

# News Release

December 10, 2010

## **Surrey Board of Education considers more flexible class scheduling and increased access to online courses to manage lack of new schools**

At its December 9 public board meeting, the Surrey Board of Education has supported a report from superintendent Mike McKay (attached) that recommends exploring secondary school class scheduling and course delivery options as a way to use limited school spaces as efficiently as possible and preserve neighbourhood and “choice” program enrolment.

The recommendation reflects community feedback that stressed the need to both sustain neighbourhood access to schools, as well as maintain the stability of programs of choice. The report says as one example, where school capacity issues are most extreme, extended school day timetables could be considered beginning in September 2011.

“With district enrolment increases of more than a thousand students each year—equivalent to one secondary, or three medium elementary schools full of students—and no new schools on the horizon for at least another three to five more years, our board must consider ways to manage the classroom spaces as best we can while ensuring a quality education for our students,” says Surrey Board of Education chair Laurae McNally.

The board also supports the superintendent’s recommendation that existing school programs not be expanded, nor any new ones be established unless there is confidence the program can be maintained at one location for the foreseeable future.

“We can’t create instant school spaces, so we must use the space and class time we do have as efficiently as possible,” says Surrey School District superintendent Mike McKay.

McKay’s report was released in conjunction with a consultant report summarizing five district public presentations and forums, and an online survey conducted this fall. The consultations were held to inform the board as to the priorities of parents and other constituents as the board enters its budget planning processes early in the new year.

.../2

In his report (attached), consultant Dr. Bruce Beirsto, retired Richmond School District superintendent, says there was a strong consensus among parents and other participants that:

- the district mandate and goals are appropriate;
- whatever challenges the board faces, it is important to maintain a strong focus on programs and services that help students succeed in their learning;
- it is important to protect support services for vulnerable students;
- decisions should take into account the differing needs of various parts of the community;
- the board should take a long-term view, even as it deals with urgent issues;
- ongoing communication with parents is essential and;
- parents encourage the board to advocate strongly for the unique and urgent needs of the district, and (parents) are willing to participate in support of such advocacy.

In his report summary, Dr. Beirsto says forum participants expressed appreciation for the information provided about financial and facility challenges facing the district, and some were surprised, even shocked by the details.

For more information, please contact:

Doug Strachan  
Communications manager  
604-599-7468 (office)



**M E M O R A N D U M**

---

**To:** Board of Education

**From:** Mike McKay, Superintendent of Schools/Chief Executive Officer

**Date:** December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010

**Re:** **Community Consultation**

---

Attached to this memorandum is the Report prepared by Dr. Bruce Bearsto, consultant and facilitator for the Public Forums 2010 hosted by the Board of Education in September and October. Throughout the five forum sessions, Dr. Bearsto engaged the community in a process that shared key information about the district's operation and the related challenges and also invited commentary from community members about the priorities and principles the Board might consider in making decisions for next year and beyond.

Participation in the Forum sessions was broad. There were almost 400 attendees as well as other contributors who commented on line to the information and the questions posed. The local community has provided feedback and has helped to highlight several key messages for the Board's consideration. It is important to note that the consultation sessions held in October were not stand alone events; rather they were a continuation of the Board's commitment to engage with its communities in formal and informal settings over a range of topics. As circumstances change, discussions evolve and competing priorities and dilemmas become more apparent, the Board is able to consolidate the information provided by staff and the feedback shared by the community. Dr. Bearsto identified a number of often repeated themes emerging from the consultation process and suggested these can be shaped into principles for decision making in the Board's planning processes. They include:

- maintain the current Mandate and Goals
- Focus on supporting student success in their learning journey
- provide priority support to the most vulnerable learners and school communities
- recognize and respond to the differing needs of various communities
- pay attention to the long term view (sustainability is crucial)
- keep communicating with parents
- continue your advocacy and seek out new voices in that work

I wish to publicly thank Dr. Bearsto for his engaging and highly-skilled processes and the consolidation of information in a way that was accessible to the community. It is also important to acknowledge the commitment of the many community members who attended one or more of the consultation sessions to bring their voices and ideas to complex challenges.

# MEMORANDUM

---

Following is a summary representing my observations and recommendations for action related to several key issues, building on the issues highlighted in the Forum consultation and requiring the attention of the Board and its staff:

- 1) **The primary importance of accessibility to neighbourhood schools.** The School Act, Section 74.1 (6) states that enrolment priority, when space is an issue, is given to catchment area students. Further, the Board's Policy 9320 and Regulation 9320.1 speak to principles and priorities for student enrolment. Local area children need to be able to enrol in their local area schools for issues related to safety, reasonable home-school travel distance and routing and the related environmental focus, healthy and active lifestyles for students, and a feeling of belonging.

