



CHAPTER 7 Summary:

Resources fall well short of the need: Summary of the findings in the context of the underfunding of BC public schools

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



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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

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- Leadership, co-ordination, and input into final reports, Barb Ryeburn, Assistant Director, Professional and Social Issues Division
- 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)

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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.

Summary and discussion

Child poverty remains persistently high in BC. One in every five BC children is living in poverty, affecting 167,810 children, according to the most recent Child Poverty Report Card.² This means tens of thousands of children attending BC schools are experiencing the effects of poverty and may be in need of extra resources to meet their basic needs and to provide extra learning support to overcome educational barriers related to poverty.

Overall adequacy of resources to address poverty-related needs at the school

These survey results provide evidence that the overall adequacy of funding to address educational barriers related to poverty falls well short of the need. Only one in eight teachers³ rated the overall adequacy of the resources to address the poverty-related needs at their school as either “Quite” or “Very adequate”. On average, teachers across all regions rated the resources at the school to address poverty-related needs below “somewhat adequate” indicating a province-wide shortage of resources to support students who are experiencing poverty. Resources to address poverty-related needs are rated the least adequate by teachers in low-income schools and in schools where more than three-quarters of the students are of Aboriginal ancestry. While these schools are likely to receive funds through CommunityLINK⁴ and the Vulnerable Students supplement⁵, the survey results suggest these amounts are not nearly enough to address the poverty-related needs of students in BC public schools.

Adequacy of resources to address learning gaps

In the focus group research, teachers were especially concerned about the learning gaps that develop over time when the educational needs of students who require extra learning support are not addressed. Teachers noted that these are often the same students who are experiencing poverty.⁶ In this provincial survey, many teachers reported having grey area students in need of extra support who have not been assessed. Of the 727 teachers who responded to the question, one in three teachers indicated “Between one-quarter and one-half” of the students they teach are “grey area” students. One in ten teachers (combined percentage) indicated that at least one-half of the students they teach are in need of assessment and extra learning support. The survey provides ample evidence that current staffing levels for learning specialist teachers are inadequate to meet the needs of students who require extra support to address learning gaps.

² First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. Factsheet 1: “BC’s Child Poverty Rate Still 1 in 5” in the 2015 Child Poverty Report Card, available at <http://firstcallbc.org/child-poverty-report-cards/>

³ Based on 714 responses.

⁴ The annual CommunityLINK (Learning Includes Nutrition and Knowledge) grant funds programs and services such as breakfast, lunch and snack programs, academic supports, counseling, youth workers and after-school programs⁴. The 2015/16 CommunityLINK grant provides \$51.2 million to all 60 school districts.

⁵ Starting in 2012–13, the Supplement for Vulnerable Students was added to the operating grants formula, providing extra funding to eligible school districts, based on a formula that weights various socio-economic indicators. In 2015/16, the Vulnerable Student Supplement (VSS) provided \$11.2 million to 25 school districts. There has been no increase to the VSS since 2012–13, with funding frozen at \$11.2 million in the three-year budget plan (2015/16 to 2017/18).

⁶ 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.

Counsellors/Psychologists

Staffing for Counselling/Psychologists was rated as the least adequate of all types of learning specialist teachers listed. Two-thirds of the teachers (for whom it applied) rated the adequacy of staffing for Counsellors/Psychologists as either “Not very” or “Not at all” adequate with the average ratings for all regions and socio-economic groups well below “somewhat adequate”. This suggests there is a systemic shortage of counselling services in BC public schools. In the comments, teachers express the urgent need for staffing to support students dealing with mental health issues including counsellors, psychologists, and psychiatrists as well as child, youth, and family care support workers.

Special Education and Learning Assistance teachers

The survey findings indicate there is a shortage of Special Education teachers in BC public schools to assess and provide services to students in need of extra support to address learning gaps. Over one-half of teachers rated the adequacy of staffing for Special needs assessment and Learning Assistance teachers as either “Not very” or “Not at all” adequate. Teachers in low-income schools rated the adequacy of staffing for Special Education teachers the lowest of all socio-economic groups as did teachers in Kootenay and North Coast zones. Teachers expressed many concerns about the shortage of Special Education assessment services such as students being on the wait list for an assessment for years, the lack of funding for assessments, and the ministry criteria for funding special education designations as being too narrow, leaving some children without the learning support needed to address learning gaps.

