

BCTF Research Report

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Education staffing cuts—Year 2: A threat to B.C.'s top-ranked public education

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All direct educational services in B.C. public schools have lost staff since 2001.

Anyone who has looked into B.C. public schools recently knows that teachers have been disappearing at a much faster rate than students.

Enrolments have declined in the public schools over the past two years — by 15,552 students, for a 2.5% drop from 632,024 in September 2001 to 616,472 September 2003. The decline in the birth rate and slowing of immigration has meant that fewer students entered school each of these years than graduated. However, over that same period, the number of teachers paid for by public funding declined by 2,558, a drop of 7.7%, a much larger loss of teachers than the decline in student enrolment.

This loss of teachers is a direct result of two actions by the B.C. government. The total funding for schools was effectively frozen by government, even as increased expenses were imposed. Further, legislation directing the stripping of staffing formulas and class size limits from the teachers' collective agreement led to the elimination of many of the specialist services that previously supported student learning.

All categories of direct teaching service to students have lost staff over the past two years: special education, ESL, libraries, counseling, Aboriginal education, continuing education, career programs, and the regular classroom.

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Figure 1:

Staffing Changes between September 2001 & September 2003*

	<u>% change</u>
Teachers (total)	-7.7%
Special Education teachers	-17.5%
Teacher-Librarians	-23.4%
Aboriginal Education teachers	-12.5%
Counsellors	-9.5%
Continuing Education teachers	-34.5%
Career Program teachers	-27.4%
ESL teachers	-20.0%
Clerical and support staff	-10.2%
Administrators (total)	-4.1%

* See Appendix for details

Support for students with special needs is declining.

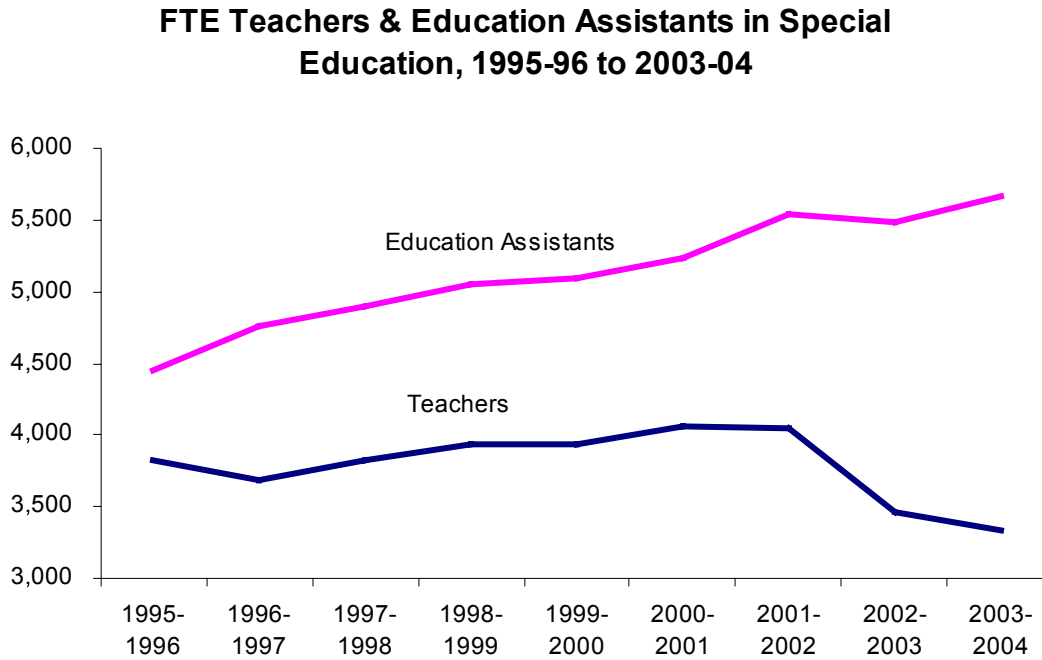
One of the pressures facing teachers is the increase in students with special needs in their classrooms at the same time as resources to adequately support the learning of these students have disappeared. This has an impact on all students in the class—those with special needs for extra attention, and the other students who have less access to direct attention from their teacher.

The number of students formally identified as having “High Incidence” special needs (excluding “Gifted”) has declined by nearly 10% since the changes in funding. Following the first year of the freeze, identified students in this category declined overall by 8.7% and in 2003-04 they continued in a downward trend, declining another 1.0% from the previous year. These changes indicate a reduction in students *identified* as having “high incidence” special needs, not a reduction in actual numbers. The students have not disappeared, only their right to have special attention to their needs has been lost to them and to their teachers.

