

# **EDUCATION FUNDING**

*A Brief to the*

**Government of  
British Columbia**

*from the*

**British Columbia  
Teachers' Federation**

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Kit Krieger, President

Elsie McMurphy, Executive Director

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# No^Cuts to Education: BCTF 1998 Education Funding Brief

*Public education has been—and will continue to be—the single most powerful invention of capitalist democracies. It is the richest generator of economic wealth in history. It is the foundation of all great economies of the developed world, and it has been the saviour of little countries surrounded by dominant neighbours. All those kids in today’s public schools who will soon take their place in business, the professions, politics, the social services—*  
***they are not a debt; they are our most valuable asset.***

—Stephen Hume (September 22, 1995)

## **PUBLIC EDUCATION AS AN INVESTMENT**

Too often, governments succumb to political arguments of economic imperative without examining the long-term consequences. Many people today uncritically accept that government debt and deficits jeopardize our children’s future. We challenge this view, asking instead: What future will children have if they are denied access to an adequate education? How will they ever participate equally in society and the economy? We must see our education system as a means of escaping from the debt. If we simply cut, we will end up being worse off than we were when we started.

The vast majority of British Columbians seem to agree. In a recent poll commissioned by the BCTF, 90% of those surveyed agreed that “our public education system is not part of the country’s deficit; it is the source of our future wealth” (McIntyre and Mustel, May 1997). Decreased real funding for education threatens that investment.

In British Columbia, public schools were subjected to extensive cutbacks in resources between 1982 and 1986. The rationale? “The need for fiscal restraint.” B.C. teachers opposed the cuts as short-sighted and harmful to the long-term benefit of the province’s children and hence to its future. The BCTF continues to advocate for improvements to learning and working conditions in our schools.

# Principles of Education Funding

Stable, adequate, and fair funding provisions are essential to maintaining high-quality public education. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation recommends that education-funding policy be based on the following principles:

- Operating expenditures per student will be increased to cover inflation.
- Increased enrolment will be fully funded.
- Funding for students with special needs will fully reflect the specific needs and conditions identified.
- Funding will provide for a fair and reasonable salary increase for teachers.
- Policies in respect to reporting student progress, the preparation of Individual Education Plans, and changes in curriculum will be funded adequately, or policy demands will be revised to match existing funding.
- Monitoring and accountability measures will ensure that instructional budgets are used for instruction, not administration.
- Taxpayer dollars should not be used to fund private schools.
- The education funding formula should result in equitable allocations to school districts.

## Education Resources in Decline

Over the last six years, we have seen a gradual decline in the overall resources available for education, with a significant reduction in non-enrolling teachers. Although government has made a priority of education and health care in its budgetary decisions, those decisions have made teaching more difficult. Recognizing that others in society are hurting from decreases in government spending, teachers have not been excessive in their protestations about funding decisions. There is a common interest in portraying public education in its best light to counter many of its detractors, including those who say public schools are not meeting the needs of students in a competitive, global economy.

In a survey of BCTF members (Viewpoints Research, February 1997), 88% of respondents indicated they were either very satisfied or somewhat satisfied with their current job. At the same time, however, over half (57%) of the public school teachers surveyed told us that the stress level of their jobs has increased over the last three years. The most common reasons given were increased workload and growing demands on their time, both directly related to tightened funding.

# Public Support for Education Funding

The B.C. public continues to support adequate funding for our public schools.

According to the BCTF's most recent province-wide public opinion poll (McIntyre & Mustel, May 1997):

- 64% of British Columbians think current education funding levels are too low;
- 62% believe that corporations are not paying their fair share of education costs through taxes;
- 71% think it is more important to maintain or increase education spending than to eliminate the provincial deficit within the near future;
- 54% support increasing resources for integrating children with special needs;
- 53% favour an increase in funding for counsellors, learning assistance teachers, and teacher-librarians.

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation calls on government to provide adequate funding for the demands being placed on the system today, and to halt the practice of adopting policies that generate new demands without providing adequate funding to meet those new demands.

## WHAT WE EXPECT

Providing high-quality educational services to students requires continuity of funding. Over the years, British Columbia parents and the public in general have come to expect public schools to offer students a solid foundation of essentials and a variety of specialized educational experiences.

To acquire the level of education required in our rapidly changing world, all students in the public education system depend on continuity of programs to make full use of the resources already invested in their education. Continuity of service is also critical to enable students to have equitable access to post-secondary learning opportunities. Discontinuities in the funding system threaten these goals.

# What has been happening in the funding system?

In 1990–91, block funding was introduced, as recommended by the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education. Each year, the ministry responsible for education establishes a provincial per pupil dollar amount that is then multiplied by the projected number of students to determine the Total Estimated Provincial Funding Allocation. This global amount is then assigned to districts using the Funding Allocation System, which uses factors such as the individual district's enrolment, and specific factors that apply to each school district. In addition, districts receive a number of other grants from the government, for example Employer's Association and Pay Equity; however, those grants are not the subject of this brief.

