

Trends and Patterns in Public Elementary School Enrollment in the City of Vancouver

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BTAworks

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Introduction

As a means of exploring various metrics of neighborhood health in the City of Vancouver, this brief looks at patterns of public elementary school enrollment. As key community institutions, schools are a neighborhood anchor for families with children. While there has been substantial growth in independent (private/religious) schools in Vancouver, the vast majority (80 percent) of school aged children attend public school. As such, public school enrollment is a measure of a City's ability to support families with children. Conversely, school enrollment reflects the confidence of families to raise children in the City of Vancouver.

Under the assumption that children of elementary school age will most often attend their local neighborhood school, BTAworks has focused on enrollment patterns for public elementary schools in the City of Vancouver.

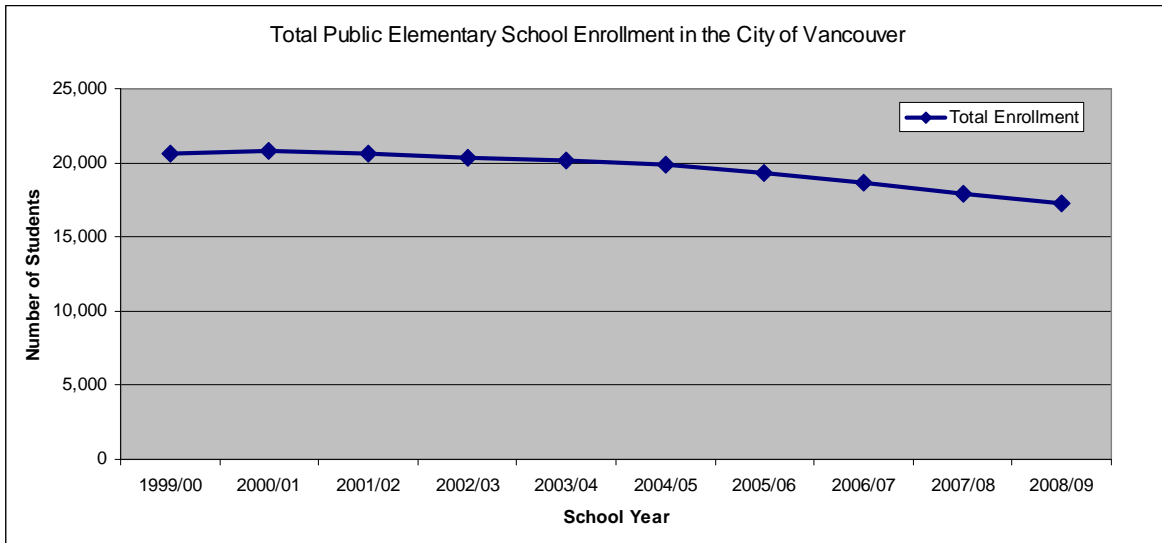
Due to an open catchment boundaries policy enacted by the Vancouver School Board, there are no longer strict controls on attending one's neighborhood school. Since 2002, students from any part of the City may attend any city school in the district with approval of the receiving school's principal.

To account for the possible impact of student movement resulting from this open catchment policy change, our analysis for individual schools enrollment begins in 2004. However, in order to provide context, we initially undertook an enrollment analysis for the overall public elementary school system in Vancouver from 1999 to 2008.

This data brief is an exploratory document that is intended to facilitate a discussion on the health and sustainability of our City. For the last ten years, public elementary school enrollment in the City of Vancouver has been on the decline with significant geographic disparities. There is no single reason behind the decline in public elementary school enrollment in the City of Vancouver; likely, it is a convergence of multiple demographic, cultural, and economic factors such as an aging city and shrinking family sizes, combined with an open boundaries policy and an outflow to independent schools. The effects of these factors on a diminishing public elementary school system are further compounded by a lack of affordable housing for young families with children in the City of Vancouver.

Total Citywide Trends for Public Elementary School Enrollment

Overall, total enrollment in public elementary schools in the City of Vancouver has been declining since the 2000/01 school term when public elementary school enrollment peaked at 20,800 students. Since then, enrollment has steadily declined to 17,238 students in the 2008/09 term. From the 1999/00 to 2008/09 school years, there was a total 19.3 percent (3,339) drop in elementary school enrollment.



