

NVPAC Advocacy In Action - School Funding Issues Primer

The North Vancouver Parent Advisory Council (NVPAC) is asking all parents in North Vancouver to contact their MLAs by phone, by mail and by email. Please refer to the heading below: "Who Should I Contact?" for further information.

You, as parents and the public, represent first hand the voting community. It is up to you to inform the government as to how their cuts to school and PAC funding are impacting your schools and your children. We ask you to insist on funding for education: it is not a luxury and it cannot sustain continual erosion. NVPAC is sending letters to our government, but as an organization, we do not vote. You do. You are who the government needs to hear from, so please, send a letter. Send a bunch of letters. Overwhelm the 2010 budget consultation survey with responses ([BC 2010 Budget Consultation Survey](#)). Cuts to education need to be reversed to maintain the quality of education in BC.

Want to know more about the situation? Why we are asking you to do this? What to do? Please read on. We've tried to capture what you need to do and why as well as we can here. But if you want to know more, feel free to ask us or even better come to an NVPAC or School Board public meeting. For more information contact info@northvanpac.org

And please let us know when you send a letter to the minister. Send an email to info@northvanpac.org, knowing how many parents are advocating helps us advocate on behalf of all parents.

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What is the Current Situation?

This fall the government is asking if they should preserve core funding to health and education, [BC 2010 Budget Consultation Survey](#). The most important aspect of education funding is the preservation of quality. It is imperative that this is both benchmarked and acknowledged. The static funding of education does not necessarily protect quality.

The public education system is currently under threat in North Vancouver and throughout BC because of ongoing cuts to education funding. The Premier, the Finance Minister, the Education Minister and the Minister for Housing and Social Development need to be told by parents and all that are interested in the success of our public school system that cuts are unacceptable. The school system requires stable, consistent funding that is aligned with and respects the school year and meets the costs of inflation, salaries and the ever-increasing mandate of the school system. The unfortunate reality is that years of static funding mean that while the government may claim to be preserving "core funding" they have in fact been under-funding schools relative to the costs of inflation, salary increases, and increased demands on the district that increase the mandate for public schools.

This fall our students have returned to face another round of surprise government budget cuts to both school maintenance and PAC funds. The Provincial Government and the Minister of Education appear to be ill-informed about how these funds are used in schools today. In North Vancouver the cuts represent \$3.1 million in Annual Facilities Grant funding for school maintenance (about \$200 per student) and \$10 per student for PAC funding. While a cut to maintenance project budgets and PAC funds may appear on the surface not to hit classrooms and students directly, bear in mind that these cuts are on top of the \$3 million cut during the budget process coming into this year. These provincial funding cuts have direct implications on students throughout the province and North Vancouver is no exception.

While a cut to maintenance project budgets and PAC funds may appear on the surface not to hit classrooms and students directly, thus "preserving core funding" as the government likes to say, this is not the case. Today our schools are running very lean with very little contingency. The maintenance project funds come from the same operating budget as all the other costs, including education. Cuts to the Annual Facilities Grants are a cut to the overall school budget and as a result school programs and staffing suffer.

Similarly PAC funds are the one funding item that parents know go to their children, because they are the ones deciding how to spend the money. But the reality is that while parents would prefer to spend these funds on enrichment activities most of these funds go to replace items that schools no longer have in their own budgets for basic education. This would include library books, computer equipment, sports equipment and general school and curriculum supplies. These are things that should be part of the school budget but are not. As a result, the PAC funds have become a part of the core funding for schools, so once again, the cuts to PAC funding directly impact education.

Why advocate?

Parent groups at all levels from individual PACs to North Van PAC and BCCPAC are asking parents to personally reach out to their MLAs to advocate for education funding in BC. Funding cuts are hurting our students today, preventing school districts from long-term planning and are eroding public confidence in the school system.

To date, the government is not listening to parent groups or the district administrators. The government is even contemplating whether they should be preserving education funding. Parents and all voters need to tell the provincial government to support public education and focus on preserving the quality of education in our Province.

As we mentioned above, this fall the government is asking if they should preserve core funding to health and education, [BC 2010 Budget Consultation Survey](#) . We strongly believe that the mandate is to preserve the quality of education rather than statically fund education: the difference is that the former protects, the latter erodes as inflation increases real costs that go underfunded by a static budget. The government should preserve quality not just funding.

Parents need to advocate because schools are pushed to the limit and the government is pushing them there.

What should I do?

The North Vancouver Parent Advisory Council is asking all parents in North Vancouver to contact their MLAs by phone, by mail and by email. Tell the government how their cuts to school and PAC funding are impacting your schools and your children. Insist on funding for education. Send a letter. Send a bunch of letters. The more the letters represent the personal input of parents the better. The more direct the contact the better.

