

Partner Group Budget Input 2019-2020
Responses to January and February 2019 Input Requests
From Parent Advisory Councils and Education Partner Groups

1. What areas should be given priority in order to support success for all learners?

- Increased access to study materials (hard copy or on line) for all courses in line with the BC Curriculum to enable students to reinforce what they have learned in the classroom. (Personal note: for new coming parents it has been very challenging to assist our children without access to the subject material and techniques).
- Provided study materials to be current (a Social Studies book from 2006 is not relevant on current affairs)
- Increased access to the Challenge Program for children joining SD 61 after Grade 9.
- Consistency in French language education - it is uncertain whether French or Quebecois is the correct method, but this has a major impact on pronunciation if not taught consistently.
- Increased access to Dramatic Arts as the Mt Doug drama program was canceled for 2018-2019.
- Homework to become a regular and frequent part of the study process to reinforce what has been learned and to teach a strong work ethic.
- I also would like to have information about specific aspects of the curriculum (e.g., what is my son learning in mathematics this week?), as well as information about upcoming assignments/projects. This information would allow me to reinforce learning at home. This could be accomplished by having a teacher maintain a website or send out weekly emails. Of course, this would put additional demands on already maxed out teachers. Perhaps funding could be used to have an administrative support person manage those websites/emails.
- As a parent with a child with special needs, I would like to see increased funding for children with designated disabilities (and to expand those definitions to include diagnoses, such as Attention Deficit Disorder). This would not only provide more consistent support for a particular child, but would provide support to a teacher who then would require less time/energy to manage the behaviours of that particular child.
- Maintaining smaller class sizes
- Psycho-educational assessment funding so student needs can be identified and met without delay
- More info to parents on option of Late Immersion French
- Learning support funding for students with ADHD and other behavioral disabilities
- One high priority area for us is inclusion. We would love to see the District put more EAs and resources (OT, SLP, technology etc.) into schools to support students and teachers. If a teacher is struggling with a challenging child, all the children struggle. Stable classroom should be the goal and we are far from that in the District right now. It would be wonderful in SD61 followed the example of the School District in Sooke and raised the wages and working hours of EAs to make it a more desirable career choice and reduce the turnover. We would also love to see the District leave certain programs open for children with complex special needs. Inclusion isn't just about integrating students, inclusion is about making sure every student gets what they need. To say that these Programs are life changing for some student and their families, would be an understatement.
- We would also love to see the teachers get funds to support their classrooms so they don't have to use their own money.
- Alternative learning spaces in school: As inclusion is embraced in our school, we have created some alternate spaces for students to have time for breaks, to get additional support, to carry out alternative programming and to just be in a safe and comfortable place outside of the classroom setting. The alternative space at our middle school is different than a learning support room where a specialized teacher provides augmented/supported/extended learning for literacy and numeracy, but rather it is a space for unique personalized learning experiences to occur. This inclusive environment comes at a cost: education for staff, a teacher to program for individualized needs, a teacher and EAG to carry out the programming. Alternative space funding to support inclusion 2019 and beyond is an asset and a necessity to the success of students.
- Psycho-educational assessments: Many students have needs/unique learning styles that are ascertained through psycho-educational assessments completed by psychologists. Our school has limit of assessments per year and students must be prioritized. We need to grow a system where all students with needs at an early age have access to the assessments. If students are first time identified at middle school, they should not have to be put on a waitlist. They should have access to the assessment. No waitlists should exist.
- Students in all classrooms should have access to additional classroom support (EAG) for literacy and numeracy basics.
- Overall it seems like both of our children are receiving wonderful education across all subjects. If I had to highlight an area to see more priority given to - it would be to encourage more development of rote math skills. There is a great deal of creative and exploratory math activities...but little to develop a foundation of the simple pieces you have to memorize. For example, my daughter is in grade four and has still not learned

formally about multiplication (just memorizing the 1-12 multiplication pieces). She understands the concept of multiplication and division, and is generally good at math. But if you just ask her what is 4×6 she will revert to adding. This is a basic skill that needs to be learned and taught. We have started doing it at home for her since it isn't covered at school. Also, at many schools health is still something that could be worked on (healthy eating, physical activity).

