

Teacher and Support Worker Morale Connected to Workload and Supports, VSB Must Do Better
Vancouver, BC - May 13, 2024

Qualitative Data Emergent Themes Summary:

Members were asked what they would say if they were given the opportunity to speak to the Superintendent of the VSB regarding employee morale and several themes emerged.

Teachers and support workers work hard to create positive learning environments for all students. Supporting all of our students requires differentiation, modifications, and adaptations. Increasing class complexity without commensurate support has a significant impact on teacher workload.

First, teachers expressed loving working with students and their colleagues, but felt that too many supports have eroded over time and too many barriers prevent them from doing the job they know they can do:

“I really love being a teacher, however workloads and insufficient support of Student Support Workers (being cut back or not giving enough hours per student), waiting for designations to get support, and having to deal with very difficult behaviour has increased my stress to a point where I had to take leaves for stress related health issues.”

“My colleagues are fantastic and I love working with everyone and seeing all that they do. However, this is unsustainable. I never want to take a sick day because I don’t want my resource teacher to have to cover.”

“I love my job. I want to keep loving it, but I feel pulled in all sorts of directions with the needs in my classroom with a complete lack of resources and constantly changing expectations (reporting, self-assessments of core competencies, changing dates of report cards, FSA's, Satisfaction Surveys).”

Second, many teachers responded by inviting the Superintendent and Senior Management to their classrooms so they could see the true state of working and learning conditions in the district. Many felt that the distance between senior management and the everyday worker has become too large, leading to those making decisions not understanding their impact on everyday life for workers and students:

“Come to the schools and spend a week, or even just a day, and shadow a teacher, resource teacher, prep teacher etc. Find out what REALLY goes on in a

school, and the pace we have to keep in order to maintain a high standard of education and support for all our students, despite the increased workload and declining supports. Find out how challenging it is to support 29-30 students with various needs and trying to make sure all students are feeling heard. My issue is that a lot of trustees and management don't necessarily have an education background, and don't know what it's like to be a teacher, yet they get to make decisions that impact us."

"I would like to see each senior staff spend a day a month in an actual classroom. A whole day. When senior staff have been at my school they have stayed in the school office or walked in and out of a classroom for a minute. I would like them to attend Staff Committee and listen to teachers."

"I want them to spend a day in a classroom. I want them to talk to us and truly understand the SIGNIFICANT impact that their choices are having."

Third, many teachers who have worked for decades in the district noted how much supports for students have eroded over the years, and how management culture has shifted:

"I have worked with the VSB as both a support worker and now as a teacher... I always use the analogy that I run a restaurant where I am the server, waiter, cook, cashier, and busboy."

"I have worked for the VSB in Special Education for most of my adult working life. I have watched services, positions, programs and supports being cut year after year and that having significant negative outcomes for students. Over the past 6-7 years I have never experienced such low morale with staff, and I have worked at a few different schools with different demographics. People feel completely unsupported by the VSB, unheard, and completely disconnected from the district."

"I used to fight for "my" district. I've participated in conferences, praised its values on social media, and recruited friends from out of province. Now I feel I'm just an employee so I collect my check."

I look back 10, 5 or even just a couple years ago. Everything has been slashed while the board hires more associate this and deputy assistant that each month."

Lastly, teachers expressed frustration at the closure of many district programs this year:

“I am upset that we are told programs will close without any real consultation and then we get gaslit about demand being low for said programs when we have sent in student applications which are then denied... I think the board is way out of touch about our workload and concerns and I think they don't really care.”

“The closing down of special programs is horrible. The district is making it so incredibly difficult for students to get into these programs, and are claiming that there is low enrollment.”

Teachers believe in inclusion, but true inclusion requires support, funding, staff and reliable and consistent programming. “Inclusion” has to be supported by differentiated supports and programs and cannot be a cost-savings measure. Our students are the most important part of the work. Educators and support staff are ready and willing to do the job. We need the district to do theirs.