



British Columbia Teachers' Federation

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A Union of Professionals

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EDUCATION FUNDING

A Brief to the

Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

from the

British Columbia Teachers' Federation

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President

Executive Director



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Education Funding Brief 2013

BC Teachers' Federation

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Teachers and the BC government share a common interest in a quality education system that serves both our students and society. Even with that common interest, we often don't agree on what resources are required to achieve and maintain quality education.

In this brief we intend to provide the teachers' case for resources that are needed for us to fulfill the mandate that society gives us to have a high-quality public education system that serves both our students and society. It is our hope that this committee will find our case persuasive and will recommend to government that more resources be put into public education.

How much is enough?

We recognize that many social priorities require more funding—but education is one priority that affects, directly or indirectly, every citizen. How should we decide how much is required for education? We suggest there are two key ways to do this.

One approach is to look at the mandate given to the schools by the government. What would it cost to do well the many different things that are expected from the schools? We know, and we hope you understand as well, that we are being asked to do more than current resources allow. We work with more students with special needs, without the specialist support that could make this more effective. Many of us take from our own pockets to provide food for students whose performance is limited by hunger. And we frequently have to purchase the consumable resources we need because limited budgets are expended early in the school year. Ongoing improvements in teaching practice are carried out without time provided to respond to changes in curriculum and technology.

In the longer term, we think the province should undertake a systemic look at the finance formula to link the mandate of the public schools with the funding provided to the schools. In theory, such an examination might lead to some of the expectations placed on schools being reduced to fit the underfunded mandate. However, as we all know, the expectations on schools and teachers keep increasing, not decreasing.

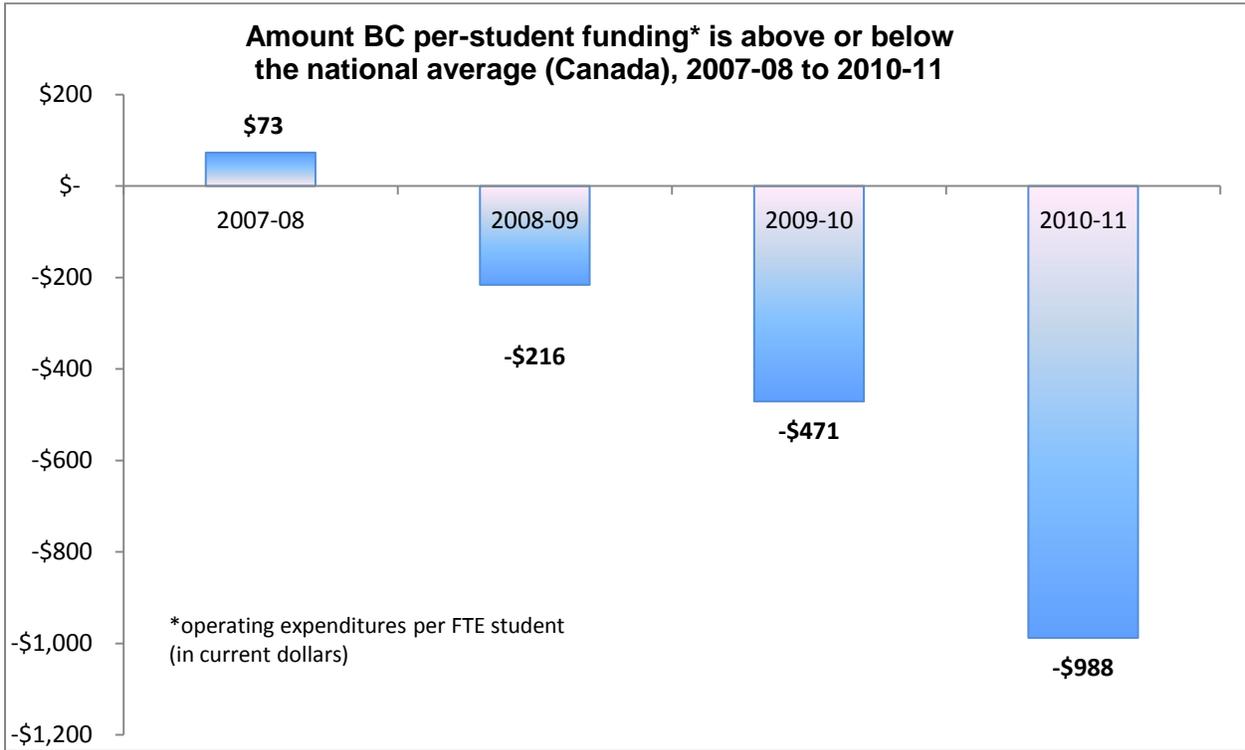
While the financing system should change in the long run to better match resources and expectations, we are here now to talk about the shorter term; what resources will be included in the next provincial budget for public education.

