



CHAPTER 1:

Teachers who responded to the survey and the students that they teach

This report is one of a series documenting the findings of the Poverty and Education survey. For additional information, see: <http://www.bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx>



A BC Teachers' Federation study. This survey was conducted by BCTF Research in collaboration with the Anti-poverty action group of the Committee for Action on Social Justice.



Poverty and Education survey: A teacher's perspective

About the Poverty and Education survey

The *Poverty and Education survey: A teacher's perspective* was conducted by BCTF Research in collaboration with the BCTF Anti-Poverty Action Group of the Committee for Action on Social Justice, building on the findings of focus group research that explored poverty and education issues with teachers in four school districts¹. The purpose of the provincial survey was to assess whether and to what extent the focus group findings reflect teachers' experience across the province, to deepen our understanding of how poverty and education issues vary by regional, socio-economic, and school characteristics, and to identify what resources are most needed to address poverty within BC schools and the community.

Contributions and acknowledgments

BCTF Research Department

- Research design, data analysis, and reporting of survey results: Margaret White, Senior Research Analyst
- Assistance in all phases of the research project: Anne Field, Research Assistant
- Leadership and support for the project: Larry Kuehn, Director, Research and Technology Division

Committee for Action on Social Justice—Anti-Poverty Action Group

As staff and committee members have changed since the study began, we would like to acknowledge those who contributed, past and present, at various phases of the research project.

- Leadership, co-ordination, and survey promotion: Kathy Hartman, Assistant Director, Professional and Social Issues Division
- Leadership in the early phases of survey design: James Chamberlain, Assistant Director, Professional and Social Issues Division (up to August 2012)
- Pre-testing, survey promotion, and/or input into survey results: Amy Dash, Sue Spalding, Debbie Sabourin, Annie Ohana (current members as of May, 2013), and ongoing input from members of the CASJ Anti-Poverty Action Group.
- Survey development and questionnaire design: Ilse Hill (former member of the CASJ Anti-poverty action group)

We would like to acknowledge former members of the CASJ Anti-Poverty Action Group (Ilse Hill, Julia MacRae, Stacey Kemp), and Linda Young of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association Anti-poverty Committee, for their contribution to the focus-group research in phase one of the study. We also wish to acknowledge the contribution of all the teachers who took the time to complete the survey, assisted in the pre-testing, and the teachers who participated in the focus groups that led to the development of this survey.

We also wish to thank Adrienne Montani of First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, for taking the time to review a draft of the survey, and First Call for providing us with opportunities to share the research results with community groups across BC.

We also wish to acknowledge the BC Teachers' Federation for supporting this project.

¹ White, M., Hill, I., Kemp, S., MacRae, J., and Young, L. (2012). *Poverty and education: A teacher's perspective—Summary of the findings of the focus group research*. Available at: www.bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx.

Table of contents

Introduction

- Rationale for the study
- Purpose and objectives

Study design

- Survey design
- Survey sample and response
- Analysis and reporting

Survey results

- Teachers who responded to the survey
- Teacher characteristics
- Type of teaching assignment
- Student characteristics
- Socio-economic context of the school

Chapter 1: Summary

Introduction

Rationale for the study

Over the past decade, BC has experienced persistently-high child poverty rates. The *2014 Child Poverty Report Card*² shows that child poverty worsened after the 2008 global recession, with only marginal improvements since 2010 (using the after-tax Low Income Measure). In 2012, child poverty rates remained unacceptably high, with one in five (20.6%), or 169,420, BC children aged 0–17 living in poverty. This means tens of thousands of BC families are struggling economically, whose children are dealing with the effects of poverty at home and at school. Considerable research exists on factors contributing to child poverty in Canada³ and on the impact of socio-economic factors on educational outcomes⁴. Much less is known about how teachers in BC public schools perceive the effects of poverty on students, how they respond to poverty in the classroom, and what teachers view as necessary to support students to overcome educational barriers related to poverty. For this reason, the BC Teachers' Federation conducted a provincial survey of BC teachers on poverty and education issues.

Purpose and objectives

The *Poverty and Education survey: A teacher's perspective* was conducted by BCTF Research in collaboration with the BCTF Anti-Poverty Action Group of the Committee for Action on Social Justice, building on the findings of focus group research that explored poverty and education issues with teachers in four school districts⁵. The purpose of the provincial survey was to assess whether and to what extent the focus group findings reflected teachers' experience across the province, to deepen our understanding of how poverty and education issues vary by regional, socio-economic, and school characteristics, and to identify what resources are most needed to address poverty within BC schools and the community.

The objectives of the survey were to document, from a teacher's perspective, the poverty-related needs of students, assess the adequacy of resources to meet these needs, and identify what is most needed to overcome educational barriers related to poverty. The survey also sought to learn what teachers view as priority areas for BCTF advocacy on poverty and education issues, and teacher recommendations for the provincial government.

² First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (2014). 2014 Child Poverty Report Card, Factsheet #1, pp.7-8.

