



British Columbia Teachers' Federation

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2012 Poverty and Education survey: A teacher's perspective

Key findings

This survey was conducted by BCTF Research
in collaboration with the Anti-poverty action group
of the Committee for Action on Social Justice

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Key findings of the 2012 Poverty and Education survey: A teacher's perspective

The *2012 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. The survey 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, priority issues for advocacy, and training and professional development on poverty and education issues.

This document lists the key findings of the survey for each of the topic areas. A report providing an overview of the survey findings, including visual charts, is also available online.

A detailed report for each topic is being prepared, and will be available in the coming weeks, at bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx. These topic-specific reports 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.

Teachers who responded to the survey and the socio-economic context in which they teach

Representativeness of the sample

- 778 teachers responded to the survey. The respondents are well-represented across regional zones. Almost half (42.8%) of survey respondents teach in urban areas, 28.4% teach in suburban areas, 22.4% teach in rural areas, and 1.9% teach in remote areas.
- Teachers with less than ten years experience are under-represented in the survey, and teachers with more than twenty years experience are over-represented in the survey.
- One-quarter (24%) of respondents teach Kindergarten, 40.6% teach Grades 1 to 3, and one-third (34.2%) teach Grades 4 to 7. About one in ten (9.3%) of respondents teach middle-school grades, and about one-third (30.7%) teach Grades 8 to 12.

Socio-economic context of the school

- One-third of teachers (32.8% of the sample) describe the socio-economic environment of their school as low-income, and about one-half (47.2%) describe it as mixed-income. A smaller proportion of teachers describe the school as being located in a middle income (12.9%) or a high-income (4.8%) neighbourhood.
- Almost all (95%) of the 755 teachers who responded to the question teach at least some students who are experiencing poverty-related issues. One-third (31.9%) estimate “Between one-quarter and one-half” of the students they teach are experiencing poverty. One in ten teachers (10.7%) estimated “Between one-half and three-quarters”, and 6.1% estimated “More than three-quarters” of all the students they teach are experiencing poverty-related issues.
- Almost one-half (44.8%) of the 759 teachers who responded to the question said the proportion of students experiencing poverty increased since they began teaching at the school, while 3.7% said poverty had decreased. One-third (33.3%) of respondents indicated poverty was “Unchanged” and 18.2% answered “Do not know”.

Hungry students and adequacy of resources to support them

- About 8 out of 10 teachers responding to the survey report having students in their class(es) who start the day hungry (80.6%) and who do not bring food for lunch and snacks (80.3%).
- Overall, 70.7% of teachers indicated their school provides some form of nutritional program, ranging from snacks to formalized meal programs. Less than half of respondents indicated the school offers a Lunch program (44.3%) or Breakfast program (42.9%).
- Of the 550 teachers who indicated some form of nutritional support at the school, one-half (50.2%) said they have students in their class who would benefit from school meal programs but do not participate for reasons such as the family cannot afford fee, the parent may not be comfortable requesting financial assistance, the student may be afraid of being judged by peers, and the food may not reflect cultural practices.
- Of the 572 teachers who rated the adequacy of school meal programs to meet the needs of all students who require nutritional support, one-third (combined percentage) rated the adequacy of school meal and/or snack programs as either “Quite adequate” or “Very adequate”.
- Four in ten (40.2%) teachers indicated they bring food to school for students who are hungry, spending an average of about \$30 per month (\$28.88) of their own money on food for students. (This average amount is based on figures provided by 291 respondents who indicated an amount spent.)

School fees and participation in school-related activities

School fees and ability of families to pay fees

- The survey results indicate that many schools charge students a fee (or deposit) for school calendars, band and music instruments, general school supplies, materials for art, shop and/or sewing classes, and for textbook deposits.
- Of the 421 teachers who said they are responsible for collecting money from parents for fees at the start of the school year, 68.2% indicated “Most” and 5.7% indicated “All” families are able to provide payment for these fees. About one-quarter (combined) of these teachers indicated only “Some” (17%) or “A few” parents (8.6%) were able to provide payment for fees at the start of the school year.

