Our Hopes and Dreams for Public Education in BC

Institute for
Public Education / *British Columbia*

About the Institute for Public Education BC

The Institute for Public Education BC (IPE/BC) is an independent, nonpartisan society that provides high quality research, commentary and leadership to build a strong public education system for British Columbia's children, families, and communities. IPE/BC offers analysis of current educational issues, supports public education, and shares research findings to enrich dialogue on educational issues in British Columbia.

You can find out more about IPE/BC at https://instituteforpubliceducation.org

"Our Hopes and Dreams for Public Education" was carried out on unceded Indigenous territories around the province colonially known as British Columbia. We are grateful to live, work, be in relation with and learn from the wisdom of Indigenous people. The Institute for Public Education is based in Vancouver, on the traditional, ancestral and unceded lands of the Musqueam, Squamish and Tseil-Waututh Nations. We are honoured to live on this land and are committed to reconciliation, decolonization, and building relationships in our communities and schools.

Acknowledgements

We thank the more than 1,000 people who participated in this project by sharing ideas and vision for public education in BC.

We thank the members of the IPE/BC Hopes and Dreams Committee: Barbara Silva, Patti Bacchus, Moira Mackenzie, Rory Brown, Kirsten Daub, Anna Chudnovsky, Steve Cardwell, Janice St. Helene, David Chudnovsky. These members of the IPE/BC Board of Directors volunteered their time to promote the project, develop and conduct workshops, and collate the findings.

The project team used two generative AI tools, ChatGPT and Claude, to assist in analyzing statements about project participants' "hopes and dreams for public education." These statements were collected in anonymous form through a series of workshops and online consultation. Specifically, these tools were used to assist in identifying and developing the key themes and subthemes discussed in the report. Project team members also manually reviewed all materials collected to develop their own observations about key themes and to select participant quotes to highlight. Otter.ai was used for transcription.

Special thanks to Shannon Daub for her tremendous work in transforming reams of consultation materials into a coherent, organized and beautifully presented vision, and to Anita Sekharan for her thoughtful work on the visual design of this report.

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Introduction

We don't often have the time or opportunity to discuss, debate, or engage with each other about the future of public education.

We're usually caught up with immediate issues — whether the excitement and fulfillment of a project, assignment or learning process, or a critical analysis, protest or condemnation of an ongoing weakness or problem. But shouldn't we be talking about these issues, imagining and planning for a future that meets the educational needs of every child — articulating and sharing our hopes and dreams?

Our Hopes and Dreams for Public Education is a project of the Institute for Public Education BC (IPE/BC). Over the past two years, IPE/BC facilitated a community-based discussion and collection of data from British Columbians that we collated, analyzed, and now share in this report. Our aim is to inform public policy and decision-making — and to make clear to the broader community what our schools could and should be like.

We asked hundreds of participants, "What are your hopes and dreams for public education in BC? What do you think BC public schools need? What would an equitable, inclusive, and diverse public education system be like?"

Many of us are legitimately concerned about conditions faced by students, families and educators in BC's public schools. And we express our criticisms publicly as we should. This project, though, is unique in that it asked participants to talk about their vision for the education system they want, rather than their criticisms of the system we currently have. This was difficult for many, especially for parents, Education Assistants (EAs) and teachers worried about the unmet and significant needs of particular children. Initially they found it a challenge to "hope and dream" rather than criticize. But we at IPE/BC shared our belief that this positive-oriented process is simply another way to advocate for public education, for our schools and for our students.

In the end our participants overwhelmingly supported this opportunity to turn legitimate criticisms into inspirational discussion. We spoke with and heard from students, parents, EAs, District Parent Advisory Councils (DPACs), teachers, school trustees, advocates for students with diverse needs, teacher educators, student teachers and more. Participants included people of different genders, ages, Indigenous identities, racial and cultural backgrounds, immigration status, abilities, and locations around the province.

The project was presented in workshop form to hundreds of participants in more than 30 sessions that took place between 2024 and 2026. More than 1,000 people participated. The workshop design focused concretely on what people want to see. Part of the workshop content was to acknowledge there are glass half empty people and glass half full people. But the task of this project was to imagine the glass — our public education system — full to overflowing. During the workshops, participants engaged in discussion and were invited to share their "hopes and dreams" on notes that were then collected and transcribed. We received more than 2,000 discrete statements through these sessions, and additional online feedback – many of them are highlighted in this report.

To be clear, "Our Hopes and Dreams for Public Education" was not, nor was it meant to be, a randomized survey of British Columbians. Rather, it was a participatory community engagement and consultation process — an in-depth discussion with people connected in some way with our public schools.