BC is getting further and further behind the rest of Canada in funding and in teaching conditions

One way of judging whether funding is adequate is to look at what is happening in other provinces. One of the principles of the Canadian political system is that citizens should have similar levels of public service in all provinces—that is the basis of the equalization formula that provides more resources to the have-less provinces.

So where does education in BC stand in comparison to the rest of Canada? Further and further behind, is the answer—about \$1,000 per student behind, according to the most-recent Statistics Canada data, as shown in Chart 1.

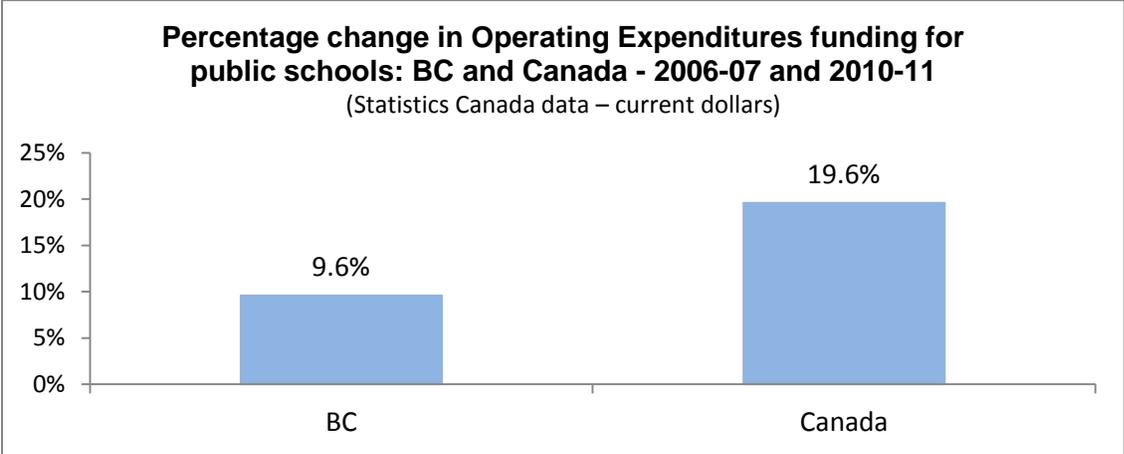
Chart 1



Source: BCTF calculations with data from Statistics Canada (2013), *Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories, 2006/2007 to 2010/2011*, Table 21, p. 25.

These Statistics Canada data show that BC has done considerably less than the rest of Canada to improve operating funding to school districts. Between 2006–07 and 2010–11, Operating Expenditures for elementary and secondary public schools in Canada as a whole increased by 19.6%, compared to only 9.6% in British Columbia.

Chart 2



Source: BCTF Research calculations with data from Statistics Canada (2013), *Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories, 2006/2007 to 2010/2011*, Table 16.

BC ranks lowest of all the provinces in terms of improvements to education funding. Our province ranked the lowest for seven key indicators used by Statistics Canada to measure public-school expenditures.

Table 1: Percentage change in funding for elementary and secondary schools between 2006–07 and 2010–11

Type of funding	Rank among provinces (out of 10)	Including territories (out of 13)
Operating expenditures (in current dollars)	10th	12th
Operating expenditures per student (in current dollars)	10th	13th
Total expenditures (in current dollars)	10th	12th
Total expenditures per student (in current dollars)	10th	12th
Total expenditures per student (in 2002 constant dollars)	10th	12th
Total expenditures per capita (in current dollars)	10th	12th
Total expenditures per capita (in 2002 constant dollars)	10th	12th

Source: BCTF Research table with information from Statistics Canada (2013), *Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories, 2006/2007 to 2010/2011*, charts 16.2, 21.2, 18.2, 19.1.2, 19.2.2 (and Table 19.2), 25.1.2, and 25.2.2 (and Table 25.2).

BC falls behind other provinces in student-educator ratio

Falling behind in funding has consequences for our students. “Student-educator ratio” has a clinical sound to it. However, in reality it is at the heart of the process of education, where the student and the teacher connect and the teacher can guide the developing person.