**Figure 1**

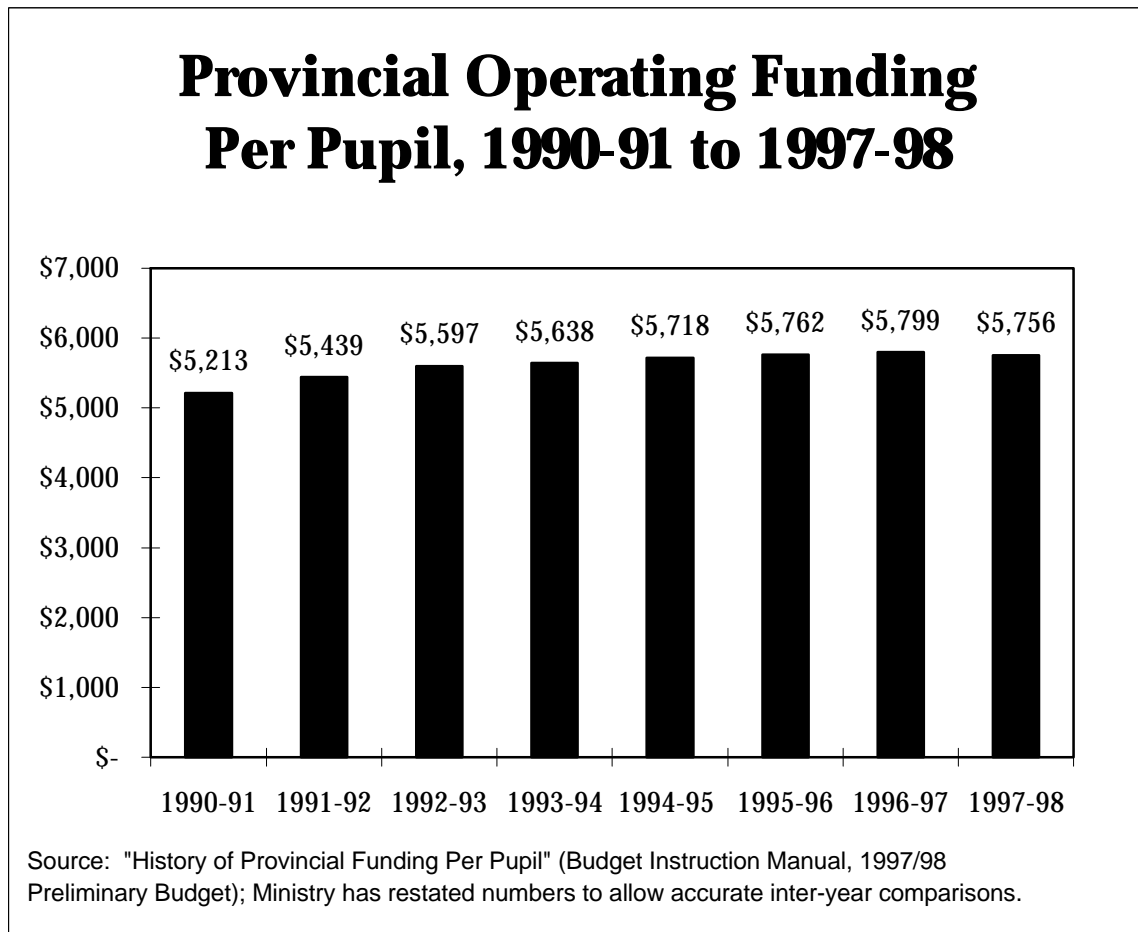
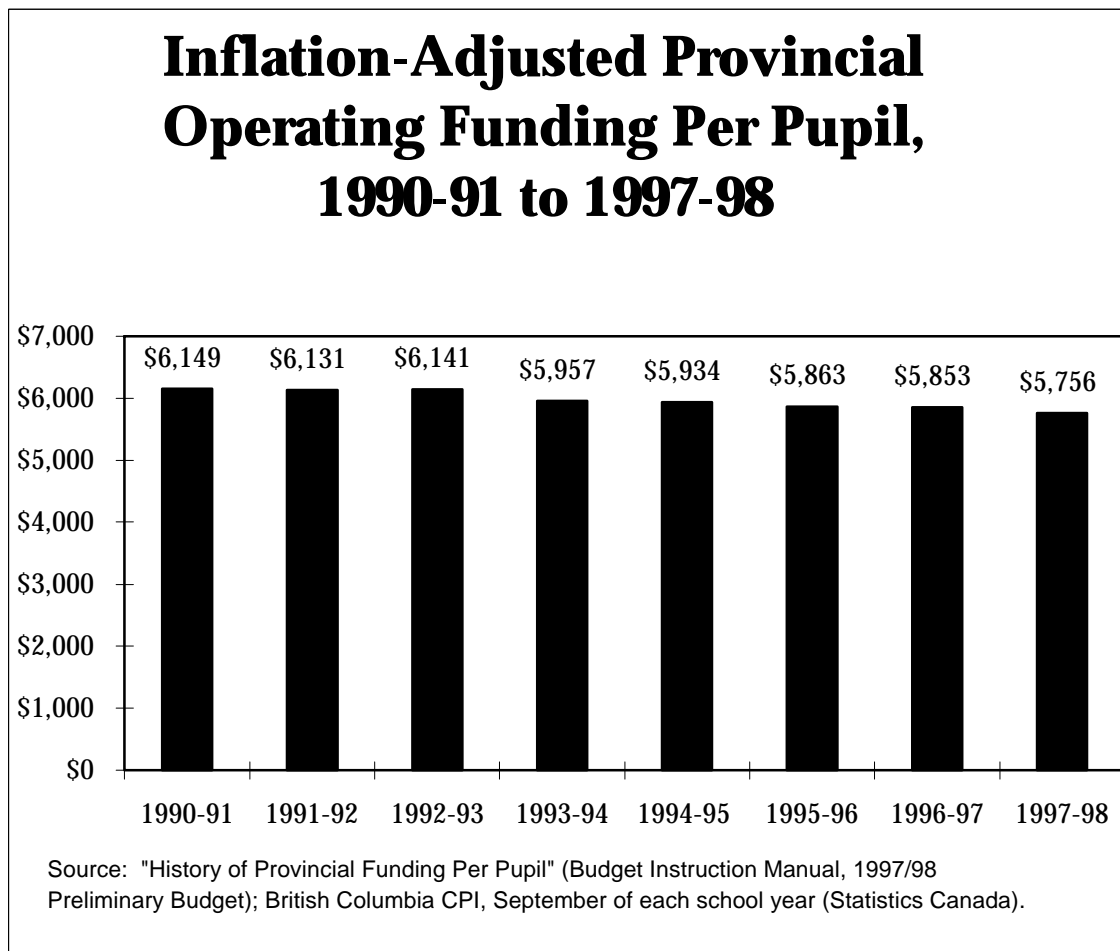


Figure 1 displays the history of provincial funding per pupil since the introduction of block funding. These figures, published by the ministry in the Budget Instruction Manual supplied to school districts, take into account changes in the education funding system to allow for accurate inter-year comparisons. For example, funding for Community Schools—now the responsibility of the Ministry for Children and Families—has been removed retroactively from previous years' figures. For this reason, these numbers may differ from previously-published per-pupil amounts.

At face value, the amount of funding per student increased every year between 1990–91 and 1996–97, but will decline in 1997–98 for the first time in seven years. The decrease of \$43 comprises expected system-wide “Efficiency Adjustments” of \$49 per student, tempered somewhat by \$6 per student for teachers’ negotiated salary increase. In spite of this decline, the resulting per pupil amount of \$5,756 is \$543 or 10.4% higher than the comparable amount for 1990–91.

