

### BC Education Funding in the Canadian and International Context

BCTF Research is often asked how funding in BC compares to funding in other provinces, and in other countries. While these comparisons can be useful, it is important to be aware of some key methodological limitations.

#### Limitations in comparing education funding between jurisdictions

One way to look at funding is by comparing education spending as a percentage of countries' overall Gross Domestic Products (GDPs). This juxtaposes each country's overall national wealth with the financial resources invested in education.

However, it is important to be aware that GDP includes a variety of factors not related to education, potentially distorting comparison statistics. For example, Luxembourg and Norway routinely spend less on education as a percentage of their GDP than the average OECD country.<sup>1</sup> However, both nations are also among the highest spending of OECD countries for education on a per-student basis.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, The Pacific Island nations of Kiribati and Tuvalu appear to have very high education spending when analyzed as a percentage of GDP—16.4% and 15.8% in 2024. However, this reflects extremely small formal economies rather than aggressive prioritization of education investment.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond GDP-related distortions, several other factors significantly affect education spending comparisons. The structural costs of education vary by geography, population density, and demographic differences across jurisdictions, (fertility and immigration rates, aging patterns, etc.) creating divergent funding pressures. Funding items included in “education spending” totals are also not standardized, nor the length of the school year or instructional hours. A full examination of these limitations is beyond the scope of this document, but they should be kept in mind when interpreting the education spending figures below.

#### Education funding as a percentage of GDP, 2006 – 2022–2023

Figure 1 below shows the total expenditure by educational institutions (private and public) on primary and secondary schooling from 2006 to 2022–2023 as a percentage of GDP in each Canadian jurisdiction. Also included are the overall national figures and the average among OECD countries.

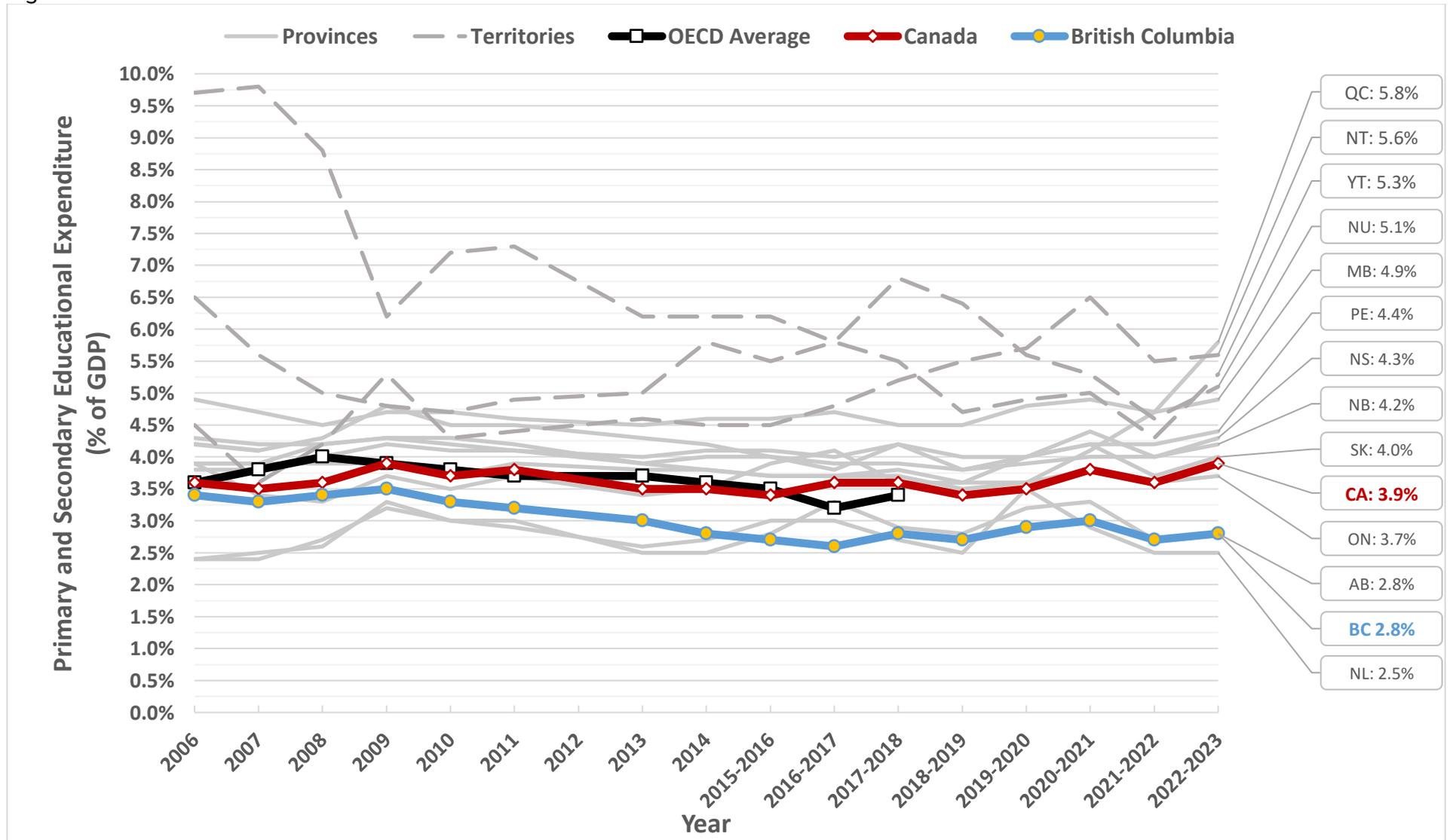
In general, Canadian education expenditure has followed the overall trend demonstrated by the OECD average and has been relatively consistent over time (3.6% of GDP in 2006 and 3.9% in 2022–2023). However, there is quite a bit more variance between Canadian jurisdictions.

