

A Short History of K-12 Public School Spending in British Columbia, 1970-2020

Jason Ellis

Number 196, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1078520ar>
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078520ar>

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Publisher(s)

Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan

ISSN

1207-7798 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Ellis, J. (2021). A Short History of K-12 Public School Spending in British Columbia, 1970-2020. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy / Revue canadienne en administration et politique de l'éducation*, (196), 102-123. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1078520ar>

Article abstract

This article looks at fifty years' worth (1970-2020) of public K-12 education expenditure data from the Canadian province of British Columbia. It asks if spending has increased or decreased in this period and examines the causes and correlates of spending changes. Previous research has tended to assume that spending has decreased during this "neoliberal" period. However, historical and empirical research in this article gives a much different picture. K-12 public education spending in British Columbia – adjusted for inflation – is 250 percent higher in 2020 than it was in 1970. Meanwhile, enrolment in 2020 is only 110 percent of 1970 enrolment. The main cause of spending growth is increase in the number of teachers the system employs, which depended in no small part on the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF)'s successful attempts to negotiate class size and composition rules. Other causes of spending growth are provincial and district spending priorities. Successive provincial governments have tried to rein in education spending by legislating cost controls on district spending and teacher contracts but have seldom achieved reductions for long. Spending increases and attempts at cost control are at best only linked partially to governing party ideology, with right-wing and left-wing provincial governments both initiating years of increases and cutbacks. More empirical research is needed, especially into spending's effects on educational equity and quality, to complete the picture of education finance in British Columbia.

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A Short History of K-12 Public School Spending in British Columbia, 1970-2020

Jason Ellis
University of British Columbia

Abstract

This article looks at fifty years' worth (1970-2020) of public K-12 education expenditure data from the Canadian province of British Columbia. It asks if spending has increased or decreased in this period and examines the causes and correlates of spending changes. Previous research has tended to assume that spending has decreased during this "neoliberal" period. However, historical and empirical research in this article gives a much different picture. K-12 public education spending in British Columbia – adjusted for inflation – is 250 percent higher in 2020 than it was in 1970. Meanwhile, enrolment in 2020 is only 110 percent of 1970 enrolment. The main cause of spending growth is increase in the number of teachers the system employs, which depended in no small part on the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF)'s successful attempts to negotiate class size and composition rules. Other causes of spending growth are provincial and district spending priorities. Successive provincial governments have tried to rein in education spending by legislating cost controls on district spending and teacher contracts but have seldom achieved reductions for long. Spending increases and attempts at cost control are at best only linked partially to governing party ideology, with right-wing and left-wing provincial governments both initiating years of increases and cutbacks. More empirical research is needed, especially into spending's effects on educational equity and quality, to complete the picture of education finance in British Columbia.

Keywords: education spending, education finance, neoliberalism, British Columbia, British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), history

British Columbia's K-12 public school spending increase in the last five decades is astounding. In 1970, yearly operating expenditures on public K-12 schools in the province were approximately \$315 million.¹ The 1970 figure, when you adjust it for inflation, comes to just over \$2.1 billion in 2020 dollars.² In 2020, however, British Columbia did not spend \$2 billion on K-12 public schools. It did not spend \$3 billion – or even \$4 billion. For 2020, operating grant block funding expenditures on public K-12 schools in British Columbia were \$5.3 billion. This does not include special operating grants or government grants

¹ Operating expenditures refers to funds spent to run schools on a day-to-day basis, such as money for teachers' and other staff's salaries, school buses, learning materials, building maintenance, and the like. It excludes capital costs, such as the cost to construct new school buildings. However, it may include interest charges on borrowed capital for school construction.

² When I say adjust for inflation, I mean that I have removed the inflating effect of the changing value of currency by converting all historical dollars to 2020 dollars using the Bank of Canada inflation calculator. All inflation calculations in this article are my own. <https://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>

to private schools. These grants add close to \$450 million – each – on top of the \$5.3 billion figure.³ British Columbia's block operating grant alone – adjusted for inflation – is more than 250 percent higher than what the province spent on K-12 operating in 1970.

