



DPAC IEWG Response to Teacher & Staff Joint Press Release RE: Staffing Levels at VSB Schools

Summary statement

The Vancouver DPAC Inclusive Education Working Group (IEWG) shares the concerns expressed in the unions' joint press release that resource teachers are regularly being pulled from their duties to fill in for absent teachers and about the dramatic reduction in student support worker ratios this year. Resource teachers and support workers are vital to the inclusion of children with disabilities in education. Without this essential support, students with disabilities are being left behind. We call on the VSB to immediately rectify these issues and develop a plan to address shortages over the long term.

Longer statement

The Vancouver DPAC Inclusive Education Working Group (IEWG) shares the concerns expressed in the recent joint press release from unions representing teachers and staff employed by the Vancouver School Board (VSB). We are concerned that, with increasing regularity, resource teachers are being pulled from their duties to fill in for absent teachers. Added to this, there has been a dramatic reduction in student support worker (SSA) ratios this year. Resource teachers and support workers are vital to the inclusion of children with disabilities in education. Parents have witnessed the negative effects of these educational gaps on our children, and we call on the VSB to immediately rectify these issues and develop a plan to address teacher and staffing shortages over the long term.

The DPAC IEWG is a group of parents of children with disabilities who have come together to advocate for our children, many of whom are being left behind by the VSB. We have been contacted by several parents this year observing a dramatic drop in the number of SSAs who, in previous years, supported their children's learning. SSAs support students in a variety of ways under the guidance of teachers and administrators. This extra support may mean the difference in a child being able to stay in school or not, or in being able to learn and complete assignments or not.

Parents have informed us of numerous cases this year where student support, which was previously available, has been stripped. For example, last year at Templeton Secondary, there were 7 SSAs assigned to the school, who were deployed to support a number of different students in a variety of classes. This year, the number of SSAs was

reduced to 2, despite the fact that the needs of students remained the same. The result is that students with disabilities go without support, and many struggle to access learning during their classes.

Additionally, parents have witnessed reductions in support from resource teachers who struggle under excessive caseloads and who are repeatedly pulled from their duties to fill in for classroom teachers who are sick. This has meant significant delays in the Individual Educational Plan (IEP) process for students with disabilities. An IEP documents adaptations to a child's learning program, which is intended to allow for equitable educational access for the student. Many students have not yet received an update to their IEP even this late in the school year. Even more concerning, some students with disabilities have never received an IEP at all.

Parents have met with VSB administrators and trustees to report on the situation, explaining that their children are being underserved by their schools. We are being told that there has been a change in the way that the VSB is allocating their staff and that the allocation of SSAs has been shifted only to medical, personal care, and safety needs of students, rather than support with learning. Administrators have indicated that classroom teachers and resource teachers should be providing all the needed support for learning.

We do not accept this decision or reasoning. First of all, as we have outlined, resource teachers have heavy caseloads and are often pulled from their duties to fill in for absent classroom teachers, meaning that they are often not available for learning support. Secondly, the drop in numbers/ratios of SSAs from last year to this year was dramatic, suggesting a change in policy at the district level. Parents were never informed about this change. We have also been told by trustees that this policy was not discussed at the board level.

Another concern we have is the move to silence parents' voices at public delegation meetings. A group of elementary school parents applied to present at a board meeting about this issue. Staff intervened and told the parents that their concerns were too school specific and that they were not allowed to publicly present. This is a troubling trend. Staff were aware of complaints from parents at a variety of schools about this issue; why did they then elect to prevent parents from bringing this issue to the board?

In 2024, our school district should be moving towards a model of increased inclusion of students with disabilities in our public schools. This recent decrease in SSAs and the reduction of resource teaching hours is a clear move in the opposite direction of equitable educational access for this vulnerable group of learners. As the Moore case established, and as a recent Human Rights Tribunal case clearly demonstrates (see below), it is the duty of the school district to provide the accommodations needed for all students to have full access to an education. We believe that the VSB needs to urgently take steps to ensure this is the case at Vancouver public schools.

We call on the VSB to address these teacher and staff shortages immediately. We are halfway through the school year, and students with disabilities are being left behind. These children cannot wait any longer to have their educational needs met.

For more information:

1. [Joint letter/press release from VSB teacher and staff unions](#)
2. [Moore Case: Moore v. British Columbia](#)
3. [Human Rights Tribunal case: Student \(by Parent\) v. School District](#), 2023 BCHRT 237 (CanLII)
4. [BC Ministry of Education Special Education Policy Manual \(2016\)](#) with definition and expectations of IEPs