

# EDUCATION FUNDING

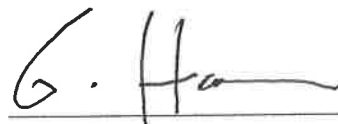
*A Brief to the*

## **Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services**

*from the*

## **British Columbia Teachers' Federation**

October 2018



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President



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Executive Director

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# **Education Funding Brief 2018**

## **BC Teachers' Federation**

*[bctf.ca/BriefsAndPositionPapers.aspx](http://bctf.ca/BriefsAndPositionPapers.aspx)*

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF) is pleased to have the opportunity to present its views on priorities for the 2019 provincial budget to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. The BCTF represents 43,000 teachers and associated professionals in public schools across British Columbia. Our brief to this Committee is focused on recommendations that would make the necessary and pressing improvements to public education that have been denied for far too long.

Reversing direction is not simple for an institution as large and diverse as public education, but that is no reason to be timid; if anything, it is a reason to act boldly and for the long-term. Good will on the part of everyone in the system will, we are sure, allow for the establishment of a new equilibrium, where schools and students across the province have what they need to flourish and thrive.

## **Summary of issues and recommendations**

### **Adequate, stable and predictable system-wide funding**

#### **Recommendation 1**

That the Ministry of Education provide stable, predictable, and adequate funding to enable school districts to fulfill their responsibility to provide quality public education to all students in British Columbia.

### **Education funding formula reform to reflect system needs**

#### **Recommendation 2**

That the Ministry of Education reform the provincial funding formula for operating grants to one based on the identified needs of school districts, an equitable distribution of resources, as well as the full mandate of the public education system.

#### **Recommendation 3**

That all new provincial initiatives or costs be reflected in corresponding funding, eliminating the practice of downloading costs onto school districts.

### **Investment in classroom resources and the new curriculum**

#### **Recommendation 4**

That the Ministry of Education provide substantial new funding for classroom resources, with particular focus on Indigenous content across the curriculum (including mechanisms for developing this content locally), physical education and health, and French education.

#### **Recommendation 5**

That the Ministry of Education provide grants to school districts for professional learning time and learning resources to support the implementation of the redesigned K–12 curriculum, based on a minimum of \$1,500 per teacher per year, for three years.

#### **Recommendation 6**

That the Ministry of Education provide infrastructure and support for new technology.

## **Support for successful inclusion**

### **Recommendation 7**

That the Ministry of Education align special education funding with special education needs, closing the current gap between what school districts receive in special education funding and the much greater amount they spend on special education, including dedicated funding for professional learning for teachers.

### **Recommendation 8**

That the Ministry of Education provide targeted funding to support the early identification and designation of students with special needs, particularly in the K–1 years.

### **Recommendation 9**

That the Ministry of Education introduce per-student funding amounts for high-incidence designations, including children with learning disabilities and those requiring moderate behaviour support, into the funding formula.

## **Expanded adult education**

### **Recommendation 10**

That the Ministry of Education increase the number of funded courses in adult education to reflect a broad range of educational needs and interests that help create an educationally enriched society as well as improved employment opportunities for individuals.

### **Recommendation 11**

That the Ministry of Education fund adult students on an equivalent basis to school-age students.

## **Dedicated funds for teacher recruitment, retention, and mentorship**

### **Recommendation 12**

That the Ministry of Education provide dedicated funding for teacher recruitment and retention initiatives across all school districts.

### **Recommendation 13**

That the Ministry of Education provide relief to teachers in school districts with high housing costs, through a mix of capital grants and loans to develop non-market teacher housing in those districts and/or a per-teacher housing allowance.

### **Recommendation 14**

That the Ministry of Education fund new teacher mentorship programs to support teachers new to the profession and those entering new roles.

## **Supports for families with children and an end to child poverty**

### **Recommendation 15**

That the Ministry of Finance act on recommendations made by First Call to redesign the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit into a BC Child Benefit that covers children under the age of 18, increases the maximum benefit to \$1,320 per child per year, and indexes it annually to the cost of living.

## **A phase-out of public funding for independent schools**

### **Recommendation 16**

That public funding for independent schools be eliminated, over a four-year timeline, beginning with the elite private schools in Group 2, whose 2019 funding should be halved, down to 17.5% of the per capita local school district rate.

## **Seismically safe schools**

### **Recommendation 17**

That the Ministry of Education accelerate capital funding for seismic upgrades to meet its target of having all upgrades complete by 2025.

# 1. Adequate, stable, and predictable system-wide funding

## Recommendation 1

That the Ministry of Education provide stable, predictable, and adequate funding to enable school districts to fulfill their responsibility to provide quality public education to all British Columbia students.

After 15 years of neglect, British Columbia has an opportunity to make the necessary investments that will put our public education system on a stable footing for students, parents, and teachers. However, today's K–12 system remains chronically underfunded; the question teachers and administrators have to pose too often is “what can I do without?” The effects of underfunding are felt every day: outdated materials, insufficient supplies, portable classrooms, etc.

