



SEYMOUR HEIGHTS RESPONSE TEAM REPORT

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Prepared by request of NVSD44 School Board

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Response Team Comment

The Seymour Heights Response Coordinating Team would like to take this opportunity to express its understanding and appreciation for the dilemma and difficult task facing our School Board at this time.

It is our belief that the School Board has been adequately informed, through correspondence, conversations, and meetings as well as through the Response Reports of other schools considered for closure, on the common community impacts, common community concerns, common alternative proposals such as extending spring break and common revenue generating potentials such as All-Day Fee paying Kindergarten.

Our team has concluded that it is unnecessary to repeat in its report the concerns and proposals we have in common. While we consider these proposals to be of merit and worth pursuing, little value appeared to be placed on them by the board of trustees in the decision making process.

The Seymour Heights Response Coordinating Team has endeavored to condense their report to reflect concerns and recommendations specific to their school, and trusts that you will relate and consider with our Response Report, the valuable common concerns, proposals and recommendations provided and expressed in the Response Reports of all other schools considered for closure.

As you address the balancing of the budget and make your decisions, we would like to remind you ***not to forget to balance the human factor*** in to the figures and decisions before you, because without this factor, no matter how the numbers add up, it will remain forever unbalanced in the eyes of your community and the children you serve.

The tremendous and potentially devastating impact your decisions have on the future of our neighborhoods and lives is incalculable with the graphs and statistics by which we have been measured in the current process.

Respectfully,

Seymour Heights Response Team

"To build may have to be the slow and laborious task of years.
To destroy can be the thoughtless act of a single day."

- Sir Winston Churchill (1874 - 1965)

Response Team Report

Background

Seymour Heights Elementary School (see Appendix A) is one of five elementary schools in the family of schools for Windsor Secondary, operated by North Vancouver School District 44 and within the jurisdiction of the District of North Vancouver.

These five schools, Blueridge Elementary, Lynnmour Elementary, Maplewood Elementary, Plymouth Elementary and Seymour Heights Elementary, each serve the elementary students in their specific catchment area. Due to recent changes to bylaws, they are enabled to serve students outside their catchments as well.

As outlined in the NVSD Strategic Directions Framework (2003/2004), "the Ministry of Education, with specified duties and powers under the School Act, is responsible for overseeing the governance of the province's K-12 school system. The Ministry of Education, through a framework of legislation and policies, allocates funds for the education system, sets educational standards based on the outcomes students need to achieve, monitors student performance and reports results to the public."

"The School Act delegates responsibilities to School Boards to govern and oversee the management of school districts in accordance with specified powers. The North Vancouver School District is a high quality performance-oriented school system and, within the provincial framework, has developed unique intentions and a distinctive character, which are expressed through its mission statement, values, School Board goals, supporting policies, priorities and activities."

New School Funding Formula

In their pre-election campaign, the B.C. Liberal party published "A New Era for Education" (see Appendix B.) blaming the NDP's "one size fits all" approach to education for forcing schools to cut services and compromising student learning possibilities. They promised to protect education funding, to establish strong province-wide education standards, provide multi-year funding envelopes to improve planning, and give districts the financial flexibility to meet students' needs. They promised to devote more of each education dollar to improving the quality of education, and less to bureaucracy. Local School Boards were to be given more autonomy and control over the delivery of education services, subject to provincial curriculum and testing standards.

How this has translated, however, is that we presently have education funding on a per capita basis. As the enrollment decreases, so does the funding. Presently, 93% of education funding goes to teacher salaries, administration and maintenance costs. School Boards must present a balanced budget while dealing with the province imposing un-funded costs on school districts (e.g. salary increases, increase in benefit costs, inflation). The Liberal government maintains that it is unacceptable to continue to operate in a deficit situation, blaming the present day \$7.3 million per day interest on loans to previous governments financing their spending by incurring debt.

Current Status

Consequently, we now have a School Board that has the difficult task of desperately seeking revenue-generating measures and exploring further cuts to the system in order to deal with a \$4.66 million funding shortfall for next year and an estimated \$2.5 million shortfall for the 2005-2006 school year. The North Vancouver School Board, at a public Meeting of the Board of Trustees on Dec 9th 2003, accepted a proposal to consider seven of its elementary schools for permanent closure over the next two years to address funding shortfalls.

