

Inclusive education and student success

1. How will you prioritize inclusion and diversity within the public school system to ensure all students feel safe, respected and valued?

Our government has prioritized ensuring that people see themselves represented in their elected officials, in their government, in boards and tribunals, and in our work as a whole. Our school system is no exception.

Through our *Anti-Racism Data Act*, our work supporting Indigenous education, our racist incident hotline, and our support for anti-racism programs delivered in schools and in local communities, we have prioritized ensuring that all students have safe and welcoming learning environments.

And, through our *Safe Access to Schools Act* – opposed by John Rustad’s BC Conservatives – we’ve taken action to ensure schools remain inclusive, safe, and accessible places for learning, by activating protected zones on and around school grounds to prevent any disruptive behaviour, such as aggressive protests, from occurring within 20 metres of schools.

In addition, our K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan empowers students, educators, and school district leaders to recognize and respond to racism and discrimination wherever it is present – lifting the heavy burden currently on the shoulders of Indigenous and racialized students, staff, and families. And our *erase* tool is providing a confidential platform to inform their school of any concerns by sending a secure and anonymous message to their safe school coordinator for immediate follow up.

We hear from students, educators, parents, and school districts every day. We know there’s more work to do and we’re up for the challenge.

2. Accessibility for staff and students within our schools is a top priority. What do you plan to do to make schools more inclusive and accessible?

Ensuring that our schools are safe for all children is a major priority for our government. This means ensuring that we are meeting minimum seismic safety standards to ensure kids are safe in the event of an earthquake. It also means ensuring that all of our new schools are built to maximize accessibility for kids and staff with a diverse array of accessibility challenges.

Making sure that every child feels welcome and part of the school community is also a vitally important part of accessibility, and a big priority for us. Part of this work includes ensuring that children from diverse backgrounds and with diverse perspectives and unique needs are welcomed into the school community as full participants in school life.

By preventing bullying, by ensuring that hateful protesters are kept at a distance from our schools and our kids, and by underlining the importance of creating a welcoming school environment, our school trustees and the provincial government can ensure that every child is valued and welcome.

Since 2017, we have more than doubled funding to school districts, helping kids who need additional support to meet their full potential. With the largest school food program in the province's history, we're ensuring that students are well-fed and ready to learn. And, for families who need extra help, we're taking action to cover the costs of school supplies and class trips, as well as sports and music programs.

In addition, we have launched K-12 literacy screening and learning supports, helping all students, especially those with dyslexia and other learning disabilities, get the support they need to achieve their best. We know there's more work to be done here – and we're ready to do it.

Our commitment to school accessibility and inclusivity stands in stark contrast to that of our opponents. Disturbingly, John Rustad's BC Conservatives are promising to establish a school textbook censorship committee if elected. This represents a huge risk to the progress we've made in ensuring a safe and welcoming environment for every student in BC's public school system.

3. How do you plan to support school districts in implementing mental health and addiction awareness programs tailored to the needs of students?

We believe that every student in BC's K-12 public school system must be able to access the mental health and addiction awareness services they need. When a student is struggling with their mental health or with substance use, we know how vital it is to provide them with the supports they need early on through prevention, treatment and comprehensive services.

That's why, if elected, we are committing to ensure that there is a school counselor available in every school in BC to ensure that students get the attention and support that they need with mental health challenges, and that administrators and teachers are able to focus on the work that they need to do supporting the broader school population.

We are also taking action by expanding our Integrated Child and Youth (ICY) teams to 20 school districts by next year. Working closely with districts, these teams make it easier for young people and their families to connect to the care they need, where and when they need it, putting the needs of each child at the centre.

In addition, to better support students with disabilities and diverse abilities in rural and remote regions where access to services can be limited, we've launched two new Provincial School

Outreach Teams to complement school districts' ongoing efforts in the areas of awareness and prevention.

If elected, school districts across our province can count on our continuing support. Worryingly, John Rustad's plan for sweeping budget cuts would put all this at risk.

4. What initiatives will you commit to undertake to address completion rate results between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students?

We believe that reconciliation and education must go hand in hand. That is why closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student completion rates is a priority for our government. All students deserve the opportunity to succeed in our province, and a significant part of that success is being able to complete a full educational program and move on to developing skills in post-secondary training that will serve them for a lifetime.

