

BCTF Education Funding Brief

2022:

Charting a bold path for
healthy and resilient schools



BC Teachers' Federation

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Summary of issues and recommendations

Over the last year and a half, British Columbians have worked together to decrease the spread and reduce exposure to COVID-19. For many, this has included working from home and limiting travel and gatherings in groups. For teachers, this has often meant continuing to work in overcrowded classrooms while trying to keep students and colleagues as safe as possible.

BC teachers have risen to the challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic, even as it has taken its toll. The sentiment that “this has been the hardest year of my teaching career,” has echoed across the province, with significant impacts on physical and mental health.¹ Already acute recruitment and retention challenges have been exacerbated. Teachers are worried about their students and are keenly aware that an already underfunded public education system is further buckling under the strain of unmet needs. These needs are not bounded by the school bell; they are entangled in the deeper societal and economic crisis that the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified.

Teachers are also on the front-line of witnessing what is needed to move BC from a crisis response to a longer-term—and public-led—recovery and reconstruction effort. BC teachers submit to government that this requires:

¹ Gadermann, A.M., Warren, M.T., Gagné, M., Thomson, K.C., Schonert-Reichl, K.A., Guhn, M., Molyneux, T.M. & Oberle, E. (2021). *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teacher Well-Being in British Columbia*, 22. Human Early Learning Partnership. Retrieved from earlylearning.ubc.ca.

Committing to a Just Recovery for British Columbia

Recommendation 1

That the government commit to a public-led just recovery that addresses the inequalities and vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic to build a more resilient British Columbia.

Recommendation 2

That the provincial government lobby the federal government for increased transfers to provinces and continued support for provincial borrowing by both the federal government and the Bank of Canada, making it easier to make the necessary investments in safe, sufficient, and well-resourced public services that will be a cornerstone of social cohesion and economic reconstruction.

Ensuring adequate funding for public education to thrive

Recommendation 3

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

Recommendation 4

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 and inflation.

Recommendation 5

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

Recommendation 6

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.

Supporting health and safety in challenging times

Recommendation 7

That the Ministry of Education maintain additional funding provisions for increased health and safety measures.

Recommendation 8

That the Ministry of Education ensure sufficient and targeted funding for enhancing sick leave and other accommodations for teachers, additional custodial staff to maintain the necessary higher levels of cleanliness, as well as adequate stocks of personal protective equipment for staff and students who need or request it.

Recommendation 9

That the Ministry of Education fund infrastructure and staffing improvements to reduce classroom density within BC schools that assure effective physical distancing during public health crises and facilitate a higher quality of educational experience for all learners.

Recommendation 10

That the government continue to prioritize ventilation upgrades to address air quality standards in schools—and other public buildings—and provide regular updates on the progress of these efforts as part of a comprehensive public health approach that does not rely solely on vaccination as a means to control the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

Funding the Mental Health in Schools (MHiS) framework

Recommendation 11

That the Ministry of Education provide additional targeted funding to support a trauma-informed approach to mental health for students, staff, and district administration, including more counsellors and professional learning for teachers on trauma-informed practice.

Supporting effective teacher recruitment and retention strategies

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 provide 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.

Funding for resources and professional development

Recommendation 15

That the Ministry of Education provide substantial new funding for classroom resources, in line with the updated provincial curriculum, as well as infrastructure and support for new technology.

Recommendation 16

That the Ministry of Education provide grants to school districts for professional learning time and learning resources to support the implementation of changes to the curriculum and to facilitate appropriate utilization of new resources and technologies.

Building inclusive school communities

Recommendation 17

That the Ministry of Education terminate the consideration of a prevalence-based model for special education funding and align special education funding with identified special education needs.

Recommendation 18

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

Recommendation 19

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.

Supporting adult education for a more resilient society

Recommendation 20

That the Ministry of Education increase the number of funded courses in adult education to reflect a broad range of educational needs and interests and improve employment opportunities for individuals.

Recommendation 21

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

Resisting the privatization of public education

Recommendation 22

That the government prioritize funding for public schools and immediately reduce—and eventually eliminate—public subsidies of elite private schools.

Recommendation 23

That the Ministry of Education fund any continuing school district shortfalls in international student tuition revenue for the coming year, and commit to reforming the international student program for an equitable distribution of students and tuition revenues among districts.

Investing in schools and communities

Recommendation 24

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

Recommendation 25

That the provincial government accelerate its planned investment in a universal, \$10-a-day childcare system in BC, which should include a build-out of public childcare facilities and the provision of before- and after-school care.

Recommendation 26

That the Ministry of Education provide grants to school districts for universal school meal programs.

Recommendation 27

That the provincial government move rapidly towards a universal, public, \$10-per-month broadband service.

Committing to a just recovery for British Columbia

Recommendation 1

That the government commit to a public-led just recovery that addresses the inequalities and vulnerabilities exposed by the pandemic to build a more resilient British Columbia.

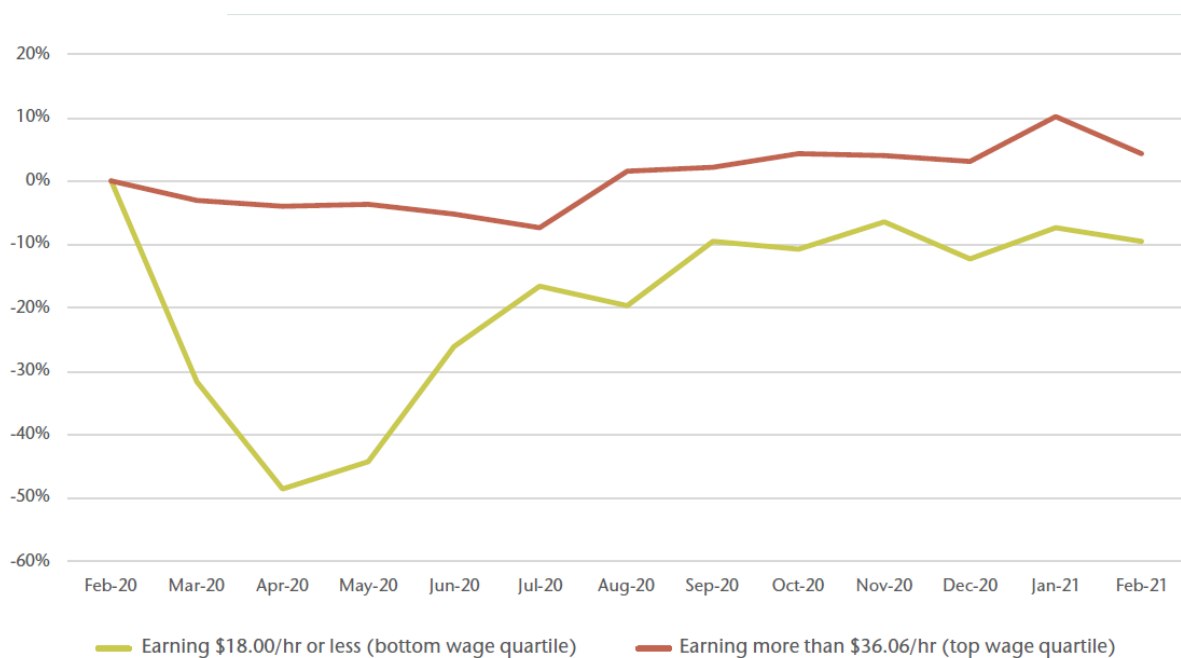
Recommendation 2

That the provincial government lobby the federal government for increased transfers to provinces and continued support for provincial borrowing by both the federal government and the Bank of Canada, making it easier to make the necessary investments in safe, sufficient, and well-resourced public services that will be a cornerstone of social cohesion and economic reconstruction.

It is clear that while the pandemic has affected all British Columbians, the full impact is not evenly distributed within our population. The necessary decision to shut down entire sectors of the economy in the interest of public health has created vast economic uncertainty and hardship, while deepening already-existing inequalities. Market solutions and private investment are ill-equipped to handle these difficulties—a lesson learned during the Great Depression—and sustained public investment is required to avoid stagnation and depression while we build back a society that is more just than the one which entered it. As the vaccination effort in BC rolls on and we hope to move toward a safe reopening of the province, we need to take stock of the lessons learned during this pandemic. Government spending—federal, provincial, and municipal—needs to remain elevated to support reconstruction and to generate investment and jobs.

