

**Presentation to the
Vancouver Board of Education
by the Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education
Regarding the Proposed Response to the Special Advisor' Report**

November 10, 2015

I am speaking tonight on behalf of the Parent Advocacy Network for Public Education. We are a grassroots advocacy organization with connections in 36 schools across the district.ⁱ We would like to address the trustees today with concerns arising from the proposed response to the Special Advisor's Recommendations...and specifically recommendations 6.17-6.28.

Most serious is the 95% capacity rationalization target recommended in the EY report (recommendation 6.18). The VBE response uses the language of 'consideration', but the MOU signed with the ministry in August 2014 suggests that this 95% target has ALREADY been agreed upon as does the fact that staff are currently working on a LRSFP (Long Range Strategic Facilities Plan) for achieving this goal through the SMP (Seismic Mitigation Plan).ⁱⁱ

If complied with, a target of 95% WOULD require massive restructuring and upheaval across the district; the closure of instructional spaces not currently used for enrolling purposes, widespread school closures and the consequent amalgamation and redistribution of student populations into a smaller number of new 'right-sized' facilities. (Rec. 6.27)

The disruption and trauma of school closures on families and neighbourhood communities is very real and although acknowledged in the VBE response - does not highlight the disproportional impact of this on schools on the East side of Vancouver, particularly in areas of lower socioeconomic status - areas in which neighbourhood schools are crucial in providing stability to communities and

supports to families that extend far beyond simple delivery of 'educational services'.ⁱⁱⁱ

To be clear

Capacity Rationalization is a euphemism for the containment of the largest number of children into the smallest possible cubicles of space *for the least possible expenditure*. It is based on corporate models of efficiency and NOT on educationally informed principles about the environmental and spatial conditions necessary to meet the basic learning needs of children.

So - What does 95% capacity rationalization look like for children?

SCHOOLS IN WHICH EVERY ROOM IS A CLASSROOM MAXIMIZED WITH CHILDREN.^{iv}

This allows very little flexibility for responding to population fluctuations and the mobility patterns of 'choice schooling' resulting in highly volatile and stressful enrollment processes - lotteries and the inevitable forced mobility of children outside of their neighbourhood schools.^v

It also makes NO allowances for alternative programming or the smaller class sizes that are necessary for learning disabilities or children at risk.^{vi}

The 'rightsizing' of one or more schools through replacement facilities is presented in the VBE response as the best option for meeting a 95% capacity utilization target (Rec. 6.23 and 6.28).^{vii} Although new schools may have the perceived benefits of deferred maintenance (cost savings), and the opportunity to design space for 21st century learning, rightsizing must conform to the ministry's area standard restrictions.^{viii} This means that new schools and classrooms are only 65% of their original size.^{ix} NO matter how innovative the design, if learning spaces are too small and overcrowded, how will the VSB support 21 century learning? *For example- at*

Norma Rose Point, the poster-child for 21 century learning design, 120 intermediate children are now occupying pod spaces whose functional design was intended for only 90 children.

It is unconscionable for the ministry to extoll higher class sizes or for the VBE to speculate on the benefits of larger schools (meaning student populations not the size of the building) (Rec. 6.17). Research *overwhelmingly* shows that larger schools and overcrowding contribute to anxiety, feelings of alienation, isolation and increased incidences of negative behaviours such as bullying. The VBE has already acknowledged in their 2014 District Plan for Student Learning, that the social emotional well being of students is vital to their academic success. And the research shows that conditions for this are found in smaller schools with ample space that foster the building of strong relationships and a sense of belonging.^x

One further and unacknowledged casualty of capacity rationalization is the ARTS. In existing schools, this means closing of purpose built music and art rooms or converting them into enrolling space. In new elementary school builds, NO space at all is allocated for music/drama or visual arts.^{xi} Despite the specific spatial requirements of these subjects, it is assumed that they can be adequately conducted in new right sized classrooms. However, the new 'right-sized classrooms' are only 75 square metres (including cloakroom, teacher area and storage) for a nominal student class size of 25 - which in reality, with capacity targets of 95%, this will be closer to 30. These conditions are not compatible with any kind of quality instruction in the arts or with the innovative, exploratory, and creative vision of the new curriculum.^{xii}

A 95% capacity utilization will be a de facto elimination of the arts for the children of this district.

To summarize - A 95 % capacity utilization target is not only untenable and educationally unsupportable, it is detrimental to the social and emotional wellbeing of children.

We all recognize that student enrollment has changed and there are issues with surplus space.

But WHY IS THE BOARD COMMITTING TO A CAPACITY TARGET OF 95%. Has the board examined the implications of such a target?^{xiii} Have they questioned the ministry on the criteria upon which such a target is based?^{xiv} Surely there is a more reasonable capacity target that would be fiscally prudent while still providing the ability for alternate programming, flexibility for population fluctuations, the preservation and creation of arts based spaces and the ability to meet the needs of a diverse range of learners.