While teachers have been pleased to see several important announcements on capital funding, there has been little change to the long-term austerity pattern in operating funds for public education. Nearly all increases in funding over the past two years have been driven by pre-existing commitments: enrolment growth, the Supreme Court settlement, or contractual obligations. The Premier's mandate letter to the Minister of Education, dated July 18, 2017, made clear that substantial increases in funding were necessary: “fast-track enhancement to K–12 education funding” and “additional annual funding” for supplies.<sup>1</sup> While successive governments, including this one, have bragged of “record-breaking” or “highest ever” levels of funding, these unadjusted, nominal figures lose their sheen when adjusted for inflation, and when contrasted with the rest of the economy, education funding in other provinces, and student needs. Between 2001 and 2015 (the latest year of available comparable national data), British Columbia saw spending on education drop relative to GDP by nearly a third.<sup>2</sup> This was the government of

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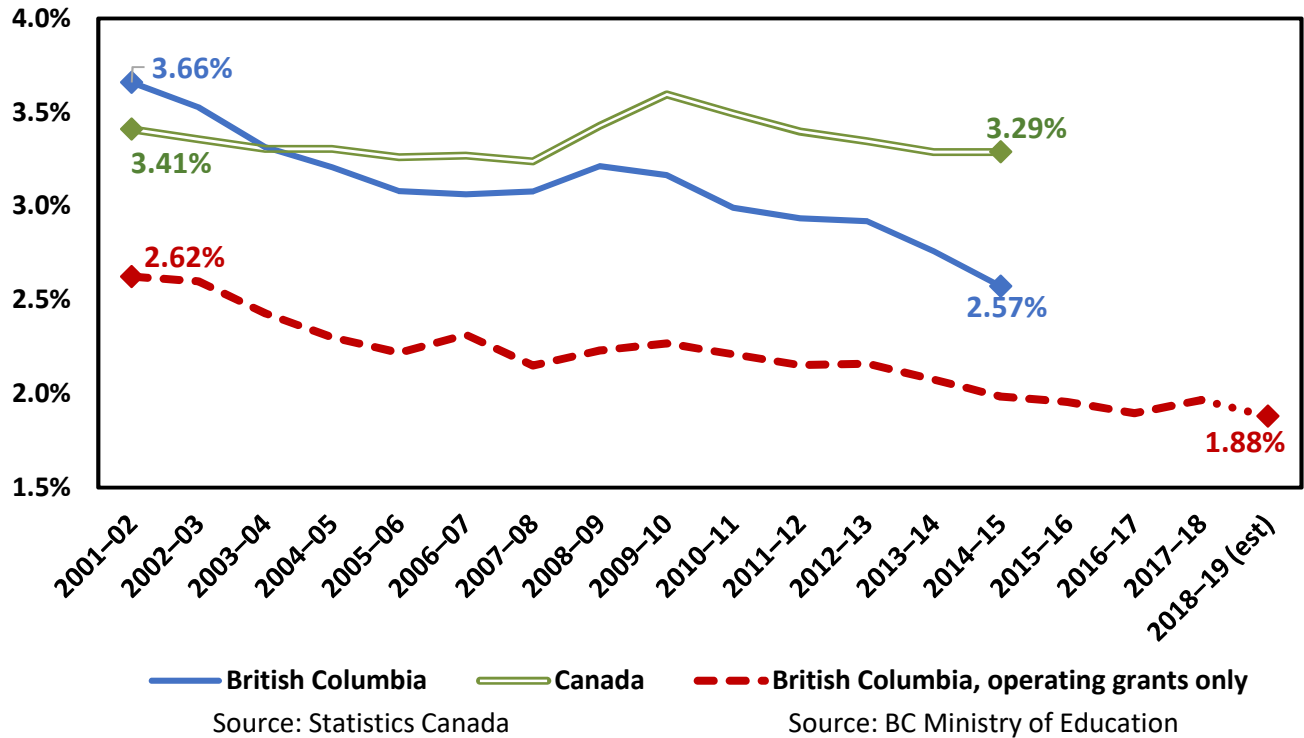
<sup>1</sup> Mandate Letter from Premier John Horgan to Minister of Education Rob Fleming, dated July 18, 2017. Retrieved from [www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/premier-cabinet-mlas/minister-letter/fleming-mandate.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/government/ministries-organizations/premier-cabinet-mlas/minister-letter/fleming-mandate.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> BCTF calculations based on Ministry of Education Operating Grant Tables, Statistics Canada GDP Tables (CANSIM Table 384-0038), and Statistics Canada Education Spending Tables (CANSIM Table 478-0014).



the day effectively saying that education should be less and less important and putting aside an ever-smaller part of our total social resources toward teaching our children.

**Figure 1.0: Spending on public K–12 as a share of GDP**



In addition, while total operating grants grew relative to GDP in 2017–18 as the Classroom Enhancement Fund was implemented, they are due to fall in relative terms again next year. And not only are total operating grants (including the formula-generated grants and all additional temporary funding streams) falling relative to GDP, they are falling per full-time equivalent (FTE) student. In inflation-adjusted terms (2017 dollars), total operating grants were \$10,077 in 2017–18; this school year they are projected to fall to \$9,764.<sup>3</sup> In fact, total grants per FTE student are 30% lower than they would have been, had British Columbia continued to put aside the same share of GDP toward them as we did in 2001–02, even adjusting for enrolment decline. Not adjusted for enrolment decline, this figure rises to 40%.

As educational needs have grown, new programs, including a totally redesigned K–12 curriculum, have been introduced and system costs have expanded, spending has not kept up;

<sup>3</sup> BCTF calculations based on Ministry of Education Operating Grant Tables.

indeed, it has fallen behind. The province can, and *must* do more for K–12 education. We urge the Committee to bring forward, once again, recommendations of the previous two reports that have called for adequate, stable, and predictable funding for public education. In many ways this recommendation is the foundation for everything else in this submission.

