

Draft Considerations and Process for Public Consultation

Working Title: Educational Facilities Review
Prepared by: District Management Team

What is the Educational Facilities Review?

The Board of Trustees approved the process for an Educational Facilities Review (EFR) in January 2005. The purpose of the review is to face challenges and develop a strategy for our future sustainability and effectiveness. The process began with three initiatives, now either completed or in progress:

- Reviewing French immersion expansion for September 2006 (completed);
- Examining VSB's capacity versus enrolment (excess space); and
- Initiating the BC Seismic Mitigation Program.

Subsequent phases included a review of adult education, various program options, alternate programs and career program delivery. A plan for long-term French language training has been completed, and the other reviews are underway.

These are some of the factors under consideration that affect future plans:

- Educational quality -- whether a building contributes to a high-quality learning experience, and how options for students opens up opportunities
- Continuing our commitment to the concept of neighbourhood schools
- Minimizing costs for operating our facilities and maximizing educational benefits
- Providing satisfactory placement of all district programs
- Childcare or other non-school users in our school buildings
- Heritage -- preservation of key structures in Vancouver
- Facility audit -- current physical condition of facilities
- Asset value of land and buildings
- Surplus sites/buildings -- what could/should we do with these?
- Seismic upgrading -- which schools have a high value, which have a low?

At a March 6, 2007 Trustee Workshop, the group reviewed updates and background information in order to determine the next steps for an overall consultative, public engagement process.

Background:

Since the process began in 2005, there have been many changes in our district. We operate in a dynamic climate, with constantly changing educational needs, declining enrolments, shifting demographics and populations, localized growth and substantial seismic capital investment in our schools.

Moreover, there are changes underway at the provincial level. For instance, the Throne Speech signaled an expanded mandate for "Boards of Education" offering more choice in learning, a new approach to distributed learning, opening Strong Start Centres in underutilized schools, opening underutilized schools to public and community uses,

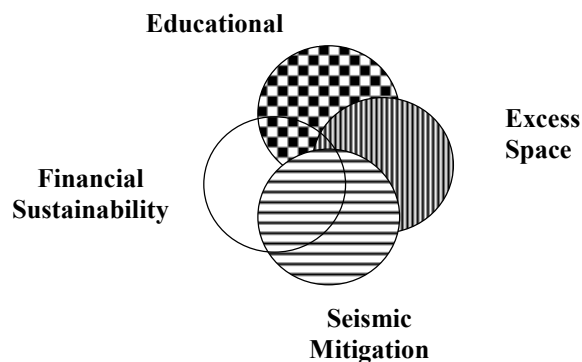
working with boards to better manage capital planning, ensuring schools or school lands are used for their highest and best use for maximum public benefit, developing more public-private partnerships, etc.

In our large, urban, and multicultural school district, we serve more than 56,000 students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, 3,000 people through adult education, and thousands and thousands more through continuing education. Because inefficient use of space leads to inefficient use of funds, it is critical that VSB review and consider the best use of its physical assets, so that we can continue to deliver the best possible educational opportunities for our very broad and diverse population of students.

Four main challenges

Within the district, myriad challenges fall within four main areas: educational; financial stability; excess space; and seismic mitigation. The diagram below illustrates that they interconnect; a decision about one affects the others. The best way to address these challenges is to build them into a long-term plan.

Trustees and district management have been working to find ways to meet these challenges. To find a workable strategy for the future, it is essential to engage school stakeholders and the public in this process.



Educational

Education is our core purpose. It is important that our decisions on student learning not be lost in the complexity of other issues.

The structures that have served education well for the past 100 years are giving way to new ways of doing things -- from new approaches to student learning, the need for expanded choice options, technology advances, and seismic upgrading. The VSB can be either at the forefront of change, or swept along by it.

In accordance with our core purpose, there are some general principles that guide development of a strategy including (but not limited to)...

- Assess every proposed action against its ability to support and enhance learning.
- Take into account available capacity in surrounding schools to accommodate families
- Make every effort to ensure all students have safe access to our schools.
- Optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of all our school facilities.
- Review all opportunities to enhance our financial sustainability.

Issues to consider

Catchment Areas and Neighbourhood Schools

The Ministry of Education website still identifies neighbourhood schools as the priority, Choice can be exercised anywhere in the province, given there is available space in the school. VSB policies also endorse these basic concepts.

District Programs

There are three different types of district programs. In Choice programs, students make the choice to attend Mini schools, Fine Arts, French immersion, etc. There are approximately 36 of these programs. Alternate programs are designed for students with specialized learning needs. In many cases these are separated from the main building. There are approximately 20 of these programs. Special education programs are mostly housed within schools.

Distributed Learning

...is rapidly changing and opening up opportunities in education. Students learn online or through a supported print program, at any time, at their own pace. In addition, teachers and counselors are available for guidance and support.

