

Attention: Rob Howard, Chair
Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services
Budget Consultation 2012

The Board of Education values the opportunity to present to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. Trustees commit to engaging with government to develop a comprehensive roadmap for a sustainable, world-class education system for B.C.'s children. The young people of this province are our future and this Board supports strategic, value-added investment in education as the best decision any government can make. The Surrey Board of Education advocates for the design of an education system for the future (*see Note 1*). Such an initiative will require urgent attention to program and policy revision as well as the development of new approaches to funding. It is not forward looking to simply focus on adequately resourcing an education system that was developed in the late 1800's and designed for the industrial age. The Board urges government to ensure that educators, policy makers (local and provincial) and partner groups work to create the learning environments appropriate for the 21st century.

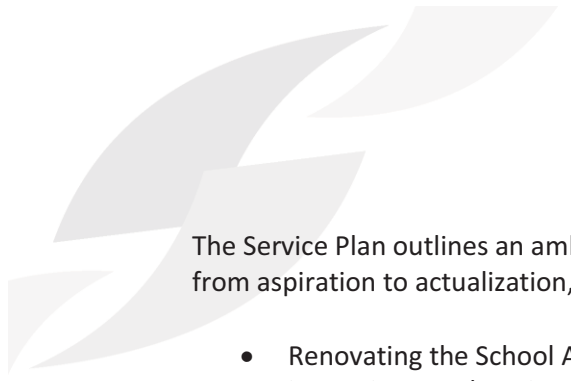
In considering its position, the Board acknowledges the Ministry of Education's Revised 2011-12 to 2013-14 Service Plan (<http://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2011/sp/pdf/ministry/educ.pdf>) and specifically notes the following key points:

A Changing World

- Students are growing up in a world that is increasingly reliant on technology. Communication is instantaneous and information is available from anywhere at any time.
- Many of today's career opportunities did not even exist a decade ago. Students need to have the skills to adapt to a rapidly changing world.
- Today's employers are looking for workers with well-developed skills in areas such as critical thinking, communication, innovation, problem solving, and teamwork.
- There is a global movement to transform education systems to ensure learners are prepared for success in the 21st century.
- Increased competition in the global economy makes improving the productivity of B.C.'s workforce a necessary and urgent priority.
- Government continues to build relationships with Asia-Pacific nations through transportation links, cultural exchanges, and educational partnerships.

Note 1:

It's true that optimizing the effectiveness of traditional education systems to maximize the value we can derive from them is a vital element of any strategy moving forward. But this is not enough. Learning is an activity not a place and goes beyond the school and the university; it always has. The knowledge explosion, driven by the power of the network to connect people and spread ideas, has changed the very nature of learning. We must innovate and develop new modes of learning, both formal and informal, that meet the demands of knowledge-driven societies in this Information Age. The Learning Society: Foreword © 2010

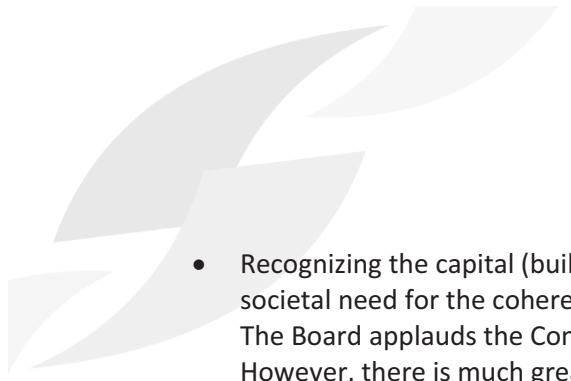


The Service Plan outlines an ambitious and wide-ranging agenda to meet emerging realities. To take it from aspiration to actualization, the Board believes it will be necessary to focus on:

- Renovating the School Act and Regulation to recognize that schools must support learning that is not time nor location bound. Learners in 2011 are engaged in complex and integrated educational experiences, not reasonably confined by the agrarian calendar, a defined school day/school week, a physical classroom populated by one teacher and a prescribed number of students or a curriculum that still values content and recall over process leading to demonstrated mastery of significant outcomes. While many students are fully immersed in highly engaging, flexible, relevant and robust learning challenges, such environments are not yet fully established as the new norm.
- Working with educational organizations representing parents, teachers, support staff, school and district administrators, trustees, business and community partners to review the relationships within which they operate, including:
 - contractual and other professional rights and responsibilities of employees to ensure the necessary flexibility to respond to learner needs;
 - expectations that the education system and the business community expand their partnership to have students engage in extended workplace experiences that are creditable toward graduation, including those work experiences that are paid. Both the private and public sector in this province look to the school system to provide the foundational knowledge, skills and attitudes for tomorrow's worker and citizen. A consistent and more comprehensive partnership with employers will contribute to this important goal;
 - protocols with community agencies so that students receive credit for being viable resources to assist in achievement of community social agendas (*see note 2*);
 - recognizing the importance of a world-class international education program that supports greater global understanding and contributes almost \$2 billion annually to the B.C. economy from international student participation in K-12 and post-secondary education.
- Updating provincial audit program requirements in Continuing Education, Special Education, Distributed Learning, Summer Learning, and K-12 Regular Enrolment, including Aboriginal Education and English as a Second Language, to focus attention on qualitative evidence of service delivery rather than quantitative and time specific measures that too often penalize innovation and limit districts from effectively resourcing emerging best practices and flexible/responsive assignment of personnel. Current audit processes are cost-inefficient and regressive.