³ See Albanese, P. (2010), *Child Poverty in Canada*, Oxford University Press, for a comprehensive review of Canadian literature and analysis of causes of child poverty, including p. 21, entitled "BC's Child Poverty Shame".

⁴ See Brownell, M., Roos, N., Fransoo, R., et al. (2006), "Is the class half empty?: A population-based perspective on socioeconomic status and educational outcomes." *IRPP Choices*, 12(5), and Flessa, J.J. (2007), *Poverty and Education: Towards Effective Action: A Review of the Literature*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

⁵ White, M., Hill, I., Kemp, S., MacRae, J., and Young, L. (2012). *Poverty and education: A teacher's perspective—Summary of the findings of the focus group research*. BCTF Research report available at: <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/2012-EI-01.pdf>

Study design

Survey design

The survey instrument was developed by BCTF Research in collaboration with members of the CASJ Anti-Poverty Action Group, with the themes identified in the focus group research informing the design and content of the survey questions. The survey was pre-tested extensively with teachers from regions across BC. The survey instrument addresses topics such as hunger and school meal programs, school fees and participation in school-related activities, awareness and understanding of poverty, adequacy of resources to support low-income students and families, and what teachers view as most needed to support students and families.

The questionnaire is comprised of structured closed-ended questions and open-ended questions to elicit teachers' thoughts, concerns, and suggestions about poverty and education issues.

Survey sample and response

The *Poverty and Education survey: A teacher's perspective* was open to all teachers in the BCTF membership (public school teachers in the province of British Columbia) who work with school-aged students and have a continuing or term teaching contract. All teachers who met the eligibility criteria, agreed to be contacted by the BCTF, and had a current e-mail address, were identified from the BCTF membership database. BCTF sent an initial e-mail invitation and follow-up reminder, with a direct link to the online survey embedded in the message. The survey remained accessible online until February 18, 2013.

The survey results presented in this report are based on 778 valid survey responses. As teachers work in a variety of teaching situations, several questions provided the option of "Does not apply". These responses are excluded before calculating the percentage responses to the question, with the number of valid responses indicated in the relevant charts (denoted as "n=").

Analysis and reporting

The characteristics of teachers responding to the survey are compared to provincial teacher characteristics to detect areas of non-response bias. The survey data is analyzed with descriptive statistics (frequencies, comparison of means) with SPSS statistical software. Key variables for the analysis include regional zone, grades taught, and socio-economic context. Qualitative descriptive analysis⁶ is the method used to analyze open-ended responses with Atlas-ti software.

An overview of the survey findings is available online, as well as a detailed report for each of the key topic areas, which provide a more in-depth analysis of how the results vary by zone, socio-economic context, years of teaching experience, and grades taught. These reports also include a summary of the qualitative analysis of the responses teachers provided to the open-ended questions in the survey. See bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx.

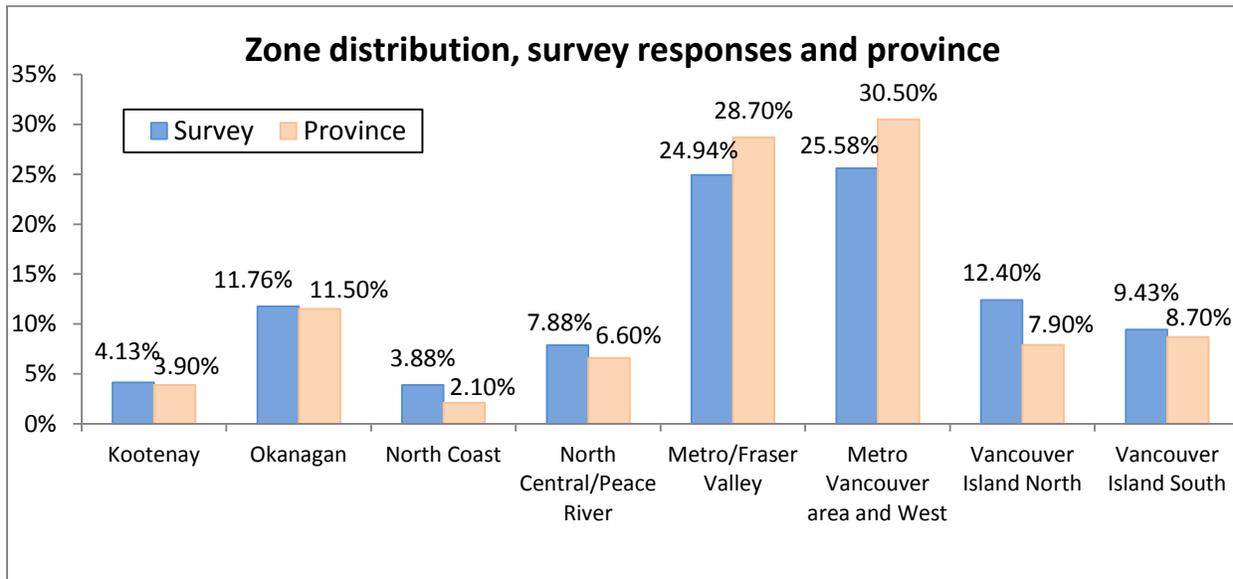
⁶ Sandelowski, M. (2000). "Whatever Happened to Qualitative Description?" *Research in Nursing & Health*, 23, 334–340.