We are partnering with Indigenous people - including the First Nations Education Steering Committee and Métis Nation British Columbia - to ensure that we are delivering culturally appropriate and safe school spaces to maximize the odds of success for Indigenous students in our schools. Significant legislative reform requiring the establishment of Indigenous learning councils will support this work. We are grateful for the support of school trustees on this important initiative. To date, seven First Nations now have recognized jurisdiction over their K-12 education systems.

We are also taking action to support better education outcomes for First Nation and other Indigenous students attending provincial public schools, increasing targeted funding for Indigenous learners by 64% since forming government, and amending the *School Act* to give First Nations more choice in which public schools their students attend and to ensure Indigenous people have a voice in decisions and funding that impact Indigenous students.

In addition, we are committed to support Indigenous learners and closing the outcome gaps by focusing support for the school districts with the highest need. And we're ensuring that all B.C. students will graduate with an understanding of the ancient history of the lands their schools are situated upon.

We will continue taking action until Indigenous learners lead graduation rates, are supported to pursue their own excellence, and can access relevant and responsive post-secondary education and skills training. Unfortunately, this progress is at risk from John Rustad's BC Conservatives, and their pledge to repeal our *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People Act* – including key commitments on improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students – and take us back to the failed approaches of the past.

Capital and deferred maintenance funding

1. What changes would you make to provincial procedures, and what resources would you provide to school districts, to enable them to sustainably provide more child care spaces?

Schools are already built environments for supporting children and they have enormous potential to address the child care needs of families. When families and educators know that students will be in one place through the whole day, it reduces parent stress and improves family well-being.

Many schools have staff who are keen to work on a full-time basis as an educational assistant providing before-and-after school care as well as working through the school day.

Our pilot program with CUPE and three school districts demonstrates that full before-and-after school support for parents and families is not only achievable, it is cost effective, and provides better working opportunities for educational assistance. If elected, we will be ensuring the required resources to support school boards in delivering before- and after-school care using this model across the province.

In addition, we will ensure that major capital projects like new schools include consideration of additional childcare spaces where appropriate for both staff and the families of students.

Only by ensuring that childcare is an integrated part of our school system will we ensure that we meet our goal of a sustainable and affordable childcare system for every child in British Columbia. The last time he was in government, John Rustad left the childcare system in chaos, with a massive shortage of early childhood educators, high fees, and not enough spaces. Parents can't afford to go back to that.

2. How will your party address the additional funding required for capital projects, deferred maintenance, seismic upgrading and inflation-driven operational costs?

British Columbia is growing rapidly. We added 180,000 people to our province just last year, including many who are arriving with children and need access to schools. We must ensure that we are building the schools to meet our growing province's needs.

Gone are the days of the previous government discussing which schools to close. To meet the needs of growing communities, we are building and expanding schools in every corner of British Columbia. Many of our aging schools are overdue for replacement and we are taking action to upgrade or replace them via our Seismic Mitigation Program.

Since forming government, we have increased funding for school boards by 55%, ensuring that they are able to meet the increasing demands for additional services to support kids, parents and families. This is a strong contrast with previous governments which cut support for school boards when the families they serve needed it most.

We will continue to work in partnership with school boards, by providing additional capital funding for school expansion and for new school projects to meet the needs of growing populations. We will make sure you have the funding and support you need to build and maintain our schools for generations to come.

Our commitments stand in stark contrast to those of our opponents. John Rustad proposes to address our growing population by increasing class sizes by at least 20% – which will lead to worse learning outcomes for kids, and greater challenges for teachers and support workers to maintain control in the classroom while providing support for children with additional needs. And the last time he was in office, his government froze school construction funding for eight straight years as the province grew rapidly, causing a massive deficit of school spaces. In short, the BC Conservatives' proposals to solve this problem are no solution at all.

3. What climate change initiatives will you implement to ensure that public schools are equipped with energy-efficient infrastructure and resources?

Our party believes that climate change is real. Unlike John Rustad's Conservatives, we do not think that human-caused climate change is a hoax.

As a result, we will continue to work with school boards to ensure that public schools are comfortable for all students to learn in, through building energy-efficient infrastructure and resources.

