

Institute for Public Education  
Steve Cardwell  
Sent via email

October 15, 2024

## Re: BC NDP Response to Institute for Public Education

Dear Steve Cardwell and the Institute for Public Education,

Thanks for the opportunity to engage with you at this critical time. Please see a response to your questions below.

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### 1. Funding:

B.C. has fallen behind the rest of Canada in how it funds its public schools. The only province that spends less of its GDP on education is Newfoundland and Labrador. B.C.'s relative contribution to public school budgets has fallen significantly over the period from year 2000 to the present, from the perspective of what the province can afford.

Note: For the 2023/24 school financial year, B.C. reports spending grants of \$6,754 million across the province's 60 school districts. If B.C. were to spend at the "percentage of GDP" rate found for the year 2000, this budgetary allocation would increase by \$3.8 billion to \$10.552 billion.

*What will you do to increase funding to B.C.'s public schools to ensure students receive the opportunities and supports that their counterparts in other provinces are able to access?*

British Columbia is growing rapidly. We added 180,000 people to our province just last year, including many who are arriving with children and need access to schools. Every child deserves a strong start, and investing in K-12 education is how we build a brighter future for our kids and our communities.

Since forming government, we have increased funding for school boards by 55%, to support them to meet the increasing demands for additional services to support kids, parents and families. This is a strong contrast with previous governments which cut support for school boards when the families they serve needed it most.

David Eby and the BC NDP are taking action to give our kids the quality education they deserve. With the largest school food program in the province's history, we're ensuring that students are well-fed and ready to learn. And, for families who need extra help, we're taking action to cover the costs of school supplies and class trips, as well as sports and music programs. We are bringing more care into schools by launching School Outreach Teams for Children and Youth with Support Needs, providing rural and remote school districts access to specialist staff to support families. In addition, we have launched K-12 literacy screening and learning supports, helping all students, especially those with dyslexia and other learning disabilities, get the support they need to achieve their best.

We will continue to work in partnership with school boards, by providing additional capital funding for school expansion and for new school projects to meet the needs of growing populations. We will make sure schools have the funding and support needed to build and maintain our schools for generations to come.

Our commitments stand in stark contrast to those of our opponents. John Rustad proposes to address our growing population by increasing class sizes by at least 20% – which will lead to worse learning outcomes for kids, and greater challenges for teachers and support workers to maintain control in the classroom while providing support for children with additional needs. And the last time he was in office, his government froze school construction funding for eight straight years as the province grew rapidly, causing a massive deficit of school spaces. In short, the BC Conservatives' proposals to solve this problem are no solution at all.

## **2. Staffing:**

B.C. schools are struggling with an urgent shortage of qualified teachers and special education support workers. This is shortchanging students and putting increased stress on school employees, making it difficult to retain them.

### ***What will you do to recruit and retain teachers and education support workers?***

Beginning in 2017, the BC NDP committed to hiring more teachers, especially in fast growing and rural school districts. Our province has grown by more than 300,000 people in the last two years under Ottawa's immigration programs. That's why we are building new schools and hiring more teachers — over 5700 new teachers so far — to ensure our kids have supportive learning environments.

David Eby and the BC NDP are committed to hiring more teachers and educational assistants — because that allows for more one-on-one time and delivers better student results. We will keep making schools work better by getting more teachers into the classroom by creating a faster pathway to teacher certification for adults

already working on-call in BC schools and attracting more teachers to high-need areas of the province through incentive programs.

In our Action Plan for You, we are committed to:

- Increasing support for students in the critical kindergarten to grade 3 years by staffing each classroom with an education assistant to support complex needs, and to support before- and after-school care programs.
- Ensuring every public school has a mental health counsellor - freeing up principals and teachers to do the work they're trained to do and making sure our kids can get help before small problems become big ones.
- Increasing support for kids with learning disabilities and their families by working with teachers to identify kids who are struggling early and support those kids with strategies to learn, as well as expanding services and interventions for kids with dyslexia and other learning differences.

John Rustad's government closed 267 schools when he was in government, and fought with teachers all the way to the Supreme Court to try to increase class sizes. And he's on record calling for a 20% increase in class sizes. That is the opposite of what is needed in BC - we can't afford that.

### **3. Facilities:**

The Ministry of Education is forecasting significant enrolment growth in B.C.'s public schools, yet many districts already have overcrowded schools and not enough space for all in-catchment students. Hundreds of B.C. schools are still at high risk of significant structural damage in the event of an earthquake.

***How will you ensure that B.C.'s students have timely access to safe, neighbourhood schools?***

We believe that no matter where people live in the province, their kids should have access to a high-quality public school. Gone are the days of the previous government discussing which schools to close. To meet the needs of growing communities, we are building and expanding schools in every corner of British Columbia. Many of our aging schools are overdue for replacement and we are taking action to upgrade or replace them via our Seismic Mitigation Program.