The Board's staff continue to work with the City of Surrey and City of White Rock to develop best practices in data sharing to inform community planning work so that access to educational services is a prime consideration when residential development is being considered. In addition to the staff to staff consultation on such matters, it is important that the public is made more aware of the processes in place to promote intelligent and sustainable community planning;

- 2) **The long-term viability of District (Choice) programs.** Parents, students and staff who are committed to District (Choice) programs develop deep connections to the home school for those programs. Even though parents are made aware that District (Choice) programs could be moved based on available space, the sense of membership in a school community results in a feeling of dislocation and loss when program location is jeopardized. Given that reality, it is recommended that:

- a) In order to minimize the pressure to move programs, the district neither expand existing programs nor establish new ones unless it is confident that the program can be housed in the same location for the foreseeable future. The current circumstances, in which the Board is faced with substantial challenges due to lack of capital funding for new schools or expansion of existing facilities, make it unreasonable to commit to new or expanded program venue certainty with any degree of confidence. It is not reasonable to make such commitments as they are not sustainable over time;
- b) Where possible, the location of current District (Choice) programs be protected, subject to viability and ongoing community interest. This can be facilitated by considering school scheduling options to maximize the use of time and space within current school district facilities so that no current students and programs are displaced;
- c) As an initial stage of exploration, secondary school administrators, staff and communities will be asked to explore scheduling and course delivery options to increase the efficient and effective use of space while continuing to serve the school population eligible to attend from the catchment area and from registration in District (Choice) programs. Some secondary schools, where physical space capacity issues are most extreme, will be the focus of alternative scheduling options, including but not limited to extended days, beginning in September, 2011;

- 
- 3) **The introduction of more 21st Century learning environments.** In public education today, there is specific reference to developing greater learner independence for those students in the senior grades of their secondary schooling. The development of hybrid (on-line and face to face) course delivery will help deal with current enrolment capacity challenges and will also support students in their transition to post-secondary education which includes on-line, hybrid and face to face learning environments. Just as no single instructional strategy suits every student's learning preference today, it will be so in the future; therefore, it is important to recognize that on-line and/or hybrid options must be introduced with attention to student readiness for greater independence, equity of access to technology and appropriate professional growth opportunities for staff who will be working in different ways;
  - 4) **Continued commitment to our most vulnerable learners.** The Board is acknowledged for its ongoing emphasis on equity so that schools with high needs populations are provided with the additional resourcing to give their students the greatest chance for success in the short and long term. Through the consultation process, the public was clear that supporting students in need must be maintained as a high priority; and,
  - 5) **The ongoing resourcing of the Community-Schools Partnership.** While not everyone understands the architecture of our C-SP initiative, it is clear from feedback comments that there is recognition that C-SP is particularly important in support of our vulnerable students and neighbourhoods. It adds value to the learning experiences of students and builds the inter-agency and community relationships that are essential to viability and long-term sustainability and growth. The district must continue to monitor issues related to the extended operation of school facilities (evenings, weekends, summer) and the associated costs as well as the development of protocols that protect student safety in an environment where more members of the community are routinely accessing the school for community program options.

The community also strongly indicated that it is interested in being kept up-to-date with the district's advocacy efforts with the provincial government so parents can add their voices in support of Surrey schools. The Surrey School District faces unique challenges related to both operational and capital funding. The district continues to grow at a dramatic pace, in contrast to the overall decline in population in almost every other district. Therefore, some of the funding policies and decisions that may make greater sense across much of B.C. are causing significant stresses to the delivery of programs and services in Surrey schools. The Board and its staff will need to ensure that communication, both during the budget process and throughout the year, is enhanced so there is a greater level of shared ownership of issues and advocacy on behalf of our community's learners.

# **Public Forums 2010**

report on a series of public forums  
held in the Surrey School District  
concerning fiscal and facilities issues

prepared by

Dr. Bruce Beirsto

November 12, 2010

# Table of Contents

## Executive Summary

## Body of Report

Purpose of the Forums .....	1
Process of the Forums.....	2
Background Information.....	3
Enrolment Projections.....	3
Facilities.....	4
Budget.....	4
District Mission and Goals.....	7
Illustrative Dilemmas.....	7
Table Group Discussions .....	9
Reflections on the Process of the Forums.....	9
Summary of Response Received at the Forums .....	10
Concluding Statement.....	13

## Appendices

Forum Materials

On-Line Materials

Response Data in Raw Form

## Executive Summary

During September and October, 2010, 5 public forums and an on-line survey were conducted as part of the Board's ongoing consultation process to provide information about financial and facility challenges facing the Surrey School District and to work towards principles and priorities to guide the Board in its decision-making.

A total of approximately 380 people participated in the forums, which were also attended by trustees, senior staff and representatives of the District Parent Advisory Council.

After presentation of information about district goals, enrolment projections, the operating budget and facilities issues, members of the public were invited to discuss and submit comments about this information, Choice Programs, community-school partnership, portable classrooms and the principles they felt should guide the Board. Written responses were received from 56 table discussion groups and 72 individuals.

Overall, participants expressed appreciation for the information provided and the opportunity to comment. Some of the information provided was surprising, even shocking, to the participants and many suggested that it should be made more widely available to parents and the community.

A wide variety of opinions and perspectives were included in the feedback received but there was a strong consensus that:

- the District Mandate and Goals are appropriate;
- whatever challenges the Board faces it is important to maintain a strong focus on programs and services that help students succeed in their learning;
- it is important to protect support services for vulnerable students;
- decisions should take into account the differing needs of various parts of the community;
- the Board should take a long-term view even as it deals with urgent issues;
- ongoing communication with parents is essential; and
- parents encourage the Board to advocate strongly for the unique and urgent needs of the District, and are willing to participate in support of such advocacy.