## **2. Education funding formula reform to reflect system needs**

### **Recommendation 2**

That the Ministry of Education reform the provincial funding formula for operating grants to one based on the identified needs of school districts, an equitable distribution of resources, as well as the full mandate of the public education system.

### **Recommendation 3**

That all new provincial initiatives or costs be reflected in corresponding funding, eliminating the practice of downloading costs onto school districts.

Education funding must be responsive and proportional to the real, identified needs of classrooms, schools, and school districts. Tying funding to the actual costs and resource needs of running schools gets districts away from the excessive cost control enforced by the current formula, one too reliant on abstract per-pupil funding.

Imagine a well-resourced, flourishing school—this is the reference point for a needs-based funding model. Understanding what a school needs to thrive makes chronic underfunding harder to sustain and makes it easier to fulfill all the other values education funding should uphold: equity, stability, transparency, and flexibility. In fact, needs-based funding is more transparent than the present system where districts are often forced to make difficult decisions about programming and services because of sudden drops in funding not aligned with changes in their costs.

For many years, this committee has included a version of this recommendation in its final reports to the provincial legislature, most recently writing, “with broad stakeholder input, [the Ministry should] review the per-pupil funding formula to develop a new needs-based, stable and sustainable model to fund actual costs, resource needs, and professional development requirements of each school district.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services 2017. Retrieved from [www.leg.bc.ca/content/CommitteeDocuments/41st-parliament/2nd-session/FGS/Budget2018Consultation/FGS\\_2017-11-15\\_Budget2018Consultation\\_Report.pdf](http://www.leg.bc.ca/content/CommitteeDocuments/41st-parliament/2nd-session/FGS/Budget2018Consultation/FGS_2017-11-15_Budget2018Consultation_Report.pdf).

Of course, a funding formula must also have enough flexibility to account for all the diversity of a province like British Columbia—needs will vary among schools and districts as well as between students and so should funding. Making needs explicit makes equity easier to maintain. While the current model relies too heavily on an undifferentiated per-student amount, any new model should build on ways that funding currently, however inadequately, promotes equity.

Needs-based funding reduces the risk of unfunded cost pressures. There were gaps in funding caused in part by the incentive for austerity in the current formula, the previous government patched them with last-minute, temporary funding. British Columbia students need a formula that can adapt to new circumstances and provide stable and adequate funding as a baseline—there should be no need to patch frequent gaps with unpredictable, temporary funding that often reflects fleeting political priorities.

Any new funding model should be explicit about broad categories of readily identified needs and the cost of the resources to fulfill them. If the province enacts curriculum change, it must fund its genuine cost. If it signs a collective agreement, it must fully fund that too. If it wants students with special needs to thrive and be truly included, it must identify them and fund their particular needs.

### **3. Investment in classroom resources and the new curriculum**

#### **Recommendation 4**

That the Ministry of Education provide substantial new funding for classroom resources, with particular focus on Indigenous content across the curriculum (including mechanisms for developing this content locally), physical education and health, and French education.

#### **Recommendation 5**

That the Ministry of Education provide grants to school districts for professional learning time and learning resources to support the implementation of the redesigned K–12 curriculum, based on a minimum of \$1,500 per teacher per year for each of three years.

#### **Recommendation 6**

That the Ministry of Education provide infrastructure and support for new technology.

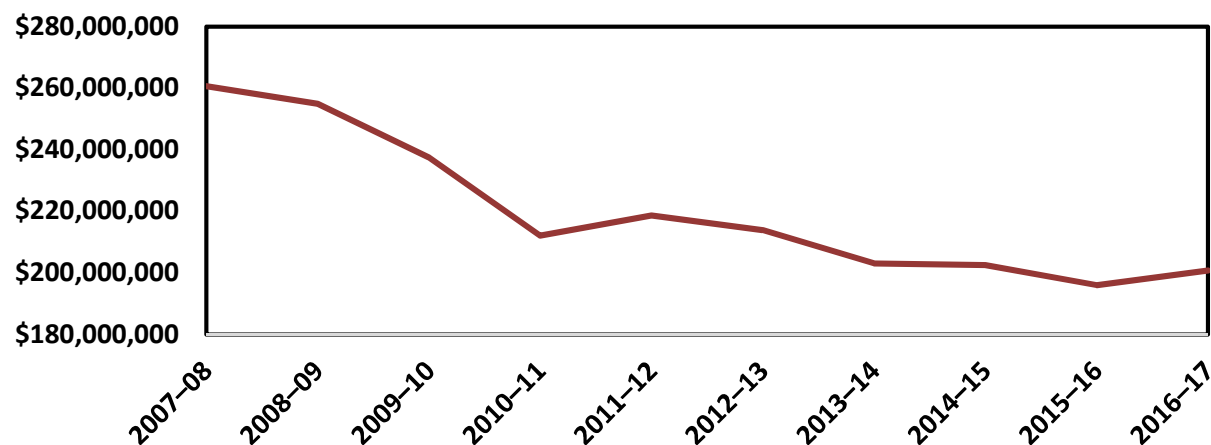
For too many years, public schools around the province have been making do with broken equipment, incomplete sets of books for language arts classes, out-dated (sometimes additionally racist and historically inaccurate) textbooks, and antiquated equipment in shops and lab classes. Teachers cannot be left on their own to develop new resources nor should parents be fundraising for new resources and equipment or, worse still, teachers paying out of pocket. Schools have fallen far behind in having funding available to maintain resources and materials. In inflation-adjusted terms, real funding spent on supplies dropped about 23% between 2007–08 and 2017–18, from 5.0% to 3.8% of total operating expenditures. And no part of this is due to falling enrolment; the number of full-time equivalent students actually increased by 1% over the same time frame.<sup>5</sup>

