



NORTH VANCOUVER SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 44

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June 19, 2009

The Honourable Margaret MacDiarmid
Minister of Education
P.O. Box 9045, Stn Prov Govt
Victoria BC V8W 9E2

Dear Minister MacDiarmid:

Subject: Funding Concerns and Submission of 2009/10 Opportunity Budget

On behalf of the North Vancouver School District, Board of Education, North Vancouver Parent Advisory Council, Secondary Study Group, Association of Elementary Administrators, North Vancouver Teachers' Association, and the Canadian Union of Public Employees Local 389, we are writing to express our deep concern regarding inadequate funding for public education. The 2009/10 Opportunity Budget, prepared by the North Vancouver School District, is presented herewith, and illustrates the insufficiency of the current operating grant model and funding levels.

The North Vancouver Board of Education recognizes the trust and responsibility it has as stewards of public funds to ensure a balanced budget is prepared and implemented by the School District. The challenge associated with preparing the 2009/10 Operating Budget was to address a funding shortfall of \$3.2 million. In fulfilling this responsibility, the Board led a series of meetings with partner representatives and the public to inform the development of the 2009/10 budget. This process of public consultation magnified our understanding of the consequences of years of inadequate funding for public education in the province and its impact to our School District.

Although we were able to achieve a balanced budget, it has not been without sacrifices. As a result, we have been unable to address a range of pressing needs in the School District that have been affected by year-after-year cutbacks and insufficient funding. The 2009/10 Opportunity Budget estimates the additional expenditures required to preserve current services, restore services eroded by past budgets, and address unmet needs.

As well, the School District finds itself, along with other School Districts in the province, to be expected to address an ever-expanding mandate particularly in the areas of early learning, community literacy, student safety, and healthy living. To date, funding has either not been forthcoming or inadequate to realize the government's goals in these areas. We are strongly of the opinion that any new initiatives from government should be fully funded by government, without negatively impacting any other School District programs or services.

The Vision of the North Vancouver School District is to "provide world-class instruction and a rich diversity of engaging programs to inspire success for every student and bring communities together to learn, share and grow." To do this, and to support the stated goals and mandate of the

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Ministry of Education, a new provincial funding model is necessary, one that acknowledges inflation, increasingly complex student needs, a growing mandate, and a need to restore educational and support services eroded by years of budget restraint.

As executive leaders of the primary organizations involved in the development and delivery of public education to students in North Vancouver, we ask you to begin creating a future where public education in British Columbia is not only adequately funded but recognized as a priority investment to promote the long-term viability of our province and its people.

In closing, we thank you for your consideration of our concerns and we look forward to a reply to this letter.

Yours sincerely,



John Lewis
Superintendent of Schools



Susan Skinner
Acting Chairperson
Board of Education



Lisa Cartwright
Chairperson
North Vancouver Parent Advisory
Council



Mark James
President
Secondary Study Group



Karen Harrop
President
Association of Elementary
Administrators



Cindy McQueen
President
Canadian Union of Public Employees
Local 389



Linda Watson
President
North Vancouver Teachers' Association

PC/ps

Enclosure North Vancouver School District's 2009/2010 Opportunity Budget

cc Board of Education
The Honourable Gordon Campbell, MLA, Premier of the Province of British Columbia
Naomi Yamamoto, MLA, North Vancouver-Lonsdale
Jane Thornthwaite, MLA, North Vancouver-Seymour
Ralph Sultan, MLA, West Vancouver-Capilano

North Vancouver School District
THE 2009/10 OPPORTUNITY BUDGET

A. Discussions of the 2009/10 Operating Budget

Throughout the winter and spring of 2009, the Board and its *Finance and Facilities Standing Committee* met on several occasions to consider and communicate matters relating to the preparation of the 2009/10 Annual Operating Budget. During these public meetings, trustees and education partners canvassed the following matters:

- The prospects for the 2009/10 operating budget
- The magnitude and impacts of revenue reductions occurring during the 2008/09 budget year
- The certain impacts of anticipated further funding and expenditure restraints in 2009/10
- Anticipated reductions and effects in 2009/10
- The potential need to consider school closures.

The sentiments, views and expectations and opinions of participants at budget meetings and budget ‘tier’ meetings included the following:

- The need for communication with all partner/stakeholder groups during the process of developing the 2009/10 operating budget
- The need to provide opportunity for partner groups to be involved and to express their views respecting the development of the 2009/10 operating budget and the impact of budget decisions on the level of programs and supports provided to students
- The importance of ensuring that parents and the community at large understand the challenges faced by the Board in balancing its expenditures to available revenue and the effect this will have on the level of programs and supports provided to students
- The concern that despite promises and assurances by the province, education funding has not been protected to the extent expected and assumed by parents
- The need for the Board to protest the imposition of unfunded costs on school districts through the imposition of a continually expanding mandate.