- Inclusion: There is widespread understanding that effective implementation of the model of full inclusion is expensive. The board's philosophical support for inclusion must be met with financial support in order to adequately meet the needs of all students. School-Based Teams are contractually required to make recommendations regarding assessment, programming, placement, and strategies to support students (See Collective Agreement Article D.2). Too often, these professionals are discouraged from making recommendations to support student s' academic, physical and social-emotional growth and well-being, because of budgetary limitations. The GVTA encourages the District to budget not only for the minimum staffing requirements of the Collective Agreement, but also for the staffing and resources needed to fully and meaningfully comply with Section D.3: Mainstreaming and Integration, which outlines the types of supports and resources that must be made available when students with special needs are integrated into regular classes. Smaller class sizes, additional teaching and support staff, time for consultation and collaboration, training and inservice, and provision of resources and equipment, are all necessary to support inclusion. In recent years, the district has moved to close a number of programs that specifically serve students with special needs, and to move towards "full inclusion" in the regular classrooms. We are concerned that schools, students and families no longer have access to a continuum of options for meeting students' needs. Where inclusion in regular classrooms is not adequately supported by additional staffing in and out of the classroom, training and inservice, and access to alternate facilities and materials, students are too often fully excluded from school when they are sent home or scheduled for less than full hours. Additionally, the GVTA is concerned that it appears the number of people working in the Tolmie office at an arm's length from students is increasing at a time when we are facing shortages in the schools. We urge the board to carefully weigh the efficacy of district-level staffing against provision of direct student services.
- Recruitment and Retention: Students, especially students with special needs, are frequently losing direct service as a result of teacher and EA shortages. When a teacher or EA is absent and no replacement is available, students miss out. This situation contributes to stress and burnout as teachers work while sick as they are worried about the possibility of not being replaced. There is a need for more Teachers Teaching on Call and Spareboard EAs in the District. The GVTA recommends that the District invest in recruitment of new employees and retention of current employees. Some possible investments include: funding for teacher-driven professional development, financial support for teachers interested in gaining additional qualifications, a robust mentorship program, support for teacher participation in resource development, financial support for resources and materials to support the new curriculum (especially Aboriginal ways of knowing) and time for teachers to collaborate. The GVTA is interested in exploring any number of recruitment and retention possibilities with the District.
- Specialist Teachers: We applaud the board's decision to increase counselling FTE in elementary schools, to provide a base of 0.5 FTE per school. Alongside restoration of learning support, counselling and librarian ratios, this has resulted in improvements in the district, but we think we can do better. The GVTA recommends that the District budget for increased staffing of specialist teachers, including but not limited to: teacher counsellors, teacher librarians, teacher psychologists, learning support teachers, and ELL teachers. Classroom teachers need support to meet the educational needs of a broad range of learners. They need specialist teachers to work directly with struggling learners. Classroom teachers also need specialist teachers to collaborate in assessment, differentiation, and resource research. Secondary counsellors express frustration with the amount of administrative work they are expected to do, which takes away from their ability to actually counsel students. Teacher librarians need more time to be able to fully meet the demands of running school libraries and providing direct support to teachers and students. Learning support teachers need time to collaborate with each other and with classroom teachers. Specialist teachers in all areas tell us that they need time to collaborate with their colleagues in other schools. They need support to relieve the administrative aspects of their jobs. The District would benefit from targeted funding to "new" specialist teachers - whether they are new to teaching, or in a role that is new to them. These teachers are often "one of a kind" in a school and need funded and structured support, collaboration and mentorship. French Immersion teachers regularly report to the GVTA that they face an additional workload due to the shortage of French language resources available to them. Financial support for resources and materials, as well as time for FRIMM and FSL teachers to collaborate and create resources for district-wide use would help ease this burden and make teaching FRIMM/FSL more appealing to more teachers. Finally, where the District is experiencing or anticipates shortages of specialist teachers, financial support for teachers to attain qualifications would be a welcome recruitment and retention initiative.
- Mentorship: Two years ago, the District and the GVTA agreed to support a mentorship program together. This year, with an allocation of \$40,000, the program includes 17 mentees and 15 mentors. The mentorship program has been highly successful and much appreciated in supporting new teachers, and teachers in new

assignments. The program is ready to expand to include more teachers, and with an increased budget could support 50 mentee teachers with 25 mentor teachers.

