

Enrolment up in North Vancouver and West Vancouver schools

Jane Seyd / North Shore News

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North Vancouver students in class. file photo Cindy Goodman

The popularity of specialty sports academies plus programs like French Immersion and International Baccalaureate are continuing to boost school enrolment figures across the North Shore.

Enrolment is up in both North Vancouver and West Vancouver school districts for the second year in a row.

In North Vancouver schools, about 250 more students than expected registered this fall, bringing the total number of students to 15,260, compared to just under 15,200 last year. That number doesn't include a number of students who are completing courses online, which will add another 130 students to the count. It also doesn't include over 700 fee-paying international students.

The story is similar in West Vancouver, where numbers are up about 200 students to 6,790 this year. The West Vancouver School District also has about 600 additional fee-paying international students.

Enrolment figures are important for school districts because a large portion of provincial education funding is tied to those numbers. **School districts receive \$7,390 for each full-time student enrolled.**

Administrators in both school districts say the increase in students is spread throughout the grade levels.

Increases are due to students choosing to remain in the local public schools because of specialty programs offered and students who live outside the school districts enrolling in those programs.

About 1,000 of West Vancouver school students come from other areas of the Lower Mainland, including Vancouver and North Vancouver, said West Vancouver schools superintendent Chris Kennedy.

French Immersion is one hugely popular program in West Vancouver schools, said Kennedy, with almost 1,000 students from kindergarten to Grade 12 registered.

"We have the highest-ever French immersion numbers," this year, he said.

More students who start French immersion in elementary school are continuing with the program in high school

through to graduation, he added.

Specialty academies offered as fee-paying high school programs in both school districts are another draw. In North Vancouver, there are about 530 students now registered in those academies, said North Vancouver schools superintendent John Lewis. Soccer and volleyball are the most popular, but others include digital media, dance and hockey.

Some of the enrolment increase is also due to families moving into North Vancouver from areas like downtown Vancouver, said Lewis.

The increase in enrolment isn't spread evenly throughout either school district. In North Vancouver, schools in the more central urban area of the City of North Vancouver and points north of that have the highest enrolment, while the student population in the more eastern Windsor and Seycove catchment areas is still falling.

New schools like Carson Graham and Sutherland also tend to attract enrolment, said Lewis.

In West Vancouver, schools on the eastern side of the district tend to have fewer empty desks. The western side of the district – farther away from transportation corridors and with less dense housing development – tends to have fewer students.

Both North Shore school districts have fewer English Language Learners than many other school districts in the Lower Mainland.

But in West Vancouver, that trend is changing. There are now close to 1,000 ELL students in West Vancouver, a number that's grown from about 400 in the past decade. Mandarin is the first language spoken by most of those students, followed by Farsi and Korean. "It speaks to the changing demographic," said Kennedy.

North Vancouver school district also has close to 1,000 ELL students – about 6.5 per cent of the total student population.

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