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EDUCATION FUNDING

A Brief to the

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

from the

British Columbia Teachers' Federation

June 2019



President



Executive Director

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Funding the Schools We Need

Education Funding Brief 2019

BC Teachers' Federation

bctf.ca/BriefsAndPositionPapers.aspx

British Columbia teachers are pleased to have an early opportunity to present their views on priorities for the 2020 provincial budget to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (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 give our students the education system they deserve. British Columbia has an opportunity to make the necessary and pressing improvements to public education that have been denied for far too long and re-orient public education funding to fully reflect the needs of students and classrooms.

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.

Recommendation 2

That the Ministry of Education immediately move ahead with significant enhancements to operational funding for K–12, beyond the funding increases associated with enrolment growth.

An education funding formula to reflect system needs

Recommendation 3

That the Ministry of Education terminate the implementation of a prevalence-based model for special education funding.

Recommendation 4

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 5

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 6

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 7

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 8

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

Support for successful inclusion

Recommendation 9

That the Ministry of Education align special education funding with special education needs, rather than pursue a prevalence-based funding model, thus closing the current gap between what school districts receive in special education funding and the much greater amount they spend on special education.

Recommendation 10

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, as well as dedicated funding for professional learning for teachers.

Recommendation 11

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, fully funded adult education

Recommendation 12

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 13

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 14

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

Recommendation 15

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 16

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

A phase-out of public funding for independent schools

Recommendation 17

That public funding for independent schools be eliminated, over a four-year timeline, exempting on-reserve schools and 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 18

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.

Recommendation 2

That the Ministry of Education immediately move ahead with significant enhancements to operational funding for K–12, beyond the funding increases associated with enrolment growth.

After a decade and a half 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. Unfortunately, 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.

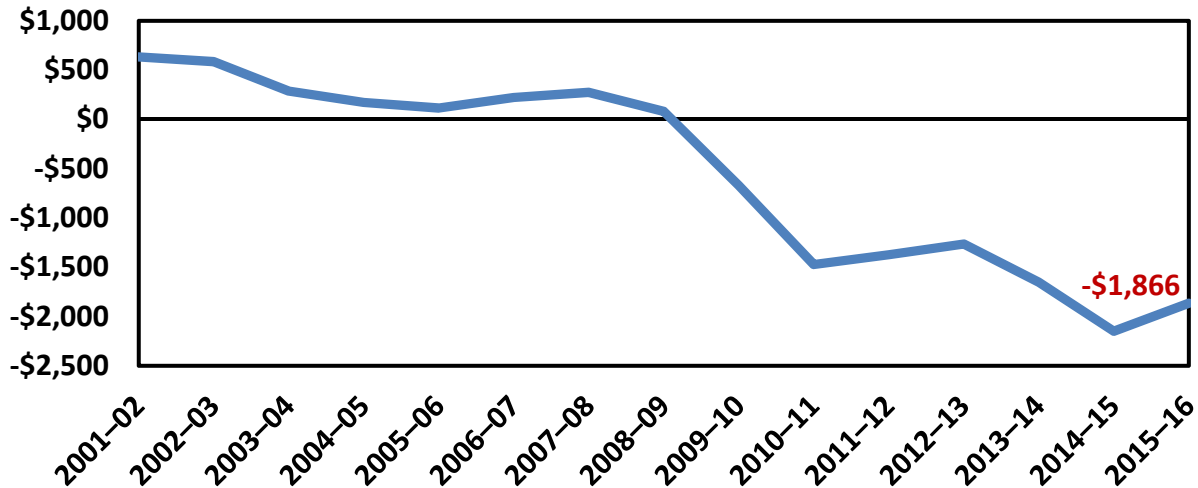
While teachers have been pleased to see several important announcements on capital funding, there has been little change to the long-term austerity pattern in operating funds for public education. Nearly all increases in funding over the past two years have been driven by pre-existing commitments, including enrolment growth, contractual obligations, and the BCTF court win. In fact, the largest infusion of truly new funds into the system in recent memory was due to the court-ordered restoration of teachers’ collective agreement provisions on class size and composition. The resulting Classroom Enhancement Fund, annually totalling just over \$400 million, has created 3,700 new teaching positions across the province.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education’s projections for the coming 2019–20 school year indicate that, as has frequently been the case over the past 15 years, growth in per-student funding will not even keep up with inflation on a year-to-year basis. Total operating grants are set to erode from \$10,400 to \$10,280 per student in 2018–19 dollars.¹ This is a real resource cut per student.

