

Neighbourhoods for a Sustainable Vancouver

Principles for Vancouver School Board - 2014-2018

Preamble:

School buildings are the heart of every neighbourhood. The City of Vancouver was originally designed to have elementary and high schools within walking distance of every resident. This is a very important part of a sustainable city design.

Over the last decade, provincial funding formulas and directions taken by the Vancouver Board of Education (also called Vancouver School Board, VSB) have eroded this well-established model. The VSB has been considering proposals for school closures, real estate sales and Public-Private Partnership (P3) funding schemes that could encumber School Board land for future generations and preclude public interest options. Even market housing development on school sites is being considered. As a fundamental concept, we believe that elected officials must protect schools properties and their associated public spaces and resist artificially forced privatization of public assets.

The School Board must favour long term public interest over tapping present capital assets to fund operational or immediate improvement costs. Many of the schools in Vancouver are iconic heritage structures that face threat of demolition, when retention and upgrade for modern needs and seismic safety are in order.

The following principles pertain mainly to respect for the public good and concern over the consequences of inadequate provincial public funding for the school system. School Board candidates for the 2014 election need to emphasize this primary issue, the electorate needs to see its centrality, and we hope our principles will generate effective public discourse.

Basic Principles:

The Vancouver School Board should:

- 1) Support, maintain and improve the public school system as a long term investment in the future of society rather than a short sighted corporate model.
- 2) Seek provincial-level reform of funding formulas for both operations and capital improvements, since education falls under provincial jurisdiction. Basic building operations funding should be stable and not based on enrolment numbers. Operations cost approximately the same regardless of the size of student enrolment. Programming could continue to be based on enrolment numbers, but funding needs to be increased for public schools.
- 3) Advocate for additional schools to service increase populations of new development. (e.g. Funding has still not been provided for an elementary school in northeast False Creek on land already set aside by the developer as required by zoning.)
- 4) Recognize that long-term growth expectation demands retention of these irreplaceable assets.
- 5) Protect School Board land as public assets from Public Private Partnership (P3) schemes, real estate speculation and sales, or long term private leases.

- 6) Retain public schools and land permanently on their current locations, as they provide the basis for sustainable neighbourhoods by being intentionally designed many decades ago to have schools within walking distance from home in every Vancouver neighbourhood.
- 7) Preserve, restore, improve and seismically upgrade heritage and existing school buildings rather than demolition and new construction. The existing schools are generally larger and have more adaptable spaces and features. If existing space is not needed for current school use, temporarily repurpose for other community amenity uses until population increases require expansion of school use.
- 8) Implement early childhood learning and family community support services on school sites.
- 9) Seek increased federal government funding for Aboriginal students and families.
- 10) Expand daycare space on existing school properties as feasible (not on park land).
- 11) Improve and expand ESL instruction.
- 12) Ensure open access to School Board information.
- 13) Lobby the Province to withdraw the application of carbon taxes to public school funding and financially assist the upgrading of buildings for energy efficiency.