- Phone is great, Letters are good.
- Put together a petition, get people to sign it and include their name, phone number and postal code. Ask them to write as well.
- Email is easily dismissed but do it anyway.
- Lastly the 2010 budget consultation survey responses are anonymous. But, on the other hand, overwhelming them with responses couldn't hurt. ([BC 2010 Budget Survey](#))

The letter and what you say in them doesn't need to be fancy. It just needs to be honest and respectful. Be specific. Tell the government how the cuts and the behaviour of the ministry are impacting your schools and your children.

Be specific. Let them know what you want them to do.

- reinstate the annual facilities grants funding
- fund schools based on the real cost of education
- commit to long-term stable funding (no surprise mid-year cuts)
- support PACs

Finally, let us know. Please CC: or BCC: any letters you send to the ministers or others to info@northvanpac.org or just send us an email letting us know you've sent a letter. Doing

so helps us to know how many North Van parents have contacted the minister, which is useful to us as we try to advocate on behalf of all parents.

Who should I contact?

Minister of Education re: Annual Facilities Grant Cuts

E-mail: margaret.macdiarmid.mla@leg.bc.ca

Office:
Room 347
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Victoria, BC
V8V 1X4

Constituency:
104 – 1245 West Broadway
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Premier

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3615 West 4th Avenue
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Minister of Housing and Social Development re: PAC Gaming Grant Cuts

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Opposition Critics

Robin.Austin.MLA@leg.bc.ca (NDP critic for Education, Early Learning and Literacy)

Shane.Simpson.MLA@leg.bc.ca (NDP critic for Housing and Social Development)

Other MLA's

<http://www.leg.bc.ca/mla/3-1-1.htm>

What are the issues?

There are several immediate funding related issues that parents, students and anyone interested in the success of our school system in BC should be concerned about.

1. Cutting the entire Annual Facilities Grant eliminates much of the districts' ability for long-term maintenance of aging schools
2. Cutting the PAC gaming funds eliminates needed money spent by parents directly in the classroom
3. Announcing mid-year cuts to agreed budgets eliminates the School Districts' ability to plan even for the upcoming year, let alone long-term planning
4. Cutting funding without reviewing (and even increasing) the Ministry's demands for services from School Districts means schools must increasingly deliver more with less

The size of the Annual Facilities Grant cut from the North Vancouver School District is significant, from \$3.1 million to \$0 overnight. The province claims to be continuing to support education funding but at best the funding is static and the loss of the Annual Facilities grant has resulted in an effective 2.5% cut to the school budget (\$3.1 million out of about \$140 million in North Vancouver). Schools have been under-funded for many years and have been running with little contingency or much of anything in the way of frills for a long time. At this point, all cuts impact students. Much of the school maintenance budget comes from this grant. How long can North Van's aging schools go without maintenance?

The government's dismissive approach to the elimination of PAC funds suggests a lack of understanding of where these funds are spent. While these may not be the biggest cut to the school system the PAC funds are important to our schools. They replace core education materials and are the only public money under the discretion of parents for the needs of students. PAC grants are important because they meet the specific needs of individual schools. The minister of Housing has said publicly that he hasn't been hearing complaints from parents. We suspect this will come as parents become aware of the impact of these cuts. The minister has also said he believes parents would prefer to see the funds in the classroom, but the only money parents can guarantee they will see in the classroom are the PAC funds as these are the funds parents control. The most direct way to fund the classroom is through the PACs, because parents will see those funds go straight into the classroom.

The timing of the cuts, coming in the middle of a school's budget year irresponsibly eliminates any opportunity for long-term planning. As they did with the changes to secondary funding formulas and other changes in previous years, the ministry has imposed dramatic cuts after the school budgets have been approved and the budget year started. This is irresponsible management. Schools create their budgets the year before and have these budgets approved in June, and then work and plan based on these budgets. Cutting the funding in mid-year not only inhibits the districts' ability to do long term-planning, it also means higher costs. This is because districts cannot plan with confidence for multi-year activity. Changes like this appear from the Ministry on a regular basis. School Boards need stable government funding that respects the school year to plan for and achieve long-term success. Stable funding, then, would allow the school board to plan and implement those plans rather than constantly wondering when the next set of cuts are going to occur.