¹ BCTF calculations based on Ministry of Education Operating Grant Tables and 2% annual inflation projections.

This year-to-year stagnation coincides with a persistent gap between British Columbia and other provinces in per-student public education spending. According to the latest data from Statistics Canada, in 2015–16 British Columbia lagged the national average of per-student spending for public K–12 education by \$1,866.² While the addition of the Classroom Enhancement Fund has somewhat closed this gap since then, it almost certainly remains well above \$1,000 per student.

Figure 1.0: Gap in per-student spending on public K–12 between BC and the Canadian average



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.³ 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 enrolment, and when contrasted with the rest of the economy, education funding in other provinces, or student needs.

Between 2001 and 2016 (the latest year of available comparable national data), British Columbia saw spending on education drop relative to GDP by nearly a third.⁴ This was the government of

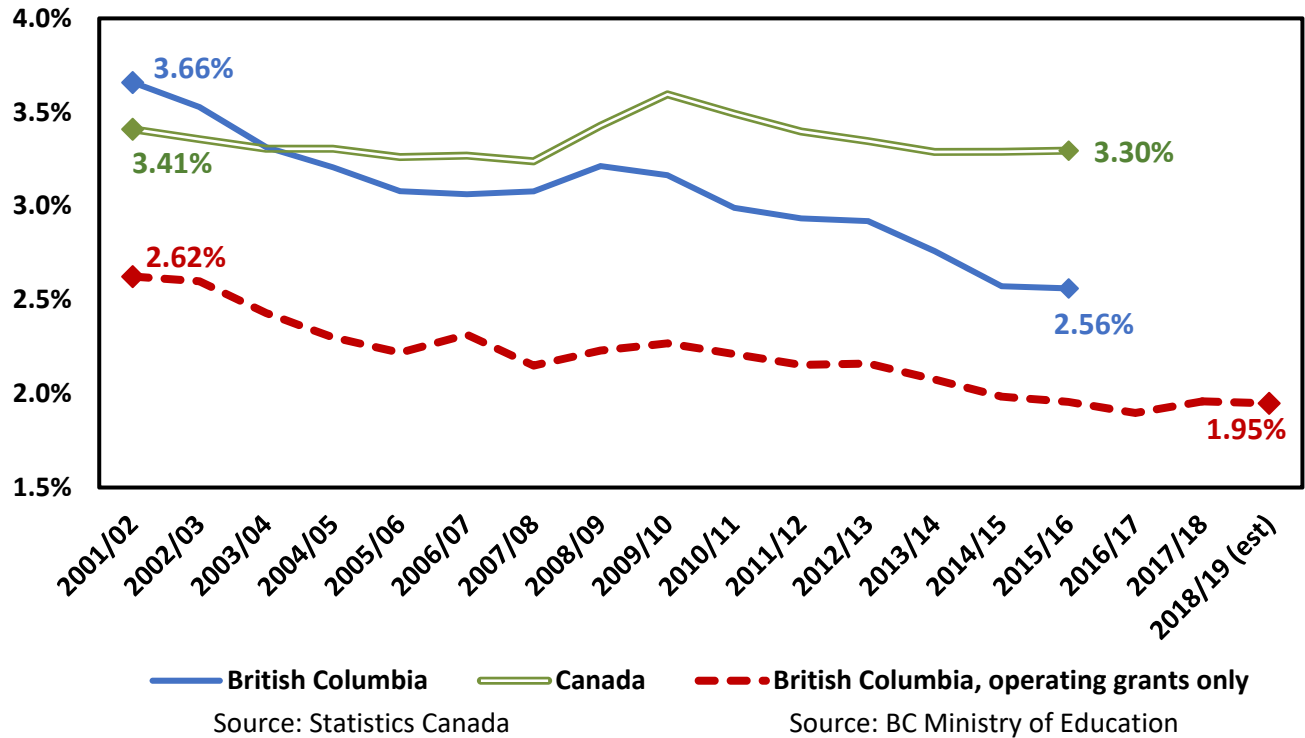
² BCTF calculations based on Statistics Canada Education Spending Tables (CANSIM Table 478-0014).