Targeted funding for the “High Incidence” students was eliminated from the funding formula by the current government. No specific funding targeted for these students, and reductions in the staff who carry out the assessments of special needs, have combined to produce this 10% drop over two years in numbers of students identified.

Over that same two years, small increases were reported in the Low-Incidence/High-Cost categories of special needs that still receive special funding based on individual identification of the student’s severe needs. These students require exceptionally high levels of individual attention, such as “Severe Behavior” and “Dependent Handicapped,” and the funding follows the particular student.

Figure 2:



The loss of service is demonstrated clearly in the decline of the number of special education teacher specialists. It fell from 4,051 in 2001–02 to 3,341 in 2003–04, a decline of 17.5% in only two years. This was a direct result of stripping the provisions for specialist teachers from the teacher collective agreement, along with the cuts made necessary by the funding freeze. To address the shortage of specialist teachers, more education assistants are being hired. Figure 2 above shows that over the same period the number of education assistants increased by 116 (2.1%).

Figure 3:

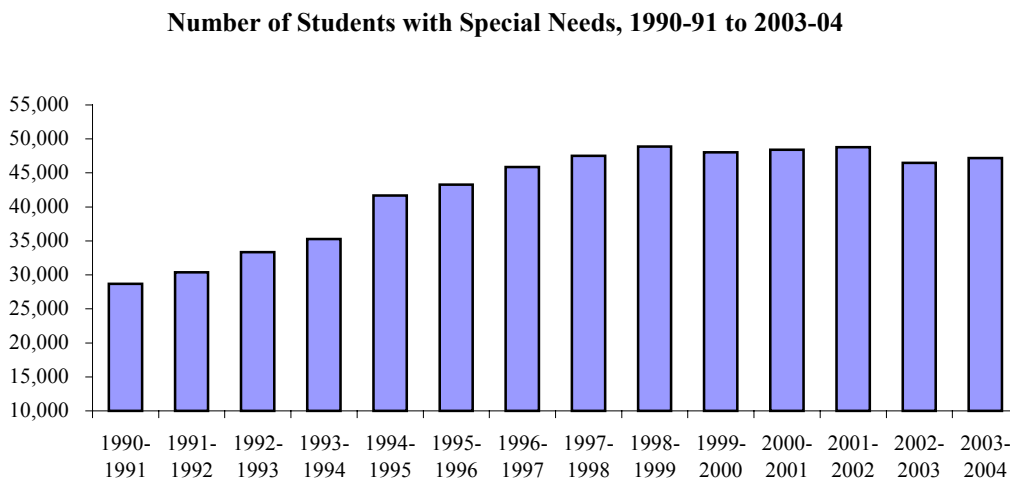


Figure 3 above shows a rapid increase in the total numbers of students with special needs over the period from 1990–91 to 1998–99. Following this period of increase there is a leveling off

beginning in 1998–99 and slight decline from 1998–99. Teachers believe that many more students exist in a “grey area,” meaning that their needs have not been formally identified, but they require extra assistance that is not provided.

Teachers note¹ that the composition of classes has “become more difficult” as limits to the numbers of special needs children in each class were removed.

Under the contract we had only three special needs children in each class. Now I have many more. Children who were Ministry identified, First Year ESL and School Based Identified all figured into a class size reduction formula which helped me cope with their particular learning needs. Now special education funding is cut back as time becomes more targeted to the worse case children. Criteria for special needs are adjusted to meet fiscal targets rather than addressing children’s learning needs. Special Education teacher time is cut and class size is increased which reduces the one on one contact time so necessary to success for special needs children.

Before the contract shredding, I never had more than one special needs student in the class, and whenever there was such a student an aide always came with him or her. The class size was usually below twenty-five and never above twenty-seven. The last time I taught English 10 (which I will no longer teach) I had 33 students, 7 special needs with disabilities such as Down Syndrome and Autism, and one aide who really did her best under impossible conditions. I could not teach in a way that gave me any satisfaction as a teacher, but what really broke my heart, was that there were two very talented students in the course, and I COULD NOT MENTOR THEM.

Class size, class composition, and Student Educator Ratio

Ministry data show that the average elementary class size has been creeping up from 22.51 (2001–02) to 23.11 (2002–03) to 23.16 (2003–04) over the last three school years. While no standard ministry data are available for secondary class size, other data clearly show that size is increasing, and along with composition, is having a negative impact on teaching and learning.

Concern over class size and the effect it has on the quality of education was the dominant theme expressed by teachers when asked to comment on the biggest changes their students have experienced in the last two years. This change has had a direct impact on student learning as teachers have less time for individual students.

