



**SAVE BRITANNIA**

**Save Britannia Community Secondary  
Press Kit**

## **Background**

Founded in 1908, Britannia Community Secondary School is the oldest remaining secondary school in Vancouver boasting such illustrious alumni as Tong Louie (London Drugs, Order of Canada recipient); Frank Iacobucci (former Supreme Court Justice); Barbara Howard (BC Sports Hall of Fame inductee); Dave Barret (former Premier of British Columbia); Amber Hall (former WNBA player); and Shane Simpson (MLA Hastings-Sunrise).

Situated in the Commercial Drive area of Vancouver, Britannia is a part of a larger community site which includes an elementary school, public library, skating rink, fitness facility and swimming pool. Britannia is also host to a number of programs which support the full range of student needs including the only public International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme on the city's East side, a Hockey Canada Skills Academy, and the renowned Streetfront Alternative program whose students last year summited Mt. Kilimanjaro, to name a few.

Yet despite its extensive history of academic excellence, on June 20, 2016, Vancouver School Board staff placed Britannia on a list of potential school closures expected to take effect on June 30, 2017. Among the criteria for determining whether a school should be closed are vulnerability of population, heritage status and seismic safety, which has left many wondering how Britannia ever ended up on a potential closure list.

By any measure, Britannia's student population (including ~180 students of Aboriginal decent) is the most vulnerable in the city, with 30% of students living households that receive income assistance, or are who working poor. A 2009 VSB report on Inner-City Schools noted that "the Social Service Index (SSI) five year average for Britannia Secondary is 29.3. The index for the next closest secondary school is 15.1"<sup>1</sup>. While on the VSB's Heritage report commissioned in 2008, Britannia scores higher than all other schools under consideration for heritage status<sup>2</sup>. Finally, the Education Ministry's Seismic Mitigation Structural Risk Ratings report notes that two of the four Britannia blocks are at low risk for structural damage, one block (the gymnasium) is at medium risk, and only the shops and science block – approximately 10 classrooms – is a high structural risk<sup>3</sup>. The board proposes to move Britannia students to Templeton Secondary School, whose block by block rating of seismic risk is much higher than Britannia's.

Britannia Community Secondary unites the Grandview-Woodlands, Strathcona and Downtown Eastside communities, providing valuable support to the entire community. Despite the many challenges our students and their families face, Britannia students continue to be successful; winning awards, attending post-secondary schools, and becoming engaged community members.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/school-files/Resources/ICP\\_Recommendations\\_Report\\_May\\_2009.pdf](https://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/school-files/Resources/ICP_Recommendations_Report_May_2009.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/shared/Schools%20Heritage%20Value%20Final%20Report%20-%20March%202008%20\(Web\)%20no%20cover.pdf](https://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/shared/Schools%20Heritage%20Value%20Final%20Report%20-%20March%202008%20(Web)%20no%20cover.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/resource-management/capital-planning/seismic-mitigation/seismic\\_structural\\_risk\\_ratings\\_blocks.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/resource-management/capital-planning/seismic-mitigation/seismic_structural_risk_ratings_blocks.pdf)

## Our Position

1. Schools are the hearts of our communities. Britannia Community Secondary is a vital part of the Grandview-Woodlands, Strathcona and Downtown Eastside communities, as well as of our city's history, and should not be considered for closure.
2. Closing Britannia and moving students is not in-keeping with the Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreement, signed between Vancouver Board of Education, the BC Ministry of Education, Coast Salish Nations, Musqueam Nation, First Nations, Métis and Inuit and the Urban Aboriginal Peoples of Vancouver, "to increase Aboriginal students' sense of pride, self-esteem, belonging, place, acceptance and caring in their schools."
3. Vital programs such the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme, Hockey Academy, Streetfront, Outreach, and many school based initiatives like Britannia Business Club, Venture (academic challenge grades 8-10), LSP (Learning Support Program), and ACE-IT Auto Service Technician Program, which have been built over decades by dedicated teachers and administrators, will be lost if Britannia closes.
4. Moving students to schools farther from home puts additional pressure on Britannia's already struggling families – both financially, and logistically – as parents grapple with the need for bus passes, and to make alternative care arrangements for younger siblings, no longer in schools near to their older siblings.
5. Students with learning and/or behaviour challenges will be further disadvantaged by moving to a new school as they will receive fewer supports (small class sizes, student support workers etc.). Due to the concentration of needs at Britannia, the school receives additional staffing from the Education Fund (formerly LIF) which allows for smaller class sizes, additional counsellors and student support workers. The concentration of needs will be diluted when students move to a new school, and the additional supports will be withdrawn.
6. Long-standing community partnerships will be disrupted, and in many cases lost.
7. The recently approved Grandview-Woodlands Community Plan includes increased family housing in the neighbourhood and predicts population growth over the life of the plan. To close the Britannia is short-sighted.
8. School districts are being starved because of years of underfunding. 240 neighbourhood schools in British Columbia have been closed in recent years. The Provincial Government must restore funding to BC public schools.
9. Students and families should not be held hostage to politics between the Provincial Government and the Vancouver Board of Education. Safety of schools should be the priority of both bodies.

