



Empowering Teachers through Mentorship: Lessons from British Columbia

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About The Author

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Contributors

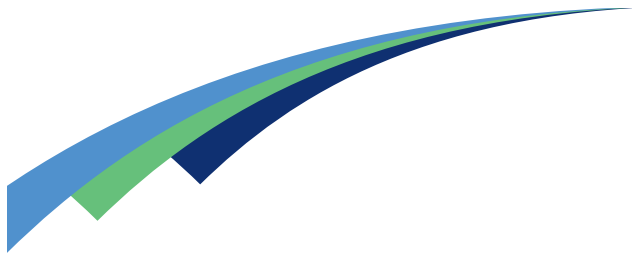
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Acknowledgement Of Traditional Territory

BC Teachers' Federation members and staff live, teach, and carry out union work on the traditional and unceded territories of the many First Nations Peoples of British Columbia. We specifically acknowledge the unceded joint territory of the $x^w m \theta k^w \acute{y} \acute{a} m$ (Musqueam), $s \acute{a} l i l w \acute{a} t \acute{a} \ddot{a}$ (Tseil Waututh), and $S \acute{k} w \acute{x}$ wú7mesh (Squamish) Nations on whose land the BCTF building is located.



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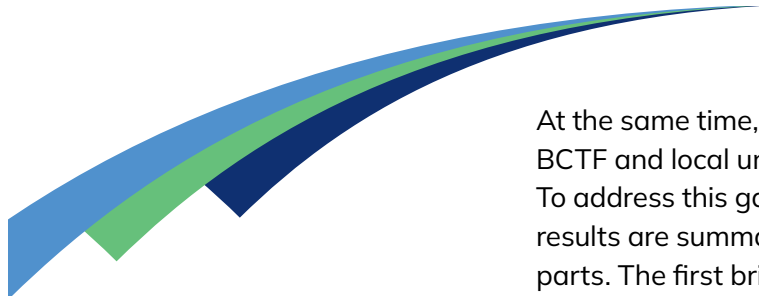
Introduction: What Teacher Mentorship Can Do

British Columbia's public education system has a critical teacher shortage. Every day, schools scramble to find enough qualified teachers to provide instruction and meet the needs of diverse learners in the face of increasingly complex and challenging conditions.¹ According to WorkBC's most recent forecasts, 19,610 new K–12 teachers will be needed in BC's public schools in the next decade.² With school districts already struggling to fill postings, an urgent and comprehensive response is vital to meet current and future staffing demands.

While initial recruitment is an important part of a workforce strategy, it is essential to ensure teachers have the working conditions, resources and support they need for a successful start and lasting career in public education. The first five years after initial teacher education (ITE) are when teachers are especially vulnerable to leaving the profession.³ The 2024 BCTF Member Survey showed that approximately 14% of BCTF members have fewer than five years of teaching experience.⁴ One in seven beginning teachers who responded to the survey indicated they were either unsure about staying in the profession or are likely to leave in the next two years.⁵

Teacher mentorship can be a critical support for teachers taking up new assignments. Mentorship is the process of connecting newly certified and 'new-to-role' teachers with experienced colleagues and peers to deepen knowledge, expertise, collegial connection and collaboration.⁶ In the context of BC's ongoing teacher shortage, mentorship programs have served as a 'system stabilizer'—providing 'triage' for teachers thrown into positions with little notice and few resources. And it isn't only newly qualified teachers who are accessing mentoring. Experienced teachers taking on new grades or subject areas or moving into a different district may seek mentorship opportunities, as are an increasing number of uncertified, or 'relief' personnel, who may have little or no formal K–12 teacher education.⁷

Historically, mentorship has been a teacher-to-teacher activity in BC, rooted in a deep tradition of exercising collegiality and autonomy⁸ when it comes to how and why teachers engage in professional development. The persistence of mentorship as a teacher-led, voluntary, and non-evaluative form of professional learning can be attributed in part to union advocacy for teachers' professional rights.



At the same time, there is a gap in understanding the role of the BCTF and local unions within BC's teacher mentorship landscape. To address this gap, BCTF Research conducted a study whose results are summarized in this report. The report has three parts. The first briefly explores key moments in the history of teacher mentorship in BC and role the BCTF and local unions have played in policy, governance, coordination, and delivery.

Second, the report presents the findings of a collaborative case study, conducted with local unions, exploring the impact of \$12M in government funding awarded in 2020 during collective bargaining to support teacher mentorship initiatives and programs.

Finally, in light of the provincial government announcing a new provincial mentorship program as part of its envelope of workforce strategies to recruit and retain teachers,⁹ this report concludes by pointing to some evidence-based considerations about what an effective provincial framework might look like.

Part 1: Teacher Mentorship in British Columbia

A brief history

Teacher mentorship has been a persistent feature of the professional learning culture of BC's K–12 public education system. Prior to the 1990s, mentoring was a well-established informal practice among in-service teachers. More formal initiatives followed the 1988 Royal Commission on public education in which Commissioner Barry Sullivan noted that “the modern classroom” made teaching “more complex and demanding work than in earlier decades” and required a professional commitment to lifelong learning.¹⁰ The Commission's *A Legacy for Learners* report recommended that district-based induction programs be established cooperatively by school districts and teachers, characterized by “special support services and carefully designed teaching assignments during the first year of induction.”¹¹

Overall, school districts have been largely responsible for funding mentorship from their individual operating budgets for the past three decades, resulting in widely varying budgets, policy, administration, delivery, accessibility, and union collaboration. In 2003, the first edition of provincial teaching standards produced by the BC College of Teachers stated

that teachers should “support other professional educators by providing mentorship and encouragement, especially to those who have been recently admitted to the profession.”¹² A BCTF survey carried out in 2012 indicated that mentoring in some form was occurring in about half of BC’s school districts.¹³


The provincial government’s first major intervention in teacher mentorship came when it funded eight pilot induction and mentoring programs across British Columbia between 1991–1993. A 1994 study found that roughly a third of BC districts were providing some form of induction for beginning teachers. The second major provincial intervention in mentorship came in 2012, with the launch of a provincially funded mentorship intervention, The New Teacher Mentorship Project (NTMP).