...bigger class sizes. Class sizes at my school increased by 16.7% in the first year of our imposed “contract”. After I finish with the lesson and/or a quiz for my Grade 8 Math class, my students usually have between 30 & 40 minutes to work on that day’s assignments. With 33 Grade 8s in one class, that leaves 55–75 seconds of my time for each student. I still have to deal with any misbehaving students, and I can easily see the kids with their hands up asking questions, but I have much less time to seek out the student who is quietly struggling with the

¹ Teachers were invited to respond to the following statement: “The biggest change(s) my students have experienced in the last two years is (are) ...” A total of 285 teachers provided over 2,000 comments, inductively coded into themes and sub-themes.

day's assignment and is too shy to raise his hand in class. The quiet ones are being left behind because I don't have time to find them.

Less one-on-one time due to larger class sizes. I used to be able to work with smaller groups who needed extra help or enrichment but now I have neither the time nor the physical space because of the size of my class. I also teach computers and it is difficult to do the types of things I would like to because of large classes. Our school has won awards for our use of technology but I just don't have the time to do all the extra things needed to achieve previous results.

Larger classes – for example, 31 children in a room built for a maximum of 30.

Regression to the mean. The system is gearing itself toward mediocrity, toward teaching the average student average amounts of knowledge. Students on the fringes, both the low and the high achievers, are being short-changed with larger classes and less individualized programs.

Although class composition data are not available at the secondary level, the data that are available show that many secondary-level classes are at or above physical capacity of the rooms and well above a level commensurate with sound pedagogical practices. In one district, 43% of English classes and 67% of Science classes had over 30 pupils per class. Information from another district provides a different viewpoint of class size data: out of 12 Science classes for grades 8 to 12 students, 3 had enrolments that exceeded the listed room capacity. This was also the case for 3 of 16 Mathematics classes; 3 of 14 Social Studies classes; and 3 of 13 CAPP courses.

Student-educator and student-teacher ratios climb.

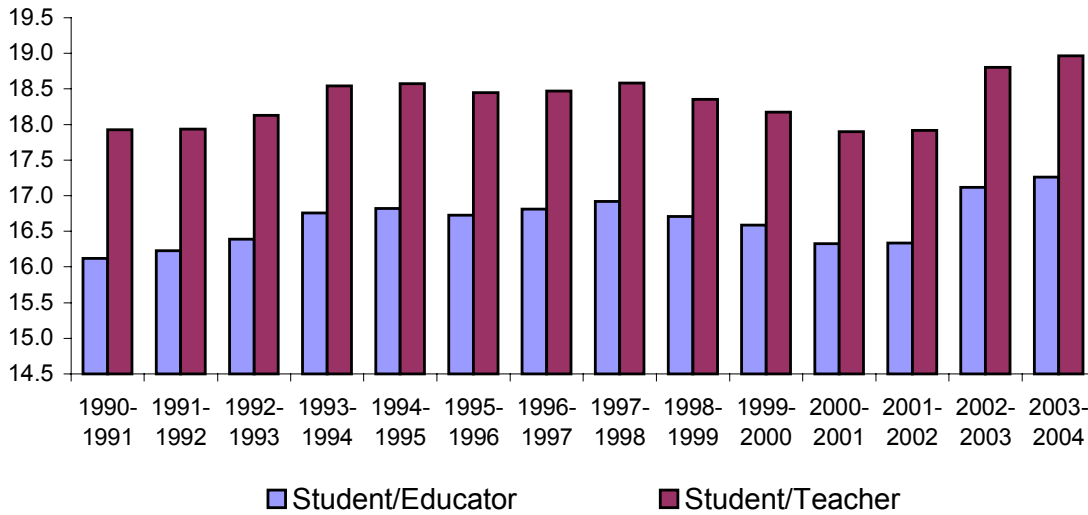
In addition to the above qualitative data, changes in the nature of the student-teacher relationship are evidenced in the dramatic increases in the student-educator ratio. The 2001 to 2003 school years saw increases in the student educator ratio, climbing from 16.38 (2001–02) to 17.18 (2002–03) to 17.26 (2003–04).

The ratio of students to teachers² shows a similar increase: in 2001–02 there were 19.49 students to every teacher and by 2003–04 this figure had increased to 20.66.

² FTE Students (SR2077) to FTE Teachers and Department Heads (SR2063).