- Professional Development Funding: Professional development is crucial to success in the classroom for teachers and students. Teachers are professionals who reflect on their students' needs to determine the best investment of time and resources. Our students' needs are diverse, and so are our teachers'. A one-size-fits-all approach does not work. In recent years, the board has allocated an additional \$100,000 to teachers' professional development. These funds have been appreciated and have enabled more teachers to participate in quality professional learning. Even with this additional funding, the GVTA has been forced to turn down many teachers request for funding from the Joint Professional Development Fund. These teachers have assessed their classroom needs and made professional determinations about appropriate and useful professional development, and we are put in the regrettable position of denying funding. Increased funding for teachers' autonomous professional development would not only support improved student learning, but it would also be a sound investment in increasing teachers' efficacy, agency, enthusiasm, creativity, innovation, and morale.
- In-Service and Training: In addition to teachers' ability to access autonomous professional development, we recognize that there are times when the district has obligations and/or priorities as an employer that require training and/or in-service for employees. Topics might include district policies and/or procedures, health and safety, or orientation for new employees. There are often attempts to schedule these activities for Professional Development days, which is not appropriate given teachers' right to autonomous decision-making about their professional development. The activities then land outside of the scheduled workday, often in after-school school staff meetings, which means they are often rushed and resented. The GVTA acknowledges that there are important and relevant training and in-service activities that the employer may want to provide to employees. When the employer believes that a learning opportunity is valuable and necessary, they should demonstrate their commitment by providing a budget allowance for adequate release time for employees to complete this training.
- Facilities: In 2016, the GVTA's feedback on 2017-18 budgeting was simply that "The GVTA would suggest that the Board of Education prepare, and budget for, the reinstatement of our stripped language." Two years later, we have teachers working without appropriate classrooms or spaces for individual or small-group support, or without adequate access to gymnasiums or libraries, for example. Many teachers are required to share spaces, squeeze into spaces that were never intended for teaching, and make teaching decisions that are based not on their students' needs, but on the limitations of the facilities. We recognize that the District is currently considering changes to catchment boundaries and reviewing the adequacy of space available. The GVTA submits that at this time, there are too many teachers and students in portables, and with anticipated enrolment increases, it is necessary to open an additional school. Schools were built with intentional classroom to shared space ratio, and teachers and students are adversely affected when access to washrooms, gymnasiums, libraries, outdoor facilities, and other shared spaces is limited. In a number of schools, specialist teachers and prep teachers have no choice but to "teach from a cart" - rushing through the hallways from class-to-class with a cart full of materials - because they do not have consistent dedicated space in the school. This is not a sustainable practice for teachers. It is unsettling for teachers and students, and hinders teachers' ability to make pedagogical decisions. Many classroom teachers whose prep coverage occurs in the class find themselves without an appropriate space in the school in order to do their prep work. These conditions do not support student learning and they are frustrating and disheartening for teachers. The GVTA has concerns about facilities maintenance. It seems that we are facing longer waits for routine maintenance and repairs, and teacher regularly express frustration about the lack of custodial time in schools.
- Hire additional Education Assistants with hours support a living wage. This will mean less movement between schools which occurs as they search for positions with greater hours. This will bring stability to schools and classrooms and all students will benefit, especially the vulnerable ones.
- Inclusive Education - while we support inclusivity. We need to staff our schools so that we can achieve the desired outcome. For a student to be in an inclusive situation they need to feel part of the classroom and have a sense of belonging. With the current staffing levels we are only integrating students into the classroom.
- Art/Music programs – make school fun/engaging
- Sports programs/nutrition/healthy lifestyle education
- Counsellors (especially Secondary schools)
- Basic safety/disaster preparedness equipment. In BC, earthquake kits should be fully funded.
- Facilities – updating, expanding and beautifying
- Better equipment in sciences
- Equity in transportation access
- Always allocate time for reading, writing and numeracy
- Examples of supports for all children to succeed – one on one support, small classes, more teachers, more educational assistants
- Provide teachers with the resources they need to teach their subjects
- More funding for more EAs