Aboriginal Education

These survey results suggest that current funding to address the educational needs of Aboriginal students, many of whom live in poverty⁷, falls well short of the need. Almost one-half of teachers⁸ rated the adequacy of staffing for Aboriginal Education teachers as “Not very” or “Not at all” adequate. Staffing for learning specialist teachers (Counsellors/Psychologist, Learning Assistance teachers, Aboriginal Education teachers, and English as a Second Dialect services) are rated the least adequate in classes with the highest proportion of Aboriginal students. The inadequacy of staffing for English as a Second Dialect services is especially of concern in view of recent research that shows a meaningful improvement in reading scores of Aboriginal students who have had access to ESD services⁹. These survey results suggest that many Aboriginal students who may benefit from ESD services do not have access to this type of learning support.

English Language Learning

Persons recently immigrated to British Columbia are at a much higher risk of poverty (34%) than non-immigrants (14%).¹⁰ Many of these are children attending BC public schools and in need of English Language Learning services. Over one-half of teachers rated staffing for English Language Learning teachers (ELL) as either “Not very” or “Not at all” adequate. On average, teachers with ELL students in their classes rated the adequacy of staffing for ELL teachers at the school below “Somewhat adequate”. The Ministry of Education does provide a Unique Needs supplement of \$1380 per each student who meets the criteria for English Language Learning and

⁷ First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. Factsheet 1: “BC’s Child Poverty Rate Still 1 in 5”, p.9 in the 2015 Child Poverty Report Card, available at <http://firstcallbc.org/child-poverty-report-cards/>

⁸ Based on 692 respondents (Excludes “Does not apply” responses)

⁹ Michele Battisti, Jane Friesen, and Brian Krauth. “English as a Second Dialect Policy and Achievement of Aboriginal Students in British Columbia.” *Canadian Public Policy* 40.2 (2014): 182–192. *Project MUSE*. Web. 1 December 2015. <https://muse.jhu.edu/>

¹⁰ First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. Factsheet 1: “BC’s Child Poverty Rate Still 1 in 5”, p.9 in the 2015 Child Poverty Report Card, available at <http://firstcallbc.org/child-poverty-report-cards/>

a supplement for Newcomer Refugees in the operating grants funding formula.¹¹ These survey results indicate that this supplemental funding falls well short of meeting the needs of English Language Learning students in BC public schools.

Other types of staffing needed to address poverty-related needs at the school

Teachers described other types of educational staffing needed to help to address learning gaps and other poverty-related issues, not already listed in the survey. In their comments teachers expressed an urgent need for Speech Language Pathologists to provide assessment and speech-language support services. Teachers also identified a need for Child and Youth Care Family Support Workers, Teacher-Librarians, Occupational therapists and Physiotherapists, Nurses, Social Workers, and First Nations Support Workers. Some teachers indicated a need for staffing to address the needs of students new to Canada, including Home Support workers, Multi-cultural workers, Settlement workers, and translators.

The widening socio-economic gap in BC public schools

Income inequality in BC has increased considerably, widening the gap between the wealthiest and poorest of families in the province. While annual income for BC families with children in the lowest three income brackets decreased over the last twenty years (after adjusting for inflation), income for affluent families in the top three income brackets increased by as much as \$55,000 per year¹². As socio-economic factors are predictors of educational success, this trend has worrying implications for the educational future of students in low-income families. The survey results show a large socio-economic gap in student access to basic school supplies, adequate study space and technology resources outside of school, especially between students in low-income schools and high-income schools. Teachers expressed many concerns about unequal access to technology with respect to learning gaps and the ability to fully participate as schools increasingly utilize technology in learning and for on-line communication and collaboration.

School fund-raising

Teachers expressed concern about a growing reliance of schools on fund-raising to compensate for inadequate provincial funding. Teachers are especially concerned about disparities in the amount of funds generated by Parent Advisory Committees in schools located in affluent neighbourhoods relative to schools in low-income neighborhoods. As the schools with the greatest need have the least capacity to fund-raise, this widens disparities between schools. Many teachers expressed a sense of injustice over the widening disparities in learning resources available for students depending on whether they attend a school located in a low-income area or in a more affluent area in the school district.

Some teachers expressed the view that the government is effectively downloading the costs of educational resources onto schools rather than adequately funding the public school system. Several teachers viewed school fund-raising as a political issue suggesting that by engaging in fund-raising, schools are enabling the government to avoid its responsibility to adequately fund public education. Teachers also expressed concern about how fund-raising efforts take time away from teaching, places undue pressure on families who are experiencing financial hardship and reinforces a sense of exclusion for students whose families are less able to contribute.