**Purpose of the Forums**

During September and October of 2010, the Surrey School District held a series of public forums in order to work towards principles and priorities that will assist the Board’s decision-making for continuous improvement of student outcomes and responsible stewardship of its resources.

These forums were part of the regular planning cycle illustrated in Figure 1, which includes a variety of consultative processes conducted prior to the end of February each year. This year, however, they were initiated earlier than usual so that information gained from the forums could be fully considered before budget and other significant decisions had to be made.

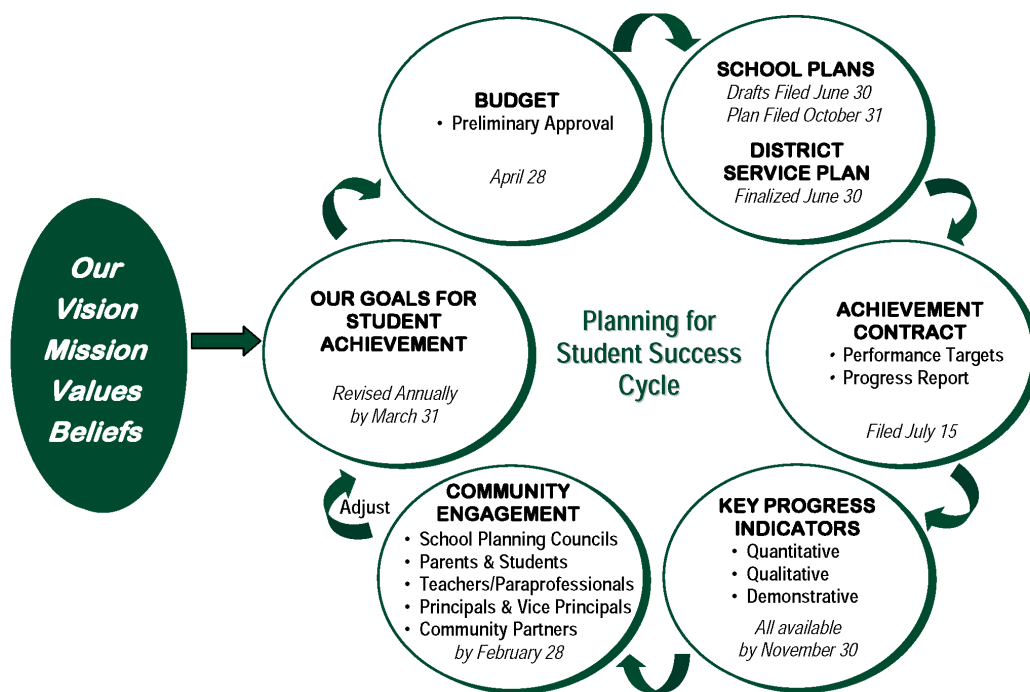


Figure 1: Surrey School District Planning Cycle

All school districts face difficult decisions as they reconcile the diverse perspectives, needs and preferences of their community within the limits of the operating grant provided by government. The Surrey School District, however, faces the additional problem of serious overcrowding in its schools, which exacerbates these challenge and creates new difficulties that are unique to the district. It is for this reason that public forums were added to the regular community consultation process and initiated early in the school year.

### **Process of the Forums**

Public forums were held from 7:00 pm to 9:00 pm. They consisted of a presentation followed by table group discussions in response to a series of provided questions. Each table group completed a response form and every individual participant was given the opportunity to submit personal responses to the same questions.

The introductory presentation included:

- The purpose of the forums
- The process of the forums
- Background information on enrolment, facilities and budget
- District Mission and Goals
- Illustrative Dilemmas: Choice Programs, Community Use of Schools and Portables

The background information provided is outlined in the next section of this report. The response forms are attached in the Appendix.

Representatives of stakeholder groups were invited to the first forum, at which input was gathered both about key questions and the survey process itself. The refined process was then repeated in four regional forums, to which each school was invited to send 4 representatives. Trustees, senior staff and DPAC representatives attended all of the forums as interested observers but the forum was facilitated by the author.

A parallel on-line survey was posted on the district web site for those who could not attend.

The schedule of forums was as follows.

- Stakeholder Forum (Conference Center): Monday, September 27th; 75 participants
- North Area Public Forum (Kwantlen Park): Monday, October 4th; 80 participants
- South Area Public Forum (Elgin Park): Tuesday, October 12th; 65 participants
- East Area Public Forum (North Surrey): Thursday, October 14th; 75 participants
- West Area Public Forum (Fleetwood Park): Monday, October 18th; 60 participants
- On-Line Forum: October 5th to October 30th; 23 respondents

The Stakeholder Forum included representatives of DPAC, Surrey Teachers' Association, CUPE, the Excluded Professional Employees' Group, the Secondary Students' Leadership Group (IDEAS 36) and Advisory Groups for a range of programs: IB, French, Aboriginal, Montessori, Traditional, Integrated Fine Arts, Integrated Studies and Discovery.

