

Vancouver Parents for Public Education

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why is the Vancouver Board of Education cutting programs and laying off teachers?

Vancouver School Trustees are projecting a budget shortfall of \$16.32 million dollars for the upcoming 2010-2011 school year. Provincial legislation and regulations make it illegal for the board to run a budget deficit so in order to balance its budget the board is looking at a variety of ways to cut costs including reducing or cutting programs and laying off staff.

The VSB has made reductions in programs, staffing, resources and supplies every year since 2001.

2. The provincial government says it is spending more money than ever on K-12 education, so why is there a budget shortfall?

While the provincial government may have increased the dollar amount of per pupil funding, in reality it is failing to meet the rising costs of education.

With an adjusted funding figure per student that takes into account provincially mandated teachers' salaries (as just one of the provincially mandated expenses) we see that local boards of education actually have less money per student to pay for the essentials of education than they did in 2006-07.

Year	Funding per student	Adjusted Funding per student
2006-07	\$7584	\$6520
2007-08	\$7811	\$6488
2008-09	\$8118	\$6465
2009-10	\$8318	\$6438

Funding per student can be a misleading way to look at the figures. A more important way to think about public school funding is that the percentage of the provincial budget spent on public education has been steadily declining over the past decade - from **26.36%** in 1991-92, to **20.06%** in 2000/2001 to **15.34% in 2009/10**.

3. The provincial government says that declining enrolment is the problem?

While some districts have declining enrolment, it is not the cause of this crisis in public school funding. It is important to note that in the Surrey School District where enrollment is actually increasing they are facing a shortfall of \$12.3 million. Declining enrollment in Vancouver is a red herring that does not account for the funding shortfall.

The province's funding formula is a large part of the problem. The per student formula fails to take into account the fixed costs of running schools - in other words the costs that don't change or change only a little when there are more or less students.

4. Since most of the school board's budget is spent on salaries, shouldn't teacher salaries be reviewed?

The British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) is the bargaining agent for all school boards and is jointly governed by public school board representatives and the provincial government. Teacher's salaries are negotiated between the BCPSEA and the BC Teacher's Federation for all public school districts.

In Vancouver, teachers make between \$43,790 and \$81,488. The higher end of the pay spectrum applies to teachers who hold a Masters or Ph.D and have moved up the pay 'steps'. Most teachers are in category '5' which includes 10 'steps' reflecting a salary range of \$48,083 - \$74,353 with the majority of teachers falling somewhere in the middle.

Source: BC Public School Employers Association, homepage (<http://www.bcpsea.bc.ca/access/index.html>)
Vancouver Elementary Teachers' Association *Teacher's Salary Grid*
(<http://bctf.ca/vesta/download/salarygrid.xls>)

5. Is the Shortfall Due to Board Mismanagement?

If only a few districts across the province were facing funding shortfalls it might suggest that individual boards had mismanaged funds. However, when every board across the province is facing significant funding shortfalls it indicates the problem is much more systemic – the per-student funding formula fails to reflect the proper costs of public education. Since 2002-03 the Vancouver School Board has cut 276.8 positions to address ongoing funding shortfalls. Proposed cuts in 2010-11 include 161.7 positions. And, with an additional \$7 million shortfall the following year these damaging cuts will continue until we fix the flawed funding formula.

6. If I choose to pay fees for my child to attend a private school why should I have to pay taxes for public education if I don't benefit?

As taxpayers we don't get to cherry pick which public services we support. We might use the roads more than the parks and the hospitals more than the schools but our tax dollars fund the whole system. Even if your child doesn't attend a public school it is in your best interest to have a strong public education system. If we don't give all of our children a good education we won't have a qualified workforce and a strong tax base in the future.

7. What Should the Government Cut to Properly Fund Public Education?

It is easy to flippantly point the finger at things like stadium roofs which certainly seem to fall more in the frills, than core priorities category but we don't want to get into a funding tug of war with special interest groups. We aren't asking for the impossible - It may surprise people to learn that it would only take a fraction of 1% of the provincial budget to restore 2009/2010 funding levels across the province (which is a start towards properly funding public education). The government was elected to represent the people of British Columbia. Seventy-nine percent of British Columbians say that the provincial government should increase funding to public schools– it is the government's job to determine what frills we can do without in order to properly fund public education.