Participants were not unanimous, of course. People bring different needs, experiences and values to the question of what an equitable, inclusive and diverse public education system could look like. But a remarkably coherent vision emerged from their responses, which we have done our best to represent through the seven key themes described in this report.

Many participants also spoke about the positive aspects of our existing education system – in articulating a vision for the future we do not intend to imply that none of these elements exist at present.

The Hopes and Dreams for Public Education project was inspired by a process that began in 2003 with the Charter for Public Education. The Charter was created from passionate discussions about public education with people from 42 communities around the province and 620 submissions.

Twenty years later, much has changed — life is more complex and stressful for many, and public schools are under pressure. IPE/BC developed the Hopes and Dreams project to respond to this new context and to help our province's public education system benefit from the advice, experience and wisdom of our project participants across BC. We invite you to read the report, to be inspired, to respond, to debate and participate in this vital discussion.

Steve Cardwell
Chairperson, Institute for Public Education/BC

David Chudnovsky
Chairperson, Hopes & Dreams Project

01. Decolonizing BC's public education system

OUR COLLECTIVE DREAM

We dream of public education that centres Indigenous knowledge, cultures and histories. We envision schools that are safe places for Indigenous students and staff, where their worldviews, life experiences and cultural practices are respected and welcomed.

We dream of schools where non-Indigenous students learn about colonization as both a historical and ongoing reality in BC, and experience decolonizing practices like land-based teaching, learning from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and exploring Indigenous ways of knowing across subject areas.

01: Decolonizing BC's public education system

As First Nations continue to take authority over public education on their lands through jurisdiction agreements, the provincial K-12 system will also be transformed through reconciliation and decolonization, with schools honouring Indigenous ways of knowing as foundational to all learning.

"Center Indigenous voices, authority, & perspectives."

Meaningful relationships with local First Nations

School districts will develop and strengthen collaborative relationships with First Nations and Indigenous community organizations to ensure district decisions reflect their needs, knowledge and priorities.

"Everyone included in the education landscape understands cultural safety and Indigenous pedagogies."

Indigenous knowledge systems as core curriculum

Schools and public education curriculum will integrate Indigenous epistemologies as valid, essential knowledge across all subject areas. Indigenous students will see their identity and culture reflected in a holistic and relational learning environment, supporting their success through graduation and beyond. Non-Indigenous students will benefit from this enriched environment in their own learning journeys and will develop experiential knowledge of Indigenous culture and worldviews.

Indigenous language learning as a right: Schools will feature fully funded Indigenous language programs with immersion options in every district. Public education curriculum will support students and their families to lead activities connected to community language revitalization efforts. All students will hear Indigenous languages spoken in their classrooms and at school events.

"I dream that Indigenous language + culture is weaved into every school day."

"Fully funded Indigenous language classes"

Centering Indigenous culture

Elders and Knowledge Keepers in schools will contribute to safe, welcoming environments for Indigenous students and families, who will have access to dedicated spaces for gathering and respite. Elders and Knowledge Keepers will determine when and how to share ceremonies, stories and other traditions with the wider school community, and will support educators in bringing decolonizing practices into the classroom. Inside and out, schools will feature Indigenous art and design created through collaboration with local artists.

Land-based learning

Students will have access to experiential, place-based learning connected to specific Indigenous histories, practices and cultural teachings, helping them connect to the land as ancestor and relative.

"Take all kids out onto the land to experience land-based learning"

"A safe Indigenous location is supported for students + staff."

"UNDRIP is honoured and Indigenous students are able to feel more comfortable in schools and are able to thrive, not just survive"

Indigenous staff, educators and leaders at every level

Schools and school boards will prioritize Indigenous representation in all areas of school life and all parts of the education workforce. Indigenous students will see themselves reflected in the people they interact with day-to-day and in the decision-making structures that shape public education.

"More Indigenous people in senior management...at all levels"

"Prioritize Indigenous teaching practices led by Indigenous educators."

02. Knowledge and skills for life

OUR COLLECTIVE DREAM

In an era of information overload and rapid change, we envision an education system that equips students with the tools to navigate complexity, think critically and create meaningful lives. We dream of schools where learning connects to real-world experiences, where the arts and trades are valued alongside robust traditional academics, and where every student graduates with both practical skills and a sense of purpose.

02: Knowledge and skills for life

Students will experience a rich, broad-based curriculum that develops critical thinking and life skills, preparing them for meaningful futures in a complex world.

