



Attachment 2
*Nov 7, 2022 Letter from School Board
to the City*

BOARD OF EDUCATION

OPEN LETTER

November 7, 2022

Mayor Johnstone and City Councillors
City of New Westminister
511 Royal Avenue
New Westminister, BC V3L 1H9

Sent by email: clerks@newwestcity.ca

Dear Mayor Johnstone and Councillors,

RE: School capacity crisis and impacts on childcare

New Westminister Schools has reached a state of crisis with regards to school capacity across the District. A situation that can only be remedied through building new schools.

For years, the District has put forward requests and advocated for additional school funding for an elementary school and middle school in the Fraser River Zone. It was only recently, March 2022, that the Ministry of Education and Childcare (MECC) approved us to move forward to the first of two business cases for a new elementary school. The District anticipates that the business case stage of approvals to completion of construction will take approximately five (5) years. Until then, the District has a significant challenge of managing enrolment for our growing student population.

The District and City have historically worked together to co-locate schools adjacent to city park space to provide outdoor play and learning space for students. We have a land deficit of 31 acres in comparison to MECC area standards. It is because of this deficit of space that it makes it so challenging for the District to accommodate growth on both a temporary (via portables) or permanent basis.

In June 2022, staff were tasked with the creation of a short-term capacity review strategy to manage the growth within the confines of our existing spaces. At the June open board meeting, the Board of Education passed the following principles to guide staff this work:

- Guiding Principle #1 – Prioritize the utilization of space within our schools to support K-12 in- regular enrolment while also ensuring sufficient play and outdoor learning space.
- Guiding Principle #2 – Programs of choice, community partnerships (including infant/toddler childcare), and non-instructional uses of space will be operated, and when necessary, relocated to school facilities where space permits.

While the short-term capacity review looks to create capacity in the short-term, the decisions being made will be permanent and have long-lasting impacts. As previously shared with City Staff and Council, the first of these decisions is about the re-location of childcare (infant/toddler programming) spaces at Qayqayt Elementary (Qayqayt) and Fraser River Middle School (FRMS) to accommodate rapid rates of growth to in-catchment regular enrolment at these schools.

District staff have put forward applications for the New Spaces Fund offered by the MECC for the relocation of both the Qayqayt and FRMS childcare centres to the respective school grounds of F.W. Howay Elementary and Lord Tweedsmuir Elementary. The District has considered other district-owned sites closer to the core of town, however, no school sites are capable of accommodating the facility and required outdoor play space to host an infant/toddler program. Both applications put forward were approved by MECC on October 21, 2022 requiring a 15-year commitment per site and funding attached of \$2.8M (\$1.4 million per site). These approvals mitigate the loss of childcare space operating out of our schools. The acceptance of the application represents a recovery of spaces which the Ministry has allowed via the new creation of an exceptions policy offered to districts that have land space pressures in a desire to not lose childcare space. This change in policy was motivated by the unique situation of New Westminster Schools. The funding received is specifically for the application that was put forward by the District using district-owned property and cannot be transferred to another entity. Should a viable alternate space become available, the District would be pleased to work as a conduit between that entity and the MECC to redirect funding earmarked for the District project.

The re-location of much needed child care spaces outside of the downtown area is far from ideal. We have heard loud and clear from most notably, families from the Qayqayt infant/toddler program, that a relocation represents a significant hardship to families. We are writing to you now, as our community partner, but also as an entity tied to, responsible for, and intimately aware of the childcare challenges New West families face, to work alongside the District and Purpose Society, in helping them with their search for an alternate location downtown for childcare spaces for infant/toddler programming.

Timing is of utmost importance. A narrow window exists to identify a viable solution for a downtown location as child care spaces need to be transformed into classrooms for the September 2024 school year. With a relocation of childcare, we are able to create 6 classroom spaces which represents approximately 150 seats (which is in addition to 2 classrooms, or 50 seats, created by relocating community programming out of Qayqayt elementary for the 23-24 school year). District staff are working on a plan which only relocates childcare after the new facility is complete, licensed, and ready to accept children. Only after this time would we commence work to convert these previous childcare spaces to classrooms. Based on preliminary work on using our internal site, the documentation/permit, site prep and construction will take the better part of one year thus making a relocation of childcare possible for Spring 2024, leaving some months for the renovation of classroom spaces for September 2024.



We have submitted a request to the City Clerk for dates for a joint city and district meeting as soon as possible to continue these discussions.

Sincerely,

SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 40 (NEW WESTMINSTER)



Gurveen Dhaliwal
Chair, Board of Education

Cc: Trustees, Board of Education
Karim Hachlaf, Superintendent of Schools/CEO
Bettina Ketcham, Secretary-Treasurer/CFO
Dave Crowe, Director of Capital Projects
Matt Brito, Director of Facilities
Lisa Spitale, Chief Administrative Officer, City of New Westminster
John Stark, Senior Social Planner, City of New Westminster
Meredith Seeton, Policy Planner (and School District Liaison), City of New Westminster
Lynda Fletcher-Gordon, Executive Director, Purpose Society