Recent discussions with the Ministry of Education about both classroom resources and support for curriculum implementation have been positive, but need to be backed by sustained, multi-year funding commitments to ensure success. Major investment in school resources is long overdue, and is specifically referenced in the mandate letter from the Premier to the Minister of education.

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<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Education, Operating Grant Tables.

**Figure 3.0: Spending on supplies, inflation-adjusted 2017 dollars**



This decrease in funding for resources is all the more striking given that K–12 education in British Columbia is undergoing unprecedented curriculum change that places new demands on teachers and resources. While the redesigned curriculum is already in use in most classrooms, the implementation process has been dramatically under-resourced. To date, the Ministry has committed just \$25.6 million specifically for curriculum implementation (2015–18), \$4 million of which is for coding. This number is grossly inadequate for the curricular materials, technology, and sustained teacher collaboration and planning required at both school and district levels to make curriculum change a success.

Learning resources include not only new textbooks, but all materials needed across all classrooms: science equipment, fine arts supplies, musical instruments, trades and technology equipment, and appropriate resources for all other subject areas. Respondents to a recent BCTF member survey rated their access to necessary instructional materials as a 4 on a scale of 0 to 10.<sup>6</sup> Although there is a need for new and updated equipment and resources across all subject areas, three priorities stand out, all closely linked to the redesigned curriculum.

A first priority is to procure and develop a wide range of accurate, up-to-date, and culturally appropriate teaching resources that reflect the diversity of First Nations in BC and Indigenous peoples across Canada. The Premier’s mandate letter to the Minister of Education highlighted this priority, calling on the Minister to “make substantive progress on...implement[ing] the

<sup>6</sup> BCTF, 2017 Curriculum Change and Implementation Survey. Retrieved from [bctf.ca/CurriculumSurvey/](http://bctf.ca/CurriculumSurvey/).

educational Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,”<sup>7</sup> of which this is one. Given that Indigenous content and knowledges have been woven into all subject areas and at all grade levels in the redesigned curriculum, there needs to be a diversity of resources to support this area in a respectful and meaningful way. When resources are being newly developed, provisions should be made for substantive local input from Indigenous educators and communities. Translation of such materials into French and other languages taught in the province is also important for learners in languages other than English. There is an important role for the Ministry of Education to play.

A second priority is accurate, up-to-date, and LGBTQ-inclusive teaching resources for the revised sexual health curriculum, which has been incorporated into what is now known as the Physical and Health Education curriculum. All students need to understand, consent, and have accurate information that reflects their lives, bodies and identities. These materials should be developed in conjunction with the BCTF, the ministries of education and health, and others to ensure that they are appropriate and widely available. Not only is the need significant, but the availability of such materials is potentially of great consequence for youth—their lack has the potential to put many students at significant risk.

Third, there is a particular need for resources for French education, especially resources that conform to the new curriculum and integrate Indigenous content in all subject areas. There should be no inequity between the quality of education in either of Canada’s official languages.

Success in implementing a new curriculum, however, goes far beyond the availability of learning resources: professional learning time for teachers is equally important. Given the scale of curriculum change in BC, professional learning should be taken very broadly and include additional non-instructional days, a wide variety of teacher-led professional development and employer-provided in-service opportunities in all regions of the province, as well as a collaborative model for joint district and local planning for the additional non-instructional days, in which local teacher associations take a leadership role (a model successfully used in 2015). These must come with dedicated funds.

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<sup>7</sup> Mandate Letter from Premier John Horgan to Minister of Education Rob Fleming.

Finally, proper resourcing must include the proper supports, in particular around new technologies and tools. Teachers and students must have the proper training and technical support. And crucially, there is a pressing need for in-service around student privacy as new technologies place significant new responsibilities on teachers in this regard.

New investment in resources and curriculum implementation should be targeted. Schools must have direct access to funding to purchase resources with new funds allocated to school districts. These funds should be spent in their entirety in schools, not siphoned at the district level for other initiatives. Decisions over their use are best made at the school level with the teachers involved.



## 4. Supports for successful inclusion

### Recommendation 7

That the Ministry of Education align special education funding with special education needs, closing the current gap between what school districts receive in special education funding and the much greater amount they spend on special education, including dedicated funding for professional learning for teachers.

### Recommendation 8

That the Ministry of Education provide targeted funding to support the early identification and designation of students with special needs, particularly in the K–1 years.

### Recommendation 9

That the Ministry of Education introduce per-student funding amounts for high-incidence designations, including children with learning disabilities and those requiring moderate behaviour support, into the funding formula.