Survey results

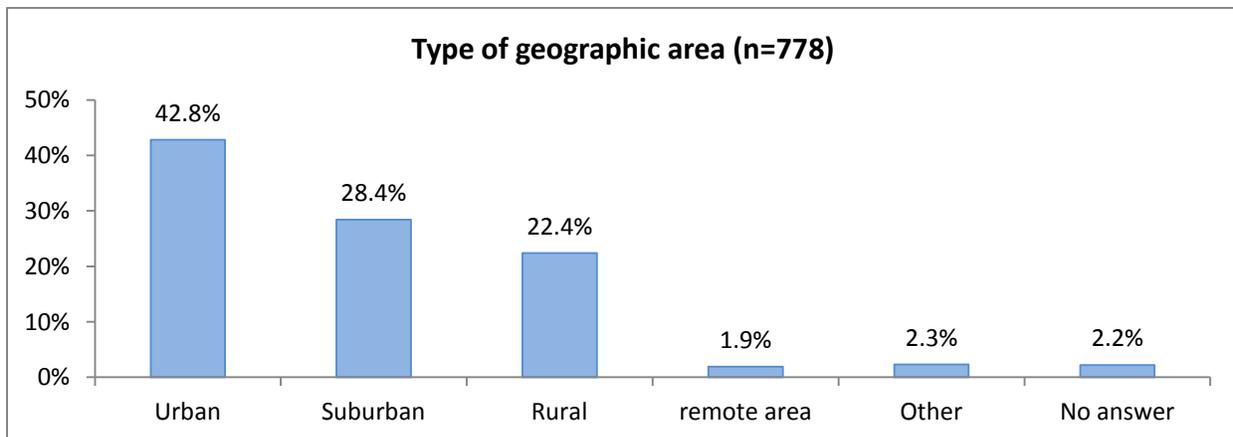
Teachers who responded to the survey

Regional characteristics

The BC Teachers' Federation is a provincial organization, with representatives from 76 union locals and sub-locals in 60 school districts, grouped within eight regional zones across BC. A comparison of the distribution of survey responses to provincial membership data shows that all zones are well-represented in the survey. North Coast, North Central Peace, Vancouver Island North, and Vancouver Island South are slightly over-represented, and Metro/Fraser Valley and Metro Vancouver area and West are slightly under-represented in the survey.



The survey also asked teachers to describe which geographic term best described the area where they teach. Almost half (42.8%) of survey respondents indicated teaching in urban areas, 28.4% in suburban areas, 22.4% in rural areas, and 1.9% in remote areas.