Parent representatives from each of the schools in the region were invited to the Public Forums.

The On-Line Forum was open to all.

**Background Information**

Selective background information was provided to assist in understanding the types of dilemmas that the District faces. It fell into three categories: enrolment projections, facilities and budget.

*Enrolment Projections*

The Ministry provides student enrolment projections based on a large-scale model for population growth but it is not sufficiently accurate or detailed for district planning purposes. Therefore, the District develops more detailed projections using three sources of data.

- Age Cohort Data: The number of students in each grade at each schools provides a good foundation for projecting enrolment in the following year.
- Family Allowance Data: Statistics Canada also provides information about every child in the community. This allows an accurate projection of Kindergarten enrolment in the following year.
- New Construction Information: Close liaison with the City provides information about new housing construction that has been approved. Based on the number and type of units being built it is possible to project population growth.

Despite the very careful analysis that is conducted, surprises do occur due to fluctuations in immigration rates, changes in the number of students attending private schools, variations in the sales rate of newly constructed units and other such factors. Overall, however, enrolment projections are a very reliable guide for planning.

Figure 2 shows enrolment projections as follows:

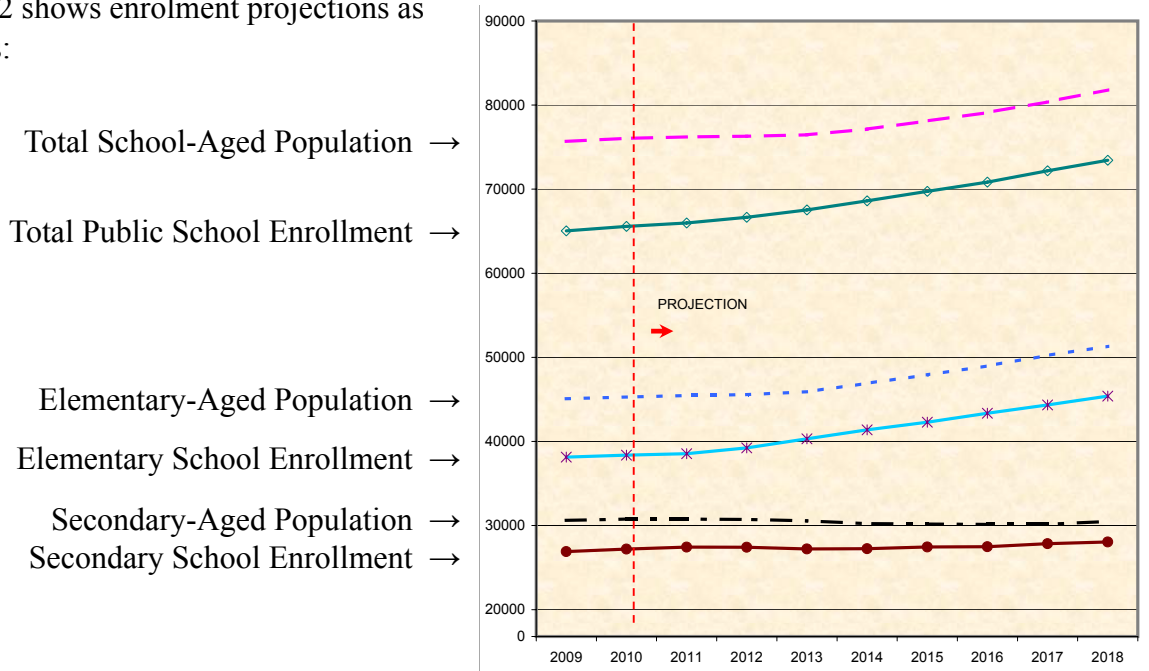


Figure 2: Enrollment Projections

The data indicates that significant enrolment increases in Surrey schools will continue (6570 students over the period shown), primarily in elementary schools. However, it should be noted that secondary schools are already operating at several thousand students over capacity and that the enrolment increase in elementary schools will eventually hit secondary schools as well.

### *Facilities*

Site acquisition, school expansion and new school construction is approved and funded by the Ministry of Education separately from the funding for ongoing operations. The District submits a Five Year Capital Plan annually in order to define its needs. The Ministry then reviews the plans from all districts and announces what it will fund for each.

Typically, funding is announced three years in advance and then confirmed with approval to sign contracts for design and construction being given closer to the scheduled date. From that point it typically takes 2 years for the school to be ready for use. Thus, there is approximately a five year gap between a funding announcement and the school opening.

There have been no new school construction funding allocations to Surrey in the past five years. (There has been some funding for seismic upgrading of existing schools and modular facilities to accommodate full-day kindergarten, but this does not increase the total capacity.) The construction now occurring represents the tail end of what was “in the pipeline” but nothing additional has been approved at this time. Thus, the projected increase in student enrolment will have to be accommodated in existing schools, which are already operating beyond capacity. This will require addition of portable classrooms on existing sites.

