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MEDIA RELEASE

Mixed results for public schools in B.C.'s 2024 budget

VICTORIA – Despite some positives, today's budget overlooks pressing needs in B.C.'s public education system. Funding to ease enrolment pressures and escalating costs facing families are welcome news, but this budget missed addressing key issues facing schools, including aging infrastructure, inflation-driven operating costs and recruitment and retention pressures.

"While we are pleased to see a renewed commitment to supporting families with the reinstatement of the student and family affordability fund and the focus on literacy screening for students with learning differences, it is disappointing that education is not receiving more of a focus," said Carolyn Broady, president of the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA). "Although government says that K-12 is one of their top priorities, we do not see that fully reflected in the 2024 budget. Education is the second largest budget area, second only to health, but the resources are not adequate to tackle the scale of challenges facing our public education system."

"Focusing on the needs of students with expanded school outreach teams is welcome news and, while limited, funding to support children with diverse learning needs and new literacy support programs is a good starting point."

"We recognize that this government is investing in housing affordability, which we know is a factor in our ability to recruit and retain staff," said Broady, highlighting the critical need for improved teacher recruitment and retention strategies, particularly in rural areas. "However, we would have liked to see improved workforce planning for teachers and education assistants and an expansion of online and hybrid teacher education programs."

Capital funds for new schools as well as expansion and replacement projects will help address some of the province's population growth issues and relieve enrolment pressures. "However," said Broady, "the omission of adequate funds to address the deferred maintenance and upkeep of schools is disappointing. Our schools are aging, and districts need funds to address the maintenance requirements of those facilities." Also missing was funding to address ongoing inflationary costs facing school districts.

"Every child in this province deserves access to a high-quality public education, no matter where they live, what their background is or what's going on at home," said Broady. "Investing in education is investing in our future."

Boards of education are committed to improving student outcomes in B.C.'s public schools and ensuring that every student can reach their full potential.

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