Honouring diverse ways of knowing

BC's school curriculum will integrate Indigenous knowledge systems and differing cultural perspectives as valid ways of understanding the world. Students will engage with multiple perspectives in social studies and science, developing the empathy and critical thinking skills needed to engage with diverse viewpoints, cultures and life experiences.

Language learning as a gateway

Schools will be truly multicultural spaces where language learning opens doors to different cultures and ways of thinking. This includes making Indigenous languages accessible to all students, strengthening French immersion options and providing comprehensive support to English Language Learners. Strong language programs will equip students for a wide range of workplaces and occupations.

"My hope for public education is a future where every single student, regardless of their background or circumstance, has equitable access to the resources, tools, and enriching opportunities necessary to a truly well-rounded education — including strong foundational knowledge across all disciplines and the opportunity to explore their unique passions and skills."

"That education becomes a joyous activity, where children are excited and inspired by their school."

Schools bursting with art and creativity

Students will experience vibrant music, visual arts, drama, dance and writing programs. These programs will be well-resourced and valued as essential elements of public education. Every student — regardless of socio-economic background — will have access to art supplies and musical instruments.

Movement, wellness, and athletic enjoyment

Students of all abilities will have opportunities to find joy in movement, whether through team sports, outdoor education or individual wellness activities. Schools will support lifelong health through inclusive physical education that builds students' self-confidence and exposes them to a range of competitive and non-competitive sports.

Pathways to skilled trades

The value of trades education will be reflected through modern equipment and partnerships with local industry, creating clear pathways from school to apprenticeships and careers. This includes developing apprenticeship systems for trades teacher education, ensuring a new generation of instructors who can pass on both technical skills and pride of craft. Kindergarten through grade 9 applied technology programs will instill a confidence and independence in the use and social implications of the use of tools and the world of work.

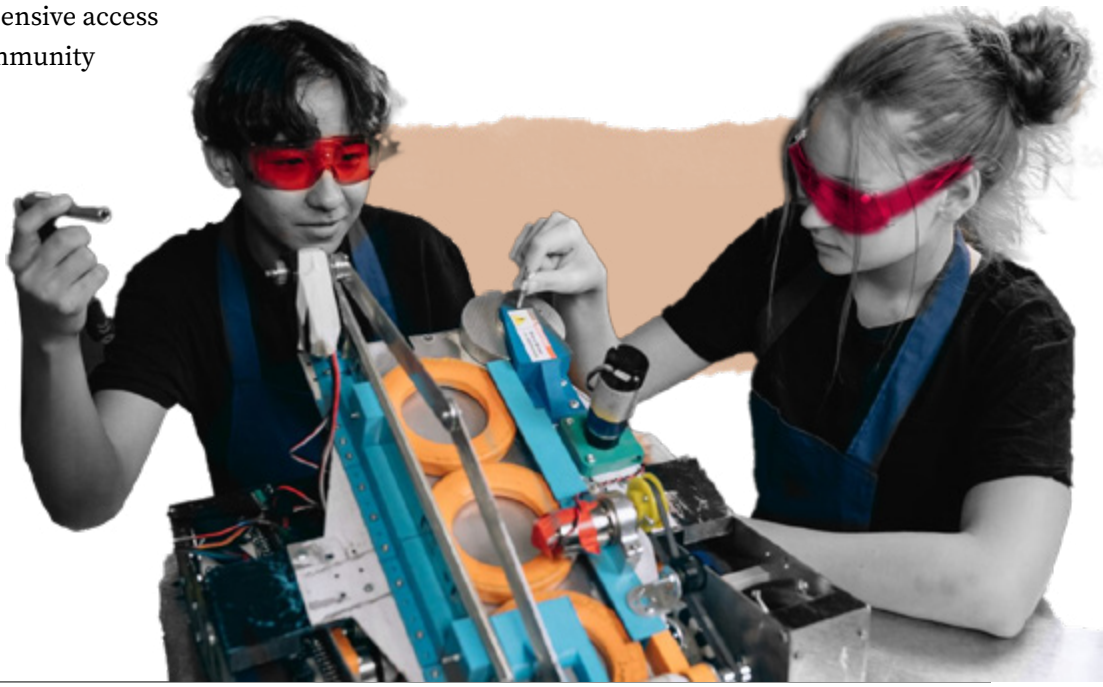
Skills for life — from cooking to critical thinking

Students will graduate with practical competencies and skills, such as financial literacy, healthy relationships, digital citizenship and food preparation. These will be integrated throughout the curriculum — for example: budgeting in math class, nutrition in science, healthy communication in language arts. Graduates will be equipped to navigate the everyday challenges of adult life, including how to navigate online spaces safely and critically. Students will have free and inexpensive access to a range of extra-curricular community programs.