**Figure 2**



When inflation is taken into account, however, the figures tell a different story. Figure 2 displays the same per-pupil funding amounts as Figure 1, this time adjusted using the British Columbia Consumer Price Index (CPI) to reflect September 1997 dollars (that month was chosen as the benchmark since it is the beginning of the school year). This chart demonstrates that real operating funding per student has declined every year since 1992–93.

Figure 3 partially explains why funding has deteriorated. Each year when it determines the Total Estimated Provincial Funding Allocation, the government decides whether to incorporate an “Economic Adjustment.” This chart compares the Economic Adjustment to the annualized inflation rate, as represented by annual average changes in the British Columbia Consumer Price Index. In 1990–91, the adjustment exceeded the change in CPI, but in every year since then, inflation has outstripped per-pupil funding. In three of eight years, the economic adjustment was 0%.

**Figure 3**

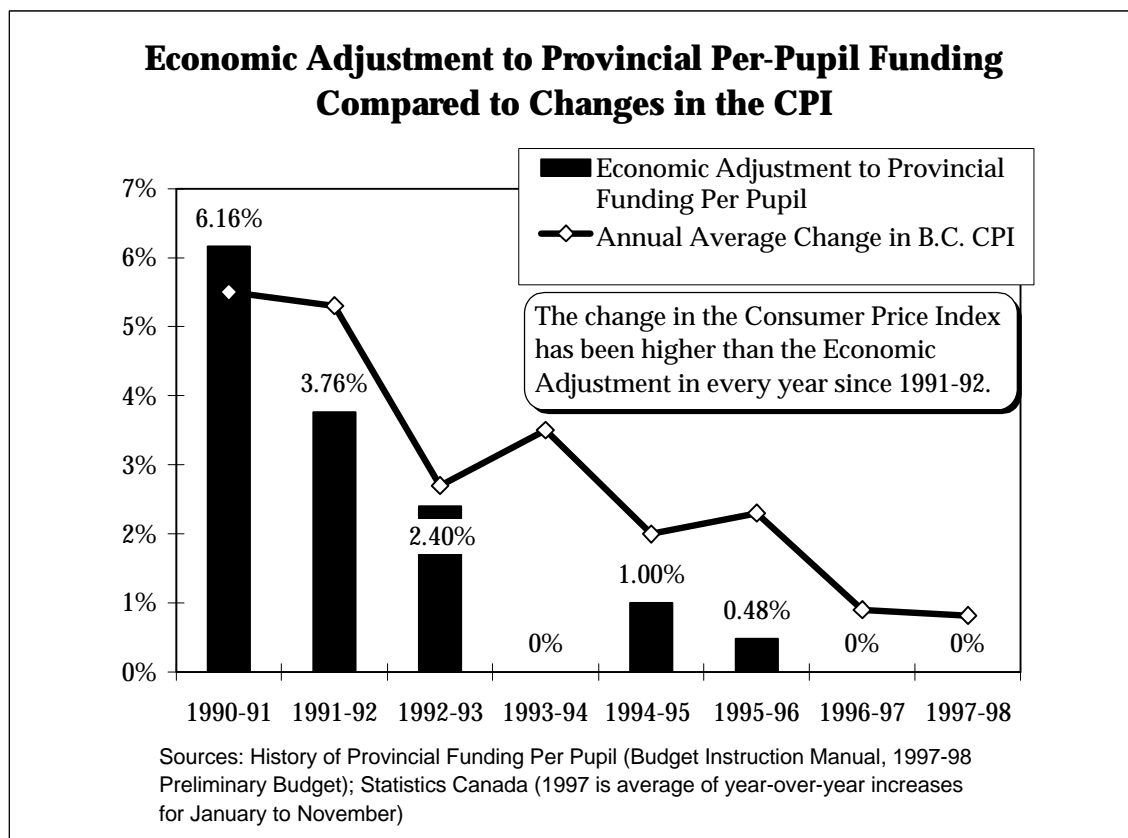


Figure 4 combines actual funding per pupil (shown as bars) with inflation-adjusted amounts (shown as a line). It is evident from these figures that public education in British Columbia has experienced a decline in real per-pupil operating funds of \$393 per student since 1990–91. This 6.4% decline has

