



Shaughnessy Parent Advisory Council

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Ms. Patti Bacchus
Chairperson
Vancouver School Board
1580 West Broadway
Vancouver BC V6J 5K8

30 March 2010

Dear Ms. Bacchus:

We are the parents of Shaughnessy Elementary PAC (SHYPAC). Our school of some 500 K-7 students is a thriving and diverse learning community, with dedicated educators, administration and support staff. We are proud of our programs and our students' outstanding rate of participation in academics, the arts, social responsibility activities and athletics. Our parents are known for their remarkable volunteerism, support and participation. There is much to celebrate at our school.

We are worried. We perceive a steady erosion of public school education in our province and we note, with mounting concern, the Vancouver School Board's projected shortfall of a substantial \$18M+. At our recent PAC meeting, parents requested and unanimously agreed to launch a grassroots, non-partisan postcard campaign to the Minister of Education to express our community's support for adequate funding for our public schools. Our parents recognize the main source of public school funding is from the provincial government, and not the school board. But, it is the school board who allocates these funds and we are emphatic that a decent public school education for children includes academics and the arts, athletics, special needs education, libraries and integrated family and child support programs. Our parents believe quality public school education is a core Canadian value and critical to our future success as a country. Enclosed is a copy of the postcard – it is a clear reminder to our educational leaders that it is ALL about the children.

Our PAC members also had an opportunity to discuss some VSB-specific issues, particularly the proposed school calendar changes. Here are some things we heard:

- All decisions must be based on sound education practices. We need to question underlying assumptions and ask why we do what we do.
- While many love the idea of two weeks spring holiday and extra break days throughout the year, concern was expressed for the many families who would have to shoulder the extra cost of child care (assuming it is even available!)
- There is no evidence presented to suggest that adding small amounts of time each day contributes to better learning. The School Board itself states this is solely a cost-saving measure and has nothing to do with improving our children's education.
- Are we adding these non-productive minutes just to satisfy a standard quota of required instructional hours? Why is this particular amount required? Whom does it serve? Does this standard have anything to do with our children's education and well-being or something else? If we are going to tinker with our school schedule, why not optimize it

to best serve our students? If we need to cut hours to save money why not just cut the hours and not add on meaningless educational time?

- We are intrigued with year round schooling as it appears to clearly support enhanced learning.
- New teachers invigorate our schools, with their enthusiasm, innovative skills, fresh thinking and ability to connect with students. Under the current system, many of these new educators are the first to go under budget cutbacks. How can we ensure we retain our best teachers?
- Can we tap into the other networks/assets that will support our schools? (e.g. parents, volunteers, and businesses). Let's recognize that our schools are neighbourhood centres and community assets.
- Libraries are the heart of our schools.
- Children and youth often learn best through the arts – why would we cut things like band or art class?
- Ranking the importance of programs is divisive. Should we say that Gifted Ed is more important than ESL or School Counselling just because we need one and not the other? They are all important!

In conclusion, we thought we would paraphrase one of our parents: “We are a rich country – why can't we properly fund public schools? We seem to have lost our focus. There is something wrong with this!” We wholeheartedly agree.

Please, Vancouver School Board, ensure your decisions are based on sound educational practices and that our CHILDREN (not the School Board, nor the Teacher's Federation, nor the Ministry of Education) are your first priority when you allocate our precious public school resources.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Hum
SHYPAC Co-Chair

Teresa Pryce
SHYPAC Co-Chair

c.c.

Trustees Bouey; Denike; Gregson; Wong; Blakey; Clement; Gibson; Lombardi
Superintendent Cardwell
Principal Barrie
Vice-Principal Dale