

EDUCATION FUNDING

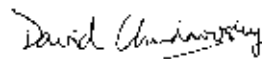
A Brief to the

Government of British Columbia

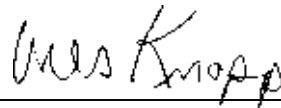
from the

British Columbia Teachers' Federation

November 1999



President



Acting Executive Director

Table of Contents

List of Figures	ii
Public Education Operates in the Public Interest	1
Principles of Education Funding.....	2
More Teachers—Better Learning.....	3
The Provincial Agreement.....	3
What We Expect.....	3
Changes in the Funding System.....	4
Statistical Changes in the System Since 1990.....	8
Enrolment Changes.....	8
More Students per Educator	9
Students with Special Needs	10
English as a Second Language Enrolments	11
Class-Size Increases.....	11
Cutbacks: Evidence from the Field	12
Education-Funding Issues.....	14
Cap on Administration.....	14
Teachers Subsidizing the System	15
“Efficiency Adjustments”	16
ESL Funding.....	16
Special Education Funding	17
The Teacher Professional Development Service.....	19
School Fees	19
Funding for Mandated Activities.....	20
Potential Sources of New Revenue	21
Private-School Funding.....	21
School Taxes	23
Conclusion and Recommendations	26

List of Figures

Figure 1	Provincial Operating Funding Per Pupil, 1990–1991 to 1999–2000...	5
Figure 2	Inflation-Adjusted Provincial Operating Funding Per Pupil, 1990–1991 to 1999–2000	6
Figure 3	Real Provincial Funding Per Student	7
Figure 4	Enrolment Growth, 1990–1998	8
Figure 5	Student/Educator Ratio, 1990 to 1998.....	9
Figure 6	Number of Students with Special Needs Rises Dramatically	10
Figure 7	ESL Student Enrolment, 1990 to 1998.....	11
Figure 8	Elementary Class Size Still Higher than in 1990–1991	12
Figure 9	Program Allocation of Administrative Officers’ Time, Preliminary Budgets, 1998–1999.....	14
Figure 10	Average Gross Salary of Educators, September 1998	15
Figure 11	Median Net School Tax	23
Figure 12	British Columbia Residential Tax Rates, School Purposes.....	24

PUBLIC EDUCATION, PUBLIC INTEREST: BCTF 2000 Education Funding Brief

We believe that the future of our society depends on informed and educated citizens who, while fulfilling their own goals of personal and professional development, contribute to the social, economic, and cultural development of their community and of the country as a whole.

— Joint Declaration of the Council of Ministers of Education
1993

Public Education Operates in the Public Interest

Over the past decade, debate has raged across the country about government budgets, spending on social programs, government debt and deficit, and the stresses placed on individuals and the economy by increasing globalization. We have been prone to accept the framework for the debate established by the business community and various think tanks and agencies that promote the market economy at the expense of all else. Now that governments appear to have wrestled the deficit demons to the ground, some gurus of the new economy are calling for tax cuts for business and high-income earners.

The B.C. Business Summit, for example, has been promoting tax cuts financed by reduced program spending of \$1.5 billion in the next provincial budget. This proposal, if implemented, would have a catastrophic impact on public education, health care, and other social programs. The tax-cut agenda is based on the premises that we already spend enough in education, health, and social services and that any surpluses obtained as a result of cuts to social spending in the past decade should be given to taxpayers in the form of tax reductions. While tax cuts to middle- and low-income earners would increase consumer spending power, restoring programs that were cut to balance budgets should be a first priority. As this brief will show, education funding has suffered in real terms during the 1990s in spite of recent improvements.

Each year, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation analyzes the impact on public education of government fiscal decisions. We continue to advocate for improvements to learning and working conditions in our schools. We are pleased with the improvements in teacher staffing that have come about as a

result of the collective agreement now in place. Reductions in class-size limits at the K–3 level and the establishment of staffing ratios for non-enrolling/ESL teachers have brought about an improved learning and teaching situation in our schools. These class-size reductions are broadly supported by the public and, in particular, by parents with children in public schools. For instance, in a survey of adults in British Columbia completed in October 1999 (McIntyre & Mustel), 84% of those polled supported the inclusion of class-size limits in collective agreements with teachers. The figure was even higher for parents with children in public schools: 88% of these constituents supported class-size limits.

There is strong public support for public education. At a time when change is occurring at ever-increasing speed, citizens need to affirm their support for public institutions. Only public schools can operate in the public interest.

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 for those students.
- Policies in respect to reporting student progress, the preparation and delivery 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.
- Accurate and timely data collection will ensure that targeted and special funds are being used correctly.
- Taxpayer dollars should not be used to fund private schools.
- The education funding formula should result in equitable allocations to school districts and reflect the actual costs of operating the districts, including those generated by the collective agreement.
- Adequate funding will be provided to maintain satisfactory levels of support staff, including clerical, maintenance staff, and teaching assistants.
- All improvements arising from the teachers' collective agreement will be fully funded.

More Teachers—Better Learning

The addition of 482 teachers to B.C. schools in 1998–1999 and funding of a further 379 in 1999–2000 represents the first significant improvement in classroom conditions in B.C. schools in over a decade. Prior to the collective agreement negotiated in 1998, per-pupil funding in real dollars was declining and the student/educator ratio was increasing. While last year saw major improvements in staffing in non-enrolling/ESL areas, this year marked a significant improvement in Primary class size numbers, with a provincial limit of 20 for Kindergarten and of 23 for Grades 1 to 3. Capital spending to build new classrooms and reduce the number of portables in use in B.C. has been another positive development.

The Provincial Agreement

Government has a responsibility to fully fund the collective agreement that covers the employment of close to 45,000 teachers in B.C.'s public schools. The collective agreement consists of matters negotiated provincially as well as provisions rolled over from previous local agreements. Arguments of inadequate government funding or misallocation of government funds should not sidetrack the implementation of the agreement. Government's responsibility to fund the collective agreement adequately is heightened by the legislature's adoption in 1998 of the collective agreement, including all previously negotiated provisions.

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.