My argument in this empirical article is that increase is the story of K-12 public school expenditures in British Columbia since 1970. Spending grew unhindered in the 1970s. Since the early 1980s, provincial governments have used legislation to try to rein spending in. Their efforts have seldom succeeded for long. Dramas over teachers' salaries and collective bargaining, over class size and composition, and over school districts' taxing and spending powers have shaped spending growth in British Columbia in the past fifty years. In K-12 education, personnel costs drive operating spending. Salaries and benefits account historically for 80 or 90 percent of education expenditures in British Columbia.⁴ This means that nearly all of the events this article looks at involve familiar players in British Columbia's education politics. They are the province's teachers and their union, the British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), the teachers' employers and their representatives – namely school districts and (more recently) the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) – and successive provincial governments.

Despite a sizeable spending increase over the last several decades, there is a misperception, which some education professors contribute to (Davidson-Harden et al., 2010; Ross & Gibson, 2007; Schuetze et al., 2011), that there have been education spending *cuts* and austerity in this neoliberal period. This misperception of spending reductions is not based on historical research. It is also likely symptomatic of a bigger problem in the education policy literature: attributing rising or falling spending too simply and singly to political ideology, in this case, neoliberalism. Scholarship in public finance and political science has established that many factors in addition to ideology play key parts in Canadian provincial government spending (Simon & Tatalovich, 2014; Tellier, 2006). As just one example, Tellier & Imbeau (2004; see also, Simon & Tatalovich, 2014) found that the “electoral cycle” affects provincial deficit spending more than party ideology does. The greater predictor of deficits is not parties' ideologies, but rather the point they have reached in the electoral cycle. This public finance and political science literature (Mou et al., 2018; Tellier & Imbeau, 2004;) further shows stronger effects on spending from the business cycle and from “fiscal rules” than from governing party ideology alone. (Fiscal rules are parameters that governments apply to how much they spend or borrow. A very formal example is balanced budget legislation [Mou et al., 2018]). The history of education spending in British Columbia also tends to support a less than totally ideological explanation of spending changes. I have not found a consistently strong alignment between governing party ideology and education spending, though they sometimes matched.

Sources

For practically all of British Columbia's history, two financial reservoirs have supplied most of the funds to cover the province's public K-12 education expenditures. These reservoirs are direct government grants the province pays to school districts from general provincial revenues and monies that school boards (and more recently the provincial government) raise by taxing people's and corporations' real property for education purposes.⁵ The share from each, and who holds the power to tax and spend, have shifted over time. However, the main revenue sources remain the same today as they were back in the late nineteenth century (Fleming & Anderson, 1984; Gidney & Millar, 2012).

The five decades of spending data I present in this article come from Statistics Canada and Province of British Columbia sources. (See also Appendix). Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, and Tables 2 and 3 draw on data that British Columbia school districts reported to Statistics Canada. I extracted data for Figure 2 and Table 2, covering 1970 to 1974, from a bigger data set in *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Statistics Canada & Wi-

³ Special purpose grants include, notably, the “Classroom Enhancement Fund” (CEF) that the provincial government established in 2017 to provide funds for districts to comply with a Supreme Court of Canada decision (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2017). In 2019/20, the CEF added \$465 million of funding to the public system above the operating grant block amount (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020b). The government also funds private schools to the tune of \$430 million yearly (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2020a). For the history of public spending on private schools, which goes back to 1977 in British Columbia, see Barman, 1991.

⁴ Experts' estimates vary. Sometimes this figure includes teaching and non-teaching staff, essentially all paid positions from teacher, to principal, to caretaker and office staff (British Columbia Education Funding Review Panel 1992; Cutt et al., 1988; Young et al., 2008).

⁵ Real property is usually real estate, i.e., land and buildings. Unusually, British Columbia used a poll tax, not a property tax, to fund its schools until 1888. Johnson, 1964.

esenthal, n.d.). These data do not include capital expenditures. Included are provincial grants, local tax revenues, and other school board income. Figures 4 and 5 and Table 3 (covering the years 1975 to 2001) rely on a different Statistics Canada (n.d.a) source that *does* include school board capital expenditures. It also includes contributions to teachers' pensions, but excludes direct provincial expenditures on schools or direct provincial administrative expenditures on education. (An alternate source is Statistics Canada, n.d.b.) Finally, Figures 6 and 7 and Table 4 (covering 2002-present) use British Columbia Ministry of Education (2021) data. These data reflect operating costs (block operating grant) only (Independent Funding Model Review Panel, 2018). Capital spending, special operating grants, and government grants to private schools are not included (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2021).