The New Teacher Mentorship Project (NTMP)

The NTMP, a pilot program that ran from 2012–2017, was created in response to policy and program gaps across the province, with the aim of developing “a more formalized and integrated system of support for inducting, developing, and retaining teachers in BC.”¹⁴

The NTMP was jointly run in a three-way partnership between the BCTF, the University of British Columbia (UBC), and British Columbia School Superintendents’ Association (BCSSA). In addition to sitting on the project’s advisory committee, the BCTF contributed various forms of ‘support in kind,’ including office space for the provincial coordinator and a half-time support staff person. The BCTF also provided technology, accounting, and administrative support for coordinating release time, resources, events, and communications. Meanwhile, UBC administered the operating grant and the secondment of the program’s technology integration coordinator. UBC also hosted the NTMP’s annual summer institutes—three-day events exploring mentorship philosophy, pedagogy, facilitation, and sustainable program design.

The NTMP’s aim was to provide advocacy and collaborative consultation so districts and unions could develop a path towards self-sustaining mentorship programs. The NTMP’s program principles emphasized teacher-driven inquiry, collaboration, and placed-based adaptability. The NTMP advocated that beginning teachers’ professional learning models “be responsive to the diversity and distinctiveness of district cultures and practices in all regions of BC.” School districts



were to “ensure that mentorship is non-evaluative and non-remedial, and that participation is voluntary,” and emphasize “learning through inquiry and critical reflection on practice.”¹⁵

School districts applied to the NTMP to receive funding for release time, as well as facilitation support, through the NTMP coordinator and 15-member Provincial Mentorship Resource Team (PMRT)—comprised of BCTF members appointed through an open-call process. In return, districts committed to establishing an advisory committee that included representatives from district and school-based administration, and local unions. The NTMP provided facilitation support, participant release time and resources, while school districts provided an advisory committee, organizational supports, and meeting spaces.

Between 2012–2017, NTMP participation expanded from three districts to 45, including the creation of 10 new school district programs where mentorship had not previously been offered. The NTMP provided learning opportunities for beginning and mentor teachers, and additional in-service and professional learning opportunities for several hundred educators through a variety of workshops and conferences across all regions of BC. This included a provincial conference cohosted by the BCTF in 2014.

The NTMP also established connections with other provincial professional learning networks to build alignment of principles and practice related to teacher learning (e.g., Growing Innovation in Rural Sites of Learning Network, Network of Innovation and Inquiry, and BC Early Career Teachers Provincial Specialists Association).¹⁶ The summer institutes brought together mentorship practitioners with UBC faculty and field experts, as well as visiting faculty from Alberta and New Zealand.

Concurrent with the field work of the NTMP was a longitudinal research initiative, carried out by the UBC Faculty of Education and funded by a three-year Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Partnership Development Grant. Among the preliminary findings emerging from the three-year research inquiry, *Pedagogical Assemblage*,¹⁷ was the necessity of respecting the diverse and particular ‘placed based’ needs of BC’s beginning teachers—whose geographical circumstances range from urban to rural settings and encompass the complex needs and demographics of the students they serve. The study also suggested that “effective teacher mentorship has


impacts beyond improved retention of new teachers”¹⁸—a commonly invoked reason for providing mentorship supports.

Despite significant stakeholder support, including a recommendation by a ministerial task force on recruitment and retention,¹⁹ the application to renew the NTMP’s Ministry of Education grant for a second three-year phase (2016–2019) resulted in only one additional year of funding. This necessitated reductions in staffing and program capacity, and the winding down of NTMP activities by June 2017. Some local mentorship programs established by the NTMP folded after its funding and training supports were withdrawn. In the absence of a provincial mentorship framework, BC’s decentralized mentoring programs continued to operate with fewer provincial networking and funding opportunities.

Two key learnings emerge from the NTMP experiment about union involvement in teacher mentorship. First, within the NTMP framework, mentorship remained teacher-led, voluntary, and non-evaluative—consistent with the BCTF’s stance on preserving teachers’ professional autonomy. Second, the NTMP illustrates the importance of the BCTF’s engagement with other public education policymakers in cross-organizational visioning, governance, and implementation to provide meaningful and relevant professional support for BC’s newest teachers and their mentors. On both counts, the BCTF’s integral role in the NTMP points to the importance of maintaining union engagement in teacher mentorship to protect and advocate for teachers’ professional learning conditions.

Union policies and collective agreements related to mentorship

The BCTF and local unions have advocated for teacher mentorship through policy statements and collective bargaining. For example, a recommendation presented during the BCTF’s 2018 Annual General Meeting (AGM) called for assurances of provincial government funding and direction for mentorship initiatives. *Recommendation 12* outlined a comprehensive list of guiding principles to ensure equitable access, local autonomy, and recognition of the distinctive and diverse needs of school districts and teachers.



That the Federation call upon the provincial government to ensure that the necessary funds and political direction are in place to ensure that teacher-led mentorship initiatives flourish, and that these initiatives be:

1. responsive to the diversity and distinctiveness of district cultures and practices in all regions of BC.
2. responsive to the diversity of teaching positions and of teachers' identities.
3. non-evaluative and non-remedial.
4. voluntary on the part of participants.
5. available in all school districts.
6. inclusive of release time, training, co-ordination time, and other supports for all participants.
7. supportive of teachers at all stages in their career.
8. supportive of teachers of French as a first or working language.
9. provided in conjunction with funding and support for other initiatives such as the BCTF's Program for Quality Teaching, action research, in-service, and a wide variety of professional development opportunities.

Recommendation 12, BCTF Annual General Meeting, 2018

Between 2019–2024, several local resolutions were brought to the BCTF's provincial governance meetings advocating for various teacher mentorship provisions and debating how mentorship should be governed and funded. At the 2019 AGM, for instance, an amendment was carried to add “advocating for Ministry funded mentoring programs” to the 2019–20 BCTF leadership priorities. In 2024, the AGM passed Resolution 109 calling for the Federation to “establish mentorship funding for racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+, neurodivergent and people with disabilities/ disabled.” The resolution's supporting statement cited the “unique challenges” experienced by marginalized teachers and argued that dedicating funding would “reinforce the union's commitment

to diversity, equity and inclusion.” Overall, there has been persistent pressure from locals to ensure the BCTF addresses teacher mentorship in provincial education and union policy discussions, while negotiating the question of where responsibility for teacher mentorship funding and coordination ultimately lies.