Changes in the Funding System

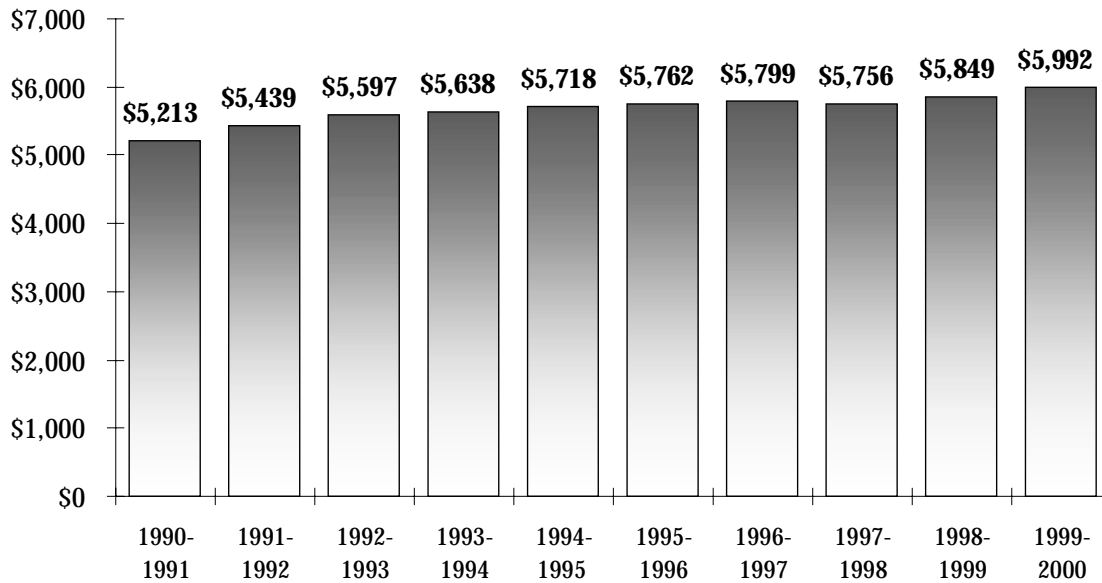
Block funding was introduced in 1990–1991, as recommended by the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education. Each year, the ministry responsible for education establishes a provincial per-pupil dollar amount that is then multiplied by the projected number of students to determine the Total Estimated Provincial 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, Technology grants from the Ministry of Education, and Community Schools and School Meal Program grants from the Ministry for Children and Families; however, those grants are not the subject of this brief.

Figure 1 displays the history of provincial operating funding per pupil since the introduction of block funding. These figures, published by the ministry in the *Budget Instruction Manual* supplied to school districts, took changes in the education funding system into account to allow for accurate inter-year comparisons through 1998–1999. For example, the Annual Capital Allowance that was removed from the formula in 1996–1997 was removed retroactively from previous years’ figures. **Unfortunately, the ministry did not provide adjusted per-pupil amounts in the 1999–2000 *Budget Instruction Manual*; therefore, inter-year comparisons are questionable. The BCTF calls upon the ministry to provide clear and understandable funding information to facilitate understanding of changes in the funding system from year to year.**

At face value, the amount of funding per student increased every year between 1990–1991 and 1996–1997, then declined by \$43 in 1997–1998 for the first time in seven years as the result of system-wide “Efficiency Adjustments.” The upward trend resumed in 1998–1999 with a boost in per-pupil funding of \$93, or \$50 more than the 1996–1997 level. The resulting per-pupil amount of \$5,992 is \$779, or 14.9%, more than the per-pupil amount for 1990–1991. This amount, however, is inflated by the incorporation of funding that was not included in previous years’ figures, for example the non-enrolling/ESL and K–3 provisions of the collective agreement.

Figure 1

Provincial Operating Funding Per Pupil, 1990-1991 to 1999-2000

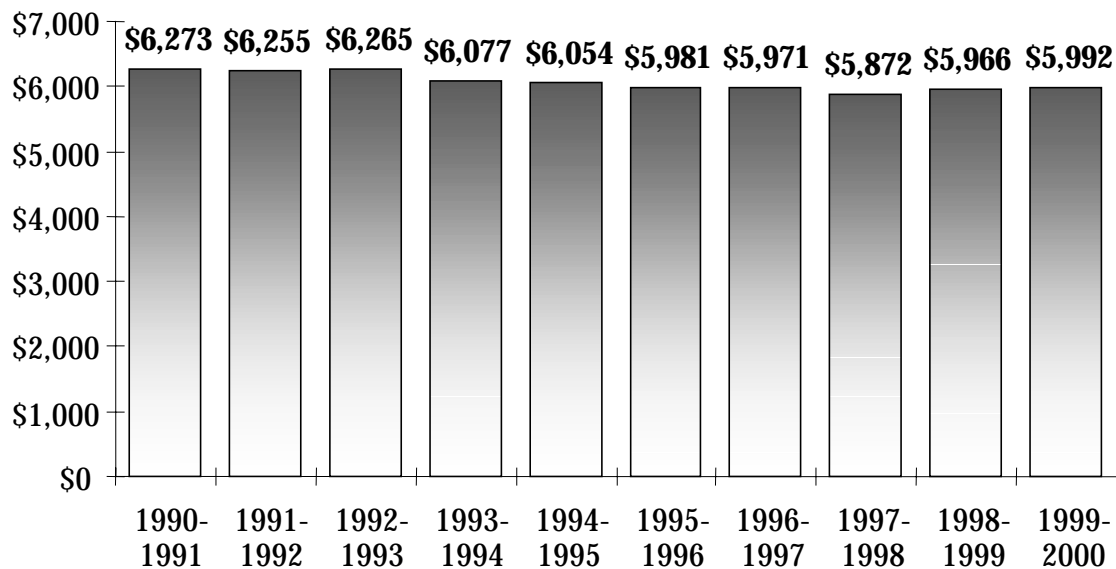


Sources: Budget Instruction Manual, 1999-2000 and 1998-1999 Preliminary Budgets. Figures *not* adjusted in 1999-2000 to allow accurate inter-year comparisons. See text for details.

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 1999 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 declined every year between 1993–1994 and 1997–1998. The modest increase in 1998–1999 returned real funding almost, but not quite, to its 1996–1997 level, while the unadjusted increase in 1999–2000 topped the per-pupil funding of 1995–1996.

Figure 2

Inflation-Adjusted Provincial Operating Funding Per Pupil, 1990-1991 to 1999-2000



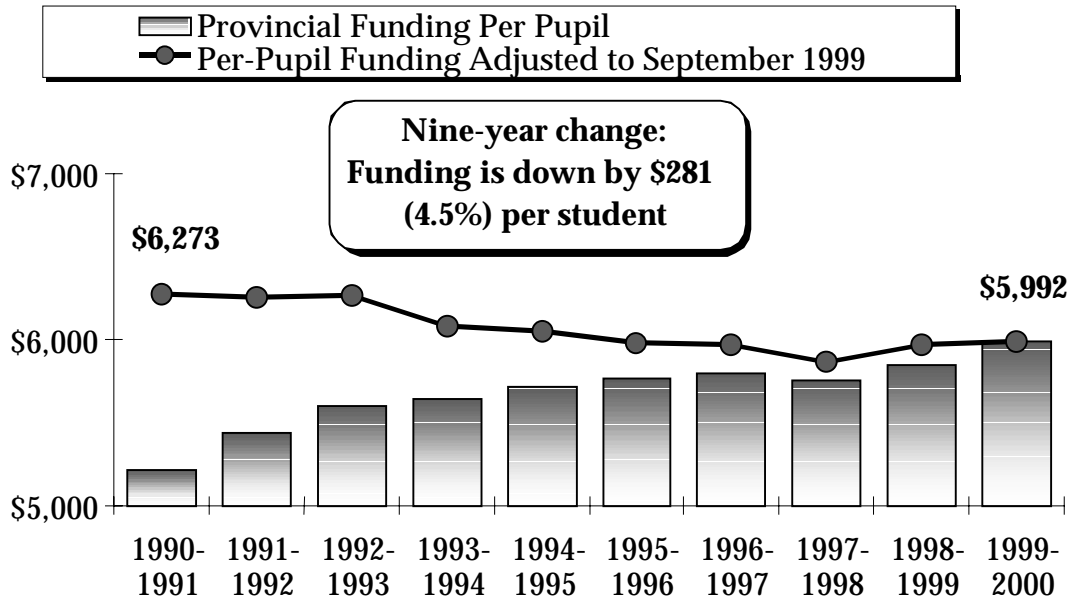
Source: Budget Instruction Manuals; British Columbia CPI, September of each school year (Statistics Canada).
 Figures *not* adjusted in 1999-2000 to allow accurate inter-year comparisons. See text for details.