The just recovery plan for British Columbia must be guided by intersectional, gender equity, and social justice lenses. The more vulnerable segments of our population are disproportionately experiencing the worst outcomes resulting from the COVID-19 health crisis and related economic recession. This highly unequal experience of the pandemic is immediately evident when comparing the magnitude of employment losses between the highest and lowest paid workers in British Columbia (see **Figure 1** Below).²

Figure 1: Share of BC workers in the top and bottom wage quartiles who lost their jobs or the majority of their regular hours relative to February 2020



Note: Excludes the self-employed because they are not asked about their wages in the Labour Force Survey. Seasonally adjusted by removing average change in each category since February over the past three years.

Source: Author's calculations based on data from Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey PUMF.

This unequal experience of job loss by income level is one key difference that sets the COVID-19 pandemic apart from previous recessionary periods.³ Much of this unemployment differential is explained by the fact that the industries worst affected by the pandemic—and associated public health restrictions—are also the industries that

² Ivanova, I. (2021). *Inequality, Employment and COVID-19: Priorities for fostering an inclusive recovery in BC*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 6. Retrieved from www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/inequality-employment-and-covid-19.

³ Statistics Canada. *COVID-19 in Canada*.

typically pay lower wages: “Four of the five lowest-paying industries in BC saw the largest pandemic-related job losses in the spring of 2020, while four of the five highest-paying industries saw the smallest job losses.”⁴ In addition, Statistics Canada data have demonstrated that workers in lower-wage occupations are less likely to hold jobs that can be done from home, resulting in greater employment disruption for those who already receive the least financial compensation for their work.⁵

Besides the lowest paid workers of BC—and Canada—there are other segments of the population that stand out as being disproportionately affected by the pandemic. Young workers (ages 15–24) have experienced the largest employment losses—and slowest recovery—from COVID-19 shutdowns, with 42% of young women and 31% of young men losing their job in the first two months of the pandemic (compared to only 10% of workers between the ages of 25–34 and 14% of those 55 and over).⁶ The permanent impacts of starting one’s career during a recession are considerable and long-lasting, so the International Labour Organization has warned that the “exclusion of young people from the labour market, given the long-lasting impacts, is one of the greatest dangers for society in the current situation.”⁷

Job losses and work hour reductions were also considerably higher for recent immigrants, as 45% of recent immigrants—permanent residents of Canada within the last 10 years—who were working in BC in February 2020 lost their job or the majority of their hours by April (see **Figure 2** below).⁸

⁴ Ivanova, I. (2021). 25.

⁵ Messacar, D., Morissette, R., and Deng, Z. (2020). “Inequality in the Feasibility of Working from Home during and after COVID-19,” *StatCan COVID-19: Data Insights for a Better Canada*. Retrieved from www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00029-eng.htm.

⁶ Ivanova, I. (2021). 34-35.

⁷ International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020). *ILO Monitor: COVID-19 and the World of Work. Fourth Edition*. Retrieved from www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/impacts-and-responses/WCMS_745963/lang-en/index.htm.

⁸ Ivanova, I. (2021). 35

Figure 2: Share of BC workers who lost their jobs or the majority of their regular hours relative to February 2020 by immigration status

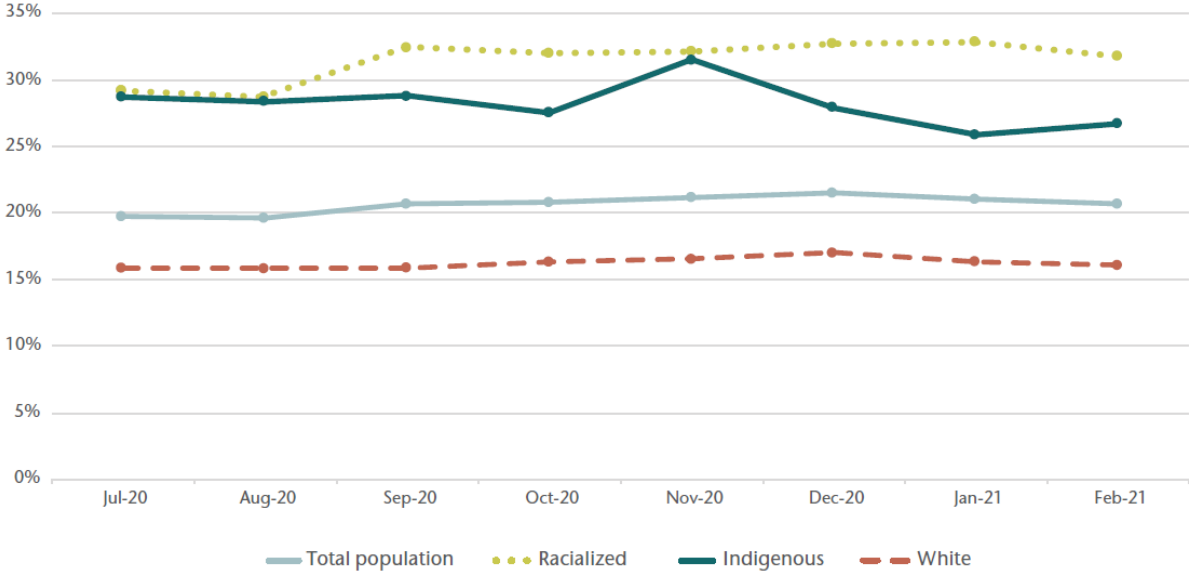


Source: Source: Author's calculations based on data from Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey PUMF. Seasonally adjusted by removing average change in each category since February over the past three years.

Racialized and Indigenous Canadians have also experienced more job loss and reported more financial insecurity as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. As demonstrated in **Figure 3** below, well over 25% of the surveyed individuals within these groups have reported that it was difficult or very difficult to meet basic household financial commitments over the course of the pandemic.⁹ In comparison, the number of white Canadians reporting difficult or very difficult household financial situations has not risen much higher than 15% over the first year of the pandemic.

⁹ Ivanova, I. (2021). 35.

Figure 3: Proportion of people living in households that reported it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to meet basic household financial commitments in the last four weeks, Canada



Notes: Data for the population aged 15 to 69. Data is not seasonally adjusted.
 Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey Supplement, July 2020 to February 2021, custom table.

Employment rate recovery for both men and women in BC has outpaced the national rate, but the recovery to pre-pandemic levels of employment for women has lagged behind men by a small margin—even when the “typical” gender gap in employment is controlled for.¹⁰ However, gendered differences in employment recovery are even more obvious when particular segments of the population are studied: low-income women, Indigenous and racialized women, mothers with young children (especially single mothers), women who have recently immigrated, and young women have all taken a greater economic hit than most in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹¹

¹⁰ Ivanova, I. (2021). 30-31.

¹¹ Ivanova, I. (2021). 31.

Ensuring adequate funding for public education to thrive

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The widespread recognition of the importance of public education for the well-being of all children in BC is an opportunity to reform our provincial funding formula into one that can fulfill the needs of British Columbians and provide a stronger foundation for future generations. There are essentially two different philosophies for funding a public education system. The first perspective, implicit in recommendations made by organizations like the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