## Did You Know?

- Britannia is home to the most successful ACE-IT program in the province? Our pass rate 87.5% vs. provincial rate 49%
- Britannia's auto shop has the most state of the art equipment in the district?
- Britannia is home of Skills Exploration 11 summer program to introduce all VSB students to opportunities in the trades?
- Britannia has partnered with VCC for 10 years to bring Auto Service Technician to VSB students?
- Britannia's Business Club has been named top company of the year, 4 years times in the past 9 years?
- Britannia students have received top individual awards for Excellence & Leadership from Junior Achievement 3 times in the past 9 years?
- Britannia had four students accepted to UBC Sauder for September 2016? Normal acceptance rate? 1 in 17 applicants.
- Britannia stands for Bravery, Responsibility, Integrity and Tenacity? It's the BRIT way!
- Britannia is home to the only public IB program in East Vancouver?
- Britannia's IB program received a commendation for its five year pass rate of 90%?
- Britannia's extraordinary programs will all be lost if the school is closed? They do not transfer to other schools.
- Britannia's graduates take home more than \$100K in post-secondary bursaries and scholarships each year?
- Britannia students have won the Loran Award (top 30 students in the country) twice in the past 8 years?
- Britannia has partnered with UBC's Let's Talk Science for the past 10 years to send our students to district & national science fairs?
- Britannia has sent 10 students to the national Science Fair in Ottawa in the last 10 years?
- Britannia students routinely finish in the top 3 slots at the District Science Fair, against much larger schools like Churchill or Van Tech?
- Britannia consistently sends more teams to the District and Regional Science Fairs than any other school its size?
- Britannia is the only school in the district to bring science mentors from UBC's Let's Talk Science into the classrooms?
- Britannia is home to the largest after school tutoring program in the district? Each year 370+ students receive free tutoring 3x a week?
- Britannia is home to the city's only Hockey Canada Skills Academy?

## **Media Contacts**

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### ***Social Media***

Twitter: @BritSave  
Facebook: @SaveBrit

## **Britannia Programs**

### ***Venture***

Open to students in grades 8-10, Venture provides an academically challenging program of study to highly motivated students, many of whom transfer to the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in grades 11-12. In addition to academics, the program values community mindedness and volunteerism. Venture students lead the Brit Environment Club, responsible for recycling and composting endeavours in the school, are members of student council and other school clubs, and reflect Britannia's code of conduct – Bravery, Responsibility, Integrity, Tenacity – known as the Brit Way.

### ***International Baccalaureate (IB)***

Open to students in grades 11 and 12, IB offers a unique set of academic challenges to students whether they are enrolled in certificate courses, or engaged in the full diploma program. IB is recognized world-wide as the best preparation possible for university study as it offers a full slate of academic course work, along with experience in research and essay writing, and an exploration of how knowledge is created in the world. In addition to academics, IB is based on the premise of peace education, and therefore encourages international mindedness, and volunteerism through it's CAS (Creativity, Action, Service) program. Finally, the IB learner profile asks students to consider ten attributes of highly responsible community members – inquirers, knowledgeable, thinking, communicators, principled, open-minded, caring, risk-takers, balanced, reflective – and reflect on them as they complete CAS. These reflections often form the basis of university applications, as schools are increasingly moving towards broad based admissions where an applicant's character and ability to reflect is considered along with grades.

### ***Hockey Academy***

Britannia Hockey Academy (BHA) is Vancouver's first sport specific academy. BHA blends regular secondary school coursework and graduation programs with a licensed **Hockey Canada Skills Academy (HCSA)**. Britannia Secondary School is the perfect location for a HCSA program, as it has an ice arena on site! BHA, students receive credit for grade level P.E. along with credit for hockey specific training at each grade level. Students in grades 11 and 12 also have access to the Board authorized course "Coaching Team Sports 11". With the ice arena is only steps away, BHA participants have a greater degree of flexibility in their timetabling, and is committed to accommodating individual student needs. BHA participants also have access to marquee Britannia programs such as Venture and IB.