- Support classroom supplies for new curriculum
- More counseling and mental health services for middle school students. We currently are allocated .5 hours for a counselor, which we feel are not enough to support our students.
- Update textbooks and other learning support materials. (Some textbooks our children are using at school are more than 20 years old!) We appreciate all of the digital learning opportunities our children have at school, but we would still like current and relevant books to be available for students in the classroom.
- Continue to provide extra staff (inclusive learning specialists and assistants) to support all students, especially ones with learning challenges. Keep offering special learning opportunities for all students – including gifted learners. Try to cut down on wait times for inclusive specialists (such as speech therapists.)
- Maintain school leadership time. We appreciate that our vice principal is not teaching all of the time and has time to learn firsthand how to lead.
- More Human Resources support
- Learning materials to support the new curriculum (inquiry-based learning can be expensive)
- Interactive learning/sensory activities
- Forward-thinking budgeting to create effective learning commons
- Maintaining school-based learning support staffing, particularly Learning Support teaching and Ed Assistant time to support learning and inclusion of students with extraordinary needs
- Priority on supporting the students with significant learning and behavioural needs in schools - training admin, teachers, support staff on strategies to work towards creating settings that allow do fill inclusion - microenvironments need to be set up, planned for, coordinated, programmed, sustained.
- Increasing teacher-counselor time at the elementary and middle levels to further support students'
- Ensuring there are enough skilled/trained people to support the diverse needs in any given building, this includes Teachers, EAG's LST, ELL, Librarians, Counsellors, Office personal, Custodians
- Maintaining current school-based leadership time (principal and vice-principal admin time) at middle and secondary as well as increasing elementary admin (vice-principal) time to ensure effectively run schools and opportunity for maximum leadership learning that furthers the district's vision, mission, and values
- Keeping district structures that further quality instruction/support, most notably the various "Learning Team (including Digital Tech for Learning)", "Student Support", and "Languages/Multiculturalism" infrastructure and initiatives, which ultimately furthers student learning and success
- Maintaining Facilities Department staffing levels (including daytime custodians) to keep school physically well-maintained
- Maintaining school's "Professional Learning Funds" to support teachers' participation in professional learning opportunities and collaborative initiatives and collegial mentorship that ultimately furthers student learning
- Continuing to support the technological needs of each school to maintain a base level for all and beyond based on the principle of equity

2. What areas do you feel progress is being made and should be continued?

- Google Classroom is a valuable asset and should be developed further.
- Global awareness programs are excellent.
- Music programs are excellent.
- Specialized programs offered by different schools, (e.g. music at Arbutus) are excellent. I would suggest that funding be structured so that students from out of catchment could move to a school that offers the specialized program that meets their needs (I know that the catchment rules keep changing and I am not sure how funding plays a role in that).
- Smaller class size
- Seismic upgrades
- Reasonable class sizes need to continue to be a priority. With the present composition levels at schools like Rockheights, the class sizes need to remain reasonable. All students need to be successful and have access to teacher time.
- In schools where high percentage of students do not come from homes where financial stability exists, there needs to continue to be additional funding available to help pay for additional supplies or opportunities for students.
- Our school does an amazing job at reading and creative writing. The kids learn a ton and love the combination of hearing, reading, and writing their own tales, there is good progression and flow between grades. I also think that the addition of nature education at our school has been invaluable. It weaves together learning, environmental studies, compassion, physical activity, and stewardship in our community...so great on so many levels! Sadly this isn't offered at most schools, having the natural environment embedded within everyday activity, it is so beneficial to the kids' learning and health overall.
- Technology - our world is changing and the District is moving forward.

- Secondary school (and Middle school) counsellors (educational and emotional)
- Technology
- Inclusivity
- SIP – District Career Programs
- Building an anti-bullying culture
- Creating an inclusive environment
- Improving technology
- Smaller class sizes
- Counselling
- Library/Technology
- Communication between parents and staff
- Keep musical education and support a priority – including allocating district funding for musical instrument repair
- Continue to fund daytime custodians, so that our admin staff does not have to spend their time cleaning up messes at school.
- Maintain district programs for teachers to support new, progressive learning initiatives. These programs enhance and engage teachers and deeply enrich the learning that goes on in the classroom.
- Continue to fund district programs such as Pink Shirt Day that teach empathy and responsibility to our children.
- We like the smaller class sizes
- Happy with creation of additional learning spaces (portables, etc.)
- Glad catchment boundaries are being reviewed
- (Technology) Access to technology (devices) in our buildings has improved greatly, along with wifi/connectivity access.
- At the Elementary level, Science and Math resources have been well supplied
- Acknowledging the need for an increase in FTE for School Counsellors and Teacher Librarians at the Elementary level has had a huge positive impact
- Numeracy Workshop offerings have been well received by teachers at the Elementary level
- The wide range of professional learning opportunities - workshops in relation to numeracy, aboriginal principles of learning, writing, inclusive learning, mental health, digital tech for learning, TPRS, and much more - all of which not only enhance the instructional practices of participating teachers, but also have a positive ripple-effect back at their schools
- Career/Pathway opportunities/support/etc. including partnerships with relevant beyond-the-district organizations (i.e. South Island Partnership, etc.)
- Digital Tech infrastructure in schools and related tech support
- Overall well-maintained facilities

