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604-341-0197

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Among a number of other important matters, the issue of class size and composition is one that has been a major concern for many educational professionals over past years ... and is certainly earning significant discussion in current labour dialogue.

Thanks to some research and a recent article by reporter Susan Lazaruk of The Province newspaper, the old adage of “some things never change” is as appropriate as ever. For those who missed it, “return with us now to those thrilling days of yesteryear.”

“A news story about teachers in Vancouver uniting against school authorities under the subheadings ‘Salary question an issue’ and ‘Overcrowding of rooms’ made the front page of the Vancouver Daily Province. The date? Oct. 3, 1910.”

“A hot topic, then as now, was class size, but 100 years ago there were 60 to 65 students per room in schools in the growing outlying suburbs of – Kitsilano, Fairview and Grandview. ‘Dozens of rooms are overcrowded to the point where it is not good for the health of the children and where it is next to impossible to get any results from teaching’, an unnamed teacher said. ‘The teachers try to do their best, but there isn’t a chance of successful work in a class of that size.’ She said that there were ‘only 25 to 40 students in rooms in schools in the West End and in the central part of the city, which proved ‘very clearly that, in these sections, the population is decreasing rather than increasing.’ The teacher pointed to a need for a class-size limit of 40, which she called ‘reasonable’ and pointed out it had been implemented in some Ontario cities.”

Let’s not kid ourselves, the times have certainly changed in the one hundred years since these dedicated educators of the day raised concerns that they felt needed to be addressed in order to improve our public education system ... or have they really changed that much? Just like in 1910, challenges need to be addressed and solutions need to be found, and it’s up to our government leaders to show the way. I think we’d all like to be a part of the solution ... rather than having the same headlines being read at the start of the school year in September ... 2112!

Larry Hayes
Board Chair / Trustee
Burnaby Board of Education SD41