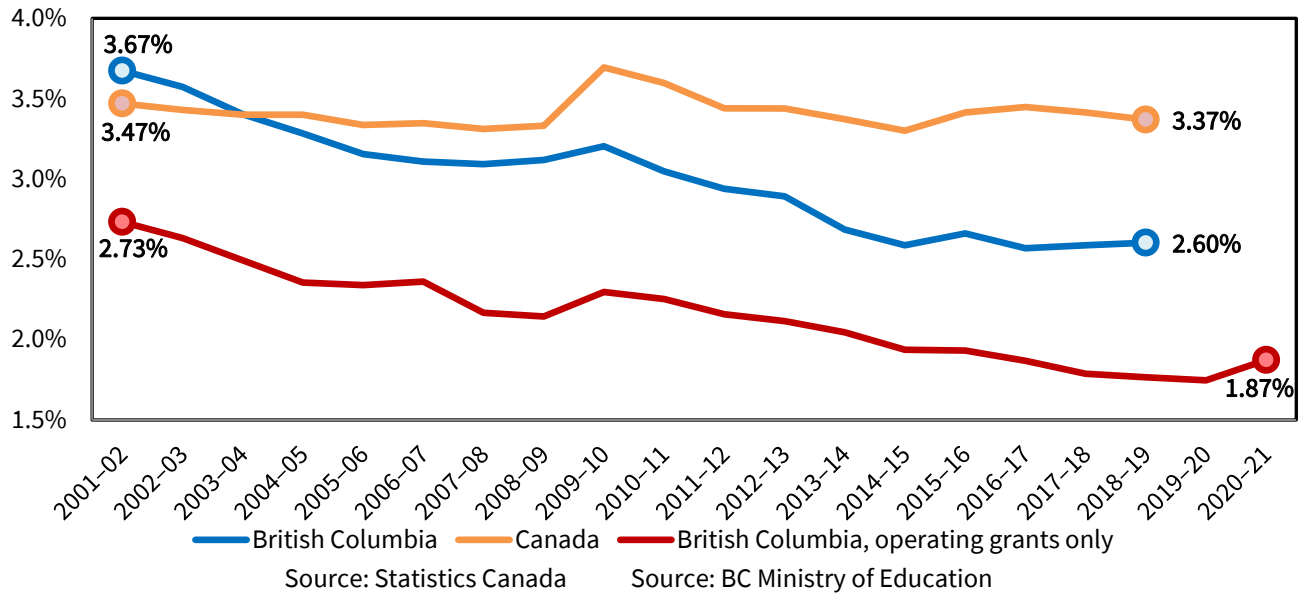
(OECD), and also in the operating procedures of our current enrolment-based funding model, is to first determine a pool of resources and then ask what kind of public education system can be maintained within this—often arbitrary—budget. In this approach, what public education is, and what it can accomplish, follows from the whims of overall funding allocations.

Alternatively, there is a second option—where funding follows from the vision for what public education should be, and is firmly connected to the identified needs of students. We first ask what mandate education should fulfill and what needs exist within the system, and only then is it determined what resources are required to fulfill this mandate and best meet the real, identified needs of classrooms, schools, and school districts. Teachers firmly believe in an education funding model based on this second option—with a well-resourced, flourishing school as the reference point for a new vision of public education in British Columbia.

Unfortunately, the story of educational funding in British Columbia in the 21st century is one characterized by precipitous drops in spending and the struggle to provide quality education within a system hobbled by almost two decades of austerity. Between 2001 and 2016, British Columbia saw spending on education drop relative to GDP by nearly a third.¹² This was the government of the day effectively saying that education should be less and less important, and putting aside an ever-shrinking part of our total social resources toward teaching future generations. In recent years, these declines have been halted, but we remain at a point where BC still invests a considerably lower amount of GDP into education compared to the rest of Canada (See **Figure 4** below).

¹² BCTF calculations based on Ministry of Education Operating Grant Tables, Statistics Canada GDP Tables (36-10-0222-01) and Education Spending Tables (37-10-0066-01).

Figure 4: Spending on public K–12 as a share of GDP

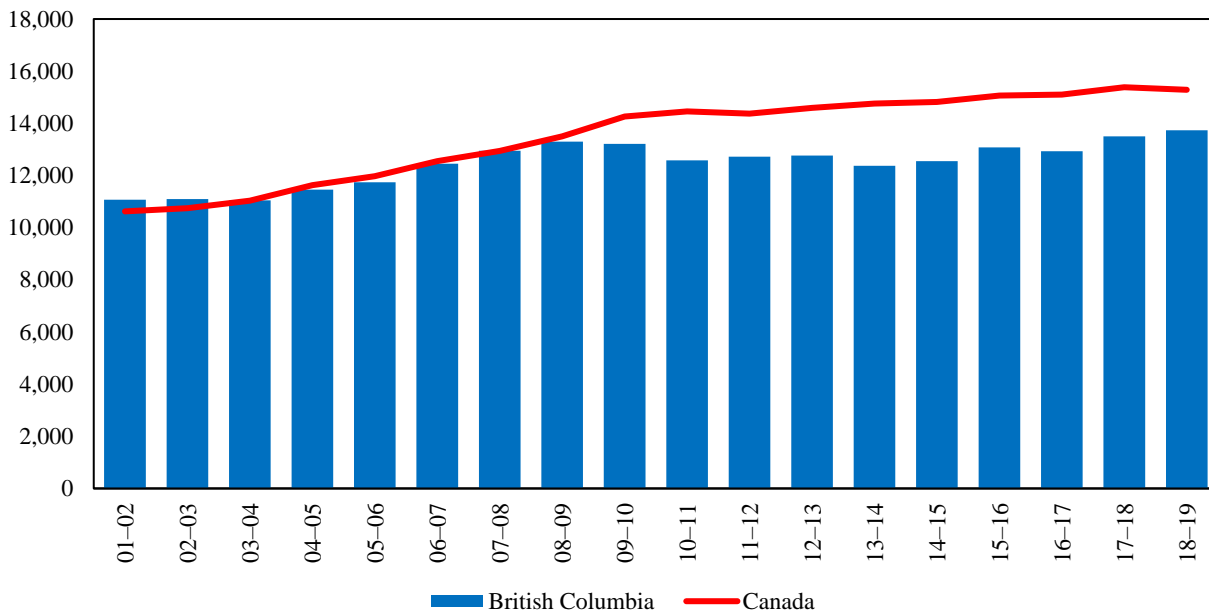


The implementation of the Classroom Enhancement Fund in 2017–18 grew operating grants relative to GDP, but these funds have remained stagnant ever since—one should note that the bump in 2020–21 is due to a reduction in GDP related to COVID-19 and not a real increase in educational operating grants.

Another way to quantify the anemic public education spending in BC is by looking at per-student funding. Since the mid-2000s, British Columbia has also fallen further and further behind the Canadian average in terms of per-student funding. Once again, the benefits of the Classroom Enhancement Fund can be recognized within the timeline, and the gap in per-student funding between British Columbia and Canada has closed slightly to about a \$1,600 deficit in 2018–19 and 2019–20.¹³

¹³ BCTF calculations based on Statistics Canada Number of Student Tables (37-10-0007-01) and Education Spending Tables (37-10-0066-01).

Figure 5: Public K–12 education inflation-adjusted spending per student, BC, and Canada



Many in public education work tirelessly and make personal sacrifices daily to ensure that the students of British Columbia receive a quality education, but these commendable individual efforts are still constrained by shoestring budgets for public education. Considering the importance of the public education system as a vital support for the wider economy—made even more obvious during the COVID-19 pandemic—the question arises of how much longer can we afford to underfund our public education system? In recent years, we have seen the expansion of educational needs and program initiatives and the redesign of the K–12 curriculum—initiatives that require funding at the provincial level if they are to succeed (see also Recommendations 15 and 16).

A major contributing factor to the underfunding of BC public education is the incentive toward austerity baked into the very structure of the current funding formula. This formula has often resulted in funding crises that the previous government patched with last-minute and temporary spending based on fleeting political priorities. The two-decade legacy brought about by this funding model is one of austerity and cutbacks—as districts tried their best to make do with funding that was never sufficient to enable local visions for what a quality education could look like. The enrolment-based funding

model has achieved its primary purpose of increasing cost-control at the provincial level: by funding “students” in the abstract and downloading the actual (and escalating) costs of service to the districts, public-education spending by the provincial government is now incredibly low. So, these savings at the provincial level are enabled only by the decision to underinvest in BC’s education system—a decision that has serious consequences for districts and schools, guaranteeing that some student needs will continue to go unmet.

For many years, this Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services has included a version of a recommendation to review the funding model in its final report to the provincial Legislature, previously 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.”¹⁴ The historic moment has arrived to begin the transition toward an educational funding model that is more responsive to identified needs in the present and the anticipated needs of the future.

¹⁴ Report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services (2017), emphasis added. Retrieved from www.leg.bc.ca/content/CommitteeDocuments/41st-parliament/2nd-session/FGS/Budget2018Consultation/FGS_2017-11-15_Budget2018Consultation_Report.pdf.

Supporting health and safety in challenging times

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That the Ministry of Education maintain additional funding provisions for increased health and safety measures.