³ 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.

⁴ 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 1.1: 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 have now continued to stagnate. Put differently, total grants per full-time equivalent (FTE) student are 26% lower than they would have been had British Columbia continued to put aside the same share of GDP toward public K–12 education as we did in 2001–02, even adjusting for enrolment decline (not adjusted for enrolment decline, this figure rises an additional 10%).

As educational needs have grown, new programs, including a totally redesigned K–12 curriculum, have been introduced and system costs have expanded, but spending has not kept up; indeed, it has fallen behind. We once again urge this committee to pressure government to move ahead with enhancements to operating funding for K–12 in the upcoming budget. Immediate enhancements are necessary to implement the recommendations from the reports of this committee, to implement the remainder of the recommendations from the Task Force on Recruitment and Retention, and to finally begin to address the many other long-unaddressed

matters dependent upon operational funding, including but not limited to items listed in the Premier's mandate letter of July 17, 2017:

- 1) "New technology, lab equipment, learning material and professional development support for teachers;" and
- 2) "Additional annual funding to ensure students have the school supplies they need to succeed."

Our province has, can, and *must* do more for K–12 education. We urge the committee to bring forward, once again, the recommendations of previous reports that have called for adequate, stable, and predictable funding for public education, bolstered by immediate, significant enhancements that go beyond enrolment growth. In many ways these recommendations are the foundation for everything else in this submission.

2. Education funding formula reform to reflect system needs

Recommendation 3

That the Ministry of Education terminate the implementation of a prevalence-based model for special education funding.

Recommendation 4

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 5

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

Teachers are deeply concerned about some of the key recommendations that were publicly released in December 2018 by the Funding Model Review Panel, in particular the recommendation to move to prevalence-based model for funding special education and other services. This recommendation is even more concerning given that the Ministry of Education has yet to release the specifics of a potential model as well as its impacts on the funds flowing to all 60 of our province's school districts. The immediate impact will certainly be to create “winners” and “losers” among districts—and therefore among students—as the new model redistributes resources. By decoupling special needs funding from identified needs and combining funding for special needs with that for other services, prevalence funding will create:

1. incentives for cost control, and special education budgets that are even further from meeting the needs of all students than they are today.
2. competition for and among services (English language learners [ELL] vs. inclusive education vs. breakfast programs) that increases the influence of parental and teacher advocacy, the capacity for which is very unequally distributed.
3. fewer opportunities for the assessment and identification of student needs, opening the door to a greater role for private assessments and therefore yet greater inequity.

4. greater variation in services between districts.

The BCTF is troubled by the Ministry of Education's, as well as the current government's, openness to this model. Rather than seeing long wait times for special needs assessments as an outcome of chronic underfunding over the past decade and a half, the panel frames them as a symptom of administrative inefficiency and suggests funds currently spent on identifying real student needs could be redirected toward student services. Our fear is that needs will be under-identified, resource allocations will wither, and competition for services will enforce chaotic and inequitable services, both across the province and over time.

British Columbia's current funding model already enables excessive cost control, yet it still ties some funds to allocations based on identified needs, such as special needs designations or ELL. Although funding amounts are purely allocative and districts are ultimately free to use funds however they wish, they provide some tenuous link between funding and services or costs. The Funding Model Review Panel's recommendations would almost entirely sever even these limited links. The recommendations combine separate and sometimes disparate allocations into oversimplified, less transparent factors that take the funding model even further from the actual services needed or provided—in particular for students with special needs.

Instituting these recommendations would force parents, teachers, and schools to *compete for services* for students. Without reference to specific needs, funding can be increasingly discretionary: will it be directed toward services for learning disabilities or breakfasts for undernourished children? It is the potential for such zero-sum decision-making that would increase the role of advocacy in directing education resources. This in turn would further cement inequities: while all parents want the best for their children, we know that the capacity and resources to advocate are very unequally distributed and highly correlated with socio-economic status.

