

---

# BCTF Research Report

---

RR2013-05

## Did the “Learning Improvement Fund” (LIF) make a difference? Not really

<http://www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630>

By Larry Kuehn, Ed.D.  
BCTF Research  
September 2013

The “Learning Improvement Fund” is described by government as responding to the need for more resources for the system. The government claims that 500 new teaching positions were created in 2012–13 with the Learning Improvement Fund, in a recent Ministry of Education bulletin<sup>1</sup>—“To date, the LIF has helped to hire 500 new teachers and 400 new special education assistants”. Yet the ministry data tell a different story. That claim is not based on facts. In the first year of the LIF, the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) teachers in the province dropped by 33 compared to the previous year, rather than going up by 500.

### Here is an explanation

The LIF was announced as a three-year program, with \$30 million in the first year, \$60 million in the second year, and \$75 million in the third year, for a total of \$165 million. The overall amount was emphasized and most who heard the announcement may have thought these numbers represented a significant increase. They would not have realized that there would not be any significant improvement.

The amount in the LIF was increased in the first year from \$30 million to \$60 million, when the province took much of the salaries not paid to teachers during a three-day strike and added that to the fund. That meant the LIF was \$60/\$60/\$75 for a total of \$195 million, with \$30 million in the first year financed by teachers.

One of the conditions of the LIF is “Reduction prohibited: 4. A board that receives a grant under section 115.2 of the Act must not reduce the expenditures *it would have made to address learning improvement issues* if the board did not receive the grant.” (italics added)

This implies that all these funds would add staff—teaching and support staff—rather than boards reducing the staff in the general budget and then replacing those teachers with staff funded from the LIF. However, the vague language did not produce an improvement. While it told boards not to reduce “learning improvement issues.” The reality is that boards don’t have funds to make learning improvements—they are actually reducing services because of lack of funding.

---

<sup>1</sup> BC Ministry of Education. Education by the numbers, *Information Bulletin*, August 27, 2013.  
<http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2013/08/education-by-the-numbers-2.html>

The amount of the LIF available to add teachers was further limited when the government and the school district bargaining agency, BCPSEA, reached an agreement with the unions representing support staff, primarily CUPE, that at least \$7.5 million each year would be applied to support-staff positions.

How, then, if 500 teaching jobs were to be created by the fund, did the reported number of FTE teachers in the system actually fall by 33?

The Learning Improvement Fund (LIF) has been a bait-and-switch game in the way it played out in its first year, 2012–13. It is important to remember that the level of funding has been frozen, according to ministry budget documents, for the three years of the LIF funding. However, costs to boards were not frozen, which means that school boards have had to reduce expenditures somewhere. Costs determined by the province, including MSP premiums, BC Hydro rates, busing support and pension contributions, increased, leaving boards with no options other than to reduce the major costs—which are the people they employ.

### Year One of the LIF—2012–13

The explanation is complex, but this is how the bait-and-switch has worked:

The number of FTE learning specialist teachers increased by 132 in 2012–13, not by 500 as claimed. While the Learning Improvement Fund appears to have resulted in an increase of 99 FTE teachers in the Special Education program in 2012–13<sup>2</sup>, FTE counselling positions increased by only 1 FTE in 2012–13, despite a loss of 119.5 FTE positions since 2001–02. FTE positions in Library Services and English Language Learning increased marginally in 2012–13, not near enough to compensate for the loss of staffing since 2001–02 (Table 1).

**Table 1: Change in FTE specialist teachers: 2001–02 to 2011–12, and 2011–12 to 2012–13**

FTE specialist teachers	2001–02	2011–12	2012–13	Change in FTE— 2011–12 compared to 2001–02	Change in FTE— 2012–13 compared to 2011–12
Library Services	921.8	635.8	646.6	-286.0	10.8
Counselling	989.6	870.1	871.1	-119.5	1.0
Special Education	4,051.5	3,282.3	3,381.3	-769.2	99.0
English Language Learning	1,015.6	673.7	686.2	-341.9	12.5
Aboriginal Education	206.9	196.0	204.7	-10.9	8.7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>7,185.4</b>	<b>5,657.9</b>	<b>5,789.9</b>	<b>-1,527.5</b>	<b>132.0</b>

BCTF Research tables, with figures from BC Ministry of Education (2002, 2012, 2013), *Staff by Year and Program Code* (unpublished Form 1530 data).

