

June 25, 2024

The Honourable David Eby, MLA
Premier of British Columbia

Dear Premier Eby,

The [Institute for Public Education BC](#) (IPE/BC) is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan organization that provides high-quality information and leadership to strengthen public education for British Columbia's children, families, and communities. We believe that a strong and accessible public school system is an essential means of building and reinforcing our democratic institutions. We are committed to ensuring high-quality public education that is welcoming and inclusive for all children.

While we write to express appreciation and support to the provincial government for the efforts to improve K-12 education in BC, we also write to express growing concern at the relative level of funding for public education as compared to other jurisdictions in Canada.

We applaud the work being done to support Indigeneity through new curriculum and learning resources – an essential priority. As well, we note the strong focus on equity, diversity and inclusion through sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) and other anti-discriminatory programs and practices. These resources include comprehensive anti-bullying programs and policies addressing issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity, creating safe and inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ students. These programs are being actively implemented across British Columbia's schools and include training for educators and other supportive measures to protect students from discrimination and bullying. Additionally, the government is providing mental health services and resources to support students facing discrimination or mental health challenges.

Overall, British Columbia's K-12 education system is making strong progress in fostering an inclusive, equitable, and supportive environment for all students. These efforts are crucial in ensuring that every student has the opportunity to succeed and thrive in a diverse and dynamic society. We applaud these efforts.

However, we are becoming increasingly concerned that this is not enough. In fact, we note that British Columbia is rapidly falling behind other provinces in its financial support for public education, a statistic that does not reflect well on our government.

We urge the Province to invest more in public education, recognizing that an investment in public education is an investment in our collective future. While this is not the only solution to our challenges, the long-term impact of inadequate funding on teacher shortages, workload, and recruitment and retention issues will undermine the quality of our public education system. The ongoing teacher shortage and poor working conditions in BC are complex and caused by many factors. These include limited recruitment and retention efforts, lack of localized opportunities for teacher training, and a prolonged salary scale. Addressing these problems will require systemic responses including raising the status of teaching, stable and universal induction and mentoring programs, proactive public policies, and sufficient funding.

As illustrated in the table below, the most recently available Statistics Canada data (2021) shows BC ranking ninth amongst Canadian provinces in funding support provided for education as a percentage of Gross Provincial Product, with only Newfoundland and Labrador contributing slightly less in relation to the size of its provincial economy and neighbouring Alberta contributing slightly more. Not great comparators for BC!

Table 1. Funding support provided for education as a percentage of Gross Provincial Product (2021).

Jurisdiction	All primary and secondary education
Northwest Territories	6.5
Nunavut	5.3
Yukon	5.0
Manitoba	4.9
Nova Scotia	4.4
Saskatchewan	4.2
Prince Edward Island	4.2
Quebec	4.1
New Brunswick	4.0
Ontario	3.8
Alberta	3.3
British Columbia	3.0
Newfoundland & Labrador	2.9
Canada	3.8

Source: Statistics Canada¹ (Data sources are listed at the end of this letter).

We note that these statistics (above) combine public and private school spending. BC Independent (private) Schools continue to receive new funding -- up \$72 million or 14.5 per cent to more than \$570 million in the most recent budget. Funding to this area increases in tandem with levels of per student spending in the public system with added stimulus provided by enrolment growth. The latter is of special importance in that, as resources to address challenges in the public system have been held in check, parents are incentivized to migrate their children into private sector alternatives that benefit from de facto indexation to larger system spending.

Table 2. Public and Independent School Funding.

Summary (\$ millions)	2023/24 Revised Estimate	2024/25 Estimate	2025/26 Plan
Public Schools	\$ 7,391,494 M	\$ 8,023,617 M	\$ 8,071,422 M
Independent Schools	\$ 498,977 M	\$ 571,217 M	\$ 575,523 M

Source: Ministry of Education Service Plan 2024/25² (Data sources are listed at the end of this letter).

Moreover, BC'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.

For the 2023/24 school financial year, BC reports spending grants of \$6,754 million across the province's 60 school districts. If BC were to spend at the "% of GDP" rate found for the year 2000, this budgetary allocation would increase by \$3.8 billion to \$10.552 billion.⁴

The following table shows total provincial grants to public schools as a percentage of the size of the provincial economy, by five-year intervals, through this period.

Table 3. Total provincial grants to public schools as a percentage of the size of the BC economy.

Year	Operating grants to school districts as % of BC GDP
2000	2.7 %
2005	2.2 %
2010	2.2 %
2015	1.9 %
2020	1.8 %
2024 est.	1.6 %

Source: BC Ministry of Education³ (Data sources are listed at the end of this letter).

The budgetary approach favoured by the current government centres on an explicit targeting of new funding to a small set of defined needs such as contract costs and monies for more students. Yet our schools are complex and expansive institutions that face inflationary pressures affecting not just wages and salaries but benefit costs, and those related to learning materials, utilities, specialized services, professional development, recruitment and retention, transportation, IT, and many other factors, and on the capital side, facility renewals and new builds. While the annual Funding Allocation System is intended to capture these demands when budgetary allocations are set, there has not been a clear or consistent recognition of the budgetary pressures in these areas and how they impinge upon school system mandates in the instructional arena.

We are hearing a consistent and louder call from many quarters for increased provincial spending on public education. With great respect, the Institute for Public Education echoes these calls. Without keeping up, and indeed moving this province to the top of the list among jurisdictions, there will be a long-term negative impact and decline of positive outcomes for the students in British Columbia – as always, those most impacted will be the students who are most marginalized.

In summary, we urge you to seize this opportunity to make the change that is needed and invest in public education. After all, investment now will enable all learners to develop their individual potential and contribute to a healthy society and a prosperous and sustainable future.

Sincerely,

Dr. Steve Cardwell
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and on behalf of:

David Chudnovsky, Vice Chairperson, Institute for Public Education
Patti Bacchus, Board member and Fellow, Institute for Public Education
and the full IPE BC Board.

- c. Honourable Lisa Beare, Minister of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills
Honourable Mitzi Dean, Minister of State for Child Care
Honourable Rachna Singh, Minister of Education and Child Care

Rohan Arul-pragasam, President BCSSA
Carolyn Broady, President BCSTA
Dr. Kenneth Christie, President CUFA BC
Dr. Allyson Jule, Chairperson ABCDE
Clint Johnston, President BCTF
Brian Leonard, President BCPVPA
Bonnie McBride, President BCCPAC
Tyrone McNeil, President FNEC
Karen Ranaletta, President CUPE BC
Ray Velestuk, President BCASBO

Sources:

1. Statistics Canada. Table 37-10-0211-01 Public and private expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, by level of education **DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.25318/3710021101-eng>
2. Ministry of Education and Child Care 2024/25 – 2026/27 Service Plan. <https://www.bcbudget.gov.bc.ca/2024/sp/pdf/ministry/educ.pdf>
3. GDP data is from the provincial economic accounts and the 2024 provincial budget (for the 2024 estimate). Annual data for the years 1981 to 2022. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/data/statistics/economy/bc-economic-accounts-gdp>
4. School funding data is from the BC Ministry of Education’s annual operating grants information. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/resource-management/k-12-funding-and-allocation/operating-grants/>