



## Today's BC Liberals

### **What does your party see as the role of parents in education, and what measures will you take to enhance parent connectedness in schools?**

Today's BC Liberals are committed to encouraging parents to have an active role in their child's education. We know that when parents are interested and involved, children are more successful. This is why Premier Christy Clark appointed MLA Jane Thornthwaite as Parliamentary Secretary for Student Support and Parent Engagement.

Improving parent connectedness is about improving communication. This past year, Parliamentary Secretary Jane Thornthwaite spent time listening to parents, students and education partners about their ideas on increasing parent engagement. This Spring, Jane released her findings in the report, *Toward Better Communication*. Two themes emerged – school culture and practice. For instance, how can schools be more welcoming for parents and how can best practices around communication help parents feel more connected. Today's BC Liberals will continue to explore these themes in consultation with educational partners because improving communication between parents and schools involves all educational stakeholders.

### **What does your party see as the role of a School Planning Council (SPC)? What changes, if any would you make to this structure?**

Today's BC Liberal government is committed to School Planning Councils – in fact, we created them to facilitate parents' ability to have a greater role in their child's education. We know that children are more successful in their academics when their parents are engaged. While Today's BC Liberals have no current plans to change the role of School Planning Councils, we remain committed to exploring with education partners the ways parents can be better involved in school planning.

### **How would your party change the bargaining structure between the BCTF and BCPSEA to ensure minimal impact on students and families during bargaining?**

Achieving long-term labour peace is a key component of Today's BC Liberal platform. Kids benefit when learning is not repeatedly disrupted. This is why Premier Christy Clark proposed a new, innovative framework to achieve a 10-year agreement with teachers that will benefit students, teachers and families.

Our framework proposes a dedicated fund to address policy priorities; a policy council to include teachers, trustees and government; and salary certainty by providing increases that would be the average of those achieved by the public sector. Had teachers bargained under this framework over the past decade, there would have been no classroom disruptions due to compensation and teachers would have received a higher wage increase after strikes and job action.

Also, we proposed a structured bargaining process, with timelines, mediators and the ability for a full strike. Teachers would still maintain the ability to negotiate class size and composition. We're putting this framework forward in good faith and if re-elected, we would immediately begin negotiations with BCPSEA and the BCTF to secure a long-term labour agreement. Today's BC Liberals are prioritizing kids because everyone can agree the past school year was difficult for families, teachers, administrators and students.

**How does your party envision the future of education in BC? What elements of the BC Ed Plan would you implement?**

Exciting changes have been happening in the K-12 system with the introduction of the BC Education Plan. Today's BC Liberal government has been moving forward on transforming the education system to become more flexible, dynamic and adaptable to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. The BC Education Plan is about acknowledging the great things already happening in the classrooms, schools and districts and sets out a vision for where we want the education system to go.

As part of this transformation, we have been reviewing a number of elements, such as curriculum, graduation requirements and, most recently, student assessment. In doing so, we want to make sure B.C.'s curriculum allows for effective learning and assessment, and is providing the data needed to support student learning. We've also allowed school districts to set their calendars to allow boards more flexibility in meeting the education needs of students and families.

**What other changes would your party make to the education system in BC?**

B.C. has a great education system in part because we have outstanding teachers. Student achievement in B.C. is regularly ranked among the best in the world. Today's BC Liberals recognize that teachers invest time, money and effort into making their school culture more vibrant through extracurricular activities. This is why if re-elected, we will create a new tax credit for teachers who coach extracurricular sports or arts activities. Teachers will be able to claim up to \$500 under this new tax credit.

**What is your party's position on class size? What changes would you make and why?**

On the topic of class size, it's important to keep in mind some key facts and figures. Currently, there are more than 67,000 classrooms in B.C and of these, only 1,363 have more than 30 students – that's just two per cent of all classrooms in the province. Most of these classes are often drama, PE, or other activities that benefit from having larger groups. Under Today's BC Liberal government, this figure has decreased by almost 85 percent over the past seven years. The vast majority of classes have either less than 24 students (42 per cent) or between 24 and 30 students (56 per cent).



**What is your party's position on class composition? What changes would you make and why?**

Every classroom in B.C. is a unique make-up of student strengths and needs. Individual Education Plans (IEP) support students with special needs by ensuring they have a documented plan to summarize their education program. It's up to elected boards of education to ensure teachers have the supports they need to meet complex needs in their classrooms.

To further assist boards with providing supports for complex classroom needs, Today's BC Liberal government is providing \$210 million over the next three years through the Learning Improvement Fund. At \$60 million, the first installment produced positive results, with 500 new teachers, 400 new EAs, and 7400 EAs received increased hours and smaller classes.

**Does your party support conducting the FSA in its current form? If not, what changes would you make?**

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In early April, we announced the formation of a provincial advisory group to look at the B.C. student assessment program. Chaired by the Deans of Education from UBC and SFU, this advisory group will examine what is working and where there is room for improvement. Assessment is a key part of generating the information needed to ensure student learning is being supported and public accountability exists for the significant investment made to B.C.'s education system.

The NDP are looking to scrap the FSA without any indication about what they would replace it with. Today's BC Liberals feel that it's important to discuss the principles of student assessment prior to making any potential improvements.