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That the government continue to prioritize ventilation upgrades to address air quality standards in schools—and other public buildings—and provide regular updates on the progress of these efforts as part of a comprehensive public health approach that does not rely solely on vaccination as a means to control the spread of COVID-19 in schools.

While it has been suggested British Columbia is moving out of the worst days of the COVID-19 pandemic, variants of concern continue to emerge. At the time of writing, a new surge of COVID-19 cases has been linked to the Delta variant. With a student

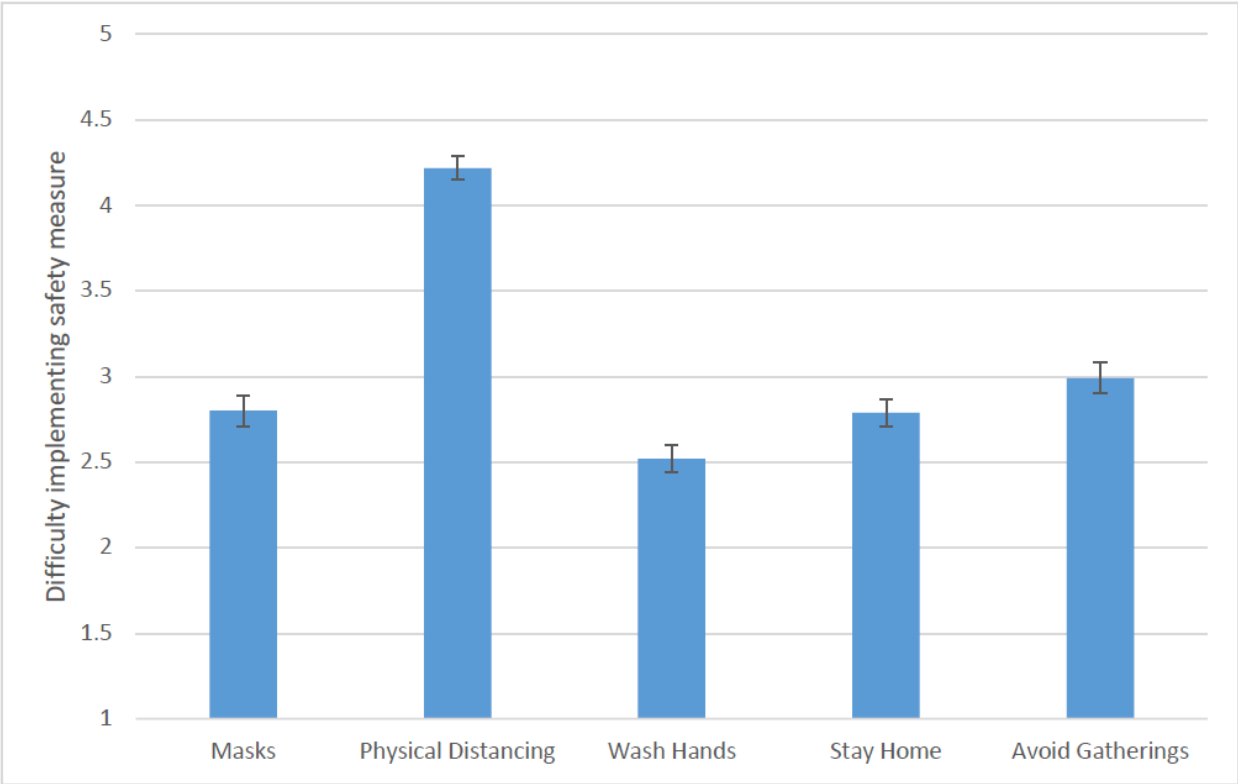
population that will remain largely unvaccinated for the 2021–22 school year, we must be careful not to relax the health and safety measures which have allowed schools to remain open over the last year. School districts will require additional funding to ensure that sustained staffing levels under pressure from more frequent use of sick leave, maintain higher levels of cleanliness in school buildings and all other district sites, and provide adequate stocks of personal protective equipment (PPE) for staff and students. With the global pandemic still ongoing, school districts will continue to face additional cost pressures. Adequate provincial funding must be made available immediately to prevent the costs of these vital health and safety measures from being downloaded to the district-level.

While recent discussions on health and safety in schools have focused primarily on the short-term measures designed to help manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, we must also prepare longer-term strategies to make schools resilient against future public health challenges.

Teachers have long advocated for smaller classes as a pedagogical measure, but this pandemic has illustrated how reducing classroom density is also a health and safety imperative. In a recent study published by researchers from the University of British Columbia’s Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP), physical distancing stood out as the COVID-19 safety measure which was most difficult to implement in BC’s schools.¹⁵

¹⁵ Gadermann, A.M., M., Warren, M.T., Gagné, M., Thomson, K.C., Schonert-Reichl, K.A., Guhn, M., Molyneux, T.M. & Oberle, E. (2021). *The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teacher Well-Being in British Columbia*, (p. 22). Human Early Learning Partnership. Retrieved from <http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/>.

Figure 6: Mean response to difficulty in implementing five different safety measures at school



Note. Represents Estimated Marginal Means with 95% Confidence Intervals. Survey question was: “How easy or hard is it to implement the following safety measures at your school”. Response options were: 1 (*Very easy*), 2 (*Somewhat easy*), 3 (*Neither hard nor easy*), 4 (*Somewhat hard*), 5 (*Very hard*).

The infrastructure of school buildings themselves will need to be rethought in light of the COVID-19 experience. The Ministry of Education should also move quickly to reform school building standards to ensure that schools—and portables—are better suited to handle the measures necessitated by public health emergencies. This includes trending towards smaller class sizes, but also potential new expansions of outside school space and open areas where large numbers of students congregate.

Perhaps the most critical update required to make our school infrastructure more resilient is the upgrading of old ventilation and filtration systems. It is now commonly understood that airborne spread is the dominant form of transmission for COVID-19, but improvements in ventilation and filtration in public areas—such as schools—have

been an afterthought in our public health strategies up to this point.¹⁶ Improving the air quality in BC schools will have an immediate impact in reducing the total number of cases of COVID-19, but this investment will also have long term benefits such as decreasing the transmission of other common respiratory viruses—such as influenza. In a recent survey of BC teachers working in-person during January 2021, only 24.8% of teachers agreed that the ventilation system in their workplace was adequate to help reduce the spread of COVID-19.¹⁷ In the August 2021 announcement of BC’s back-to-school plans, government representatives placed a welcome emphasis on the importance of ventilation for the health of students and staff and indicated that additional funds had been earmarked for vital air-quality upgrades in schools.¹⁸ It was also indicated by government that “100% of schools are working on ventilation.” It is recommended that the provincial government continue to prioritize ventilation and provide updates on progress to address air quality standards in schools—and other public buildings—as part of a holistic public health approach that does not rely solely on vaccination as a means to control the spread of COVID-19.

¹⁶ Fallis, B (2021). *A vaccine-only strategy won't prevent a fourth wave of COVID-19*. The Globe and Mail. Retrieved from www.theglobeandmail.com/amp/opinion/article-a-vaccine-only-strategy-wont-prevent-a-fourth-wave-of-covid-19/.

¹⁷ BCTF Research (2021). *Keeping Safe Schools Open in a Pandemic: What BC Teachers Say We Still Need*, 3. Retrieved from web.archive.org/web/20210624214827/https://bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/Research/2021BCTFHealthSafetySurvey_FinalReport.pdf.

¹⁸ Back-to-school announcement video (2021). Global News. Retrieved from globalnews.ca/news/8136053/bc-back-to-school-covid-plan-2021/.

Funding the Mental Health in Schools (MHiS) framework

Recommendation 11

That the Ministry of Education provide additional targeted funding to support a trauma-informed approach to mental health for students, staff, and district administration, including more counsellors and professional learning for teachers on trauma-informed practice.

Health and safety in BC schools goes far beyond physical measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and school districts need resources to alleviate the burden of the pandemic on the mental health of staff and students. In response, government should provide districts with additional targeted funding for increased mental health supports centred on a trauma-informed approach. As stated in the Ministry's 2021 *Key Principles and Strategies for K–12 Mental Health Promotion in Schools* report, "The return to school in the Fall provides opportunity for reconnection and a focus on holistic health promotion with intentional actions that address systemic inequities."¹⁹ The Ministry of Education has further noted the "resounding consensus among researchers, educators, parents, and students that a focus on social emotional learning, mental health literacy and trauma-informed practice is an effective way to promote students' positive mental health."²⁰ Supporting a trauma-informed mental health framework must include resources for professional learning and in-service for teachers on trauma-informed

¹⁹ BC Ministry of Education (2021, August 30). *Key Principles and Strategies for K–12 Mental Health Promotion in Schools*, 2. Retrieved from www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/key-principles-and-strategies-for-k-12-mental-health-promotion.pdf.

