

**Placing a Priority on Public Education**  
**Addressing Immediate Needs in the Upcoming Provincial Budget**  
**Institute for Public Education/BC**

Much attention is devoted these days to the challenges coming from the U.S. president. However, it is essential that we do not let that overwhelm the ongoing and future needs of our society. Public education is central not only to the health of our communities currently, but also to ensure our collective future. The Institute for Public Education (IPE/BC) believes that the following are priority immediate needs and that we urge the BC government to recognize in the current provincial budget.

**1. Provide funding for increased staffing focused on education assistants and counselling, but also other supports in the classroom.**

During the election campaign the NDP promised education assistants in every primary classroom and counsellors to help address the need i given the mental health crisis among out youth. The mandate letter for the Minister of Education reinforced this commitment:

“Work to ensure that teachers and schools have access to additional supports in the classroom and beyond, including the expansion of education assistants and counseling resources.”

These commitments cannot be met without additional funding in grants to school districts. These must be real increases that go beyond those to cover inflation and enrolment increases we have seen in past years. The Ministry should ensure reporting from boards to show how they are spending additional funds to support these priorities.

**2. Support districts to have the resources so students with special needs are not excluded from the school.**

The Ombudsman is currently developing a report on the problem of students with special needs being excluded from the school, sometimes completely or for part of the day. We do not need to wait for the report to know that this has already been widely reported by parents around the province. Having adequate staffing and appropriate training for staff are key to ensuring that all students have full access to education.

**3. Fund post-secondary institutions to expand preparation of teachers to meet the teacher shortage and training programs for education assistants and fund school districts to support mentoring and apprenticeship for young and new teachers.**

Increased funding for staffing will not mean much if there are not qualified people to fill the positions. Recruiting and retaining staff require an investment in ensuring that the people are ready and available to fill the positions and that they have supports to succeed in their new profession.

**4. Provide more funding for accelerating the construction of schools to anticipate and keep up with enrolment growth.**

It has been well publicized that some districts have a desperate shortage of classroom space, and this provides a less-than-ideal learning environments for students. Although significant investments have been made in the past, much more is needed, based on planning for future

enrolments, not waiting to begin the process when the students are already looking for a desk, but the classrooms will not be there until they are already gone.

**5. Provide specific funding to districts to cover the costs of portables so that they have the full funding to provide services.**

The province provides most of the funding when a school is built, but nothing for the rental or purchase of portables a student sits in until the new school is built. Relieving district budgets of this expense would release funds for direct education services that are now going into portable infrastructure. The districts that have significant lack of adequate classrooms in school buildings are placed in an unequal position in comparison to districts with sufficient classroom space for all their students and do not have to fund portables.

**6. Increase post-secondary funding increase to make up for reduction in revenues from international students.**

Both student associations and faculty have pointed out the desperate funding situation post-secondary institutions are in. Provincial funding has long been less than required, leading to finding additional funds by active recruitment of high fee-paying international students. When the federal government cut off much of this source of funding by limiting student visas, the funding crisis was exacerbated. The province needs make up this shortfall to maintain the essential quality of education for our students, including those preparing for the trades.

Despite recognizing the many pressures faced by the provincial government, the IPE/BC believes that these are necessary commitments to maintain and improve education for our students at all levels of the public education. We look forward to seeing these proposals being incorporated into the budget.



*Institute for*  
Public Education/British Columbia