There are currently 292 portable classrooms operating in Surrey. While these used to be funded by the Ministry of Education until permanent facilities could be provided, that funding ceased five years ago as well. Since that time 40 of the current portables were added at District expense of approximately \$100,000 each. In the summer of 2010, the Ministry provided an exceptional grant of \$2 million to retroactively offset half of that cost, but there is no guarantee that such funding will continue.

### *Budget*

School taxes all go to Victoria. They are then redistributed to school districts according to funding formula based on student population and district characteristics. The school district does not have any taxation authority and thus cannot generate its own revenue except through limited options that are explained later in this section.

Figure 3 outlines the calculation of the Operating Grant provided to the school district by the Ministry of Education for the 2010/11 school year. The calculation is primarily based on enrolment but there are also adjustments for unique student needs, geographic factors, transportation, distributed learning and mid-year increases in some populations.

**Estimated Operating Grants -- 2010/11 School Year**  
**SD 36 Surrey**

Enrolment Based Funding - September			
Type	Enrolment	Funding Level	Total Funding
Total School Age FTE: (Regular and Continuing Education)	64,541.6330	\$6,740	\$435,010,606
Total School Age FTE: (Alternate Schools)	1,160.6250	\$6,740	\$7,822,613
Distributed Learning September:	702.0000	\$5,851	\$4,107,402
Course Challenges:	277	\$211	\$58,447
Home School students: September:	10	\$250	\$2,500
Total September Enrolment: 66,404.2580 (does not include course challenges or home school)			
<b>TOTAL SEPTEMBER ENROLMENT BASED FUNDING:</b>			<b>\$447,001,568</b>
<b>TOTAL SEPTEMBER FUNDING (ENROLMENT-BASED + SUPPLEMENTS):</b>			
<b>\$523,675,315</b>			
Enrolment Based Funding - February			
Distributed Learning			
School-Age:	330.8850		\$1,622,872
Adult:	31.0500	\$4,430	\$137,552
<b>Total:</b>	<b>361.9350</b>		<b>\$1,760,424</b>
Newcomer Refugees:	37.0000	\$3,370	\$124,690
ESL Supplement	32.0000	\$670	\$21,440
<b>Total:</b>	<b>251.1000</b>		<b>\$146,130</b>
Enrolment Based Funding - May			
Distributed Learning			
School-Age:	225.5850		\$1,105,031
Adult:	25.5150	\$4,430	\$113,031
<b>Total:</b>	<b>251.1000</b>		<b>\$1,218,062</b>
SUMMARY			
<b>TOTAL AGGREGATE 2010/11 FUNDING:</b>		<b>\$529,339,506</b>	
Estimated 2010/11 Operating Grant from INAC:		\$55,575	
2010/11 Operating Grant from Ministry of Education:		\$529,283,931	

Supplementary Funding:			
1. Enrolment Decline Supplements (September enrolments, excluding all Kindergarten):			
a. 2010/11 School	2009/10 School	Enrolment	
Age FTE	Age FTE =	Change	
62,424.2580	62,037.9983	386.2597	0.62%
b. Decline between 1% and 4% of last year's FTE: Supplement = Adjusted Decline x 50% x \$6,740 = \$0			
c. Decline beyond 4% of last year's FTE Supplement = Adjusted Decline x 75% x \$6,740 = \$0			
Including Kindergarten:			
d. 2009/10 School	2007/08 School	Enrolment	
Age FTE	Age FTE =	Change	
65,155.9983	63,358.1918	1,797.8065	2.84%
Total Enrolment Decline Supplement Funding:			\$0
2. Unique Student Needs:			
English as a Second Language:	Enrolment	Funding Level	Total Funding
	14,289.0	\$1,340	\$19,147,260
Aboriginal Education:	2,950.0	\$1,160	\$3,422,000
Special Education:			
Level 1:	77.0	\$36,600	\$2,818,200
Level 2:	1,740.0	\$18,300	\$31,842,000
Level 3:	875.0	\$9,200	\$8,050,000
Adult Education:			
September:	1,175.2500	\$4,430	\$5,206,358
Total Unique Student Needs Funding:			\$70,485,818
3. Salary Differential:			
Differential:	-1,475		
Estimated number of educators:	3,754.417		\$6,648,848
4. Unique Geographic Factors:			
			\$272,054
5. Transportation and Housing:			
			\$1,982,511
6. Formula Transition			
			-\$2,715,484
7. Funding Protection:			
			\$0
<b>TOTAL SUPPLEMENTARY FUNDING (SEPTEMBER):</b>			<b>\$76,673,747</b>
Summer Learning			\$2,095,800
Special Needs Enrolment Growth - February			
	FTE Growth	per FTE	Total Funding
Level 1	0.0	\$18,300	\$0
Level 2	48.5	\$9,150	\$443,775
Level 3	0.0	\$4,600	\$0
<b>Total</b>	<b>48.5</b>		<b>\$443,775</b>

March 2010

Figure 3: Operating Grant

The upper left portion of the form above provide the basic per capita allocation. The upper right portion provides adjustments for rapid decline in population (which does not pertain to Surrey), English as a Second Language, Aboriginal Students, Students with Special Needs and Adults who are completing high school graduation requirements. The remaining boxes provide adjustments for summer learning, mid-year increases in the number of students with special needs and refugees and students who take graduation program courses on-line (which is called distributed learning). The total operating grant for 2010/11 estimated at \$529 million in the spring will be adjusted to actual student enrolment as of September 30th by December.