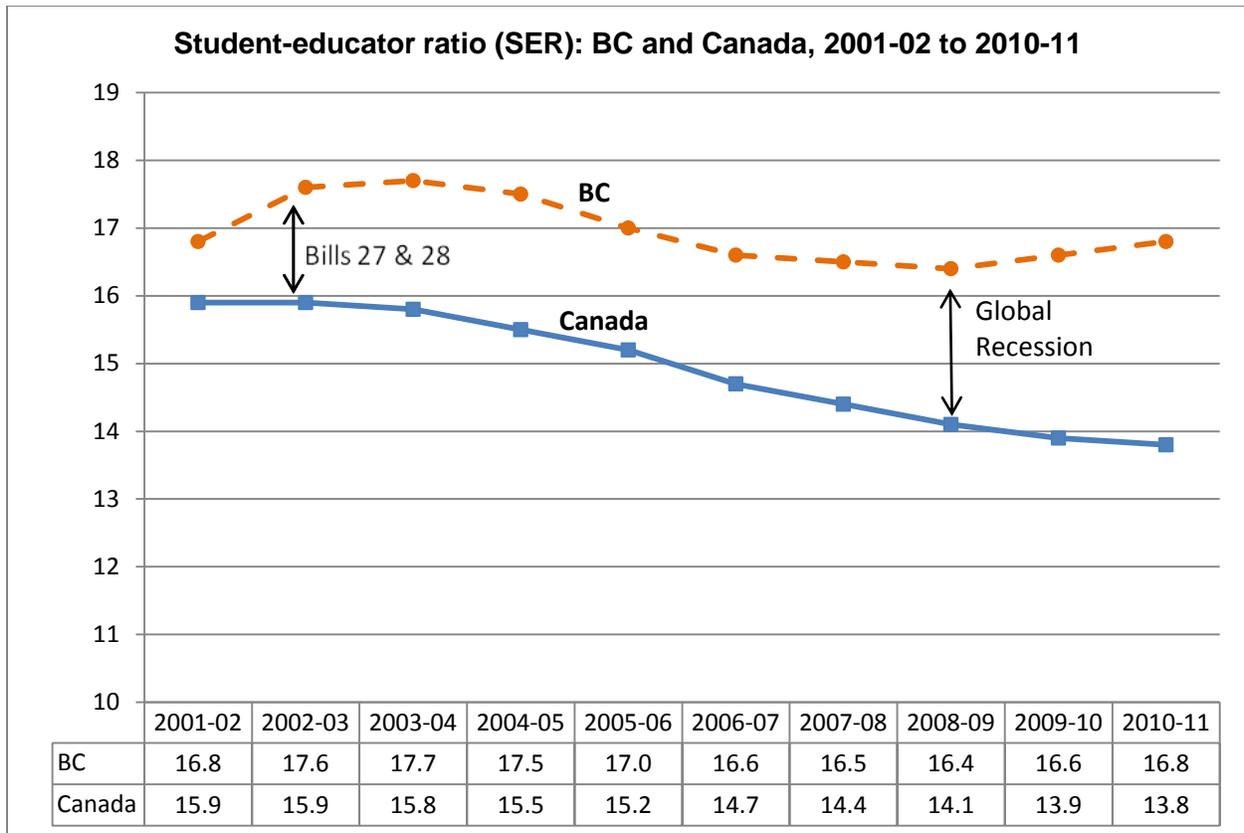
The BC government claims¹ that the student-educator² ratio (SER) has been stable over the decade. Yes, that is correct, but that is a problem, not something to boast about. Other provinces have improved what they are able to offer to students, while BC has not.

BC’s student-educator ratio of 16.8 students per educator (educator includes administrative staff) was the worst in Canada in 2010–11 (the most-recent year for which these statistics are available), considerably higher than the national average of 13.8 students per educator. The gap between the student-educator ratio in BC and in Canada widened even further after the global recession in 2008, as BC did less than other provinces to improve support for students.

¹ BC Ministry of Education. Education by the numbers, *Information Bulletin*, August 27, 2013, <http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2013/08/education-by-the-numbers-2.html>.

² The student-educator ratio includes teachers, administrators, and pedagogical support.

