

Education and Childcare

A well-supported education system that creates the conditions for all students to thrive.

HOW WE'RE THINKING ABOUT THIS

BC's education system, from early childhood to post-secondary, must create an environment where all students can thrive. Every public school should be a place where students, educators and staff feel safe, included, welcome and cared for. When this happens, optimal learning follows. Students cannot succeed in environments marked by scarcity and insecurity—and our schools must be fully equipped to meet their needs and those of the educators who support them.

Currently, BC's child care system is fragmented by pilot projects and ad hoc funding, making it difficult for both providers and families to navigate. This disconnected approach has placed enormous strain on child care providers, leading to burnout and the closure of vital spaces. By creating a universal funding model, we can simplify the process for providers, allowing them to focus on the children and reduce unnecessary administrative burdens.

Staffing shortages continue to affect educational outcomes, from early childhood through to post-secondary. We must prioritize recruitment and retention of early childhood educators, education assistants, and teachers, whose contributions are essential to a thriving education system.

At the post-secondary level, the rising cost of living and tuition has made further education out of reach for many. We must work toward a future where every BC resident, regardless of income, can access higher education and vocational training. A well-educated, well-equipped workforce will create the conditions for everyone in BC to thrive.

PROBLEM DEFINITION

Education is the foundation of a healthy society, yet it has been consistently deprioritized by consecutive governments in British Columbia. Teacher shortages, reduced funding for special education and rising operating costs are having a heavy impact on students. When schools are inadequately funded and students spend their education years in portables, a clear

message is sent to our youth: we are not investing in you. Despite persistent and visible inequities, no BC government has adequately addressed these issues in over two decades.

The K-12 and childcare sectors in BC are struggling to attract and retain qualified staff, particularly in rural and remote areas. Chronic underinvestment has left teachers unable to do their jobs effectively, affecting the prospect for students to receive the education they deserve. This underinvestment is felt not only in K-12, but also across post-secondary institutions.

While there have been recent increases to operating grants, the current BC NDP government is still not spending enough on post-secondary education. Funding has not kept pace with inflation and has failed to compensate for the significant cuts. It is crucial for the province to invest in post-secondary education to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed.

Our education system must be designed to prepare children for the future, equipping them with adaptability, perseverance, problem-solving and creativity. These are the skills they will need to thrive in an evolving world—and it is our responsibility to make sure they are ready.

POLICIES FOR ANNOUNCEMENT

Education Workforce Strategy

Strengthen the education workforce by providing financial support, fair compensation, and streamlined processes for educators.

- Provide paid final practicums for teachers and Early Childhood Educators (ECEs), offering financial support during their essential training periods.
- Simplify the certification process for teachers from other provinces or countries to attract more qualified educators to BC.
- Develop bursaries for educators who commit to serving in remote districts, and increase funding for rural and remote teacher education programs to address workforce shortages.

- Ensure Educational Assistants (EAs) receive fair compensation and increased hours, ensuring they earn a living wage and have job security.
- Pursue loan forgiveness programs for teachers, ECEs, and EAs as part of broader post-secondary support initiatives (see: Post-Secondary Education section).

Child Care

Develop a universal, accessible and well-compensated ECE system.

- Create a universal Early Childhood Education funding model to reduce administrative burdens for childcare providers, allowing them to focus on care. This model will address wage grids, space creation, licensing, staffing, and fee reduction initiatives.
- Implement gradual increases to the ECE wage grid, and reach \$30-40 per hour by 2026.
- Ensure ECEs have access to pension plans and extended health benefits to improve job security and retention.

Improve access to affordable childcare for children under 5.

- Allocate at least \$250 million to expand childcare space creation for children and infants under 5.
- Provide ECE and childcare centres with the necessary supports to continue operations and create more spaces to meet demand.
- Ensure the province remains on track to deliver \$10/day childcare for all, making early childhood education affordable for all families.
- Provide \$100 million in new funding to create a capital program within the Ministry of Education for renovations and additions to schools to support ECE space creation.

