

SEPTEMBER 2021

REPORT to CSBA

Report to the Canadian School Boards Association

COVID-19 Response

This September, students across the province returned to full-time, in-person learning in British Columbia public schools. A mask mandate has been put in place for grades 4-12, which will continue to be evaluated alongside immunization protocols as we move into the fall.

Significant evolutions in our reporting updates and improved communications have been established. The data continues to show that schools in B.C. are safe for students and were shown not to be drivers of COVID-19 transmission. Science-based evidence continues to show that school closures do not drive down rates in the community. A recent study from the Fraser Health Authority indicated that COVID-19 entered schools from community exposures over the winter period, and minimal transmission occurred within school settings.

BCSTA was able to successfully advocate that school staff be prioritized for vaccines earlier this year. Board chairs have had regular opportunities to meet with doctors from the Office of the Provincial Health Officer and B.C. Centre for Disease Control staff to discuss these issues, and BCSTA is also represented on the provincial COVID-19 steering committee. Boards of education continue to work closely with BCSTA and the government to prioritize the health and safety of students and staff. In conjunction with these actions, BCSTA created a report that addresses areas boards of education believe the government needs to focus on to effectively mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on the young people of B.C. [Read the report.](#)

Member Resources

Over the course of the year, BCSTA developed several key guides for the province's boards of education that have been posted on our members-only [intranet](#) site (BCSTA HUB). Example areas of focus include advocacy, government processes/procedures and trustee rights and responsibilities. BCSTA also has a variety of working groups taking on key initiatives such as climate change and capital.

A school life cycle funding [discussion paper](#) was prepared by the capital working group to identify issues with insufficient funding and the achievement of CleanBC goals.

In response to returning to a near-normal in-class instruction this fall, BCSTA created a discussion paper outlining considerations for secondary school schedules. The COVID-19 working group gathered stories and experiences from member districts over 2020 to share with B.C.'s government. Our inclusive education, mental health and recruitment and retention working groups have also been hard at work to provide valuable information for B.C.'s boards of education. They have been diligent in addressing historical concerns in areas such as staff and student mental health and inclusive education delivery, as well as assessing the impact of the pandemic on staff and students. BCSTA staff are also currently updating the Trustee Learning Guide in anticipation of the upcoming local elections in October 2022.

B.C. Politics

B.C.'s New Democratic Party established a majority government after holding a snap election in October of 2020. The Honourable Jennifer Whiteside, a first-term MLA, became B.C.'s new minister of education. Minister Whiteside has made significant efforts to engage with BCSTA's membership and has continued to champion the vital role local boards have as co-governors of B.C.'s K-12 education system.

In April of 2021, the province released the 2021 provincial budget. In a [media release](#), BCSTA stated, "Boards of education are pleased that K-12 education continues to be a priority for the government but are concerned that funds announced today will only partially cover increased operating costs in school districts." An overview of the [budget](#) was created and is hosted on the BCSTA HUB.

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BCSTA Events

During the pandemic, BCSTA held several events virtually, including our most recent AGM and annual Trustee Academy. We received high attendance and robust and positive member feedback from these events. Special attention was given to preserving the integrity of the business session with the development of a custom voting system for motions and elections, which was met with positive reviews. Planning for an in-person Trustee Academy this December is underway as B.C. continues with its COVID-19 recovery plan.

Association Leadership

BCSTA's Chief Executive Officer, Mike Roberts, will be retiring on September 30. Mike joined the association in 2014 and has served the province's public education sector, and its students, in various positions for over 30 years. His dedication to public education, as both an educator and leader, will be greatly missed. Suzanne Hoffman, who most recently served as superintendent of the Vancouver School Board, will be joining BCSTA as CEO on October 1, 2021. Prior to joining the VSB, Suzanne was the chief educator and superintendent of learning transformation at the Ministry of Education. She also previously held the position of superintendent with the Langley School District. You can find more information in our [media release](#).

During our 2020 AGM, two directors (Valerie Adrian and Mike Murray) did not run for re-election on the BCSTA board of directors. BCSTA's membership elected Dr. John Chenoweth, a first-term trustee from Nicola-Smilkameen, and Tracy Loffler, chair of the Mission Public Schools board, to the board in their place. John has been invited by CSBA to speak about Indigenous issues on a Canadian panel at the National School Boards Association meeting, taking place on April 2022 in San Diego. BCSTA's new board of directors has updated their strategic plan for the upcoming year, and it can be viewed [here](#).

Framework for Enhancing Student Learning

B.C.'s Framework for Enhancing Student Learning formalizes planning and reporting expectations for schools, with a goal of improving learning outcomes. Accountability, evidence-informed decision making, continuous improvement and a focus on Indigenous inclusion comprise this approach. The projected outcome is increased parity across school districts, and a combined focus on improvements in public education across the province.

To begin the process this September, the Enhancing Student Learning Reporting Order requires each board of education to prepare and submit a report that includes student performance information and the school district's strategic plan.

The following student populations are to be separately addressed:

- Indigenous students, both living on reserve, and living off reserve.
- Children and youth in care.
- Students with disabilities or diverse abilities.

A critical component of the report involves the board's approach to continuous improvement of student achievement. As part of this process, the Ministry of Education worked with BCSTA to find trustee volunteers to participate in Framework for Enhancing Student Learning (FESL) review working groups this past June.

[Learn more.](#)

School District Surpluses

BCSTA is continuing its work to inform the government as to why school districts surpluses are a vital component of the continued success in B.C.'s public education system. Districts maintain contingencies to adapt to a variety of government regulations and processes, as well as covering unfunded liabilities that occur over the school year.

There are conversations occurring that indicate that the provincial treasury may be looking at these surpluses as a place to obtain funds to assist in managing the provincial deficit and debt. BCSTA is working with BCASBO to create an understanding with government that contingencies are not excessive funding but an important part of prudent fiscal planning. ■



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