### ***Streetfront***

Streetfront provides an alternative education opportunity with an emphasis on physical activities and outdoor experiences. Students in grades 8-10 receive core academics including Math, Science, Socials and English, along with electives such as Physical Education, Outdoor Education, Planning, Woodworking, and Foods classes. The hallmark of the Streetfront program, however, is running. Students run three days per week, with many students training for and participating in the Seattle

and Vancouver full and half Marathons. Students spend approximately 35 of the 190 school days in an outdoor environment - including the three four-day camp trips. Streetfront is home to the ambitious Street2Peak project, which endeavours to take disadvantaged youth on five incredible adventures on five different continents in the next ten years. Last year, Streetfront students summited Africa's Mount Kilimanjaro.

### ***Outreach***

Outreach provides a full range of academic and non-academic courses to Aboriginal students in grades 10-12, working towards graduation. In a cultural supportive setting, students work at their own pace to complete the academic requirements for graduation, while also exploring opportunities for post-secondary success including work experience opportunities, and university/college transitions and tours, and cultural enriching activities. Outreach students engage in strongly in their communities, keeping the three As in mind – attendance, attitude and achievement.

### ***Britannia Business Club (BBC)***

Formed in 2008, BBC is an after-school program focusing on entrepreneurship. Working with **Junior Achievement**, a student company is formed every year with the help of business consultants, in hopes of making a profit. Students brainstorm business ideas, create and design a product/service and use sound business fundamentals in the operation of their venture as they experience the risks and rewards of entrepreneurship. BBC student businesses have won the coveted Junior Achievement CIBC Student Company of the Year award, which recognizes excellence in teamwork and cooperation, creativity and innovation, and outstanding planning and operation of a Student Venture company, four times in its 8 year history. In 2016, BBC student business Wanderlust Candles was also the recipient of the Beedie School of Business Digital Marketing Award. Members of BBC are accepted into Sauder School of Business and Beedie School of Business at higher than average rates.

### ***ACE-IT Auto Service Technician***

Britannia is home to the VSB's ACE-IT Auto Technician program where students pursue industry certification or the foundation level of a trade program while simultaneously completing the requirements for high school graduation. Students in Britannia's AST save time and money, and get jump start on post-secondary education in the Automotive trades, working with state of the art equipment in a supportive learning environment. Britannia's AST program's success rate is higher than other ACE-IT programs in the district, and is nearly double the provincial success rate for similar programs.

\*\*The majority of students taking part in programs at Britannia Secondary are students from the local neighbourhood, and nearby East-side communities.

## **Britannia Community Partners**

1. UBC Pacific Institute of Math and Science
2. More Sports
3. Frontier College
4. UNYA
5. Aboriginal Health
6. Public Library
7. Britannia Community Services Centre
8. Canucks Family Literacy Centre
9. Vancouver Girls Basketball Association
10. St James Music Academy
11. Project Limelight
12. Sarah McLaughlan School of Music
13. Aboriginal Friendship Centre
14. Heroes Hockey
15. Basketball BC
16. Exceleration
17. Public Health Canada
18. St George's
19. HIPPY Canada
20. Immigration Services of BC
21. VAFCS
22. MCFD
23. Red Fox
24. CLICK
25. Vancouver Homework Club Society
26. Arts Umbrella
27. Grandview Woodland Food Connection
28. UBC Let's Talk Science
29. UBC Teacher Education Office (teacher practica)



## Testimonials

Britannia Secondary is the home of Alternative Education in British Columbia. It was the school that introduced what an *alternative program* was and what it was capable of producing. It was also the school that understood that a community has all kinds of learners and that one type of school setting does not work for everybody. In the early 1970's Britannia was on the forefront of a great educational movement recognizing the need to build and support these programs. Every school district now has an alternative program or programs but no secondary school has valued them to the extent that Britannia Secondary has. While other schools may have alternative programs, no alternative programs have ever had a main school like Britannia Secondary.

Britannia has valued the worth and voice of alternative programs so much that they included an alternative teacher to be a Department Head, helping define school policy (not just policy involving alternative kids). This is not insignificant - rather it shows the ethos of Britannia Secondary. Formerly marginalized students come to Britannia and their issues garner as much attention as the IB students. They are every bit as valuable. This is the essence of public education - every kid counts and every kid matters. At Brit, these aren't just trite phrases or clichés; they are the fabric and sinew of this great school.

Britannia has long been the home for kids who need a place to be accepted and supported. My class is filled with sad stories of kids who couldn't find the connection they desperately needed in order to be successful. Once they arrive at Brit, they never want to leave. We must be into the hundreds in terms of requests to extend our program to grade 12. Once these kids have found a home (and the *home* metaphor is an apt one because Brit does in fact become their defacto home) they never want to leave it because they fear their educational outcomes will return to what they once were.