"Media literacy and critical thinking skills...Because everything that's coming at kids and teens today is potentially overwhelming."

Teaching and assessment methods that honour how students learn

With smaller class sizes and adequate classroom support to meet each student's needs, teachers will have the time and flexibility to use project-based, experiential and land-based learning approaches. These approaches will emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving skills over memorization. Students will receive authentic, growth-focused assessments that supports their learning.



03. Schools where every child truly belongs

OUR COLLECTIVE DREAM

We dream of schools designed from the ground up to welcome all learners. We envision seamless systems where help arrives when needed, diversity is anticipated, mental health support is readily available, and where no child goes hungry or lacks the tools to learn. In these schools, inclusion is the default — from physical spaces that offer quiet refuge, to teaching practices that honour multiple ways of learning, to teams working with students' diverse learning abilities or disabilities.

03: Schools where every child truly belongs

Schools will provide wraparound supports that ensure each student — regardless of ability or background — experiences genuine belonging. Hot meals, mental health services, behavioural supports and inclusive physical spaces that enable full participation in school life will be the norm.

Every child feels they belong

A student's identity will not determine the quality of their education – regardless of their learning needs, gender, race, immigration status, socioeconomic background, sexual orientation or abilities. Experiences of discrimination or exclusion will be heard, believed and addressed systemically. Supports for students with diverse learning abilities and disabilities will be abundant instead of rationed. Every school around the province will be equipped — physically, pedagogically, and culturally — to welcome every learner.

"Students can go anywhere in the province and get the same high-quality education and feel the same sense of belonging."

"...a truly inclusive education for our neurodiverse children, not just checking the boxes of the IEPs."

Sometimes together, sometimes apart, always belonging

No student will experience forced inclusion that ignores their individual needs or segregation that denies them community. Schools will have the physical spaces, staffing and teaching flexibility to meet each student's needs without stigma – whether they thrive in bustling classrooms or require quiet spaces to regulate and focus.

Mental health as an educational priority

Students will have immediate access when needed to counseling and culturally safe wellness supports. Mental health services will be embedded in schools, with teachers and staff at all levels receiving training in trauma-informed education practices.

Nourishing bodies nourishes minds

Schools will provide universal healthy hot breakfast and lunch programs. These programs will offer nutritious food in dignified spaces where eating together builds community rather than stigma.

"Every student fed and ready to learn."

Addressing root causes of behaviour challenges

Teachers, EAs and specialists will have the time and space needed to work with students experiencing challenges with the goal of preventing crises rather than managing them. Supports will be based on need, not formal diagnosis.