British Columbia’s public education system has a policy commitment to inclusion. This commitment is based on the principle that all students, including those with diverse physical, cognitive, cultural, and linguistic needs, are “fully participating members of a community of learners...[with] equitable access to learning, achievement and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs.”<sup>8</sup>

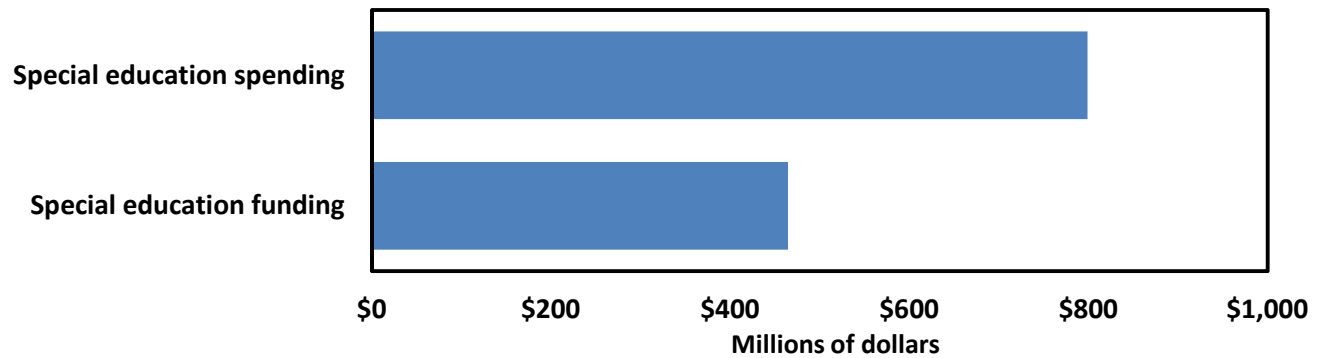
Currently, BC’s school districts receive in special education supplemental grants on average just 58% of what they spend on special education.<sup>9</sup> This mismatch between what the Ministry believes districts need for special education and districts’ actual needs creates pressures to ration special education services, redirect funds from other areas with their own pressing needs—or both.

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<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Education, *Special education services: A manual of policies, procedures and guidelines (2016)*. Retrieved from [www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/inclusive/special\\_ed\\_policy\\_manual.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/inclusive/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Spending data from school district Audited Financial Statements, Schedule 2C; funding data from Ministry of Education Operating Grant Tables; see chart.

**Figure 4.0: Funding versus spending on special education, province-wide, 2016–17**



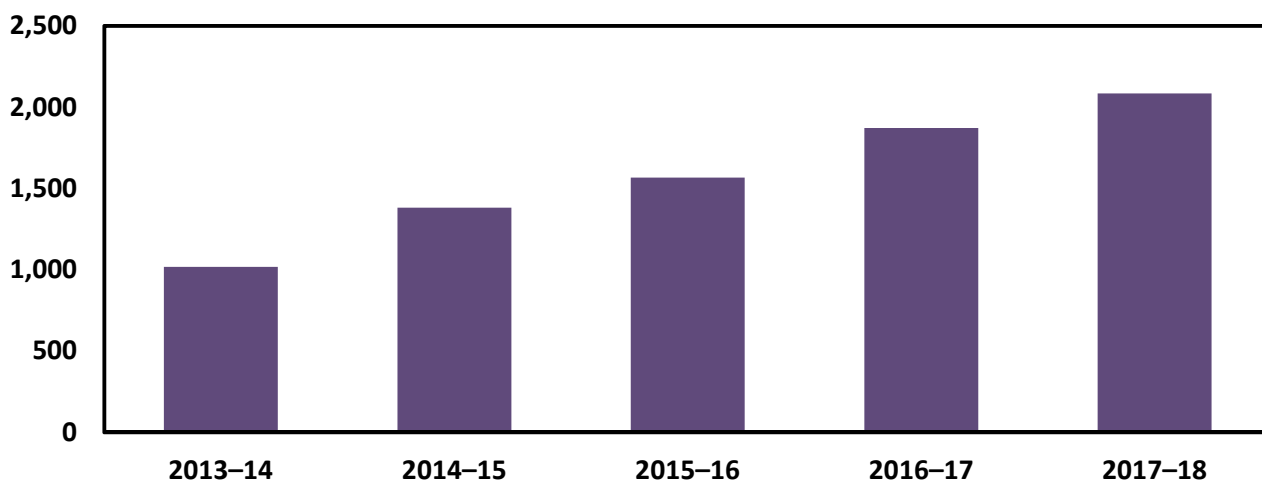
While the Supreme Court ruling and subsequent memorandum of agreement between the BC Public School Employers’ Association, Ministry of Education, and British Columbia Teachers’ Federation promises the restoration of a significant number of specialist teaching positions, ongoing systemic underfunding means that the return to full-service needs-based assessments, and a sustainable supply of staffing and resources is still a precarious outcome. The legacy of chronic underfunding inherited from the previous government needs to be durably rectified.

As adequate funding is a foundation for the entire K–12 system, so it is for particular areas of the system. Inclusive education should be a top priority for funding matched to needs if we are to truly guarantee every child’s right to an education and achieve meaningful inclusion in schools. Otherwise, we risk seeing the exodus of students with special needs from the public education system continue. In just the five years between 2013–14 and 2017–18, the number of students with special needs enrolled full-time in independent distributed learning (DL) programs has doubled.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ministry of Education, Form 1530 data; see chart.