Chart 3



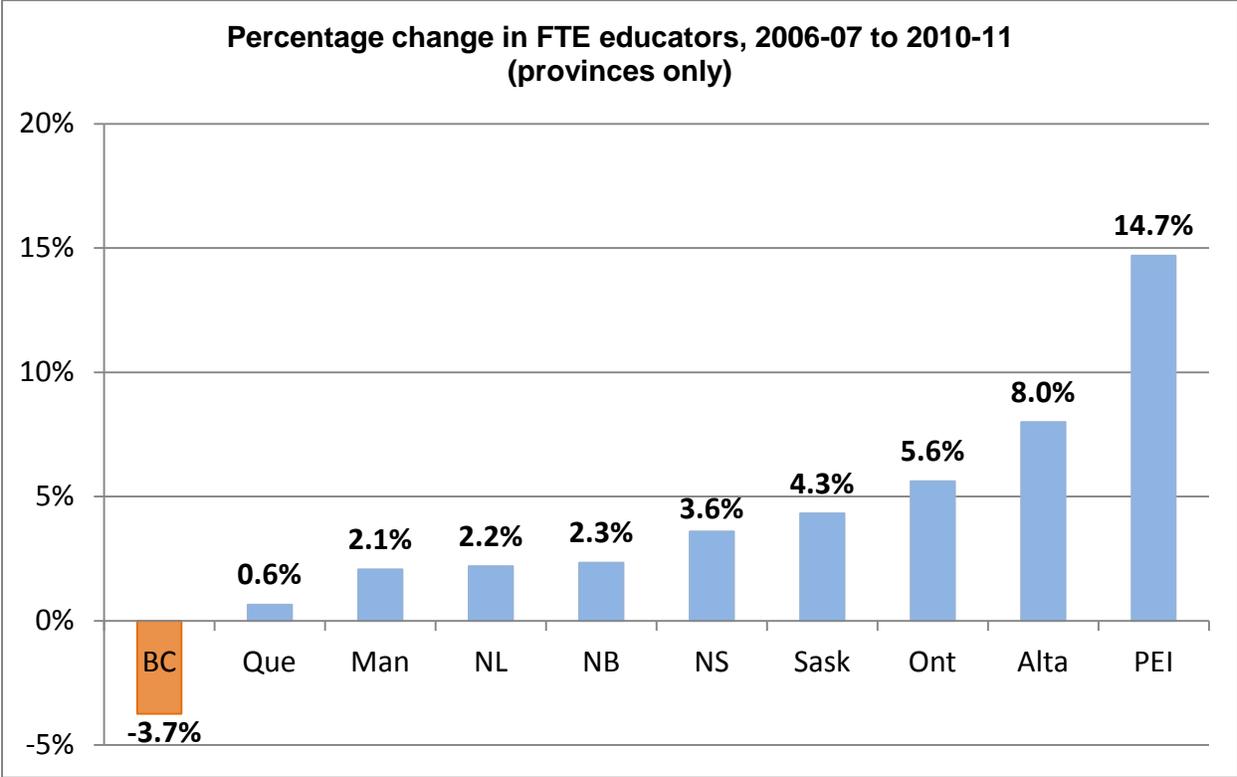
Sources: BCTF Research table: For 2001–02 to 2007–08 figures, see Statistics Canada (2010), *Summary Public School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories, 2001/2002 to 2007/2008*—Table A.14 (p. 34). For 2006–07 to 2010–11 figures, see Statistics Canada. (2013), *Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories, 2006/2007 to 2010/2011*, Table 13, p. 21 available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-595-m/81-595-m2013099-eng.pdf>.

Note: Statistics Canada revised the SER figure for 2009–10 for Canada from 14.0 to 13.9 in the 2013 report.

We often hear the premier or the education minister use declining enrolment to try to justify school closures and other education cuts. Yes, enrolment has declined in BC, as it has in all other provinces except Alberta and Saskatchewan³, but the difference is that all provinces except BC have hired more educators. Between 2006–07 and 2010–11:

- FTE educators increased in all provinces **except BC**.
- FTE educators *increased* by an average of 3.2% across Canada.
- FTE educators *decreased* by 3.7% in BC.

Chart 4



BCTF calculations with data from Statistics Canada (2013), *Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories 2006/2007 to 2010/2011*, Table 12.1, p. 20.

³ Source: Statistics Canada (2013), *Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories, 2006/2007 to 2010/2011*, Chart 2.2, p. 30. available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-595-m/81-595-m2013099-eng.pdf>.

Recommendation 1:

Increase funding in each of the next three years by enough to reach the Canadian average per-student funding or above by 2016.

Just getting to the Canadian average in expenditures doesn't seem like an outrageous goal. Surely we care enough about our children that we are prepared to improve to the average, rather than being last in improving financial support for their education.

If BC brought per-student funding up to the national average, this would provide an additional **\$543 million** in funding for BC public schools⁴, based on the most-recent Statistics Canada data⁵.

BC is the worst in Canada in resources—Does this make a difference?