Process for requesting financial assistance to cover the cost of school fees

- Two-thirds (67.2%) of teachers in the survey said they are aware of a process in place at the school for a student, parent, or teacher (on behalf of a student) to apply for assistance to cover the fee for course materials or school-related activities.
- Of the 523 teachers who responded, 23.1% rated students (or parents) as “Quite aware” and 8.4% as “Very aware” that financial assistance is available to cover fees. One-quarter (24.7%) of these teachers rated the level of awareness of families as “Not very aware” and 3.8% as “Not at all aware” that financial assistance is available to assist with fees.
- The survey asked about factors that might prevent students (or parents) from apply/asking for financial assistance, when it is available.
 - Over half (55%) of teachers identified: “Parent and/or student is not comfortable asking” as a barrier to seeking financial assistance with school fees.
 - About one-third (31.1%) of teachers identified: “Family has no transportation to and from activity” and 28% identified: “Family cannot afford equipment and clothing” as barriers preventing families from applying for assistance with fees.
 - Other barriers are related to the application process itself, with 23.9% of teachers indicating “Application technically difficult to complete” and 8% indicating “Language barriers, when translation is not available”.
- When asked how well the process works for providing financial assistance to families:
 - One-quarter (25.8%) of teachers rated the process as working “Quite well” and 7.8% “Very well” for providing financial assistance to ensure that all students can fully participate in courses and school-related activities.
 - The rest of respondents rated the process as working either “Somewhat well” (34.6%), “Not very well” (15%), “Not at all well” (4.2%), or did not answer the question (12.5%).

School fees as a barrier to participation in school-related activities

- The survey asked teachers (if it applied to their teaching situation) “Of the students you teach whom you know are experiencing financial hardship, how many participate in school-related activities that charge a fee?”
 - Two-thirds (65.6%) of teachers indicated “Most” or “All” students experiencing financial hardship participated in field trips, one-half (51.5%) indicated “Most” or “All” participated in graduation ceremonies, and one-third (32.9%) indicated “Most” or “All” participated in school band or music programs.
 - About one-quarter indicated “Most” or “All” students experiencing financial hardship participated in extra-curricular sports (28.4%) and activities involving overnight travel (26.5%). Only 17% of teachers indicated “Most” or “All” participated in academies.

School attendance and poverty-related barriers

This section of the survey asked teachers about poverty-related barriers that can make it difficult for students to attend school, the approaches schools use to encourage attendance, and the challenges encountered by students who are working in paid employment.

- Most (84.5%) teachers indicated having some students in their class(es) for whom low attendance is a concern.
- One-third (36%) of teachers indicated “Less than one-quarter” and 12% indicated “Between one-quarter and one-half” of students with low attendance are also experiencing poverty. About one in four teachers (combined percentages) indicated at least one-half of the students for whom low attendance is a concern are also experiencing poverty.

When asked about poverty-related barriers that make it difficult for students to attend school:

- Two-thirds of elementary teachers and 85.6% of middle/secondary teachers indicate having students in their class(es) who miss school because the “Student does not have a stable living or housing situation”.
- Of the 307 middle/secondary teachers in the survey, two-thirds or more indicate having students in their class(es) who miss school for the following reasons: “Stay home to look after younger siblings” (72.6%), “Lack of transportation to and from school” (63.2%), or “Parent has illness or disability that makes it hard to get children to school” (64.2%).

Of the 220 middle/secondary teachers who indicated having students in their class who work in paid employment:

- Almost one-half (45.5%) indicated “A few” students, one-quarter (26.4%) indicated “Some” students, and 7.3% indicated “Most” of these students work in paid employment to help support themselves or their families.
- 40.5% indicated “A few”, 27.3% indicated “Some”, and 1.4% indicated “Most” students working in paid employment miss school because “Work schedule conflicts with school”.
- About one-quarter of these teachers indicated it is a challenge for “Most” or “All” students working in paid employment to: “Complete assignments on time” (26.8%) and to “Maintain grades” (23.1%). About one in ten teachers indicated it is a challenge for these students to “Attend classes regularly” (13.2%) and/or to “Stay enrolled in course or school” (10.9%).

When asked about approaches to encourage attendance (percentages are based on those who answered the question and for whom it applied to their teaching situation):

- About 80% of teachers indicated the approaches used at their school to encourage students to attend include “Staff are welcoming to students, if they arrive late” and “Programs to help track school attendance”. About one-half (56.8%) have dedicated staff to support attendance.
- About two-thirds (64.2%) of teachers indicated the school has “Programs to welcome and involve parents in the school”.
- Less than one-third (29.5%) indicated the school offers “Assistance with travel costs to and from school”.

Staff awareness and understanding about poverty issues

Teacher perceptions of staff awareness of poverty issues at their school

- One-quarter (24.4%) of teachers rated the level of staff awareness of poverty issues at their school as “Very aware”, one-third (33.2%) as “Quite aware”, and 26.0% as “Somewhat aware”.
- About one in five teachers (combined percentages) rated the level of staff awareness as either “Not very aware” or “Not at all aware”, and 5.5% did not answer the question.
- Higher ratings (by teachers) of staff awareness of poverty issues are associated with teaching in northern and remote regions, a high proportion of students in poverty, and elementary grades.