In closing

I urge the board to consider carefully the implications of 95% capacity for children and make the "creation and preservation of optimal learning environments the driving factor in decision-making." (as exhorted in Rec. 6.17) Once made, the decisions you make will be irreversible because they will be literally 'set in stone' and will determine the kind of learning environments that the children of this city will experience for decades to come.

ⁱ Bayview Elementary, Charles Dickens Annex, Charles Dickens Elementary, Collingwood Elementary David Livingstone Elementary, Douglas Annex and Elementary, Edith Cavell Elementary, Eric Hamber Secondary, Lord Selkirk Annex and Elementary, General Brock Elementary, Gladstone Secondary, Hastings Elementary, Henry Hudson Elementary,

Killarney Secondary, Kitsilano Elementary, Laura Secord Elementary, Lord Nelson Elementary, Lord Roberts Elementary, Lord Strathcona Elementary, Lord Tennyson, Maple Grove Elementary, McBride Annex and Elementary, Nootka Elementary, Point Grey Secondary, Prince of Wales Secondary, Queen Alexandra Elementary, Simon Fraser Elementary, Shaughnessy Elementary, Sir Charles Tupper Secondary, Sir James Douglas Elementary, Southlands Elementary, Trafalgar Elementary, Tyee Elementary

ii "As part of the MOU for the VPO, in addition to the current requirement to submit five-year capital plans, VBE is required to prepare and submit to the Ministry a LRSFP to ultimately achieve 95% capacity utilization in a manner that is as fiscally sound as possible. The MOU provides a deadline for completion of the LRSFP of June 30, 2015. VBE advised it is on track to meet this deadline." EY, Report on the Special Advisor's Review of the Vancouver Board of Education, June 8, 2015 (123).

http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/resource-management/reports/moe_vsb_review_report_june_2015_exec_summary.pdf

iii The majority of schools identified as under capacity are on the east side of Vancouver and many of these are named in a report by the VSB in 2013 investigating better ways to support the growing number of high-risk children in inner city schools. Val Odegard, Re-visioning Inner City and CommunityLINK Resources: Summary Report, VSB, January 2014 <http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/publications/SummaryReportJanuary2014FINAL.pdf>

The language of 'delivery of educational services' undermines the very premise of education, which is to educate the whole child and develop their potential to become productive and fulfilled members of society. Education is achieved through an investment in relationships between teachers, students and peers that attend to the social and emotional health of children in addition to their acquisition of knowledge. The Vancouver Sun adopt-a-school program is a good illustration of the extent to which many schools in Vancouver are instrumental in meeting the needs of children and their families far beyond 'instruction'. <http://www.vansunkidsfund.ca/category/schools-in-need/>

iv The ministry's definition of capacity is to determine the maximum number of children that can be legally fit into a space. This is 22 for Kindergarten, 24 for grades 1-3 and 30 for each subsequent grade. "[Capacity] is calculated by taking the total number of classrooms available for occupancy in the District and multiplying it by the maximum number of students permitted in each classroom (calculated with reference to limits on the number of students per class and physical space requirements. These limits are both set by legislation in BC)." EY, 129.

^v A third of the student population in Vancouver is 'mobile' or attending schools other than their catchment school. Districts like Surrey that are meeting or exceeding ministry capacity rationalization targets are dealing with problems of overcrowding, student displacement and rotating timetables to manage enrollment because of the inherent lack of flexibility in a 95% capacity utilization target. For distribution of mobile student populations in Vancouver see Erick Villagomez, "Schooling Vancouver", Spacing Vancouver, June 29, 2015. <http://spacing.ca/vancouver/2015/06/29/schooling-vancouver/>

^{vi} The summary findings of the VSB inner city report recommended that schools take a place based approach to providing services to at risk children. "There is a growing appreciation by governments at all levels – both domestically and internationally –of the importance of locating the capacity to plan and integrate services as close as possible to the individuals and communities that the services are intended to benefit." This means that these schools would have spatial requirements that fall outside the capacity definitions of the ministry. Odegard, 2014.

John R. Slate and Craig H. Jones show that one criteria or policy applied to all schools for a perceived economy of scale was ill conceived and that size impacts different schools in different ways and one optimal school size does not exist. The most important factor is the socio economic status of the community and the impacts of larger students populations (not even smaller spaces!) are very negative for students in areas of lower socio economic ability. Effects of School Size: A Review of the Literature with recommendations. <http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol132005/slate.pdf> Vancouver Board of Education 1014/15

^{vii} "Classrooms and schools will be downsized or rightsized to match projected enrolment and ultimately maximize utilization" Recommendation 6.28, VBE Assessment, Proposed Response.