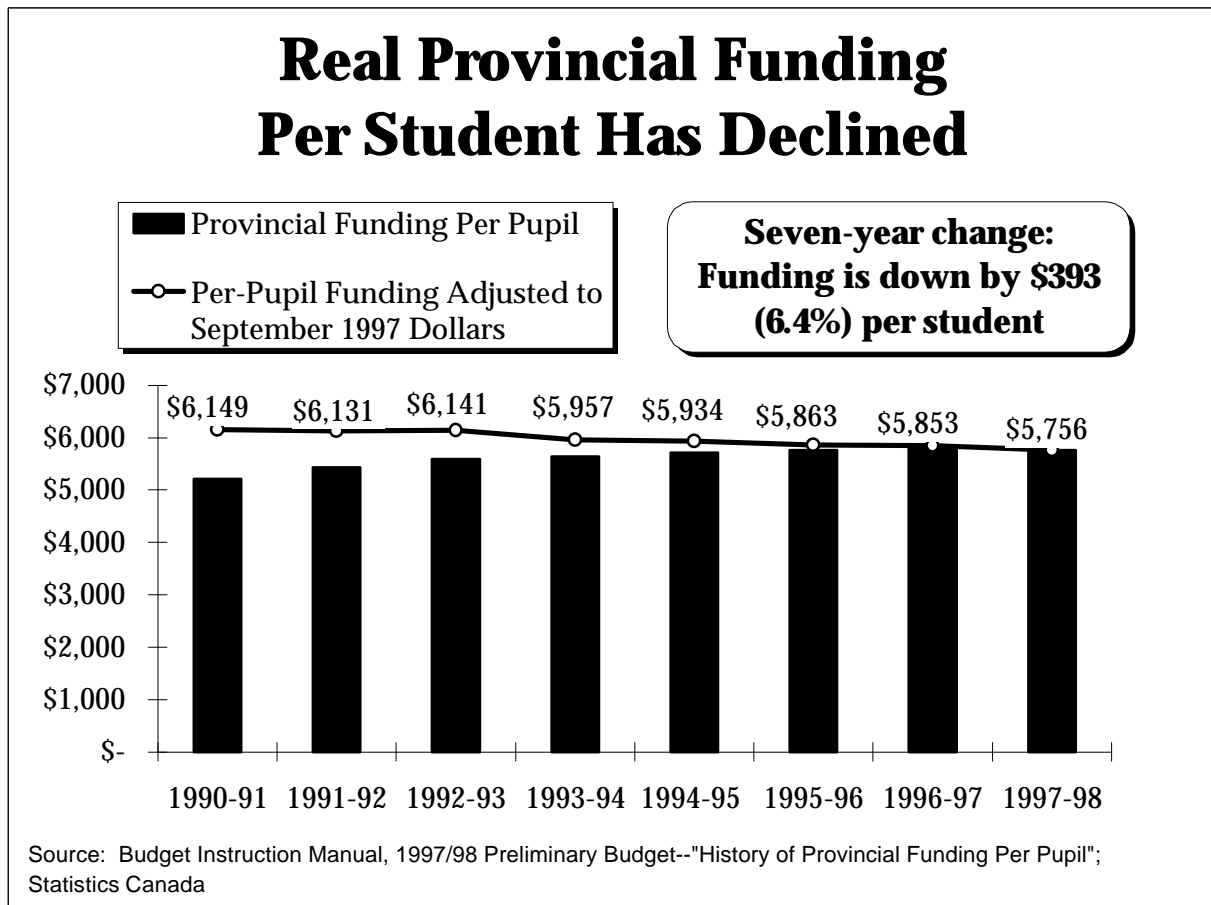


occurred when more and more students need specialized educational services, when more students have English as their second language, and when more students are identified as having special needs.

Reduced per-student funding for education threatens the number and quality of educational experiences available to students. If the real per-pupil amount for 1997–98 were the same as in 1990–91, the system would be funded to the tune of about \$237 million more in the upcoming year. This funding could be used to hire more than 3,700 additional teachers.

Cumulative effects are even more devastating: even relatively small reductions in funds to support the delivery of instruction to students in the next budget year will have much larger, negative impacts on educational opportunities. Restoring per-pupil operating funds to a provincial average of \$6,149 would ensure continuity of programs. At the same time, it would provide for the expected 1.6% increase in the number of students in 1998–99 (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, Standard Report 1558A, September 1996).

**Figure 4**



# THE STATE OF THE SYSTEM TODAY

A teacher from outside the Lower Mainland describes her recent experience in a split class:

*My class consists of 21 Grade 6 students and seven Grade 5 students. Of the 28, two students take up most of my time and attention. One, who I'm going to call Simon, has a designation of moderate behaviour. Although we could have chosen any number of ways to designate him, we could only choose one designation, and it seemed to us that his behaviour was the direct cause of most of his learning difficulties.*

*Some test results were not valid because of his high level of distractibility, but the assessment determined that this Grade 6 student was working mostly at a Grade 2 level both academically and socially. Being highly distractible, Simon is unable to work in a classroom setting. He was taken off Ritalin this fall; now any little noise in the classroom distracts him. And, if he does not have one-on-one attention, he becomes a distraction to every child near him. The help that I get for him in the classroom is negligible. Once a day he's out of the classroom for one 40-minute period, but the rest of the day is spent in the classroom.*

*One other student in my class also has severe behavioural problems, but he has not been designated. Philip comes from a single-parent home, with Spanish as a first language, and in his home there is extreme dysfunction. The mother is constantly in tears, since she doesn't know what to do with him or how to control his behaviour. He is angry, he is unhappy, and this manifests itself in extreme inability to get along with other members of the class. He is defiant, he is rude, and he is unwilling to work. For him, I have no help. My day is spent in constant intervention between these two boys.*

*What disturbs me most is that the other 26 children—who sit quietly in the classroom and do their work—do not get any attention. They are somehow overlooked because they don't "rock the boat." If my class size were increased, that would simply mean that there would be even more students who would be neglected.*

This teacher explains that her class composition is not unusual. This description of her class reflects the mix of students that teachers now deal with every day.

Even teachers who have been out of the classroom for only a few years cannot comprehend the changes that have taken place in the composition of classes. Most senior administrators do not even understand the teaching load and how it is increasing because of the needs of students.

# Intensified Demands on Teachers

Change is a constant in contemporary society—and in its education system. Many of the demands for change make sense, but that doesn't make them any easier. Effective change strategies require a climate of support as well as an understanding of why the changes are necessary or will make things better.

These demands for changes have accelerated in the 1990s, even as real per-student funding has declined.

The intensification of teachers' work shows no sign of a letup. Consider just a few of the more significant demands:

- Students with special needs are integrated into regular classrooms. Time is required to assess students and to work out an Individual Educational Plan (IEP) for each. Teacher assistants and specialist staff often work with the teacher, and consultation among these parties is demanded if the work is to be effective for students. Government directives also require consultation with parents in the preparation of IEPs. All of these circumstances mean that instruction will sometimes lose out to paperwork.
- The ESL population has continued to grow. Not only does this increase the demand from specific ESL programs. It also means that teachers must pay special attention to students being integrated into regular subject classes, to ensure their facility with English continues to develop.
- The direction of education has shifted dramatically over a three-year period, requiring the development of new plans and approaches while previously mandated changes had to be abandoned after just a short time.
- New curriculum has been introduced throughout the school program. A new framework for curriculum, the introduction of Integrated Resource Packages in many subjects, and many new recommended teaching materials require substantial work on the part of teachers to incorporate these changes into their work. The timeline has been compressed into a four- to five-year framework.
- New reporting procedures and criteria are placing an exceptionally heavy, increased demand on teacher time, both at school and outside school hours. Mandating criterion-referenced assessment, requiring more structured written reports, and other requirements are all increasing pressure on teachers.
- The rapid development of technologies requires constant research and retraining just to keep up with what is available. To make matters worse, there are enormous inequities in access to hardware, software, telecommunications facilities, and training for both students and teachers. For many

teachers, implementing new technologies is like being required to build a new building without a foundation or proper tools.

- Parents are becoming more demanding. They want to be more involved, to have a say in what is happening in the school and the classroom—all this places more demands on teachers.
- More students are facing the traumas and trials of the social change taking place around us: more inequality in society, less stable family structures, increased poverty, ethnic and personal conflicts. All these and more just add to the difficulty of carrying out the work of teaching.

Teachers don't have the option of just ignoring these changes and carrying on as they may have in the past. To successfully meet these challenges—and the expectations of government—teachers must have more concrete and visible support.