<sup>2</sup> These figures reflect staffing changes as of September 30, 2012.

These minor improvements in learning specialist positions in 2012–13 are offset by a loss of overall teaching support in BC classrooms. The ministry’s *Teacher Statistics* report shows a decrease of 33.3 FTE teaching positions between 2011–12 and 2012–13 (Table 2), even though the Learning Improvement Fund was expected to result in an increase teaching positions in 2012–13.

**Table 2: Change in FTE teachers in BC public schools: 2008–09 to 2012–13**

Year	FTE teachers
2008–09	30,867.3
2009–10	30,393.0
2010–11	30,110.1
2011–12	30,407.4
2012–13	30,374.1
Change since 2007–08	-493.2
Change since 2011–12	-33.3

BCTF calculations with data from: Ministry of Education. *Teacher Statistics 2012/13* – Province, public schools, p. 3. [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/teacher\\_stats/public.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/teacher_stats/public.pdf).

### **Districts cut expenditures on teacher salaries in instructional programs**

Districts spent \$10.1 million less on teachers’ salaries in “Regular Instruction” in the 2012–13 amended budgets than shown in their projected annual budgets<sup>3</sup>. They were able to do this because the district maximum class-size averages for elementary grades were eliminated by Bill 22. Thus, districts could fill classes to the maximum and reduce the number of teachers required. This explains why the total number of FTE teachers could decrease while the number of FTE specialist teachers increased.

Districts spent \$4.1 million less on teacher salaries for Special Education (does not reflect the LIF), and \$4.9 million more on Special Education Assistants, than indicated in their proposed annual budgets<sup>4</sup>. Districts *reduced expenditures on Special Education teachers* (presumably knowing they could pay for more in the LIF) and used that amount to hire more Special Educational Assistants.

<sup>3</sup> See BCTF research report RR2013-06, *Changes in salary and benefit expenditures in instructional programs: A comparison of amended and annual budgets for 2012–13 and 2013–14*, Table 1. Available online at <http://www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630#Edfunding>.

<sup>4</sup> Note: These figures are based on Function 1: Instruction which includes Regular Instruction and a range of specialist programs including Special Education, reported on in Table 6 (Annual) and Table 15 (Amended) of the 2012/13 Revenue and Expenditure tables. These tables reflect changes after the 2012–13 enrolment count as of September 30. A final accounting, based on district Audited Financial Statements, is not yet available.

## Class composition worsened as a result

In 2012–13, class composition worsened considerably. There were 14,885 classes with 4 or more designated special needs students (entitled to an IEP) in 2012–13, an increase of 2,234 classes over 2011–12. Of these, 3,485 classes had 7 or more students entitled to an IEP (Table 4).

**Table 3: Class composition, 2006–07 to 2012–13**

Number of classes with more than 3 IEP students	
Year	All grades (K–12)
2006–07	9,559
2007–08	10,313
2008–09	10,985
2009–10	11,959
2010–11	12,240
2011–12	12,651
2012–13	14,885

BCTF Research table, with figures from BC Ministry of Education (various years). *Overview of Class Size and Composition in BC Schools*; accessible from the ministry data reporting page, <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/>. 2012–13 figures are available at [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/class\\_size/2012/public.pdf](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/class_size/2012/public.pdf).