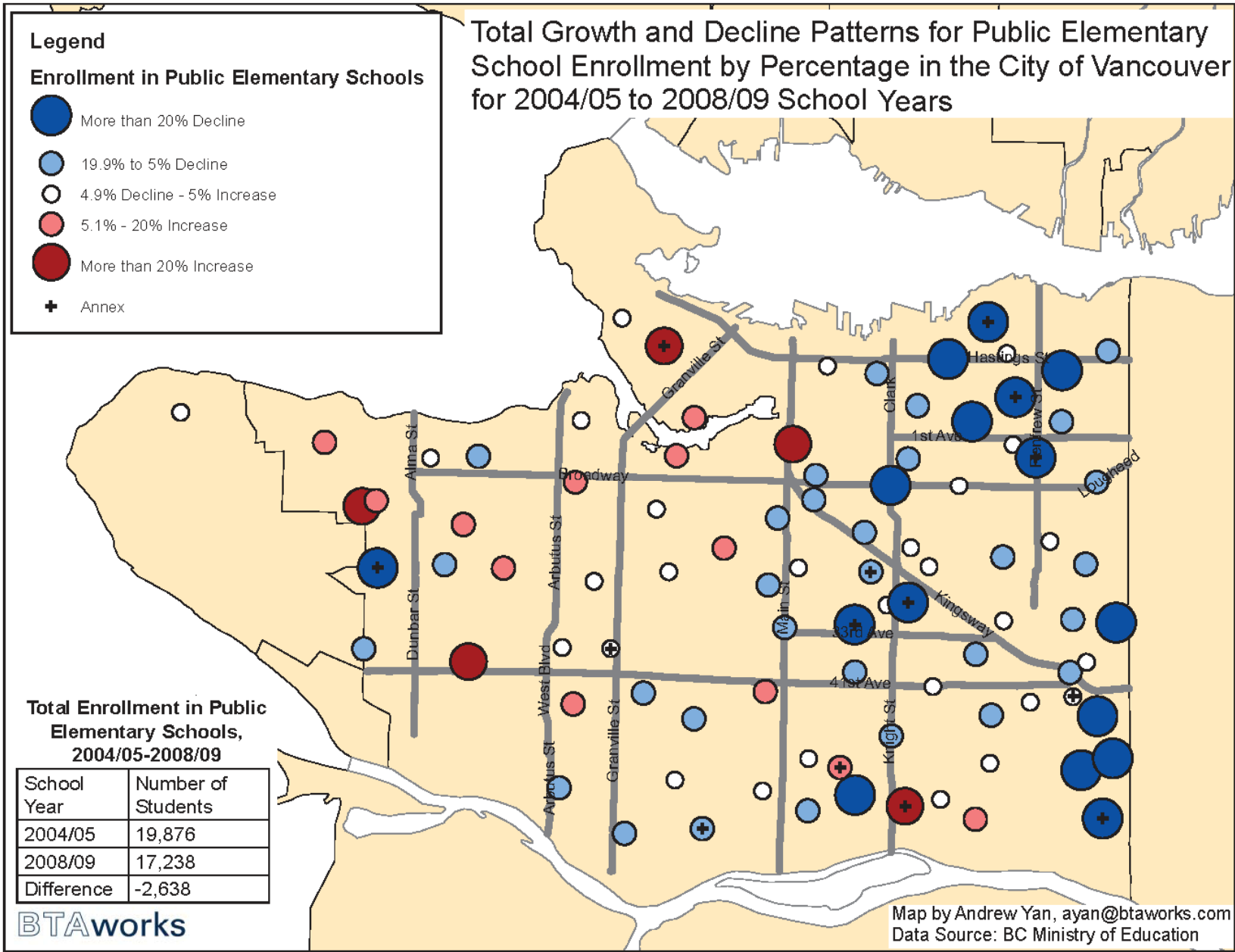
Year to Year Total Public Elementary School Enrollment Comparison

Year to Year Comparison	Enrollment Change by Number of Students	Percent Change
1 Year (2007/08-2008/09)	-647	-3.60%
5 Years (2004/05-2008/09)	-2,638	-13.20%
10 Years (1999/00-2008/09)	-3,339	-19.30%

Enrollment Increases and Decline by Schools

Focusing on a five year (2004/05-2008/09) timeframe, almost fifty percent (43 of 91 schools) of public elementary schools saw an enrollment decline of more than 5 percent. In the same time period, nearly 20 percent (17 of 91 schools) saw an enrollment increase of more than 5 percent.

	Number of Schools	Percentage of Total Schools
More than 20% Decline	17	19%
19.9% - 5% Decline	26	29%
4.9% Decline - 5% Increase	31	34%
5.1% - 20% Increase	12	13%
Greater than 20% + Increase	5	5%
Total	91	100%



Geographic Patterns

Using Main Street as an east-west boundary and 33rd Avenue as a north-south boundary, the geographic distribution of enrollment change is highly uneven. Over the five most recent school years, schools in the northeast and southeast section of the city have seen significant declines (approximately 11 percent), whereas schools in the northwest and southwest areas have seen small increases in their student populations.

From 2004/05-2008/09, the five schools with the largest enrollment declines are:

School	City Quadrant	2004/05 Enrollment	2008/09 Enrollment	Decline in Total Number of Students
Walter Moberly Elementary	Southeast	784	590	-194
Captain James Cook Elementary	Southeast	496	356	-140
Lord Nelson Elementary	Northeast	442	323	-119
Dr A R Lord Elementary	Northeast	313	213	-100
Champlain Heights Community Elementary	Southeast	416	321	-95

From 2004/05-2008/09, the five schools with the largest enrollment declines by percentage are:

School	City Quadrant	Percent	Total Number of Students
Sir William Macdonald Community Elementary	Northeast	-48%	-80
Garibaldi Annex	Northeast	-37%	-29
Dr A R Lord Elementary	Northeast	-32%	-100
Chief Maquinna Annex	Northeast	-32%	-46
Champlain Heights Annex	Southeast	-33%	-43

From 2004/05-2008/09, the five schools with the largest enrollment increases:

School	City Quadrant	2004/05 Enrollment	2008/09 Enrollment	Increase in Total Number of Students
Kerrisdale Elementary	Southwest	510	632	122
Queen Elizabeth Elementary	Northwest	386	470	84
Lord Tennyson Elementary	Northwest	373	430	57
Sir William Van Horne Elementary	Southwest	366	422	56
Maple Grove Elementary	Southwest	398	453	55

From 2004/05-2008/09, the five schools with largest enrollment increases by percentage are:

School	City Quadrant	Percent	Increase in Total Number of Students
Lord Roberts Annex	Northwest	26%	31
Kerrisdale Elementary	Southwest	24%	122
Sir James Douglas Annex	Southeast	22%	38
Queen Victoria Annex	Northeast	22%	26
Queen Elizabeth Elementary	Northwest	22%	84

Technical Notes

The map and enrollment data for this analysis were generously provided by the British Columbia Ministry of Education.

This analysis also excludes elementary students in special needs programs outside of existing elementary schools.

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About BTAsworks

BTAsworks is an architectural and urban research and development division of Bing Thom Architects committed to promoting innovative and resilient design, dialogue, and good urban living.