



Building Capacity in Education for BC's Future

More teachers, more classrooms, more research

Institute for Public Education/ BC

**Submission to the Select Standing
Committee on Finance
and Government Services**

Budget 2024 Consultation



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The Institute for Public Education/British Columbia has submitted the following recommendations to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services for consideration in the Budget 2024 Consultation process. Thank you to the committee for making this opportunity for public input available each year.

Recommendation 1:

The BC government should address the shortage of qualified teachers, including providing additional funding to teacher education programs.

Supporting statement:

Students' educations are being compromised in some cases by the lack of enough qualified teachers in the system.

This is especially a problem for students with different abilities and special needs as their teachers are pulled away from supporting them to cover other classes because of a shortage of teachers on call. Unfortunately, these are daily occurrences in many BC schools and can only be overcome with more qualified teachers available.

Other students are having their education compromised in districts which have hired teachers who are not properly qualified. This problem began in some of the districts outside the urban areas that have in the past had difficulty attracting teachers. However, it has recently expanded to districts in urban areas that have advertised for teachers without certification. Even districts filling their rosters with qualified teachers are unable to hire enough teachers on call. This is a powerful indicator of just how difficult the situation has become.

The BC government must recognize shortages as a serious problem to address, as it has in other areas such as health care. Similar responses are possible.

In the short term, the system can look to the pool of qualified and experienced immigrants who have faced barriers to getting their qualifications recognized. Some of these barriers can be reduced and subsidies provided to individuals to meet the further qualifications required to join our classrooms.

That won't solve the ongoing problem though. There must be funding to expand the teacher education programs at BC's universities, with particular emphasis on programs that encourage preparation in rural areas. Further, individuals should be encouraged to enter the programs by providing government financial assistance.

Recommendation 2:

The system for approving building schools must be revised to plan for the future rather than building only after students have already arrived.

Supporting statement:

Media reports of the need for “double decker” portables in Surrey is symptomatic of the problem with meeting the needs of growing populations of students.

Planning and approval of building new schools in the past has been based on districts showing that students are actually appearing at a school door when populations are growing in a neighbourhood.

Then it often takes years before the new school is approved, financed, designed, and finally built and students can walk in for the first time. In the meantime, students are in overcrowded schools with growing numbers of portables.

Large scale immigration into the province makes this retro planning unacceptable. The government has recognized that population growth requires increased housing and is pressing communities to build more spaces. That housing includes families with children who will need a classroom and those classrooms should be ready when the students show up.

Making this possible requires a number of changes.

The government must start by revising three policies:

1. It must announce that it is modifying its approach to capital planning for schools to be future oriented, not just catch up with existing needs and must follow through with these changes.
2. It must increase the capital budget for schools to allow those plans to actually be carried out in a timely basis and the funds must include the full cost of future schools, not further squeezing school district operating funds.
3. It must provide for school districts to be part of the planning process that it is initiating with municipalities for housing development.

Without new policies and joint planning by province, municipalities and school districts, more and more students will learn in overcrowded schools and inadequate portables.

Recommendation 3:

Increase funding and support for post-secondary education in British Columbia, as the current funding model is failing our institutions and jeopardizing their academic missions.

Supporting statement:

A comprehensive review conducted by CUFA BC has revealed the alarming reality of insufficient funding in post-secondary education. This situation is particularly concerning given the province's projection of one million job openings in the next decade, with 80% of these positions requiring a post-secondary education. Our universities are a fundamental pillar of our society and play a crucial role in shaping the future of our province.

To ensure continued excellence and innovation, we call for immediate action on three requests:

- 1) Commit to stable, predictable funding: Allocate a minimum of five percent of the annual government expenditures to BC's public universities, compared to the current inadequate investment of only 3.5%. This increase is imperative to support the academic mission effectively. With adequate resources, universities can meet the demands from government while also attracting and retaining top-tier faculty, driving research and innovation, and enhancing the overall quality of education provided to students.
- 2) Fund basic research in universities: Basic research serves as the foundation for groundbreaking discoveries and technological advancements. Research programs also develop the necessary skills for students as they transition to their professional careers. Funding specifically for basic research in universities provides researchers with the necessary resources to explore new frontiers, address critical societal challenges, and support student involvement in academic research. BC currently lags other provinces in research investment, particularly in disciplines beyond STEM. Funding must extend to social sciences, humanities, the arts and fine arts, crucial disciplines for developing critical thinking skills we desperately need in a society that's combatting racism, anti-science, and alarming populist rhetoric in our communities.
- 3) Address the housing crisis for faculty and staff: The housing crisis not only affects students but also poses significant challenges for faculty and staff recruitment and retention. Collaboration between the government, universities, municipalities, and private developers can lead to innovative solutions such as affordable rentals, subsidized housing, and housing allowances.



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