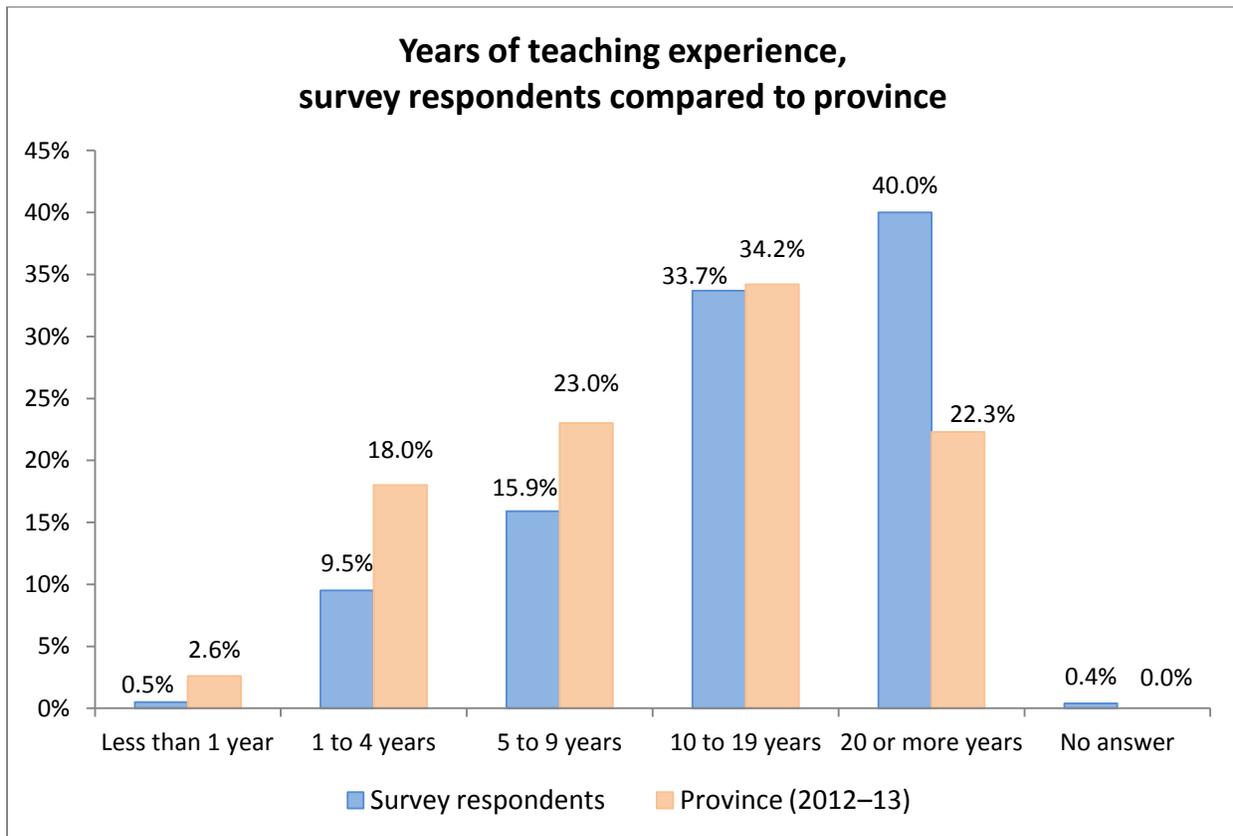


Teacher characteristics

Years of teaching experience

The majority of teachers responding to the survey have considerable teaching experience, with one-third (33.7%) having 10 to 19 years and 40% having 20 or more years of teaching experience. A comparison of the distribution of survey responses to 2012–13 provincial figures⁷ for teachers by years of teaching experience shows some non-response bias, with less-experienced teachers underrepresented and mid- to late-career teachers overrepresented relative to all teachers in the province. This should be considered when interpreting the quantitative survey results for questions where years of experience may be a factor.

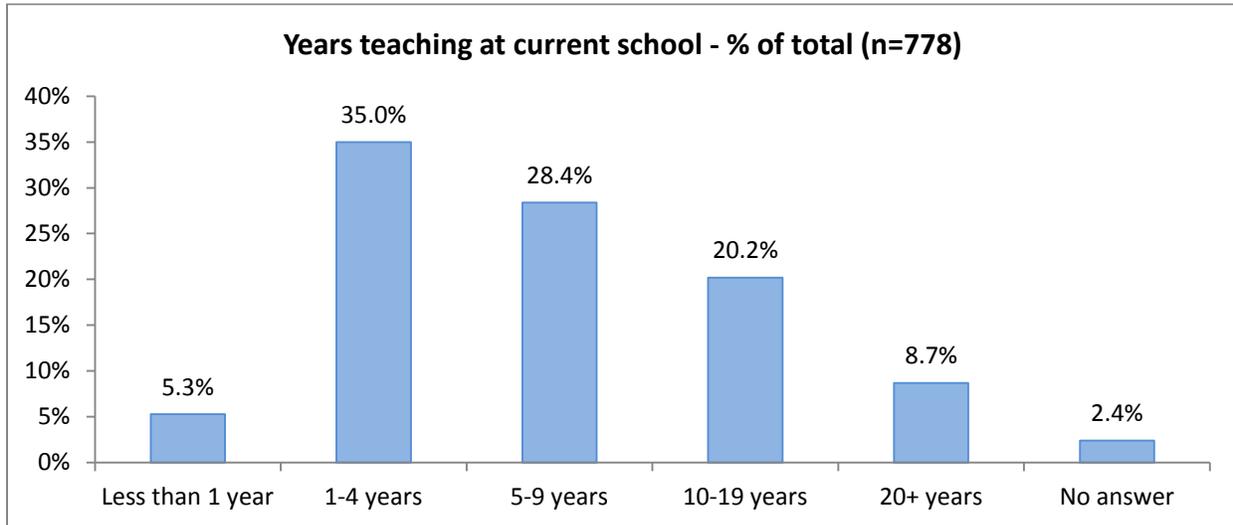
Early-career teachers with less than 1 year experience (0.5% versus 2.6% in the province), 1 to 4 years experience (9.5% versus 18% in the province), and 5 to 9 years experience (15.9% versus 23% in the province), are under-represented in the survey responses. Late-career teachers are over-represented in the survey responses, with 40% having 20 or more years of teaching experience, compared to 22.3% of all teachers in the province.



⁷ BCTF calculations based on figures in: Ministry of Education (2013). *Teacher Statistics—2012/13, Province—Public Schools*, January 2013, p. 3.