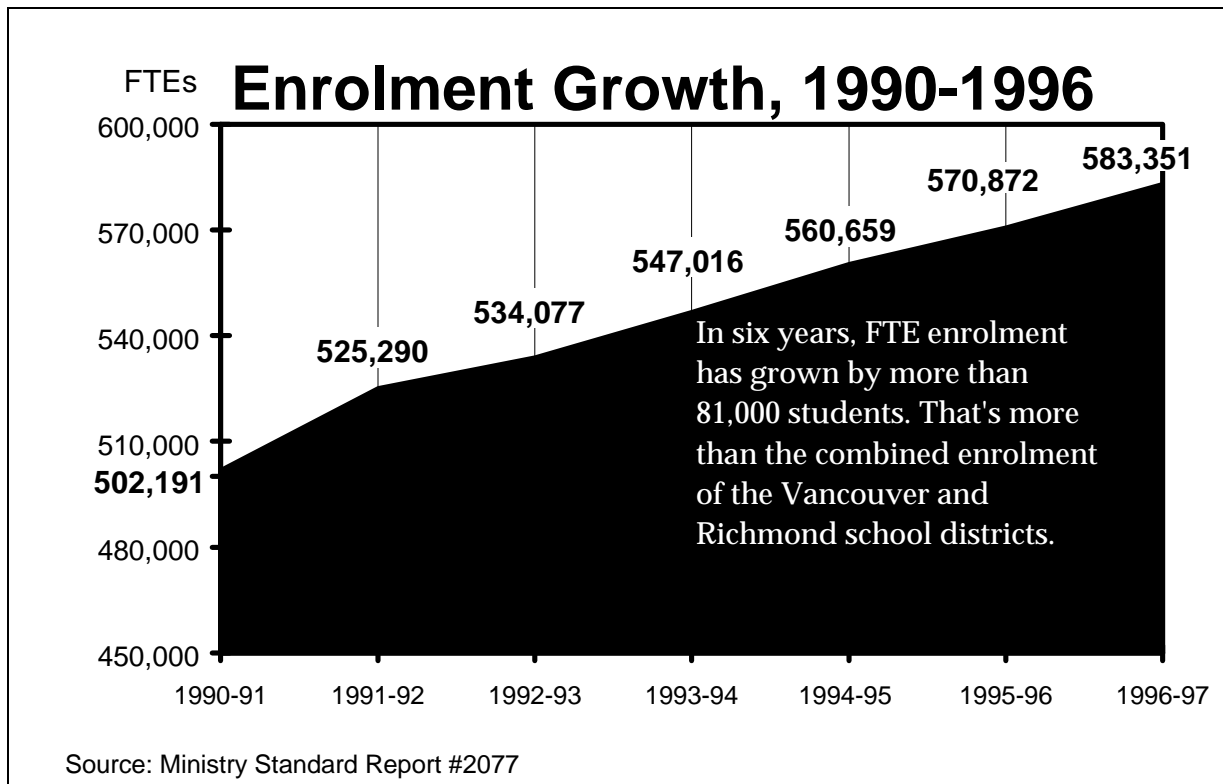
# Statistical Changes in the System Since 1990

The increased demands on teachers in today's classrooms have been intensified by reduced staffing levels. The following overview uses the most recent data available to the BCTF to illustrate enrolment and staffing trends.

## Growing Enrolment

The increasing enrolment in B.C. schools is dramatic. As illustrated by Figure 5, more than 81,000 additional full-time-equivalent students entered the system in the six years between 1990 and 1996 (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Report 2077, September 1996). That is more than the combined enrolment of the Vancouver and Richmond school districts (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Report 2077, September 1996). Such numbers cannot be easily accommodated without considerable cost and stress on an already overburdened system.

