

BCTF Education Funding Brief 2024:

Recruiting and retaining teachers for the
inclusive schools our students deserve

BC Teachers' Federation
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BC TEACHERS' FEDERATION

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Opening/preamble

A robustly funded public education system generates social and economic benefits for BC communities, including enhanced student learning outcomes, greater equity and social mobility, reduced poverty, better physical and mental health, stronger employment indicators, improved public health and safety, and greater civic engagement and stability. Only a long-term systemic fiscal strategy can resolve the demoralizing and damaging effects of BC's current teacher and funding shortages. To anchor that recovery, the BCTF is recommending targeted envelopes of additional operational funding over the next three years (2024–2027) to address teacher recruitment, teacher retention, and special education needs.

Recommendation 1

Provide a targeted teacher recruitment funding envelope to relieve current K–12 staffing shortages and fill projected labour needs.

The provincial shortage of certified teachers is impacting student learning and services daily. The BCTF's provincial random-sample survey conducted in early 2023 showed 81% of BC teachers are affected by staffing shortages in some significant way. Teachers report increased workload, lost preparation time, missed personal/sick leave, and lack of replacement staffing for absent colleagues. The most frequently reported impact, however, was “not being able to get necessary support for my students.”

Chronic shortages have led an increasing number of BC school districts to employ uncertified personnel to fill teaching gaps in K–12 classrooms. Already struggling to meet present staffing needs, BC's educational services sector is one of the top five major industry groups expecting further job vacancies in the next decade, according to BC's

2023 Labour Market Outlook Report. The province forecasts that an additional 64,500 education workers, including elementary and secondary teachers, will be needed to account for increasing student enrolment and retiree replacement alone, before taking into account normal staffing fluctuations due to illness, parental and other leaves, and occupational attrition. An accelerated province-wide approach is needed, complementing existing initiatives such as the province's StrongerBC Future Skills Grant Program, to get qualified teachers into BC's K–12 schools and adult education programs.

Drawing on evidence-based research and past provincial task force recommendations, this targeted funding envelope for teacher recruitment would enable:

- expanding and diversifying teacher education delivery models and capacity
- addressing the accessibility and affordability of teacher education programs and undergraduate education degrees
- enhancing recruitment incentives tied to obtaining BC certification and initial public school district employment
- student loan forgiveness programs
- waiving initial teacher certification (TRB) application fees.

Recommendation 2

Provide a targeted teacher retention funding envelope to enhance retention of the current work force.

According to the BCTF's provincial random-sample survey conducted in early 2023, 16.2% of BC's 50,000 public school teachers report that they are likely to leave teaching within the next two years. Of those respondents who indicated their likeliness to leave, the top three reasons given were: inadequate working conditions (53.4%), mental health concerns (52%), and lack of support for students with disabilities and diverse needs (35.6%).

Retirement eligibility is another key factor (33.8%). These numbers clearly illustrate that improving working conditions is a key factor in retaining teachers and improving professional sustainability.

Mentorship and collaboration play a critical role in supporting professional sustainability. Well-developed, funded, and co-ordinated mentorship programs provide early career teachers with the pedagogical and relational resources and support needed to launch successful classroom practice and improve retention in the profession. Meanwhile, dedicated collaboration time facilitates professional learning and more robust collegial relationships, thereby reducing professional isolation, alleviating workload, and ultimately ensuring students receive more co-ordinated support and instruction.

Immediate actions must be funded to alleviate workload intensification, support early career teachers, and acknowledge teachers' expertise and professional contributions to BC's teaching profession, schools, and communities. A targeted teacher retention funding envelope will enable:

- increased preparation and collaboration time during instructional hours to alleviate workload and promote professional learning and collegial relationships
- targeted remuneration for experienced teachers who provide mentorship to new teachers through local teacher mentorship programs
- improved flexibility and long-term career sustainability for teachers in full time (1.0 FTE) assignments
- retention incentives for teachers who are reaching retirement eligibility.

Recommendation 3

Provide, at a minimum, funding for special education staffing and services that fully covers what school districts actually spend on inclusive education.

For years, the province has allocated far less money for special education than districts have been spending to ensure inclusive education for all. In 2021–22, total provincial special education supplemental funding was \$696,568,720. However, total expenditures on special education services were over \$1 billion (\$1,030,584,491)—a gap in funding of over \$330 million that districts had to make up for. Or put another way, special education funding only covered 67.6% of what school districts actually spent. This mismatch between what government allocates to districts for special education and what districts actually require creates austerity pressures to ration special education staffing and services or redirect funds from other operational areas.

This persistent funding gap is felt in classrooms. In the BCTF's 2023 provincial random-sample survey, only 13.1% of teachers felt that students with disabilities or diverse needs are having their needs met. To create a truly inclusive public education system, \$350 million in emergency funding is needed to close the gap between special education funding and actual costs. This funding should be targeted to:

- meet the needs of all students with disabilities and diverse needs, including those with a “high-incidence” designation and those who have not yet been designated
- decrease the unacceptable wait times students and parents experience to get the assessments they need to access special education support
- increase equity across the system, by ensuring special education funding can be accessed by any student who needs it in any district, without taking from other operational areas.

Ultimately, providing adequate special education funding will result in more abundant funding for all as more operating funds will be available across the system.

CJ:ms:tfu