**Figure 4.1: Special needs students enrolled in independent DL programs**



As with curriculum implementation, teacher professional learning is vital to successful inclusion. A decade and a half of austerity budgets in public education have disproportionately affected funding for professional learning by teachers—both, in-service training for administration priorities and professional development run autonomously by teachers. Too often this area was excluded from funding decision-making. However, the need for professional learning has only grown and the ability to better meet the needs of all students with special needs is very high on the priorities for professional learning.

Inclusive education cannot be truly successful if we do not know who is to be included and how. BC schools need the resources to identify and designate students with special needs so that they receive the supports they need as early as possible. A recent BCTF survey of Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers found that 71.7% of respondents found the current process of identifying and assessing students with diverse learning, physical, and behavioural needs to be “inadequate” or “very inadequate.”<sup>11</sup> We cannot let another generation of students leave the system having never received sufficient supports. Early, well-resourced identification and assessment is key to making this a reality.

Finally, inclusion is not complete when some students are identified as having a “high incidence” need but that need is not tied to dedicated funds. “High incidence” designations, such as learning disabilities or issues requiring moderate behaviour support, are no less important or worthy of

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<sup>11</sup> BCTF, Full Day Kindergarten Working and Learning Conditions Survey 2018.

funded support. This includes students who have ADHD and dyslexia. Once a need is identified, it must be met with resources and supports in all 60 school districts.

## 5. Expanded adult education

### Recommendation 10

That the Ministry of Education increase the number of funded courses in adult education to reflect a broad range of educational needs and interests that help create an educationally enriched society as well as improved employment opportunities for individuals.

### Recommendation 11

That the Ministry of Education fund adult students on an equivalent basis to school-age students.

Teachers whole-heartedly welcomed Minister Fleming's announcement in August 2017 that tuition fees for adult learners, which had posed such a significant barrier to thousands of students, would be eliminated. This increased access is an excellent beginning, but more needs to be done to create a learning society accessible to all. The next step must be to ensure that adult learners have a full range of educational opportunities available to them, which in turn requires that funding be commensurate to that in school-age programming.

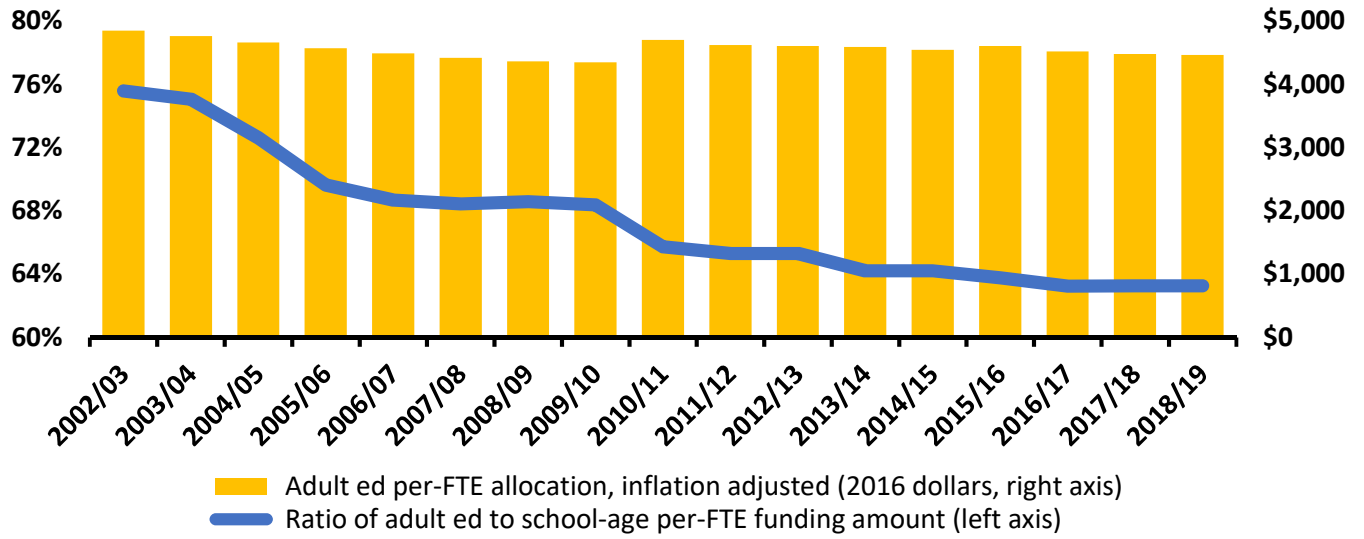
Adult education is particularly important for those who need to develop their language skills and enhance skills for employment and further education; course offerings should respond to a full spectrum of such needs. Adult education should open opportunities for lifelong learning for all, a requirement for full participation in a rapidly changing society and economy.

Funding from the Ministry of Education should ensure that school districts have the resources to offer a wide range of adult education offerings. The current funding formula underfunds adult students relative to their school-age peers. While the basic funding amount for a school-age full-time equivalent (FTE) student is \$7,423 in 2018–19, it is just \$4,696 for an FTE adult learning student—a gap of nearly 37%.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> BCTF calculations based on data drawn from Ministry of Education, Operating Grant Tables.

**Figure 4.2: Adult education funding**



While the funding gap between adult and school-age students has grown in recent years, adult learners have the same, if sometimes not greater, learning needs as their school-age counterparts. If we want them to succeed within our education system, we must ensure that they are furnished the resources to make this possible.

