

# Vancouver School District Preferred School Size Working Group Meeting #4

**November 16, 2020**

## **Meeting Summary**

### **Facilitators**

Dorli Duffy  
Susan Rhodes

### **In attendance:**

Carmen Batista, VSB Associate Superintendent – Employee Services  
Nancy Bourque – VEPVPA  
John Dawson, VSB Director of Educational Planning and Student Information  
Megan Davies, VEPVPA  
Aaron Davis, VSB Director of Instruction – School Services  
Nick Despotakis, VASSA  
Rosie Finch, VSB Director of HR  
Angie Haverman, VASSA  
Amanda Hillis, DPAC  
Dameun Kim, VSB Educational Planning  
Anne Lee, VSB Educational Planning and Student Information  
Anne Miller, VESTA  
Hayden O'Connor, VSB Facilities Planner  
Skye Richards, DPAC  
Michael Rossi, VSB District Principal – Educational Planning  
Bernie Soong, VASSA  
Chris Stanger, VSB Director of Instruction  
Terry Stanway, VSTA  
Chris Wong, VSB District Principal – Education Planning

### **Regrets:**

Shehzad Somji, VSB Assistant Secretary-Treasurer

## **1.0 Objectives**

The Vancouver School Board Preferred School Size Working Group held their fourth meeting virtually via Zoom on November 16, 2020. The meeting objectives were to:

- Discuss preliminary guidelines for preferred school size
  - Review PSSWG process information and preliminary findings to be shared with Focus Groups
- Review and discuss information regarding Seismic Mitigation Program in relation to school size

- Discuss how preferred school size guidelines could influence the Seismic Mitigation Program
- Confirm Focus Group dates and process
- Clarify next steps including additional information needs, homework and subsequent meetings

This document provides a brief summary of discussions held during the meeting. A copy of the November 16, 2020 PowerPoint presentation is available on the dedicated PSSWG link at [Preferred School Size Working Group](#).

## 2.0 PSSWG Process Overview and Preliminary Findings

Following introductory remarks, John Dawson shared a slide presentation offering an overview of the PSSWG process and preliminary findings to be shared during focus groups scheduled between November 18 and 25, 2020. The purpose of the focus groups is to gather feedback from stakeholder groups regarding PSSWG findings and preliminary draft guidelines on preferred school sizes in the VSB:

### **Preliminary Guidelines for Preferred School Size (all factors considered)\***

**Elementary School Size Guidelines** = min 300 – max 550 enrolled students

**Secondary School Size Guidelines** = min 1100 – max 1750 enrolled students

*\*Note: this includes consideration of the guideline implications developed on March 9 (school organization, staffing, student services/programs) and Oct 8 (financial considerations)*

During the Focus Group presentation, it was acknowledged that these guidelines would not be used in isolation and that other considerations important to stakeholders would also be part of any decision-making process. Further, it was acknowledged that schools of different sizes will likely continue to exist within the District.

## 3.0 Elementary and Secondary Sub-Group Discussions

The Working Group engaged in Elementary and Secondary Sub-Group discussions to discuss the preliminary guidelines for preferred school sizes. Groups addressed the following questions:

- Do you understand how these numbers were arrived at?
- Is anything missing?

### 3.1 Elementary Sub-Group Findings

The Elementary Discussion Group supported the preliminary guidelines for preferred school sizes in VSB elementary schools: minimum 300 to maximum 550 enrolled students. Comments included:

- I'm not surprised. It's what I expected
- Yes, it aligns with my experience

- These numbers align with our discussions and recommendations
- Even if I don't like them, I know where these numbers came from.

Additional considerations raised during this discussion included:

- Impacts on student success of different school sizes
- Balancing economic considerations with a sense of community and connectedness within schools
- Dual track schools may end up being larger

## 3.2 Secondary Sub-Group Findings

The Secondary Discussion Group supported the recommended guideline for the maximum number of enrolled students, but questioned the minimum number recommended at 1100. Comments included:

- Should not use financial considerations to drive the minimum as school organization and school programming are negatively impacted below 1200 students
- 240 students/cohort allows for 8 core courses per grade (e.g., Grade 12 English courses can be offered). With this range in offerings, students have the ability to take the core courses in a variety of times, and therefore are able to enroll in other elective “singletons” (e.g. English Literature), and these courses are filled and can be provided. When the numbers go below 240, there are too few core courses offerings, and students are limited by their timetable in their ability to fit the singletons, and therefore they are often undersubscribed and have to be cancelled. These elective courses enrich student education, and provide the opportunity to explore interests beyond core coursework.
- Schools smaller than 1200 will only have 2 Administrators. It is beneficial for school operations to have a full Administrator compliment.
- Teachers in smaller schools will have more “preps”, which negatively impacts their time and professional experience.
- The change from 1100 to a 1200 minimum student enrollment was unanimously supported

## 4.0 Report Back and Large Group Discussion

### Elementary Report Back

The Elementary Discussion Group supported the preliminary guidelines for preferred school sizes in VSB elementary schools: minimum 300 to maximum 550 enrolled students.

### Secondary Report Back

The Secondary Discussion Groups altered the minimum to 1200 and retained the maximum at 1750 enrolled students (explanation provided as per section 3.2).

## 5.0 Seismic Mitigation Program

VSB staff provided a draft presentation on the Seismic Mitigation Program. The SMP is a provincially funded capital program with a mandate to ensure that there are sufficient seismically safe schools to accommodate enrolment. The VSB presentation illustrated how preferred school size guidelines could influence the SMP process.