Ensure all families have access to before- and after-school care.

- Expand the availability of dedicated school-age care spaces across BC schools to meet the needs of working families.
- Increase before and after school program offerings to provide flexible childcare solutions for families.

K-12 Education

Modernize public school funding and infrastructure to support student success.

- Modernize operational funding and increase grants for school districts to ensure every school has the resources to meet instructional and student support needs.
- Undertake comprehensive reforms in facilities management to ensure all schools meet high standards of safety, functionality, and climate resilience.
- Collaborate across ministries and the construction industry to create pre-approved universal school building designs, which will be reevaluated every 10 years to ensure they meet climate-resilient standards.

Foster community connections by expanding the use of school facilities.

- Increase provincial funding support for community schools, which serve as spaces for community connection and make use of public buildings outside school hours.

Support students with diverse learning needs through equitable and inclusive education.

- Work with education partners to create province-wide inclusive education policies, ensuring equitable access to education for all students.
- Establish a sustainable funding model for organizations addressing diverse student needs, such as the Take a Hike Foundation, to ensure long-term support.
- Ensure every school district has sufficient funding to provide accessible recreation programs. Invest in outdoor education to promote leadership skills and confidence in youth.
- Continue funding ArtStarts and other arts programs, ensuring educators have the tools to integrate arts education into classrooms, supporting mental health and wellbeing.

RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

- Expand the discussion of accessibility to include neurodiverse individuals, such as those with autism, ADHD, dyspraxia, dyslexia and Tourette's. Create environments that are inclusive of all abilities and accommodate the needs of all individuals, including those with down syndrome.

Ensure all students have equitable access to mental health support in schools.

- Increase the counsellor-to-student ratio in school districts to provide better mental health support for students.
- Allocate additional provincial funding to hire more school psychologists, counsellors, and social workers across BC schools.

Provide healthy, nutritious meals for all students.

- Create a universal school food program ensuring all students, regardless of family income, have access to healthy meals.
- Ensure school meals meet comprehensive nutritional guidelines to support children's health and development.
- Partner with schools, local farmers, and community organizations to promote sustainable food practices and educate students about healthy eating.

Equip educators with the tools and knowledge to deliver quality, inclusive education.

- Ensure educators have the resources to equip students with critical thinking skills and knowledge about: our electoral systems and the responsibilities of citizenship, the World Wars, the Holocaust, the Nakba, the Cold War, apartheid South Africa, human rights movements, impacts of colonialism, and other critical moments in history. Young people are graduating into a rapidly changing world and need to be equipped with the skills, knowledge, and understanding to navigate a growing volume of disinformation and misinformation.

- Provide robust learning resources for Indigenous and French languages, as well as American Sign Language, ensuring diverse language education options.
- Develop guides for digital literacy, preparing students for an increasingly digital world.

Promote inclusivity and support for LGBTQ+ students in BC schools.

- Continue supporting and expanding the SOGI 123 initiative to create inclusive school environments that support LGBTQ+ students and address issues of gender identity and sexual orientation.

Post-secondary Education

Increase access to post-secondary education and support for students and institutions.

- Increase the amount students can receive through the BC Access Grant and extend eligibility to graduate students to reduce financial barriers.
- Collaborate with Student Aid BC to expand the list of professions eligible for student loan forgiveness, targeting in-demand occupations and underserved communities.

Ensure equitable access to education for Indigenous students through culturally relevant institutions.

- Create a dedicated funding stream for First Nations-mandated institutes, providing Indigenous language programming and culturally relevant education for Indigenous students in rural and remote areas.

Create a culture of safety and respect on post-secondary campuses.

- Amend the act to include the 11 minimum standards identified by Students for Consent Culture to improve campus safety.
- Provide \$5 million annually to support the operation of sexual violence prevention offices and initiatives at post-secondary institutions.
- Implement measures and legislation to prevent the misuse of Non-Disclosure Agreements (NDAs) by post-secondary institutions, ensuring transparency and accountability.