One consistent trend is that the Canadian territories spend more on education—as a percentage of GDP— than the provinces.<sup>4</sup> This trend is expected given the structural differences between provinces and territories: education costs are higher in the territories, and they have smaller GDP figures.<sup>5</sup>

However, there are also some differences in spending between individual provinces. The 2006 figure for British Columbia (3.4%) was just slightly below the OECD average and Canadian

statistic for that year (3.6%). However, since that time, education spending in this province has consistently been lower in comparison to much of the rest of Canada. In 2022–2023, British Columbia's percentage of education expenditure (2.8%) shared the second lowest spot with Alberta, exceeding only Newfoundland and Labrador (2.5%) in education expenditure relative to GDP.

Figure 1



Source: Statistics Canada (2010-2025).<sup>6</sup>  
 Additional Notes.<sup>7,8</sup>

### Comparing per student education expenditure

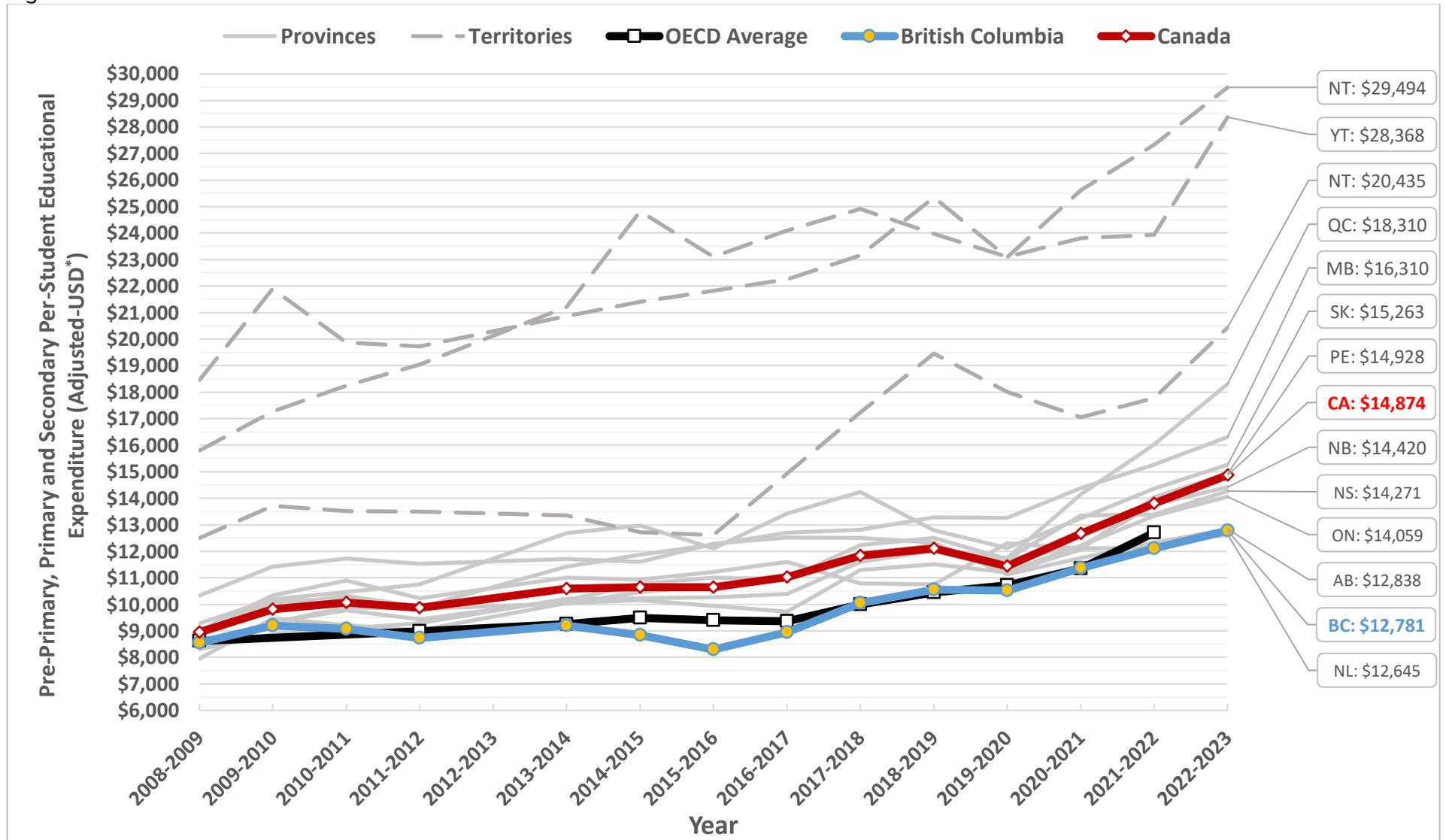
An alternative method of comparing educational expenditure is to examine spending per student across jurisdictions. Measuring resources on a per full-time equivalent student basis can also sidestep many of the GDP-related distortions discussed earlier.