Overall, the panel's recommendations fundamentally continue along the path worn by the current, enrolment-based funding model introduced in 2002. This model largely funds "students" in the abstract rather than concrete services, has little recourse to the actual costs of providing services (and escalations in these costs), and absolves the provincial government of responsibility for ensuring adequate resources. The result, too often, is that student needs are unmet, and yet it seems that nothing can be done to effect change.

There are two broad ways of going about funding a public education system. One can ask first about the vision and mandate of the system and then determine what resources are needed to fulfill this mandate. That is the first option, where funding follows from the vision for what public education should be and the identified needs of students. The other option, implicit in the recommendations made by international organizations like the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and implicit in the proposed funding model, is to determine first a pool of resources and only then ask what kind of public education system can be maintained from this pool. Here what public education is and what it can accomplish follows from the whims of overall funding allocations.

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. Education funding in British Columbia should be reoriented toward the first option that starts with the mandate of and vision for the K–12 system.

Imagine a well-resourced, flourishing school—this is the reference point for a needs-based funding model. A funding model should start with the mandate of the education system, the services that it takes to fulfill this mandate, and the costs associated with providing them. Understanding what a school needs to thrive makes chronic underfunding harder to sustain and makes it easier to realize all the other values education funding should uphold: equity, stability, transparency, and flexibility. Such a system of funding would be 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 and their responsibilities to students.

For many years, this committee has included a version of a recommendation to review the funding model in its final report to the provincial Legislature, 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.”⁵ In our view, the report of the current Funding Model Review Panel cuts against this recommendation. The panel’s recommendations, in particular those to move to a prevalence model and a new accountability framework that does not include accountability for the Ministry to provide adequate resources, should be abandoned.

Instead, the government should take responsibility for funding the full mandate of the system, ensuring that accountability flows in both directions. The costs of new initiatives and increases in the costs of ongoing initiatives cannot simply be downloaded onto school districts, they must be fully funded. 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.

Of course, any new funding formula must 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, still inadequately, promotes equity.

Needs-based funding reduces the risk of unfunded cost pressures. When gaps in funding have arisen, 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.

British Columbia students deserve a formula that provides adequate, stable, equitable, and predictable funding. The process of crafting one must be open to stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, who were excluded from membership on the current review panel and largely ignored in consultations that focused on the views of district and school administration. Our

⁵ 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.

sector has an opportunity to embark on a new process of funding review to create an improved formula collectively.

3. Investment in classroom resources and the new curriculum

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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.

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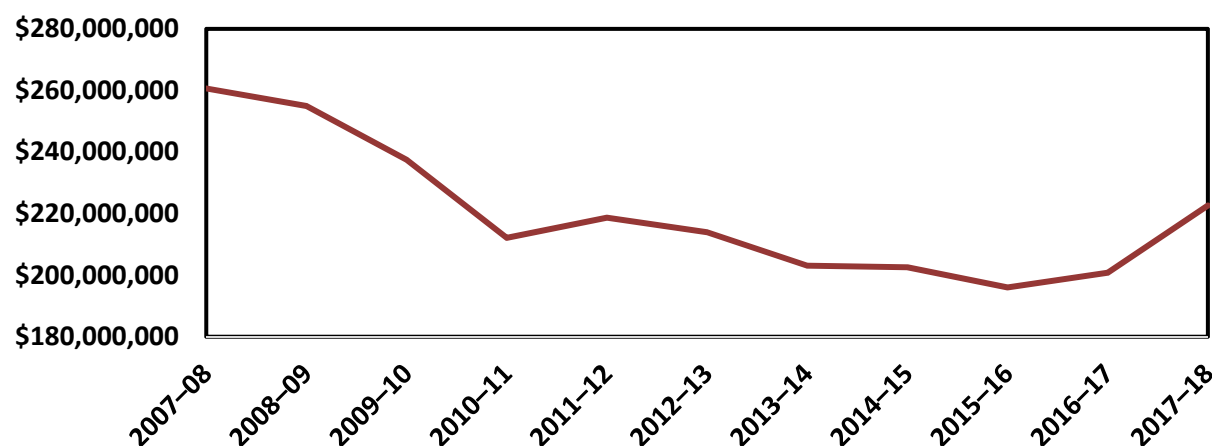
For too many years, public schools around the province have been making do with broken equipment, incomplete sets of books for language arts classes, out-dated (sometimes additionally racist and historically inaccurate) textbooks, and antiquated equipment in shops and lab classes. Teachers cannot be 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. Spending on supplies dropped nearly continuously between 2007–08 and 2016–17, falling by 23% in inflation-adjusted terms over this decade. And no part of the decline was due to falling enrolment; the number of FTE students actually increased by 1% over the same time frame.⁶ In 2017–18, schools saw a welcome real increase in outlays on supplies; however, spending remains 15% lower than in 2007–08 in inflation-adjusted terms⁷ and has dropped from 5% to 4% of total operating expenditures.