## **6. Dedicated funds for teacher recruitment, retention, and mentorship**

### **Recommendation 12**

That the Ministry of Education provide dedicated funding for teacher recruitment and retention initiatives across all school districts.

### **Recommendation 13**

That the Ministry of Education provide relief to teachers in school districts with high housing costs, through a mix of capital grants and loans to develop non-market teacher housing in those districts and/or a per-teacher housing allowance.

### **Recommendation 14**

That the Ministry of Education fund new teacher mentorship programs to support teachers new to the profession and those entering new roles.

BC's public education system is experiencing a major demographic shift, creating an increasing demand for teachers—and critical personnel shortages. According to provincial labour market projections, BC schools will require 17,630 new teaching staff over the next decade because of a combination of projected student population increases and teacher retirements.<sup>13</sup> Numerous BC school districts are already reporting significant, chronic shortages for teachers teaching on call (TTOCs), as well as general and specialist teachers, in part because of the still ongoing restoration of collective agreement language on class-size and composition.

Some districts, particularly in Interior and Northern regions, are over-reliant on retired teachers working as TTOCs; and, province-wide, there is currently a record number of uncertified instructors employed on Letters of Permission (without teaching certificates) in BC classrooms, four times the usual amount.

Initiatives to respond to these needs could be addressed in collective bargaining, for example, by shortening the salary grid (removing the lowest three or four steps on the grid) to bring starting wages more in line with other provinces. Administrative initiatives could include student loan forgiveness programs, assisting new hires with moving expenses, making available more unpaid

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<sup>13</sup> WorkBC, *British Columbia Labour Market Outlook: 2018 Edition* (includes educational counsellors).

mid-year leaves, addressing gaps in classroom conditions in some school districts, and greater access to in-service. All would require additional funding, distributed equitably among districts. In fact, in December 2017, the Minister of Education’s own Task Force on Immediate Recruitment and Retention Challenges released an extensive set of recommendations,<sup>14</sup> only a handful of which have been implemented to date. Minimal progress on recruitment and retention would see implementation begin on the remaining short- and long-term recommendations from the task force.

Teachers in BC earn among the lowest salaries in Canada (at all levels of experience), but face some of the highest living expenses, particularly housing. A targeted way to improve both recruitment and retention of teachers is provincial government support for programs to reduce the high cost of housing for teachers.

BC school districts have a long tradition of directly providing affordable housing to teachers, with teacherages still operating in some communities. School districts often have access to land that could be used to build modern, high-quality, affordable, non-market housing for teachers and their families. Non-market housing can be designed to largely pay for itself, especially if land costs are null—upfront construction costs are repaid over the long-term by a steady stream of rental income. There are also affordable ownership models where housing can only be sold back to the district at an administered price. The Ministry of Education could support districts with high housing costs by providing or guaranteeing low-interest loans for housing construction, providing targeted capital grants for affordable teacher housing or funding housing allowances for teachers.

Attrition rates among early career teachers are estimated at 25% to 30% in Canada. Not only does attrition have negative fiscal impacts, but staffing instability negatively affects student achievement and cohesion within school communities. A growing body of research indicates that purposeful induction and mentorship is an effective means of decreasing new teacher attrition rates, as it contributes to everything from less isolation to increased confidence and problem-solving capacities. Mentorship support also promotes increased retention and staffing stability,

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<sup>14</sup> Ministry of Education, *Report presented by the Minister’s Task Force on Immediate Recruitment and Retention Challenges*. Retrieved from [www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/uploads/task\\_force\\_report.pdf](http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/uploads/task_force_report.pdf).



making teachers less likely to leave teaching or even move schools. Mentorship should be institutionalized rather than left to happenstance.

There is an important role for government to play in supporting across-district programs to help grow research-informed and union-supported mentorship programs in all regions of the province, then a plan does need to be put in place to address this significant need somehow, with dedicated funding for mentorship going to school districts. Given the thousands of new hires around the province, it is crucial that funding for mentorship be re-established to support success in classrooms. The lack of mentorship programs in school districts, coupled with the lack of comprehensive in-service to address the many needs facing teachers, means that we risk continuing to lose many new teachers within their first five years in the profession.

## **7. Supports for families with children and an end to child poverty**

### **Recommendation 15**

That the Ministry of Finance act on recommendations made by First Call to redesign the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit into a BC Child Benefit that covers children under the age of 18, increases the maximum benefit to \$1,320 per child per year, and indexes it annually to the cost of living.

Today, one in five children in BC live in poverty, and many more live in precarious situations because of the high cost of housing and other expenses alongside anemic wages. Teachers have long been advocates for eradicating child poverty. They see the effects of poverty and the growing gap between rich and poor in their classrooms every day. It is unconscionable that in a wealthy society like ours, children do not have the basic necessities for thriving in life.

Teachers whole-heartedly support the recommendations made by First Call BC to this Committee to redesign the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit into a BC Child Benefit that both covers more children and is more progressive. Of the eight provinces that have a provincial child benefit, British Columbia is the only one to restrict it to children up to the age of six; all other provinces extend this benefit to families with children up to the age of 18. Teachers see first-hand how families with school-age children sometimes struggle to meet basic needs.

