



February 17, 2021

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

Re: Concerns about VSB Reduction of Instructional Hours

Dear Minister Whiteside,

I am writing to you today to follow up on a letter sent to you on January 29, 2021, by my colleague and MLA for Vancouver-Langara Michael Lee, who relayed a series of concerns he has received from a large number of parents with students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools across School District 39 in Vancouver.

Families have been asking the Vancouver School Board (VSB) — as well as your Ministry — why their children are only receiving 8.75 hours of instruction per week. This current allotment is not only far behind that of neighbouring North Vancouver, Burnaby, and Surrey — who currently receive between 17.75 and 22.7 hours weekly — but it is also significantly below the minimum-required 25.5 hours of instructional time as is required by law under the *School Act*.

As my colleague outlined in his previous letter, families fear their children will fall significantly behind their peers in neighbouring school districts and the rest of the province under these conditions. Since the Vancouver School Board is allowing teachers to treat unsupervised assignments as instruction, families are concerned that the impersonal and ineffective quality of this form of remote learning is not only impacting the quality of education their children are receiving, but having adverse effects on the mental health of their children and hindering their development of teamwork, attentiveness, and other invaluable social skills that should be developed through these experiences.

Given the importance of this matter, I am sure you can understand my colleague's desire to receive a prompt reply from you, so he may update his constituents with a clear explanation. It has been two weeks since his letter to you, and more than a month since these concerns were first raised in our Vancouver MLAs' constituency offices — and undoubtedly your ministry as well.

To reiterate my colleague's inquiries that were outlined in his previous letter, I ask that you confirm:

- Have you provided the VSB with approval to reduce instructional time below the minimum of 22.5 hours per week or the 952 hours annually as is required under the *School Act*?
- Have you authorized, via "guidances" or otherwise, the VSB to treat unsupervised assignments as instruction?



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- Will you 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?
- Will you ensure that the VSB defines instruction as requiring active teacher participation and supervision?

I would also like to reiterate MLA Lee's 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. The many families of SD39 simply want to ensure their children receive the highest quality of education amidst the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. We look forward to your prompt reply.

Regards,

Jackie Tegart
MLA, Fraser-Nicola
Official Opposition Critic for Education

cc:

Michael Lee, MLA, Vancouver-Langara