Figure 4:

Student/Educator & Student/Teacher Ratios 1990-91 to 2003-04



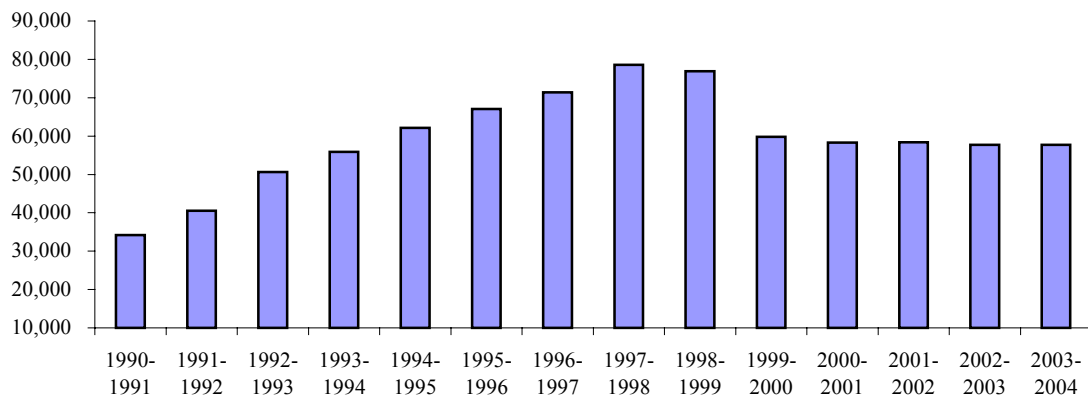
English as a Second Language staffing declines.

The number of students funded for English as a Second Language decreased by 22% in the year following the funding cap (1999). This was not because students needing ESL support disappeared, but because of a funding change that put a cap on funding of ESL students at five years. Even if a student needed more support after five years, districts no longer received funding for them.

Because such a dramatic drop had already taken place in earlier years, the further drop in those identified for funding and service was only 1.0% from 2001–02 to 2002–03 and 0.1% from 2002–03 to 2003–04.

Figure 5:

ESL Enrolment, 1990-91 to 2003-04



While the number of ESL students identified for service declined by only about 1% over two years, there was a 20% decline in the staffing, falling from 1,016 to 813.

The student enrolment figures mask significant changes in the numbers of funded ESL students by education level (elementary and secondary).

Between 2001–02 and 2002–03, secondary school students identified as ESL declined by 7.6%; between 2002–03 and 2003–04 the numbers declined by 4.2%. At the same time, the numbers of both Kindergarten and elementary ESL students have increased while total enrolments of all students have decreased.

The 1999 5-year funding cap on ESL students restricted the numbers identified for service at the secondary level because beginning ESL students reach their maximum allowable funded service before leaving the elementary grades. Research into second language acquisition and proficiency shows that approximately six years or more of specialist support is needed for a beginning ESL learner to become proficient in academic use of the language. This suggests continued unmet ESL needs among students at the secondary level.

Library services are disappearing.

Library services are under serious threat in B.C. schools. Since the 2001–02 school year, total full-time equivalent teacher-librarians have declined by 23.4%, almost ten times the student enrolment decline of 2.5%. The support staff assigned to libraries has also declined by 20.6%. Only administration time formally assigned to libraries has increased, going up 41% (from 20.6 to 27.4).

Budgets for library acquisitions have dropped by 50% over a 10-year period across the province, with huge variations within districts, ranging from \$0.80 to \$35.00 per student per year.

With a clear link established between student achievement and development and access to library resources and support, the negative impact on student success is inevitable. When asked to comment on the areas of greatest change experienced by their students over the last 2 years, the area of librarian assistance and access to library resources was repeatedly mentioned. The following comments are typical of the sentiments and concerns of teachers who commented on this theme.

[There are] fewer blocks available to access the library due to lack of teacher/librarian hours devoted to that duty.

I'm a teacher-librarian at the high school level who has been cut back to half time. This means that students in my school only have access to my services every other day. Students who have Socials or English or Science on Day 1 are in great shape. I can co-plan the lesson with the teacher, or co-teach the unit with them, work on Information Literacy outcomes, find materials to support instruction and help students develop a clear understanding of Resource Based Learning. Students with those subjects on Day 2 miss out. I am teaching other courses on that day; I am not in the library. Surely this is a question of equality of access: some students are getting services that others are being deprived of!

There is no co-operative planning between teacher-librarian and classroom teachers because teacher-librarian time has been cut dramatically.

Students have little access to library resources as our library time has been cut. Less access to library services means less access to books.

Fewer Aboriginal Education teachers.

Over the last decade students with Aboriginal ancestry have been identified in greater numbers. Almost 30,000 more students identify as Aboriginal today than in 1990–91, a 119% increase. While identifying Aboriginal students is an important initial step to providing the services and education they need to be successful in the public school system, students still face many challenges. Cultural biases in the curriculum and in social interactions, poverty, damage caused by the residential school experience, and learning in a language not their own are but a few of these challenges.