^{viii} BC Ministry of Education, Area Standards.
<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/topic.page?id=DEDC8587EAC34EEB96A41583B7C0BB2D>

^{ix} Noel Herron, "Is Your School about to be demolished? Lessons to be Learned from Charles Dickens Elementary in Vancouver", BCTF, April 2009
<https://bctf.ca/publications/NewsmagArticle.aspx?id=18250>

^x The Vancouver School Board in their District Plan for Student Learning, 2014, prioritizes the social and emotional health of children as foundational to learning conditions for children "The Vancouver School District considers a focus on social responsibility and social and emotional learning (SEL) to be foundational to each student's success, and expects that all schools intentionally attend to these areas, ensuring that learning takes place within a context of positive relationships and within a safe, caring, and inclusive environment." District Plan for Student Learning, VSB, 2014.

Research shows that small spaces with high student class sizes have detrimental impacts on the social and emotional health and learning outcomes for children.

C. Kenneth Tanner from University of Georgia find that "the consequence of high-density conditions that involve either too many children or too little space are: excess levels of stimulation; stress and arousal; a drain on resource available; considerable interference; reductions in desired privacy levels; and loss of control". According to Tanner's formula for minimum class size standards, 20 students and 1 teacher require 95.70 square meters. Compare this to the 75 square meters for 30 students and 1 teacher. Tanner, "Minimum Class Size and Number of Students per Class", 2009.
<http://sdpl.coe.uga.edu/research/territoriality.html>.

Researchers at the University of Georgia found a direct relationship between schools operating at or near maximum capacity and behavioral disruptions.
<http://sdpl.coe.uga.edu/researchabstracts/behavior.html>

The Oregon Department of Education Office of Curriculum Instruction and Field Services, This document summarizes the findings of 15 years of research which shows that reducing school size (student population) create a greater sense of belonging and decrease apathy and feelings of alienation and anonymity in students, teachers, parents and the larger community creating communities rather than bureaucracies. They recommend that Secondary schools have a student population no higher than 600 and Elementary schools should not exceed 400. "Keeping Kids Connected: How schools and teachers can help all students feel good about school....and why that matters," May 2000.
<http://www.ode.state.or.us/teachlearn/specialty/alt/keepkids.pdf>

There are numerous studies that show that smaller schools help mitigate the impact of poverty on student outcomes, whilst larger schools exacerbate the challenges of socio economic disadvantages. See "Are Smaller Schools Better Schools?" Education World: Connecting educators to what works, 2000; Wasley, P.A., Fine, M., Gladden, M., Holland, N.E., King, S.P., Mosak, E., and Powell, L.C., "Small Schools: Great strides a study of new small schools in Chicago", (New York, NY: The Bank Street College of Education, 2000) and Howley, Craig B.; Bickel, Robert, "When It Comes to Schooling...Small Works: School Size, Poverty, and Student Achievement", (Rural School and Community Trust, Randolph, VT, 2000).

^{xi} For comparison, the Ontario Area Standards provide space allocation in elementary schools for art classrooms and science classrooms as well as a stage area adjacent to gymnasium space over and above the regular enrolling instructional space for new elementary school builds. Building our Schools Building our Future, June 2010.
http://faab.edu.gov.on.ca/Capital%20Programs%20Branch/Report%20of%20Expert%20Panel%20-%20Building%20Our%20Schools_Building%20Our%20Future%20-%20ENG.pdf

^{xii} Music classrooms require need sufficient unimpeded space to play instruments, sound-proofing and proper storage for instruments. For music classrooms do not provide adequate space for playing instruments, instrument storage or sound-proofing. Many music rental services will not supply instruments to schools unless they have adequate storage. At Dickens, one school fortunate enough to have a music specialist teacher last year music was conducted in the circulation hallway space beside the service elevator, as the music room was converted into an enrolling classroom. Spaces for art instruction should be flexible, open and freely accessible, larger than the 75 square metres currently allocated for new elementary classrooms, with access to natural light, large tables and industrial sinks. Lack of

circulation space between small desk tables, lack of appropriately sized sinks or at all, makes any instruction in clay, wire, 3D sculpture, printmaking or painting virtually impossible. In fact, these classrooms allow little more than drawing on 8.5 x 11 paper. ^{xii}

^{xiii} This article is a cost benefit analysis of the capacity rationalization scheme undertaken in Chicago in 2013. The report demonstrated almost no net financial benefit for the government - now dealing with over-crowding problems - but huge costs in terms of reduced access to resource services and supports, disruption and destabilization of families, social conflict between amalgamated school communities, loss of important social and arts based programmes and negative impacts on the mental and emotional health of children impacted. Carol Caref, Sarah Hains, Pavlyn Jankov, 12 Months Later: The Impact of School Closings in Chicago (Chicago Teachers Union, 2014) <http://www.ctunet.com/question-center/TwelveMonthsLaterReport.pdf>

^{xiv} Why are preschools, strong start programs, international students, adult education students, resource centres and other educational uses of spaces not included in this formula?