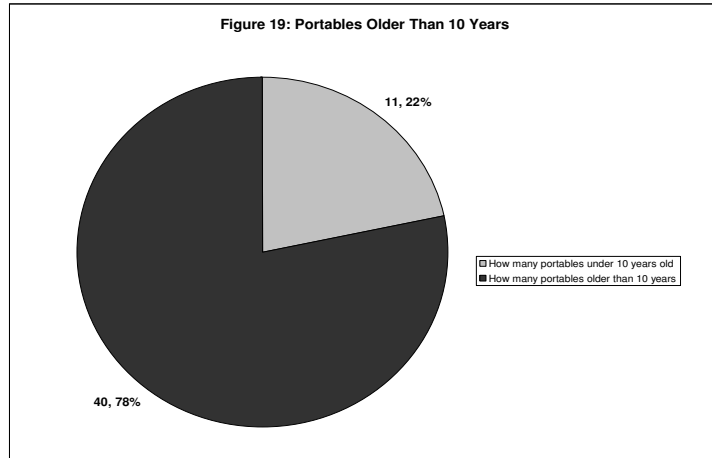


Survey participants indicated that computers and software top the list of purchases. Physical education equipment and shop equipment were second and third followed by classroom and reference materials. Musical instruments ranked fifth on the list of purchases followed by fine arts equipment and fine arts supplies. A few schools

reported spending funds on office equipment and substitute teachers. Substitute teachers were funded by parents to ensure that teachers could get away for the length of time needed to accompany students on field trips and opportunities for enriched learning experiences. It is clear from the kinds of things that schools are spending money on that fundraising is contributing significantly to the delivery of core curriculum. See Figure 18.

Portable Classrooms

The survey included two questions about the number and age of portable classrooms located on school property. Information provided by the district, indicates that there are 51 portables in use at Vancouver's secondary schools. Assuming 75% occupancy at any given time and an average class size of 30 students, this means 1,140 students in Vancouver are attending school in a portable.

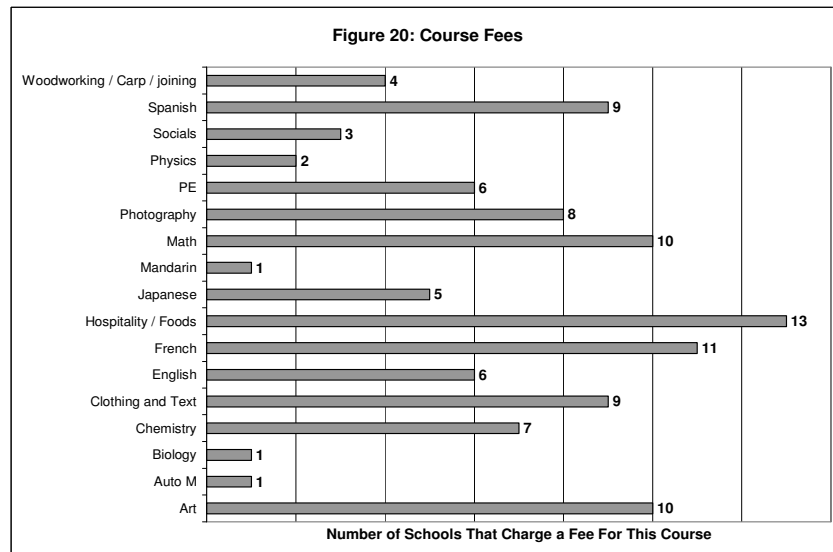


Furthermore, of the 51 portables, 40 or (78%) were reported as older than 10 years.

Course Fees

The survey includes district information about fees charged for selected courses at the grade 11 level at all 18 secondary schools.

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. Figure 20 identifies the number of schools that charge a fee for the identified grade eleven courses.



Course fees vary dramatically between schools. Figure 21 illustrates the range of fees from minimum to maximum.

Figure 21: Course Fee Range

Course	Fee Range
Art	15.00 - 40.00
Auto Mech	15.00
Biology	25.00
Chemistry	7.00 - 25.00
Clothing & Text	5.00 - 35.00
English	6.00 - 35.00
French	9.00 - 75.00
Hospitality/Foods	5.00 - 60.00
Japanese	15.00 - 60.00
Mandarin	19.25
Math	4.00 - 100.00
Photography	25.00 - 50.00
PE	50.00 - 80.00
Physics	11.00 - 13.00
Socials	17.00 - 25.00
Spanish	15.00 - 50.00
Woodworking/Carp	10.00 - 100.00

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, our goal in carrying out this first survey of Vancouver’s secondary schools was to make clear, accurate and accessible information available to students, parents, the general public and decision-makers at all levels of government. We asked questions about issues that we, as parents, think are important for people to understand. There are many other questions, but the constraints of time and resources made a longer survey unmanageable.

Our perspective is transparent. We value public education; we believe that high quality public education on a universal model is an investment in the future of our society; and we will act to support public education when we see it being threatened. This survey is our way of shedding light on the debate over public education. We hope it will bring greater understanding of the need to support strong public schools.