At the local level, many collective agreements contain clauses that address new teachers’ working conditions and provisions, including mentorship. For example, the Richmond Teachers’ Association (RTA) agreement states “the Board and the Association shall support and assist beginning teachers in their adjustment to teaching by administering and facilitating a mentor/beginning teacher program.” The agreement reiterates that “participation of mentors and beginning teachers in such a program shall be voluntary” as well as specifically outlining what engagement in the program entails including: (a) “an appropriate teaching assignment”; (b) “an orientation and teacher induction program”; and, (c) “an opportunity for observation, demonstration, collaboration and consultation pertaining to job related activities such as planning, classroom management, instructional strategies, evaluation, reporting and other assistance as mutually agreed by the mentor/beginning teacher.” Article D.34 also states “each mentor/beginning teacher pair shall be funded to a maximum of five (5) days release time”—contract language that has been leveraged to secure continuity of mentorship access over time.²⁰

Similarly, Peace River North Teachers’ Association (PRNTA) agreement contains language that the employer will provide “a beginning teacher with specific conditions to help them in their adjustment.” This includes:

“a mentor program, including a bank of 40 days for release time for conducting observations, demonstration teaching, collaboration, consultation and professional development activities. The Board and PRNTA Professional Development Committee will each contribute 20 days to the bank to be administered by the Professional Development Committee in consultation with the Director of Instruction, wherever possible.”²¹

These two examples point to how collective agreement language can be used to delineate employer-union obligations and collaboration regarding mentorship funding and governance.



Part 2: Local Teacher Mentorship

In October 2020, the BCTF secured \$12M for teacher mentorship as part of the collective bargaining process. *Letter of Understanding (LOU) No. 16* (see Appendix B) stated:

“[a] one-time lump sum of Twelve Million Dollars (\$12,000,000) will be prorated between the sixty (60) school districts. The parties agree that BCTF shall determine how to allocate the Twelve Million Dollars (\$12,000,000) for early career teachers to engage in mentorship opportunities.”

Significantly, *LOU 16* also stated “[the] parties agree that BCTF shall determine how to allocate the Twelve Million Dollars (\$12,000,000) for early career teachers to engage in mentorship opportunities.” *LOU 16* gave the BCTF, rather than the employer, the authority over how to distribute the funds. This departure from how local mentorship budgets have commonly been allocated created both opportunities and challenges—as discussed more fully below.

In November 2020, funds were distributed to locals on a per capita basis (see Appendix A). In a memo to local presidents (October 28, 2020), the BCTF encouraged locals to put policies and procedures in place to guide decision-making about how funds should be used. In addition, described as “initial guidance,” the BCTF advised that funds be prioritized for “release time for teacher collaboration or peer mentorship” and not “to purchase consumables, resources or technology.” Further, locals were advised to prioritize mentorship opportunities for “members in the first five years of the teaching career” and “experienced members in their first or second year in a significantly different position.” Otherwise, locals had full autonomy for determining application and selection processes as well as fund usage. To support locals in mentorship program development, a full-day workshop, *Teacher Mentorship 101*, was offered at the Federation Leadership Institute (FLI) in November 2020.

How local unions were able to make use of the one-time grant, referred to informally as the *CA19 Grant*, was the focus of a BCTF Research collaborative case study conducted from January 2023–June 2024. BCTF Research asked local unions to contribute information about how their allocation of the 2020 Mentorship Fund—the *CA19 Grant*—affected teacher mentorship in their school district. Contributors also provided information about their programs’ histories, governance, activities, mentor recruitment and training to provide additional context (see Appendix C for

project description and methodology). Insights gained through analysis of these submissions have been grouped into six key findings described below: 1) There is no “one size fits all” model for mentorship in BC; 2) Current programs largely prioritize early career teachers; 3) Mentorship programs focus on teacher’s individual needs; 4) Mentorship requires dedicated time; 5) Relying on volunteer mentors is unsustainable 6) The 2020 Mentorship Fund had varying impacts depending on local conditions.

Each of these key findings deepens understanding of what mentorship looks like and how unions have been involved across BC.²²

1) There is no “one size fits all” model for mentorship in BC

Some locals reported having continuity of mentorship for over 20 years or more in their district. In others, mentorship was a new or recent undertaking. This points to the highly varied development and presence of teacher mentorship across BC’s diverse regions and jurisdictions.

Funding models ranged across three main approaches:

1. Fully funded by the school district. In this scenario, *CA19 Grant* money was used to either supplement or expand existing mentorship staffing or capacity, or to set up a parallel program by the local union.
2. Jointly funded with contributions from both district and local.
3. Fully funded and managed by the local union.

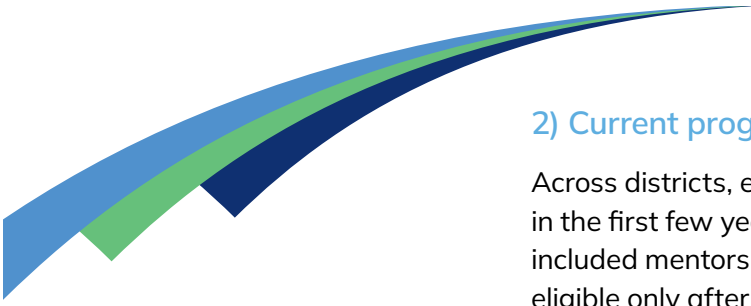
District or jointly funded mentorship programs were often overseen by a joint advisory committee comprised of district and union representatives. Many programs had either a full or part time coordinator or staff person assigned to manage the program, organize professional learning opportunities, and provide mentor training and support. Districts with larger student enrolment might hire a district-level coordinator or helping teacher to oversee mentorship programs or initiatives. In districts where mentorship was run exclusively by the local union, a teacher was sometimes appointed to run the program. However, mentorship sometimes became the responsibility of a local representative or table officer to run “off the side of their desk” due to limited funding or capacity.

“While we would argue that we have always mentored each other...we did not have a formal program until the funding allotment.”

“Mentorship, in some form, has been part of the district for 23+ years.”

“Our program is funded through the bargained settlement money and managed through the local union office.”

“We have a committee that is composed of four seats, one of which is allocated to the district.”



2) Current programs largely prioritize early career teachers

Across districts, eligibility for mentorship was extended to those in the first few years of their teaching career. Some programs included mentorship for TTOCs while, in others, teachers became eligible only after obtaining a contract assignment. Some programs limited mentorship access to one year, while others recommended two years or more if funding and mentors were available. As one local contact described: “All teachers with less than 3 years seniority are specifically invited to join the program and any teacher can join. There is no limit to how many years a teacher can stay in the mentorship program; it is up to the individual teacher.”