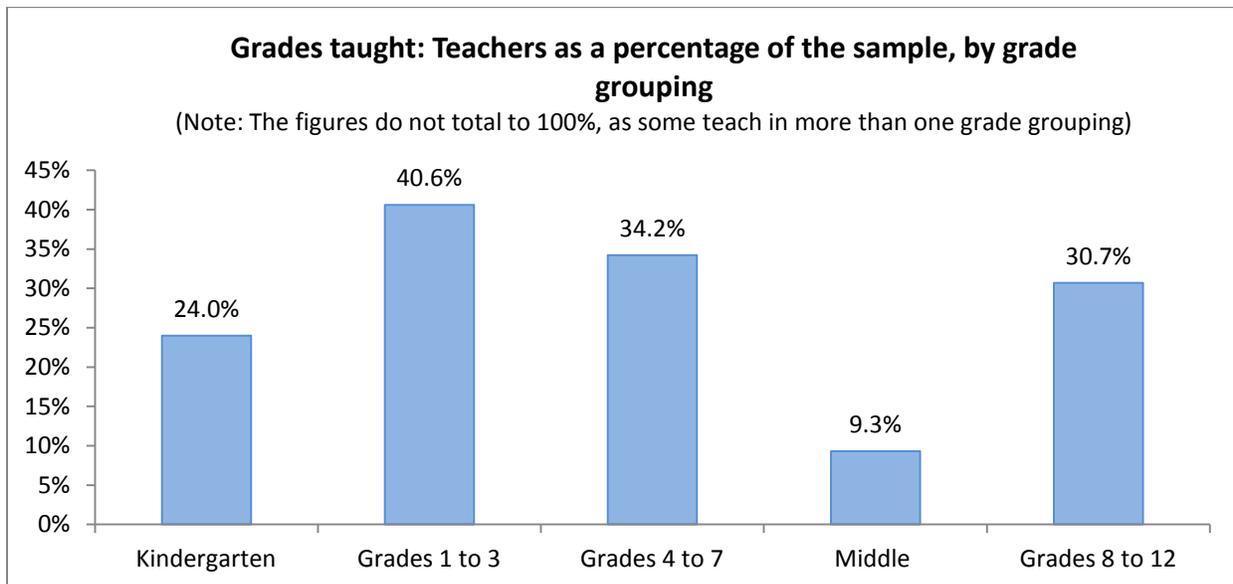
Number of years teaching at the current school

The survey respondents include both teachers who are quite new to the school and teachers who have been teaching for many years at their current school. About one-third of respondents have been teaching at their current school for 1 to 4 years, and another 5.3% for less than one year. In terms of long-term teachers, one in five teachers (20.2%) have been at their current school for 10–19 years, and another 8.7% for 20 or more years.



Grades taught

The survey respondents are distributed across all grade levels: 24% of respondents teach Kindergarten, 40.6% teach Grades 1 to 3, one-third (34.2%) teach Grades 4 to 7, 9.3% teach middle-school grades, and 30.7% of respondents teach Grades 8 to 12. Of the 56 middle school teachers who specified a grade level, 21 teach elementary grades only, 28 teach a mix of elementary and secondary grades, and 7 teach secondary grades only.



Type of teaching assignment

Subject specialists

Almost one-third (29.8%) of the sample said they were subject specialists; that is, they teach one or two subjects most of the time, somewhat higher than teachers in the province. Subject specialities described by respondents include the arts (art, music, band, drama, dance), the sciences (science, biology, chemistry, physics), language arts (English, French, Spanish, Modern languages), mathematics, social studies, history, technology education, industrial skills, and home economics.

Alternate education program

The survey also asked whether respondents taught in an alternate education program. There are 56 teachers among the respondents (7.6% of the sample) who teach in an alternate education program.

Learning specialist teachers

Learning specialist teachers as a percentage of the sample include Special Education teachers (16.7%), English Language Learning teachers (6.9%), Teacher-librarians (4.1%), Counsellors (3.1%), and Aboriginal Education teachers (1.8%). “Other type of specialist teacher” comprises 3.2% of the sample, and includes such positions as Speech Language Pathologist, School Psychologist, and Early Learning and Literacy.

Type of teaching assignment—Learning specialist teacher (Sample size=778 responses)

Type of teaching assignment	Number of responses	Percentage of sample
Special education teacher	130	16.7%
ELL teacher	54	6.9%
Teacher-librarian	32	4.1%
Counsellor	24	3.1%
Aboriginal Education teacher	14	1.8%
Other type of specialist teacher	25	3.2%

Note: Some learning specialist teachers may teach in more than one specialty and/or also be a classroom teacher.

The following table shows, for each speciality, learning specialist teachers as a proportion of all teachers in the province compared to learning specialist teachers as a proportion of the survey sample. The proportion of specialist teachers in the sample is slightly higher than that for the province, more-so for Special Education and ELL teachers. This may in part be because the provincial data is based on FTE teachers, while the survey data does not distinguish between full-time and part-time teaching assignments.