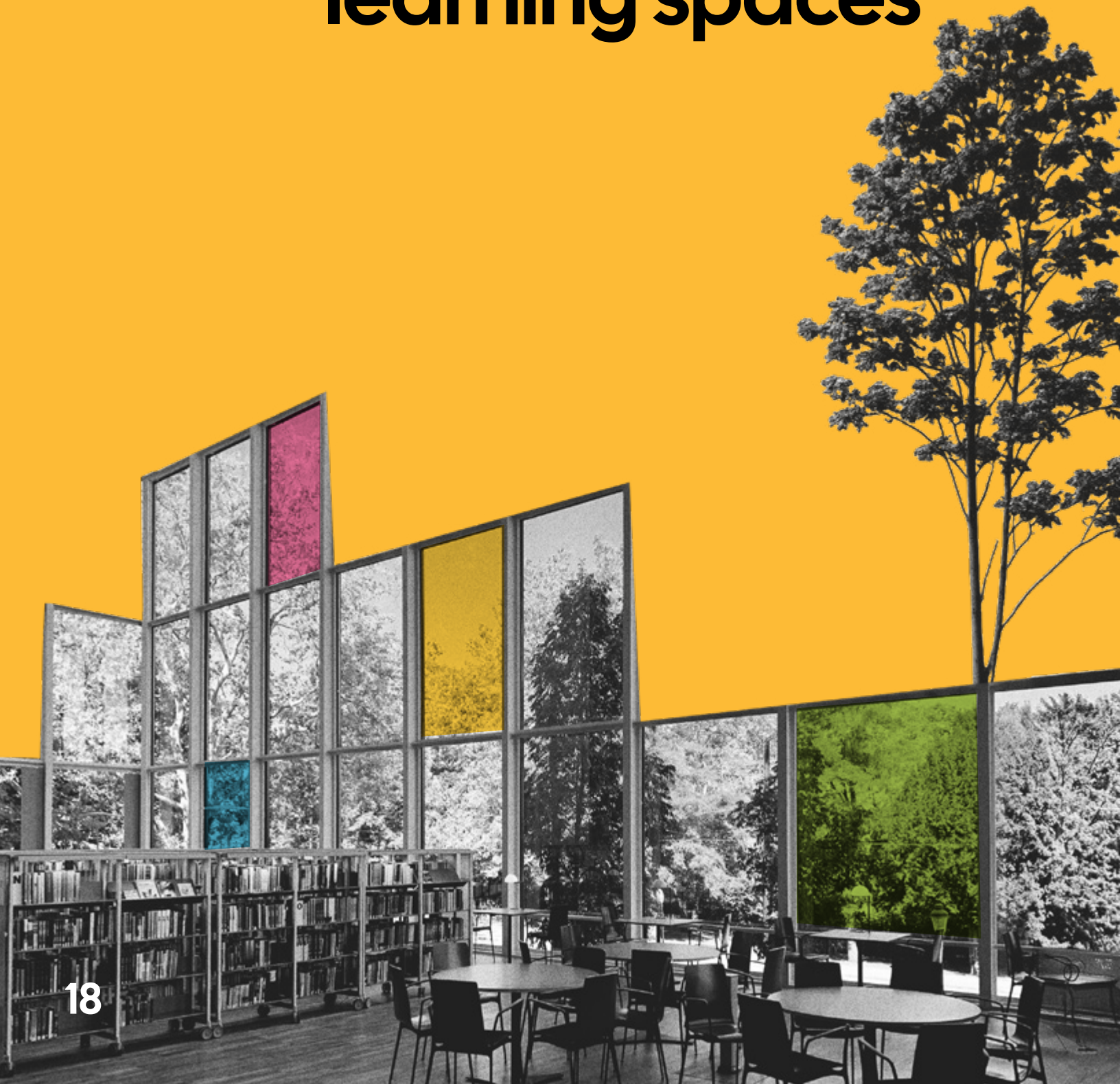
"Early intervention is key.... Early on, children need to know that someone cares about them, understands any challenges they are facing and can help."

Early intervention before school entry

Children with diverse learning needs, disabilities and behavioural challenges will receive assessment and support from an early age. As a result, appropriate resources for each student's success will be in place from day one of Kindergarten.

"What if parents were advised and connected to counseling, parenting courses, occupational therapy, physical therapy, social play programs, and educational apps that would aid in their child's development before even entering Kindergarten?"

04. Safe, accessible, and inspiring learning spaces



OUR COLLECTIVE DREAM

We see schools as more than buildings. We dream of welcoming, accessible spaces that inspire learning through their design – where students, families and educators enjoy spending time. This vision extends beyond basic safety and comfort to imagining built environments that actively support diverse learning styles, foster connection with nature and invite creativity.

04: Safe, accessible and inspiring learning spaces

Students will learn in seismically safe, well-maintained permanent facilities that are accessible to all students — featuring ample space for varied activities, equitable access to technology, outdoor learning areas and comfortable temperatures year-round.

Schools built for modern learning

Each school will be a permanent facility designed for 21st-century learning, designed to allow for varied types of activities and able to accommodate changes in neighbourhood demographics over time without the need for portables. These buildings will include specialized learning spaces — dedicated science labs, art and music rooms, libraries, multi-purpose spaces, and technology-rich learning commons.

Safe and comfortable classroom environments

All classrooms will feature windows that allow for abundant natural light and fresh air. Proper temperature control and air filtration will ensure year-round comfort and safety as the climate changes. Flexible furniture will allow spaces to be reconfigured for different learning activities — from collaborative group work to quiet individual study. Schools will be clean and well-maintained, with adequate maintenance staffing during school hours. Schools will be seismically safe and the physical buildings and grounds will be well-maintained.

"Every student benefits not only from a school that won't fall down in an earthquake , but also from warm, inviting, safe spaces for learning."

"Trees! Plants! Gardens! at every school."

Nature-based learning environments

Schools will seamlessly integrate indoor and outdoor learning, with gardens, outdoor classrooms and natural play spaces. These natural spaces will support land-based learning and environmental education while allowing for movement and sensory regulation throughout the school day.

"Technology that works and is available to all."