¹¹ 2015/16 Operating Grants Manual available at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/k12funding/funding/15-16/welcome.htm>

¹²First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. Factsheet 10: “Incomes of families with children: Growing inequality” in the 2015 Child Poverty Report Card, available at <http://firstcallbc.org/child-poverty-report-cards/>

Teachers spend their own money to meet the basic needs of students

When fund-raising falls short, many teachers spend their own money to address the unmet needs in their classroom. Several teachers commented on the lack of funding for basic school supplies, the shortage of textbooks at their school and the challenge of having to share scarce resources with other classrooms. Some teachers observed that the poverty-related needs of students at the school are far greater than what can reasonably be met by donations and staff contributions. Two-thirds of teachers said they use their own material or monetary resources to provide school supplies and resources that students need to complete assignments, spending an average of \$53.57 per month. These 511 teachers spend a combined total of \$22,262 per month or \$222,620 over a ten-month school year on supplies and/or resources for students.

Education funding and policy implications

Tens of thousands of BC children are living in poverty and attending BC public schools. While the provincial government does provide some funding to address poverty-related needs of students attending BC public schools, the potential benefits of this funding is offset by cuts to educational services arising from inadequate provincial funding¹³. The survey results provide ample evidence that current funding to support students to overcome educational barriers to poverty falls well short of the need. The amount of the CommunityLINK grant increased marginally since 2012–13 and the Supplement for Vulnerable Students of \$11.2 million remains the same in 2015–16 as in 2012–13.¹⁴ This means fewer students supported by school meal and after-school programs for low-income students as each year inflation erodes the purchasing power of those funds.

Budget shortfalls and loss of learning specialist teaching positions

The inadequacy of resources to address educational barriers related to poverty needs to be viewed in the overall context of inadequate provincial funding for BC public schools. Many of the learning specialist teachers who provide support to address learning gaps for students are primarily funded by district operating grants. When school district operating grants are not enough to cover the rising costs of public K–12 education, budget shortfalls arise. Unless districts have reserve funds or other sources of revenue, shortfalls inevitably lead to cuts in educational programs and services. Schools in districts with little access to other sources of revenue such as International Tuition fees and/or school-generated funds are less able to absorb the cutbacks arising from structural budget shortfalls. This contributes to the growing inequities within and between school districts that many teachers in the survey expressed concern about.

BC public schools have experienced ongoing cuts to teaching positions in recent years as districts cut programs and services to offset budget shortfalls¹⁵. This means there are fewer special education teachers to address learning gaps, fewer counsellors to support students to overcome educational barriers related to poverty, and fewer teachers in English Language Learning and English as a Second Dialect programs to support students in need of language and literacy support. Teacher-librarian positions have been especially hard hit by budget cutbacks (see Appendix). This results in less literacy support and less access to school libraries, which low-income students may rely on for the resources these libraries provide. This may especially

¹³ BC Teachers' Federation (2015) *Education Funding – A brief to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services*, September 2015, available at <http://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=10720>

¹⁴ 2012/13 and 2015/16 Operating Grants Tables, Table 4c, and the 2015/16 Operating Grants manual, p.7 available at: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/k12funding/>

¹⁵ BC Teachers' Federation (2015) *Education Funding – A brief to the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services*, September 2015, p. 18-19, available at <http://www.bctf.ca/IssuesInEducation.aspx?id=10720>

pose barriers for students who rely on the library for access to computers to complete school assignments.

Some teachers noted that funding cutbacks to education programs and services most impact low-income students whose families cannot afford to pay for much-needed services that are no longer provided by the school. The survey findings provide evidence to confirm these impressions. Teachers in low-income schools rated the adequacy of staffing for Special needs assessment the lowest of all socio-economic groups. Teachers observed that over time these students fall further behind without the extra staffing resources required to address learning gaps. Teachers also expressed an urgent need for counsellors to address poverty-related needs and mental health issues of students yet there are fewer counsellors in 2014–15 than when this survey was conducted in 2013.

Over the last several years of budget shortfalls, districts have succumbed to pressure from the provincial government to charge fees for students who depend on the school bus to travel to and from school. Students in low-income families are the most-adversely affected by this policy. Even if financial assistance is available for students experiencing financial hardship, parents are often reluctant to disclose their economic situation¹⁶, and may avoid using the service for this reason. The survey found that about two-thirds of middle/secondary teachers and one-half of elementary teachers have low-income students in their class who miss school due to lack of transportation to travel to and from school.¹⁷

Recommendations by the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services

These ongoing cuts to public education arising from inadequate provincial funding deprive vulnerable students of much-needed services, and undermine the democratic principle of equality of access to public education. The Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services *Report on the Budget 2016 Consultations* noted the large number of submissions requesting the government “prioritize learning support in K–12 schools” and concluded “current funding levels and assistance are inadequate, which is causing significant operational and program delivery problems in schools throughout BC”. One recommendation of the Select Standing Committee on Government Finance for Budget 2016 is that the government “Provide stable, sustainable and adequate funding to enable school districts to fulfill their responsibility to continue to provide access to quality public education” (Recommendation 2, p.11)¹⁸.