A question and answer session followed the presentation:

**Question 1.**

If there are 2 single track choice programs in red zones. Has opening them up to catchments and moving the programs to blue areas been considered? Choice programs were previously placed in under-enrolled areas and other dual track programs have been moved.

**Answer 1.**

Moving District programs is one long range facilities planning option to consider.

There are three single track EFI programs: Jules Quesnel, Tennyson, and L'Ecole. Each of these schools is fairly fully as there is high demand for EFI. Jules Quesnel is in an area with surplus catchment capacity, Tennyson is in an zone of fairly balanced catchment enrolment, and L'Ecole is in a zone with catchment enrolment pressure. Even though they are all 'District' Programs, elementary District programs tend to fill with students from their local area. Moving a single track program is a significant planning decision as it would by necessity mean phasing out a regular program at its new location as well as phasing out a large existing program. Moving a single track District program to an area with low enrolment would tend to have the effect of re-distributing students in that area rather than attracting students from full zones further distant.

Carleton elementary has been proposed by some as a potential location for a single track EFI program. This school was damaged by fire in 2016 and has not accommodated any students since that time. The fire damage to the school has not been repaired. Although the school was previously prioritized for funding through the SMP, ministry staff has informed the District that the school will not be considered for upgrade/replacement funding through the SMP as the business case is not sufficiently strong to warrant the necessary expenditures. Any funding directed to repairs or a seismic upgrade of the main building at Carleton would need to be provided by the Board.

**Question 2.**

In secondary, we spoke about a school size minimum. Just curious what the minimum is for elementary? And how does a new elementary school cost?

**Answer 2.**

Preliminary guidelines for preferred school sizes in elementary schools: minimum 300 – maximum 550 enrolled students. The minimum cost for a new build is \$30 million plus, depending on size.

**Questions 3.**

Do you think that students will perhaps see that as an incentive to traveling further? I know some students travel a long way for choice programs.

**Answer 3.**

Boundaries were removed for Choice Programs a few years ago and there has been less movement to access those programs than we might have expected. Students still generally attend local catchment

schools. Elementary school enrolment is localized whether it is a regular program or a District program. Logistics of travel and availability of daycare are two of the primary factors that parents consider when choosing an elementary school.

**Question 4.**

Have you asked about the option of amalgamating 2 schools into 1 new school?

**Answer 4.**

The Board will need an approved LRFP before any additional funding for capital projects will be advanced by the Ministry of Education. The option of amalgamating two secondary schools is a long range planning option to consider. In Richmond there is an example of 2 high schools being amalgamated into one new school. Planning for the consolidation of two secondary schools could require a temporary accommodation strategy as part of an overall plan.

**Question 5.**

Why are some of the schools that are rebuilds or new schools built to 100% or greater and they are in areas of grow? Do we not want to think about this in size? It would help to have some conversation hypothetically with the Ministry for parent understanding.

**Answer 5.**

The mandate of the Seismic Mitigation Program is to upgrade or replace schools at the same capacity (or a smaller capacity) as the existing school. Funding for school expansion and new schools (EXP) is allocated separately from SMP funding. In its Capital Plan Submission, the District prioritizes requests for funding from both capital programs (EXP and SMP). It is challenging to make a strong business case for EXP funding, especially when there are nearby schools with surplus capacity. The Ministry of Education looks at provincial (vs. district) level needs and VSB has excess capacity, whereas districts like Surrey need additional capacity. For many years, the VSB has been requesting funding to increase its enrolling capacity and overall enrolling capacity has increased with the completion of Crosstown and Norma Rose Point in recent years. To date the VSB has not significantly reduced capacity in areas of enrolment decline which is where most of the remaining seismically unsafe schools are located.

We hope that in the future the Ministry will engage with the VSB in zonal planning approaches that could involve simultaneously providing funding from both capital programs. Similar zonal approaches could also be applied in areas of enrolment decline.

## **Focus Group Sessions – update**

Dates and plans for additional focus group sessions were reviewed. While seven focus groups were originally planned, only five sessions will be held as three stakeholder groups were unable to identify more than 2-3 potential participants.

- DPAC – November 19 – 7:00 – 8:30
- IUOE and CUPE – November 20 – 4:00 – 5:30
- VSTA – November 23 – 3:15 – 4:45
- VEPVPA – November 24 – 4:00 – 5:30
- VASSA – November 25 – 3:45 – 5:15

VESTA is requested to direct members to the Working Group link: [Preferred School Size Working Group](#) to review preliminary guidelines for schools sizes. In addition, VESTA Working Group members are requested to send a summary of any resulting feedback to Anne Lee by November 30, 2020.

Focus Group and additional stakeholder feedback will be brought to the December 10 PSSWG meeting for discussion and consideration.

## 6.0 Summary of Next Steps and Homework

- Meeting summary and PowerPoint presentation from November 16, 2020 Meeting #4 to be posted on the Working Group link: [Preferred School Size Working Group](#).
- **Working Group** to review and circulate meeting notes within their organizations
- **Focus Group** sessions to be held November 18 – 25, 2020
- **Next Meeting** – December 10, 2020, 3:45 – 6:15 PM via Zoom
- **Working Group** requested to complete post-meeting evaluations.
  
- Working Group members are reminded that you have been asked to serve as representatives of your schools, group or organization. Please strive to be inclusive of the array of perspectives within your constituency when circulating information and participating in working group discussions.

Please contact Dorli Duffy at [dorli@dorliduffy.ca](mailto:dorli@dorliduffy.ca) if you have any questions or requests regarding this meeting summary.