**What steps will your party take to address the impact of poverty in BC schools?**

No government wants to see any child living in poverty. This is why Today's BC Liberal government has been focused on job creation and growing the economy. We also have worked closely with UBCM's Healthy Communities Committee to develop poverty reduction strategies.

To support students, we provide school districts with over \$62 million through CommunityLINK and a vulnerable student supplement for services such as breakfast and lunch programs, inner city and community school programs, school-based support workers and counseling for at-risk children and youth. We also launched a successful program providing fresh fruit, vegetables and now milk in schools.



**What plans has your party in place to ensure that technology expansion does not impede other learning supports, or continue to be available only for those with the means to meet the costs?**

Exciting changes have been happening in the K-12 system with the introduction of the BC Education Plan. Today's BC Liberal government has been moving forward on transforming the education system to become more flexible, dynamic and adaptable to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. Using smart technology in schools will better prepare students for the digital world, which is why learning empowered by technology is one of the five pillars of our BC Education Plan. Other key elements to help further improve our education system include personalized learning for every student, quality teaching and learning, flexibility and choice, and high standards. Together, these elements will help transform our education system and prepare students for tomorrow.

**How will you ensure safe use of technology such as Wi Fi in schools?**

Today's BC Liberals believe every school should be safe for students and staff. Provincial Health Officer, Dr. Perry Kendall, has indicated that there is a lack of convincing evidence of any adverse health effects related to Wi-Fi. Locally elected school trustees have the autonomy to determine where Wi-Fi is used in their districts. Currently, we have no intention to provide direction to school districts on the use of Wi-Fi.

**How would your party support and fund the activities of BCCPAC?**

Today's BC Liberal government remains committed to supporting the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils. We will continue to provide funding through grants and through community gaming grants. The work that BCCPAC provides to the education system is invaluable. We know that the more parents are involved and interested in the child's education, the greater success the child will have in school.

**What steps will your party take to support Special Education and Mental Health in Schools initiatives?**

Today's BC Liberals believe all children, including those with special needs, deserve the best chance for success in school and life. To help school districts and independent schools provide the necessary resources, our government invests almost \$880 million annually – a substantial increase of more than 60 per cent since 2000/01. Today's BC Liberals are directing these dollars to essential supports for students with special needs. This year, we provided more than \$393 million in supplementary funding for districts.

Today's BC Liberals have made important changes to ensure children with special needs are receiving the funding they require to succeed. In 2006, we expanded the categories of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) so more students receive additional supports and in 2010/11, we increased the per-pupil funding to \$18,300 per year per ASD-identified student. Meeting the education needs of all students sometimes requires funding programs outside of schools, which is why we provide almost \$29 million for the Provincial Resource Programs that, among other uses, fund education programs for youth in mental health centres and outreach programs for Autism and related disorders.



Beyond this funding for special needs, school districts now also receive \$210 million in funding for classroom supports through the Learning Improvement Fund. In consultation with teachers and principals, districts can use LIF funds to hire additional teachers and special education assistants, provide additional teaching time and support professional development to help teachers meet the complex needs in their classrooms.

### **How will your party support aboriginal education in BC?**

Today's BC Liberals are committed to working with all our education partners, including boards of education and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC), to help Aboriginal students succeed. We will provide boards of education \$63 million for Aboriginal Education and work together with Aboriginal communities through Aboriginal Education Enhancement Agreements. We're seeing good progress – over the last 5 years, the Aboriginal student completion rate has increased by about 10 per cent.

There is still more to be done for Aboriginal learners. This is why last June, Today's BC Liberal government appointed B.C.'s first Superintendent of Aboriginal Achievement, who is working closely with FNESC, other educational partners and school districts to identify priorities that best support Aboriginal student achievement. Collectively, we want to continue to improve the graduation rates for Aboriginal learners.

### **What is your party's position on Section 177 of the School Act? Are you aware of parent concerns pertaining to this legislation?**

Successful parent engagement is about good communication. As Parliamentary Secretary Jane Thornthwaite discovered and highlighted in her report, *Towards Better Communication*, this means focusing on culture and practice. Today's BC Liberals are committed to continuing to explore the culture around parent-school communication and best practices that encourage better parent engagement.

In listening to parents, Jane heard concerns about section 177. While Today's BC Liberals currently have no plans to amend the *School Act*, we support dialogue with education partners to ensure effective communication is occurring at all levels – including on school grounds.

### **What will your party's funding formula for education be?**

BC's has a great education system, one that is well funded and where student achievement frequently ranks among the best in the world. Today's BC Liberal government continues to provide record-level funding for public education. Since 2000/01, B.C.'s student population dropped by over 8 per cent, yet we increased funding by 26 per cent. Next year, despite an estimated decrease of 6,200 students, we will maintain public education funding at \$4.7 billion.

Our Learning Improvement Fund is also investing \$210 million over three years to help school districts address complex classroom needs. At \$60 million, the first installment produced positive results, with 500 new teachers, 400 new EAs, and 7400 EAs received increased hours and smaller classes.



**Does your party contemplate the amalgamation of school boards in BC? If so, please supply details.**

We are committed to working with school districts, health authorities and post-secondary institutions to reduce overhead costs, find efficiencies, and look for additional savings through collaboration and shared services. Although we support exploring ways to reduce these costs through shared services, Today's BC Liberals are not currently contemplating the amalgamation of school boards in B.C.

