

BTAworks

For Immediate Release

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Where Have All the Children Gone?

Enrollment in Vancouver public elementary schools in steady decline since 2000.

VANCOUVER - Research reveals that since 2004, enrollment in public elementary schools in the City of Vancouver has declined by more than 13 percent (over 2,600 students) -- a continuation of a steady enrollment decline since 2000.

“While our overall City population has grown, it is surprising to discover that public elementary school enrollment has actually been on the decline by so much and for such a long time”, observed Andrew Yan, a BTAworks researcher and Urban Planner who wrote the brief. “Almost 20 percent of all Vancouver public elementary schools lost more than 20 percent of their students over the last 5 school years”.

BTAworks, the research and development division of Bing Thom Architects examined enrollment data from the Ministry of Education as part of their ongoing series focused on the health and sustainability of Vancouver neighborhoods and the overall city.

Yan notes that enrollment decline was very geographically uneven, with schools in the Northeast section of the City facing the largest losses while school enrollment on the City’s west side remained largely stable and, in certain cases, increased.

Elementary schools in the Northeast of the city, such as Lord Nelson, Walter Moberly, and Queen Alexandra lost about 25 percent of their enrollment, with William McDonald losing 50 percent of its student enrollment over the 5 most recent school years while Kerrisdale and Lord Tennyson saw 20 percent increases over the same period.

While some have suggested that an exodus of students to the independent school system accounts for this loss of students, Yan notes that growth in the private system in the same time frame only accounts for a partial number of missing elementary students.

“There is no single reason behind this decline in public elementary school enrollment, but the perfect storm created by factors such as an aging city and shrinking family sizes, combined with an open boundaries policy for all City of Vancouver schools and an outflow of independent schools who all have a role. This is compounded by a lack of affordable housing that is suitable for young families with children”, Yan suggests.

“If we cannot create a city where families want to send their children to the school down the block, what chances do we have of creating the greenest city in the world?”, said Michael Heeney, a principal at Bing Thom Architects, “This brief highlights one of the most basic sustainability challenges we have in the City of Vancouver.”

Heeney concludes, "Schools are only one example of millions of dollars of existing child supportive infrastructure in this city that runs the risk of being wasted. Like the proverbial canary in the coal mine, the decline in elementary school enrollment may also mean that families will start to disappear from Vancouver as well."

The full data brief is available at www.btaworks.com.

Media Contact

Andrew Yan
 Researcher/Urban Planner
ayan@btaworks.com
 (604) 682-1881

About BTAworks

BTAworks 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.

Attached Graphic: A Map Illustrating Public Elementary School Enrollment Decline and Growth in the City of Vancouver for the 2004/05 to 2008/09 School Years

