



Budget 2026 Submission

Institute for Public Education BC

June 2025

Introduction

The Institute for Public Education BC (IPE/BC) - <https://instituteforpubliceducation.org/> is dedicated to strengthening public education through research, advocacy, and public engagement. Drawing from provincial data, consultation feedback, and research, this submission addresses urgent priorities: staffing and recruitment, inclusive education funding, and public vs private school funding equity. The recommendations presented respond directly to systemic pressures facing public schools and outline evidence-informed solutions to ensure all students in BC have access to quality, inclusive public education.

Recommendation 1

Increase funding for staffing, including teachers, education assistants, counsellors, and specialist support staff, while expanding post-secondary teacher and EA education programs and supporting school-based mentoring and recruitment.

Explanation

BC's public education system is experiencing a serious and worsening staffing crisis. The shortage of teachers, education assistants (EAs), counsellors, psychologists, and other support staff undermines the quality and equity of learning across the province. While previous budgets have increased operational spending, most of the new funding is allocated to cover wage agreements, leaving little room for urgently needed staffing expansion. Without a strategic increase in staffing capacity, students will continue to face overcrowded classrooms, reduced supports, and missed learning opportunities.

This crisis is especially severe in rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, where recruiting and retaining qualified educators is a persistent challenge. Many districts are forced to assign non-specialist or unqualified personnel, compounding inequities for vulnerable learners. Expanding post-secondary programs that train teachers, EAs, and specialists is essential. Investment in flexible delivery models-including online, rural, and practicum-integrated pathways-can support new entrants and mid-career transitions.

Mentorship and induction programs also play a vital role in retaining early-career educators. Initiatives like UBC's provincial teacher mentorship pilot have proven effective and should be expanded system-wide. Competitive compensation, meaningful professional learning, and safe, respectful workplaces are equally important to keep educators in the system.

Investment in staffing is foundational. Without a qualified, stable, and well-supported workforce, no amount of capital investment or policy reform can ensure students receive the inclusive, high-quality public education they deserve.

Recommendation 2

Fully fund inclusive education by addressing the persistent gap between actual district costs and government allocations, ensuring all students with diverse abilities receive adequate, consistent supports and services in their neighbourhood public schools.

Explanation

Although inclusive education is a human rights obligation and an affirmed priority in BC's public education system, the necessary funding has consistently fallen short. School districts are expected to provide appropriate learning environments for students with a wide range of diverse needs-physical, cognitive, behavioural, and emotional-yet provincial funding has not kept pace with the rising complexity or volume of those needs. According to Ministry data, only 72.3% of the estimated cost of inclusive education was covered in 2023-24, resulting in a shortfall exceeding \$340 million. This ongoing funding gap forces schools to make impossible trade-offs, leaving many students under-supported.

Current funding structures rely heavily on rigid categorical labels and historical enrolment figures, failing to reflect actual, real-time student needs. Funding is not tied to the services a student receives, meaning children with high support requirements may not be allocated adequate resources. Furthermore, inclusive education funding is not protected within district budgets-it is pooled with general operations and vulnerable to internal reallocation. As a result, even students with designated needs often face delays or denials in accessing necessary supports, while educators are stretched beyond capacity.

The Ministry has taken steps to improve inclusion through revised Individual Education Plan (IEP) guidelines and outreach initiatives, but these efforts cannot succeed without corresponding financial commitment. We call for a targeted, transparent, and needs-based funding model, designed in partnership with families, educators, and inclusion experts. Adequate and predictable funding is a prerequisite to inclusive classrooms and a rights-based education system.

Recommendation 3

Reallocate a portion of public funding from private (independent) schools to strengthen the public system. Restore public school investment as a share of GDP and prioritize equitable access, transparency, and accountability in public education funding.

Explanation

British Columbia has significantly reduced its investment in public education as a share of GDP, dropping from 2.7% in 2000 to just 1.6% in 2024. This decline represents a real loss of over \$3.8 billion annually-funds that could support critical improvements in staffing, programming, and infrastructure. At the same time, funding to private (independent) schools has increased by 14.5% and is projected to reach \$571 million in 2024-25. These public subsidies are allocated to institutions that are not required to accept all students, do not adhere to inclusive education mandates, and operate without the same levels of transparency or public oversight.

This dual funding model creates an uneven playing field and weakens the integrity of public education. It diverts scarce resources from a universal system committed to equity, access, and inclusion. In some communities, public schools are closing while nearby private schools receive substantial public dollars-often serving wealthier families. These subsidies are no longer defensible in a context of budgetary constraint and growing unmet needs within the public system.

Reinvesting even a fraction of these funds-such as reallocating 25% of private school funding-would return over \$140 million to public schools. These funds could be used to restore arts and music programs, update equipment, expand mental health supports, support trades programs, and reduce class sizes. Unlike private institutions, public schools are accountable to all British Columbians and serve the full diversity of students and communities.

A phased approach to reducing public subsidies to independent schools-paired with strategic reinvestment in public education-would better reflect BC's social values and fiscal responsibilities. This is a necessary and achievable step toward a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable education system for all.