Funding for Aboriginal students has retained targeting, meaning that school districts must spend the extra dollars received for identified Aboriginal students on programs for Aboriginal students. Consequently, the largest expenditures for staffing, Aboriginal education assistants, increased slightly from 2001–2002 to 2003–2004 from 494 to 512.

However, the number of full-time equivalent teachers assigned to Aboriginal Education fell by 12.5%, from 206 to 180, while school administrator time assigned increased from 21 to 30.

Fewer counsellors to support students.

Counselling is another area that has been harmed by the elimination of staffing formulas from the collective agreement. The reduction in counselling services has an impact that is particularly felt by students who need the most support to be successful in their school experience.

The staffing assigned to counselling has declined by 9.5%, from 991 to 897 teacher counsellors.

Continuing education is barely continuing.

Continuing education programs are also in decline. These programs serve students who have not made it through the regular program of the school and who generally are attempting to make up for areas missing from their educational experience. In some cases, these are ESL adult students seeking to improve their chances for taking a full part in B.C.'s society and economy.

Because of the nature of the students involved, completion of courses is less than in the regular system. A new policy for financing continuing education now provides full funding only for students who complete courses. Districts now get only 50% in initial funding for each continuing education student and nothing more if the student does not complete the course.

Because of the squeeze on funding elsewhere in the system, districts now have less flexibility to serve the adult students in need of these services. The staffing for continuing education has declined by 34.5% between the 2001–02 school year and 2003–04, the largest percentage decline of any of the education services.

Career program staffing is going.

The business community and the B.C. government have both claimed to want more career programs that lead students into alternatives other than the academic post-secondary programs. Career programs in secondary schools offered these alternatives to students, often helping them move directly into employment.

Separate funding for these programs was eliminated so they now compete with all the other programs that are also short of funding. The reduction in staffing for career programs has been 27.4% between 2001–02 and 2003–04.

Administrative staffing has decreased.

While the number of teachers has declined by 7.7% since 2001, the number of administrators has decreased by 4.1%, going from 2,668 to 2,558.

Appendix: Staffing Changes Table, *Form 1530* from 2001–02 to 2003–04

The Ministry of Education data collection *Form 1530* provides staffing information by district and by program area. School boards are responsible for collecting and submitting this data to the ministry under the School and Student Data collection Order (M33/96).

Staffing Changes—2001-02 to 2003-04

	2001	2003	Percent change
Teachers—regular instruction	24,126	24073	-0.2%
Career programs	340	247	-27.4%
Library services	922	706	-23.4%
Counselling	991	897	-9.5%
Special education*	4,051	3,341	-17.5%
ESL	1,016	813	-20.0%
Aboriginal	206	180	-12.5%
Continuing ed	123	81	-34.5%
Teacher total	33,275	30,717	-7.7%
Admin total	2,668	2,558	-4.1%
SD governance	358	357	-0.3%
Business admin—other prof.**	354	359	1.4%
Business admin—support**	528	529	0.3%
Education Assistants total	6,896	7,026	1.9%
Support total (clerical, other)	11,947	10,734	-10.2%

* In 2001, includes 1.04 Learning Assistance; 1.13 Special Health Services; 1.16 Severe Behavior; 1.17 High Incidence-Low Cost; 1.18 Low Incidence-High Cost; 1.19 Dependent Handicapped; 1.32 Gifted; 1.33 Hospital/Homebound; and 1.45 Identification/Planning.

** In 2001 includes 4.41 Business Administration and 4.42 Human Resources Administration.

Definitions (2003-04):

Teachers include all staff who hold a valid certificate of qualification or a Letter of Permission and who are employed by a board to provide an educational program to students, except for Principals, Vice-Principals, Directors of Instruction, Superintendents or Assistant Superintendents.

Principals and Vice Principals (Admin) include all staff who hold a valid certificate of qualifications or a Letter of Permission and who are employed by a Board under an Administrative Officer contract such as Principals, Vice-Principals and Directors of Instruction.

Educational Assistants include teacher assistants and child care workers.

Support Staff includes non-excluded clerical, secretaries and clerks, and other staff such as accountants, maintenance staff, custodians, and bus drivers.

Other Professionals include Superintendents, Assistant Superintendents, Secretary-Treasurers, Assistant Secretary-Treasurers, Trustees, and any other board employee who is excluded from a union agreement.

Other (2002-03) includes non-excluded staff such as accountants, maintenance staff, custodians, and bus drivers.

Source: B.C. Ministry of Education data collection Form 1530.

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