Teachers respond to the effects of poverty everyday in their classrooms, often without the resources needed to assist children and families. More funding is required to address poverty issues in BC schools because the provincial government has failed to make a substantial reduction in the child poverty rate by implementing policies that could greatly improve the economic situation for low-income families. First Call Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives have been calling on the government for several

¹⁶ BC Teachers’ Federation. (2013). *2012 Poverty and Education survey: A teacher’s perspective: Overview of the Findings*, p.18, available at

http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SocialJustice/Issues/Poverty/Research/Overview_of_the_findings.pdf

¹⁷ BC Teachers’ Federation. (2013). *2012 Poverty and Education survey: A teacher’s perspective: Overview of the Findings*, p.22, available online at

http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/SocialJustice/Issues/Poverty/Research/Overview_of_the_findings.pdf

¹⁸ Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services. *Report on the Budget 2016 Consultations*, November 2015, pp.10-11.

years to implement a poverty reduction strategy with targets and timelines.¹⁹ BC is one of the few provinces that have not done so²⁰. After hearing from many advocacy groups across BC, the Select Standing Committee on Finance and Government Services recommended to the Legislative Assembly that the provincial government “Explore the option to strike an all-party parliamentary committee to develop a comprehensive and integrated poverty reduction strategy, including legislated timelines and targets for the reduction of poverty (including child poverty) and homelessness in BC” (Recommendation 42, p.36, 2016 report).

Teachers in this survey made extensive recommendations for what the provincial government could do to better support students who are experiencing poverty, and emphasized the need for the government to implement policies to address the underlying causes of poverty. *Chapter 9, What is needed to support students and families experiencing poverty, and teachers' recommendations for what needs to change*²¹, documents what teachers view as the professional staffing resources and programs that are most needed to support students experiencing poverty, and presents teachers' recommendations for the provincial government in four key areas.

¹⁹ First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. *2015 Child Poverty Report Card*, p.48, available at <http://firstcallbc.org/child-poverty-report-cards/>

²⁰ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. *CCPA Submission to BC Budget Consultations 2016*, p. 10-11. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/ccpa-submission-bc-budget-consultations-2016>

²¹ <http://www.bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx>

Appendix

Change in FTE learning specialist teacher positions: 2001–02 to 2014–15

This table shows the difference in FTE learning specialist teachers between the years 2001–02, and 2014–15. These figures do not include teaching positions funded by the Teacher Education Fund.

FTE specialist teachers	2001–02	2007–08	2011–12	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	Change 2001–02 to 2014–15	
							#	%
Library services	921.8	730.0	635.8	646.6	627.5	577.1	-344.7	-37.4%
Counselling	989.6	915.8	870.1	871.1	858.3	856.6	-133.0	-13.4%
Special education	4,051.5	3,446.5	3,282.3	3,381.3	3,236.8	3,082.7	-968.8	-23.9%
English language learning	1,015.6	788.7	673.7	686.2*	816.8	792.6	-223.0	-22.0%
Aboriginal education	206.9	193.4	196.0	204.7	203.1	200.9	-6.0	-2.9%
Totals	7,185.4	6,074.4	5,657.9	5,789.9†	5,742.5	5,509.9	-1,675.5	-23.3%

Change in FTE learning specialist teacher positions: 2011–12 to 2014–15

This table shows the difference in FTE learning specialist teachers between the years 2011–12, and 2014–15.

FTE specialist teachers	2011–12	2014–15	Change 2011–12 to 2014–15	
			#	%
Library services	635.8	577.1	-58.7	-9.2%
Counselling	870.1	856.6	-13.5	-1.6%
Special education	3,282.30	3,082.70	-199.6	-6.1%
English language learning	673.7	792.6	118.9	17.6%
Aboriginal education	196	200.9	4.9	2.5%

BCTF Research tables: totals calculated with figures from BC Ministry of Education, Staff by Year and Program Code (unpublished Form 1530 data, various years).

* No staffing was reported by SD34 for Program 1.30, ELL, for 2012–13—an unexplained anomaly in the data.

† The total for 2012–13 is affected by the asterisked note, above. As well, it appears that, for 2012–13, SD87 reported all teachers under Regular Instruction, and none as learning specialist teachers.