²⁰ BC Ministry of Education *Mental Health in Schools Strategy (MHiS)*, (p. 8). Retrieved from www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/erase/documents/mental-health-wellness/mhis-strategy.pdf.

practice, a trauma-informed approach to teach mental health, and increased numbers of counsellors in schools.

In addition to promoting students' mental health, the Ministry of Education's mental health policy "acknowledges that adult well-being is a critical element toward alignment and improved system-wide mental health outcomes."²¹ In the February 2021 survey by UBC Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) researchers, 80.5% of BC teachers reported that their mental health was slightly or significantly worse than before the pandemic—this can be contrasted with only 40.5% of the wider Canadian population.²² The same study found that, according to standard psychological measures, the majority of BC teachers displayed the characteristics of "moderate mental distress" (56.5%) and another 22.9% were in "serious mental distress." At least one other research study conducted during the same period corroborates these findings,²³ and it is undeniable that the teachers of BC have experienced an inordinate impact on their mental health over the course of the pandemic.

Teachers are also concerned about the impact of the pandemic on their students. In the UBC HELP study mentioned above, the researchers found that 42.8% of their sample of BC teachers believed that the social and emotional needs of students might be only "slightly" or "not at all" met during the 2019–20 school year²⁴—findings that are largely consistent with a BCTF research study conducted a month earlier in January 2021.²⁵ While schools remained open in BC, it was at a significant cost. BCTF member surveys demonstrate a link between the lack of health and safety measures in schools to the

²¹ BC Ministry of Education *Mental Health in Schools Strategy (MHIS)*, 5. Retrieved from www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/erase/documents/mental-health-wellness/mhis-strategy.pdf.

²² Gadermann, A.M., Warren, M.T., Gagné, M., Thomson, K.C., Schonert-Reichl, K.A., Guhn, M., Molyneux, T.M. & Oberle, E., 9.

²³ BCTF Research (2021). 7-8.

²⁴ Gadermann, A.M., Warren, M.T., Gagné, M., Thomson, K.C., Schonert-Reichl, K.A., Guhn, M., Molyneux, T.M. & Oberle, E., 19.

²⁵ BCTF Research (2021). 10.

negative impact on teacher mental health. The long-term impacts of not supporting mental wellness are severe. School districts must have sufficient resources to deal with all aspects of making schools healthy and safe for everyone—a crucial component for building a resilient public education system.

Supporting effective teacher recruitment and retention strategies

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 provide a per-teacher housing allowance.

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

The lack of investment into teacher recruitment and retention is an existing, chronic challenge that unfortunately undermines the foundations of education in British Columbia. The province is experiencing major demographic shifts that are creating an increasing demand for teachers—and critical personnel shortages. According to labour market projections, BC schools will require 20,206 additional teachers over the current decade (2020–29).²⁶ Numerous BC school districts are already reporting significant, chronic shortages for TTOCs, as well as general and specialist teachers, in part due to the ongoing restoration of collective agreement language on class size and composition that improve learning conditions for all students. Some districts, particularly in Interior

²⁶ Labour Market Information, BC Ministry of Advanced Education, Skills and Training (2020). 2020-2029 *Labour Market Outlook Occupations Job Openings by Type and Occupation for BC and Regions*. Victoria: Government of British Columbia. [NOTE: These projections include Secondary school teachers (NOC 4031), Elementary school and kindergarten teachers (NOC 4032) and Educational Counsellors (NOC 4033)].

and Northern regions, have significant numbers of retired teachers working as TTOCs, and—province-wide—there are many uncertified instructors employed on Letters of Permission (without formal teaching certification).

British Columbia was confronted by a looming teacher shortage prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. In December 2017, the Minister of Education’s own Task Force on Immediate Recruitment and Retention Challenges highlighted teacher shortages in several key areas—specialist positions, TTOC availability, and vacancies in rural or smaller districts—and noted the increasing recruitment and retention challenges associated with an aging population.²⁷ However, only a handful of the recommendations released by this task force have been implemented to date, and the experience of teaching during a public health crisis has intensified the challenges to teacher recruitment and retention.

In a recent BCTF health and safety survey, 72.8% of the teachers who were working in-person reported that their workload had increased in comparison to before the pandemic.²⁸ Additionally, a third of the surveyed BC teachers (34.2%) indicated that they are now more likely to leave the profession within the next two years due to their experience of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁹ These findings are echoed by a recent study by HELP at UBC on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teacher well-being in BC. When teachers were asked about their turnover intentions in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, 40.3% of the respondents said that they were now more likely to seek to leave the profession in the next few years.

To best meet the challenges of new recruitment and retention in BC, a number of initiatives might be considered. Teachers in BC still earn among the lowest salaries in

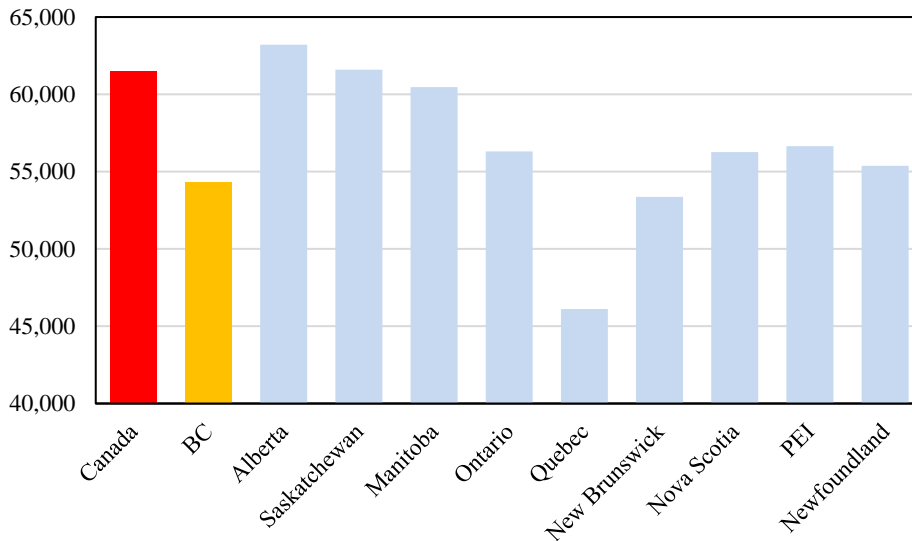
²⁷ Ministry of Education (2017). *Report presented by the Minister’s Task Force on Immediate Recruitment and Retention Challenges*. Retrieved from www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/uploads/task_force_report.pdf.

²⁸ BCTF Research (2021). 5.

²⁹ Ibid.

Canada (at all levels of experience), but the salaries of new teachers stand out as being particularly depressed—third lowest of the provinces.

Figure 7: Starting salary of public school teachers, Canada and provinces



Note: Canada figures is a simple average of provinces and territories. Ontario figures is for Toronto Elementary school teachers. Quebec figures is set to increase to \$53,000 once new collective agreements are finalized.

In addition to these comparatively low wages, teachers in BC are also faced with some of the highest living expenses (particularly when it comes to housing). Government support for reducing the high cost of living for teachers is a targeted way to improve the situation for both recruitment and retention. There are a number of creative initiatives which could be implemented toward this purpose: loan forgiveness programs, assistance with moving expenses, teacher housing allowances, development of non-market teacher housing, increasing the availability of unpaid mid-year leave, and funding new teacher mentorship programs to support teachers new to the profession or transitioning into new roles. The effectiveness of different recruitment and retention initiatives will need to be compared—and it is likely that the appropriate strategy may vary by district and school—but all of these initiatives will require new funding if they are to be successful.