Adequacy of resources to increase awareness and understanding about poverty issues

When asked to rate the adequacy of resources to increase awareness and understanding about poverty issues (if it applied to their teaching situation):

- At least two-thirds of teachers rated “Resource manual on services to assist low-income families” (71.8%) and a “Curriculum that fosters a critical perspective on poverty” (66.4%) as either “Not very adequate” or “Not at all adequate” (combined percentages).
- About one-half of teachers rated “Training to increase awareness and understanding about poverty” (52.1%) and “Resources meaningful to the cultural experience of students” (45.7%) as either “Not very adequate” or “Not at all adequate” (combined percentages).

Preparation to teach in a classroom where poverty issues are present

- The survey results suggest that most teachers do not feel adequately prepared to respond to poverty-related issues. Only 21.7% of respondents indicated they feel “Quite prepared” and 7.5% “Very prepared” to teach in a classroom where poverty issues are present on a regular basis.
- About one-third (37.3%) of teachers reported feeling “Somewhat prepared”, 19.8% “Not very prepared”, and 4.5% “Not at all prepared” to teach in a classroom where poverty issues are present on a regular basis. One in ten respondents (9.3%) did not answer the question.

Adequacy of teachers’ training to prepare teachers for teaching students in poverty

- The survey results suggest that many teachers do not feel their teacher training and in-service adequately prepared them for teaching students who live in poverty.
 - Very few respondents rated their teachers’ training and in-service as “Quite adequate” (5.9%) or “Very adequate” (1.7%) in preparing them to work with students in poverty.
 - One-third (37.5%) rated their teachers’ training and in-service as “Not very adequate” and 25.2% as “Not at all adequate” in preparing them for teaching students in poverty.
 - On average, early-career teachers rated their teacher training and in-service higher than those with ten or more years of teaching experience.

BCTF workshops on poverty and education issues

- Many more teachers are interested in attending BCTF workshops pertaining to poverty and education issues than have attended to date. While 12.9% have attended the “Poverty as a classroom issue” workshop, 53.1% indicated an interest in doing so. While 7.7% have attended the “Teachers can make a difference for children living in poverty” workshop, 58.2% indicated an interest in doing so.

Adequacy of resources to address poverty-related needs at the school

Access to resources to support learning

Access to basic school supplies and clothing for school-related activities

The survey asked teachers to indicate (if it applied to their teaching situation) how many students in their class(es) have all of the resources needed at the beginning of the school year (or term).

- Of the teachers who estimated an amount, at least two-thirds (combined percentages) indicated either “Most” or “All” students have the basic school supplies (72.7%) and the clothing required for school activities (68.6%) at the start of the school term or year.
- About two-thirds (68.1%) of teachers indicate using their own material or monetary resources to provide supplies/resources that students need to complete assignments.

Access to technology resources

The survey also asked teachers to indicate (if it applied to their teaching situation) how many students in their class(es) they are aware of who have access to technology resources at home or outside of school hours.

- Of the teachers who estimated an amount, over one-half (combined percentages) indicated either “Most” or “All” students have access to internet at home (58.1%) and access to computer use outside of school hours (55.4%).

Access to health and community services

The survey asked teachers to indicate (if it applied to their teaching situation) how many students in their class(es) are in need of assessment or care for speech, hearing, or vision services.

- 83.6% (combined percentages) indicated either “A few” or “Some” of the students they teach are in need of access to speech and language services
- 76.8% (combined percentages) indicated “A few” or “Some” of the students they teach are in need of vision-care services
- 64.8% (combined percentages) indicated either “A few” or “Some” of the students they teach are in need of hearing care.

Barriers to accessing health and community services

- The survey data indicate that most teachers encounter multiple challenges when assisting low-income families to obtain services for their children. Of the teachers for whom the situation applied, and who responded to the question:
 - Eight in ten respondents indicated that “Lack of information on resources available to assist low-income families” (81.1%), “Long wait-lists for diagnostic and treatment services” (81.1%), and “Transportation barriers families encounter re. travelling to and from appointments” (80.7%), are a challenge when assisting low-income parents to obtain services for their children.
 - Other barriers included “Difficulty co-ordinating efforts between the school and community agencies” (76.5%), and “Lack of translation services for parents” (60.5%).

Adequacy of staffing resources to address learning gaps

“Grey area” students in need of extra learning support to address learning gaps

- Most teachers indicated having at least some students they would consider to be “grey area” students who are in need of extra learning support and have not been assessed. Of the 727 teachers who responded to the question:
 - Almost one-half (47.7%) indicated “Less than one-quarter” and 35.1% indicated “Between one-quarter and one-half” of the students they currently teach are “grey area” students.
 - Some teachers reported having a high proportion of “grey area” students, with 8.1% indicating that “Between one-half and three-quarters” and 3.3% indicating “More than three quarters” of the students they currently teach are in need of extra learning support and have not been assessed.
 - About one in twenty (5.8%) of these teachers indicated having no “grey area” students.