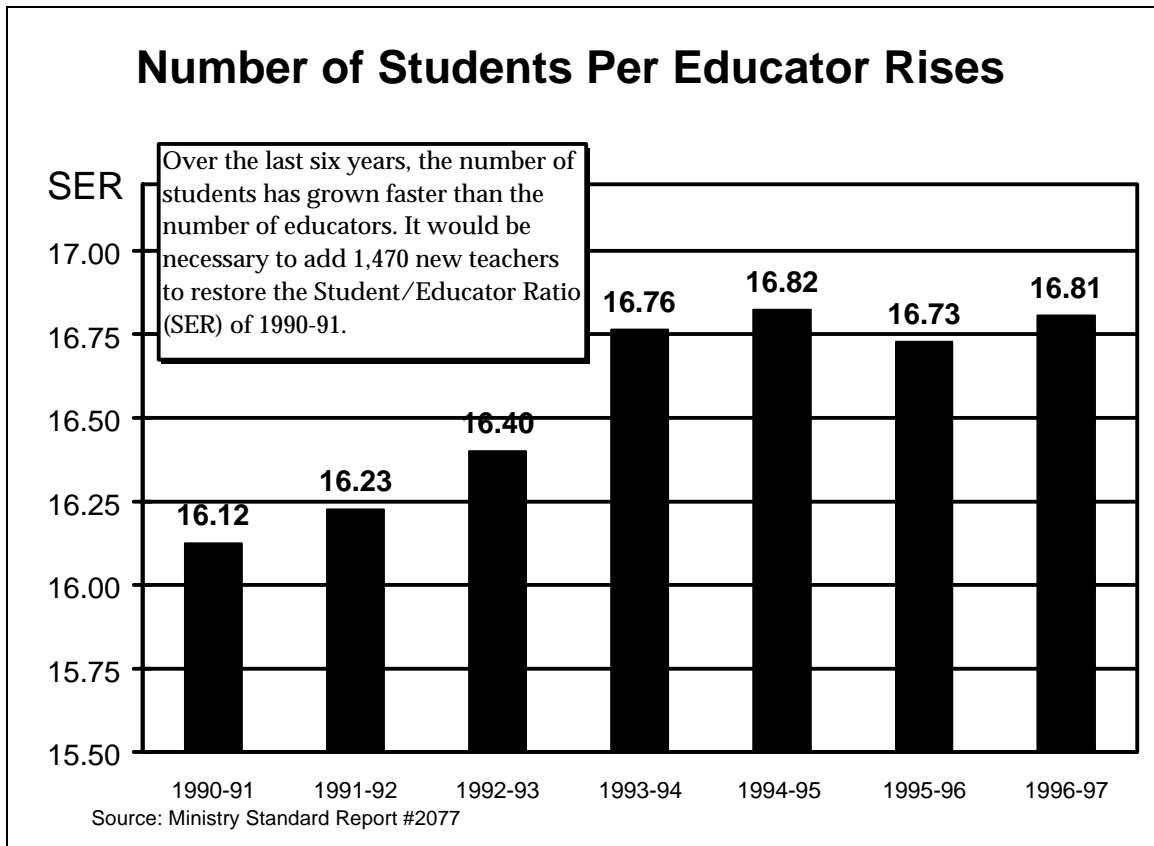
**Figure 5**



## Increased Student/Educator Ratios

When the NDP Government was elected in October 1991, the student/educator ratio (SER) was 16.12. The most recent figures (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Report 2077, September 1996) indicate the ratio has deteriorated to 16.81 (Figure 6). Instead, as provincial enrolment grew by 81,159 students, or 16.2%, the number of teachers increased by only 3,564, or 11.4%. If the SER of 1990-91 were still in place, there would be 1,470 more teachers to work with B.C.'s growing student population.

**Figure 6**

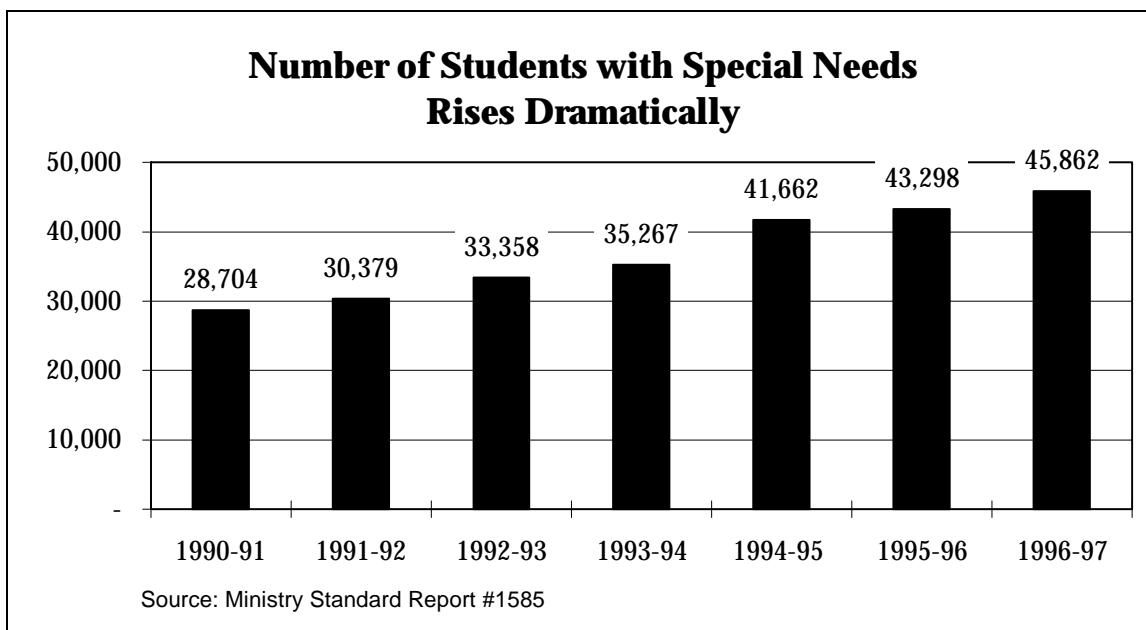


## Students with Special Needs

Students themselves have changed dramatically over the six years between 1990 and 1996 (Figure 7). In 1990, the ministry reported that there were 28,704 students with special needs (plus 15,729 gifted students); by 1996 there were 45,862 such students (plus 20,743 gifted students) (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Report 1585). That represents a 59.8% increase in identified students with special needs over a six-year period.

To place these numbers in context, consider the following: While the number of teachers entering the system increased by only 11% between 1990 and 1996, the overall number of students increased by 16% but the number of students with special needs increased by nearly 60%. Dramatic as this growth is, it is likely an understatement. One of the most common criticisms teachers level at the system is that many students in their classrooms have special needs but are not identified or recognized for funding purposes and are therefore not receiving the special services they require in order to learn.

**Figure 7**

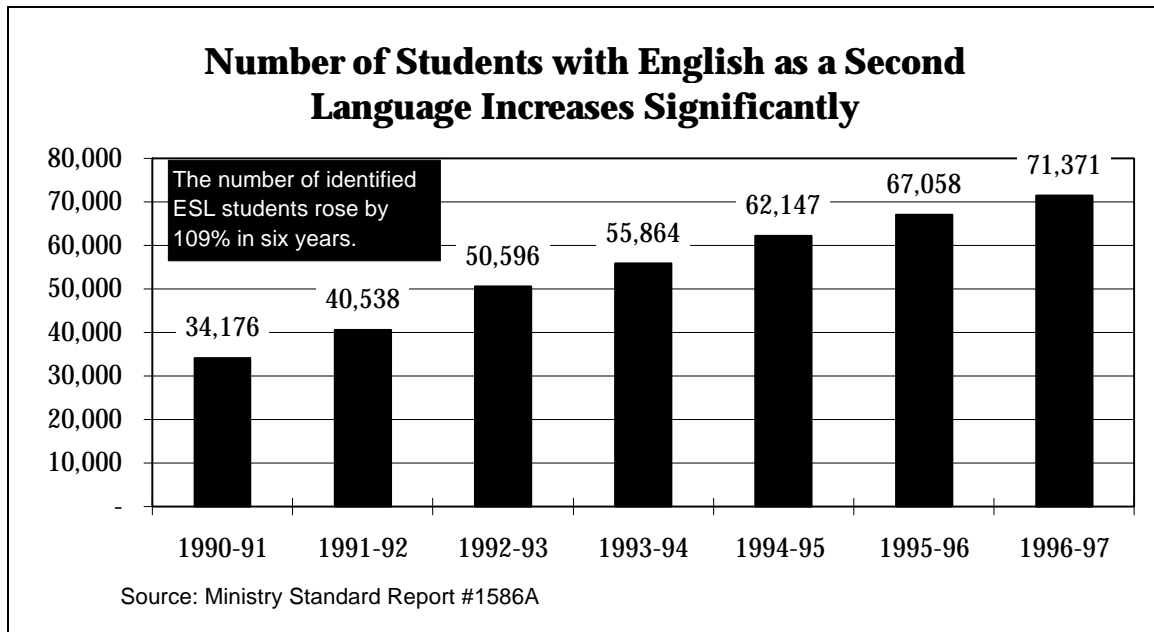


## English as a Second Language and Aboriginal Enrolments

There are other indicators of additional stresses on the system since 1990. For example, as Figure 8 shows, the number of identified ESL students receiving special services has more than doubled, going from 34,176 in 1990 to 71,371 in 1996—a 109% increase (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Report 1586A). The number of identified aboriginal students receiving special

services increased over the same six years by 128%—from 15,664 students in 1990 to 35,691 in 1996 (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Report 1587A).