Funding for resources and professional development

Recommendation 15

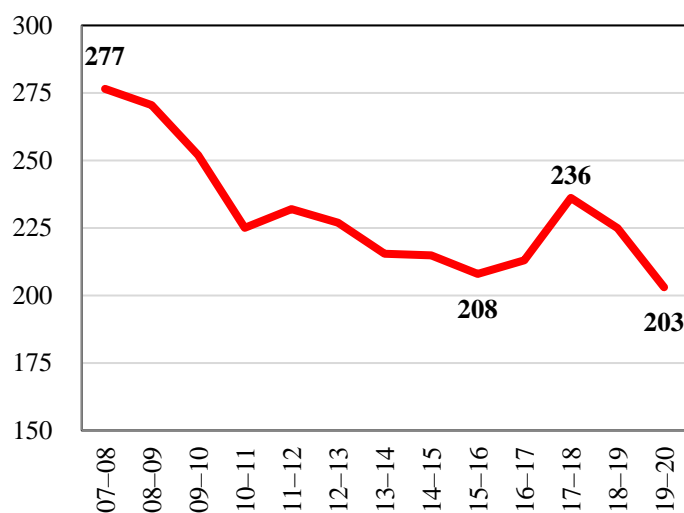
That the Ministry of Education provide substantial new funding for classroom resources, in line with the updated provincial curriculum, as well as infrastructure and support for new technology.

Recommendation 16

That the Ministry of Education provide grants to school districts for professional learning time and learning resources to support the implementation of changes to the curriculum and to facilitate appropriate utilization of new resources and technologies.

For too many years, insufficient investment into classroom resources has undermined education in British Columbia. Annual spending on school supplies dropped continuously between 2007–08 and 2016–17, as visible in **Figure 8**.

Figure 8: School districts spending on supplies by school year, inflation adjusted millions of dollars



No part of this decline was due to falling enrolment; the number of full-time equivalent students increased slightly over the same time frame.³⁰ While 2017–18 saw a welcome increase in supply spending, the following two years have seen these temporary gains entirely erased, and spending on school supplies reaching new lows in 2019–20 in inflation-adjusted terms.³¹

The decrease in funding for resources is all the more striking given that K–12 education in British Columbia has undergone unprecedented and continuing curriculum change that creates a need for new resources and places new demands on teachers across all subject areas. Crucially, schools need resources for the integration of Aboriginal ways of knowing across the curriculum—a key aspect of implementing both the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (UNDRIP) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) Calls to Action. Resources are also needed to tackle the crisis of systemic racism, one brought to the fore by police brutality and the unequal impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents to a 2017 BCTF survey on curriculum change rated their access to necessary instructional materials as an average of 4 on a scale from 0 to 10.³² In addition, approximately 3 out of 4 teachers (76%), said that they did not have sufficient access to the necessary instructional materials needed to integrate Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom.

To be successful, investment in resources for curriculum change must also cover professional learning and planning time for teachers. Given the scale of the changes required, professional learning and planning should be taken very broadly to 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. A collaborative model for joint district and local planning should also be

³⁰ Ministry of Education, Operating Grant Tables.

³¹ Ministry of Education, BC School District Revenue and Expenditure Tables.

³² BCTF Research (2017). *2017 Curriculum Change and Implementation Survey*. Retrieved from [web.archive.org/web/20210624151053/https://www.bctf.ca/CurriculumSurvey/](https://www.bctf.ca/CurriculumSurvey/).

developed in districts where they don't already exist—one in which teachers and local teacher associations take a leadership role. Finally, there is also a pressing need for in-service around privacy as new technologies create unique privacy risks in schools and simultaneously place significant additional responsibilities on teachers. Without proper supports, it is possible that resources and technology will be misused, underutilized, or simply not used at all, rendering investments much less effective.

Building inclusive school communities

Recommendation 17

That the Ministry of Education terminate the consideration of a prevalence-based model for special education funding and align special education funding with identified special education needs.

Recommendation 18

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

Recommendation 19

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 has long committed to an inclusive education system, in which students with special needs have “equitable access to learning opportunities for achievement, and the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of their educational programs.”³³ However, this commitment has yet to be matched with funding.

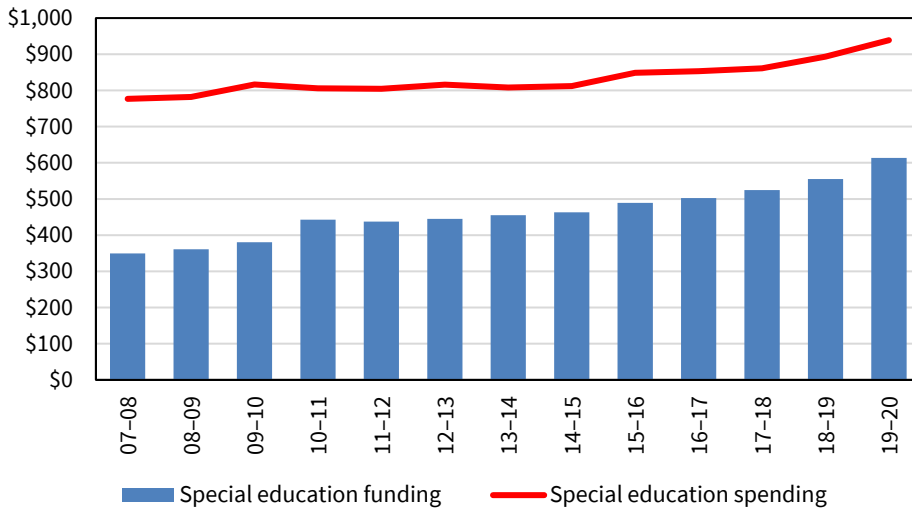
In the 2019–20 school year, BC’s school districts received only 65% of what they ended up spending province-wide on special education from supplemental special education grants from the province.³⁴ This mismatch between what the Ministry believes districts

³³ www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/special-education?keyword=inclusive&keyword=education.

³⁴ Ministry of Education. Operating Grants Tables (2019-2020); Ministry of Education. BC School District Revenue and Expenditure Tables (2019-2020).

need for special education and districts' actual needs has been a chronic problem for BC education (see **Figure 9** below).³⁵

Figure 9: Special education spending vs funding by school year, inflation-adjusted millions of dollars



This regular funding shortfall has created pressures to ration special education services and redirect funds from other areas with their own pressing needs. Any introduction of a prevalence-based model for distributing special education funding would only further cement the austerity and cost control pressures that currently exist, while misdiagnosing local conditions and true needs. Consideration of such a prevalence-based model should be fully abandoned and the Ministry should instead move toward a funding model which can accommodate the actual needs that are present within our education system. This suggestion echoes recommendations included in the previous final report from this Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services to the provincial Legislature: “the need for increased funding for resources and supports for students with special needs as well as funding to support early identification and

³⁵ Ministry of Education. Operating Grants Tables (2008-2020); Ministry of Education. BC School District Revenue and Expenditure Tables (2008-2020).

intervention, the provision of appropriate support programs, and the training and recruitment of education assistants.”³⁶

Moving toward a needs-based special education funding model requires accurate and timely identification of needs—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 require as early as possible—identification should take place in the K–1 years. However, in a recent BCTF survey of Kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers, 71% of respondents found the current process of identifying and assessing students with diverse learning, physical, and behavioural needs to be “inadequate” or “very inadequate.”³⁷ We cannot let another generation of students leave the system having never received sufficient support and inclusion. Early, well-resourced identification and assessment is key to making this a reality. Existing wait times for special needs assessments are a signal that student needs are currently going unidentified and unmet. These long wait times are an outcome of chronic underfunding—not a symptom of administrative inefficiency as is sometimes suggested. Without dedicated new funding, wait lists will continue to get longer and more families will be forced to fend for themselves, a prospect difficult enough in “normal” times, made even more challenging for families that may have been disproportionately affected by the uneven impacts of the pandemic. While most directly affecting students with special needs and their families, a lack of identification impacts the education system when classes are too large for existing—but not-yet-identified—student needs. Inequity impacts everyone.

Once student needs are identified, districts require funding adequate to meet them. Today, school districts receive supplemental funding only to cover the additional needs

³⁶ Report of the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services (2021). Retrieved from www.leg.bc.ca/content/CommitteeDocuments/41st-parliament/5th-session/fgs/Reports/Budget%202021%20Consultation%20Report_Volume%20I.pdf.

