



# Working together

to make our schools

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# healthy and safe

**Are BC's children going to schools that have:**

fresh air?

safe structures?

fresh water?

proper maintenance?

# Let's work together to ensure all BC students

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## Water quality



The use of lead solder in water pipes was discontinued only in the 1980s, so many older buildings in BC still have lead in their water systems, and some even have lead pipes. Cuts to operating budgets make it harder to lower lead levels in water.

### **Ask:**

- Is the water in schools regularly tested?
- Is water regularly treated by flushing and filtering?
- Are there plans to replace old pipes to eliminate lead from the water our children drink?

## Air quality



Most buildings constructed before the mid-1980s contain asbestos, which causes fatal illnesses when inhaled.

Many areas of BC have high levels of radon, a naturally occurring colourless, odourless, radioactive gas. It can concentrate in enclosed spaces and is the leading cause of lung cancer for non-smokers.

Cutbacks mean many HVAC systems are now shut down in off hours causing mold, mildew, and other problems.

### **Ask:**

- Are inventories of school asbestos locations fully updated and readily available? Are proper procedures in place for its removal or mitigation, and are regulations adhered to?
  - Is there regular testing and proper ventilation for radon?
  - Is ventilation sufficient to deal with all air quality issues?
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# nts can learn in healthy, safe environments.

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## Seismic upgrades



Delays to critical seismic upgrades mean that necessary work is well behind schedule. Preparing all BC schools to withstand inevitable earthquakes will not be completed for many years.

The government must keep its promise to make seismic upgrades a priority to protect our children and the staff who work with them every day.

### **Ask:**

- Does the government have a clear plan and reasonable timeline to get this crucial work done?
- Are emergency plans and procedures in place and practiced regularly?
- Are the plans readily available and shared with everyone affected?

## Winter conditions



Cutbacks in district maintenance budgets may delay snow and ice removal from school properties. Many staff whose duties include making sure schools are safe during severe weather conditions have seen their hours cut.

### **Ask:**

- What plans are in place for weather-related emergencies?
- How will schools deal with evacuations, lighting, heat, and transportation?

**This is a partial list of health and safety issues in BC public schools. For specific questions or concerns, please talk to your community's teachers or contact the local teachers' association.**

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# How can we work together to keep our public schools as safe and healthy as they can be?

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## **Talk to others in your community about the issues that affect our children's present and future, such as:**

- proper and timely seismic upgrading.
- air and water quality in our schools, and the need for regular testing and mitigation.
- the effects of school closures forcing students to travel long distances and hurting communities.
- the negative effects of inadequate supply and maintenance budgets in schools.

## **Find out:**

- from teachers and other staff what they see as top priorities for health and safety in their schools.
- if disaster planning, and ongoing testing for water and air quality is happening in schools.
- how your local school trustees and MLAs are advocating for more funding for health and safety.

## **Ask questions and report concerns through letters, messages, or phone calls to:**

- school and district administration.
- trustees and MLAs.
- local and regional health authorities.
- municipal or First Nations emergency services.
- the provincial *Emergency Preparedness BC* program.

Contact Minister of Education Mike Bernier [mike.bernier.MLA@leg.bc.ca](mailto:mike.bernier.MLA@leg.bc.ca), and Minister of Health Terry Lake [terry.lake.MLA@leg.bc.ca](mailto:terry.lake.MLA@leg.bc.ca)

**Urge them to put the health and safety needs of children first!**