Figure 3 combines actual funding per pupil with inflation-adjusted amounts. It is evident from these figures that, while nominal funding has gone up, public education in British Columbia has actually experienced a decline in real per-pupil operating funds of \$281 per student since 1990–1991. This 4.5% decline has occurred during a period when more and more students need specialized educational services, when more students have English as their second language, when more students are identified as having special needs, and when additional pressures have been placed on teachers to revise methods and curriculum. **Also,**

as noted above, the decline would likely be even more marked if comparable figures were available.

Figure 3

Real Provincial Funding Per Student



Source: Budget Instruction Manuals; British Columbia CPI from Statistics Canada. Figures *not* adjusted in 1999-2000 to allow accurate inter-year comparisons. See text for details.

Reduced per-student funding for education diminishes the quality of education available to students. If the real per-pupil amount for 1999–2000 were the same as in 1990–1991, there would be \$169 million more in the system in the current year. This funding could be used to hire more than 2,800 additional teachers, assuming an average salary of \$60,000 per teacher.

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 \$6,273 would ensure continuity of programs.

Statistical Changes in the System Since 1990

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

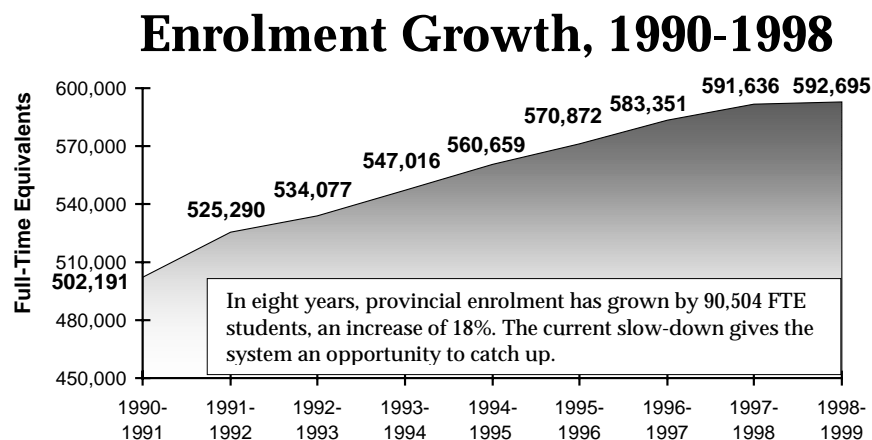
Enrolment Changes

Enrolment growth in B.C. schools was stunning for most of the 1990s. As illustrated by Figure 4, more than 90,500 additional full-time-equivalent students entered the system in the eight years between 1990 and 1998 (Ministry of Education Standard Report 2077, September 1998). That is 3,000 more than the combined enrolment of the Vancouver and Coquitlam school districts (Ministry of Education Standard Report 2077, September 1998). Such numbers could not be easily accommodated without considerable cost and stress on an already overburdened system.

While overall enrolment growth has been flat for the last year or two, certain districts actually experienced reduced enrolment for the first time in many years, a condition that brings its own unique set of problems. Such districts require special assistance to ease the transition to lower enrolments, such as the special grant for districts with enrolment declines in 1998-1999.

Although certain districts are still growing quickly, indications are that the spectacular province-wide enrolment growth of the past decade is now over; this hiatus provides an opportunity to catch up and meet the needs of the students currently in the system before another wave of new enrolment washes over the system.

Figure 4



Source: Ministry Standard Report #2077

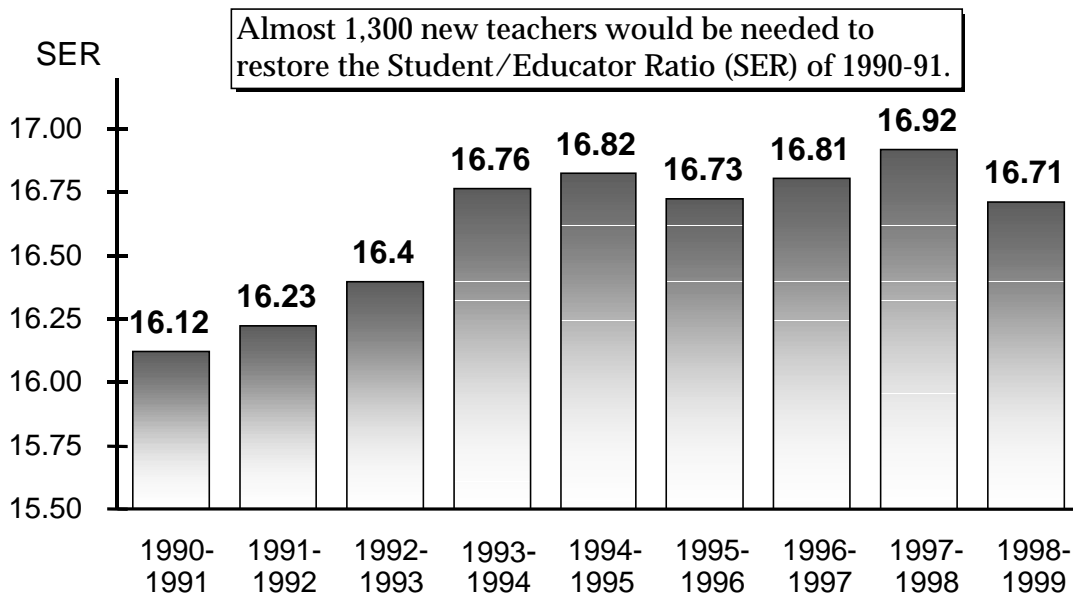
More Students per Educator

In 1990, the student/educator ratio (SER) was 16.12. In contrast, the most recent figures (Ministry of Education Standard Report 2077, September 1998) indicate the ratio has deteriorated to 16.7140 students for every educator (Figure 5). While provincial enrolment grew by 90,504 students or 18% in this period, the number of teachers and other educators increased by only 4,314 or 13.9%. **If the SER of 1990–1991 were still in place, there would be 1,299 more teachers in the system today to work with B.C.’s growing and increasingly diverse student population.**

The non-enrolling/ESL and K–3 class-size provisions of the 1998 teachers’ collective agreement call for the hiring of additional teachers to begin addressing the issue of rising student/educator ratios, and the impact was already being felt in 1998 when the SER improved slightly, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Student/Educator Ratio, 1990 to 1998