Digital equity and modern learning tools

Every student and staff member will have access to up-to-date technology that enhances human connection and hands-on learning – regardless of household or neighbourhood income levels. Schools will provide high-speed Internet, digital creation tools and adaptive technologies that support diverse learning needs.

"Amazing science labs, cutting edge technology and collaborations for kids to learn about STEM."

Abundant specialized spaces

Beyond standard classrooms, schools will feature spaces that support the full spectrum of human development. Libraries will be "warm, welcoming spaces with all the tools, games, and resources any child would want" and serve as hubs for literacy, research and imagination. Science labs will have proper equipment and safety features with class sizes that ensure safe hands-on experimentation. Art rooms, music studios, shops for applied skills, and kitchens will allow students to explore creative and practical skills with appropriate tools.

Barrier-free schools for all abilities

Schools will embody universal design principles, ensuring full accessibility by meeting each student's physical and sensory needs. This includes elevators, ramps and accessible playgrounds as standard features; single-stall washrooms that provide dignity and safety; sensory rooms and quiet spaces for regulation; and free transportation for field trips that accommodate all mobility needs.

Cultural and sacred spaces

Schools will include dedicated spaces for cultural practices and spiritual expression, recognizing the diverse communities they serve. This includes spaces for Indigenous ceremonies, multi-faith reflection rooms and areas for holding cultural celebrations. These spaces acknowledge that learning encompasses more than academic subjects — it includes cultural identity, spiritual development and community connection.

"Natural light, decent heating/cooling systems and comfortable seating in all classrooms."

05. A thriving education workforce

OUR COLLECTIVE DREAM

We view proper staffing as the fundamental condition required for inclusive classrooms where students thrive. We envision schools as vibrant workplaces where teachers, EAs and specialists, including counselors, have time to collaborate and where class sizes allow for strong, supportive relationships with students.

We also point to recruitment and retention needs relating to pay, benefits, workload and respect, along with training and mentorship opportunities that foster career-long growth. We dream of a public education system where “this is the greatest job you could ever do” with working conditions that honour the complexity and importance of the work.

05: A thriving education workforce

Schools will have sufficient qualified teachers, EAs, support specialists and administrators to meet each student's learning needs — with sustainable workloads that encourage excellence and foster greater joy in education professionals.

EAs as essential learning partners

Every classroom will have dedicated EAs sufficient to meet the full range of student needs. The central role EAs play in our public education system will be recognized through better pay, full time hours and professional training standards. Schools will maintain clear support structures for EAs, who will have time built into their day for collaboration with teachers, professional development and planning.

Class sizes that enable relationships and learning

Teachers will work with smaller class sizes with balanced classroom composition, allowing them to build meaningful relationships with their students and tailor instruction accordingly. Ratios for specialized spaces (like shops, science labs and kitchens) will be determined based on safety and equipment availability.

"Collaboration & time to gather & talk about the realities of our work are priorities."

"A system that has enough supports in classrooms. Every classroom needs an Educational Assistant! No matter the designation!!"

Working conditions that enhance the joy of teaching

Teachers will have adequate preparation time, manageable workloads and wellness supports that reduce burnout. This includes time for collaboration with other teachers, EAs and specialists, and time to plan student support with EAs.

Teachers will have the necessary resources to do their jobs well – from learning resources to technology to classroom supplies. New teachers will be supported through mentorship programs, working alongside experienced educators in their first few years rather than managing classrooms alone. Time will be provided in the mentor/mentee schedules to enable them to work with each other to support and master their practice.

Specialist support teams in every school

Every school will have support teams that include counselors, psychologists, speech therapists, and behavioural specialists. These professionals will provide timely help to deal with individual students' challenges and to reduce pressure on teachers and EAs in the classroom. Public health nurses will be available to support students on a regular basis.

Culturally diverse educator recruitment

Teachers, EAs and specialists will reflect the diversity of BC's student population, with targeted strategies to increase the proportion of Indigenous and racialized educators. Schools will have Indigenous language teachers with oral tradition expertise.

"Every child sees representation of themselves in the adults that educate and support them in their education."

Efficient and safe school environments

Administrative and custodial staff will be valued for the vital role they play in seeing that schools run smoothly and safely. Administrative load on teachers will be offset through enhanced supports and time in their schedules. Full-day custodial staff will be in place in every school.

"There should be a formal mentorship program, where the beginning teacher spends time with an experienced mentor teacher…We need more teachers and need to keep the ones we have."

Economic security for education workers

All public education workers will be able to afford to live in the communities where they work, making it easier to recruit and retain needed staff. EAs will have full-time hours, working in designated schools and classrooms.