We're taking action to help make schools more energy efficient, climate resilient and better able to support their school communities, by providing new funding earmarked for energy-efficient infrastructure, and to upgrade heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems. And there's more to come, including the continued expansion of our fleet of 92 electric school buses already operating in school districts across the province.

By contrast, John Rustad denies the science of climate change and has promised to completely abandon BC's climate action plan. Not only will this leave communities across BC more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, it will also mean an end to support for making our schools more climate resilient and energy efficient.

Recruitment and retention of staff

1. How do you plan to address the shortage of qualified teachers and education assistants in public schools?

We know that a tight labour market for teachers and educators is a reality, not just in B.C., but throughout Canada and internationally. And, with BC's highest enrollment growth in over 35 years, demand for new teachers and educational assistants is up significantly.

Sustained action is needed to support school districts in hiring more qualified teachers and education assistants, in order to meet this increased demand, and build a strong, sustainable K-12 workforce that students and families can rely on, now and in the future.

That's why we're funding nearly 350 additional training spaces in our province for teachers and education assistants. We are also working collaboratively with universities to modernize teacher training, and eliminating hiring barriers by updating the certification process to allow more internationally-trained educators to work in BC.

Targeted initiatives like our Future Ready Plan, which focuses on the recruitment and retention of teachers in high-demand areas, are also boosting hiring efforts. And, after years of underfunding by the previous government, we're providing significant wage increases to retain qualified educators by bringing salaries into line with other provinces.

We will continue to build on these initiatives, and we're ready to take further action to get new teachers and education assistants into BC classrooms.

We also believe that it is a very good thing that we are no longer discussing, as we were under the previous government, the shortage of funding for teachers to deliver the learning that students need. Concerningly, John Rustad wants to take us right back to those days, by promising at least a 20% increase in class sizes. We know how important quality learning environments are for students and parents. And that's why Rustad's plan is so risky – we know from experience that overcrowded classrooms hurt students and their learning.

2. What is your party's plan to address the differing needs of rural and urban school districts?

We believe that no matter where people live in the province, their kids should have access to a high-quality school. With the goal of ensuring standardized high-quality education across the province, we need to recognize the unique challenges in recruiting and retaining teachers in small rural communities.

We believe that by fast-tracking training for unaccredited teachers who are already working in rural, remote and First Nation communities, and who are committed to developing their career in those communities, we can ensure that kids get access to professionally trained teachers and the best possible learning outcomes, no matter where they live in BC.

That is why we are committed to working with school districts to ensure that we transition from the use of unaccredited teachers in rural and remote areas, to using accredited teachers right across the system.

We're also taking action to support hiring initiatives in rural and remote school districts, with 50 new teachers hired in those regions over the past few months alone. And we're committed to doing whatever is needed to attract and retain more teachers to high-need areas of the province.

By contrast, the last time John Rustad was in power, he closed 267 schools, fought with teachers all the way to the Supreme Court to try to increase class sizes, and froze construction of new schools for eight straight years. That's a risk nobody in BC, urban or rural, can afford.

We would also welcome any other K-12 considerations that you would like B.C.'s boards of education to be aware of as part of your party's platform:

We all want our kids to have better opportunities than we did. Every teacher, every school district, and every parent wants to give them the best start possible.

Our government is taking action to give our kids the quality education they deserve – building new and expanded schools and doing everything we can to support our kids.

Over 5,700 new teachers hired. The smallest class sizes in a decade. 280 new playgrounds. 125 new, expanded, and seismically upgraded schools built or underway. It all adds up to more space for our kids – and more attention to help them learn.

But let's be clear – the progress we're making is at enormous risk this election. We know John Rustad from his previous record in government. He would cancel school construction, increase class sizes, and fire teachers – just like he did before.

Rustad is already calling for a 20% increase in class sizes – cramming more kids into the classroom, and setting them back. In government, he closed 267 schools. He fought with teachers all the way to the Supreme Court to try to increase class sizes. And he froze school construction for eight long years as the province grew rapidly, resulting in a massive deficit in school spaces.

Every child deserves a high quality learning environment. We can't go back to a time when the fastest growing city in British Columbia, Surrey, didn't see a single new school under the previous government for four years. But that's exactly what John Rustad and the BC Conservatives are proposing.

This election, John Rustad's BC Conservatives are a risk we can't afford. Let's keep investing in our kids to give them the opportunity they deserve.