The cutting of funds without reviewing the burden placed by the Ministry of Education on School Districts is looking for savings in the wrong place. The demands from the Ministry on School Districts is excessive: numerous reports - what are they all for, mandated testing,

rules and regulations that eliminate flexibility to deliver education while limiting fundraising, forced competition between school districts and an increasing mandate for education services such as the newly imposed all-day Kindergarten in 2010. The Ministry has said they will review the school districts to look for cost savings. The districts have been going over their budgets for years looking for savings. Where the Ministry needs to look for savings is in the burdens they are placing on School Districts that raise costs and limit their ability to efficiently deliver education. The Ministry needs to look for where they can put efficiency and flexibility back into the school system by reducing their load on the districts rather than increasing the cost of oversight and adding new programs. For instance, is forcing school districts to implement an under-funded all-day kindergarten really the thing to do when budgets are already stretched thin? Are there reports that the Ministry could do without, or reduce in scope or frequency? What is the real value of the FSA tests? Are there limits to school activities that prevent the practical use of volunteers? What is the cost of the Ministry on our education system? The Premier had a task force to eliminate business red tape, perhaps the Premier should have one to eliminate red tape in the education system.

What has been done so far?

The government has already heard from BCCPAC (the parent body for PAC's in BC) about PAC funding changes.

[BCCPAC advocacy on funding cuts](#)

The North Van School District Presidents Council (comprising the District, Trustees, Teachers' Association, CUPE and Principals Association) have sent a joint letter to the minister asking for the return of the 2009/2010 Annual Facilities Grant, restoration of the grant in 2010/2011 and a commitment to longer-term, stable budgeting that reflects the true costs of schooling.

[North Van District Presidents Council letter to Minister of Education](#)

The North Van PAC executive have sent letters to our MLAs, the Premier, Minister of Finance, Minister of Education and Minister of Housing and Social Development (gaming grants) along with their respective opposition critics asking for restoration of the 2009/2010 Annual Facilities Grant, restoration of the PAC Gaming Funds, a commitment to long-term stable funding that respects the school year and a commitment to review the burden the Ministry of Education on Districts to cut red tape.

[NVPAC Letter to Minister of Education re: Annual Facilities Grants](#)

[NVPAC Letter to Minister of Housing re: PAC Gaming Grants](#)

Why do this now?

The public needs to provide input now for two reasons.

- First the long-term damage has yet to be done, impacts of cuts on maintenance budgets and PAC funds could still be averted by reversal of the cuts this year.
- Second, the next budget cycle is just beginning.

The government is seeking input into the 2010 budget and the School District has not yet begun the process of dealing with the cuts to their 2010/2011 budget.

This is a significant issue. The board has managed to defer some needed maintenance in 2009/2010 to offset the cuts to the Facilities Grants and is being forced to cut another \$1.1m in classroom funding to overcome the rest of the Annual Facilities Grants cuts. But this cannot go on indefinitely. If the Annual \$3.1m Facilities Grant is not restored in the 2010/2011 budget the school board will need to cut both that and the expected \$2m drop in per-student funding revenue caused by declining enrolment. Combined potential cuts in North Vancouver for next year are expected to be about \$4.7 million. Putting this in context, a typical elementary school costs about \$500,000 a year just to operate the building. A budget process faced with a \$4.7 million cut is going to be highly disruptive to parents across the entire school districts with difficult choices likely to have to be made about multiple school closures.

Immediate restoration of the Annual Facilities Grants and a commitment to long-term stable funding based on the actual costs of education would offset much of this and allow the school district to avoid putting parents and students through tough decisions or limited options.

Is advocacy likely to change the budget?

North Van PAC is asking parents to advocate individually as, short of the ballot box, it is the strongest voice parents have with government.

- The North Van Schools Presidents Council has sent letters in the past protesting the imposition of mid-year budget changes and inviting the minister to meet to discuss funding issues. The minister did not respond.
- Last year both the Presidents Council and North Van PAC sent multiple letters to the Ministry asking them to conduct a proper review of the contentious FSA (Foundation Skills Assessment) tests. The NVPAC letters received no response.
- The government has appeared to be highly dismissive of input from BCCPAC (The parent body for PACs in BC) on funding issues.

At the moment it does not appear that the government is interested in the input of parents through the various representative organizations such as PACs and BCCPAC, they also appear to have little interest in real dialogue with the school districts. However the Minister of Housing has made a point of saying he hasn't heard from parents so it is possible that the government will listen to the collective input from parents on an individual basis. The government is currently seeking input from individuals asking if they actually need to protect core funding for education and health, the government needs to hear the answer to this question as directly as possible. The stronger the voice of parents the better.

How are schools funded?