In general, most programs relied on their district human resource office to learn about new hires and facilitate outreach. However, some locals reported that delays in getting regular up-to-date information about new hires from human resources complicated initial contact. Mentorship was often included as a topic in district orientation sessions for new hires, alongside general information provided about health and safety, resources and employee supports. Teachers could also self-refer for mentorship, either suggesting someone they wished to work with or relying on their district program to pair them with a suitable mentor. In many districts, mentorship is available not only to early career teachers but also to experienced teachers in transition who “have taken on a new role,” “were new to the district,” or “have experienced a significant shift in their teaching assignment.” As one local shared, “a 12-year classroom teacher became a resource teacher and joined the mentorship program for support in their new role.” However, providing mentorship to teachers past early career status was often curtailed by funding limits. As one local contact explained, “We are stretched thin but creatively find ways to reach as many teachers as possible.”

“We know things will be very tight. We are VERY concerned we will not have enough for release time and general funds to prop up the program... so, it is safe to say that we are concerned about the future.”

The continuous struggle to find creative ways to stretch funding or find alternative ways to provide mentorship was especially evident in rural and remote locals. One described the “difficulty connecting teachers in remote schools with mentors (we do provide additional release time for these situations, but the need to travel and spend more than 1 day away from the classroom is not ideal).”

3) Mentorship programs focus on meeting teachers' individual needs

Mentorship programs usually focused on meeting teachers' individual needs. Prospective mentees/protégés might, for example, fill in a self-assessment form indicating areas of interest or need to assist coordinators with relevant mentor/cohort matching. Programs aimed to provide support based on “the needs of the mentees” and “location, grade and subject area.”

Mentorship events, topics and activities often aligned with shifting mentee/protégé and mentor needs at different points in the school year (see list of common topics below). Autumn months included “September kick-off” and orientation events, mentor training sessions and retreats, and workshops addressing topics such as “First Six Weeks of School” and “How to get your classroom up and running.” May and June activities included year end “wrap up” celebrations. Teachers might leave mentorship events with books, classroom kits, and other resources to support classroom instruction and professional learning.

Some mentorship programs included activities for Teachers Teaching on Call (TTOCs). For example, in one Lower Mainland district, “the Coordinator acts as ‘go to’ person for TTOCs and runs a WhatsApp group to connect TTOCs to each other and provide a forum for them to ask burning questions and get help in navigating the systems of the school district.” As one local mentorship contact summarized, they endeavoured to address “all the things that make schools unique and thus hard to navigate for teachers new to that building.”

“We did a survey the year before we started the mentorship program, and our members told us very clearly that they wanted release time to spend with another teacher. Our whole group mentorship meetings have focused largely on giving teachers time to connect and plan their days together.”

“Our mentorship program operates based on teachers' specific needs and requests, providing tailored support.”

“The overall philosophy of our program is that teachers who feel connected will feel supported, and that cohorts of teachers can develop many relationships and thus will have many people to lean on and learn from.”



Common topics at district mentorship meetings:

Assessment and reporting; report card writing
BCTF Workshops
Classroom Management
Communicating with parents
Curriculum specific support
Developing a year plan
Ending the school year
Inclusive learning practices/differentiation
Lesson planning
Literacy
Numeracy
Setting up classroom
Subject/grade specific support
Technology
Wellness

“topics encompass a comprehensive range of areas that are crucial for teachers’ professional growth and effectiveness in the classroom.”

4) Mentorship requires dedicated time

Mentorship requires time. Uncertainties related to release time during the school day made it difficult for mentorship programs to consistently and meaningfully meet teachers’ needs. Even though release time was budgeted and bookable, teachers often had to cancel their planned mentorship activities at the last minute when TTOCs were not available or cancelled to replace them in their classroom or teaching role for the day. When release time was secured during the instructional day, mentees/ protégés engaged in curriculum planning, observing mentors’ demonstration lessons or co-teaching in each others’ classrooms.

“All activities happen at the discretion of the mentee/ mentor—sometimes on weekends but mainly after school hours.”

However, when unable to access release time during instructional hours, many teachers connected after school and on weekends. Modes of delivery that worked around release time limitations included dinner workshops, retreats, mini-conferences, book clubs,

lunch time meetings and after school “walk and talk” sessions. Some events happened in district meeting spaces while others were school-based or held at the local union office. Teachers also met informally in public venues such as coffee shops or restaurants for 1:1 meet ups or in larger groups with meals covered by the program. On professional development days, teachers collaborated or participated in BCTF workshops geared to new teacher interests.²³

However, ‘fitting’ mentoring time in and around an already untenable load of teaching responsibilities is preventing potential mentors and mentees/protégés from participating. As one respondent summed up, “experienced teachers are reluctant to take on any more responsibilities, new teachers seem too overwhelmed to want to spend the time learning from someone else.” For many teachers, mentoring is an ‘extra’ rather than an embedded or normalized aspect of professional learning.

5) Relying on volunteer mentors is unsustainable

Most mentorship was done by teachers who volunteer their time as an act of service to their colleagues and profession. The result is that the demand for mentors often outpaces availability. One commenter described a shortage of mentors as “a significant barrier” saying “there are way more new teachers than there are seasoned teachers willing to mentor.” Some districts indicated they were able to find a sufficient number of mentors while most had more mentees than available mentors. One contributor noted a particular shortage of secondary, racialized, and Indigenous mentors.

In a few cases, the mentor role was part of an ‘on-site’ teacher’s assignment. For example, in one secondary school in the Fraser Valley a teacher had 0.125FTE of their assignment for supporting new teachers in that school.

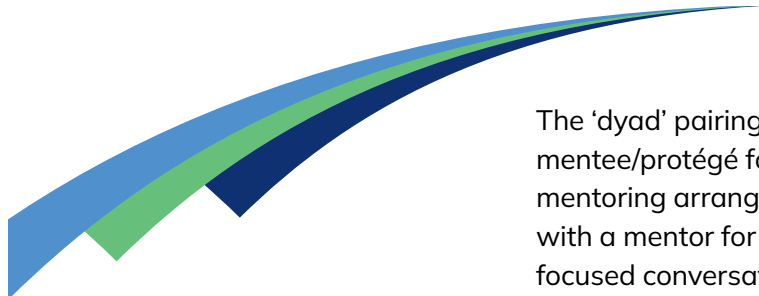
Many described a mentor application or call out process, supplemented by “shoulder tapping” or “word of mouth” when the need for mentors outstrips the number of applicants and when new teachers are hired later in the school year. Where joint district/union committees exist, mentor applications were usually reviewed collaboratively.