Note 2

We need to embrace new approaches from nontraditional sources and foster truly open and collaborative partnerships between the public, private and non-profit sectors. In addition, those responsible for guiding learning must constantly move beyond their comfort zones and continually innovate to anticipate the needs of learners as the world around them changes. People need to learn and relearn throughout their lives. Learning must increasingly focus on interdisciplinary collaboration and 21st century skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.
The Learning Society: Foreword © 2010

- 
- Recognizing the capital (building) program needs of school districts in conjunction with the greater societal need for the coherent delivery of programs and services to community members of all ages. The Board applauds the Communities of Learning initiatives and the funding of multi-use schools. However, there is much greater opportunity to achieve more efficiency, effectiveness and timely responsiveness through multi-agency capital project development as the norm rather than the exception. Public infrastructure development over the next several years will depend on shared resourcing among Ministries, resulting in highly efficient community resources;
 - Acknowledging the important role of information communications technology in today's teaching/learning dynamic and develop a future-focused technology framework to achieve affordability so that technology-enhanced learning can be provided reliably at a level that enables increasing user demand at a reasonable cost to the system.

It is instructive to note that over the past 2 years, there has been a clear and consistent call to action for education systems to lead in the development of a new skill set for the learner, the worker and the citizen of the post-industrial age. B.C.'s Royal Commission on Education (The Sullivan Commission) did a thorough job of articulating the dimensions of the educated citizen two decades ago. The Conference Board of Canada regularly lands on the same themes. Recently, a paper entitled "The Learning Society" (2010) called for:

A New Set of Skills

The citizens of the 21st century need to supplement their foundational skills and knowledge with a new set of skills that are in much higher demand than before. There is much debate about these "21st century skills", but although the exact categories may differ, these eight groupings are consistently identified:

- Gathering, synthesizing, and analyzing information.
- Working autonomously to a high standard with minimal supervision.
- Leading other autonomous workers through influence.
- Being creative and turning that creativity into action.
- Thinking critically and asking the right questions.
- Striving to understand others' perspectives and to understand the entirety of an issue.
- Communicating effectively, often using technology.
- Working ethically, firmly based in both your own society and the planet as a whole.

The paper is available at:
www.cisco.com/web/about/citizenship/socio-economic/docs/LearningSociety_WhitePaper.pdf

As a final point and related specifically to current legislation, the Board encourages government to consider:

Reviewing and reforming Class Size and Composition legislation so that schools can effectively plan and deliver student learning environments based on the unique needs of individuals and cohorts, rather than constructing classes by use of a numerical standard. One particularly problematic and ineffective element of that legislation is the district average requirements which are costly and inefficient and do not provide additional support to an individual classroom or school organization. See examples of two issues, below.

Issue #1: Class Size Legislation and Impact of District Class Size Average

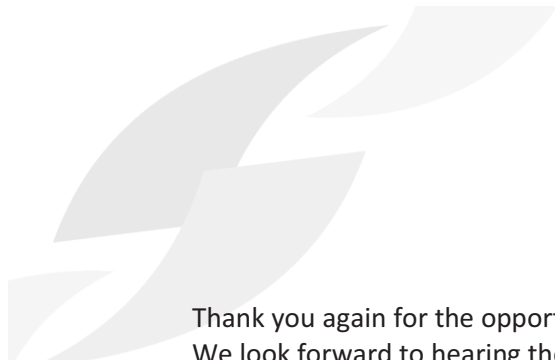
In Surrey, the district average of 19 for Kindergarten requires addition of classes that are counter to school needs, individual student needs and/or district operating efficiencies. Further, the need to maintain the district average at or below 19 throughout the school year means that growing districts like Surrey must build in additional buffer space below the 19 maximum. For example, in the 2010/11 school year we monitored and adjusted our school organization to meet the legislative requirements, and we found:

- In order to maintain a district K class average of 19, we had to add **10 K classrooms** in order to have an impact of 0.2 reduction to the average. In many of our rapidly growing areas with young families, our K classes are at maximum (22) and for every one of those, we need to establish a class of 16, or limit capacity in an already established class to an artificially low number;
- The **10 Kindergarten classrooms** required to make the 0.2 decrease resulted in teaching costs, establishment of new learning spaces (portables) and other operating challenges;
- Essentially, we made “compliance” decisions not in keeping with what we believed would be most advantageous to school organization or to student learning, but were aimed at meeting the mathematical requirements. Because our school district continues to grow throughout the year and because the district average requirements are applied throughout the year, our “buffer” to ensure that we remain compliant is substantial. Last year, that buffer was 0.6, resulting in 30 K classes and the necessary teaching and other resources being established in order to meet October 1 to June 30 growth. From year to year, we do not know what the size of the need will be. Neighbourhoods grow and mature at different times and the migration rate and housing market are outside our direct control. Our finite resources would, in many cases, be better assigned to schools based on real needs rather than dealing with the district average challenge.

Issue 2: Class Composition: The global categorization of students with IEPs

The establishment of a threshold of 3 ignores two key variables:

- a) IEP designation is not in itself, an effective descriptor of the needs or capacities of the learner; and,
- b) The class composition requirement does not recognize the role and value of co-professionals in the classroom. It continues to perpetuate a view of schooling that involves one adult (the teacher) with X clients (the students). This view is dated and does not align with the 21st century learning agenda and the changing view of learning, the learner and the relationship between learners and the resources provided by schools. Further, it does little to recognize the significant impact on learning made by the co-professionals in the classroom – including education assistants who play a key role in helping to navigate the learning journey.



Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our Board's perspective to the work of the committee.
We look forward to hearing the results of your deliberations.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurae W. McNally

Laurae McNally
Chair, Board of Education
Surrey School District