⁶ Ministry of Education, Operating Grant Tables.

⁷ Ministry of Education, BC School District Revenue and Expenditure Tables.

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



The 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 underresourced.

British Columbia schools need to be able to restore funding for resources and supplies rapidly, especially with the newly redesigned curriculum. 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.

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, new technology, and appropriate resources for all other subject areas. Respondents to a recent BCTF survey rated their access to necessary instructional materials as a 4 on a scale of 0 to 10.⁸ 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

⁸ BCTF, *2017 Curriculum Change and Implementation Survey*. Retrieved from bctf.ca/CurriculumSurvey/.

educational Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,”⁹ 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 developed by teachers in partnership with local First Nations communities 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 in co-ordinating the availability of a full spectrum of Indigenous content, in addition to the work that the BCTF and other organizations like First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) are already doing.

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. 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. We acknowledge and thank the staff at the Ministry of Education who have now commenced work on these sorts of supports. It will be important for these to be added to and accompanied with in-service and professional development opportunities across all sixty school districts over the next several years if we are to do this work responsibly and inclusively.

A third priority, also related to the physical and health education curriculum, is the availability of teaching materials and in-service opportunities in all school districts to build mental health literacy across the entire K–12 workforce, so that the needs of all learners can be met in this regard. Teachers are not clinicians, but they do have an important role in supporting the mental health of children and youth and connecting them to the appropriate supports in their communities.

⁹ Mandate Letter from Premier John Horgan to Minister of Education Rob Fleming.

Many provinces have undertaken professional development in mental health literacy and noted improved outcomes in increased knowledge about mental health and mental illness, reduced stigma, and improved help-seeking among students and teachers alike. The need for professional development opportunities in mental health literacy in all 60 school districts is crucial. The province is to be commended for investments that have been made in this regard to date.

However, as we have seen with other important initiatives in the past, the momentum generated by dedicated educators in a majority of BC districts committed to developing their own and their students' and colleagues' mental health literacy will fizzle without concerted, ongoing support.

Finally, 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.

Curriculum change is a process: what is urgently needed is a shift from whether teachers are ("correctly") implementing the curriculum, to whether the curriculum is providing space for the multiple knowledges, experiences, and needs that make up teaching and learning in BC.

Proper resourcing must also include the proper supports, in particular around new technologies and tools. There is a pressing need for in-service around privacy and protection of student data 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 9

That the Ministry of Education align special education funding with special education needs, rather than pursue a prevalence-based funding model, thus closing the current gap between what school districts receive in special education funding and the much greater amount they spend on special education.

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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 as well as dedicated funding for professional learning for teachers.

Recommendation 11

That the Ministry of Education introduce specific 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.”¹⁰

