

BC Education Coalition Reality Check: BC Government's "Education Facts"

Issue #1: Capital investment in K-12 Education – enrolment, closures & seismic

The BC government's new Education Fact Sheets provide inaccurate or misleading information. This "Reality Check," based mostly on Ministry data, debunks the following BC government "FACTS" about capital investment in K-12, from the April 2010 document "[The Facts on BC schools since 2001](#)."

"FACT: As a result of declining enrolment, boards of education began closing schools in the mid-1990s."

REALITY CHECK: Total public school enrolment grew every year through the 1990s until 1998/99. Between 2000/01 and 2008/09, enrolment dropped by 8%, but it rose again in 2009/10 and is expected to rise again in 2010/11. (SOURCE: BC Education Ministry: [Here](#) and [here](#))

The total number of public schools in BC continued increasing to a peak of 1,800 in 1999/2000 before dropping to 1,631 in 2009/10. The net number of school closures since 2001 is hard to confirm: Ministry stats keep shifting and some are clearly wrong. For example, Ministry stats suggest that the number of secondary schools in Burnaby has doubled since 2005/06 ([from 10 to 19](#)), when in fact Burnaby (SD 41) only has 8 secondary schools. The Ministry's [2001/02 Summary of Key Information](#) reported a total of 1,796 public schools in 2000/01. But recent versions of this report revise the 2000/01 tally down to 1,779 (17 fewer). The BCTF's [database of school closures](#) indicates that BC lost 176 public schools between 2001/02 and 2008/09 (about 10% of all schools) which exceeds the overall 8% decline in enrolment during that period.

A significant number of schools are expected to close province-wide in 2010-11 due to funding pressures, despite projected **increases** in enrolment for 2010/11 and beyond.

"FACT: Declining enrolment continues today and is expected to slow over the next three years, and begin increasing again in 2013. School districts have reported 541,917 full-time equivalent public school students for the 2009-10 school year – a decline of 3,350 students from 2008-09."

REALITY CHECK: Public school enrolment **increased** from 2008/09 to 2009/10 by 998 students and is projected by the Education Ministry to **increase again** by another 2,306 students from 2009/10 to 2010/11. (BC MoE reports [here](#) and [here](#))

"FACT: Since 2000-01, enrolment has declined by more than 56,000 students across British Columbia."

REALITY CHECK: Enrolment actually declined by 52,019 students between 2000/01 and 2009/10, as per above Ministry reports. Since the BC Liberal government took office in 2001, enrolment has declined by 49,563 FTE (50,934 headcount), which represents an average change of less than 1% per year, or 8% overall.

"FACT: This is the 12th consecutive year that student enrolment has decreased in B.C., with only 16 school districts reporting more students in 2009-10."

REALITY CHECK: Enrolment is no longer declining – it has been increasing since 2008-09. In 2009-10, 22 of BC's 60 public school districts saw increased enrolment. The Ministry projects a net increase of over 2,300 (FTE) students province-wide this September, with 27 districts projecting increased enrolment. (MoE reports: [Here](#) and [here](#)).

"FACT: The government has committed more than \$83 million to maximize community use in underutilized school space through Neighbourhood Learning Centres, School Community Connections program and StrongStart BC early learning centres."

REALITY CHECK: How much was actually spent? Funding for programs like Neighbourhoods of Learning comes from K-12 capital budgets, which are down significantly (see below).

"FACT: The Province continues to renovate, replace, and build schools where there is need. Since 2001, the Province has committed more than \$3.8 billion in school capital and maintenance projects across B.C. This

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includes spending more than \$1.7 billion to complete 80 new and replacement schools, 148 additions, 26 renovations, and 22 site acquisitions."

REALITY CHECK: From 2001/02 to 2009/10, total capital funding invested in new schools, seismic and other capital programs totalled \$1.7 billion. During the preceding decade (1991/92 to 2000/01), Education Ministry capital budgets totalled \$4.3 billion. Average capital spending for K-12 Education since 2001 has significantly lagged capital spending in the 1990s.

"FACT: All new and replacement schools have been constructed to meet the latest seismic standards."

REALITY CHECK: New Ministry space guidelines dictate that new and replacement schools are much smaller, and no longer include additional space to accommodate music and art rooms, pull-out space for learning support and special education activities or space for afterschool care.

"FACT: In 2005, the Province announced a \$1.5 billion, 15-year program to seismically upgrade B.C. schools and we remain committed to that program. To date, 119 schools are complete, under construction or approved to proceed to construction: 80 school seismic upgrades have been completed, 16 more are under construction and another 23 schools have received approval to proceed to construction."

REALITY CHECK: With 9 years remaining, 90% of the [800+ schools identified in 2004](#) as requiring seismic upgrades remain untouched. To simulate progress, the ministry expedited low-priority schools requiring the least work, moving them to the top of the queue, so most big, costly school seismic projects remain untouched. In 2008, BC's [Auditor General](#) criticized the slow pace of the program.

BC's 2008/09 capital budget for schools was \$140 million, or 38% **less** than in 2004, before the seismic program was initiated. 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](#).

K-12 Education capital spending: seismic upgrades & new schools (Source: [BC MoE](#))

Year	Budget (millions)
01-02	240.6
2002-03	143.6
2003-04	205.4
2004-05	224.4
2005-06	202.3
2006-07	206.3
2007-08	216.7
2008-09	139.4
2009-10	156.9
Totals	\$1.736 Billion

CONCLUSION: The BC government's "Education Facts" are inaccurate and/or designed to mislead. Find more Reality Checks documenting the growing crisis stemming from the BC government's eroding financial commitment to K-12 Public Education on our Website: <http://stopeducationcuts.org>

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