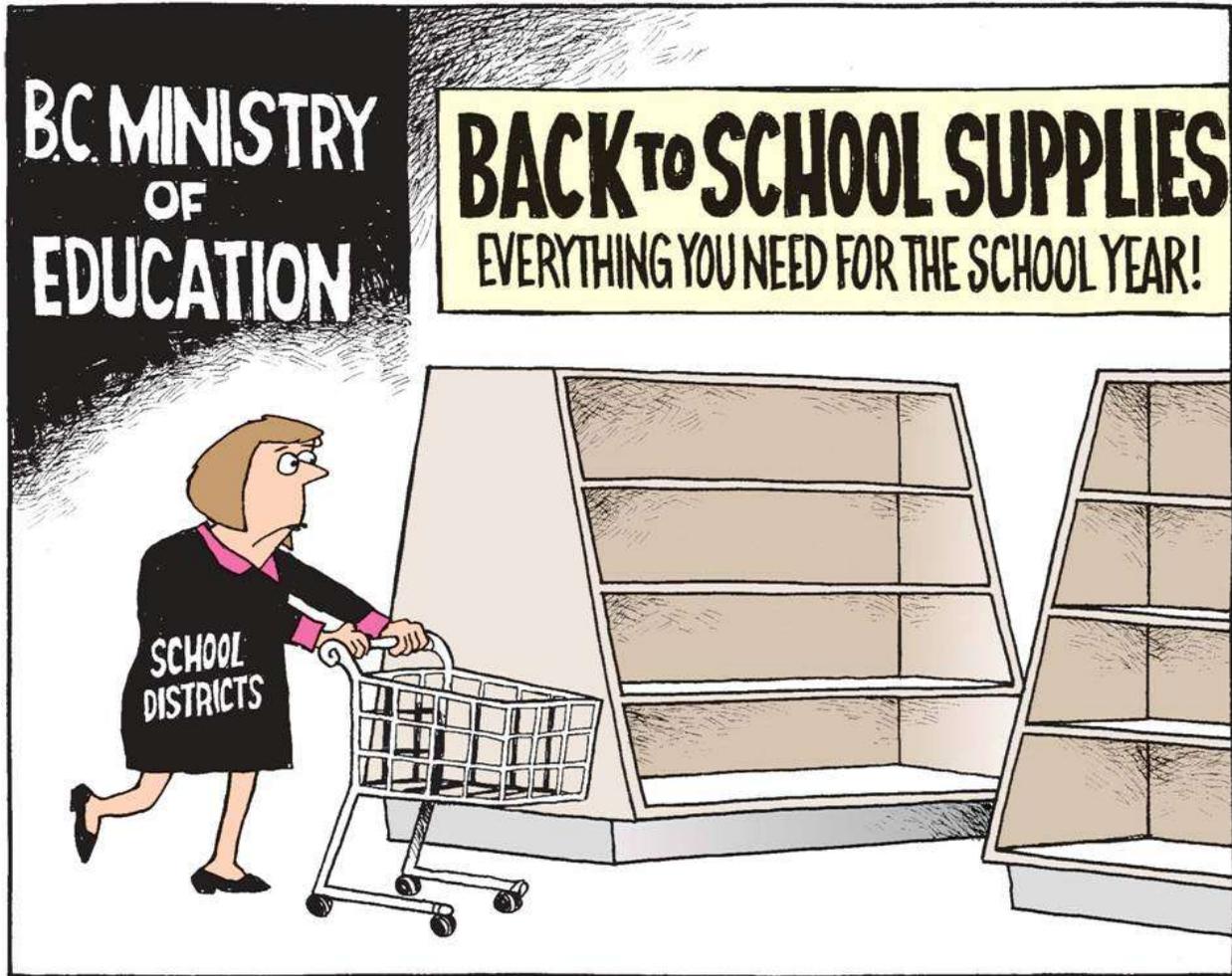
- **Teachers, of course, think it makes a difference in many ways.** Just focus on one factor—the support we need for the BC students living in poverty. BC has persistently high child poverty rates, with the latest figures showing child poverty worsening in BC⁶. In a recent BCTF survey about what we can do to provide educational support for children in poverty, teachers called on the province to make improvements to classroom conditions so teachers can address diverse learning needs (staffing ratios, class size) as well as provide more specialist teachers for students in need of extra learning support, early-intervention literacy programs, psychologists and counsellors to provide emotional support to students and families, and speech language pathologists to assess and support students.

⁴ This figure (\$543,437,544) was calculated by multiplying the difference between per-student funding for BC and average per-student funding for Canada for 2010–11 (\$988 per student) and multiplying by the number of FTE students in BC in 2010–11 (550,038 FTE).

⁵ BCTF calculations with data from: Statistics Canada (2013), *Summary Elementary and Secondary School Indicators for Canada, the Provinces and Territories, 2006/2007 to 2010/2011*, available at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-595-m/81-595-m2013099-eng.pdf>. 2010–11 FTE enrolment figures for BC (550,038): Table 2.1, p. 13.

⁶ BC's child poverty rate increased from 10.5% in 2010 to 11.3% in 2011, with 93,000 children living in poverty, according to the First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition news release on July 5, 2013, "Child poverty rate in British Columbia back to the worst, children of single moms hard hit."

- **School trustees** think underfunding is a problem. In response to the ministry budget announcement for the 2013–14 school year, Teresa Rezansoff of the BC School Trustees’ Association pointed out that freezing the budget to the level of the previous year meant “programs and choice for students will be sacrificed as school districts struggle to meet these cost pressures.”⁷
- **Even cartoonists** think school districts are underfunded.



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There is a public understanding that funding for education has left the cupboards bare.

⁷ https://dsweb.bcsta.org/docushare/dsweb/Get/Document-72484/2013-02-19_e-Alert.htm

Recommendation 2:

Provide full funding to school districts to cover all increased costs over which the districts have no control (e.g., MSP premiums, BC Hydro rates, the cost of busing students, pensions, and collective agreement provisions for support staff, in-service for curriculum change, and the development of expanded skills training programs.