06. Schools as trusted, community-centred institutions

OUR COLLECTIVE DREAM

We envision schools at the heart of community life. We dream of spaces that belong to everyone and serve families' needs well beyond traditional hours — with seamless before-and-after-school child care and on-site health and social services. We want administrative and elected leadership that reflects the diversity of school populations and that works in partnership with educators, students and their families.

06: Schools as trusted, community-centred institutions

Schools will serve as centres of community life with integrated services and meaningful family engagement that fosters open, trusting relationships. Students, their families, school administrators, teachers and all staff members will have a voice in shaping their immediate school-based experiences and the larger public education system.

Enabling family engagement

Schools will actively reduce obstacles that prevent families from participating in their children's education. They will offer flexible meeting times that accommodate working parents' schedules and provide multi-lingual and culturally responsive engagement. Families will feel comfortable in their children's schools and be encouraged to ask questions and make informed decisions about their children's learning.

Integrated child care, health and social services

Schools will house wraparound support services, bringing help directly to where children and families already are. Seamless before and after school child care will be available to all parents who want it, and students will have on-site access to health providers and specialists (such as public health nurses and speech therapists) and social services (such as family and youth workers).

"Before & after school care in every school."

Schools as community hubs

School buildings will hum with activity from morning to evening, with before- and after-school child care, evening classes and weekend community events. Libraries, gyms, and specialized spaces will be available for after-hours community use, maximizing public investment while strengthening neighbourhood connections. Schools will cultivate partnerships with local First Nations, cultural organizations, post-secondary institutions, employers and service agencies to build bridges throughout the community and broaden the range of learning opportunities for students.

"Schools should function as true community hubs where families access all services they need."

"It takes a village — but you have to first build the village..."

Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers

Elders and Knowledge Keepers will connect Indigenous communities and traditions into school life. They will be fully compensated as co-educators and will influence school culture, decision-making processes and approaches to community building.

"Cultural events are frequent and embrace full diversity of the community."

Democratic governance and accountable administration

Public school and district governance will be transparent and responsive, anchored in authentic consultation with Indigenous communities, and with families, students, and staff. School administrators will have the time and resources to be instructional leaders who remain connected to the daily realities of classroom life. Public education leaders and decision-makers will be representative of the populations they serve. School board governance will encourage open, transparent and democratic public voice. Parents, students, unions, and members of the community will be free to speak at public meetings without barriers or constraints.

Meaningful accountability instead of rankings

Parents and communities will learn about how well schools are serving all students and their diverse learning needs, not just those who excel at high-stakes standardized assessments. With equitable and abundant education resources, school rankings will cease to have much relevance.

07.

Funding every school for every student's success

OUR COLLECTIVE DREAM

We envision a fully-funded public education system where every student's learning needs are met. We dream of schools where teachers and EAs have what they need to create stimulating, relationship based classroom environments, where every community — regardless of wealth or location — has equitable access to the highest quality education. We want funding that matches public education's foundational importance to society, plentiful enough to make the hopes and dreams expressed in other sections of this report a reality.

07: Funding every school for every student's success

Public education will receive predictable, needs-based funding that covers actual costs. Schools will be places of abundance, where teachers, educators and staff are consistently able to deliver on every student's right to a high quality, inclusive education.

"We have a system that we know is really good...but it's been starved...How do we give this pretty darn good system the support that it needs to let these professionals do the work they want to do?"

Funding that meets actual education costs

Districts and schools will have operating budgets that reflect the true cost of delivering high quality, inclusive education to all students based on need. In particular, this means substantially increased funds for staffing to enable smaller class sizes, an EA for every student who needs one, and a range of specialist support from speech language pathologists to educational psychologists to counselors.

Capital funding for 21st-century schools

Infrastructure investments will ensure every school building is safe, comfortable and conducive to learning. This includes accelerated seismic upgrades, technology infrastructure for equitable digital learning, and facility improvements that create accessible and inspiring learning environments. Rural and remote schools will receive equitable capital investment. The regular maintenance of school buildings will reduce prolonged waits for repairs and upgrades. School playground equipment will be brought up to current standards with regular maintenance and updating.

Universal quality regardless of geography or demographics

Every child will have access to the same high-quality education. A student's postal code, family income, cultural background or learning needs will not determine the quality of education they receive.

"I'd like to see a fully funded system that includes smaller classes, no-cost materials and technology for families and resources provided directly to teachers."

"My biggest hopes and dreams would be equity across all schools and sites. I have seen the disparity in expectations, resources and outcomes across districts and school sites."