³⁷ BCTF Research (2018). *Full Day Kindergarten Working and Learning Conditions Survey*. Retrieved from web.archive.org/web/20210625051659/https://www.bctf.ca/frontline/.

of students with so-called “low incidence” designations. However, about half of students with an identified need are designated with a “high incidence” designation, which is accompanied with no additional funding. This has created a situation where districts only receive about \$6 in supplemental special education funding for every \$9 they actually spend on special education services.³⁸ Providing additional per-student funding amounts for students with “high incidence” designations would go far in reversing this trend and finally recognizing that students with these particular needs are no less important or worthy of funded support. Moving toward an educational funding model that is more responsive to the actual identified needs of British Columbia’s students is necessary and overdue.

³⁸ Ministry of Education. Operating Grants Tables (2019–2020); Ministry of Education. BC School District Revenue and Expenditure Tables (2019–2020).

Supporting adult education for a more resilient society

Recommendation 20

That the Ministry of Education increase the number of funded courses in adult education to reflect a broad range of educational needs and interests and improve employment opportunities for individuals.

Recommendation 21

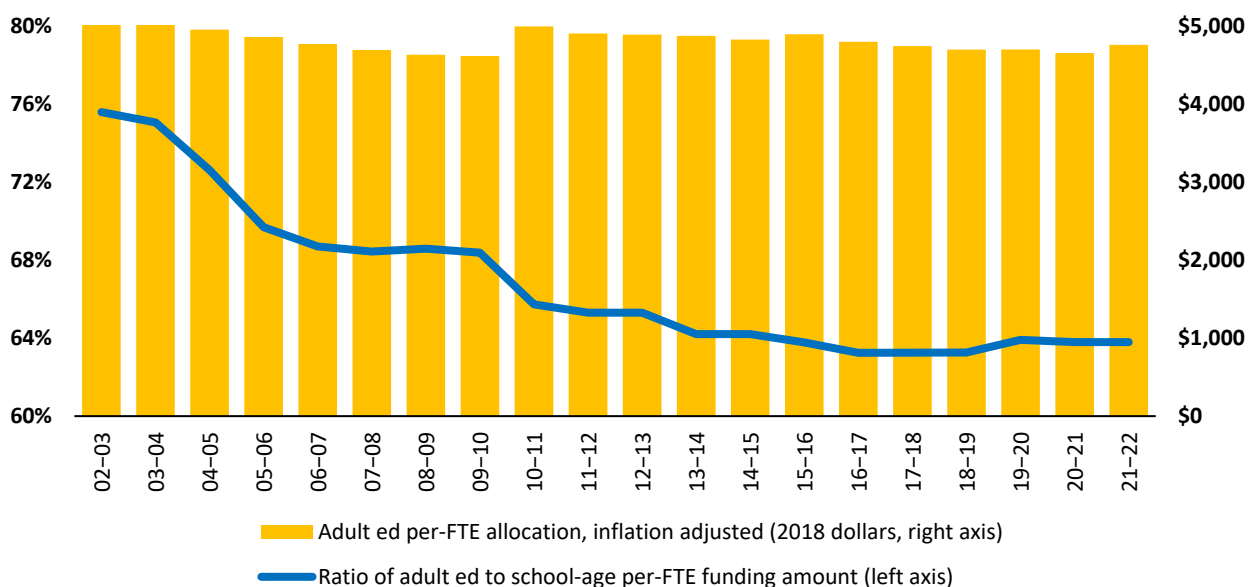
That the Ministry of Education fund adult students on an equivalent basis to school-age students.

Adult education and retraining are powerful recession-fighting tools and workers made jobless often take up education as a way of dealing with a recession. In this context, improvements to adult education in BC's public education system should be a top priority. Elimination of tuition fees for adult learners in 2017 was 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. 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 the full spectrum of such needs. Currently, only courses in English, French, communications, math, and sciences are offered tuition-free to graduated adult students.³⁹ Students who wish to increase their grades or proficiency in courses in other courses still have to pay tuition. Adult education should open opportunities for upgrading, retraining, and lifelong learning in multiple subjects for all.

³⁹ www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/adult-education/adult-upgrading/already-graduated.

These enhancements in turn require that funding be commensurate to that in school-age programming. Funding from the Ministry of Education should ensure that school districts have the resources to provide 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 was set at \$7,885 for the 2020–21 school year, it was just \$5,030 for an adult student—a gap of 36%.⁴⁰ Not only is the funding amount for adult students over a third lower than the base amount for their school-age peers, but it has also consistently declined relative to inflation over the long term.

Figure 10: Adult education funding by school year, per-FTE allocation dollar amount and comparison with regular student per-FTE funding



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

⁴⁰ BCTF calculations using Ministry of Education, Operating Grant Tables (2002–2021).

Resisting the privatization of public education

Recommendation 22

That the government prioritize funding for public schools and immediately reduce—and eventually eliminate—public subsidies of elite private schools.

Recommendation 23

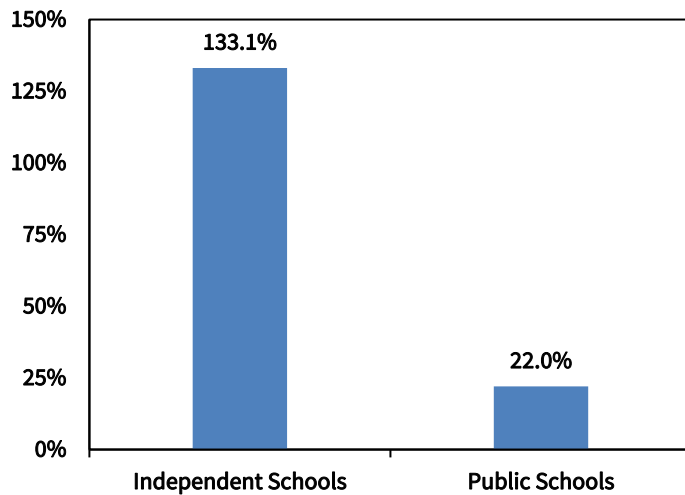
That the Ministry of Education fund any continuing school district shortfalls in international student tuition revenue for the coming year, and commit to reforming the international student program for an equitable distribution of students and tuition revenues among districts.

Public education serves as the foundation of democratic equality and the primary catalyst for social mobility in our society. Equality of opportunity in British Columbia can only be as strong as our public education system, and it is the duty of government to protect and support this social equalizer.

Equality of opportunity is undermined by providing public funding to private schools. In 1977, British Columbia became one of five provinces that elected to subsidize private education (“independent schools”) with public funding. Since then, the stream of funding increases to independent schools has routinely outstripped the resources afforded to public schools. In the last two decades, the education funding growth for independent schools in BC has been six times greater than that of public schools (see **Figure 11** below).⁴¹

⁴¹ Ministry of Education, Service Plan (2000-2020).

Figure 11: Inflation-adjusted education funding growth from 2000–01 to 2019–20, public vs independent schools



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, elite private schools. Elite private schools, in addition to receiving ever increasing funding growth, 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.⁴² Taken together, the disproportionate increases in funding and robust tax breaks for private schools signals a weakening in government commitment to a democratic education system and a worrying trend of locking more and more public dollars each year into an educational vehicle that is only accessible to the wealthiest of British Columbia.

Public resources currently spent on funding private education should be redirected to public education, which has seen chronic underfunding for almost two decades. 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

⁴² Hemingway, A. (2018). Elite private schools rake in public funds while special needs students go without. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Retrieved from www.policynote.ca/elite-private-schools-rake-in-public-funds-while-special-needs-students-go-without/

recent public opinion survey, 78% of British Columbians opposed public funding for elite private schools and 69% opposed public funding for religious private schools.⁴³ Moving forward, the government must commit to the democratic purpose of education by prioritizing public funding for public education and immediately reducing—and eventually eliminating—the public subsidies padding the profit margins of elite private schools.