In short, Trustees and education partners expressed the view that previous and current provincial governments were not providing funding increases commensurate with cost increases and as a consequence, were not providing, through its operating grants, sufficient funds for public education.

The preparation of the 2009/10 Operating Budget

The challenge associated with preparing the 2009/10 Operating Budget was to address a funding shortfall of \$3.2 million through a combination of revenue improvements and expenditure reductions. Projected revenues from all sources other than the provincial grant were decreased by \$866,000 as a consequence of the current economic conditions. Expenditure reductions in the amount of \$4.1 million were required in the development of the 2009/10 Operating Budget. The Board adopted its 2009/10 Operating Budget Bylaw on May 26, 2009.

B. Concerns with the 2009/10 Operating Budget

The 2009/10 Operating Budget adopted by the Board on May 26, 2009 was not a needs budget – it balanced planned expenditures to estimated revenue from all sources, meeting the requirements of the *School Act*. The 2009/10 Operating Budget does not enable the preservation of current service levels and provides for no restoration of services eroded over the past years of under funding, fiscal controls and expenditure restraints and provides no contingency to address the materialization of risk factors throughout 2009/10.

The reduction in service levels, unmet needs, the accumulated impacts of expenditure reductions in the past years and the risk factors associated with restraints, have been reported to the Board on a number of occasions.

Included among the risk factors are:

- Unforeseen and/or inescapable changes in the forecasted revenue and/or forecasted expenditures
- Unanticipated and/or unavoidable increases in the costs of goods or services
- Emergent issues related to essential replacements or repairs of aging instructional and non-instructional equipment
- Emergent issues related to aging facilities, related occupational health and safety issues, and related health board requests
- Downloading of responsibilities and costs from other senior levels of government
- Security issues and the associated costs of vandalism, break-ins and theft
- Replacement of aging technology and the acquisition of needed new technologies/supports
- Costs of compliance, including legal costs, associated with increasing regulatory powers and requirements of various government agencies

Without a contingency, the Board would have to address the materialization of risk factors by reducing planned expenditures for 2009/10.

The 2009/10 Operating Budget adopted by the Board provided for a reduction in current service levels and no opportunity for any restoration of services eliminated or reduced over the past years. The management of unmet needs and expectations become more challenging each year.

Significant unmet needs and challenges include:

- Class sizes in core courses at secondary schools
- Class sizes at grades 4 to 7
- Actual costs associated with supports for students with special learning needs
- Increased professional development supports for teachers and support staff
- Occupational health and safety programs and wellness supports
- School and classroom supplies and materials
- Actual costs associated with an expanded mandate for early learning, community literacy, adult learning, student safety and healthy living
- Actual costs associated with expanded accountability measures including the administration of the Foundation Skills Assessment

- Applications of information technology: hardware, software and technical supports
- New and replacement furniture and equipment, including workstation upgrades
- Custodial and maintenance frequency of services
- Energy efficiency upgrades and related measures to achieve ‘carbon neutral’ mandates
- Mechanical systems maintenance and upgrades
- Interior painting
- Asphalt, fencing, exterior lighting and grounds repairs.

C. The 2009/10 Opportunity Budget

The Board submitted its first Opportunity Budget to the Minister of Education in October 2003. Through its 2003/04 Opportunity Budget, the Board argued that \$8,087,000 in additional funding was required to begin addressing unmet needs. The Board submitted a second Opportunity Budget to the Minister of Education for the 2004/05 Budget year, identifying additional funding needs in the amount of \$8,850,600.

The 2009/10 Opportunity Budget amount of \$10,900,000 is the Board’s estimate of additional expenditures required to preserve current services and to restore educational services, programs and supports, to address unmet and unfunded needs and to accommodate risk factors contained in the 2009/10 Operating Budget.

D. Components of the 2009/10 Opportunity Budget

Class sizes in core courses at secondary schools (\$2,000,000)

A decrease in the average class size by 2 students in Secondary courses would require an additional 21.0 FTE @ \$87,380 (average salary + benefits). Associated costs would include substitute costs, professional development and educational leadership.

Class sizes at Grades 4 to 7 (\$1,300,000)

A decrease in the average class size by 2 students in Grades 4 through 7 would require an additional 14.0 FTE @ \$87,380 (average salary + benefits). Associated costs would include substitute costs, professional development and educational leadership.

Classroom supports for students with special learning needs (\$1,400,000)

An increase in Learning Assistance and Student Services staffing with the restoration of special education aides to prior service levels would help address needed supports for students with special learning needs.

Professional development of teachers and support staff (\$400,000)

Support for training of teachers and support staff has been reduced over successive budgets. The provision of \$400,000 is to address in service in areas of teaching mathematics, literacy

instruction, the application of information technology, supporting students with special needs, teaching citizenship and social responsibility, and implementing graduation requirements.

