

Sources of BC's Special Education Funding Crisis:

Provincial Special Education funding, spending, staffing & enrolment trends: 2001/02 to 2009/10 (with 2011/12 update)

| Special Education Students - enrolment totals | 2001-02 | 2009-10 | Change | Change adj. for CPI* | 2011-12 | Change | Change adj. for CPI* |
|--|---------------------|----------------------|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------|-----------|-------------------------|
| Low incidence (high needs, e.g. Autism): Cat. A - G (Level 1 & 2) | 11,161 | 16,335 | 46% | | 17,041 | 53% | |
| High Incidence: Cat. Q, K, R (e.g. Learning Disability, not funded since 2002) | 31,086 | 26,849 | -14% | | 26,468 | -15% | |
| Severe Behaviour/mental illness: Cat. H (Level 3) | 6,519 | 7,519 | 15% | | 6,988 | 7% | |
| Total Enrolment, designated students with special needs | 48,766 | 50,703 | 4% | | 50,497 | 4% | |
| Changes in Average Educator salary vs. inflation: 2001/02 to 2009/10 | | | | | | | |
| Change: Average educator salary (excl benefits)** | 57,026 | 69,546 | 22% | 5% | 73,773 | 29% | 6% |
| <i>I can't find published ministry data on average benefit cost per educator over time, but that's likely increased significantly based on the share of total special ed spending as noted below</i> | | | | | | | |
| Change: Consumer Price Index: Sep 01-Sep 11 | 98.4 | 114.7 | 16% | | 120 | 22% | |
| Breakdown: Total Special Education spending by local boards | | | | | | | |
| Teacher salaries | 214,789,285 | 237,958,277 | 11% | -4% | 248,410,367 | 16% | |
| Principal, VP salaries | 10,510,995 | 8,988,195 | -14% | -26% | 10,910,478 | 4% | |
| Support staff/teaching assistant salaries | 168,856,668 | 263,586,258 | 56% | 35% | 272,247,731 | 61% | |
| Other professionals salaries | 5,675,028 | 5,570,860 | -2% | -15% | 5,077,501 | -11% | |
| Substitutes salaries | 14,491,606 | 20,054,681 | 38% | 19% | 19,872,490 | 37% | |
| Employee benefits | 83,106,803 | 123,117,566 | 48% | 28% | 134,664,555 | 62% | |
| Services & supplies | 16,273,870 | 20,213,241 | 24% | 7% | 20,484,205 | 26% | |
| Special Education Staffing - provincial totals | | | | | | | |
| Total Educators (special education teachers & principals/VPs) | 4,143 | 3,472 | -16% | | 3,404 | -18% | |
| Total Support staff/Teaching Assistants | 5,567 | 7,291 | 31% | | 7,594 | 36% | |
| Special Education funding & spending | | | | | | | |
| District Special Education Budgets | 496,929,074 | 679,489,078 | 37% | 18% | 711,667,327 | 43% | |
| Provincial Special Education grants | 443,689,292 | 324,572,000 | -27% | -37% | 381,561,200 | -14% | |
| Special Education funding shortfall | - 53,239,782 | - 354,917,078 | 567% | | - 330,106,127 | | |

PROVINCIAL FUNDING FORMULA CHANGES: In 2002, the Province discontinued funding grants for "High Incidence" students with special needs (e.g. Learning Disabilities & Mild Intellectual Disabilities). The Ministry increased base funding that year to cover the extra costs of serving High Incidence students, but that boost was quickly negated by a series of unfunded staff salary and benefit increases (and has never been adjusted subsequently to reflect rising costs or incidence ratios).

Total enrolment - Students with Special Needs: The number of students identified in special needs categories that are no longer funded since 2002 initially declined, then started to climb again, and now seems to be levelling out. The number identified in some of the funded categories has grown significantly in the same period (particularly in the autism category). Most districts have long waitlists for assessments, and it is widely thought that a growing number of students with learning challenges are going unidentified until more severe problems manifest. Thus the actual number of students with special needs has probably grown more since 2001 than the 4% rise reflected in the official stats above.

*** Inflation adjustments:** To facilitate comparison, all dollar increases/decreases were adjusted for inflation to show the net increase/decrease over and above inflation (16% increase between 2001-02 and 2009-10, based on the Canadian CPI (Consumer Price Index)). This shows that Education staffing costs under provincially-negotiated contracts have risen faster than CPI. Salaries and benefit cost have also grown faster than provincial education funding. Staff benefits in particular, have risen much faster than funding and are consuming an increasingly significant portion of special education budgets.

**** Average educator salary:** The increase in this average reflects the cumulative impact of salary increases (but not benefit increases) as well as the effects of an aging workforce, with more older teachers in higher salary brackets. The ministry defines "educators" as teachers and principals/VPs, so these totals would be for all teachers and/or principals classified by boards as "special education teachers."

IMPACTS: The statistics show extensive erosion of special education teaching capacity, despite growing numbers of students, especially those with more complex needs. The stats also show significant increases in the number of teaching aides hired to work with students with special needs. In effect, the unfunded pressures has resulted in the education of students with the most complex learning needs increasing being delegated to teaching aides instead of to teachers.

In 2006, the Province introduced another partially-unfunded cost challenge: Bill 33, the Class Size and Composition Act. While loopholes in the legislation allow boards to exceed the limits in many cases, the legislation did force class size reductions in many cases. But boards were only able to achieve those smaller classes by cutting specialist teacher positions (special education teachers, librarians, etc) and reassigning them to classroom teacher positions. Unfunded class size and composition limits therefore also help to explain the unusually high erosion of special education teachers over the past decade province-wide. In Vancouver, for example, the Board committed in 2011 to limit further losses after we showed that Vancouver had lost 24% of its special education teachers since 2001 despite a 33% increase in the number of identified students with special needs.

Unfunded special education costs are part of a wider pattern of unfunded cost pressures in public education, which has presented a growing challenge and contributed significantly to the structural deficits facing most local School Boards, especially those with large proportions of unfunded "high incidence" students, such as Coast Mountains (11% ratio of unfunded high-incidence students with special needs in the overall student population vs. a provincial average of 6%).

Sources

* Missing link: 2001 financial report that includes total employee benefit costs - MoE website no longer links to reports older than 2006

[2001/02 Preliminary targeted & budgeted amounts for Special Education & Aboriginal programs](#)

[2009/10 Annual budgeted operating expenditures of program 1.10 Special Education](#)

[Provincial summary of FTE employees based on the 2001/02 preliminary operating budgets](#)

[2009/10 Provincial summary of FTE employees by type of employee and program](#)

[2001-02 Final Funding Allocations](#)

[2009/10 Operating Grant Autumn Recalculation](#)

[Student statistics - 2009/10](#)

[Teachers statistics - 2009/10](#)

[Summary of Key Information 2001/02](#)

[Bank of Canada: CPI - 1995 - 2010](#)

2011/12 updates

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/accountability/district/revenue/1112/pdf/table11.pdf>

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/accountability/district/revenue/1112/pdf/table06.pdf>

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/teacher_stats/public.pdf

<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/accountability/district/revenue/1112/pdf/table10.pdf>

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<http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/k12funding/funding/11-12/operating-grant-tables.pdf>

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/student_stats/prov.pdf