Closure bylaws for three of the four schools considered for closure June 30, 2004, Maplewood Elementary, Monterey Elementary and Westover Elementary have been passed at the March 9, 2004 public Meeting of the Board of Trustees. The fourth, Ridgeway Annex, was defeated. These closures are estimated to address 17% of the funding shortfall for the upcoming year. Two further schools, Lonsdale Elementary and Westview Elementary are to be considered for closure and consolidation in June 2005 and Seymour Heights Elementary school is being considered for closure in June 2006. (see Appendix C.)

In October 2003 the Board established its goals for 2003/2004 which reflect the consensus of trustees. Among these aspirations is the desire to foster positive relationships, trust and respect, and cooperative effort among students, parents, the community and employees. The intention is to improve communication between the Board and its community, to allocate fairly and transparently the funds the Board receives and raises, and to continue advocacy for full funding for the real costs of public education and to raise additional revenue for the enhancement and enrichment of educational programs.

As a step towards fostering cooperative effort between the Board and the community and addressing budget constraints, public meetings were held to inform the public of the challenges facing the school board and an invitation for the public to present their ideas and input. The Finance and Facilities Standing Committee then studied and pursued some of these initiatives, others continue to be evaluated and some were deemed to be of insignificant value. The measures were broken down into a ten tier system each of which was evaluated for impact and estimated revenue. (see Appendix T.)

At North Vancouver School District's Finance and Facilities standing committee meeting on February 17, 2004, a draft version of the Interim Report of Budget Working Groups was tabled. The Interim Report establishes the guidelines for reducing North Vancouver School District budgets by \$4.66 million in the 2004/05 Budget Year. The Ten budget tiers include Corporate Services, Ancillary Services, Program/Extension Services, Administrative Services, and School Services.

The School Board requested the Seymour Heights Parent Advisory Council to select a Response Coordinating Team (R.C.T.) to coordinate the responses from the local school community. Their objective was to submit a Response Report including a response to the criteria from policy 610: Closure of Schools (Permanent), applied for the identification of schools for potential closure, and a summary of response forms by Feb 20, 2004. (This date was later changed to March 18, 2004, see Appendix D.)

An input form, to be distributed to the local school community and summarized by the CRT, was provided by the school board. See Appendix L. for the summary and completed forms.

Local School Community Concerns

Please read the attached (see Appendix E.) document titled "The restructuring of the education sector, North Vancouver School District (NVSD) policy on school closures and the potential effects of closing Seymour Heights Elementary School on the community", written by Richard Gilbert. This document fully describes the background, concerns, and recommendations we wish to include as an integral part of this Report. To do it justice and avoid fragmenting the document into the sections of this Report, it has been included as an Appendix.

Process Concerns

A reasonable time to respond after the December 9th, 2003 announcement of the proposal for closure of Seymour Heights 9th, 2003 has not been given. All schools proposed for closure in the same announcement have expressed this same concern.

Adequate public consultation has not been facilitated. The current process may serve the board to reach their objectives, but fails the public it serves with the obvious lack of planning, addressing of concerns and time allotted to find the best solutions possible. It is reactive instead of proactive.

There is a distressing lack of addressing the public's serious concerns by the School Board. The public input and community concerns have been acknowledged in word and writing by the School Board, but no actual actions have been shown to be taken to address these concerns. As it is more difficult to repair damage done than to prevent it, the Board should consider addressing these concerns in a manner more acceptable to the public.

The process fails to measure and address psychological effects on the affected children. In our opinion, this should be an important factor in any process the School board undertakes that affects elementary school children. No plans or processes are mentioned anywhere in school board documentation or in the final reports accepted by the Board, even after public input of four schools to address the effects caused by this process and possible outcomes. The NVSD has shown an unacceptable lack of planning and provision of information on any available resources to address these concerns.

The effects and impact on the surrounding community in relation to the announced closure of Maplewood on June 30, 2004 have not yet been determined. Sufficient time is needed to monitor and address these, without further closure of an additional elementary school in the same Family of Schools. Seymour Heights is also needed to receive Maplewood Elementary students displaced by the closure. Seymour Heights is the closest/most convenient school for Maplewood students. Closing two schools in such close proximity is too much for a community to adjust to.