Figure 2 graphs the total pre-primary, primary and secondary education expenditure by full-time student equivalency from 2008–2009 to 2022–2023.<sup>9</sup> During this period, most OECD countries—including Canada—have seen nominal increases in per-student education spending.<sup>10</sup> However, unlike the figures for spending as a percentage of GDP, Canada has exceeded the OECD average on this measure of education spending.

Conversely, British Columbia has been one of the lowest spending Canadian jurisdictions over the same period. Beginning in 2008–2009 with \$8,546 in US dollar-adjusted per-student spending, BC exceeded the spending of only Prince Edward Island (\$7,953), Quebec (\$8,308) and New Brunswick (\$8,395), also slightly trailing the overall Canadian figures (\$8,947).

Since then, British Columbian education spending has mostly tracked the OECD average but has consistently remained near the bottom among Canadian jurisdictions, sitting second-lowest<sup>11</sup> at \$12,781 per-student in 2022–2023—about \$2,000 (approximately 14%) below the Canadian figure of \$14,874.

Figure 2



Source: Statistics Canada (2010-2025).<sup>12</sup>

\* Currency units are adjusted using Purchasing Power parity (PPP) exchange rates to equalise the purchasing power of currencies, controlling for differences in price levels across jurisdictions during the same comparison year.

Additional Notes.<sup>13,14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> OECD. (2025). *Education at a Glance 2025: OECD Indicators*. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1787/1c0d9c79-en>.