**Table 4: Number of classes with 4, 5, 6, and 7-or-greater students entitled to an IEP**

Number of students entitled to an IEP	Number of classes		
	Grades K–3	Grades 4–12	All grades (K–12)
4 students	128	5,737	5,865
5 students	30	3,522	3,552
6 students	15	1,968	1,983
7 or greater	15	3,470	3,485
Total classes - more than 3 IEP students	<b>188</b>	<b>14,697</b>	<b>14,885</b>

Source: BCTF Research table, with figures from BC Ministry of Education. *2012/13 Overview of Class Size and Composition in BC Schools*, p.3; accessible from: [http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/prov\\_data\\_summary.php](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/prov_data_summary.php).

Almost 3,000 teaching positions in BC public schools have been eliminated since 2002, when the provincial government stripped the teachers' collective agreement<sup>5</sup>. About 1,500 of these were learning specialist teachers. Special Education was especially hard hit. In 2011–12 there were 769.2 fewer FTE special education teachers than in 2001–02. After the LIF was implemented in 2012–13, there are still 670.2 fewer special education teachers than in 2001–02 (Table 1).

If all of the 132 FTE learning specialist teaching positions were funded through the \$60 million LIF allocation, this would cost a maximum of \$12 million<sup>6</sup>. Unless and until the government provides data accounting for how the LIF was actually spent in 2012–13, and exactly how many FTE specialist teaching positions were created through the LIF, there is no evidence to support the claim that 500 teaching positions were created.

<sup>5</sup> See page 22 of BCTF *2012 Education Facts* at <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/2012EdFacts.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> This estimate is based on average total teacher compensation (\$89,628) multiplied by 132 = \$11,830,896. This should be considered a maximum, as many new teachers hired likely place at the lower end of the salary scale.

## Year Two of the LIF—Ministry budget data suggest fewer teachers and EAs will be in classes in 2013–14

A comparison of the 2012–13 amended annual budget to the 2013–14 proposed annual budget provides further evidence that the downloading of costs onto school districts by the provincial government directly impacts on the classroom. The increased cost of benefits (+\$32.9 million) in 2013–14 is almost exactly offset by a decrease in expenditures on salaries (-\$30.2 million) for all employees in instructional programs<sup>7</sup>. Provincial data on the 2013–14 proposed annual budget for instructional programs shows that districts plan to spend \$17.5 million less on teachers' salaries and \$5.54 million less on Educational Assistants' salaries in 2013–14, compared to the 2012–13 amended annual budget<sup>8,9</sup>. While these data do not reflect LIF funding, they do suggest that the bait-and-switch approach will continue, with staffing improvements through the LIF likely offset by a loss of teachers and EAs across instructional programs.

## The Learning Improvement Fund is inadequate to meet identified needs

To maintain current conditions, let alone improve them, requires that more funds be available to school districts. To freeze budgets, as has been projected in the provincial budget three-year plans, will put British Columbia further and further behind achieving the Canadian average as an objective. The Learning Improvement Fund has simply failed to make the claimed improvements.

Additional, related information is available in the following BCTF research reports:

- RR2013-06, *Changes in salary and benefit expenditures in instructional programs: A comparison of amended and annual budgets for 2012–13 and 2013–14*, <http://www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630#Edfunding>
- RR2013-07, *Changes in FTE Learning Specialist Teachers, 2001–02 to 2012–13*, <http://www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630#Demographics>

RR2013-05

2013-09-18  
LK:unifor464/mw:af:tfeu

---

<sup>7</sup> See BCTF research report RR2013-06, *Changes in salary and benefit expenditures in instructional programs: A comparison of amended and annual budgets for 2012–13 and 2013–14*, Table 3. Available online at <http://www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630#Edfunding>.

<sup>8</sup> These figures do not reflect changes in 2012–13 that occurred between the amended annual budget and the final accounting based on district audited financial statements.

<sup>9</sup> See BCTF research report RR2013-06, *Changes in salary and benefit expenditures in instructional programs: A comparison of amended and annual budgets for 2012–13 and 2013–14*, Table 2. Available online at <http://www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630#Edfunding>.