**Figure 8**



## New Programs

The system is stressed with all these additional needs while also striving to provide new programs to more and more students. The number of students taking Japanese, for example, went up by 175% between 1990 and 1996, from 2,664 to 7,328 students in six years (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Report 1574E). Similarly, the number of students taking Mandarin as a second language increased by 311% over the same period (1,077 to 4,425 students) (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Report 1574F).

## Class-Size Increases

In this environment of increased student needs, intensified demands, and additional programs being offered, class sizes have actually increased in the elementary grades in the six-year period under study. Class size averaged 22.6 in 1990; by 1996, the average had risen to 23.35 (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Report 2040).



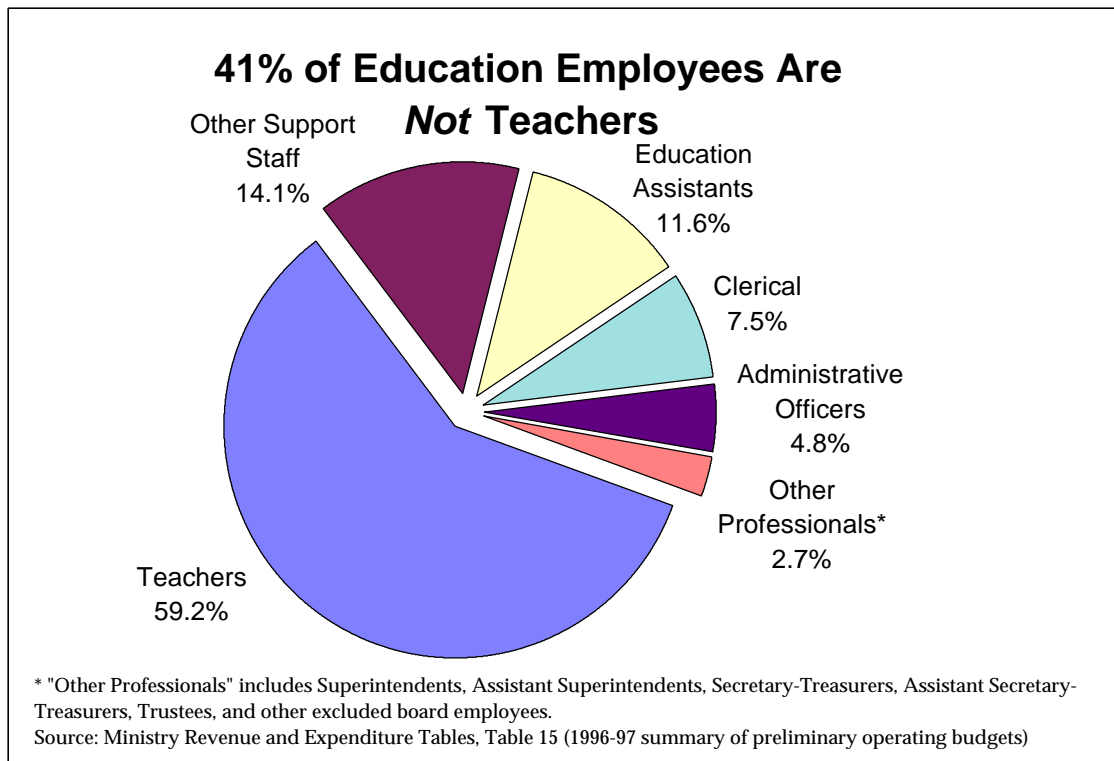
# EDUCATION-FUNDING ISSUES

## Teaching Staff

The preliminary budgets submitted by school districts for 1996–97 show that only 49.5% of budgets are set aside for teachers' salaries, contrary to inaccurate media reports of 80% or even 90% (Revenue and Expenditure Information, October 1996, Table 10). This is even less than last year's figure of 49.9%.

As Figure 9 demonstrates, of the 54,064.6 people currently working in the education system, 41% are *not* teachers (Revenue and Expenditure Information, October 1996, Table 15). The comparable figure for 1995–96 was 40%, indicating a decline in the relative number of teachers. While the number of teachers budgeted in 1996–97 rose by 231 or 0.73%, the number of Education Assistants was 235 or 3.9% higher than in the previous year, and the number of Other Professionals went up by 214 or 17%. Other Professionals include Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Secretary-Treasurers, Assistant Secretary-Treasurers, Trustees, and any other excluded board employees.

**Figure 9**



Districts have reported that only 20% of staff assigned to work with low-incidence/high-cost students are teachers. These, the most needy students in our system, are not getting the help of teachers. Insufficient attention is being given

to providing adequate teaching staff in our schools. Surely the major cost of education *should be* teachers' salaries.

## **Administrative Staff**

Confounding the issue of how many resources are actually directed toward students in the classroom is districts' allocation of 1,204 of the total 2,609 full-time-equivalent administrative officers to the instructional budget at a cost of \$90.5 million (Revenue and Expenditure Information, October 1996, Tables 10 and 15). In other words, almost half of administrative officers' time is allocated to instruction. Introducing monitoring and accountability measures to ensure that instructional budgets are used for instruction, not administration, would help counteract this trend.

## **Increases in Operating Budgets**

The Ministry's Revenue and Expenditure Information (October 21, 1996) indicates the increased capital cost in the system for construction and debt services more than doubled over the past six years. While increased spending needs for capital costs are recognized, the same cannot be said for classroom operating costs. Although operating budgets rose by 30% over the period, all the increase was absorbed by inflation (the B.C. CPI rose by 16.9%) and additional funded enrolments (up by 17.2%). When projections for 1997-98 are taken into account, the result is a 6.4% decline in inflation-adjusted per-pupil operating funding since 1990, as demonstrated in an earlier section of this brief.