3. How do you feel the budget process could be improved for greater public participation and ease of understanding?

- Move questionnaires like this online in a polling format with access granted to all parents so that more data can be gathered but processed more easily.
- on line questionnaire with link sent out to parents for ease of access and providing feedback
- The budget snapshot infographic was extremely helpful for understanding the bigger budget picture.
- I feel there should be greater transparency and communication to parents about the value of Pro D Days and why these are completed during school time rather than one day at the beginning of Christmas break, one day over spring break, and one day at the beginning and end of the summer break. It is a point of contention among many parents at our school, since several of the Pro-D days the teachers are actually not in session learning...they have banked hours to take those days off. It is hard to see how this is a good use of tax payer money, and hard to see how this extra time can be justified. All professional jobs have work that occurs outside of 9-5 hours, this doesn't mean this time should be banked in lieu of actual professional development. It is a big ask of parents to take time off from work, or pay for childcare, on Pro-D days when no relevant Pro-D has occurred. I think teachers should be required to provide the agenda for each Pro-D session to their school PAC so we understand how this time is beneficial to our kids and why it is a good use of paid teacher time.
- More online surveys, fewer meetings
- Infographics – the one attached to this was good
- Utilize more online feedback tools (e.g. online surveys)
- Won't make everyone happy you ask and it's going ok
- Window to provide feedback is too compressed – we need more time to consult with the parent community.
- Provide more information about district spending for PACs to share with parents.

- Give parents more time to look at the information and discuss thoughts (we got this in December and information was initially requested before we would be meeting as a group)
- We would like to know how this information will be compiled and shared
- Providing the information earlier in the year for Principals to share with their teachers and PAC members may allow for greater input. It was a short turn around with the Winter break following the information that was shared.
- Greater emphasis on schools participating. It appears that PAC input and partner group input is sought but less of a focus on schools.

4. Do you have any general comments you would like to add?

- At least equal emphasis to be placed on the majority as is given to minority groups. Nether group should suffer on behalf of the other.
- Emphasis of the SD61 should be placed on achieving the highest academic rigor and not accepting mediocrity. Comments from teachers that the BC School System is not "as academically ambitious as that in Europe" should not be acceptable.
- Professional Development Days either be reduced or be harmonized with holidays to ensure that parents do not have to take extra days of work. Move a Pro-D day to make a long weekend or go back to school one day late after a major holiday so that there is not another interruption.
- The 'snapshot' communication tool is easy to understand and provides clear overview
- Suggestion to have more funds available to students from low income families for support in afterschool activities
- The Parent Education Fund that is offered to parents is greatly appreciated. However, \$250 often does not cover costs. Can there be an increase in the maximum that can be requested? Especially for school who have small PACs with limited capacity to raise funds due to the population of fundraisers/fundraisees.
- This is not directly a budget concern, but is something that a great deal of time and resources are spent on at our school (so it is a policy and budget issue too). The peanut/nut allergy issue is taking over the eating and nutritional conversation at our school. There are a few very very vocal and worried parents of nut-allergic children who seem to be dictating policy at our school. For example, my children have had peach yogurt, avocados, and quesadillas sent home because concerns that these items might have pits in them and pits resemble nuts. My daughter's class has to line up at the beginning of the day to have their lunches manually inspected by teachers to ensure the contents (what better way to transfer allergens then to root through each kid's lunch with your hands?). Parents have come into our classrooms to provide "health education" about nuts...these are not qualified health professionals but parents who are worried about nuts being near their children...after which many of the kids believe nuts to be unhealthy and something to be avoided. Children are sent to eat in the hallway by themselves should parents send an item with nuts in it. This all takes time and manpower too if you are looking at budgetary connections. There has got to be a system whereby parents who want to keep their children in a bubble can (e.g. a designated safe zone for anaphylactic kids to go with a few of their friends? For those whose parents demand this kind of sterile environment), but the other 300 students and their families can eat a variety of nutritious options and not have whole food groups policed daily.
- In conclusion, the GVTA appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback about our priorities for the District's 2019-2020 budget. We look forward to ongoing discussion about the needs of teachers and students in the District now and in the future.
- We need to really focus on basics in Elementary schools (reading, writing, math) and socialization
- We need more focus/standardization starting from elementary and middle school about coming to class, being on time, being respectful and getting work done. We have become way too accommodating producing graduates unfit for the work environment.
- Coordinating bulk purchase of equipment for schools
- See above. Thank you for soliciting our feedback!
- Over the past few years, there has been a significant increase in the overall mutual respect/trust and collaboration between and within the many partner-groups throughout the district, which is a very important cultural piece that is greatly enhancing the success of any budgetary decisions, initiatives, and strategies aimed at furthering student growth & learning in schools throughout our district.