



September 29, 2016

Vancouver Board of Education Trustees
Vancouver School Board
1580 W. Broadway
Vancouver, BC V6J 5K8

Dear Trustees,

The Parent Advocacy Network (PAN) would like to acknowledge the extensive work Trustees and staff have done thus far in the Proposed School Closure process; parents appreciate how overwhelming this situation is. However, after the September 27 release of details related to the Proposed School Closure Consultation process, several questions and concerns have come to light for which parents require clarification. Given the very tight timeline, we hope these concerns will be addressed as soon as possible so parents and community members will have a clearer understanding of the process, and so that the process has the intended outcome of allowing people to feel as though they have been adequately consulted.

1) PAN would like to understand why consultation meetings will not be held at the actual schools being considered for closure. Parents and community members understood that school-specific consultation meetings would take place at the affected schools – venues where affected families are most likely to feel comfortable at and live near. Proximity for some families will be crucial to their ability to attend. Most elementary school gymnasiums hold several hundred people, so it is clear that size of venue is not an issue. We respectfully request that trustees and staff give serious consideration to moving these consultations to the affected schools.

2) PAN also questions the choice of time for school-specific meetings. An early evening time is very difficult for parents, especially considering that most parents work outside the home. Parents cannot be expected to get home from work, pick up children from school or childcare, deal with after-school activities, and prepare dinner all before a 5PM meeting. This is especially true if they must travel outside their neighbourhood to an unfamiliar school in order to attend the meeting. We respectfully request that trustees and staff give thought to moving the start time to 6PM or 7PM for school-specific meetings.

3) Given statements made on September 26, PAN believes it is the VSB's intention to enable as many parents as possible to attend the consultations. With that in mind, for many families childcare will be an issue. Please confirm and make clear in all communications, if on-site childcare will be provided.

4) Of particular concern is the need for attendees to register beforehand to speak about their school. Many people will find this very intimidating and overly formal, and we strongly encourage staff and trustees to consider eliminating this requirement. It would seem very appropriate for attendees to have the opportunity to register on-site upon arrival, and there should be an open-mic opportunity for attendees to speak about issues or concerns that may come up for them over the course of the meeting.



5) We have heard from many parents who are confused and find it difficult to access clear information about the specifics of the consultation process; they believe they should have a specific person they can contact with questions. Who is in charge of the VSB Engagement communications, and will they be able to respond to questions and concerns in a timely manner? To whom should parents and community members direct questions and concerns prior to the meetings such as those addressed here?

6) As both schools closing and those receiving students will be affected greatly by any closure, we would ask the VSB to ensure that receiving schools have also been sent invitations to all consultation meetings. Their voices also need to be heard and, with respect, every effort should be made to ensure they too have all the information needed to actively participate in this consultation process. Many parents are unaware of the potential impacts of amalgamation on their school and should be informed if there is a possibility of losing utilized educational spaces or community programs.

7) We appreciate that translations of the consultation letters have been made available. Will translators be at the consultations to facilitate the participation of parents who do not speak fluent English?

8) We realize that this consultation process is going to be facilitated by a third party. A third-party summary cannot possibly substitute for hearing people's very important concerns firsthand. We hope that all trustees will be present at all meetings so you can hear what people have to say. In addition, trustees should have the opportunity to pose any questions they may have directly to speakers. A strong show of interest by trustees will show everyone that VSB is just as concerned as the rest of us about the possibility of school closures.

We understand that this is a very busy, difficult, and stressful time for staff and trustees. It is also a very difficult time for families and community members. We hope we can all work together to get this information clarified and disseminated to everyone in a very timely fashion. We know that you understand the gravity of these decisions and that you are committed to providing a consultation process that is as fair, open, and accessible as possible.

Thank you for your prompt attention to these concerns.

Warm regards,

The PAN Steering Committee