Source: Ministry Standard Report #2077

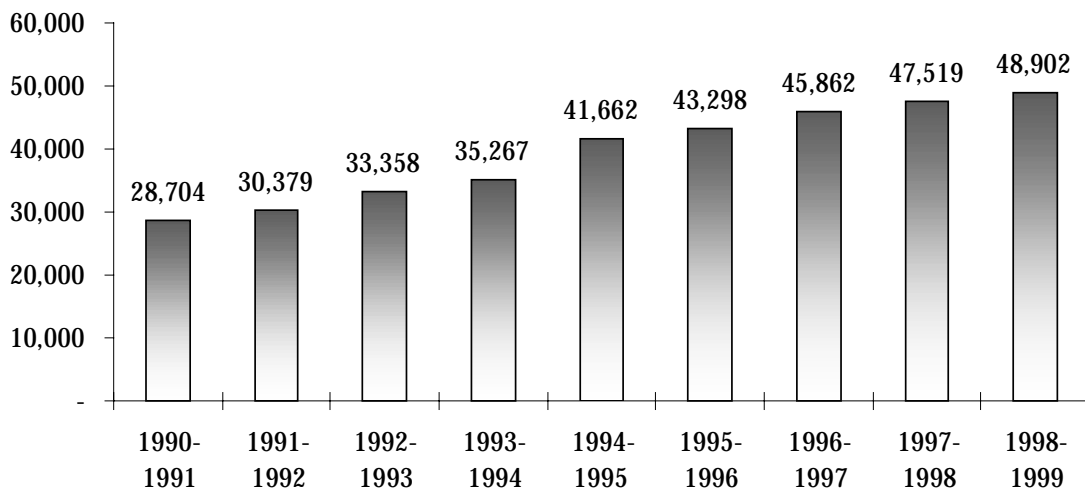
Students with Special Needs

Students themselves have changed dramatically over the eight years between 1990 and 1998 (Figure 6). In 1990, the ministry reported that there were 28,704 students with special needs such as physical dependence, visual impairment, severe behaviour disorders, and learning disabilities; by 1998, a total of 48,902 such students were identified (Ministry of Education Standard Report 1585, excluding gifted). That represents a 70.4% increase in the number of students identified as having special needs over an eight-year period.

To place these numbers in context, consider the following: While the number of teachers entering the system increased by only 14% between 1990 and 1998, and the overall number of students increased by 18%, the number of students with special needs increased by 70%. 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. Accurate identification and data are required to ensure that special-education funding is being used for its intended purpose: providing services to all students with special needs.

Figure 6

Number of Students with Special Needs Rises Dramatically

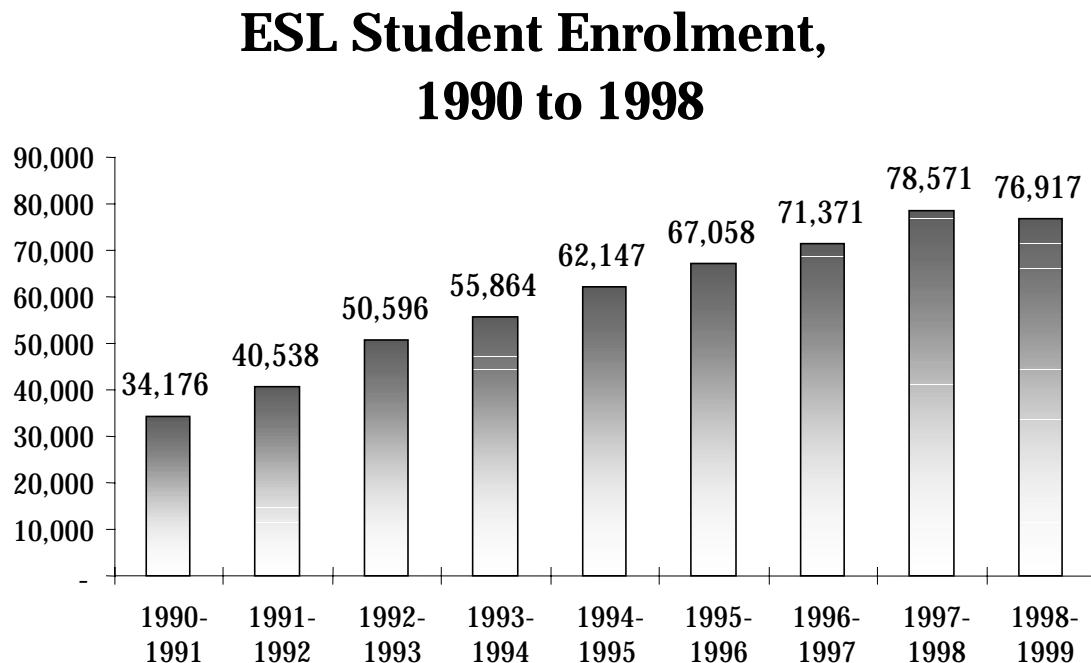


Source: Ministry Standard Report #1585

English as a Second Language Enrolments

There are other indicators of additional stresses on the system since 1990. For example, as Figure 7 shows, the number of identified ESL students requiring special services has almost doubled, going from 34,176 in 1990 to 76,917 in 1998—a 125% increase (Ministry of Education Standard Report 1586A).

Figure 7



Source: Ministry Standard Report #1586A

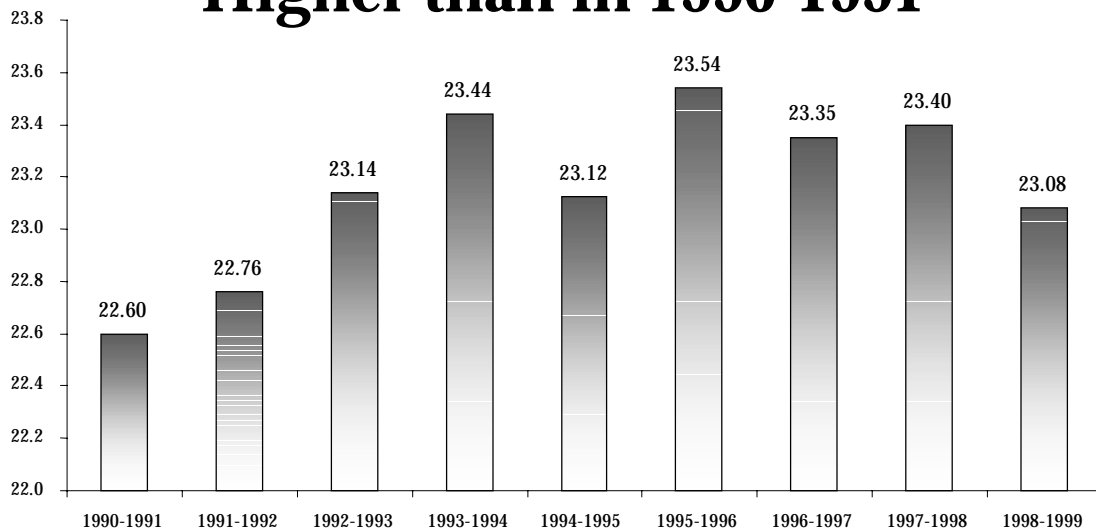
Class-Size Increases

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 eight-year period under study (Figure 8). Class size averaged 22.6 in 1990; by 1997, the average had risen to 23.4 (Ministry of Education Standard Report 2040). In 1998, elementary class size improved to 23.1 students, but that figure was still 2.1% higher than it was in 1990.

Unfortunately, comparable numbers are not available for secondary class size as the practice of gathering this information was discontinued in 1997. Furthermore, elementary-class size by grade cannot be determined. These omissions point to the need for accurate and relevant data collection to monitor the performance of the system with respect to working and learning conditions.