More specifically, following First Call's recommendations would redesign the BC Early Childhood Tax Benefit into a BC Child Benefit that covers children under 18, increase the maximum benefit to \$1,320 per child per year, index it annually to the cost of living, and steepen its progressivity—families with an annual net income of up to \$80,000 would receive the full benefit and it would be completely phased-out for families with annual net incomes above \$100,000.

## 8. A phase-out of public funding for independent schools

### Recommendation 16

That public funding for independent schools be eliminated, over a four-year timeline, beginning with the elite private schools in Group 2, whose 2019 funding should be halved, down to 17.5% of the per-capita local school district rate.

Public education serves as the foundation of democratic equality and it is the duty of government to protect and support this social equalizer. In 1977, British Columbia became one of five provinces that elected to subsidize private education (“independent schools”) with public funding. This school year \$426 million in public money is projected to flow to private education.<sup>15</sup>

The BCTF is opposed to public funding of private schools. The opposition is not to parents having the right to send their children to private schools, but to the public funding of these schools, in particular elite private schools. Elite private schools are projected to receive approximately \$43 million in public money in 2018–19 and also benefit from a host of tax breaks for both schools and parents, including property tax exemptions, the charitable donations tax credit, and a federal childcare tax credit based on claims of supervision of students outside of class time being childcare for tax purposes.<sup>16</sup>

Public resources currently spent on funding private education should be redirected to public education, which has seen chronic underfunding for over a decade. Half of Canada’s provinces already choose not to publicly fund private education at all and moving British Columbia into this group is popular among the public, with over 60% of British Columbians opposed to public funding of both secular and religious private schools.<sup>17</sup>

It is the view of the BCTF that government must prioritize public funding for public education and eliminate, over a four-year progressive rate reduction schedule, the per-student grant rate to

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<sup>15</sup> Ministry of Education, *Budget 2018 Overview* (February 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, “Elite private schools rake in public funds while special needs students go without”. Retrieved from [www.policynote.ca/elite-private-schools-rake-in-public-funds-while-special-needs-students-go-without/](http://www.policynote.ca/elite-private-schools-rake-in-public-funds-while-special-needs-students-go-without/).

<sup>17</sup> Insights West, “BC Religious and Secular Attitudes 2016” poll conducted for BC Humanist Associatio. Retrieved from [www.bchumanist.ca/religious\\_and\\_secular\\_attitudes\\_2016](http://www.bchumanist.ca/religious_and_secular_attitudes_2016).

independent schools beginning in the first year with halving to 17.5% the per-capita local school district rate for elite private schools.

## 9. Seismically safe schools

### Recommendation 17

That the Ministry of Education accelerate capital funding for seismic upgrades to meet its target of having all upgrades complete by 2025.

The BCTF has welcomed the capital funding announcements made by the NDP government during the 2017–18 school year. This funding is urgently needed to both upgrade all seismically vulnerable schools by the existing 2025 deadline and replace portables with permanent structures.

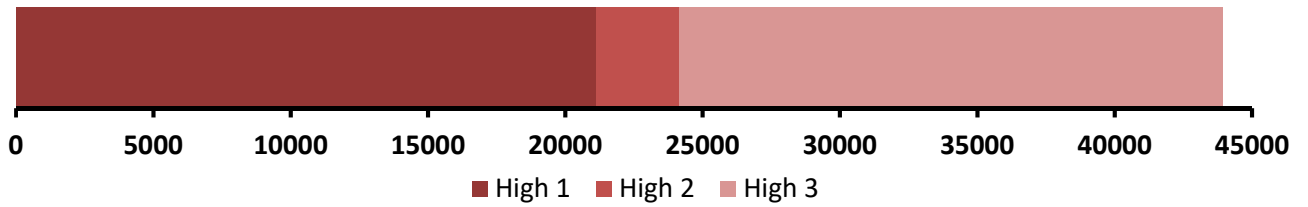
When the provincial government formally announced its plan to make seismic upgrades to school buildings in 2005, the goal was to have these upgrades complete by 2020. Some progress toward this goal was made initially, but progress dramatically decreased in 2013 at least partly due to a target, announced by the Ministry of Education, that a school district’s capital plan should include the goal of a district-wide utilization rate of 95% of school spaces. Recognizing the slow progress, the government announced in March 2015 that the completion deadline was being extended to 2025 for the province, and to 2030 for Vancouver. In September 2016, the 95% utilization rate requirement was removed; projects would now be approved on a case-by-case basis.

Between September 2016 and September 2018, only 23 schools finished their seismic upgrades. Of those schools 47 marked with the highest risk rating have still not begun developing business cases. In total, there are 43,946 students in schools with the three highest risk ratings on which work is not being done.<sup>18</sup> At the current rate it will be 2033 before the last school is upgraded—and this does not count the additional schools that, as they age, will likely be identified as in need of seismic upgrades. If the current rate at which schools are being added continues, the completion date for all necessary seismic upgrades will be 2037.

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<sup>18</sup> BCTF calculations based on Ministry of Education data; compiled in BCTF Research Report, “Seismic mitigation: The urgent need for safer schools”

**Number of students in each of the highest risk categories of schools not worked on**



In order to meet an overall deadline of 2025, the average number of projects completed per year needs to increase by between 105% to 130%, depending on the number of additional schools that require seismic upgrades. To protect the lives of students, teachers, and other workers, the Ministry of Education must keep its promise to accelerate the seismic upgrade program and make BC schools safer.

GH:mr:pl:jv:tfu