



## IPE/BC Presentation to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services Budget 2027 Consultation

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June 4, 2026

Good morning, Chair and Members of the Committee.

My name is Dr. Steve Cardwell, and I am presenting on behalf of the **Institute for Public Education BC**.

IPE BC is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan society that provides research, analysis, and leadership to support a strong public education system for British Columbia's children, families, and communities. We believe public education is in the public interest, and that high-quality public education that is accessible, welcoming, and inclusive is essential to a strong democracy.

Our work is grounded in three core principles: commitment to democracy and public education's role in strengthening democratic life; high-quality public education for all children; and accessible, welcoming, and inclusive public schools.

I bring this submission from a lifetime of work in public education, including service as Superintendent in Delta and Vancouver, Vice President of Students at KPU, Professor of Teaching at UBC, Chair of ArtStarts in Schools, and Chair of the Institute for Public Education BC. Across those roles, the same lesson has been clear: public education works best when it is properly funded, fully staffed, inclusive, and accountable to the public.

For Budget 2027, we are asking the Committee to act on three practical priorities that reflect those principles: staffing, inclusion, and public accountability for public dollars.

### **First, increase funding for staffing in public schools.**

That means teachers, education assistants, counsellors, psychologists, specialist teachers, and other school-based support staff. It also means expanding post-secondary teacher education and EA training programs, supporting rural and remote pathways, and investing in school-based mentoring and recruitment.

Last year, the Committee's report recognized staffing shortages, the need for safe and effective student support, and the importance of dedicated counsellors and education assistants in schools.

We strongly support that direction. But the issue remains in terms of funding and implementation. Districts cannot solve a staffing crisis through short-term allocations or one-time grants. They need stable, predictable operating funding that allows them to hire, retain, and support qualified people. This is especially urgent in rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous communities, where recruitment and retention challenges are often more severe. I grew up in Salmo and taught for 10 years in Kitimat, so I know these rural and northern challenges from experience.

Staffing is not an add-on to education. It is the foundation. Without enough qualified adults in schools, students lose access to counselling, learning support, inclusive programming, arts, music, trades pathways, and the relationships that keep them connected to learning. As an example, much to my wife's chagrin, I collect old books. I have every annual report for BC education going back to the early 1900s. I have two copies of the Putnam Weir Report of 1925. Putnam and Weir toured the province and reported on the state of education. They commented that they lamented the loss of support for the arts, in particular music education... it seems that nothing much has changed in the intervening century.

### **Second, fully fund inclusive education.**

Inclusive education is a legal, moral, and educational commitment. But it cannot be delivered on commitment alone.

The Supreme Court of Canada has made clear that inclusive education services are not a dispensable luxury. They are the ramp that gives students meaningful access to the statutory commitment to education.

The funding reality still falls short. In 2024-25, BCTF Research found that provincial supplemental inclusive education funding covered only 75.8 percent of what BC school districts actually spent. Districts received about \$994.8 million but still had to make up a shortfall of \$316.8 million from other operating funds. This funding gap has persisted for at least 18 years.

That gap has real consequences. It means districts must ration inclusive education staff and services, shift support from one student to many, delay assessments, and pull resources from other parts of the system. The Ministry's own funding model also provides supplemental funding only for some categories of need, while other needs are expected to be covered through the basic allocation.

We acknowledge new funding in Budget 2026 for teachers, student services, and inclusive learning, but the continuing gap shows that BC still needs a transparent, needs-based model tied to actual costs and actual student needs.

This is not only about students with designations. It is about the health of the whole classroom. When students with diverse needs are properly supported, teachers can teach, EAs can assist, students can learn, and schools become safer, calmer, and more inclusive.

### **Third, reallocate a portion of public funding from private independent schools to strengthen the public system.**

Last year, IPE BC recommended reallocating a portion of public funding from private schools to public schools, restoring public school investment as a share of GDP, and prioritizing equity, transparency, and accountability. The Committee's Budget 2026 report specifically recorded this concern ~~under its discussion of independent and private schools.~~

This issue matters because budgets are choices. Public schools are required to serve every student who comes through the door. They serve students with complex needs, newcomer students, students in care, students facing poverty, and students in every region of the province. They are governed by elected boards and are accountable to the public.