Figure 8

Elementary Class Size Still Higher than in 1990-1991



Source: Ministry Standard Report #2040

Cutbacks: Evidence from the Field

While statistics tell us what happened in the past, anecdotal evidence from a number of school districts provides insight into current and emerging trends. BCTF members describe a very stressed system, one that is finding it hard to meet the needs of all students. More comments related specifically to special education can be found in the “Special Education Funding” section below.

- *Almost every time we discuss resources for students with special needs with senior administration, the amount of money the district receives per student is brought up first before trying to look at how this can be worked out.*
- *Cuts to our special education and library teaching assistants are causing grief. Some libraries are now closed to kids at times when they would have been open before the cuts. In some cases, students with special needs are back in a resource centre model of service.*
- *Band/music programs have been cut every year and continue to face potential cuts. There is also an overwhelming need for more elementary counselling time—there is just too little of it. The counsellors burn out after a few years of two people servicing eight elementary schools.*

-
- *Class size averages are rising. Three-quarters of classes in this district are now full to max. In the secondary areas, courses are cancelled if they are not enrolled to sufficiently large numbers, and students are being denied access to courses they want or being steered into technology-based programs to get needed credit.*
 - *Non-enrolling teacher ratios are great, but elementary schools in this district still have no counselling services. Furthermore, a school's share of the teacher-librarian time (0.08 FTE to 0.33 FTE in elementary schools) is often too small to be of any value.*
 - *The school board is desperately seeking ways to generate funds, causing them to focus their energies more on generating profits from their operations than on providing an educational service.*
 - *The board has changed its method of ordering supplies, which was previously usually done by staff assistants. Now, classroom teachers are asked to review tons of computer print-outs in October to order supplies for the following year.*
 - *Our board has just announced that all the library clerk positions in the district will be cut effective January 1, 2000. This decision will have a huge impact on librarians and will affect the way they are able to deliver library services.*
 - *In this part of an amalgamated district, we are already down 3.6 FTE teachers from last year, and one of my schools has to cut a further 0.5 in January. And the future is dismal. The secretary-treasurer is predicting 10–12 FTE teacher cuts across the district in each of the next two years. I don't think attrition will handle it all.*
 - *We're not making widgets here, and it takes people (who cost money, heaven forbid!) to humanize the school system and make it function the way people would like it to.*
 - *In many elementary schools here, phones are not being answered in the last half hour of instructional time because the board cut two-and-a-half hours a week out of the CUPE secretaries' time: They now go home half an hour before school finishes. So the phones are ringing...what happens if there is an emergency?*
 - *Technology spending is being done in a totally wasteful and irrational fashion. Hardware is put in schools with no money for upkeep, software, upgrading, or teacher education. Labs are full of crashed computers needing repair but ignored because there are no staff to keep them running.*

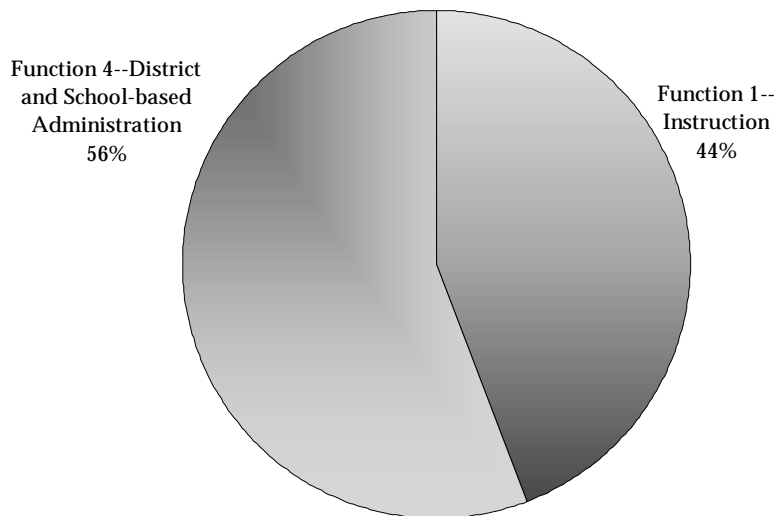
Education-Funding Issues

Cap on Administration

Clouding the issue of how many resources are actually directed toward students in the classroom is districts' practice of allocating at least 1,142.398 of the provincial total of 2,590.815 full-time-equivalent administrative officers to the instructional budget at a cost of \$92.6 million (Figure 9) (Revenue and Expenditure Information, February 1999, Tables 10 and 15). This means that almost half of administrative officers' time is allocated to instruction in school districts' budgets.

Figure 9

Program Allocation of Administrative Officers' Time, Preliminary Budgets, 1998/99



Source: Ministry of Education, British Columbia School District Revenue and Expenditure Information, February 5, 1999.

In addition, it is impossible to tell from districts' budgets and audited statements how much of central-office administrators' time—for example, directors of instruction and assistant superintendents—is being identified as, and paid for out of, instruction. One possible symptom of the confused accounting is the inconsistency in numbers of administrators reported on different forms. In September 1998, for example, districts reported a final count of 2,663.44 FTE administrative officers on Form 1530 while the corresponding number on Forms 2001 and 2003 was 2,704.91. In other words, 41 fewer principals, vice-principals, and directors of instruction were reported as administrators on Form 1530

(Ministry of Education Standard Report 2063, September 1998; unpublished September 1998 Form 1530 data from Ministry of Education).

These inconsistencies have serious cost implications when the average administrative officer earns almost \$25,000 more than the average teacher—\$78,299 compared to \$53,730 (Figure 10) (Ministry of Education Standard Report 2063, September 1998). It is essential to the health of the public-education system that monitoring and accountability measures guarantee the use of instructional budgets for instruction, not administration.

Figure 10

Average Gross Salary of Educators, September 1998



Source: Ministry Standard Report #2063

Teachers Subsidizing the System

Teachers are subsidizing the system in two major ways. First, they provide extra unpaid labour as they try to meet the additional learning requirements of today's students with inadequate overall funding. About 38% of Canadian teachers work overtime, almost always unpaid (Statistics Canada, *Labour Force Update: Hours of Work*, 71-005-XPB, first quarter 1997). And teachers in B.C. work even harder than their hard-working colleagues in the rest of the country: 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 (Statistics Canada, *Education Quarterly Review*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1994).

Second, teachers—especially beginning teachers and those who are changing assignments—often pay for classroom materials and resources to create an environment that is amenable to learning in otherwise barren classrooms. Estimates of this amount range from \$200 to \$1,500 per year (Verena Foxx, “Teachers subsidizing education,” *Teacher*, September 1998).

“Efficiency Adjustments”

In 1998–1999, cuts to funding were made under the guise of an “Efficiency and Restructuring Adjustment” (\$27 million) and a “Savings Initiative” (\$4.3 million). Similarly, a “Restructuring and Savings Adjustment” drained \$31.05 million from the system in 1999–2000. These initiatives were implemented with the express intention of not affecting the classroom; unfortunately they have had a negative impact on classrooms throughout the province. While the ministry has announced that districts will retain a portion of the savings realized by districts through efficiencies, the BCTF urges government to return the entire amount to operating funding.