<sup>2</sup> Luxembourg's GDP denominator includes massive amounts of international financial activity unrelated to the cost of educating Luxembourg's children. Norway's GDP calculation includes large transfers of petroleum royalties to the nation's sovereign wealth fund which can vary significantly on a year-to-year basis depending on the price of oil. Norway reports education spending to the OECD using "Mainland GDP" (which excludes petroleum extraction) to minimize this distortion, but this methodological adjustment creates its own challenges for comparability with jurisdictions – like Canada and its' provinces/territories – that report GDP including all natural resource revenues.

<sup>3</sup> UNESCO Institute for Statistics. (2025). "Government spending on education as a share of GDP, 2024." Retrieved from [https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/education-spending?time=latest&spending\\_type=gdp\\_share&level=all](https://ourworldindata.org/grapher/education-spending?time=latest&spending_type=gdp_share&level=all).

<sup>4</sup> The exception here is Quebec, which surpassed the territories in education funding in recent years.

<sup>5</sup> The territories face substantially higher education delivery costs due to small, geographically dispersed populations across vast distances, requiring smaller schools and higher per-student staffing ratios. The cost of living is also significantly elevated. These structural cost differences mean that comparable per-student investment levels would still appear as a larger share of territorial GDP than provincial GDP.

<sup>6</sup> Source List: (1) Statistics Canada, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics. (2010-2020). *Education Indicators in Canada: An International Perspective [2010-2020 Editions]*. Table B.2.1 for 2011 to 2020 editions; Table B.1.1 for 2010 edition. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/81-604-X#wb-auto-2>. (2) Statistics Canada. (2025). "Public and private expenditure on educational institutions as a percentage of GDP, by level of education [2018-2019-2022-2023]." Table 37-10-0211-01. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710021101&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2018+%2F+2019&cubeTimeFrame.endYear=2022+%2F+2023&referencePeriods=20180101%2C20220101>.

<sup>7</sup> Data for 2012 not available in source documents. Additionally, data for the OECD average was not included in source documents for 2018-2019 to 2022-2023. Starting with the 2018 edition of "Education Indicators in Canada: An International Perspective," the format for reporting educational expenditure switched to one that crosses calendar years.

<sup>8</sup> Canada classifies expenditure by education level in a way that differs slightly from that of most other countries in the OECD – pre-elementary education is grouped with expenditure at the elementary and secondary levels, while expenditure on postsecondary non-tertiary education is grouped with tertiary-type B expenditure. This has only a minor effect on international comparison since expenditure at the elementary and secondary levels is dominant.

<sup>9</sup> Figures are expressed in current United States Dollars for each year, with purchasing power parity adjustments to account for jurisdictional differences in costs.

<sup>10</sup> Nominal increases over time reflect both real spending growth and inflation, as figures are in current dollars rather than constant dollars.

<sup>11</sup> Only Newfoundland and Labrador had a lower level of spending on a per-student basis than British Columbia at \$12,645 in 2022-23.

<sup>12</sup> Source List: (1) Statistics Canada, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics. (2012-2020). *Education Indicators in Canada: An International Perspective [2012-2020 Editions]* Table B.1.1.2 for all editions. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/81-604-X#wb-auto-2>. (2) Statistics Canada. (2021-2025). "Annual expenditure by educational institutions per student, by educational level [2018-2019-2022-2023]." Tables 37-10-0210-01, 37-10-0227-01, 37-10-0240-01, 37-10-0270-01 and 37-10-0293-01. Retrieved from the following links: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710021001&pickMembers%5B0%5D=3.2;> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710022701&pickMembers%5B0%5D=3.2;> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710024001&pickMembers%5B0%5D=3.2;> <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710027001&pickMembers%5B0%5D=3.2;> [https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710029301&pickMembers%5B0%5D=4.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=3.2.](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=3710029301&pickMembers%5B0%5D=4.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=3.2)

<sup>13</sup> Data for 2012-2013 not available in source documents. Additionally, data for the OECD average was not included in source documents for 2009-2010, 2010-2011 and 2022-2023. 2016-2017 data for Nunavut were also unavailable.

<sup>14</sup> The figures associated with the OECD average include post-secondary non-tertiary, while those figures are excluded for Canadian jurisdictions. This has a very minor effect on international comparison since expenditure at the elementary and secondary levels is dominant.