

January 4, 2011

Dear Parents, Students and VSB staff:

As a new calendar year begins, on behalf of the Vancouver Board of Education, I want to wish you all a happy and healthy New Year.

For the Vancouver school district, 2010 was filled with many successes, both large and small. Those successes take place every day in schools as lives are transformed through teaching and learning. Success takes many forms: being able to read that first simple book; figuring out a math problem; mastering an athletic skill; making a friend; playing a song; writing a poem; starting a club; winning a championship, scholarship or award; getting into one's post-secondary program of choice; or landing that first job.

It was also a challenging year for the VSB as we grappled with a large funding shortfall last spring and the resulting spending reductions that are being felt throughout our district during this school year. The Board spent much of the fall on the difficult school closure consultation process as it considered whether or not to close five schools. We are very grateful to the hundreds of people who participated in the process and provided feedback – parents, grandparents, students, alumni, neighbours, community members, teachers, support staff, MLAs and MPs. The process concluded in December with the Board supporting the recommendations of the senior management to not proceed with closures, and to instead work with those communities to create neighbourhood centres based in the schools and consider other options to make the schools more viable and more supportive of their communities. The full report and details of the approved recommendations can be viewed at: [www.vsb.bc.ca/school-closures](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/school-closures).

We also expanded all-day Kindergarten programming to accommodate approximately 60 per cent of our five year olds last fall, and will be moving ahead with full-day Kindergarten for all students in September 2011. In some cases, this will require additional classroom space to be added with either modular or more permanent additions to schools.

We are also beginning a community consultation process this month to discuss whether the district should establish an Aboriginal-focused mini school or other model that will enable students, who may wish to do so, to learn through an Aboriginal lens.

Registration is now underway for our new Early Mandarin Bilingual Program that will be offered at Norquay Elementary School in September 2011 – [www.vsb.bc.ca/programs/early-mandarin-bilingual](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/programs/early-mandarin-bilingual). We are very pleased to be able to offer this new opportunity that will complement the many other learning options available for students in our schools.

We continue to see progress on our seismic upgrade program. Two major projects are currently underway – Jules Quesnel Elementary and Laura Secord Elementary – and should be completed in time for students to move back into their upgraded schools by September. We have also approved concept plans or project by-laws for several other major projects, including Kitsilano Secondary, Douglas Elementary, Sexsmith Elementary, Kitchener Elementary, Queen Mary Elementary, General Gordon Elementary and Strathcona Elementary. We appreciate the support of the Ministry of Education and the City of Vancouver in supporting the district in moving these projects forward.

There is a lot of buzz these days about “21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning” and calls for reform of how we deliver education and prepare students for this rapidly changing world. In Vancouver, we are pleased to report that 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning is well underway in our schools. The district will continue to work collaboratively with our educators and students to look for ways we can further support and enable innovative and creative teaching and learning strategies that increase student engagement and success for all.

As we move toward spring, the district will be developing its budget and spending priorities for the coming 2011/12 school year. Early projections indicate that we will have a funding shortfall of approximately \$11.5 million. That figure may change, but we will begin working on a review of programs and spending and once again search for efficiencies and savings in order to balance the budget. We will, of course, continue to advocate strongly for the provincial funding necessary to fully meet the needs of each child in our school district. Year-over-year funding shortfalls have made that increasingly challenging for our world-class school system. It is critical that we all ensure that investing in public education remains a high priority for our province. Information about our budget process and how you can participate is posted on the VSB website at: [www.vsb.bc.ca/budget-2011-2012](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/budget-2011-2012). We expect to approve a final 2011/12 operating budget in early May.

As your elected Board of School Trustees, we thank you for your continued support and contributions to our public school system. We have something we can all be very proud of – one of the most effective and successful school systems in the world. We need to keep up that support and keep working to ensure that every child has access to the programs and opportunities they need to meet his or her full potential.

We welcome your feedback and comments at any time (trustee information is available at [www.vsb.bc.ca/about-vsb/trustees](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/about-vsb/trustees) – click on the trustee’s name for further contact information).

I also want to thank our teachers, school support staff, support workers, building engineers, school administrators, district staff and my colleagues on the board for their ongoing commitment to making the VSB a truly great place to learn.

Lastly, I want to wish everyone a wonderful 2011 – full of learning, good health and great happiness.

Sincerely,

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