ESL Funding

As noted in the statistical section of this brief, the B.C. school system faces an ongoing, overwhelming responsibility to educate thousands of students who have English as their second language. While about 90% of these students are educated in eight Lower Mainland districts, even districts with small enrolments have unique issues related to ESL funding and delivery. Through their excellent teaching programs, dedicated professionals have been able to ensure that the province’s ESL students achieve at high levels, often graduating with marks equal to or even better than their English-speaking peers. This has been a remarkable investment in our province and in our future, and it is worth continuing to fund. Teachers believe they must continue to provide the same kind of quality service and inspiration to each ESL student so every one has the opportunity to contribute to Canadian society in the most positive way possible.

The BCTF urges the ministry to provide the funds required to ensure that any identified ESL student in need of ESL services has access to those services. Furthermore, it is urgent that the additional funds promised to those students who have been in ESL programs for more than five years be distributed to districts as soon as possible so that the additional ESL service required by these students can be retained. We believe every ESL student has the right to be successful. The citizens of British Columbia will all benefit in the end.

Special Education Funding

In 1999–2000, the ministry provided \$411.4 million in preliminary funding for special education programs, including just under \$4 million for gifted education. While this is a targeted amount, most districts will need to spend more than the amount funded by the province to *begin* to meet the needs of students with special needs who have been formally identified. In 1998–1999, for example, targeted funding from the ministry for the province as a whole weighed in at \$407,385,813—but districts budgeted \$469,124,004, or 15.2% more than that. The experience of individual school districts varies, with one underspending by about 5% and eleven overspending by 20% to 56%. The net effect, however, is that districts had to take nearly \$62 million from other parts of the budget to meet the nominal requirements of special education.

A danger is inherent in this situation. When times are tight, as they have been for several years, districts are tempted to treat the targeted amount as a ceiling rather than a floor, and begin to divert additional funds formerly devoted to special education to other uses. A number of BCTF locals and members report that this is already occurring in their districts:

- *Special education spending is being ratcheted down to the target, resulting in fewer and fewer resources being available to address integration. We currently have about 30 grievances around integration issues.*
- *Key services cut this year are mostly in the area of special needs. The reduction of teacher-psychologists and speech-language pathologists means almost no direct service for students and longer than two-year waiting lists for testing. Cuts of alternative program workers—who are called in when students are deemed to be at risk to themselves or others—and special education assistants mean less one-to-one help for students at risk. District resource teachers, who now have caseloads of 30, are having difficulty writing IEPs for the many students with communication problems because there is no one to provide the service.*
- *Education assistants are spread so thin it's beyond belief. There are about 30 of them on the layoff/recall list, and unless you can demonstrate that a student is an ax murderer, there's no relief coming....*
- *Speech pathologists have been cut back so much that their services are almost non-existent—sometimes they see schools once every two weeks or once per week for only one-half of the school year. The parent of a student with a severe language and processing delay has said that the service “might as well not exist.” A further problem is that those parents who can afford to pay \$85 per hour for private*

speech therapy do so, while the others who cannot, do not get any service.

Furthermore, as noted in the statistical section above, many students with special needs have not been formally identified. These students, in what is often termed the “grey area,” need additional services but are not receiving them. The following comments from the field hint at the scope of this issue.

There is an extreme situation in a number of classes in my school where students who have learning needs of one sort or another are not getting the learning assistance that would truly help them with their learning needs. I am not talking about those “lucky” ones who are ministry-identified, but rather those who do not meet total ministry criteria or who are one or two points away from ministry criteria. These students often have to be lumped together in classes that have their two identified students, but then there are others who need an IEP of one sort or another in one or more subject areas because they do not meet the learning outcomes in certain subjects. In one class there are not just the two ministry-identified kids, but nine others who need direct assistance, and there is no time available for this.

In my own class, I have students who need and would truly benefit from short-term learning assistance, but no one is available to give that to them. There is no staffing. I am told that my school has an excess of these “grey-area kids,” but aren’t all students entitled to assistance, aren’t all students special in some ways?

Another special education funding issue that requires attention is the 4% cap on the number of students identified in the high-incidence/low-cost category, as well as the 2% cap on the number of students who are gifted. These arbitrary caps are not supported by research; furthermore, the caps appear to contradict the government’s inclusive mandates. The effect of the caps is to rule out funding for large numbers of students who require special education or gifted education services. The BCTF’s brief to the Ministry of Education’s Special Education Review recommended that the ministry “reconsider the caps on the numbers of students to more accurately reflect current research data regarding the actual numbers of students with each specific disability.”

The Teacher Professional Development Service

The Teacher Professional Development Service (TPDS) is for, by, and about teachers and teaching. The TPDS will enhance learning opportunities for students by promoting and providing sustained, high-quality, career-long professional development opportunities for teachers in British Columbia.

The BCTF proposes to operate the TPDS on a pilot basis in 2000–2001. To this end, we request funding of \$2 million to be reallocated from the Ministry of Education Field Services Branch or other internal ministry budget. The three-year plan to expand the service calls for funding of \$3 million in the second year and \$4 million in the third year. Details of our three-year proposal are outlined in a BCTF project proposal entitled “Enhancing Teacher Professional Development in B.C.: The Teacher Professional Development Service” (November 1999).

School Fees

In spite of government regulatory and ministerial order changes, the practice of charging school fees continues. Free public education is not a reality in British Columbia.

It is too easy to forget that many individual students, who are real human beings, are excluded from courses and activities that have school fees their families can ill afford. For example, a Grade 12 student recently had unpaid fees of \$85 including \$25 for a lab book in Mechanics II, \$25 for wood fees in Construction 12, \$25 for Graphic Communications II and \$10 for Arts 12. That student would also be on the line for a basic graduation fee of \$100 plus other incidental costs related to graduation. If he wanted to participate in an extracurricular sport, he would have to pay an additional \$40. Going to a school dance costs \$5 plus two cans of food for the Food Bank—ironic for teenagers whose families may use the Food Bank themselves. There are also varying costs for field trips.

Up to now, administrators at this student’s school have managed to offer odd jobs or waive fees for students in need, but the current funding environment is restricting these options.

According to one teacher who is also a staff representative, “these students’ inability to purchase entry to participate in class activities limits their educational experience and exposure, career exploration, and future potential. Often, the poor are embarrassed by their poverty. This year in my school is the worst in memory, and we will be challenged to find enough funds.”

Funding for Mandated Activities

Government has recently launched two new initiatives that require additional resources if they are to be fully and properly implemented: new legislation mandating a number of activities related to health and safety in schools, and the interministerial child-abuse protocol.

In October 1999, the provincial government proclaimed the *Workers' Compensation (Occupational Health and Safety) Amendment Act* (Bill 14). The new legislation requires a range of teacher and support staff training in health and safety including WHMIS, violence prevention, and district and school protocols, policies, and procedures related to health and safety. It also requires training in filing of appeals, reporting accidents, and reporting unhealthy or unsafe conditions.

