

Green Party of BC - BCCPAC Survey Responses

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

The parent is the expert on the child: his/her favored learning modes, special abilities, etc. The teacher is the expert on teaching. In an ideal world, parents and teachers should collaborate to fashion a learning environment that best suits the needs of each student. But because the typical classroom has thirty students, individual student programs are not always possible. Still, we believe that should be the goal.

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

The School Planning Council provides valuable input to the the educational decision-making. It is our view, however, that the parameters of that input are currently ill-defined. There is a fine line between advising the school on the allocation of staff, for example, and being perceived as pressuring administrators and teachers on how best to run the school. Such ill-defined parameters can easily be overstepped, and can become the source of friction between the SPC and the school.

The Green Party favors expanding the avenues by which concerned parents can influence education at all levels: classrooms, schools, boards, and the ministry. But we believe that great care must be taken to ensure that our efforts are not wasted in recriminations.

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

We believe in the independence of the bargaining rights of employers and employees. And we believe that meddling in the bargaining process, by the provincial government, is unacceptable. The fact that it has in the past imposed settlements in disputes between teachers and their employers, we view as irresponsible and disrespectful to both sides in the bargaining process.

In our view the government has made a series of mistakes that cumulatively have led us to the current state is disrepair of labour relations with teachers. e.g.:

- Separating administrators from teachers: Administrators are the educational leaders within their schools. Why are they in a separate union? We suspect the government hoped to "Divide and Conquer", but the effect has been deteriorating labour relations, and a souring of relations between teachers and school administrators.

- A single bargaining unit to represent teachers from 60 school district (the BCTF) vs. a single employer's bargaining unit (the BCPSEA): Whether or not the provincial government implemented this structure to further divide teachers, that has certainly been the effect. For example, under the previous structure, teachers were allowed to bargain with their own school boards, allowing local conditions to be considered during negotiations. This is no longer possible under the current structure, as teachers' needs in disparate districts are pitted against one another. Again, it appears that the government's only

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strategy is a "Divide and Conquer" approach to labour relations with teachers.

The bottom line is, we need to explore other bargaining models. The status quo clearly isn't working.

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

If BC moves to community based schooling, which we support, the way we fund public education will need to be adjusted. While I don't think it's likely, there may be enough money in the system if it were used differently. I think our message can't be that simply throwing more money at a system without expecting better results will result in different outcomes - that is the NDP message. We do propose moving away from per pupil funding. For instance, we might determine that schools that serve children from lower income neighbourhoods may need a different funding formula so that the school can provide additional services (anything from nutritious food to mentoring and tutoring) so that the children are more likely to be successful. Again, the formula might need to be unique for each school. We challenge the one size fits all model and not responsive enough to unique local conditions.

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

Several key features of the Green Education Plan are as follows:

Curricula

We advocate for the creation of an Education Commission to establish a comprehensive framework for learning and curriculum development. The objective is to provide a range of choice and access to programs that will be appropriate for various learning communities and for the diverse needs of students of all backgrounds and learning abilities.

A core curriculum aimed at literacy and problem-solving should be retained. Certain subjects, which could be described as Life Skills Learning, are to be included, and an emphasis placed on putting an end to gender discrimination. Holistic schoolyard programs would be created, along with the greening of schoolyards, to integrate students with their communities and the natural world.

Community-based education

Communities should have more control over education. We recommend a re-structuring of the school system based on a community school model. Greater control over schools should be transferred to local school boards from the provincial government in order to tailor policies to local community needs.

Using a community school model, and reflecting a broader concept of learning, schools should be utilized for a variety of community functions. For example, library, art and music facilities can be integrated with community facilities. Schools can seek partnerships with various community groups,

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including seniors, parents, cultural groups, and other educational institutions.

Funding

The long-term goal of the Green Party of British Columbia is that public education be universal and free at every level: primary, secondary and post-secondary.

Capital funding programs should be encouraged, assisted, and coordinated between civic governments, provincial and federal ministries, and school boards to develop community schools which physically integrate community centres, recreation facilities, libraries and schools.

Per-user rather than per-capita or per-district funding of special needs programs should be provided, so that districts with disproportionately large numbers of students requiring these services receive the necessary funding.

User fees for basic school services should be prohibited. Corporate funding of any kind should not be allowed in the public education system.