The Operating Grant provides the vast majority of operational funding for the school district (approximately 97%). However, there is a small but important additional Facilities Grant to assist the District with essential maintenance (e.g., roofing, painting, paving) on existing facilities.

Provincially, government funding of K-12 education has increased annually through a period of declining student enrolment. Unfortunately, these increases have not been sufficient to offset inflationary pressures and thus there has been a slow but steady reduction in services that the District can provide.

Beyond the Operating and Facilities Grants from the Ministry of Education, the District is encouraged by the Ministry to generate its own revenue. Continuing Education courses and rental of facilities to community groups (e.g., Guides and Scouts) is conducted on a cost-recovery basis so there is no significant net income from those operations. However, from time to time facilities may be rented to a movie production or for some other commercial purpose at prevailing rates. This is episodic and generally does not generate either significant or predictable net revenue.

The only other significant source of revenue available to the District is its International Student Program, which nets approximately \$7.5 million per year (after all costs for instruction, administration, marketing and so on are covered) to supplement the operating grants that it receives from the provincial government. Although this is only 1.5% of the budget, it is vitally important as it prevents the need for further budget reductions that would have a devastating impact on students.

Budgetary expenditures are primarily for personnel, as illustrated in Figure 5. This distributed amongst teaching staff (63%), support staff (20%) and non-unionized staff (7%). Because staffing represents 90% of the budget, increases in staff salaries, which are negotiated under guidelines imposed by the provincial government, are the major source of cost increases.

Only 10% of the budget is expended on goods and services (e.g., utilities, garbage collection, textbooks, computers, paper etc.). This is a smaller proportion than in the past because over years of financial constraint budget reductions have been made to goods and services rather than personnel whenever possible in order to preserve the staff who support students and permit the district to operate safely and efficiently. As a consequence, there is a “hidden deficit” accumulating in terms of foregone renovations and aging equipment due to deferral of replacement. Deferral hides but does not eliminate these costs, most of which must be met eventually.

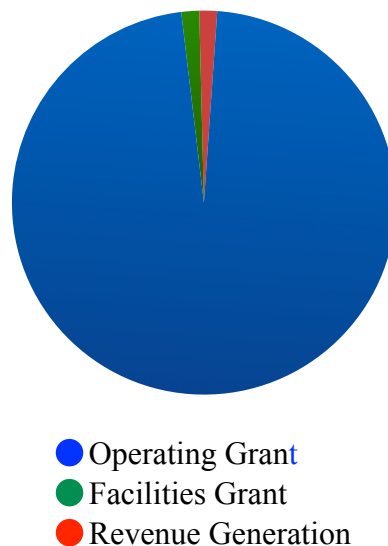


Figure 4: Income

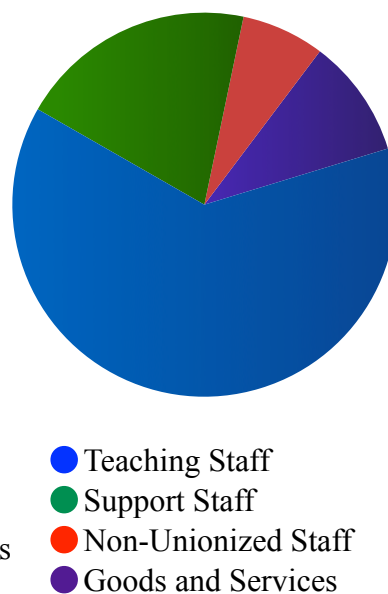


Figure 5: Expenditures

### *District Mission and Goals*

Participants in the Public Forums were also reminded of the Surrey School District Mission Statement and an abbreviated version of its annual goals for 2010/11 as follows.

- Mission Statement: Through quality teaching and learning, we commit to engaging our students in their growth as individuals and in their development of the knowledge, skills and attributes necessary to contribute to a healthy, democratic and diverse society.
- Annual Goals: Continue attention to core academics, promote positive citizenship, increase six-year completion rate, and expand community-school partnerships.

In addition, two current Ministry initiatives that the school district must implement were described.

- Full-day Kindergarten is being phased in over a two-year period.
- Personalized Learning has been introduced at the staff level as a topic for discussion and it is anticipated that a more complete description and official announcement of this initiative will be forthcoming in the near future.

### *Illustrative Dilemmas*

In order to illustrate the fact that the Board often must make difficult choices between two or more highly desirable ends because it is not possible to achieve them simultaneously due to financial and/or facility limitations, three specific examples were described briefly.

- Choice Programs: The Board has introduced many Choice programs and is committed to these options because a rich array of programs help to meet student needs and interests. When students attend a program of choice they are generally very engaged in their learning and the district can supply special resources and teaching expertise that is specific to the program. However, Choice programs sometimes have additional costs and always introduce additional complexity. They also often compete for space with neighbourhood students, and in the overcrowded circumstances of the district, this can result in difficult decisions that respect both the value of Choice and the interests of neighbourhoods.
- Schools as Community Hubs: The Board recognizes the merit of expanding community use of schools to maximize the benefits of these public buildings and to integrate services so that they are accessible and responsive to the local community. However, when space is short this intention comes into conflict with the need to provide space for school programs. If space is available, locating community service in school buildings increases operational costs and can make it more difficult to maintain student and staff safety.