Training teacher and support staff workers in health and safety will ensure not only their own health and safety but also that of students. A recent survey of violence toward teachers, conducted by SFU and the BCTF, indicates that **the existence of policies and procedures and staff knowledge of them reduces the potential for violence.**

The survey of violence against teachers also found that the existence of a health and safety committee reduces the potential for violence. The *Act* requires that all schools with 20 or more employees have school-based health and safety committees. It provides for "time off from work" for committee members to prepare for meetings, attend meetings, and do the work of the health and safety committee as outlined in the *Act*. Additional funding is required to ensure that the decisions of government, as mandated through this legislation, are implemented.

Similarly, reporting suspected or alleged child abuse and neglect is a legal responsibility under the *Children, Families and Community Service Act*, a point reinforced in a letter from the Honourable Paul Ramsey, the previous minister of education, to all school board chairs and superintendents of schools (Ministry of Education reference 44740). The new *B.C. Handbook for Action on Child Abuse and Neglect* and a companion guide have been prepared to help teachers and other professionals working with children recognize signs of abuse and become familiar with reporting procedures. Regional training based on these documents was to have occurred in 1998. **Some teachers have already received this training, but time needs to be made available for all teachers to be trained, given ministry expectations and legal requirements.**

Teachers require time and resources to implement the interministerial protocol on child abuse. While expectations regarding the amount of time and resources required are not yet clear, the BCTF expects that government will provide the required time and resources, given that this is a government-mandated program.

Potential Sources of New Revenue

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation has identified the following two potential sources of new revenue to assist in fully funding the public-education system.

Private-School Funding

In its 1999 budget, the B.C. government proposed spending \$141 million on grants to independent schools (B.C. Ministry of Finance and Corporate Relations, *Estimates, Fiscal Year Ending March 31, 2000*), compared with \$62 million in 1990 (*Estimates, Fiscal Year Ending March 31, 1990*). Between 1990 and 1998, actual government grants to private schools increased by 65%, compared with an increase in funded enrolment of 47% (Ministry of Education, Independent Schools Branch, unpublished information). The BCTF is opposed to using taxpayer dollars to fund private schools. Returning this funding to the public school system would go a long way toward addressing some of the pressing needs of the public system.

Funding to independent schools should be withdrawn for a number of reasons, including the following:

1. Unlike public schools, independent schools are not accountable to elected officials. The ministry does not have the resources to monitor the independent schools of the province.
2. Independent schools foster exclusive rather than inclusive values. Our society is growing in cultural, religious, linguistic, and economic diversity and requires opportunities for people of diverse backgrounds to interact and gain understanding of their commonality. Independent schools, particularly those that exist to preserve particular cultural or religious values, define community in a narrow and exclusive, rather than a broad and inclusive manner.
3. Government funding to independent schools gives some private schools advantages over schools that rely totally on public funds. Elite private schools that charge substantial tuition and also receive public funds are able to offer smaller classes, more individualized instruction, and superior learning resources, including technology. Government funding to these elite schools offers additional advantages to students who already benefit from a privileged socio-economic status.
4. Independent schools may be selective and discriminatory in their admission policies. Public schools turn away no child—and are proud of their inclusiveness—but private schools may deny entry to students with behaviour problems or any other attribute the school does not wish to address. Some parents choose the independent option because they want

their children to escape integrated classrooms where there are insufficient resources to meet the needs generated by inclusion.

5. Public funding of independent schools will create a two- or three-tiered education system in B.C. in the long run. A second tier will result from the upper and middle classes' abandoning public schools to obtain the advantages of smaller class size and non-inclusive classrooms. A third tier is imminent when fundamentalist groups—who reject the inclusive and secular values of our democracy—flee the system. Thousands of B.C. students attend independent schools that teach that homosexuality is a sin and that the theory of evolution is in error, in spite of the requirement that the B.C. curriculum be taught to qualify for public funding.

The BCTF believes that the public should not subsidize private education and therefore urges government to discontinue funding for independent schools. Group 1 independent schools—which offer programs consistent with the goals of the British Columbia curriculum, employ certificated teachers, maintain adequate educational facilities and meet municipal codes—currently receive 50% of the per-pupil funding granted to neighbouring public schools. **Government funding of Group 1 independent schools should be phased out by removing 25% of the total grant in each of the next four years.** This approach would free up approximately \$30 million per year for the public system.

Group 2 independent schools meet the same requirements as Group 1 schools but receive per-student grants at the 35% level because their costs exceed those of local public schools. The sum of these schools' tuition fees and current government funding results in per-pupil spending that is much higher than is possible in the public system. **Government funding of Group 2 schools should be discontinued in 2000–2001.** Public grants to Group 2 private schools currently amount to about \$15 million, so these two measures would make about \$45 million available to public schools in the first year.

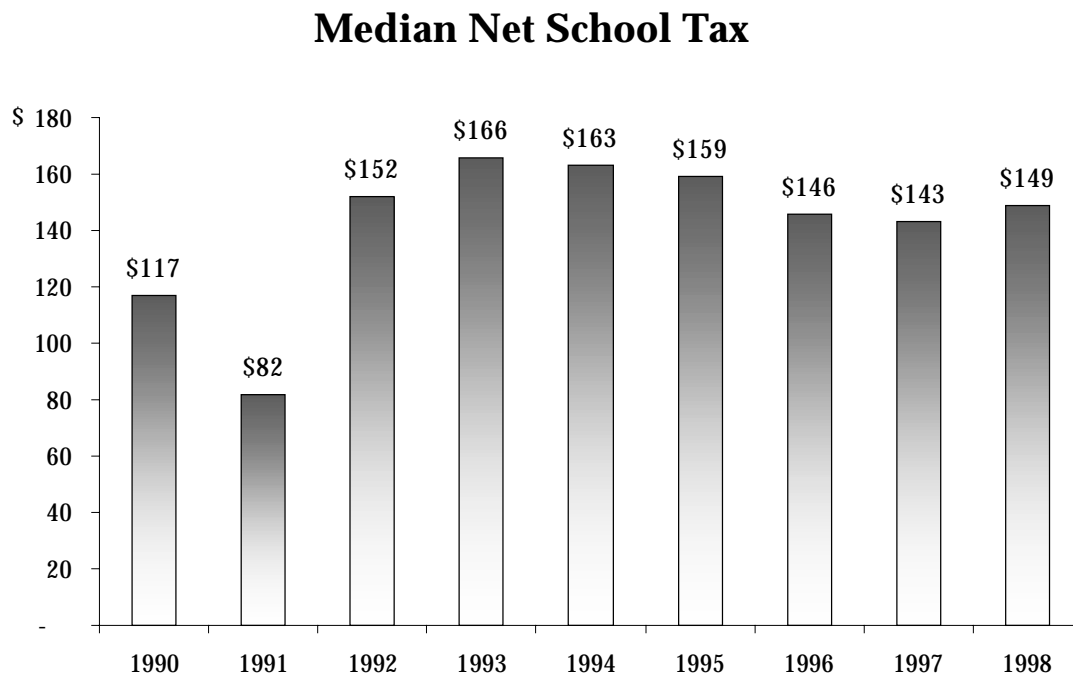
If government does continue to fund private schools, however, in no event should the combination of tuition and public funding total more than the average per-pupil allocation in the public system. The BCTF would accept adjustments for those schools that enrol students who would qualify for additional funding within the public system because of their unique needs, such as ESL, aboriginal, and special needs. Furthermore, government should base its grant on the tuition fees charged in the 1999–2000 school year to prevent a school from manipulating the public subsidy by lowering its tuition fees after the fact.