“Mentorship ranges from informal communications between mentee and mentors all the way to classroom co teaching, observation and planning time.”

“ Our mentorship committee also looks over the applications from mentees and will shoulder tap teachers who could be a good fit for a particular person. We currently have enough mentors, and some mentors are currently paired with more than one mentee.”

“Many times, it requires some convincing as teachers are so modest.”

“Our teacher mentors are doing this largely off the side of their desk. There needs to be more training and time provided to facilitate a program.”



The 'dyad' pairing, where a teacher mentor works with a mentee/protégé for one school year, was the most common mentoring arrangement. Some programs aimed to pair mentees with a mentor for two years, meeting for regular learning focused conversations. Some programs ran a cohort model, where one or more mentors supported a group of mentees/protégés. One district described how mentors "work in teams of 2–3 to support groups of protégés. Teams are usually organized around similar teaching load and location."

"Teacher mentors use coaching and collaboration to support mentees. The mentoring committee offers training sessions for mentors three times per year covering a variety of topics."

Mentor training and support varied widely across districts, with some providing robust and in-depth training opportunities while others indicated little or no "specific training," and "minimal guidance" being provided. Where a district coordinator or established program was in place, mentors were more likely to be offered learning sessions with topics including "cognitive coaching," "building a culture of inquiry," and "mentoring conversations." Mentors might participate in "several learning sessions throughout the year to build their mentorship skills."

While release time was provided for mentor training in some cases, most occurred outside of instructional time at dinner meetings and weekend retreats. One contact reported that mentors "currently do not receive any training as we cannot accommodate the release time." The lack of time and resources for mentor learning and support contributes to widely varying mentee/protégé experiences with mentoring across the province as well reluctance of some teachers to become mentors.

"Ultimately, the allotment allowed for us to launch a formal system of support for our Early Career Teachers and to prioritize our future of educators."

6) The 2020 Mentorship Fund had varying impacts depending on local conditions

Evidence of *CA19 Grant* impacts included creation of new programs and expansion of existing mentorship program staffing and access.

"Our district has had successful mentorship programs in the past. However, at the time the \$12 million funding allotment was received we had been without mentorship for several years."

Per capita allocation of the \$12M mentorship fund ranged from \$10,000 (a minimum amount set for BC's smallest locals) to over \$1.5M for the Surrey Teachers' Association (see Appendix A). As of Spring 2023, when local profile information was gathered for this study, local use of funding allocations varied from no use at all to nearing full exhaustion. Project contacts were asked to discuss successes, challenges, and barriers to implementing mentorship activities.

In some locals, the funds enabled new programs and initiatives.

One local, the Greater Victoria Teachers' Association (GVTA), used part of the *CA19 Grant* to create an Indigenous Mentorship Circle.²⁴

In some cases, locals negotiated with districts to use grant funds to expand mentorship staffing or release time provisions.

However, as *CA19* funds ran out, many locals were once again in a situation where the future mentorship programming is solely dependent on district budget decisions.

Overall, analysis showed that local unions' use of their share of the *CA19 Grant* varied widely depending on school district culture and existing mentorship infrastructure and knowledge. Grant funds appear to have had the most advantageous effects where at least one of the following was present:

1. an existing district or union mentorship program
2. a constructive relationship between district management and local union, as evidenced by open communication and shared governance (e.g., a district mentorship advisory committee)
3. sufficient local union staffing, expertise, and experience to support the initiation of a new mentorship program/structure in cooperation with, or independent of, the school district.

Overall, analysis showed that local unions' use of their share of grant funding varied widely depending on school district culture and existing mentorship infrastructure and knowledge. Evidence of union grant impacts included expansion of mentorship program staffing and access, creation of new programs and policy language, and providing increased mentor learning opportunities. Major challenges included running out of grant money where initiatives were successfully implemented or postponing the launch of mentorship plans due to a lack of sufficient grant funds to begin with (in smaller locals). Limited district-union collaboration and inability to release mentors/mentees due to district staffing (e.g., TTOC) shortages were other common challenges.

“the union was able to top up the district position by 0.2 so that the position became a 0.8. This was the year where the union and district jointly supported the Curriculum Facilitator position to support Mentorship.”

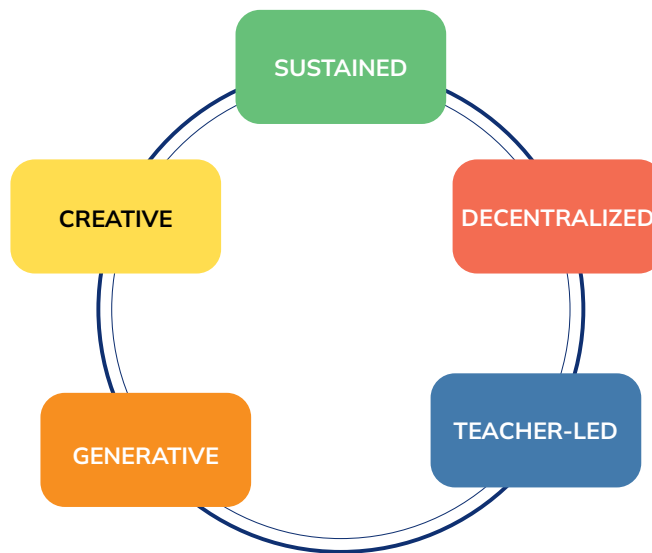
“Since receiving the funding in 2020, we have had an official mentorship program which is a joint effort funded by both the local and the district. Our district contributes 20% of the budget and the local provides the other 80%.”

“there is a little bit of money left over from the BCTF funding to allow a continuation for next year. The plan is to present to trustees to relay how important and impactful the program is so that it will be permanently funded in the future.”

“Based on our allocation in 2020, we budgeted to be able to support a mentorship program for 4 years in hopes we may get more funds in the future.”