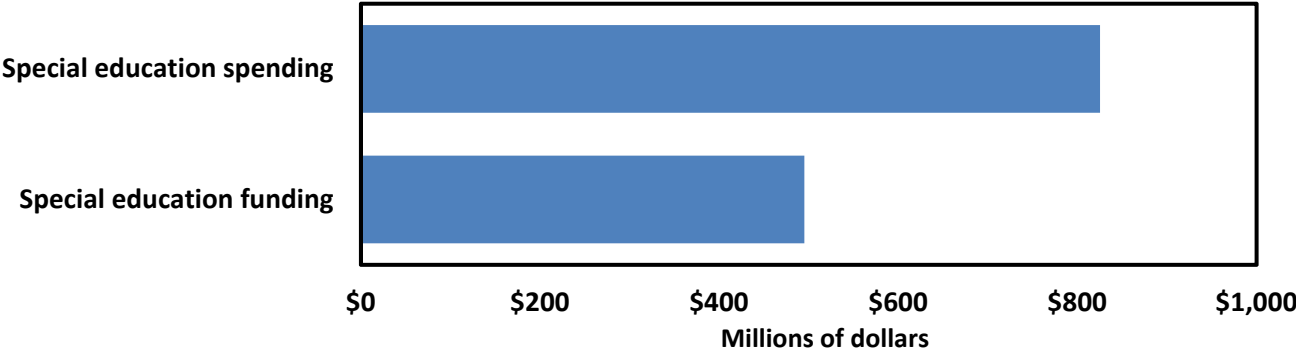
Currently, BC’s school districts receive, on average, just 60% of what they spend on special education in special education supplemental grants.¹¹ This mismatch between what the Ministry believes districts need for special education and districts’ actual needs creates pressures to ration special education services, redirect funds from other areas with their own pressing needs—or both. As noted, the introduction of a prevalence-based model for distributing special education

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Spending data from school district Audited Financial Statements, Schedule 2C; funding data from Ministry of Education Operating Grant Tables; see Figure 4.0.

funding risks cementing incentives for cost control while potentially misdiagnosing local conditions and needs from statistical data. Our education system should fund successful inclusion with reference to the identified needs of students and the resources necessary to provide the services that meet these needs.

Figure 4.0: Funding versus spending on special education, province-wide, 2017–18

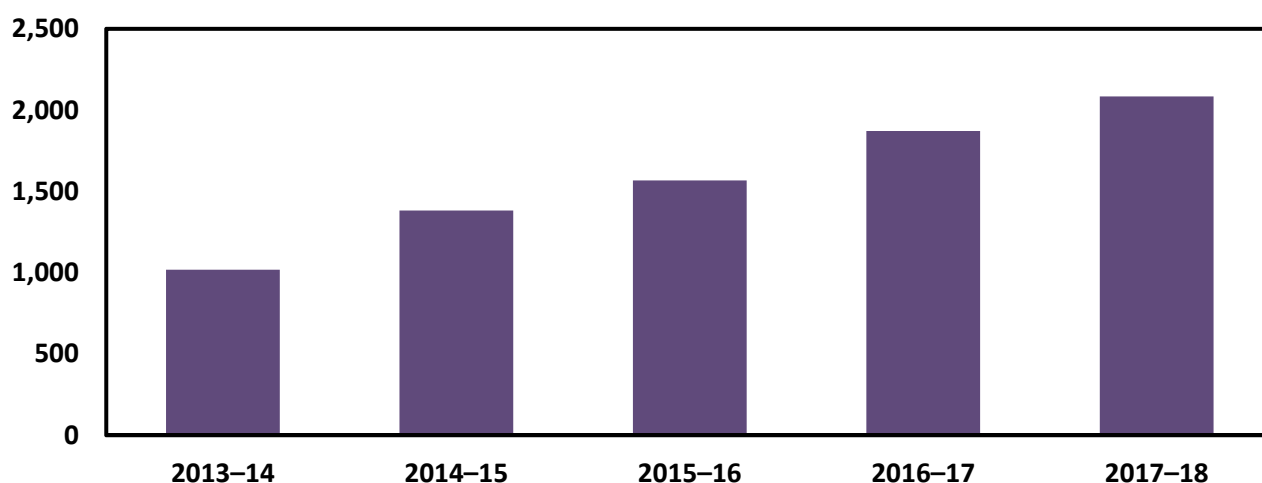


The Supreme Court of Canada ruling that acknowledged the illegal stripping of BCTF contract language, and subsequent memorandum of agreement between the BC Public School Employers’ Association, Ministry of Education, and the BCTF, has led to the restoration of a significant number of specialist teaching positions: over 1,000 non-enrolling FTE teachers were hired from the Classroom Enhancement Fund in 2017–18. However, 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.¹²

¹² Ministry of Education, Form 1530 data; see chart.

Figure 4.1: Special needs students enrolled in independent DL programs



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.”¹³ 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.

Teacher professional learning is also vital for 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 key area of the education system has been excluded from funding decision-making. However, the need for professional learning has only grown and the ability to better meet the needs of students with special needs is very high on the priorities for professional learning.