School Taxes

Information on residential school taxes is limited to 1998 and before. Staff cutbacks at the Ministry of Education have caused delays in producing the annual Revenue and Expenditure Information that is the source of this data. We call upon government to provide adequate staffing at the ministry for timely and accurate collection and dissemination of data related to the funding system.

After peaking in 1993, the median net school tax bill of B.C. homeowners declined steadily each year through 1997 (Figure 11). In 1998, net school tax rose slightly because of higher assessed values, but the average B.C. homeowner still paid only \$12.42 per month in net school taxes. That is 10% less than the \$13.83 paid in 1993 (Ministry of Education, Revenue and Expenditure Information, various years). It is necessary to reverse this trend.

Figure 11



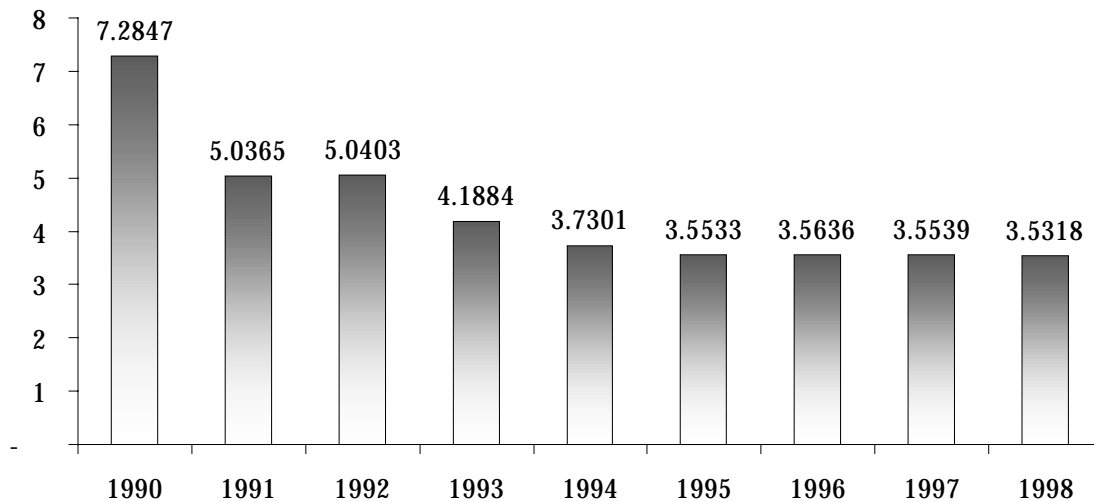
Source: Ministry of Education, Revenue and Expenditure Information, various years.

Part of the explanation for low net school taxes lies in the low level of provincial average tax rates, which were in the range of 7.0 to 7.3 per \$1,000 of value before the introduction of block funding but are now hovering around 3.5 (Figure 12). These rates are set annually by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. It should be noted that there is considerable variation between districts in tax rate levels. Nisga'a, for example, is already at the cap of 9.0000 per \$1,000 of assessed value, while West Vancouver residents need only pay 2.4185 (B.C. Ministry of Education, Revenue and Expenditure Information, Table 30, February 5, 1999.) For the province as a whole, however, **adding only 0.25 points to the tax rate**

would raise approximately \$69 million in new revenues, yet would cost the average homeowner only \$3.65 per month.

Figure 12

Provincial Average Residential Tax Rates, School Purposes



Source: Ministry of Education, Revenue and Expenditure Information, various years.

The BCTF believes it is crucial for school districts and elected school trustees to have some measure of local autonomy in budget setting. If we are to retain local interest in our schools and prevent cynicism and demoralization in our school communities, there must be a way for local boards to respond to the real needs they face in their jurisdictions. A stronger education system and democratic society are created when locally elected trustees—who are responsive and responsible to their communities—have the means to fund their own decisions, to handle student or school problems, and to address the wishes of parents and their communities. The current situation, in which bargaining and taxation are provincial responsibilities, results in beliefs that local people are unable to do anything to resolve untenable situations. This state of affairs is not good for children, communities, the provincial government, or anyone else. Government gains nothing when it prevents communities from raising small amounts of tax revenue to improve their local schools.

In the past, when school districts had the authority to raise small supplementary operating budgets and to demonstrate leadership in developing new programs or improved services for students, the province as a whole benefited through the many initiatives implemented. Lighthouse districts and programs spurred others on to greater excellence. The loss of local autonomy has meant a gradual

ratcheting down of the system to the lowest common denominator, something the NDP government will be held accountable for, even though the legislation was brought in by the Social Credit government in 1990.

In its 1999 proposals for legislative action, the BCTF has therefore recommended amendments to the *School Act* that would restore the ability of school boards to adopt supplementary budget measures. Any system for supplementary budgeting would have to include a mechanism for equalizing revenues so that some boards are not unfairly disadvantaged by the size of their tax base.

Conclusion and Recommendations

British Columbia teachers are committed not only to maintaining but also to 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 all negotiated learning and working conditions. Specifically, the BCTF recommends that the government:**

1. Restore the 1990–1991 student/educator ratio by increasing real per-capita funding.
2. Ensure that funding allocations to districts reflect the actual costs of fully implementing the collective agreement, including matters previously negotiated at the local level.
3. Support the continued reduction of class sizes at the K–3 level and support the concept of reduction of class sizes at the Intermediate and Secondary levels.
4. (a) Collect and disseminate the data required to monitor funding, learning conditions and expenditures, including accurate inter-year per-pupil funding amounts, class-size figures from Kindergarten to Grade 12, non-enrolling staffing levels, and accurate administrative time and numbers.
(b) Ensure that the Ministry of Education has adequate staffing and resources to carry out these activities.
5. Fully fund the actual costs of special education to eliminate the need for districts to raid other parts of the operating budget.
6. Provide and fund English as a Second Language services to all students needing them. Immediately distribute funds promised for students who have been in ESL programs for more than five years.
7. End the Restructuring and Savings Adjustment, which extracted \$31 million from the system in each of 1998–1999 and 1999–2000. Return these funds to the classroom.
8. Provide the BCTF with funding for the establishment of a Teacher Professional Development Service on a pilot basis beginning in the 2000–2001 school year, and reallocate \$2 million from the 2000–2001 budget of the Ministry of Education Field Services Branch or other internal ministry budget for the Teacher Professional Development Service pilot project.

-
9. Return to local school boards the right to adopt supplementary budget measures by levying additional residential school taxes.
 10. Eliminate public funding for private schools. Phase out government funding of Group 1 independent schools by removing 25% in each of the next four years. Discontinue government funding of Group 2 independent schools in 2000–2001.
 11. Continue special grants to mitigate the effects of enrolment decline in affected districts.
 12. (a) Provide one additional non-instructional day (NID) for government-mandated training of teachers under the *Workers' Compensation (Occupational Health and Safety) Amendment Act (Bill 14)* and for training required on the interministerial child-abuse protocol.
(b) Provide funding for release time for school health and safety committee meetings mandated by the WCB.
 13. (a) Eliminate the need for school fees
(b) Provide adequate education funding for resources and equipment.

AS:af:utfe/IWA Local 1-3567