Did the “Learning Improvement Fund” (LIF) improve conditions?—Not really

The “Learning Improvement Fund” is described by government as responding to the needs for more resources for the system. The claim was made by the premier that it had produced 500 additional teachers⁸. That claim is not based on facts. In the first year of the LIF, the number of teachers in the province dropped by 33 (full-time equivalent) compared to the previous year, rather than going up by 500.

Here is an explanation.

The LIF was announced as a three-year program, with \$30 million in the first year, \$60 million in the second year, and \$75 million in the third year, for a total of \$165 million. The overall amount was emphasized and most who heard the announcement may have thought these numbers represented a significant increase. They would not have realized that there would not be any significant improvement.

The amount in the LIF was increased in the first year from \$30 million to \$60 million, when the province took much of the salaries not paid to teachers during a three-day strike and added that to the fund. That meant the LIF was \$60/\$60/\$75 for a total of \$195 million, with \$30 million in the first year financed by teachers.

⁸ *Global TV news*, September 9, 2013, “BCTF gears up for billion dollar battle”, <http://globalnews.ca/news/829968/watch-news-hour-sept-9/>.

One of the conditions of the LIF is “Reduction prohibited: 4. A board that receives a grant under section 115.2 of the Act must not reduce the expenditures *it would have made to address learning improvement issues* if the board did not receive the grant.” (italics added)

This implies that all these funds would add staff—teaching and support staff—rather than boards reducing the staff in the general budget and then replacing those teachers with staff funded from the LIF. However, the vague language did not produce an improvement. While it told boards not to reduce “learning improvement issues,” the reality is that boards don’t have funds to make learning improvements—they are actually reducing services because of lack of funding.

The amount of the LIF available to add teachers was limited further when the government and the school district bargaining agency, BCPSEA, reached an agreement with the unions representing support staff, primarily CUPE, that at least \$7.5 million each year would be applied to support-staff positions.

How, then, if 500 teaching jobs were to be created by the fund, did the reported number of full-time equivalent teachers in the system actually fall by 33?

The Learning Improvement Fund (LIF) has been a bait-and-switch game in the way it played out in its first year, 2012–13. It is important to remember that the level of funding, except the LIF, has been frozen, according to ministry budget documents, for the three years of the LIF funding. However, costs to boards were not frozen, which means that school boards have had to reduce expenditures somewhere. Costs determined by the province, including MSP premiums, BC Hydro rates, busing support, and pension contributions, increased, leaving boards with no options other than to reduce the major costs—which are the people they employ.

Year One of the LIF—2012–13

The explanation is complex, but this is how the bait-and-switch has worked:

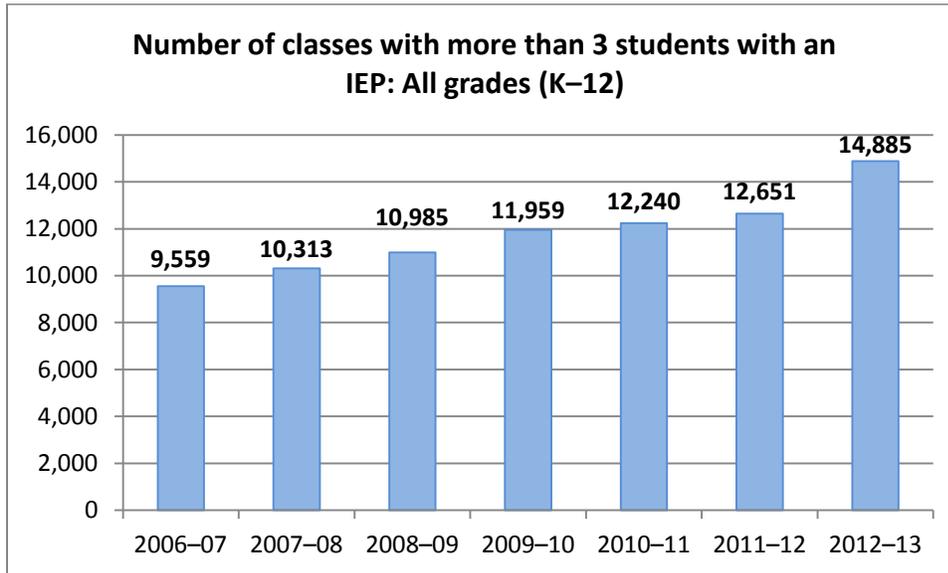
- The number of FTE learning specialist teachers increased by 132 in 2012–13, not by 500 as claimed: 99 in Special Education, 10.8 in Library Services, 12.5 English Language Learning, and 8.7 in Aboriginal Education. Counsellors increased by only 1 FTE position.
- The total number of FTE teachers in the province decreased by 33, despite the number of learning specialist teachers increasing by 132.
- Districts spent \$10.1 million less on teachers’ salaries in “Regular Instruction” in the 2012–13 amended annual budget than in their projected annual budget⁹. They were able to do this because the district maximum class-size averages for elementary grades were eliminated by Bill 22. Thus, districts could fill classes to the maximum and reduce the number of teachers required. This is why the total number of teachers could decrease while specialist teachers increased.
- Districts spent \$4.1 million less on teacher salaries for Special Education in the “instruction” amount (not the LIF), and \$4.9 million more on Special Education Assistants, than indicated in their proposed annual budgets¹⁰. Districts reduced the number of Special Education teachers (presumably knowing they could pay for more in the LIF) and used that amount to hire more Special Education Assistants.