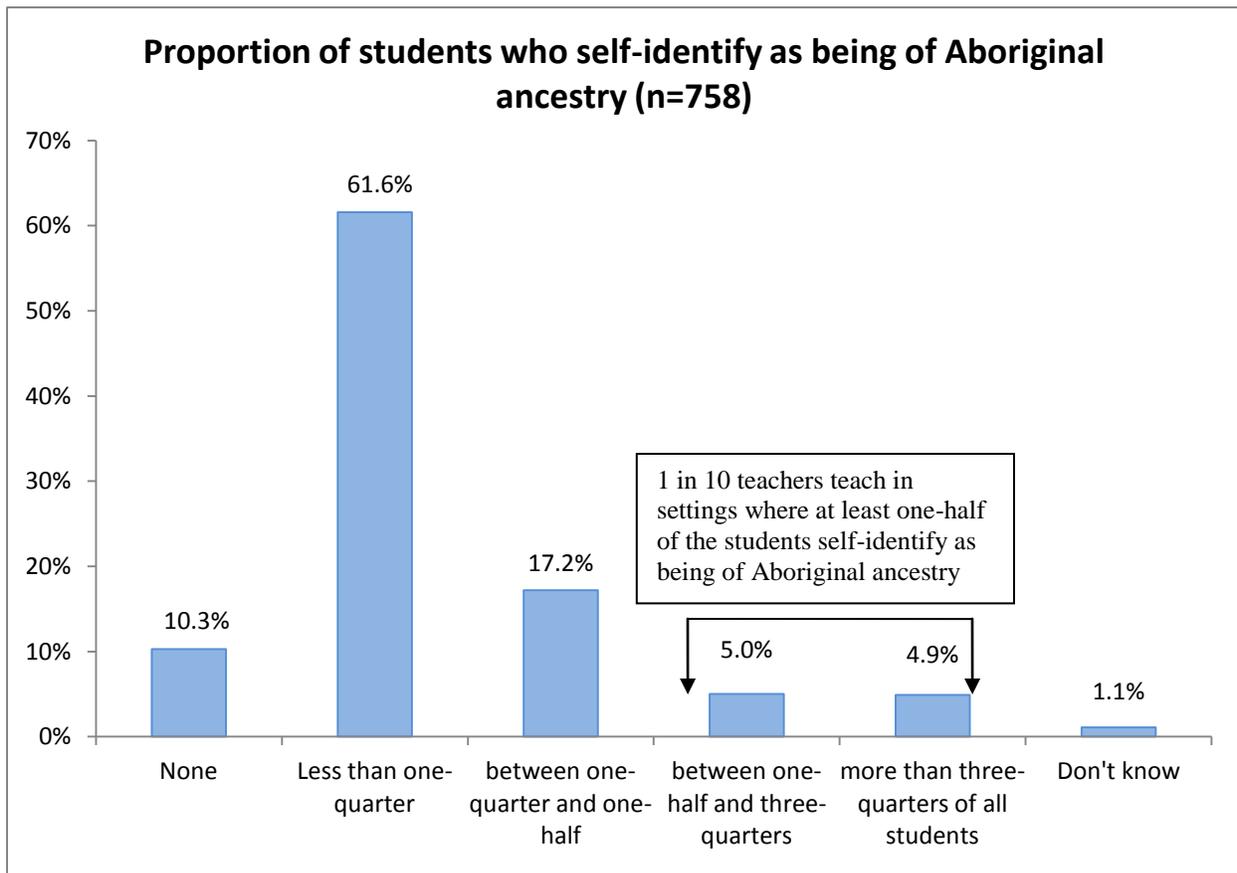
Programs with specialist teachers	Province: 2013–14 (Total=30,101 FTE teachers)		Survey sample (n=778 responses)
	LST teachers FTE	% of all teachers	% of total survey responses
Special Education	3,236.8	10.8%	16.7%
English Language Learning (ELL)	816.8	2.7%	6.9%
Library Services	627.5	2.1%	4.1%
Counselling	858.3	2.9%	3.1%
Aboriginal Education	203.1	0.7%	1.8%

Source: BCTF table, with data prepared by Information Department, Ministry of Education: unpublished Form 1530 reports, Staff by Year and Program Code, 2013/2014.