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

The current class-size rules are inflexible and unrealistic. A secondary school Social Studies class, for example, simply cannot be considered equivalent to a secondary school Physics Lab. And yet, the same class-size rule applies equally to both, causing overcrowding in the Physics Lab. Anyone who has ever been

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in a high school Physics Lab would understand this. Many other such examples exist, but, in general, we believe that class-size should be decided by those who know class conditions best, the teachers and school administrators themselves, rather than being controlled centrally by the government. One-size-fits-all simply doesn't work when deciding class size.

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

Providing the best learning environment possible for students is paramount. Decisions on class size and composition must be based on what is best for students - not the needs of the teacher, or the administrator, or the school as a whole, and certainly not what is best for the ministry.

Class composition is no less important than class size, and in fact, must be considered when determining size. But at present, teachers are often coerced into accepting special needs students, without an accompanying reduction in class size. Our position is, again, that the teachers themselves are in the best position to determine the optimal learning conditions for students, not the ministry.

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

While the GPBC believes that student progress must be tracked, and that parents need timely feedback, we also believe that educational standards must be based in reality, and must be informed by the latest pedagogical research. Furthermore, we believe the current model of

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Provincial Standardized Testing ignores several important facts.

e.g.

- Private schools get to hand-pick their students, so if they want to demonstrate academic excellence, all they need do is admit only the best students from among their applicants;

- Public schools don't have the luxury of hand-picking their students. Their catchment areas include a thorough mix of student abilities, from gifted to severely learning disabled. This can result in extreme Classroom Management challenges.

- Some public schools, like many Vancouver schools, have ESL populations approaching 80%.

(That is, as many as 80% of their students don't speak English at home, and their abilities to understand written questions is frequently limited.)

Thus, comparing FSA results from different schools can in no way be considered fair. Far more important is the progress made by individual students.

We understand that parents need a reliable means to track student progress, but we believe that FSA testing in its current form doesn't actually measure what it purports. It is a fairly good indication of how well students take tests, but not how accomplished they are at core skills. Furthermore, in order to compare test results across all schools, those schools must all operate on a level playing field. We believe the current FSA simply demonstrates further proof that inadequate funding promotes disparity in learning environments.

The current FSA model is a "quick and dirty" implementation that actually reveals very little

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about teacher effectiveness. We believe we know why the government has chosen this simplistic implementation, that is, because to create a standardized test that truly measures the quality of the learning environment within classrooms is incredibly difficult.

The Green Party's solution is to scrap the current FSA model, and rely instead on better tracking methods of individual student progress. The government made a stab at tracking student progress, with its failed BCeSIS project. Hopefully the government will learn from that failure, and implement a better, more robust tracking system in the near future. But after such a system is operational, teachers, parents and students should no longer be subjected to FSA testing.

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

The Green Party of BC believes that child poverty doesn't simply have a serious, detrimental impact on learning, but that we can actually employ the education system in the fight against poverty. For example, the following are direct quotes from our web-site:

"For every dollar Canadians spend on early childhood education we gain \$1.49 - \$2.78."

"Quebec initiated a \$7 per day childcare program (before and after school, 0-12yrs) and gained higher test scores, higher fertility rates and 50% poverty reduction."

Our vision of the future of education is based around public schools that are integral parts of the community, providing needed services to parents as well as students. Thus, schools can be the cornerstone of

Comment [1]:

Jane Sterk 3/25/13 5:27 PM
I would also add our support for the Guaranteed Annual Income. Child poverty is a function of family poverty and we would eliminate that with GAI.

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their communities, providing wholesome meals, after school programs, and more.

Finally, because child poverty is a function of family poverty, the Green party also supports the implementation of a Guaranteed Annual Income.

• 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?

There is a popular quote among educators: "Any teacher who can be replaced by a computer, should be."

This is not to say that computers have no place in the classroom, nor indeed, many other emerging technologies. No doubt, we will see a continuous flow of attempts to introduce new technologies into the classroom. But we should avoid rushing to adopt new technologies simply to enhance the prestige of a school. We believe that technologies should be introduced into the classroom only after they have proven their value to learning.