Part 3: Towards a Provincial Framework for Teacher Mentorship

In August 2024, the provincial government announced the creation of a new provincial mentorship program as part of its envelope of workforce strategies to recruit and retain teachers.²⁵ The province’s announcement marks a departure from how teacher mentorship has generally been carried out for several decades. To be workable, any new provincial initiative needs to consider the principles, programs, and practices already in play across BC school districts. Having considered the context in which provincial efforts will land, this study points to some guideposts for a provincial teacher mentorship framework.



SUSTAINED A provincial framework must include sustainable earmarked funding to embed teacher mentorship as a stable and equitable feature of our public education system’s professional learning culture. Since the 1990s, teacher mentorship has been a local endeavour, with intermittent provincial involvement. Unpredictable district budgets and fluid priorities have resulted in instability and insufficient capacity. Much of the progress made by the New Teacher Mentorship Project (2012–2017) was lost when funding and personnel support fell away. Similarly, much of the 2020 Mentorship Fund has now been fully or partially spent.

DECENTRALIZED A provincial framework must acknowledge and respect the autonomy of school districts and local unions to best meet the diverse needs of teachers in their professional communities, while enhancing their collective capacity to ensure

equity of access for all BC teachers. School districts and union locals have deep and varied legacies with conceptualizing and implementing teacher mentorship. Regional variance in professional learning cultures, management-union relationships and staffing capacity have resulted in robust mentorship provisions in some places and precarious or non-existent offerings in others.

TEACHER-LED A provincial mentorship initiative must include BCTF representatives and grassroots members to ensure teachers' diverse needs, perspectives and experiences drive design and implementation. Mentorship is a deeply rooted form of collaborative professional learning in BC, rather than a tool of administrative oversight or performance management—and must remain a space for authentic and reciprocal learning, not an exercise in “contrived collegiality.”²⁶

GENERATIVE Province-level efforts should leverage BC's ‘deep bench’ of mentorship expertise through enhanced cross-regional events and networking, resource sharing and mentor learning opportunities, and knowledge generation through place-based education conferences and research. Teacher Mentors of BC (TMBC), a grassroots network created in 2006 by district mentorship coordinators in Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows (SD42), remains the only provincial-level community of practice for K–12 mentorship. In 2019, the University of the Fraser Valley launched its Master of Education program in Educational Leadership and Mentorship, becoming a hub for place-based learning and research in teacher mentorship.^{27 28} BC's teacher mentorship practitioners, researchers and visionaries have worked in isolation for too long without places and spaces for collaboration.

CREATIVE A provincial approach must invite creative solutions that acknowledge and overcome the current constraints of time, workload, staffing and geographic isolation that are preventing teacher mentorship from flourishing and supporting the teachers who will most benefit from it. A lot of mentoring currently occurs outside of instructional time and between mentors and mentees/protégés whose workloads are already untenable.²⁹ Mentorship efforts are frequently derailed by the TTOC shortage that continues to challenge many BC school districts. Teachers are understandably tapped with the demands of planning new courses, learning new curricula and meeting student needs. Meanwhile, mentoring remains almost wholly reliant on voluntary service of teacher mentors and on coordinators who juggle multiple roles ‘off the side of their desk.’



Conclusion: What Teacher Mentorship Can't Do

As the BC Ministry of Education and Child Care explores the implementation of a new provincial mentorship program in collaboration with the BCTF and other education partners, it is important to manage expectations about what mentorship programs can achieve and what they simply cannot, and should not, aim to fix. While coaching teachers to plan more effectively, connect with colleagues and resources, and strengthen their pedagogical skills may provide critical support in the short term, mentorship cannot be mobilized as the 'silver bullet' that stems teacher turnover and staffing shortfalls. Mentorship cannot be wielded as a shortcut or substitute form of teacher education and professional qualification. Nor can mentorship fix untenable working conditions. No teacher should enter a new assignment without adequate professional preparation, working conditions, time, and resources to fully meet students' needs. No teacher should have to contemplate leaving the profession prematurely to protect their economic security or mental and physical well-being.

As the 2024 United Nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel on the Teaching Profession concluded: "The cost of teacher attrition is high for both students and teachers. It is therefore vital that new teachers benefit from additional supports, including reduced teaching loads and the availability of adequate infrastructure and resources" as well as mentorship opportunities.³⁰ While advocating for government funded, teacher-led mentorship, the BCTF is also continuing to call for improvements to systemic funding and bargain for improvements to teachers' working conditions. This advocacy includes safeguarding teacher mentoring as a space for authentic collaboration and reciprocal learning, as opposed imposed administrative mandates.³¹

While advocating for teacher mentorship as a valuable professional learning endeavour, making teaching a sustainable undertaking will involve broad and substantial commitments to BC's current and future teachers, students, and public education system.

Appendices

Appendix A: BCTF Allocation of \$12M Mentorship Fund

Local Name	Local No.	FTE	Pro-rate %	Rounded
Abbotsford	34	1,139	3.25%	\$ 390,000
Alberni	70	233	0.66%	\$ 80,000
Arrow Lakes	10	39	0.11%	\$ 15,000
Boundary	51	88	0.25%	\$ 30,000
Bulkley Valley	54	115	0.33%	\$ 40,000
Burnaby	41	1,664	4.74%	\$ 570,000
Burns Lake	55	69	0.20%	\$ 25,000
Campbell River	72	342	0.97%	\$ 115,000
Cariboo-Chilcotin	27	298	0.85%	\$ 100,000
Central Coast	49	29	0.08%	\$ 10,000
Central Okanagan	23	1,416	4.04%	\$ 485,000
Chilliwack	33	847	2.41%	\$ 290,000
Comox	71	502	1.43%	\$ 170,000
Coquitlam	43	2,036	5.80%	\$ 695,000
Cowichan	65	504	1.44%	\$ 170,000
Cranbrook	2	212	0.60%	\$ 75,000
Creston-Kaslo	86	106	0.30%	\$ 35,000
Delta	37	1,043	2.97%	\$ 355,000
Fernie	1	133	0.38%	\$ 45,000
Fort Nelson	81	44	0.13%	\$ 15,000
Fraser-Cascade	78	117	0.33%	\$ 40,000
Gold Trail	74	82	0.23%	\$ 30,000
Golden	18	56	0.16%	\$ 20,000
Greater Victoria	61	1,270	3.62%	\$ 435,000
Gulf Islands	64	104	0.30%	\$ 35,000
Haida Gwaii	50	38	0.11%	\$ 15,000
Kamloops-Thompson	73	900	2.57%	\$ 310,000
Kimberley	3	70	0.20%	\$ 25,000
Kitimat	80	66	0.19%	\$ 25,000
Kootenay-Columbia	20	238	0.68%	\$ 80,000
Langley	35	1,384	3.95%	\$ 475,000
Lake Cowichan	66	34	0.10%	\$ 10,000
Maple Ridge	42	983	2.80%	\$ 335,000
Mission	75	414	1.18%	\$ 140,000
Mt. Arrowsmith (Qualicum)	69	284	0.81%	\$ 95,000
Nanaimo-Ladysmith	68	820	2.34%	\$ 280,000
Nechako	56	180	0.51%	\$ 60,000
Nelson	7	202	0.58%	\$ 70,000
New Westminster	40	434	1.24%	\$ 150,000
Nicola Valley	31	114	0.32%	\$ 40,000
Nisga'a	92	34	0.10%	\$ 10,000
North Okanagan-Shuswap	83	399	1.14%	\$ 135,000
North Vancouver	44	963	2.74%	\$ 330,000
Okanagan-Skaha	67	350	1.00%	\$ 120,000
Peace R North	60	363	1.03%	\$ 125,000
Peace R South	59	207	0.59%	\$ 70,000
Powell River	47	142	0.40%	\$ 50,000
Prince George	57	876	2.50%	\$ 300,000
Prince Rupert	52	144	0.41%	\$ 50,000