- Portables: Space for a growing student population, Choice programs and community services can be provided by using portable facilities. However, portables are expensive to purchase (approximately \$100,000) and to operate. Currently, the Ministry is not providing for these costs (although a one-time special grant was received after the fact this past summer to partially offset district portable costs). In addition, portables increase the enrolment beyond the capacity of the core facilities of a school (e.g., gyms, washrooms, hallways), which can lead to a variety of problems and increased maintenance costs. Moreover, portables can create safety concerns and sometimes invite vandalism.

A pivotal factor in each of these illustrative dilemmas is space in schools. Several alternative responses to school overcrowding were presented briefly in order to illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.

- Boundary changes are the most straightforward approach. They can reduce the catchment area population but this is disruptive to neighbourhoods, can result in students travelling further to school and perhaps on less safe routes, and presume that there is space in the adjoining catchment area to accommodate displaced students.
- Moving choice programs is possible since parents accept responsibility for getting students to such programs when they choose them. However, this can be disruptive to the programs themselves and to the students who have committed to them, and requires an alternative location with space to accommodate the program.
- Extending the school day so that not all students are in the building at any given time allows more students to attend without adding portables but results in fragmented schedules for students and staff, makes it difficult to conduct co-curricular activities and weakens the esprit de corps of the student body.
- Having senior students take some courses online through distributed learning such as Surrey Connect so they do not have to be in school for those courses can also allow a secondary school to accommodate additional students but this option requires staff who are proficient in an very different form of instruction and is not suitable for some students.

The overcrowding that many schools are experiencing, and which is projected to increase significantly in coming years, can be alleviated through a combination of these strategies but just what combination of them is most appropriate and effective in a particular school is liable to be contentious and there is no response that does not have adverse side effects.

Since the factors that give rise to the preceding dilemmas are outside of the control of the school district the dilemmas cannot be eliminated. Therefore, in addition to commenting on the background information and illustrative dilemmas presented in the public forum, participants were asked to suggest principles and priorities that might guide the Board in the difficult decisions that lie ahead.

### ***Table Group Discussions***

Discussion occurred in groups of approximately 3 to 8 for 35 minutes. Each group was provided with a response form and all participants also had the option to submit a personal response form if they chose to do so. Additionally, participants could complete an online response form at a later date if they had subsequent comments to make.

### **Reflections on the Process of the Forums**

The forums were only one part of an ongoing consultation process. Their specific purpose was to work towards principles and priorities that will assist the Board's decision-making. It was never imagined that the forums would, in and of themselves, yield solutions to the many questions the Board is facing.

A great deal of information was shared and, given the limited length of an evening forum, a relatively short time was available to discuss it and respond. Some respondents expressed the wish that they could take more time and that trained facilitators could be provided to capture their comments and suggestions more fully. These are reasonable requests if one expects in-depth analysis, but the forums were only intended as an overview of the complex of issues facing the Board, with a particular focus on the impact of finances and facilities. If the Board wishes to engage interested parties in more extended consideration of particular issues, more time and perhaps some facilitation would be required.

Although the forums were well-attended, they were to a certain degree a process of "preaching to the choir" since it is probably the parents who are already most informed and involved who attended. This may skew the responses and makes it impossible to extrapolate from the feedback received to guesstimate the opinions and interests of parents as a whole. Nonetheless, the feedback is informative and useful.

Despite the limitations of the process, participants appreciated the information provided and the opportunity to see the "big picture" of space-related issues facing the District. In fact, many suggested that the information should be made more broadly available to parents and the community. Many also expressed the feeling that the Board consider more robust advocacy involving parents. Although these comments often seemed to indicate a lack of understanding of the advocacy that has occurred, the willingness of parents to actively support the Board in making its case for the unique needs of the Surrey School District is noteworthy.

### Summary of Response Received at the Forums

The majority of the trustees, several members of senior staff and several members of the DPAC executive attended each forum in person to monitor the discussions for their personal information. The primary mode of input, however, was via the response forms provided at the forums and the online survey that was open to all. The numbers received were as follows.

<i>Meeting</i>	<i>Attendance</i>	<i>Group Response</i>	<i>Individual Response</i>
Stakeholder	75	10	18
Area North	80	12	5
Area South	70	12	18
Area East	75	11	8
Area West	60	11	0
On-Line	n/a	n/a	23

Respondents were invited to complete whichever portions of the response form were most important for them. Most group forms address most of the questions posed but many individual forms focus on only one or two questions.

In some forums very specific regional issues were raised that are not included in the general summary of themes that follows. Examples include statements of advocacy or concern for specific Choice Programs and comments at the Elgin Park meeting about school configuration in the Ocean Park area. Although these individual issues are not reflected in the district-wide summary, they are important to individuals and areas. Readers are, therefore, encouraged to peruse the full text of responses in the Appendix, which may also serve to verify or amend the author's summary which follows.