Programs like 8J9J; Outreach and Streetfront have become world leaders in alternative education. Their student's accomplishments have been borne from the dedication and commitment of the alternative staff but also from the support and vision of Britannia Secondary's administration. The administration has given the programs the license to do what they know to be the most appropriate for these students. Instead of looking for the faults and deficiencies in the students, they see the potential and promise in them, and the results are evident: Outreach consistently graduating more Aboriginal students than any other program in the province. 8J9J for decades has pushed the limits of what a liberal arts education should be: immersing students in art; dance; music and performance. Streetfront is the world leader in marathon running for teenagers and also leading global expeditions for our at-risk students. The breadth and scope of programming that these programs offer cannot be matched in the country. We take great pride in our accomplishments, as alternative programs but I know where our heart truly lies. When I gathered the 1<sup>st</sup> group of students in **CANADIAN HISTORY** to summit Mount Kilimanjaro in 2015 for a triumphant team cheer, it wasn't, "Streetfront on 3!!!!" rather it was what all the participants knew it was going to be and should be, "Bring it in!!! Britannia on 3!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!" Britannia is my home and it's my student's home. They need Britannia and so does the rest of the world.

***Trevor Stokes, Teacher, Streetfront Alternative Program***

## Testimonials

Britannia was my home and my school. I learned so much from my teachers who I'll never forget -- in particular Mr. Boissy and Mr. Fitzpatrick who never stopped believing in me, and who taught me what a thesis is. Britannia changed my life in many ways. I was able to come out as a bi-queer woman. I led the GSA (Gay-Straight Alliance) in my grade 12 year and brought our numbers way up and felt the energy of the school change: people stopped writing "fag" on lockers and using "gay" as an insult. I ran the announcements every day, playing music for the school and reading the announcements on the PA. Both the Principal and the Vice Principal knew me by name.

As I walked through the halls I knew many people. I never felt alone at such a community school. Then I became involved in Homework Club -- a space where high school students receive tutoring and listening ears from university students. I spent every single Monday, Tuesday and Thursday there, eating Nutella and trying to get a grasp on Integration and Standard Deviation. Being in the IB program challenged me in ways I never thought possible but also gave me the best friends in the entire universe and whom I see frequently even though I graduated in 2011.

If Britannia is closed, I would feel as though part of my adolescence was taken away. Britannia is community. It offers second chances. It turns people around. In grade 10, I was determined to drop out of school and play guitar on the streets for my living. I remember Mr. Boissy saying "Leah, I know you, and I know you are not one to accept it when things don't happen for you. If you take that route you will be closing doors to your future. You are not the kind of person who wants the doors closed -- keep all your options open, you're going to do big things." Even now when I think about what he said it brings me to tears.

My teachers cared about me at a time when I desperately needed it. Britannia is not a perfect school - no school is - but it is certainly my school and has changed my life and the lives of many others. The VSB cannot close Britannia. I will fight to keep its doors open so more kids can get the chance I did to make something of their lives and to not choose dropping out or suicide; rather, choosing hope and hard work, knowing that there's a community who cares about you and wants you to succeed.

***Leah Nusgart, Britannia graduate 2011***

## **Britannia students in the news**

1. <http://theprovince.com/sports/high-school/the-difference-makers-2015-britannia-bruins-timme-zhao-fosters-family-feel-at-east-van-school>
2. <http://www.vancourier.com/news/vsb-student-trustee-reflects-on-year-at-school-board-table-1.2273432>
3. <http://www.vancouver.sun.com/Timme+Zhao/11600417/story.html>
4. <http://theprovince.com/sports/high-school/difference-makers-2015-lauren-powell-brits-senior-gives-east-end-girls-their-best-chance>
5. <https://www.tdcanadatrust.com/products-services/banking/student-life/scholarship-winners-2016.jsp>
6. <http://www.vancourier.com/news/east-vancouver-students-climb-mt-kilimanjaro-1.1803025>
7. <http://www.vancourier.com/sports/high-school/our-prospects-duong-brings-on-court-jewels-to-thompson-rivers-university-1.2299876>
8. <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/vancouver-schools-pilot-project-guides-aboriginal-students-to-graduation/article16479335/>

## Images

1. [http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/imagecache/School-Photo-for-School-Profile/node-images/Second\\_Britannia.jpg](http://www.vsb.bc.ca/sites/default/files/imagecache/School-Photo-for-School-Profile/node-images/Second_Britannia.jpg)
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