

BC Education Coalition: Education Facts - Reality Check

Updated: August 2010

The provincial government continues to dismiss growing public concern about cuts, closures and chronic underfunding of BC's public schools, claiming that education budgets have increased despite declining enrolment. While strictly true, this claim is highly misleading:

- Inflation has outpaced funding increases since 2001. Core education costs, such as teachers' salaries, have risen faster than inflation. Funding has *decreased* in real dollars.
- New demands (carbon offset fees, new reporting requirements, class-size limits and full-day kindergarten) have also increased the costs of providing public education.
- Public school enrolment losses have been relatively small (8% overall since 2001, or less than 1% change per year). Such gradual, widely-dispersed losses don't automatically generate savings (e.g. a 1% enrolment loss for a typical elementary school is 2 – 3 students, so average costs per student rise while funding is reduced based on enrolment).
- A growing proportion of provincial education spending has been going to private schools
- In inflation-adjusted dollars, BC's 2010/11 operating budget for K-12 [Education is \\$500 million less](#) than the 2000/01 Education budget

The reality is BC's public schools face the daunting task of trying to do more with less. Public education funding has also lagged economic growth in British Columbia. We spend significantly less of provincial GDP on public education vs. a decade ago. **So we *can* afford to do better.**

EDUCATION SPENDING: BC vs. rest of CANADA

- In 1991, 26% of the BC budget went to education. [That proportion](#) has shrunk to 15% today.
- Relative to provincial GDP, BC's Education spending has declined 14% since 2001.
- In 2006/07 (latest [StatsCan data](#)), BC spent a smaller share of provincial GDP on public education than every other province and territory except Alberta and Newfoundland.
- Despite roughly similar costs, [Education funding](#) in Ontario averages \$10,730 per student for 2010 (a 4.5 % increase) compared to BC's funding of \$8,301 per student.

TEACHING RESOURCES PER STUDENT

- In 2006/07 (most recent StatsCan data), BC's classrooms had [more students per educator](#) on average than every other province except Alberta.
- BC's average class sizes have remained virtually unchanged (or slightly larger) since the passage of BC's Class Size and Composition Act (Bill 33) in 2006.

CAPITAL SPENDING:

- In 2004, Premier Campbell announced a \$1.5 billion capital program to speed up [seismic upgrading of BC's schools](#). Target completion date for repairing over 800 schools on the [original list](#) of those requiring seismic upgrades was 2019.
 - But 5 years into this 15-year program, BC has yet to upgrade 90% of the sub-standard schools. In 2008, BC's [Auditor General](#) criticized the slow pace of the program.

BC Education Coalition: Education Facts - Reality Check

- That year (2008/09), BC's total capital spending for schools (new schools and seismic) was \$140 million, or 38% **less** than in 2004, before the seismic program was launched.
- The 2009 capital budget was \$157 million. In contrast, it cost over \$50 million to seismically upgrade one Vancouver high school (Van Tech).
- Recent school capital budgets are down 70% from average capital budgets [in the 1990s](#).

OPERATING BUDGETS:

- Increase since 2001-02 in public school [operating funding](#): 20%
- Increase since 2001-02 in [teachers' salaries](#) (largest component of education costs): 27%
- Net decline since 2001-02 in [public school enrolment](#): 8%
- Net loss since 2001-02 of [public school teachers](#): 9%
- Net loss since 2001-02 of [public schools](#): 10%

Resources have declined more than enrolment, despite new demands on public schools

DISTRICT CASE STUDY: VANCOUVER SPECIAL EDUCATION:

Data gathered on special education funding vs. expenditures by [district parents shows](#):

- 2008-09 Provincial Special Education funding grants: **\$32.7 million**
- 2008-09 District expenditures on Special Education: **\$60.9 million**
- Annual shortfall in provincial funding of Special Ed costs for Vancouver: **~\$28 million**

[Results of this chronic shortfall](#) in the wider context of a growing gap between costs & funding:

- Between 2001 and 2010, Vancouver has been forced to **reduce** the number of special education teachers by 24% despite a 35% **increase** in students with special needs.
- Unacceptable caseloads have made it very difficult to find qualified staff willing to fill these roles. Many special education teachers now lack training appropriate to their roles.