#### *Mandate and Goals*

- There were few comments on the Mandate but those that were made were supportive.
- The Goals were generally supported.
- Many noted the primacy of the achievement and school completion goals in particular.
- The community-partnership goal was misunderstood by many, probably due in part to the brief presentation and the focus on the community use of schools aspect in that presentation.

### *Finances*

- Respondents appreciated the high-level overview of finances and found it useful to their understanding of the District's fiscal circumstances.
- There were questions about details such as CommunityLINK and federal funding for French programs that were not included in the high-level overview.
- Several noted concern at the small percentage of the budget available for goods and services, although they understood and supported the focus on staff.
- Most respondents were very surprised, and many dismayed, at the fact that there is currently no funding from the Ministry for new construction to address the current overcrowding in schools and projections for continuing growth which will exacerbate that problem.
- Many suggested that this information be provided to parents and the community, and further that they be included in renewed advocacy for facility funding.

### *Choice Programs*

- Choice Programs were the particular focus of concern for many participants in the forums.
- Many spoke of the importance of these programs for their children and pointed out that they contributed to the goals of achievement and school completion.
- Some felt that the presentation did not do justice to the value of Choice Programs and may reveal a lack of enthusiasm for them. Although that criticism, to the extent that it is valid, is the responsibility of the author rather than the Board, it is an impression of which the Board should be aware.
- There appears to be significant confusion about the relative cost of Choice Programs and the legal/ethical limitations on fees.
- There is a clear tension in some, but not all, cases between the interests of Choice Programs and Neighbourhood Programs that results in an irresolvable dilemma. This issue may fester if not acknowledged. Although there is no "solution," open discussion can help to ensure that all involved feel heard and respected.
- Some participants were unclear about the Board's attitude towards and policies in regards to Choice Programs.
- It was noted by many that issues and opportunities in relation to Choice must be managed on a case-by-case basis to respect the distinct contextual differences across the district.

### *Community-School Partnerships*

- There appeared to be confusion about the meaning of community-school partnerships and the forms they may take. This was probably exacerbated by the very brief presentation of this topic and the focus on community-use of schools as one aspect of it.
- Many, however, expressed support for community-school partnerships, particularly as they support vulnerable students and their families.
- Many expressed specific support for the community use of schools to provide child care services before and after school.

- Many expressed appreciation for Strong Start programs.
- There were concerns about student safety if community agencies used the schools during the school day, particularly for elementary schools.

### *Portables*

- Some respondents acknowledged portables to be a “necessary evil” but there was almost universal concern about them for a range of reasons that included health and safety issues, isolation of students from the school proper and lack of access to school services, aesthetics, vandalism, impact of school infrastructure and costs.
- Respondents were universally surprised to find that the Ministry no longer provides systematic funding for portables when they are necessary.
- Many did not seem to understand the relationship between the Board and the City with respect to planning and funding in relationship to portables and facilities in general.
- Some did not appear to realize how closely the District liaises with the City in preparing its population projections and developing its capital plan.
- There was a strong sense of concern about the large number of portables and probable significant increase in the future, leading to the expectation that the Board would redouble its efforts to lobby the Ministry to alleviate the situation and a willingness for parents to actively participate in that advocacy.

### *Principles for Decision-Making*

- Stick to your Mandate and Goals
- Focus on what will help students succeed in their learning
- Sustain support for the most vulnerable
- Respond to the differing needs of various communities
- Take a long-term view
- Keep communicating with parents
- Advocate strongly for adequate funding and involve parents to help

As previously noted, this summary is a general characterization of the feedback received at public forums. However, it does not capture all the specific concerns and suggestions that were important to individuals or particular communities.

### **Concluding Statement**

These public forums were appreciated by those who participated, both for the information that was shared and for the intention to inform and involve the parent community in the difficult dilemmas that the Board is facing as a result of the inherent complexity of public schooling in a diverse community, the cumulative impact of many years of financial constraint and the unique challenge faced by Surrey as a result of population growth during a period when the province is not funding new facilities.

The greatest benefit of the forums was probably in sharing information with the community that helps it to appreciate the challenges that are being faced and provides a foundation its continued involvement in a dialogue about those challenges.

Although the feedback received is general in nature, and probably does not surprise the Board, it is important to check one's assumptions from time to time. The feedback provides a useful point of reference for future Board and community discussions.

More narrowly focussed and extensive discussions would be required to involve parts of the community in problem-solving discussions related to particular issues.

With reference to the Principles for Decision-Making in particular, there is nothing that runs contrary to what the Board has previously identified as its directions but it would be useful to develop an overt statement of underlying principles as the Board heads into a difficult round of financial and facilities decisions. Although it was not proposed as a principle for decision-making, student safety is a fundamental concern that arose in all parts of the discussion and is understandably important to parents. It should be included as an overt priority in any statement of decision-making principles.

Participants in these forums frequently requested that communication and consultation be ongoing. Parents want to understand the issues that the Board is facing so that they can provide commentary, understand the basis for decisions made and support the Board in its advocacy.