⁹ Ministry of Education (School District Financial Accountability). Revenue and Expenditure tables: *Table 6: 2012/13 Provincial summary of annual budgeted operating expenditures by function, program and object; Table 15: 2012/13 Provincial summary of amended annual budgeted operating expenditures by function, program and object*; available at <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/accountability/district/revenue/1213/>.

¹⁰Note: These figures are based on Function 1: Instruction which includes Regular Instruction and a range of specialist programs including Special Education, reported on in Table 6 (Annual) and Table 15 (Amended) of the 2012/13 Revenue and Expenditure tables. These tables reflect changes after the 2012–13 enrolment count as of September 30. A final accounting, based on district Audited Financial Statements, is not yet available.

- In 2012–13, class composition worsened considerably. There were 14,885 classes with 4 or more designated special needs students (entitled to an IEP) in 2012–13, an increase of 2,234 classes over 2011–12. Of these, 3,485 classes had 7 or more students entitled to an IEP.

Chart 5: Class composition, 2006–07 to 2012–13



BCTF Research chart, with figures from BC Ministry of Education (various years). *Overview of Class Size and Composition in BC Schools*; accessible from the ministry data reporting page, <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/>. 2007–08 to 2012–13 figures are available at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/class_size/2012/public.pdf.

- Almost 3,000 teaching positions in BC public schools have been eliminated since 2002, when the provincial government stripped the teachers’ collective agreement. About 1,500 of these were learning specialist teachers¹¹. Special Education was especially hard hit. In 2011–12 there were 769.2 fewer FTE special education teachers than in 2001–02 (Table 2).

Table 2: Change in FTE positions by type of specialist teacher: 2001–02 to 2011–12, and 2011–12 to 2012–13

FTE specialist teachers	2001–02	2011–12	2012–13	Change in FTE— 2011–12 compared to 2001–02	Change in FTE— 2012–13 compared to 2011–12
Library Services	921.8	635.8	646.6	-286.0	10.8
Counselling	989.6	870.1	871.1	-119.5	1.0
Special Education	4,051.5	3,282.3	3,381.3	-769.2	99.0
English Language Learning	1,015.6	673.7	686.2	-341.9	12.5
Aboriginal Education	206.9	196.0	204.7	-10.9	8.7
Totals	7,185.4	5,657.9	5,789.9	-1,527.5	132.0

BCTF Research tables, with figures from BC Ministry of Education (2002, 2012, 2013), *Staff by Year and Program Code* (unpublished Form 1530 data).

The government continues to claim that 500 new teaching positions were created with the Learning Improvement Fund, in an August 2013 Ministry of Education bulletin¹²—“To date, the LIF has helped to hire 500 new teachers and 400 new special education assistants”. Yet the ministry data tell a different story.

If all of the 132 FTE learning specialist teaching positions were funded through the \$60 million LIF allocation, this would cost a maximum of \$12 million¹³, only a fifth of the \$60 million. Unless and until the government provides data accounting for how the LIF was actually spent in 2012–13, and exactly how many FTE specialist teaching positions were created through the LIF, there is no evidence to support the claim that 500 teaching positions were created.

¹¹ See BCTF 2012 *Education Facts* (p. 22) at <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/2012EdFacts.pdf>

¹² BC Ministry of Education. “Education by the numbers”, *Information Bulletin*, August 27, 2013. <http://www.newsroom.gov.bc.ca/2013/08/education-by-the-numbers-2.html>

¹³ This estimate is based on average total teacher compensation (\$89,628) multiplied by 132 = \$11,830,896. This should be considered a maximum, as many new teachers hired likely place at the lower end of the salary scale.

Year Two of the LIF—Ministry budget data suggest fewer teachers and EAs in classes in 2013–14

A comparison of the 2012–13 amended annual budget to the 2013–14 proposed annual budget provides further evidence that the downloading of costs onto school districts by the provincial government directly impacts the classroom. The increased cost of benefits (+\$32.9 million) in 2013–14 is almost exactly offset by a decrease in expenditures on salaries (-\$30.2 million) for all employees in instructional programs. Provincial data on the 2013–14 proposed annual budget for instructional programs shows that districts plan to spend \$17.5 million less on teachers' salaries and \$5.54 million less on educational assistants' salaries in 2013–14, compared to the 2012–13 amended annual budget¹⁴. While these data do not reflect LIF funding, they do suggest that the bait-and-switch approach will continue, with staffing improvements through the LIF likely offset by a loss of teachers and EAs across instructional programs.