Since forming government, we have increased funding for school boards by 55%, ensuring that they are able to meet the increasing demands for additional services to support kids, parents and families. This is a strong contrast with previous governments which cut support for school boards when the families they serve needed it most.

We will continue to work in partnership with school boards, by providing additional capital funding for school expansions and for new school projects to meet the needs

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#### **4. Reconciliation:**

Historically and statistically, Indigenous students have had poorer outcomes in school due to Canada's history of colonialism, discrimination, and particularly, residential schools.

#### ***What will you do to ensure Indigenous students receive educational opportunities and supports to enable their success in B.C.'s public schools?***

BC is our home. We all want to build a good life here – and for too long, court rulings have created uncertainty across the province, and First Nations have been denied their rights. Real reconciliation means working together and finding a path forward that works for everyone. David Eby and the BC NDP are proud that in 2019 BC was the first jurisdiction in Canada to formally adopt the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* with the unanimous support from all MLAs.

Reconciliation is a shared responsibility and partnerships between all levels of government are fundamental to improve life for everyone. In 2018, our NDP government signed a tripartite educational agreement between the First Nations Education Steering Committee, the Province and the Government of Canada. Kindergarten through Grade 12 curriculum has been updated to include Indigenous knowledge, perspectives, and histories.

With the Declaration Act and through the Declaration Act Action Plan, a BC NDP government would continue to strengthen partnerships with First Nations across ministries and service areas, including the Ministry of Education and Childcare and the Ministry of Post Secondary and Future Skills.

The BC NDP government implemented a key action within the Declaration Action Plan this past August where each local board of education will now establish and maintain an Indigenous Education Council (IEC). By making each school board more accountable to communities, they can take a distinctions-based approach, prioritize local protocols and language, honour cultural diversity within schools, and maintain consistent quality of service across the province. This way, the education system will

be better equipped to ensure education on history is accurate, comprehensive, and includes content by and about local peoples.

Our government also made important changes to the School Act to support better education outcomes for First Nations and other Indigenous students attending provincial public schools, and more effective relationships between boards of education and First Nations. We know that Indigenous students can face systemic barriers that result in inequitable outcomes in school, and these changes are an important first step. There is much more work to do, including on improving graduation rates for Indigenous students, and we are working collaboratively with the First Nations Education Steering Committee and consulting with First Nations and Indigenous people throughout B.C.

In our Action Plan for You, David Eby and the BC NDP are committed to advance Indigenous education and training opportunities, including the preservation and revitalization of First Nations languages and cultural heritage. We will continue this important work to advance reconciliation in tangible and measurable ways for Indigenous students all across the province.

Since becoming leader, Rustad has alternately pledged to repeal the Declaration Act completely or water it down with just money-first agreements, threatening all the shared reconciliation work. David Eby and the BC NDP are committed to supporting advancing reconciliation so we can all move towards a more secure and prosperous future for generations to come.

## **5. Inclusion and safety:**

Ensuring that schools are inclusive and safe environments is crucial for the well-being and success of all students. Programs that support students' understanding of sexual orientation, gender identity, and anti-discrimination are essential in fostering a respectful and welcoming school culture.

***How will you ensure schools are safe, inclusive, and welcoming for all students? How will you support and protect programs that educate and support students regarding sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) and other anti-discriminatory programs and practices?***

Every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or gender identity deserves to feel safe and included in their school communities, and have equal opportunities to learn. It has been upsetting and distressing to see misinformation and disinformation used to attack our children and youth. It's very simple, SOGI is about teaching kids to respect people who are different. SOGI has been used in classrooms since 2016. BC Liberal MLAs like John Rustad supported it for years, and nothing about SOGI has changed since then.

We believe strongly that school must be a place where students, staff and families can feel secure, welcomed and respected and our kids can be fully and completely themselves. Through our Safe Access to Schools Act – opposed by John Rustad’s BC Conservatives – we acted to ensure schools remain inclusive, safe, and accessible places for learning, by activating protected zones on and around school grounds to prevent any disruptive behaviour, such as aggressive protests against SOGI 123, from occurring within 20 metres of schools.

David Eby and the BC NDP are also taking action to provide hope and help for people experiencing mental health challenges. As committed in our platform, we are providing BC students the help they need by making sure every public school has a mental health counsellor - freeing up principals and teachers to do the work they’re trained to do and making sure our kids can get help before small problems become big ones. And we are expanding mental health counselling care across BC through a new \$50 million Community Mental Health Resilience Fund.

David Eby and the BC NDP will continue to support education that promotes safe, caring and inclusive schools and to ensure young people learn to value diversity and to treat everyone with respect and dignity, so that every student feels like they belong.