The school district is primarily funded by the provincial government with some small amounts coming from international students and school leases

- The majority of provincial funding is provided on a per-student basis. The district receives a fixed amount for each FTE (full-time equivalent) student in the district. From this per student funding the district pays for teachers, administration, facilities, operations and supplies.
- In the middle of the 2007 school year the government changed the funding formula for secondary students to a per course basis rather than per student. This resulted in a significant drop in funding as not all students take a full course load.
- Certain students, such as special needs students, receive additional funding from the Province to offset the increased cost of meeting their specific needs. The per student funding is also supplemented by top-ups to offset half of the impact of declining enrollment each year.
- The only direct funding for facilities or operations has been the annual facilities grant which covers some of the cost of school maintenance.
- School Districts are not allowed to run deficits and only in very limited situations can they charge fees for optional school programs.

What are PAC Gaming Grants?

School PAC's receive annual grants of \$20 per student (now cut to \$10 per student) from the revenues generated by gaming in BC. These are the only government funds under the direct control of parents. They are the only government funds parents can directly see go into their children's classrooms. In the past these funds have been spent in the classroom for student enrichment, on larger school equipment like playgrounds or on parent education. In recent years, however, cuts to school funding have meant many PACs spend their funds on basic school supplies such as books, basketballs and computer equipment.

What else impacts the budget?

After the Annual Facilities Grant cut, the three biggest budget issues facing the District in 2010/2011 are all-day Kindergarten, declining enrolment and aging facilities.

- The province has decided to introduce all-day Kindergarten in BC starting in fall 2010 and has committed the funds they think are needed for about 50% of BC kindergarten students in the program. Unfortunately the district is not expecting to know how these funds will be distributed until February, and yet North Van School District will need to sort out how they can implement, staff and house all-day kindergarten in North Vancouver well before the budget is known.
- Declining enrolment resulting mostly from shifting (aging) demographics in North Vancouver is expected to cut about \$1.6m from the school board budget next year. This is the result of the senior year graduates students not being replaced by as many new elementary students. This issue combined with an uneven distribution of students throughout North Van is resulting in some schools operating well below capacity.
- Small, aging schools are also an issue in North Van, increasing their cost to operate as the buildings are inefficient and require significant ongoing maintenance.

What is happening now?

Right now the school district is working to find cuts necessary to offset the elimination of the \$3.1m Annual Facilities Grant. Shortly thereafter the District is going to start the budget cycle to decide how to deal with the longer-term impact of this cut combined with declining enrolment in the 2010/2011 school year. This process is being started earlier than usual because of the unprecedented level of budget cuts the district must resolve. All the stakeholders in the school community, including parents, will be asked to work together on this.

How are schools impacted?

The current \$3.1m Annual Facilities cuts have resulted in the deferment of \$2m in school maintenance projects across the district, and a further \$1.1 in cuts to school programs and services such as Special Education Assistants and other actions, some of which have not yet been identified. On top of this the District no longer has any contingency funds in the event schools need emergency repairs this year.

From the document presented at the Sept Finance & Facilities Meeting ([Link to FF Document](#))

Immediate actions have been taken to find savings within the operating budget that could fund these essential facilities costs (eg. hiring freeze, reduction or elimination of discretionary spending, no release time for committee meetings). The following planned AFG projects have been deferred until AFG is restored or another source of funding has been identified:

- Windsor Secondary Library Upgrade
- Gym floor renewal – Brooksbank
- Blinds renewal – Handsworth, Brooksbank
- Functional upgrades (offices/washrooms) – various schools
- School District ITBandwidth upgrade (to improve data transmission speed) – various schools
- Science Lab Fume Hood Certification – various schools
- Furnace replacement – Plymouth
- Exterior lighting upgrade – Capilano
- Public Address system upgrade – Brooksbank
- Lighting upgrade – Lynn Valley
- Computer room – Upper Lynn
- Handsworth Project Identification Report

Please note that there is no contingency for emergent repairs and no funds for Summer 2010 projects

What is happening next year?

Who knows!

The School District is not currently anticipating the return of the Annual Facilities Grant while enrolment decline will cut a further \$2 million for per-student funding. They currently anticipate having to cut a further \$4.7 million from their 2010/2011 budget. This will be exceedingly difficult, even with the facilities grant the loss of funds due to enrolment decline will likely entail school closures. Not getting the \$3.1 million facilities grant funds back in 2010/2011 can only make it harder. Having to implement All-Day Kindergarten in 2010/2011 will make the decisions even more complicated and challenging.

I'd like to know more?

Want to know more about the situation? Why we are asking you to do this? What to do? Please read on. We've tried to capture what you need to do and why as well as we can here. But if you want to know more, feel free to ask us or even better come to an NVPAC or School Board public meeting. For more information contact info@northvanpac.org