



BCTF

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Antipoverty Month Resources

Poverty at the School Level

by *Leon d'Souza, member of BCTF Committee for Action on Social Justice*

When we look at our class, what do we see? Are our students meeting the learning outcomes? Are we meeting their needs? What are their needs? BC's students have a variety of needs. Unfortunately, for [one out of five children in BC](#), the basic needs of food, shelter, and clothing are not being met at a level that will allow them to live, learn, and grow into healthy adults.

So, what can we do to meet the needs of all our students? A good underlying principle is to be mindful of our most vulnerable students. When focusing on poverty at the school level, the best place to start is with teacher awareness. In 2015, the BCTF conducted and published a [survey](#) on poverty and education. The survey [found](#) that one in five teachers felt that staff members were not very aware of poverty issues at their school, and that less than 30% of respondents felt quite prepared to teach in a classroom where poverty issues were present. Interested in raising awareness at your school? The BCTF has [two workshops](#) to build awareness among staff members: “Poverty as a Classroom Issue” and “Help End Child Poverty in BC’s Classrooms, Schools and Local Communities,” both of which can be booked for free. Other actions that can be taken include bringing areas of concern to our staff committee, building a school action plan, and enacting policy changes at the school level.

With growing awareness, we can understand the heavy toll that poverty exacts on our students. Child poverty contributes to barriers in attendance, access to resources, and food and nutrition, all of which impact the learning and wellbeing of the child. The BCTF has resources for members to help students overcome these barriers. This [infographic](#) outlines some of the barriers to attendance that children living in poverty face as well as ways to support students and encourage attendance. Other infographics have been created to help teachers understand barriers such as [access to resources](#) and [accessibility of education](#), and the importance of [adequate funding](#). If you would like to let the BC government know that your school does not have adequate funding to meet the needs of your students, you can contact the [Ministry of Education](#) or your [local MLA](#) (click on MLA’s name for contact information).

The [effects of hunger on learning](#) have been well-documented. The BCTF’s survey results are outlined in this [infographic](#). And while there are many school food programs in BC schools, consistency and quality is often lacking. In fact, Canada is the [only G8 country](#) without a national school food program. The quality of the food still needs improvement. But we have seen huge gains with the [BC Fruit and Vegetable Nutritional Program](#) which has grown from its initial launch of 10 schools to 1,456 public and First Nations BC schools in the 2017–2018 school year. You could advocate for a national, or at least provincial, school food program, again by contacting the [BC Ministry of Education](#), the [BC Minister of Health](#), or your [local MLA](#).

Creating a community garden on school grounds is a great way to link a healthy food source with teachable moments in nutrition and stewardship of the land, along with the aesthetic benefits.