The Learning Improvement Fund is inadequate

To maintain current conditions, let alone improve them, requires that more funds be available to school districts. To freeze budgets, as has been projected in the provincial budget three-year plans, will put British Columbia further and further behind achieving the Canadian average as an objective. The Learning Improvement Fund is not a panacea. Rather, it covers up continuing reductions in teaching and learning conditions.

Recommendation 3:

Put a priority on increased funding to support students with special needs—smaller classes and more special education and learning assistance specialist teachers.

Recommendation 4:

Restore other specialist positions that support students—teacher-librarians, counsellors, and English-language learning teachers.

¹⁴ These figures do not reflect staffing changes in 2012–13 that occurred after the amended annual budget and before the final accounting based on district audited financial statements.

The minister talks about three priorities—Where do we stand on these?

Education Minister Fassbender has been talking publicly and communicating with us on three particular issues. Here is what we are saying about these three areas.

1. The 10-year-agreement proposal

Teachers are open to a longer deal and will discuss this in bargaining. What is important is whether it provides assured funding that allows for a reasonable salary increase and significant improvements in teaching and learning conditions. Education funding is the key variable in achieving any length of agreement, and we hope that this committee's recommendations to the Legislature will reflect that.

Recommendation 5:

Bring stability to the public education system by providing adequate funding for reasonable salary increases, preparation time, in-service, and improved classroom conditions.

2. Increase in skills preparation for trades

We share a desire to have public education meet the needs of individuals and of society. Improving the opportunities for students in trades requires not just a wish, but the resources to make it real. All the arguments about small classes being more educationally effective apply in this area, but safety is an additional factor. More practical experience and partnerships with post-secondary institutions requires more co-ordination and supervision for student success. Students using tools adds a level of responsibility for the teacher to be constantly aware of the potential damage that can be done so quickly. The need for adequate conditions for skills training is another resource factor that needs to be recognized in the budget.¹⁵

3. Transforming education through the BC Education Plan

The minister has called the BC Education Plan transformative, but transformation requires resources if it is to be achieved. Teachers recognize the need for educational change, as the world

¹⁵ The Technology Education Association of the BCTF has produced a best-practices guide to ensure student safety, which can be found at <http://www.bctea.org/best-practices-guide-document-0>.

changes. The BCTF has appointed members to sit on curriculum, assessment, and other ministry committees related to education change. We expect to continue taking part in these processes.

“Transformation,” however, does require more than goodwill, a few committee meetings, and online connections. One current ministry program provides a valuable model of what is required if transformation is to take place. It is the “Changing Results for Young Readers” project.

Hundreds of teachers have been engaged, reaching some 9,000 students in the project’s first year. This project has trained teachers in models of pedagogy and the use of teacher inquiry as a tool for changing practice and meeting the needs of individual students who need more assistance to ensure their success.

Teachers brought resources to the project: the time they spent on top of the other demands of teaching; enthusiasm born of collegial and co-operative work; extra time spent on in-service in addition to the daily work of teaching effectively; and experience from other programs such as the BCTF Program for Quality Teaching. But teacher enthusiasm is not enough. Expertise and supports will be required if a “transformation” is to be achieved. Provincial and district seminars and conferences—funded by the ministry and districts—helped to build the community of practice required for changes in practice to better serve students, but now the funding for the young readers’ project has been reduced as well.

The BC Education Plan is ambitious. It calls for changes in the entire curriculum, not just in content, but also in concept. It incorporates adoption of new assessment and reporting approaches and tools, integrating technology into teaching practice, infusing Aboriginal perspectives throughout the curriculum, and focusing on critical thinking. BC teachers are supportive of many of these changes. All of this is a very large agenda, and each element requires a strategy and resources, multiplying many times what we have seen with the “Changing Results for Young Readers” project. The test of how serious the minister and the government are about transformation will be seen by what resources and supports are provided for this work.

Recommendation 6:

Provide resources specific to support changes in the public education system—resources for projects that support in-service for changing curriculum, student assessment, and teaching practice.

BC Teachers' Federation recommendations to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

Recommendation 1:

Increase funding in each of the next three years by enough to reach the Canadian average per-student funding or above by 2016.

Recommendation 2:

Provide full funding to school districts to cover all increased costs over which the districts have no control (e.g., MSP premiums, BC Hydro rates, the cost of busing students, pensions, and collective agreement provisions for support staff, in-service for curriculum change, and the development of expanded skills training programs).

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