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Joint Press Release

Open letter to: VSB Trustees, Superintendent / CEO, Senior Management

We are writing the elected and staff leadership of the Vancouver School Board to voice some serious and persistent issues with the current structure and choices of the VSB, specifically in relation to the service being provided to students.

The return to school has not been easy this year. An alarming number of teachers have reported feeling the impacts of “failures to fill,” or in other words, cases where an absent teacher is not replaced. Adding to these severe staffing issues, an alarming increase in reported incidents of violence in the classroom have also deeply affected personnel this year.

Since the beginning of the school year, the Vancouver School Board’s secondary teachers have reported just over 400 times (blocks) that were not filled. From October to December, elementary school teachers have reported almost 1,300 incidents of absences not being filled, including 972 where resource teachers were pulled from their work supporting our most vulnerable learners to instead cover classroom absences. As a result, in many Vancouver schools, resource teachers have shared their frustration with not even having yet met all their assigned students, this far into the school year.

The teachers submitted the reports on a voluntary basis to their local union via a questionnaire. The results, therefore, are not complete and under-represent the true scale of the problem. The VSB has publicly reported zero failures to fill, and announced the problem dealt with during the April 5th 2023 meeting of the VSB Education Plan Committee. This does not include cases where internal staff, like resource teachers, were pulled from their core duties and not replaced themselves, and it obscures the true impact of staffing shortages on students and staff. Therefore, we believe the data we have collected shows the figures reported publicly by the VSB are not an accurate reflection of the reality in schools.

Our concerns stem from the chronic challenges downloaded on to student-facing and school-based employees resulting from district organizational, staffing, and funding decisions. Our lived experience is of a drastic and significant decrease in support for students, especially our vulnerable students.

It is our view that a significant reduction in School and Student Support Workers, the ongoing and systemic failures to fill, and the resulting lack of consistent, appropriate support for all students has had and continues to have a significant impact on student success, social-emotional wellness, and all learning. Further, it is our vulnerable learners and students who are the most deeply impacted.

As stakeholders and front-line education workers, we believe deeply in inclusion for all students, in encouraging, supporting, and facilitating student success, and in safe and caring places for learning. We are also deeply committed to the relationships in schools with parents, administration, and the upholding of our collective agreements.

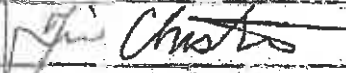
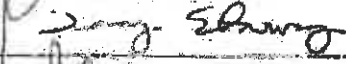



The VSB Equity Statement and Educational Plan are consistent with meaningful inclusion where student success is prioritized, and where unique learning styles and student identity, needs, strengths, and positionality are honoured. It is our opinion that this is categorically impossible in schools where staffing shortages undermine the good work done by our members, and the conditions promised by your policies. In particular, the austerity staffing we are experiencing is incompatible with the goals surrounding Reconciliation.

We are asking in one voice for the Vancouver School Board to ensure that the voices of student-serving staff are part of important processes, and that transparency around staffing decisions and use of funding be improved and restored, all in the interest of promoting student learning and safety at school.

Each of us have made significant efforts to use the procedural tools at our disposal – committee meetings, our contractual advisory processes, and the grievance process, and we continue to struggle with lack of transparency, inadequate support, increasing violence, and ongoing loss of service to students.

We ask that you join us in acknowledging that our current direction is inconsistent with the principles contained in our Equity Statement and Education Plan documents.

We would like to reaffirm our commitment in working together to address the matters we bring to your attention by way of this letter.

Tim Chester, President, Int'l Union of Operating Engineers, Local 963	
Terry Stanway, President, Vancouver Secondary Teachers' Association	
Jody Polukoshko, President, Vancouver Elementary and Adult Educators' Society	
Warren Williams, President, CUPE Local 15	
Brent Boyd, President, CUPE Local 407	

cc. VSB Trustees (via email)