

Opinion: Vancouver School Board can quickly open thousands of childcare spaces ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Excerpts

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Imagine parents and guardians weaving through the city in the early hours, journeying across the city or to neighbouring cities like Burnaby or Richmond to drop off their youngest at daycare. Then, it's a dash back to Vancouver to ensure their older kids make it to public school on time.

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This routine isn't just a test of endurance; it's the product of Vancouver's acute childcare crisis.

While there's been measurable progress towards a "\$10aDay childcare" system through provincial and federal investments since 2018, estimates show that over 70% of Vancouver families are still without sufficient access to licensed daycare and before-and-after school care. Among those who do manage to find childcare, securing a spot in their own neighbourhood or city is often impossible.

To meet the needs of today's families, Vancouver would need to create over 11,000 more childcare spaces. At the current rate, adding the 11,000-some spots needed right now will take at least 150 years.

The benefits of childcare extend far beyond convenience for families lucky enough to secure spaces for their kids. Parents without the support they need are missing out on job opportunities and career growth. High-quality childcare not only facilitates parents returning to work, but it also improves children's social and cognitive development, contributes to a more gender-equitable society, and tackles social inequities.

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While the problem feels intractable, Vancouver has a key part of the solution right in front of us: the Vancouver School Board (VSB) has 89 elementary schools, many of which could house out-of-school care. It has enough land to immediately create 6,000 to 7,000 spaces in approximately 12 months, and the provincial government has made funding available to school districts to build childcare facilities and create childcare programs.

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The VSB is one of the city's largest landholders, holding land in trust for education, children, and future generations. Building on federal and provincial commitments and a recent Vancouver City Council motion, my motion proposed the school board leverage its land to benefit the communities it is meant to serve.

By integrating public schools with provincial and federal policies, such as the "\$10aDay childcare" commitment, the VSB could better support the well-being of families, strengthen communities, and foster a more resilient and fair society.

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