The current funding pattern is difficult to justify. Recent analysis from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives shows that public K-12 spending as a share of GDP is expected to decline from 1.96 percent in 2016-17 to 1.89 percent in 2025-26. At the same time, public funding for private schools remains comparatively stable at about 0.14 percent of GDP.

The same analysis projects public school spending at \$8.4 billion in 2026-27, compared with \$604 million for private schools. Over the last decade, BC has subsidized private schools by approximately \$4.8 billion.

That \$604 million matters. It is roughly comparable to inclusive education funding for eight of the largest Metro Vancouver school districts combined. In a context where public schools face staffing shortages, unmet inclusive education needs, and real pressure on classroom supports such as music education, these dollars could make a material difference.

We are not suggesting an abrupt change. We are recommending a phased reallocation of public funding from private schools, particularly elite private schools back into the public system, beginning with a portion of those subsidies. Those funds should be reinvested directly into staffing, inclusive education, mental health supports, arts and music, trades programming, and smaller class sizes.

The principle is straightforward: public dollars should first strengthen public schools, because public schools serve all students.

In closing, our three recommendations are connected. Staff the system properly. Fully fund inclusion. Rebalance public subsidies from private schools toward public schools.

These are practical, evidence-informed steps that align with the Committee's own findings from last year. They would help stabilize schools, support students and staff, and ensure that public education remains a strong, inclusive, democratic institution in every community in British Columbia.

Public schools are more than service-delivery sites. They are community institutions, places of belonging, and foundations of democratic life. Budget 2027 should reflect that by ensuring public dollars first strengthen the public schools that serve all students.

Thank you. I welcome your questions.



*Institute for*  
Public Education/British Columbia

## Short cue-card version

**Opening:** Steve Cardwell, Institute for Public Education BC. IPE BC is independent, non-profit, and non-partisan. Former Superintendent in Delta and Vancouver, VP Students at KPU, Professor of Teaching at UBC, Chair of ArtStarts, Chair of IPE BC.

**Core message:** Public education needs stable investment in people, inclusion, and public accountability for public dollars.

**Recommendation 1 - Staffing:** Increase funding for teachers, EAs, counsellors, psychologists, specialist teachers, and support staff. Expand teacher and EA training. Support rural, remote, northern, and Indigenous community recruitment. Staffing is the foundation.

**Recommendation 2 - Inclusive education:** Move to a transparent, needs-based model. Close the gap between actual district costs and provincial allocations. Ensure timely assessments and enough staff for safe, effective student support.

**Recommendation 3 - Public funding equity:** Phase down public subsidies to private independent schools and reinvest in public schools. Use current evidence: public school spending is projected at \$8.4 billion in 2026-27, compared with \$604 million for private schools. Public K-12 spending as a share of GDP is declining, while private school subsidies remain comparatively stable.

**Closing line:** Staff the system properly. Fully fund inclusion. Rebalance public funding toward public schools. Public schools are community institutions and foundations of democratic life. Budget 2027 should ensure public dollars first strengthen the public schools that serve all students.

## Source notes for preparation

Budget 2027 presentation rules: 5 minutes to speak, 5 minutes for questions, maximum of three recommendations, no electronic displays or screen sharing.

IPE BC backgrounder: independent, non-profit, non-partisan; core principles include democracy, high-quality public education for all children, and accessible, welcoming, inclusive public schools.

Budget 2026 IPE BC submission: staffing, inclusive education, and public/private funding equity.

Budget 2026 Committee report: K-12 recommendations included improving inclusive education supports, dedicated school counsellors, and sufficient education assistants and support staff.

CCPA backgrounder, April 16, 2026: public school spending projected at \$8.4 billion in 2026-27, private school funding projected at \$604 million, public K-12 spending as a share of GDP expected to decline from 1.96 percent in 2016-17 to 1.89 percent in 2025-26, and private school public funding remaining comparatively stable at about 0.14 percent of GDP.