Teachers are subsidizing the system with their extra unpaid labour as they try, with fewer resources, to meet the additional learning requirements of the many students with special needs.

## **School Taxes**

On average, B.C. homeowners paid only \$12.17 per month for net school taxes in 1996. That is \$13 or 8.2% less per year than the average in 1995 (Revenue and Expenditure Information, October 1996, Table 30). Increasing the residential tax rate by one-quarter point in 1997 would raise another \$68 million in revenue and would cost the average homeowner only \$3.60 a month (Residential Assessed Values in 1997 and The Assessed Value of Single Family Dwellings by Decile in 1997, Budget Instruction Manual, 1997/98 Preliminary Budget).

## Private Schools Funding

Government has just budgeted \$133.4 million for grants to independent schools, an increase of 1% over the Total 1996/97 Voted Expenditure (Vote 23, Supplement to the Estimates, Fiscal Year Ending March 31, 1998). Between 1990 and 1995, the latest year for which figures are available, actual government grants to private schools increased by 47%, even though funded enrolment in those schools increased by only 32%. Government grants to private schools stood at \$82 million in 1990; by 1995–96, government funding was up almost \$40 million to \$120.3 million (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training, Statistical Supplement to the Annual Report, 1994–1995, updated with information from the Independent Schools Branch). This expenditure is excessive and unnecessary, especially when revenues are scarce for public schools.

It is unacceptable for a government to starve public schools—which take in and provide services for *all* students, including those with special needs—while providing public tax dollars to private schools, which often reject them. The BCTF is opposed to using taxpayer dollars to fund private schools.

## Prison or School? A Cost Comparison

The State of Florida now spends more on its jails than on its schools, even though it is known that seven people can be educated in college for the cost of keeping one person in jail (Dr. H. Hodgkinson, Director of the Center of Demographic Policy, Institute of Educational Leadership, speaking to the 1989 American Education Finance Association Conference). The American experience has taught us the sad fact that once the prison population requires more resources than the schools, public education as a viable public institution is threatened.

In our province, teachers struggle with inadequate resources to work with potential inmates earlier in their lives. While the amount set aside to cover educational costs per student in B.C. schools is currently \$5,756, the average annual cost of adult incarceration ranges from \$36,227 for minimum security to \$70,236 for maximum security. The average cost of keeping a young offender in custody for one year is \$74,500—that's 13 times the funding for one student. (Corrections costs from *Vancouver Sun*, December 29, 1995, B4.) We must consider the long-range costs of not providing adequate funding for at-risk students. It makes more sense to meet such students' needs early on so they can make a positive contribution to the community.

# The B.C. Teaching Force

British Columbia is fortunate to have an excellent teaching force in its public schools. Adequate resources must be provided to maintain and support a professional workforce of such competence and quality.

## Salary Comparisons

The average classroom teacher has at least five years of university education, at least one degree, more than 12 years experience in the B.C. system, and a salary of \$52,387 if working full time (Ministry of Education, Skills and Training Standard Reports 2080, 2063, 2062, and 2067, September 1996). How does this compare to earnings in other occupations? In 1995, an electrical power line and cable worker earned \$53,569; a fishing master, \$53,934; a pulp mill machine operator, \$53,975; a boat operator, \$55,645; and a police officer, \$56,608 (*1995 Estimates of Employment and Average Annual Employment Earnings: BC/Yukon; Planning and Analysis, Human Resources Development Canada, BC/Yukon Region*).

Fortunately we have been able to learn from the crisis in the American teaching force where more than 50% of America's teachers are now forced to take a second job to survive economically, and competent well-qualified people are often difficult to find. For example in 1986, 72% of American principals reported they could not find a qualified physics teacher, 63% could not find a chemistry teacher, and 57% could not find a math teacher. One of the key restructuring efforts in the United States has been to increase teachers' salary levels. Americans are starting to understand that quality education is closely tied to teacher salary levels (see Dr. M. Cohen, Director National Governor's Association, speech to the 1989 American Education Finance Association). To avoid the mistakes made in the U.S.A., we need to plan and budget to maintain our teacher salary levels. When salaries fall behind, a downward spiral—that is very difficult and costly to pull out of—begins.

New teachers in this province currently are paid only about \$37,000—this in spite of having at least five years of university education and, for many, a debt load of thousands of dollars in student loans. Preventing further erosion of teachers' salary levels is in society's best interest.

## Workload

We not only have one of the best-trained teaching forces, but we also have the hardest working. A 1994 Statistics Canada study showed that teachers in B.C. work 42.2 hours per week—almost three hours more than the national average of 39.4 (*Education Quarterly Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1994).

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

British Columbia teachers are committed to maintaining and improving our high-quality public-education system. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation therefore respectfully requests that the government **provide adequate funding to cover enrolment growth, inflationary losses, the learning requirements of students requiring special educational services, and a fair and reasonable salary increase for the teachers of this province. There must be no more cuts to education.**

Specifically, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation recommends that the government of British Columbia:

1. Provide public-education funding that meets the real needs of students and teachers. As a first step, fund public education in 1998–99 to attain the 1990–91 Student/Educator Ratio.
2. Fully fund enrolment growth.
3. Maintain funding in real terms by adjusting for the effects of inflation.
4. Ensure that funding for students with special needs fully reflects the specific needs and conditions identified.
5. Provide increased resources for English as a Second Language programs.
6. Provide sufficient funding to ensure an appropriate level of services provided by non-enrolling teachers for all students at all schools, including library services, counselling, learning assistance, and other services.
7. Honour and fund all provisions achieved through collective bargaining.
8. Introduce monitoring and accountability measures to ensure that instructional budgets are used to pay for instruction, not for administration. Require boards to report underspending of instructional budgets. Maintain the cap on administrative spending until the Accounting Manual is revised to ensure consistent financial reporting and the achievement of transparency. Continue to target allocations for special education and aboriginal programs.
9. Either increase funding to support policies on reporting student progress, the preparation of Individual Education Plans, and changes in curriculum, or revise policy demands to match existing funding.
10. Undertake school construction programs to reduce the number of portable classrooms and provide adequate learning and teaching environments for students and teachers.

## Potential sources of new revenue

11. Eliminate public funding of private schools.
12. Invest in early retirement incentive programs. This investment will lower the average teacher salary and figure and thus reduce overall costs in the system. It will also provide opportunities for younger teachers.
13. Leave savings from Workers' Compensation Board assessment changes in the school system.

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