Ample classroom resources

Every classroom will have plentiful learning materials — from books and technology to music and art supplies. There will be no need for teachers to spend money out-of-pocket just to make sure their classroom has the basics, or for parents to receive fundraising requests for school supplies, field trips or other school needs.

"Parents don't have to pay for extracurriculars, field trips, clubs, sports, etc, so that it's accessible to all"

Public dollars for public education

The approximately $600+ million currently subsidizing private schools will be phased out and redirected to public education, ensuring that public funds serve the public good. This shift represents both a practical contribution to dealing with underfunding and a philosophical commitment to public education as a universal right.

"No more public funds to private schools."

Protected, transparent funding streams

Special education funding will be used exclusively for special education. When the province negotiates salary increases, full funding to cover those costs will flow to districts. Budget processes will be open and transparent, with clear reporting on how funds flow from the ministry to districts, to schools, and to the classroom.

Focus on student voices

High school students who participated in two dedicated workshops voiced their hopes and dreams for a public education system that meets their needs as whole people – covering traditional academics while also sustaining their mental and physical health and helping them transition to adulthood. These students seek greater flexibility and autonomy, and envision schools that honour their passions with safe, enjoyable learning environments.

Flexibility & Choice in Learning

"Let everyone follow their passion."

"Pick our own classes."

"More exploration like exploring outside the school walls."

"Having the ability to take courses at other schools during the school year would be beneficial...and allow students to meet more people."

"More guest speakers to introduce a variety of topics and learning."

"Learning in a way that is fun so you don't have to JUST sit down."

"Critical thinking cannot just be a poster in the class!"

Connection Beyond the Classroom

"More outdoor ed / outside time in high school."

"More community-involved learning."

"A study room with people to help."

Rest & Schedules

"School hours should be shifted later or shortened because students aren't getting enough sleep."

"High school should cut the same time as elementary schools...so students have a chance to sleep more and be more focused in school."

Physical Health & Basic Needs

"Air conditioning and heating should be available in all classrooms."

"PE equipment available at breaks for student use."

"Healthy food available for those who need it."

"Food should be allowed and free during classes."

"Free food for broke students: meal plans."

"Private washrooms."

"If you don't have material for a project it should be available."

"A lot of students cannot afford electronic devices...We should be given our own laptops at the beginning of the year."

Mental Health & Belonging

"Everyone being nice."

"Less 'police-y' presence from supervision aides at recess and lunch – more feeling of relationship."

"Public education could provide therapy animals at school."

"Tools for mental health should be taught to young kids so they can handle difficult situations later in life."

"While tests are an easy way for teachers to determine how much their students have learned...I think it puts a lot of stress on students."

Preparing for Adulthood

"More life skills (taxes, mental health support)."

"Adulting classes? E.g., how to do taxes, non-basic life skills (homework, coding, cleaning, car maintenance, mortgage/ loans/debts, basic first aid, conflict resolution, emotional regulation skills)."

"Schools should emphasize post secondary/more prep at senior levels... It's important to create courses that help explore yourself."

"Students are not always ready for transition to post-secondary. Give students free access to help after grade 12 (course planning, financial advisement, mental health assistance), essentially an advisor."

Conclusion

From hopes and dreams to action

Public education is a bedrock of a democratic society — a fundamental mechanism of social solidarity that contributes to equity as well as individual and community well-being.

For generations British Columbians have rightfully depended on our public schools and supported both their promise and their achievements. It's fair to say, however, that systems need ongoing regeneration, investment and improvement. In short, every system — including BC's public education system — benefits from exploring the Hopes and Dreams of the community.

The Institute for Public Education/BC is gratified by the thoughtful, practical and visionary commentary that participants in the Hopes and Dreams project brought to group workshop sessions and submitted individually online and in person. We want to assure each one of them that their perspectives will be shared as widely as possible across British Columbia, including with education decision-makers at the local and provincial levels.

The Hopes and Dreams community engagement project has been an enlightening and rewarding undertaking. It affirmed that British Columbians value our public education system and wish to see it supported in becoming the best it can possibly be. The project asked participants to reframe the narrative, from what can't be to what can be; from accepting limits and losses to envisioning ideals. And they did!

At IPE/BC we see this report as simply one step in an ongoing process. If our work encourages discussion and debate about the nature of our public schools in communities across the province we will be very pleased. But that discussion and debate is not nearly enough. The suggestions and wisdom of those who engaged with us — who shared their hopes and dreams — should be studied and taken seriously by policy-makers at the school, school district and provincial levels. That should and must lead to change.

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