

Hon. Jennifer Whiteside
Minister of Education
Room 306, Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C.

January 29, 2021

Re: Concerns about VSB Reduction of Instructional Hours

Dear Minister Whiteside,

I have heard from many parents of Vancouver secondary students who are deeply concerned about the education their children are receiving at Vancouver schools due to a significant reduction in instructional hours as a result of the pandemic. I share their concerns and ask that you immediately take the steps below to address them.

Students in Vancouver secondary schools are receiving far less instruction than required under the *School Act* — only 8.75 hours of instruction per week (soon to be 10.75 hours for Grade 8 students), rather than the 25.5 hours per week required by law. I also understand they are also receiving far fewer hours than students in neighbouring school districts, including North Vancouver, Burnaby and Surrey, which provide between 17.75 hours to 22.7 hours of instruction a week, with full-time in-person instruction for students in Grades 8 and 9.

Parents are understandably worried that their children are not receiving the instruction that they need. They are concerned about the negative impact that this significant reduction will have on the overall quality of their children's education and they are worried they are missing important core parts in the curriculum. Further, parents are deeply concerned that "remote learning" in Vancouver is inconsistent and ineffective because the Vancouver School Board (VSB) is allowing schools and teachers to treat unsupervised assignments as instruction.

During these stressful times, students are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues. This school year has been very challenging for students with the limited hours at Vancouver secondary schools for in-person learning and the pressure to teach themselves at home, due to inadequate "remote" instruction. The lack of face-to-face interaction with friends severely undermines vital social growth and development, which is so critical for secondary students.

I, along with my colleagues, MLA Jackie Tegart, the Official Opposition Critic for Education and Vancouver-Quilchena MLA Andrew Wilkinson, recently met online with a group of parents from across Vancouver secondary schools to discuss their serious concerns. I understand that members of this concerned parent group also have been meeting and corresponding with Minister Eby and Minister Heyman, as their local MLAs, and that hundreds of parents in Vancouver have signed petitions echoing these concerns.



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From your recent public statements I understand that you share the concerns raised by parents, you expect the VSB to provide instructional hours required by law, and you have asked the Ministry to examine these issues with the VSB. I urge you to address the concerns of Vancouver parents, to communicate with them clearly and publicly and to ensure that, even during these difficult and uncertain times, all secondary students in Vancouver have access to the education and instruction they need. I ask that you confirm:

- whether the Ministry has provided the VSB with approval to reduce instructional time below the minimum of 952 hours required under the *School Act*;
- whether the Ministry has authorized, via “guidances” or otherwise, the VSB to treat unsupervised assignments as instruction;
- that the Ministry will require the VSB to amend its Restart Plan to comply immediately with the instructional time requirements under the *School Act* and provide full-time instruction as soon as possible; and
- that the Ministry will ensure that the VSB defines instruction as requiring active teacher participation and supervision.

Every student must receive a complete education and access to the learning resources they need to be successful. It is clear that, right now, this is not happening in Vancouver. I also request that you work with the VSB, and the many parents who have reached out to you, to rectify this as we continue to cope with the challenges of the pandemic.

Given the impending start of Q3 next week on February 4th, I look forward to hearing from you before then about your review of the concerns and requested confirmations.

Sincerely,

Michael Lee
MLA, Vancouver-Langara
Official Opposition Critic for Transportation, Infrastructure and TransLink

CC: Jackie Tegart, MLA, Fraser-Nicola and Official Opposition Critic for Education
Andrew Wilkinson, MLA, Vancouver-Quilchena