Proper planning to address long term cost savings by amalgamating local schools with similar declines in enrollment and potential for replacement or major renovations is not yet fully realized, and should include the needs of pending developments in close proximity to these schools.

Accommodating displaced students from any closed schools should be planned in advance with emphasis on keeping the student body together instead of fragmenting it over several schools.

The District of North Vancouver involvement and activity has not been fully utilized or recognized by the Board in this process. See Appendix F., containing documentation from the District of North Vancouver, and reports to council from Charlene Grant, Community Planner.

Criteria Concerns

In relation to Seymour Heights Elementary, the criteria outlined in Policy 610 have not been met.

The Matrix planning data referred to by the School Board is not believable, as demographics are historically shown as cyclical, not straight lined as reflected by Matrix. There are many sources of uncertainty that Matrix could not factor into their calculations, with another school closed within our family, pending developments, aging neighboring schools needing replacement in near future, growth potential from attracting a share from private schools through full day Kindergarten or academic standings.

Since being named as a school proposed for closure, enrollment in Seymour Heights has been lost due to this naming, and the resulting uncertainty and speculation of a closure. Effects are noticed within both the existing enrollment and future enrollment potential. Transfer requests of current students are being made to surrounding schools, Kindergarten enrollment is down, and potential enrollment of students from the Maplewood as well as Seymour Heights catchments are lost. Nobody wants to go through a closure once, let alone twice. This declining enrollment reflects an understandable unwillingness to transfer to or remain in a closing school. In relation to the criteria, present Seymour Heights Elementary School enrollment numbers cannot be considered accurate since the naming of the school in the closure proposal. The CT04 transfer data is seriously flawed due to this factor. (see Appendix M.)

The Facility Audit Summary (see Appendix G.) score used for the criteria does not reflect the schools present condition, and should be re-evaluated in light of the current situation and opportunities available to the Board. ***Seismic upgrades and other renovations have been done since the audit, and there are currently no serious faults reported or renovation requests listed for Seymour Heights. Upgrades since the facility audit are a new roof on the Gym in 2003 (cost \$75000), Non-Structural Seismic Upgrades (cost \$15000) Structural Seismic Upgrades (cost \$45000), Flooring Upgrades (cost \$75000) as well as Energy saving/conservation upgrades to lighting, heating, and water (cost \$100000).*** Surrounding shrubs and trees blocking views to school were trimmed, significantly decreasing any vandalism problems noted in the Audit.

Seymour Heights is the least expensive to operate of the five schools in the area. On a per student basis we are virtually tied with Blueridge Elementary. Please refer to Appendix O., an extract from the PWC Report: Appendix E., referring to the school rankings of our Family of Schools. According to the Price Waterhouse Cooper Financial Tables used by the Board, Seymour Heights has the lowest 10 Year Net Present Value (NPV). From worst to best, the rankings on financial performance with the percentage of the total costs are as follows:

Maplewood Elementary	\$2,815,604	30%
Lynnmore Elementary	\$2,009,512	21%
Plymouth Elementary	\$1,854,247	20%
Blueridge Elementary	\$1,413,351	15%
Seymour Heights Elementary	<u>\$1,384,955</u>	15%
TOTAL	\$9,477,669	100%

Future development

Considering the pending developments surrounding our school, it would be unwise to consider the closure of two schools within the catchment areas planning developments. (see Appendix H./I./J.)

Maplewood

The Maplewood Local Plan, which was adopted by the North Vancouver Council in October 2002, calls for an increase in residents from 2492 (in 2000) to 3526 ten years later. This is a 41 percent increase. Since the Windridge redevelopment of 57 townhouses, presently at Public Hearings, is within the boundaries of the Maplewood Local Plan, these units are included in the increase stated above.