ENROLMENT TRENDS in PERSPECTIVE:

- [Public school enrolment in BC](#) is currently higher than it has been in 28 of the last 40 years.
- Public school enrolment has been **increasing** again [since 2008/09](#) and is expected to **increase** again by at least [2,300 students in September 2010](#)
- Enrolment was up in 22 districts in 2009/10 and is [projected to rise again](#) in 27 of BC's 60 districts in 2010/11.
- [Education Ministry projections](#) show K-12 enrolment is expected to grow overall in the coming decade and to keep climbing after that.
 - By 2025, BC is expected to surpass the peak numbers of the late 1990s and to keep climbing rapidly, with enrolment surpassing the 800,000 mark shortly after that.

BC Education Coalition: Education Facts - Reality Check

SCHOOL CLOSURES:

- Between 2000/01 and 2009/10, The Education Ministry reports that BC has seen a [net loss of 148 schools](#). BCTF calculations place the net loss to 2008/09 at 176 schools.
- Current public school enrolment equal to 1993, but we have 42 fewer schools than in 1993.
- Independent school enrolment has declined slightly, following rapid increases in previous years, and several independent schools have also closed in the last couple years.

ACCOUNTABILITY

- [Foundation Skills Assessments](#), along with 6-year school completion (graduation) rates, are the two key indicators used in BC to assess system performance & broad achievement trends.
 - Eroding participation in the FSAs due to concerns about misuse of FSA data is eroding the usefulness of this instrument to track system performance.
 - A new Ministry reporting format since 2008 further limits the usefulness of FSA data.
 - Ministry reports no longer permit comparisons to previous years to see where outcomes are improving or declining.
 - The Ministry now counts all non-participating students as “fails,” which has distorted average outcomes.
 - In 2002, the [Ministry stopped tracking grad rates](#) – the only measure tracking outcomes among 17,000 students with special needs who are the intended targets of provincial grants totaling \$290 million (i.e. 92% of the provincial Special Education budget).

OUTCOMES:

- BC’s public school students continue to excel, on average, in international assessments for most key subjects.
 - BC’s students were among the top performers internationally in the most recent (2006) Progress in International Reading Literacy Study.
 - BC students exceeded both Canadian and international outcomes for science proficiency in the most recent (2006) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) report.
- But [BC graduation and FSA rates](#) tell two very different stories about how different groups of students are faring in BC’s public schools. Some groups are still doing very well. Others are being left behind as a result of growing funding pressures and erosion of educational supports for at-risk students.

1) ESL students:

- 6-year completion rate for ESL kids remains consistently higher than average

2) French Immersion students:

- 6-year completion rates much higher than average – 100% in several districts.

3) Gifted students:

- School-completion rates remain unchanged at 100%.

BC Education Coalition: Education Facts - Reality Check

4) Special needs (excluding Gifted):

- Graduation rates for most low-incidence students with special needs no longer monitored
- For the rest, grad rates for most districts have declined in recent years, some by double digits.

5) Aboriginal students:

- 6-year grad rates remain way below average overall
 - For Saanich, Vancouver and Stikine, 6-year Aboriginal grad rates are all 26% or lower; followed by Burnaby and Greater Victoria both at less than 33%.
 - Several districts that had relatively high Aboriginal grad rates (Kootenay Columbia, SE Kootenay, Rocky Mountain, Kootenay Lake and Boundary) have all slipped.

6. Kids, Crime and Care:

- The independent Representative for Children & Youth [reported in 2009](#) on disturbing links between children in care, special needs, drop-out rates and youth crime.
 - The graduation rate for youth involved in the justice system is just 13%
 - Some 87% of children in care who were involved in the youth justice system were identified with special needs within the school system

7) **Gender gaps:** vary significantly from district to district and sometimes from year to year.
Some patterns:

- Smaller gender gap in independent schools and in some districts (e.g. Greater Victoria, Saanich, Gulf Islands, West Van)
- Huge gender gaps in some rural districts

Join us for more information and discussion about public education issues, including funding, local impacts, school closures, advocacy and school reform:

Web: <http://stopeducationcuts.org>

Facebook: [Stop BC Education Cuts](#)

Twitter: stopK12cuts

Email: bcpublieducation@gmail.com

August 2010 – BC Education Coalition