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 funded support. Once a need is identified, it must be met with resources. Rather than

¹³ BCTF, *Full Day Kindergarten Working and Learning Conditions Survey 2018*.

removing nearly all links to designations from the funding formula, the Ministry of Education should be expanding the scope of identified needs that are allocated funds.

5. Expanded, fully funded adult education

Recommendation 12

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 13

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

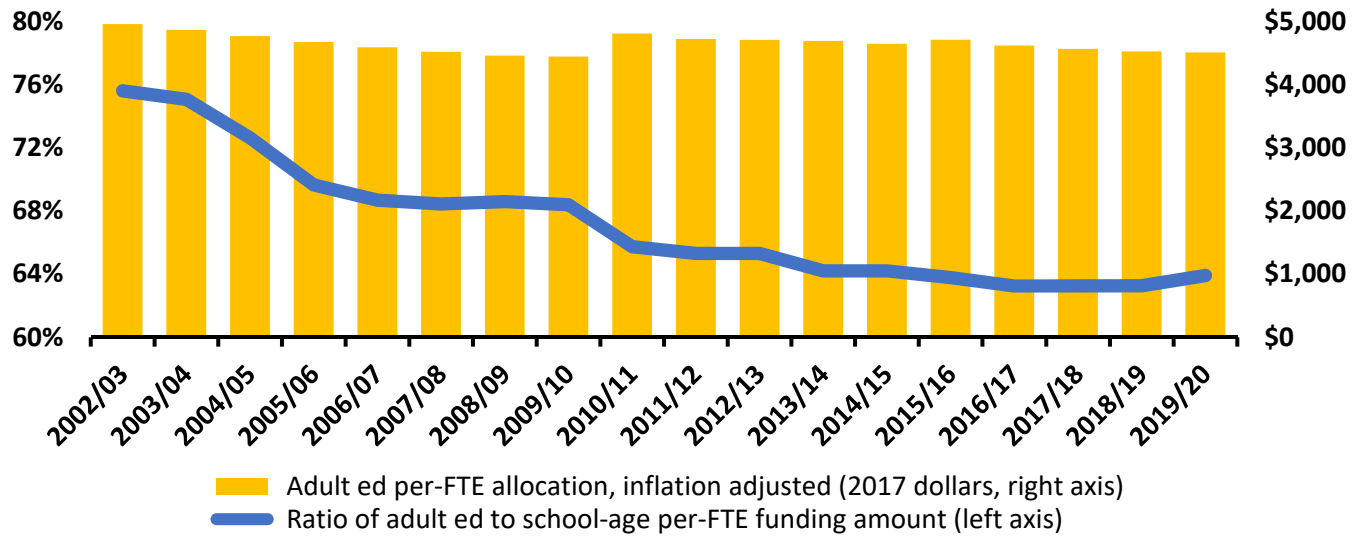
Teachers wholeheartedly welcomed Minister Fleming's announcement in August 2017 that tuition fees for adult learners, which had posed such a significant barrier to thousands of students, would be eliminated. This increased access is an excellent beginning, but more needs to be done to create a learning 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 for school-age programming.

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 dramatically underfunds adult students relative to their school-age peers. While the basic funding amount for a school-age full-time equivalent (FTE) student is set to be \$7,468 in 2019–20, it will be just \$4,773 for an FTE funded adult learning student—a gap of 36%.¹⁴ Not only is the funding amount for adult students over a third lower than the base amount for their school-age peers, it has declined relative to inflation over the long term. Today it is nearly \$500 lower in inflation-adjusted terms than it was in 2002–03, nearly two decades ago.

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.

¹⁴ BCTF calculations based on data drawn from Ministry of Education, Operating Grant Tables.

Figure 5.2: Adult education funding amounts



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 14

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

Recommendation 15

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 provide a per-teacher housing allowance.