Seymour

The Seymour Local Plan has not yet been adopted by Council. It went through a number of closed public hearings and when Council finally debated the Plan, some Councilors requested input from stakeholders. If the plan as presented were to be approved we would be looking at the following major areas for (re)development:

- **Northlands - 300 units**
- **Mount Seymour Parkway (south) - 25 units.**
- **Mount Seymour Parkway (north) - 35-105 units**
- **Roche Point East - 4 units**
- **Riverside Terrace - 36 units**

Tsleil Waututh

Outside the boundaries of the Plan there is **anticipation that the Tsleil Waututh may develop about 400 units on their lands** (in the area near Windsong). As a rough rule of thumb one could count on 2.5-3 residents per units, which should give an idea of what residential growth we can expect in Seymour over the next 15-20 years.

Analysis & Discussion

It has been suggested that a school could be part of the developments in Northlands, but at this point there are no plans available for Northlands. Whether there will be a school and when it might open is unknown and it is unlikely that if build it will be ready for use when the development is being completed. Seymour Heights should be considered as a receiving school for these developments. (see Appendix R.)

With Maplewood closing, it would be unsuitable to also close the next nearest school available to those displaced students. In fact, if one or more schools on the perimeter of the region is closed it makes obvious sense to keep the most central and most conveniently located alternative school open to receive those students. (see Appendix Q.)

Blueridge Elementary is only able to absorb 75 students and is already expected to take 27 from Maplewood (CT04s). Seymour Heights currently has 245 students plus another 17 Maplewood students expected in September for a total of 262. This leaves only 48 spaces open for Seymour Heights if students transferred this year.

The NVSD would be forcing 214 (262 - 48) students (82%) to go to even more distant schools which is unacceptable. Plymouth, the next nearest school, cannot accommodate even half of these excess students. These children would face a long walk and need to cross the Parkway, with its fast heavy traffic. Alternately, these children would need to be driven to schools across or East or West along the Parkway. Traffic and safety concerns have not been sufficiently researched and require further review. (see Appendix S.)

We understand that the closure proposal is for 2006, and the student population at Seymour Heights may be different, but we believe it will not be significantly different as the proposed developments in or near our catchment area, especially Northlands, will in all probability generate more school age children. We believe NVSD will still be forcing students to move to schools which cannot accommodate all of them.

Seymour Heights ranked higher in many categories over other schools in the family of schools, and in following the current logic used by the Board, these should be considered before Seymour Heights for closure due to their ranking and lower enrollment.

The criteria used by the Board lacks the incorporating of any academic achievements by the schools considered for closure. Seymour Heights school programs and teaching staff have been very successful in teaching their students over the years, rating higher than other schools in the Windsor family. This is supported by the Grade 4 and 7 FSA results that have been published over the last 4 years. (see Appendix K.)

As can be seen, Grade 4 results within our family of schools, on average:

- Rank number 1 in Reading comprehension
- Rank number 1 in Writing
- Rank number 1 in Numeracy

Similarly, Grade 7 results within our family of schools, on average:

- Rank number 2 in Reading comprehension
- Rank number 2 in Writing
- Rank number 2 in Numeracy

As children, we were all taught that hard work at school would result in higher grades, better opportunities for college and ultimately lead to more choice of good jobs and higher rewards. The learning habits and values we teach to our children at the elementary level provide the platform on which they move forward through high school, college and ultimately in life. As parents we want to continue this paradigm; hard work pays dividends. We don't want to send them a message that all the hard work and achievements they have made are for naught.

The parents of the Seymour Heights students cannot tolerate the Board's failure to recognize the school's high academic performance. The hard work required by teachers and students to achieve these results is sadly ignored. The children's future academic achievements and potential are substantially lessened by the requirement of the Board to transfer to a nearby school able to accommodate them, a school whose academic achievements are historically less and not acceptable to the Seymour Heights parents.