Student characteristics

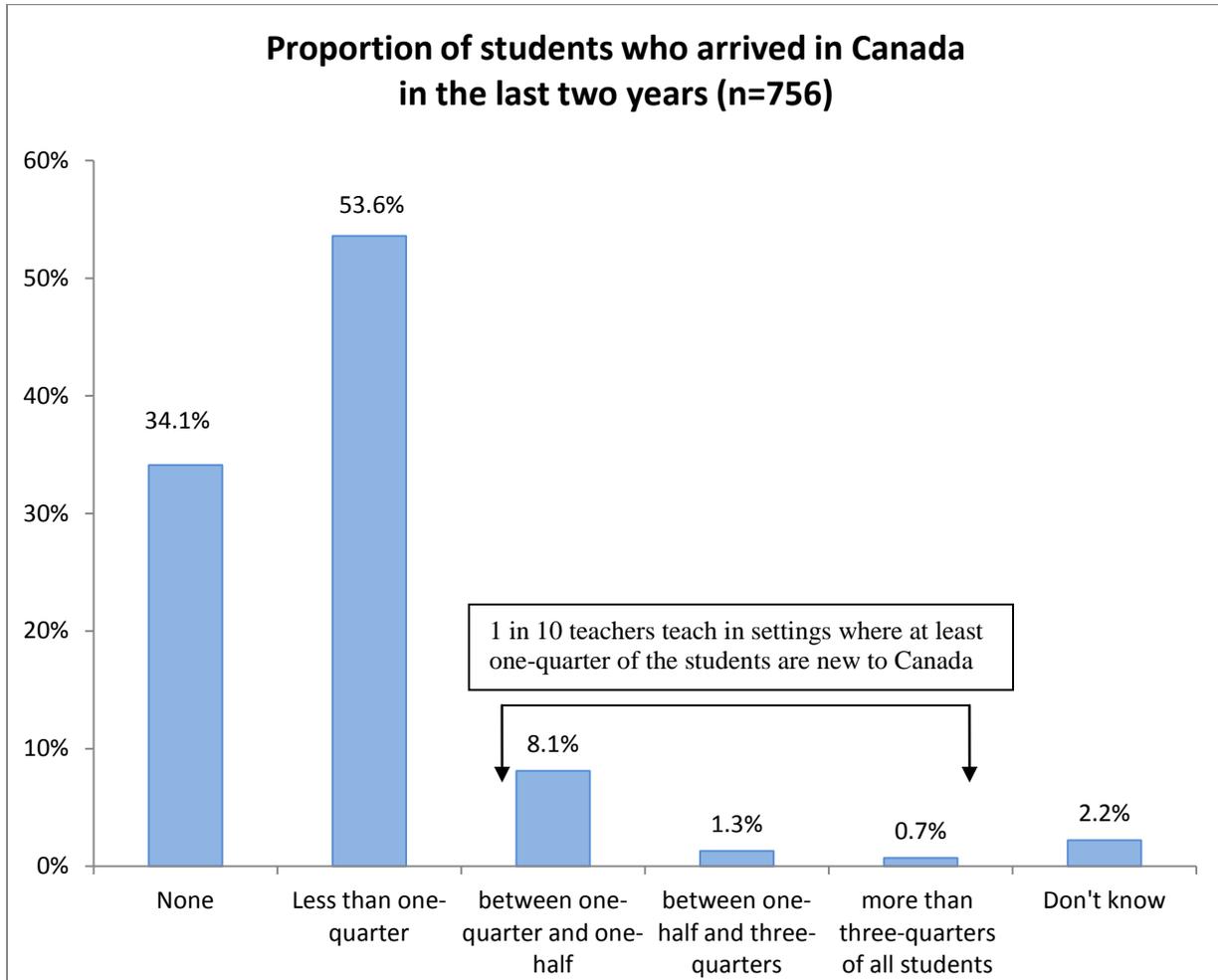
Students who self-identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry

Most teachers responding to this survey have students in their class who self-identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry. Only one in ten (10.3%) respondents reported having no students self-identified as Aboriginal in the class they currently teach. About two-thirds (61.6%) of teachers indicate “Less than one-quarter” and 17.2% indicate “Between one-quarter and one-half” of the students they teach self-identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry. A small proportion of respondents teach in schools with a high Aboriginal student population, with 5% indicating “Between one-half and three-quarters” and 4.9% indicating “More than three-quarters” of the students they teach self-identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry.



Students who are newly immigrated to Canada

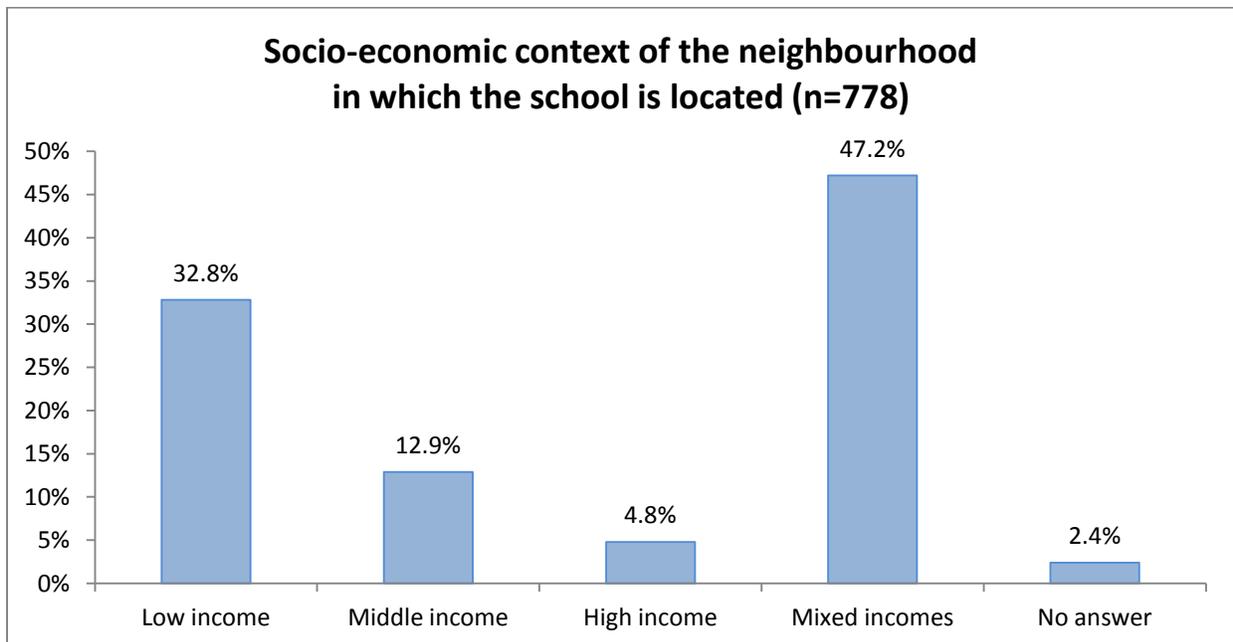
One-third (34.1%) of survey respondents indicate having no students in their class who are newly immigrated to Canada. About one-half of respondents (53.6%) indicate having “Less than one-quarter” of students they teach who arrived in Canada in the last two years. In total, about one in ten respondents teach in classes with a high proportion of students who recently arrived in Canada, with 8.1% having “Between one-quarter and one-half”, 1.3% having “Between one-half and three-quarters”, and less than 1% having “More than three-quarters” of all students being newly immigrated to Canada.