Recommendation 16

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.¹⁵ 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 due to the still ongoing restoration of collective agreement language on class-size and composition. Some districts, particularly in Interior and Northern regions, have significant numbers of 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, creative proposals to restructure the salary grid would bring wages for both beginning teachers, currently second-lowest in Canada, and for experienced teachers, lowest among provinces from Ontario west, more in line with other provinces. Administrative initiatives could include student

¹⁵ WorkBC, *British Columbia Labour Market Outlook: 2018 Edition* (includes educational counsellors).

loan forgiveness programs, assisting new hires with moving expenses, making more unpaid mid-year leaves available, 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,¹⁶ only a handful of which have been implemented to date. Just minimal progress on recruitment and retention would see implementation begin immediately on the remaining short- and long-term recommendations from the task force.

Specialist teachers face additional challenges. A recent BCTF research study on the working conditions of teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing (ToDHH)¹⁷ found that these highly qualified teachers face significant and specific recruitment and retention barriers. These include the high cost and lengthy period of initial qualification for specialist professional preparation, limited availability and access to graduate specialist programs, as well as limited availability and access to Teacher Regulation Branch-approved alternative certification programs. Specific efforts must be put in place to ensure training programs are both available and funded for specialized roles like this and others, such as speech language pathologists (SLPs) and school psychologists.

Teachers in BC earn among the lowest salaries in Canada (across 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

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ BCTF, *Recruitment and Retention of Teachers of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in BC Public Schools*. Retrieved from bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=50058.

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

Even if the government is unwilling to make the successful New Teacher Mentorship Project permanent, or to assist in developing another across-district program 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. A phase-out of public funding for independent schools

Recommendation 17

That public funding for independent schools be eliminated over a four-year timeline, exempting on-reserve schools and 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. In the current school year \$426 million in public money is projected to flow to private education.¹⁸

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 over the 2018–19 school year 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.¹⁹

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. According to a new public opinion survey, 78% of British Columbians oppose public funding for elite private schools and 69% oppose public funding for religious private schools.²⁰

¹⁸ Ministry of Education, *Budget 2018 Overview* (February 2018).

¹⁹ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, “Elite private schools rake in public funds while special needs students go without”. Retrieved from <https://www.policynote.ca/elite-private-schools-rake-in-public-funds-while-special-needs-students-go-without/>.

²⁰ Insights West, “Majority of British Columbians Do Not Support Public Funding for Private Schools.” Retrieved from <https://insightswest.com/news/bc-public-funding-for-private-schools/>.

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

8. Seismically safe schools

Recommendation 18

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 past two school years. 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 previous 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 because of a new target: 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, 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.

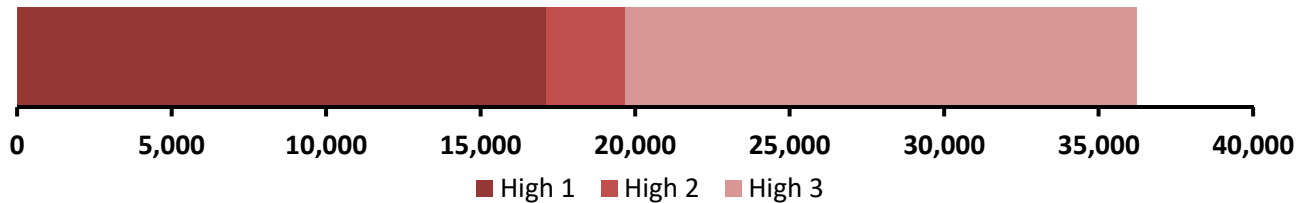
The speed with which new projects are approved has increased substantially since the election of the current government. Between July 2017 and April 2019, 22 projects began business development, while two more schools were identified in need of upgrades—a net improvement of 20 schools covered by improvements in under two years. Despite this, without an additional acceleration, upgrades will not be complete even by the current extended deadline.

Between July 2017 and May 2019, only 17 schools finished their seismic upgrades. There remain 39 schools marked with the highest-risk rating that have still not begun developing business cases. In total, there are 36,242 students in schools with the three highest-risk ratings on which work is not being done.²¹ At the current rate it will be 2033 before the last school reaches the business case development stage—and this does not count the additional schools that, as they

²¹ BCTF calculations based on Ministry of Education data; compiled in BCTF Research Report, “Seismic mitigation: The urgent need for safer schools”

age, will likely be identified as in need of seismic upgrades. If the current rate at which schools are being added continues, the date at which all schools likely needing upgrades enter business development will be 2036.

Figure 8.0: 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.