Regarding cost, new technologies are typically most expensive when first introduced to the public, and fall in price after they have had time to become more widely accepted by consumers. This points to a need for schools to provide new technologies to their students, in a technology's initial stages of implementation. For example, let's imagine that a school decides to make extensive use of iPads, as an integral part of the learning environment. An essential part of the initial implementation must be for the school to provide

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students with those tools for free, or at the very least, allow students to purchase, borrow, rent or lease them from the school. Cost must not be a barrier to student participation, as new technologies are introduced into the classroom.

If we further imagine that a school is open after hours, so that students have access to its library and computer lab, it's easy to see that students who may not be able to afford to purchase some new technology, may still use that technology to do homework, if the school makes it available.

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

We believe that the education ministry can and should set standards, such as insisting that schools prevent cheating and plagiarizing, or exposing students to inappropriate materials found on the internet. But we do not believe that the ministry should impose exactly how such standards should be achieved. We believe that teachers are professionals, and should be allowed to use their best judgement in such matters.

As for protecting students from possible harmful effects of electromagnetic radiation, we prefer to err on the side of caution. We, therefore, propose replacing WiFi with fibre-optic cable.

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

As the research on this matter makes abundantly clear, the importance of parent-involvement in education cannot be overstated. We are aware of the government's 2009 funding cuts to PACs & DPACs, and believe funding levels should be restored at the earliest opportunity. Furthermore, we believe that if the government truly valued parent-involvement, funding would be part of the education budget, rather than relying on the vagaries of gaming income.

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

When Inclusive Education was first mandated, it was seen as our moral responsibility to help integrate special needs and learning disabled students into society, as well as to expose mainstream students to the realities of our society as a whole, and hopefully develop some degree of empathy for members of society who were previously out-of-sight-out-of-mind.

At its inception, Inclusive Education was sufficiently funded, providing support for affected teachers in the form of smaller class size and extra support staff, where appropriate. But over time the support was eroded, as budgets became progressively tighter - until we find today that we have only the illusion of Inclusive Education. There is now only token support, if it exists at all.

The Green Party believes that Inclusive Education is still a worthwhile goal, but only if properly supported. The provincial government must restore support, because the current state of Inclusive Education is unacceptable.

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• How will your party support aboriginal education in BC?

A graduation rate of 50% is clear evidence that the educational system is failing to meet the needs of aboriginal students.

Many students from aboriginal homes have a variety of impediments to success, especially in the classroom. For example:

- We recognize that some aboriginal students speak a non-standard dialect of English at home, and may require English as a Second Dialect (ESD) support at school;

- Higher than average rates of poverty, substance abuse, exposure to crime, and violence in the home place some aboriginal students at risk.

Such challenges cannot be viewed in isolation, nor can they be fixed with bandaid solutions. They must be tackled with a comprehensive, on-going, and concerted effort to make all our communities places where children are valued and truly safe.

Finally, we believe that aboriginal communities must be included in the decision making process, when developing programs to meet the needs of First Nations students and their communities.

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

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Insofar as school administrators are responsible for maintaining school operations, including student safety, we believe it is reasonable that administrators be granted the power to prohibit persons who may, in their opinion, pose a risk to schools and/or students. We do, however, question the apparent lack of an effective appeal process, for persons so excluded.

In short, while we agree with the intent of Section 177, we disagree with its current implementation.

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

Education is an essential building block of our society, and a well-educated province will be a top priority for Green MLAs. We believe that the role of schools should be expanded, to better serve the goal of life-long learning. And we believe that education should be accessible and affordable, to anyone who wants it, be it primary, secondary, or post-secondary.

Higher education levels have been shown to result in a host of other benefits. e.g.: better health, lower crime, lower teen pregnancies, lower rates of smoking, and less poverty. In short, the Green Party has no higher priority than Education.

However, we have not developed a specific funding formula to meet these broad objectives. We believe that in order to reform our education system must first start with a broadly based consultation process, to determine the priorities of the citizens of BC, after which we will ensure that the resulting educational system is adequately funded.

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

The needs of school districts vary enormously from community to community.

To name just a few examples:

- School needs in Fort St. John are vastly different from those in Vancouver.

- And it isn't simply the urban/rural divide where this is true. School needs in Fort St. John are quite distinct from than those of Prince Rupert.

- Finally, schools needs also differ among urban districts. Some must deal with the needs of so-called "Inner-City" schools, for example, while others do not.

Differing communities needs are precisely why school boards were created in the first place, so in our view, amalgamation of schools boards, with decision-making centralized in Victoria, makes no sense whatsoever.