Occupational Health and Safety/Wellness Programs (\$175,000)

Staff and program costs associated with programs and services to manage costs associated with absenteeism, on the job injuries, disability management and crisis and disaster planning.

School and classroom supplies and materials (\$1,100,000)

Block budgets have been maintained at significantly reduced levels with very limited funds available for replacement of curriculum/program materials and the purchase of required textbooks for instruction, and the maintenance of libraries. A very conservative increase of 50% annually would help relieve the reliance upon fund-raising and increased fees charged to students.

Costs associated with an expanded mandate for early learning, community literacy, adult learning, student safety and healthy living (\$400,000)

The expanded mandate of the Board of Education has not been adequately funded to meet the Board of Education's requirements to delivery early learning services and programs, community and district literacy initiatives, the 'education guarantee for adults' and to address student health and safety issues related to nutrition, emergency services and procedures.

Costs associated with expanded accountability measures including the administration of the Foundation Skills Assessment (\$200,000)

The expanded accountability measures of the Ministry of Education and other Ministries and regulatory bodies have not been supported with adequate resources for their effective implementation for the intended purposes of improving student achievement.

Information Technology: hardware, software and supports (\$1,900,000)

Hardware: increasing the number of machines and planned replacement of existing machines every 4th year (\$1,000,000 annual increase).

Software: upgrades for student information and licensing costs (\$300,000 annual increase)

Connectivity: required upgrades to bandwidth to provide reasonable access to learning resources and business applications (\$400,000 annual increase)

Support: technical support for maintenance and repair (\$200,000 annual increase).

New and Replacement Furniture and Equipment (\$760,000)

Classroom/Instructional Equipment: allocate an allowance to secondary schools to permit a 25-year replacement cycle for equipment in Classrooms, Offices, Kitchens, Shops, Gyms, and Home Economics. (\$40,000 per school per year for 8 schools = \$320,000).

Workstation upgrades: ergonomic workstations to support the application of technology within classrooms are needed across the school district (\$250,000 per year for four years).

Communication Equipment: allocate funds for ongoing replacement of school communication equipment (\$20,000).

Physical Education and Audio Visual Equipment: allocate funds to replace \$2,000 worth of PE equipment on a 20-year cycle and \$3,000 worth of AV equipment on a 10-year cycle for each of the 29 elementary schools (29 x \$5,000 = \$145,000).

Custodial Equipment: allocate funds to replace custodial equipment on a 10-year cycle (50 locations x \$5000 over 10 years = \$25,000 per year).

Custodial cleaning – increase frequency of service (\$340,000)

Restore custodial complement by adding 5 positions (\$265,000), allowing custodians more time to focus on cleaning washrooms and high traffic corridors, and providing replacement services for custodians absent on approved sick leave (\$75,000).

Mechanical Systems Preventive Maintenance (\$275,000)

Required to undertake long-term preventative maintenance, address ‘carbon neutral’ requirements, improve occupant comfort, speed up asbestos removal and/or encapsulation activities, increase building equipment lifespan and significantly reduce the risk of immediate shutdown due to equipment (e.g. boiler) failure.

Interior Painting (\$200,000)

Reinstate a ten-year cycle of full interior painting. Interior painting currently consists of spot touch-up only with no provision for full interior repainting.

Asphalt and Fencing (\$85,000)

Reinstate twenty-year cycle of asphalt and fencing replacement. Holes, cracks, and root upheavals prevalent on asphalt surfaces are currently repaired only where significant liability exists. Similarly, uncapped steel fence pipe poles, steel bands, wire ends, and unprotected bottom of fencing will be repaired only where significant liability exists.

Exterior Lighting (\$250,000)

Upgrade all school lighting over five years to bring exterior lighting to current WCB standards. The value of exterior lighting upgrade requirements at an average school is \$25,000.

Grounds Improvements and Repairs (\$115,000)

Allocate funds to fund two additional Grounds workers (at \$57,500) to permit brush control twice a year and annual weeding. Current program to upgrade grounds is frustrated by lack of funding to maintain the sites. Weeding has been discontinued, and brush control is limited to once every two years.

E. Summary

The 2009/10 Operating Budget was not a needs budget – it balanced planned expenditures to estimated revenue from all sources, meeting the requirements of the *School Act*. The 2009/10 Operating Budget provided for no restoration of services eroded over the past years of under funding, fiscal controls and expenditure restraints and provided no contingency to address the materialization of risk factors throughout 2009/10.

The 2009/10 Opportunity Budget is a minimum needs budget, which includes \$10,900,000 over and above the 2009/10 Operating Budget to maintain and restore educational services, programs and supports to prior levels, to address unmet and unfunded needs, and to accommodate the risk factors associated with the 2009/10 Operating Budget.