Adequacy of resources to address learning gaps and other poverty-related needs

- The survey results suggest that the majority of teachers do not feel the current staffing levels are adequate to meet the needs of students who require extra support to address learning gaps.
- Of the teachers for whom the staffing resources applied to their teaching situation:
 - At least one-half rated the following staffing resources as either “Not at all adequate” or “Not very adequate” (combined percentages): Counsellors/Psychologists (66.7%), English as a Second Dialect (66.1%), Special needs assessment (57.6%), English Language Learning teachers (55.6%), Learning Assistance teachers (52.1%), and Educational Assistants (51.7%).
 - Almost one-half (45.3%) rated the level of staffing for Aboriginal Education teachers as either “Not at all” or “Not very” adequate.

The survey asked teachers to rate the overall level of adequacy of resources at the school to address poverty-related needs of students.

- Of the 714 teachers who answered this question:
 - Only 10.4% rated the adequacy of the resources at their school to address the poverty-related needs of students as “Quite adequate”, and 1.8% rated it as “Very adequate”.
 - One-third (32.6%) rated the adequacy of resources as “Not very adequate”, and 6.9% as “Not at all adequate” to address the poverty-related needs of students at the school.
 - The remainder (40%) rated the adequacy of resources as “Somewhat adequate”.
- On average, teachers in schools located in low-income areas rated the adequacy of resources at the school to address the poverty-related needs of students the lowest, and teachers in schools located in high-income areas rated the adequacy of resources the highest.

Funding to support low-income students and their families

The survey asked teachers “Does your school receive any of the following types of funding to provide services to ‘vulnerable’ students?”

- The most prevalent type of funding source that teachers are aware of is Parent Advisory Council (PAC) fundraising (70.4%), followed by Aboriginal targeted funding (51.7%), and CommunityLINK funding (29.6%). Some teachers indicated their schools receive Private individual or corporate donations (20.8%), Community Schools funding (19.2%), Breakfast for learning BC (17%), and/or Inner-City Schools Program funding (14%).
- Two-thirds of teachers (67.7%) indicated their school depends on fundraising for “Field trips”, one-half indicated their school depends on fundraising for “Library resources” (51.4%) and the “School playground” (51.9%), and 29.6% indicated “Other purposes”.

What is most needed to support students and families?

The survey asked teachers to indicate for each type of resource, if it applied to their teaching situation, the level of need for *additional* resources at their school to support students who are experiencing poverty.

Professional staffing resources

- Of those teachers (for whom the resource applied to their teaching situation), 64.8% indicated a “High need” for “Specialist teachers to address learning gaps”, 60.5% a “High need” for “Counselling services for students and families”, 43.6% a “High need” for “School library and literacy programs”, and 35.4% a “High need” for a “School nurse to address health-related needs of students”.
- On average, the need for all four types of staffing resources is rated the highest by teachers in low-income schools and rated the lowest by teachers in high-income schools.

Programs and resources to support and strengthen school community

- Of those teachers for whom the resource applied to their teaching situation, 42.5% indicated a “High need” for “Community services accessible to low-income families”, 30.7% a “High need” for “Resources to strengthen connections between parents and school”, 25.9% a “High need” for “Fully-funded meal programs”, and 24.9% a “High need” for “Staff training to increase awareness about poverty”.
- On average, the need for additional resources for these programs is rated the highest by teachers in low-income schools, and rated the lowest by teachers in high-income schools.

Priority areas for the BCTF to focus on in advocating for the needs of students who are experiencing poverty

- The survey asked teachers to rank five areas of focus, from highest (1) to lowest (5), with regard to how important they consider each as a priority area for the BCTF to focus on in advocating for the needs of students who are experiencing poverty.
- Of the five areas of focus listed:
 - Over one-half of teachers chose “Extra teaching support to address students’ learning gaps related to poverty” (56.5%) and “Increased provincial funding for programs that support students who are vulnerable to poverty” (55.2%), as either a first priority or second priority.
 - About one-third of respondents chose “A poverty reduction plan to address factors contributing to family poverty” (36.5%), and/or “Elimination of school fees and adequate funding so all students can participate fully at school” (30.4%), as either a first priority or second priority.
 - About one in ten teachers (13.7%) chose “Expanded PD on poverty and education issues” as either a first priority or second priority.

Teachers' recommendations for the provincial government

The survey asked teachers if they had recommendations for what the provincial government could do to improve learning conditions and address poverty-related barriers for students. About one-third of respondents made recommendations, which can be grouped in four thematic areas:

1. Provide extra resources to address learning gaps
2. Improve education funding to address poverty-related barriers
3. Address underlying causes of poverty, suggesting a range of poverty-reduction strategies
4. Increase government awareness and understanding of poverty and education issues.

For a full summary of the recommendations, see *Overview of the findings*, p. 40, available at bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx.

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 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)
- Survey development and questionnaire design: Ilse Hill (former member of the CASJ Anti-poverty action group)

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