Adult Education Centres

There are seven centres that provide adult students with courses from the literacy level to secondary school completion. Each centre responds to specific community needs and program offerings reflect student course requests and enrolment patterns. Centres offer one-to-one literacy tutoring, structured upgrading classes and individualized education programs. For long-term sustainability, we must review optimum use of all facilities.

International Students

International (fee paying) students have contributed to our district culturally, socially, educationally and economically for 25 years. Tuition fees from international students enable us to hire more teachers and additional learning resources for all our students across the district.

School Size as an Impact on Learning

Published information clearly outlines that school size has a direct impact on student learning. In the review of our schools, we will make every attempt to adjust our school capacity to reflect this understanding.

Program Options

We need to ensure there are thoughtful, sustainable and supportable programs throughout our system that maximize opportunities for students, while making efficient use of facilities and non-facility resources.

There are other non-facility “structure” issues that must be considered during the Educational Facilities Review, such as schools on semester systems that attract mid-year enrolment and international students. On the other hand, schools on modular timetables often suit learners who work well on their own.

With the challenges that lie ahead, program choice provides a real opportunity for creative problem-solving. For instance, a “hub” configuration combines two or three

secondary schools into a hub where students can gain access to specialized courses or programs at given sites.

Early Childhood Development

The Throne Speech stated a provincial change in direction toward promoting more early childhood development options. The VSB needs to incorporate this expanded mandate into its planning.

Excess Space

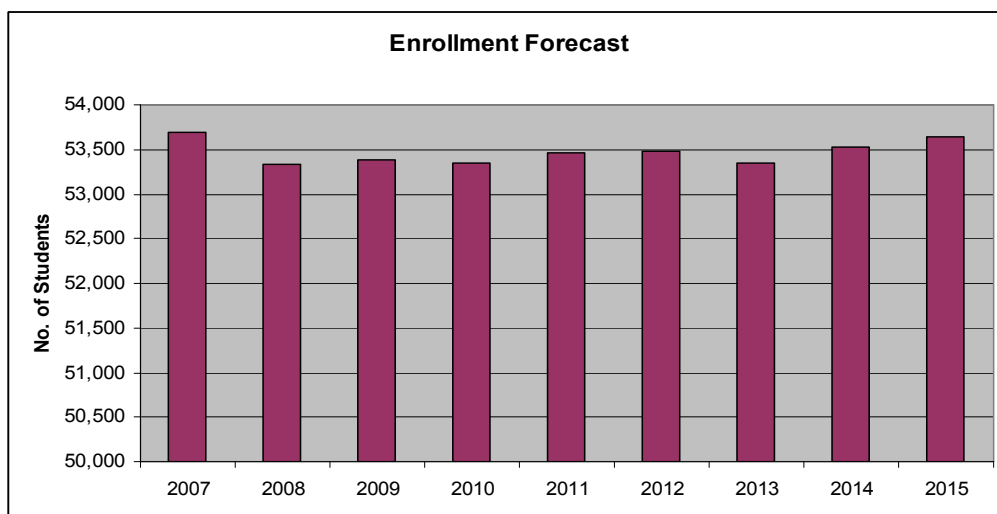
With the extra capacity in our schools, we can accommodate in the range of an extra 10,000 students in the district. While some of this extra space is being used by schools, it is not an efficient use of our physical resources, but rather a drain on financial resources. (See details in attachments A and B.)

Excess space means the VSB is spending too much of its budget on operating and maintaining extra facilities. This reduces funding available to support education. It also affects effective implementation of the provincial government's Seismic Mitigation Program. To participate, VSB, like other school boards, must be able to justify the need for space before provincial funds will be provided for seismic mitigation. (For more information, see www.bced.gov.bc.ca/capitalplanning/seismic .)

In 2006, the VSB had an enrolment decline of two per cent, more than 1,000 students. Over the past five years, our enrolment decline has been approximately 2,100 students or just over 400 students per year – a loss of less than one per cent.

The longer range enrolment forecast continues the trend of slow decline until 2009/2010, with enrolment leveling off due to population growth within the City of Vancouver, particularly downtown and at the University of British Columbia.

By 2015, we expect our total district enrolment to be approximately 600 students less than today. While not a large drop in enrolment, this loss of students equates to a large elementary school or two smaller ones.



By 2015, we expect to have opened a new secondary addition and three new elementary schools. This will add another 1,865 extra seats to our capacity, 365 spaces at secondary and 1,500 at elementary. During this time, our enrolment is expected to decline by 600 students.

| 2015 | Total Capacity | Enrolment Forecast | Empty Seats (Capacity less Enrolment) |
|------------|----------------|--------------------|--|
| Secondary | 26,665 | 23,100 | 3,500 |
| Elementary | 39,725 | 30,600 | 9,100 |
| Total | 66,380 | 53,700 | 12,600 |

Notes: These numbers are rounded. Exact capacities for these new schools have not yet been confirmed. Enrolment is a forecast. Source: VSB Planning and Facilities

Financial Sustainability

Operating Budget

We have several sources of funds that comprise our overall budget – operating, capital, reserves, trusts, etc. Most significant on a daily or annual basis is the operating budget.