Local Name	Local No.	FTE	Pro-rate %	Rounded
Princeton	17	31	0.09%	\$ 10,000
Quesnel	28	198	0.56%	\$ 70,000
Revelstoke	19	72	0.21%	\$ 25,000
Richmond	38	1,367	3.90%	470,000
Saanich	63	455	1.30%	\$ 155,000
Sea to Sky	48	309	0.88%	\$ 105,000
SEPF	93	426	1.21%	\$ 145,000
Sooke	62	688	1.96%	\$ 235,000
South Okanagan-Similkameen	53	158	0.45%	\$ 55,000
Stikine	87	19	0.05%	\$ 10,000
Sunshine Coast	46	214	0.61%	\$ 75,000
Surrey	36	4,490	12.80%	\$ 1,535,000
Terrace	88	224	0.64%	\$ 75,000
Van Island North	85	79	0.23%	\$ 25,000
Van Island West	84	47	0.13%	\$ 15,000
Vernon	22	529	1.51%	\$ 180,000
Vancouver Elementary School	39-1	1,828	5.21%	\$ 625,000
Vancouver Secondary School	39-2	1,270	3.62%	\$ 435,000
West Vancouver	45	474	1.35%	\$ 160,000
Windermere	4	77	0.22%	\$ 25,000
		35,082	100.00%	\$ 12,000,00

Source: BCTF Field Service Division (October 2020)



2020-09

October 23, 2020

By E-mail: One Page plus Attachment

\$12M Mentorship Fund

Letter of Understanding No. 16 *Re: Early Career Mentorship* in the Provincial Collective Agreement between BCPSEA and the BCTF provides:

“A one-time lump sum of Twelve Million Dollars (\$12,000,000) will be prorated between the sixty (60) school districts. The parties agree that BCTF shall determine how to allocate the Twelve Million Dollars (\$12,000,000) for early career teachers to engage in mentorship opportunities.”

The BCTF have determined the allocation by local (attached). **Districts with multiple locals should note that their total allocation has been split between each local.**

Districts can expect that their local union will be in contact with them to discuss distribution of/access to the funds.

It is anticipated that districts will receive their allocation from the Ministry of Education on November 13.

Questions

If you have any questions, please contact your BCPSEA [labour relations liaison](#).

Attachment:

Distribution of Mentorship Funds

Appendix C: Research Methodology

BCTF Research carries out research that supports the leadership priorities and key objectives of the Federation in bargaining, education policy, professional practice, and social justice. BCTF Research staff draw on a broad range of quantitative and qualitative methodologies, including participatory approaches which engage BC teachers as co-researchers.

This project aimed to highlight the diverse contexts, practices, and challenges of engaging in teacher mentorship in BC, as well as exploring the impact of the one-time funding allocation awarded to the BCTF in 2020.

The two central research questions anchoring this project were:

- What role(s) do the BCTF and local unions play in teacher mentorship design, coordination and delivery in BC school districts?
- What effect(s) has the one-time funding allocation of \$12M had on teacher mentorship capacity and efficacy across BC?

In 2023, BCTF Research invited locals to participate by completing a form providing information about teacher mentorship initiatives in their local/district and the impact of their allotment of the \$12M mentorship fund. Questions included:

- Please provide a brief history of teacher mentorship in your district/local. Did teacher mentorship program/activities exist prior to the \$12M allotment in 2020? Approximately how long has your district/local been offering mentorship for teachers?
- Describe how teacher mentorship initiatives in your local are currently managed/coordinated. For example, is mentorship run by the district, the local, or is it jointly managed? Do you have an official funded 'program'? Or is mentorship done ad hoc based on needs, staffing and resources available? Is mentorship officially part of someone's district and/or union position/FTE?
- Who is eligible to access mentorship? How many 'mentees' are currently engaged in mentorship? Is release time provided? Do events happen on weekends? PD Days? How are eligible teachers identified/invited?

- What does mentorship look like? Where and when does it happen? What are some common or in-demand themes or topics being addressed in mentorship sessions and meetings this year?
- Please describe the role of teacher mentors, if you have them. What kind of training or support do they receive? How do you reach out to them? Do you have enough mentors to meet current needs?
- How is teacher mentorship funded in your local/district? (e.g., district provides dedicated funding, local provides dedicated funding, both local and district contribute funding, no formal funding allocated in the budget) What amount is that budget for this 2022–23 school year?
- 2020 Union Grant: If your local's portion of the \$12M has been fully or partially spent, please describe what it has been used for. If your local has not spent any of the funds, please describe any upcoming plans and/or barriers to using it.

Local contacts were also invited to share anything else about their local's mentorship programs, initiatives, or challenges, as well as relevant supporting documents. 28 locals submitted detailed responses that were analysed for this study.

BCTF Research staff coded written submissions using MAXQDA³² software to construct categories and themes.³³ The resulting analysis is detailed in the section of this report entitled “Local Teacher Mentorship.”