Socio-economic context of the school

The socio-economic context of a neighbourhood is a factor influencing the needs of students and families in the school community and the types of resources and programs available to support those needs. Inequities can arise between neighbourhoods when more-affluent areas are able to generate additional sources of school revenues through parent fund-raising efforts and/or district initiatives such as international student programs. Schools in neighbourhoods where families are mostly low-income may receive some additional resources to address poverty-related needs, while schools in mixed-income neighbourhoods may have less access to such resources. All of these factors influence the learning conditions of students and the working conditions of teachers. Many studies have documented the impact of socio-economic factors on learning outcomes and graduation rates⁸.

The survey asked teachers, “In your view, does your school/workplace mainly serve a socio-economic neighbourhood considered low income, middle income, high income, or mixed incomes?” About one in three teachers (32.8% of the sample) teach in schools located in a low-income neighbourhood, almost half of respondents (47.2%) teach in schools located in mixed-income neighbourhoods, while 12.9% describe the socio-economic environment of their school as middle-income and 4.8% as high-income.



Note: Respondents who teach in more than one school were asked to answer the survey questions, thinking of the school they teach in that has the highest level of poverty.

The next chapter, *Child poverty in BC public schools and economic pressures on families*⁹, provides data on the proportion of students teachers currently teach who are experiencing poverty, and on how the proportion of students experiencing poverty has changed in the school community since the teacher began teaching at the school.

⁸ For a summary of this literature see: Brownell, M., Roos, N., Fransoo, R., et al. (2006). “Is the class half empty? A population-based perspective on socioeconomic status and educational outcomes.” *IRPP Choices*, 12(5) available at <http://www.irpp.org/FASTTRAK/index.htm>.

⁹ <http://www.bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx>

Chapter 1: Summary

This chapter provides an overview of the demographic and teaching characteristics of the teachers who responded to the *Poverty and Education survey: A teachers' perspective*. Overall, there is a good distribution of responses by the regional zones upon which BC Teachers' Federation activities are organized. Throughout the remaining chapters of the report, survey results are presented by zone to provide insights into regional differences in how BC teachers' views poverty and education issues. There is some non-response bias in terms of the representation of teachers by years of teaching experience, with less-experienced teachers under-represented, and mid- to late-career teachers overrepresented compared to teachers in the province. This should be considered when interpreting the quantitative survey results for questions where years of experience may be a factor. The qualitative data is enhanced by having ample responses by mid-to late career teachers who shared their observations on how child poverty and the resources to support students in need have changed over the years they have been teaching. While all grade groupings are represented in the survey responses, Kindergarten teachers may be over-represented. Kindergarten teachers make up a much higher proportion of the survey sample compared to Kindergarten students as a proportion of all students in BC public schools¹⁰.

Most teachers responding to the survey indicate having students in their class(es) who are of Aboriginal ancestry. One in ten respondents indicate at least one-half of the students they currently teach self-identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry. One-third of survey respondents have no students in their teaching setting who are newly arrived to Canada, while one in ten indicate that at least one-quarter of the students they currently teach are new to Canada. These student characteristics are incorporated into the analysis of the survey results, for some of the survey topics.

An objective of the survey was to assess how the survey results vary by the socioeconomic context of the neighbourhood in which the school is located. As about one-third of respondents teach in low-income and almost one-half in mixed-incomes neighbourhoods, most of these teachers will have some experience responding to poverty-related issues in the classroom. About one in six survey respondents teach in middle or high income neighbourhoods. It is valuable to have the perspective of these teachers reflected in the qualitative comments, and to provide comparative data for how the survey results vary by socioeconomic context. The next chapter, *Child poverty in BC public schools and economic pressures on families*, provides data on the proportion of students teachers currently teach who are experiencing poverty, and on how the proportion of students experiencing poverty has changed in the school community.

¹⁰ Using 2013–14 figures from the Ministry of Education *2013/14 Student Statistics* report (pp.1, 3), 6.9% of school-aged students are enrolled in Kindergarten, while 24% of teachers in the survey teach Kindergarten.