The Ministry of Education funds districts on a per student basis. We forecast declines in student enrolment, which affect our total budget. Even if the Province provides increased per student funding, it doesn't always cover inflation-related or other incremental costs.

For instance, for 2007/2008, we are currently estimating an operating budget shortfall of \$8 to \$10 million. Until we significantly reduce our annual costs in the system, we will not be financially sustainable or flexible in our ongoing operation.

The district has considerable resources in our assets (including schools), and all assets will be considered during a review. Optimizing asset use is critical to building financial sustainability over the long term.

One of our significant costs is keeping all of our current facilities open. Typical costs to operate and maintain these facilities are ...

- Annex -- \$100,000 to \$150,000 annually
- Elementary school -- \$100,000 to \$500,000 annually, depending on size
- Secondary school – \$1 million or more annually, depending on size

In addition to operational savings, there is significant asset value in surplus properties. This value could be realized through short term rental or lease of the facility, through long term lease or disposal.

Funding for Capital and Seismic Projects

Since May 2006, all Ministry approved capital and seismic projects have had some form of local district contribution. Through the seismic mitigation program, there is the

potential that several (up to 42) of our schools may need to be replaced. Many of these buildings are considered significant heritage structures within the City of Vancouver and may require additional funds.

The Ministry expects districts to use all their local assets to maximize their value (referenced in the Throne Speech).

Limitations on Use of Savings

There is a distinction between funds available for operating and those for capital. Historically, the Ministry has left operating budget decisions to school districts. It is possible that some operational savings from reducing our facilities could be reallocated by the district toward other educational priorities in the operating budget.

Partnerships

Innovative educational partnerships -- for instance, with universities, colleges, technical schools, and/or community agencies -- could provide more integrated service delivery and improve learning for all students from early childhood through the adult years.

In October 2006, the Premier said that all provincially funded capital projects over \$20 million would need to be evaluated for public-private partnership. At least nine of our secondary school seismic mitigation projects and the University Hill Secondary addition will likely exceed this amount. And so, as schools are developed, replaced, or approved for seismic mitigation, the district may need to consider multi-sector collaboration.

Seismic Mitigation

Seismic mitigation is a challenge for good long-term planning because approved projects do not fall into convenient groupings. It would be easier if all of our schools were grouped in one area at a time. Instead, the order of approval is based on the seismic risk assessment done in 2004. Our first group of 18 schools spreads across the district. We expect the remainder will be addressed in the same way.

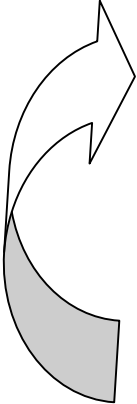
The Board decided in 2005 that we would do a combination of secondary and elementary schools each year rather than all the secondary schools first.

Other factors affecting seismic mitigation:

- Ministry of Education assesses schools individually.
- Ministry's feasibility study process highlights VSB's excess space.
- Ministry's new Due Diligence Review related to the Feasibility Study requires new processes related to space and asset value.
- Heritage preservation and related provincial, city and district partnerships

Proposed Process and Timeline

Step I: Spring 2007: Stakeholder and Public Consultation on Purpose and Scope of the Educational Facilities Review



Statement of Purpose and Desired Outcomes -- based on public input on use of district resources (**March**)

- Inform stakeholders and public about four main challenges
 - Create draft backgrounder (this document)
 - Circulate backgrounder to stakeholders and administrative officers (**March 14/15**)
 - Hold meetings with stakeholders and administrative officers
 - E-mail backgrounder, post on website, highlights in *VSB News*
- Survey stakeholders on key questions linked to challenges.
- Gather input from stakeholders, administrative officers and Committee II/III.

Consultative Process (full plan at April 3 meeting) (**April through June**)

- School-based information sessions – principals to host
 - One for staff
 - One for parents (with PAC chairs)
 - City-wide public open houses (provide dates to schools asap)
 - Regional consultative meetings (organize in hubs or by half an area)

Revision of applicable board policies (before June 30)

- Review, consolidate all policies related to the Educational Facilities Review.

Summary and analysis of public responses (June)

- Post/circulate report.
- Letter/e-mail/website acknowledge participants.
- Prepare Specific Recommendations.

Step II – Fall 2007: Stakeholder and Public Input on Specific Recommendations

Step III – Dec. 2007: Final Recommendations for Board Decision

Step IV – 2008: Implementation of Board Decisions

Recommend Board approve the Proposed Process and Timeline for spring 2007.

See also

Attachment A: Secondary School Data Sheet
Attachment B: Elementary School Data Sheet