Endnotes

1 See www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/reliance-on-uncertified-teachers-in-b-c-1.7147270 (March 22, 2024); www.globalnews.ca/news/10267381/vancouver-teachers-shortage-letter/ (Feb 1, 2024).

2 According to the 2023 BC Labour Market Report forecast, 19,610 K-12 job openings will be available between 2023-2033 (13,500 replacement; 6,110 expansion). See: www.workbc.ca/sites/default/files/2023-11/MPSEFS_11803_BC_Jobs_LMO_2023_FINAL..pdf (Page 51).

3 Kutsyuruba, B., Godden, L., & Tregunna, L. (2014). Curbing early career teacher attrition: A pan-Canadian document analysis of teacher induction and mentoring programs. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, (161), 1-42; Schaefer, L., Long, J., & Clandinin, D. J. (2012). Questioning the research on early career teacher attrition and retention. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 58(1), 106–121; Weldon, P. (2018). Early career teacher attrition in Australia: Evidence, definition, classification and measurement. *Australian Journal of Education*, 62(1), 61–78.

4 2024 BCTF Member Survey. Appendix D, Table D.3. www.bctf.ca/docs/default-source/for-news-and-stories/bctf-membership-survey-summary-report-2023-2024.pdf?sfvrsn=3bdb986c_2

5 Of 747 survey respondents who indicated they had fewer than 5 years of teaching experience, 82 (10.9%) said they were likely or very unlikely to be teaching in BC's public school system in two years' time. Another 25 (3.3%) indicated they were unsure. Source: 2024 BCTF Member Survey.

6 Castanheira, P. (2016). Mentoring for educators' professional learning and development: a meta-synthesis of IJMCE volumes 1-4, *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*, 5(4), pp. 334-346; Feiman-Nemser, S. (2001). From preparation to practice: designing a continuum to strengthen and sustain teaching, *Teachers College Record*, 103 (6), pp. 1013-1055; Hobson, A. J., Ashby, P. Malderez, A, and Tomlinson, P.D. (2009), Mentoring beginning teachers: what we know and what we don't, *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies*, 25(1), pp. 207-216.

7 See www.sd42.ca/frequently-questions-teachers/ for an example of district hiring practices regarding relief teachers.

8 The BCTF defines professional autonomy as “the freedom for teachers to choose professional development that will best support them to meet the diverse needs of students and to implement the curriculum within their collective agreement as well as their district and local union policies and procedures.” For more information, see www.bctf.ca/classroom-resources/details/professional-autonomy-lens

9 See www.news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024ECC0105-001373 (August 26, 2024).

10 Sullivan, B. M. (1988). *British Columbia Royal Commission on Education (1987-1988): A legacy for learners*. Province of British Columbia, p. 181.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 137.

12 British Columbia College of Teachers. (2003). *Standards for the Education, Competence and Professional Conduct of Educators in British Columbia*. 1st Edition. p. 2.

13 British Columbia Teachers' Federation (2012). *Mentoring: The BC Context*. [unpublished report].

14 See www.mentoringbc.edcp.educ.ubc.ca/new-teachers/project/

15 *Ibid.*

16 The BC Early Career Teachers Provincial Specialists Association (BCECTA) is one of 31 BCTF provincial specialist associations which “foster professional development through...facilitating and advocating for teacher-led professional development, in-service, and professional learning opportunities” (BCTF Members' Guide, 33.04).

17 See www.mentoringbc.edcp.educ.ubc.ca/research/about/

18 *Ibid.*

19 BC Ministry of Education. (2017). *Report presented by the Minister's task force on immediate recruitment and retention challenges*. Government of British Columbia. See www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/uploads/task_force_report.pdf

20 See Article D.34, p. 84 at www.bctf.ca/docs/default-source/services-guidance/local-collective-agreements/38_lb_final_working_doc_version_2023_05_25__v2____fully_executed.pdf?sfvrsn=b5a33283_4

21 See Article D.30, p. 54 at www.bctf.ca/docs/default-source/services-guidance/local-collective-agreements/60_lb_working_doc_final_2023_05_10____fully_executed.pdf?sfvrsn=23bd7e6_6

22 Unless otherwise indicated, the quotations in this section are drawn directly from project submissions.

23 Locals can book workshops through the BCTF's Professional and Social Issues division. BCTF workshops mentioned by project participants addressed topics such as setting personal boundaries, classroom management, and union grievance processes. See www.bctf.ca/topics/services-information/training-and-education.

24 See www.bctf.ca/news-and-opportunities/news-details/2023/02/21/nutsa-maat-mentorship-circle-a-personal-experience

25 See www.news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024ECC0105-001373 (August 26, 2024)

26 Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. Teachers College Press.

27 See www.ufv.ca/school-of-education/programs/master-of-education/

28 For a full list of completed capstone papers (2019-2024), see www.ufv.arcabc.ca/islandora/object/ufv%3Astudpapereduc

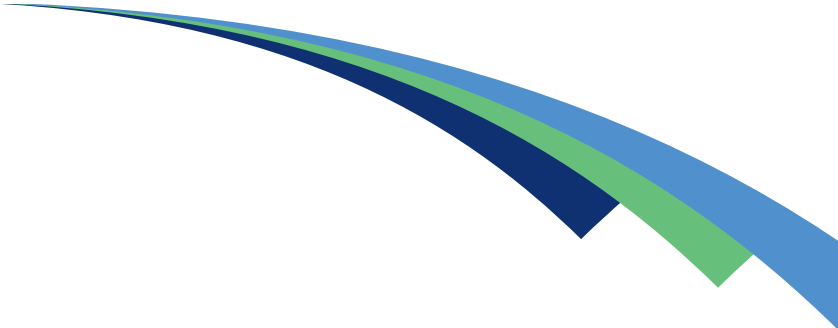
29 According to the BCTF 2024 Member Survey, only a third (36.2%) of teachers agreed that their overall workload was manageable. See Appendix B, Table B.2 in www.bctf.ca/docs/default-source/for-news-and-stories/bctf-membership-survey-summary-report-2023-2024.pdf?sfvrsn=3bdb986c_2

30 See p. 23 in www.ilo.org/publications/recommendations-and-summary-deliberations-united-nations-secretary-generals

31 Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing teachers, changing times: Teachers' work and culture in the postmodern age*. Teachers College Press.

32 www.maxqda.com/

33 Saldana, J. M. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.



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