Another form of privatization is the over-reliance of some school districts on international student tuition. Funding reform during the 2000s pushed districts, primarily those in urban areas better able to attract international students, to become overly reliant on international student tuition to fund operating expenses. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2020–21 school year saw large losses in district revenues from lower enrolment numbers for international students. This year, trustees in many districts are once again considering budget cuts as they anticipate international student numbers—and tuition revenues—to remain depressed. Students in these districts should not be facing further program cuts because of temporary dramatic shifts in international travel due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Instead, the provincial government should cover district shortfalls in international student tuition revenue for the coming year and use this moment as an opportunity to create a provincial international student program that overcomes the current system of competition and inequity between districts. In the 2019–20 school year, almost half (47.2%) of the total revenue from international and out of province students went to only five school districts (Coquitlam, Vancouver, Burnaby, Richmond, and Surrey).⁴⁴ In addition, by adding on the next five highest revenue districts (Greater Victoria, Langley, Delta, North Vancouver, and West Vancouver), we can see that the top 10 school

⁴³ Insights West. *Majority of British Columbians Do Not Support Public Funding for Private Schools*. Retrieved from www.insightswest.com/news/bc-public-funding-for-private-schools/.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Education, BC School District Revenue and Expenditure Tables (2020).

districts accounted for 71.4% of the total international and out of province tuition revenues.

International students bring much to the diversity of our public education system, so their presence should not be an object of financial competition. We need a provincial program that distributes international tuition revenues equitably across the province and ensures that all districts have the opportunity to host international students, providing equity of access to diverse cultures as part of the educational experience for both BC and out-of-country students. A new provincial program would also be resilient to future shocks, whether another wave of COVID-19, some other pandemic, or an economic crisis.

Investing in schools and communities

Recommendation 24

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

Recommendation 25

That the provincial government accelerate its planned investment in a universal, \$10-a-day childcare system in BC, which should include a build-out of public childcare facilities and the provision of before- and after-school care.

Recommendation 26

That the Ministry of Education provide grants to school districts for school meal programs.

Recommendation 27

That the provincial government move rapidly toward a universal, public, \$10-per-month broadband service.

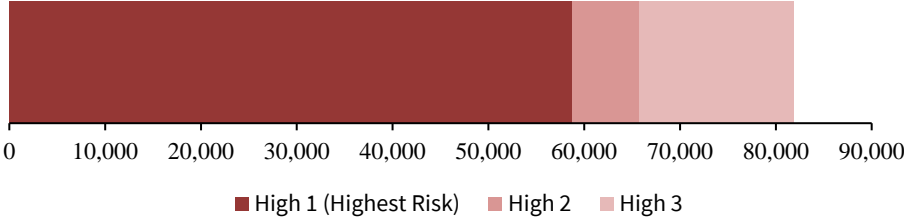
Public investment has been critical to navigating the intertwined public health and economic crises brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Effective and timely interventions at the federal and provincial levels have demonstrated how government can—and must—take swift action to address the many challenges that market solutions and private investment are ill-equipped to handle. The post-pandemic recovery will be an era of large public projects, several of which could substantially and directly benefit BC's children and youth.

Most directly, the government should urgently invest to upgrade all seismically vulnerable schools by the existing 2025 deadline and replace portables with permanent

structures. Many of these are shovel-ready projects that will not only keep students and teachers safe but create good jobs and generate local economic activity. 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. In 2015, the completion deadline was extended to 2025, and to 2030 for Vancouver. Despite these delayed timelines looming ever closer, the completion of upgrades has slowed down considerably since September 2018. Over the last five years, a total of 46 seismic upgrade projects have been completed (32 successful projects and 14 deemed inadequate based on updated scientific evidence). However, an additional 155 school projects have been added to the list for needed seismic upgrades over the same period, meaning that necessary new projects are emerging at a much higher rate than the backlog is being addressed (3.37 new projects per 1 project completion since 2016). If the effort to upgrade BC's schools for seismic safety continues at the same sluggish pace of the last three years, it will take until 2060 for the last project to complete—and this estimate ignores the additional schools that will be identified as in need of upgrades over the years to come. Today, there are 81,848 students occupying schools with one of the three highest seismic risk ratings.⁴⁵ This means that about 14.4% of all BC public school students attended a school last year that is at significant seismic risk, and about two thirds of these students (10.3% of all students) fell under the highest risk category (see **Figure 12** below).

⁴⁵ BCTF calculations based on Ministry of Education data: Ministry of Education, Seismic Mitigation Program Progress Report (2009–2021); Ministry of Education, BC Seismic Retrofit Program Seismic Risk by Block (2020). NOTE: Estimates of the total number of students in high risk schools is likely to be slightly underestimated (due to several programs masking or not reporting student headcount data).

Figure 12: Number of students in each of the highest risk categories of schools not worked on



To protect the lives of students, teachers, and all other public education workers, and to help jump-start local economies still wrestling with the employment impacts of COVID-19, the government must keep its promise to accelerate the seismic upgrade program and make BC schools safer.

Several other key areas that demand new public investment are worth highlighting in the context of education: childcare, school meals, and broadband. In 2018, the BC government embarked on a historic path toward a universal, province-wide, \$10-a-day childcare system, slated to take a decade. Existing inequities and lack of access to affordable childcare has severely impacted BC’s families for many years—even more acutely during the pandemic. The new agreement reached between the province and the federal government announced in July 2021 represents an important next step toward the creation of an affordable childcare system in BC—and Canada more generally. This progress should be accelerated as much as possible, by rapidly increasing the number of \$10-a-day childcare spaces via a mix of transitioning existing licensed spaces and building new public childcare facilities, paying special attention to sites where before- and after-school care can be easily provided to school-aged children. Besides being a vital investment in the province’s social and economic infrastructure, \$10-a-day childcare is a form of income support to the households hit hardest by the current economic crisis, especially as furloughed workers return to work. Unemployment and underemployment in this crisis has disproportionately affected women, partly due to the type of jobs being shed—sectors like food services, accommodations, and retail—and partly due to the fact that women are more likely to stay home with children when

schools close and childcare is not available. A rapid expansion of childcare will allow women to return to the workforce more quickly and help ensure that this crisis does not further accentuate existing inequalities. Finally, over the long term, universal, \$10-a-day childcare can be largely self-financing as more women are able to participate in the labour market, generating higher growth and tax revenues.⁴⁶ Considering that the population of BC teachers is still predominantly composed of women, childcare initiatives can be expected to contribute to teacher recruitment and retention efforts to address the current teacher shortage.

Food insecurity is also an enduring issue. The most recent household food security dataset published by Statistics Canada (2017–18 figures) revealed that less than 70% of single-parent families in BC were food secure (68% for female single-parent; 69% for male single-parent).⁴⁷ Food security was higher for families with more than one parent (89%), but still fell considerably short of the ideal. It is bad enough that children in one of the wealthiest societies in the history of the world go with unmet basic needs, but we also know that food insecurity is linked to challenges in childhood development, further compounding this inequity.

Given both existing levels of food insecurity and the emerging risks of even greater challenges in access to food due to the COVID-19 economic recession's disproportionate impact on our province's most vulnerable families, it is time for British Columbia to rapidly explore the provision of universal school meals to all children. The province should create new targeted grants for breakfast and lunch programs serving healthy, nutritious, and culturally relevant food for all school districts. The aim should be to create a universal program that reduces stigma and ensures all children across the

⁴⁶ Ivanova, I. (2015). *Solving BC's Affordability Crisis in Child Care*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. Retrieved from www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/BC%20Office/2015/07/ccpa-bc-solving-childcare-full.pdf.

⁴⁷ Statistics Canada (2020). Household food security by living arrangement. Retrieved from www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310038501.

province at least two nutritious meals per day and creates new food service jobs for British Columbians—another sector dramatically impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Universal broadband is another major public investment that is urgently needed. As mentioned previously, the COVID-19 pandemic has exposed many existing inequities and access to broadband internet is one of them. Inequity of access was felt more acutely as online and distance learning options were expanded as a COVID-19 response. Broadband is already a basic requirement of modern life, and is increasingly necessary for full participation in employment, social life, and citizenship.

The geographic size of British Columbia means that there are few incentives for private companies to expand service into rural and remote areas, leaving them with no or very expensive options. There are therefore reasons of both equity and efficiency to turn broadband into a public utility, a public investment into the 21st century infrastructure required for a modern society and economy moving forward. British Columbia needs a single public broadband provider offering \$10 per month service for all, operating on the basis of solidarity and cross-subsidization. This would facilitate building online communities while under pandemic conditions and enable a resilient, high-tech economy more prepared for future crises.

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