Vancouver School Board

Board Meeting Report by Mia Liu

Nov 28th, 2022

In this report, I will be providing an update about the CANley cup fundraiser, spotlighting student perspectives on school counsellors and mental health, and outlining the implications of VDSC’s role in items on today’s Board agenda.

To begin, VDSC launched CANley Cup on November 21st. Many schools have started advertising this initiative, and donation drives will be open until Dec 9th.

Second, as a continuation of my request for information on counselling resources at the last Student Learning and Wellbeing committee meeting, VDSC had a chance to connect with Ms. Gill, District Principal of Safe and Caring Schools, on November 15th.

VDSC engaged in a Q&A session with Ms. Gill, followed by a group discussion, where each school’s representatives were asked to provide one “rose” (a positive observation) and a “thorn” (an area of concern) regarding their counselling departments. Based on the responses collected, we identified three common issues prevalent across the district:

1. Of the 17 schools present at the meeting, 11 expressed that counsellors are frequently occupied and hard to reach. Students are generally frustrated with wait times for counsellor-access and email responses, as counselors are often attending meetings outside of their offices.
2. Several schools indicated that there are not enough counsellors to engage with students in an individualised and efficient manner; this is particularly pronounced in schools with low counsellor-to-student ratios, which generally have higher student populations, as well as special programs that share counselling resources with main-school students.
3. 5 out of 17 schools identified stigma around seeking counsellors for mental health support, as counsellors are sometimes perceived as unhelpful. Students may benefit from better understanding of counsellors’ roles in helping them cope with mental health issues and being made aware of other related resources around the district, such as CYMH and Coastal Health.

On the positive side, we also found three “roses” that students considered helpful and comforting:

1. Students were interested to learn that counsellors can be allocated differently to student populations, such as allocating multiple counselors to a particular grade level. Students also indicated interest in having different workers to tackle different issues, such as having non-enrolling staff to help students with mental health.
2. Many found it helpful for counsellors to be in a localized area, which makes them easier to approach and find.
3. Students acknowledged the difficulties counsellors experience in fulfilling each student’s personalized needs. Counsellors are generally very congenial and work very hard in supporting students across district.

Ms. Gill will follow up with VDSC at our next meeting to further discuss ways to address students’ concerns.

Finally, in recognition of the Board agenda, VDSC has not yet engaged in a collective discussion regarding the Board motion on the SLO program at our last meeting. I will attentively listen this evening and present all relevant information to VDSC. Moving forward, I plan to collect student perspectives on this issue through potential surveys, interviews, and forums.

I look forward to updating the Board on our discussions

Thank you.