Closing Seymour Heights will dictate/age the demographics of the community.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that the Board defer the decision to close Seymour Heights and research options and alternatives. The decision on the fate of our school is not related to the balancing of the 2004/2005 budget, therefore it could be deferred to allow for options to be explored in depth.
2. It is recommended that the Board prepare strategic plans to address long term needs of schools in the Windsor Family of Schools. A proposed closure date two years from now indicates an available timeline to properly research, plan and implement options.
3. It is recommended that the timeline between the announcing of a school proposed for closure and the actual date of closure contain a full school year to allow for research, planning and implementation of plans. The Board could consider giving an option to close the same year by obtaining a majority vote from school population input of the preferred timeline for closure. The emphasis is on working together to obtain the best answers to the issues in regards to short and long timelines. Some costs and inconvenience may be incurred with longer timelines, but could possibly be offset by the effects of proper planning
4. It is recommended that the Board consider further Input meetings with community and families of schools held to continue dialogue and promote constructive and cooperative relations between Board and public.
5. It is recommended that the Board conduct a new survey of Maplewood Parents with CT04 Forms asking for transfer preference had Seymour Heights not been named as proposed for closure. This would allow the Board to understand more clearly how many transfer enrollments have been lost for Seymour Heights due to its naming, and the interest of surrounding community in attending our school due to its central location, academic performance etc.
6. It is recommended that the Board considers doing a cost comparison to compare and decide which of the surrounding schools would be most cost effective to be utilized for amalgamating, renovation, retention or rebuild, as surrounding schools are facing similar needs for renovations or replacement within ** years of each other..
7. It is recommended that the Board considers and utilizes, in the interest of the best education for our children, the academic ratings in choosing the future direction taken for our schools. Seymour Heights has one of the highest FSA results in the District.
8. It is recommended that the Board place priority on keeping the student body of the school intact in the process of planning the rebuilding, renovating, transferring or amalgamating, to ensure that the core family aspect of the school is not lost, a major concern of our community.
9. It is recommended that the Board place priority on ensuring the Seymour Heights Elementary School community has a school that is a safe and reasonable distance for primaries to walk to.
10. It is recommended that the Board, from the point of view of the best interest of all 18,000 students, adopt the common suggestions from the Response Reports (all day fee paying kindergarten, before and after school daycare on site outsourced, two week Spring break, etc) as district wide programs.
11. It is recommended that the Board pursue awareness of the public and stress the importance of ensuring that parents and the community at large understand the challenges faced by the

Board in balancing its expenditures to available revenue and the effect this will have on the level of programs and supports provided to students. In the 2003/2004 opportunity budget paper, the NVSD states "the need for the Board to protest continuing cuts - the concern with the province imposing un-funded costs on school districts (e.g. salary increases, increase in benefit costs, inflation) - the concern that while the Board is not responsible for the funding it receives from the province, it must deal with the effects of un-funded costs and take responsibility for the budget decisions it makes - (and of particular interest) the need to raise and **consider, once again, the issue of local taxation and the matter of local support.** We suggest that the Board send out a notice to all parents/guardians district-wide, asking them to stand up and make themselves heard on this issue. People in schools not affected by closure often have no more than a passing interest and will certainly not be motivated to act unless they see the writing on the wall as it will invariably come, affecting them.

12. It is recommended that the Board increase its request of the government for more funding.
13. It is recommended that the Board give consideration to future growth in the communities surrounding the school. With current housing developments pending (that would generate an increase in enrollment) both within the catchment area and in close proximity to Seymour Heights, the school should be kept open, maintaining the existing structure, and listed in the ten year capital plan. This would allow the Board the option of replacement/major renovations to accommodate the increased area enrollment needs. Future consolidation of neighboring schools should be considered instead of closure, and Seymour Heights central location could facilitate the amalgamation of area schools if/when needed and within the context of the Capital Planning and Community Planning process.
14. It is recommended that the Board establish a close working relationship with the District of North Vancouver to address the needs of both in community planning. The potential of future consolidation of schools in the Windsor Family of School should be an opportunity for the NVSD, schools and District of North Vancouver to work together to address the needs within our catchment areas in a proactive manner. The appointment of a Joint Planner is fully supported by Seymour Heights PAC. (see Appendix L)
15. It is recommended that the Board considers that the Seymour Heights Planning Committee (to be formed) be given the task of looking at new ways of generating revenue. Please refer to Appendix P. for details on Terms of Reference.
16. It is recommended that the Board consider utilizing the available support from local school communities to assist it in any of the above listed recommendations.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that there exists too much uncertainty about much of the criteria in Policy 610 and the processes that the NVSD have followed to name Seymour Heights Elementary School.

It is therefore recommended that the Board adjusts its direction in going forward by defeating the proposed closure of Seymour Heights and consider all schools in the Windsor family to be under review on an annual basis.