With British Columbia Ministry of Education (2021) data, different years use slightly different reporting methods. I tried to pick the most representative source and figure in each year. For 2001/02-2002/03, my source is operating grants tables. For 2001/02, I used Table 2, Determination of the Final 2001/02 Funding Allocation to Districts and the provincial total in the column District Funding Allocation. The province changed the formula and reporting slightly for 2002/03. For this year, I used the table Provincial Overview of 2002/03 Final Operating Grants. For 2003/04-2005/06, I used Final Operating Grant for District 99 (i.e., provincial total). For 2005/2006, I omitted one-time funding recovered from the teachers' strike (\$55 million). For 2006/07-2019/20, I used Full Year Grant Summary or the last recalculated summary. For these years, I subtracted the federal government's operating grant for First Nations schools (usually around \$60 million yearly). My figure for 2006/07 omits \$253 million in one-time funding from the Ministry of Finance. In other years, I have counted small amounts of miscellaneous additional funding (\$1-5 million approximately) from sources such as the BCPSEA.

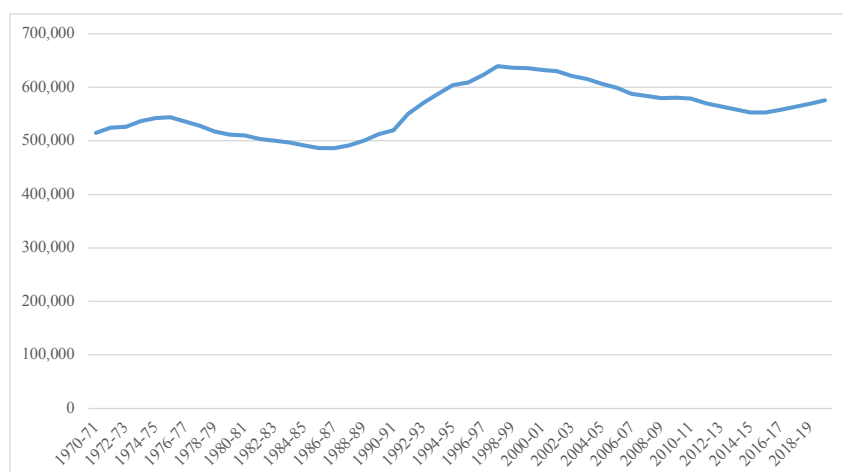
The mixture of three different sources of spending data, each of which counts slightly differently, means that readers should not necessarily compare the periods 1970-4, 1975-2001, and 2002-present directly. Note that the figures for the second period (1975-2001) include capital spending and government contributions to teachers' pensions, whereas the figures for the third period (2001-present) do not include capital spending.⁶ Despite incongruities between the three data sets, the figures that I provide in this article should at least be considered a good overview of spending tendencies generally in the province over time.

Enrolment Context

I have also included British Columbia public school enrolment data from 1970 to 2020 to add a crucial context for the changes I describe. After all, if we are talking about how much we spend on K-12 schools, it surely matters how far those dollars stretch. That is mainly a question of how many students public schools need to educate at any given point in time. In British Columbia, enrolment has not risen nearly as dramatically over the last five decades as spending has.

For Figure 1 and Table 1, I used the September 30th headcount of students that schools and districts reported. However, I had to search for this information in several different sources. For 1970 to 1974, I used Keyl & Turner (1974). For 1975-1984, I used British Columbia, Ministry of Education (1984). For 1985, I used British Columbia, Ministry of Education (1986). For 1986-1990, I used Statistics Canada (2016). (My thanks to Mark Buhler for locating these data for me.) Because this is September headcount data, the school years correspond this way: "1970" is the 1970-71 school year, and so on. For 1991/92 onwards, I used Data BC (2017a) and Data BC (2017b).

⁶ The Statistics Canada data continue beyond 2001, the date when I stopped using it and substituted the British Columbia Ministry of Education's block operating grant formula figure instead.

Figure 1*Enrolment in British Columbia K-12 Public Schools, 1970/71 – 2019/20***Table 1***British Columbia Public K-12 Enrolment (September 30 Headcount) Increase (+) or Decrease (-) from Previous Year, 1970/71 – 2019/20*

Year	Enrolment	+/- over previous year	Year	Enrolment	+/- over previous year
1970-71	515,243		1995-96	609,247	0.91%
1971-72	524,457	1.79%	1996-97	623,098	2.27%
1972-73	526,370	0.36%	1997-98	639,555	2.64%
1973-74	536,784	1.98%	1998-99	636,801	-0.43%
1974-75	542,383	1.04%	1999-00	635,460	-0.21%
1975-76	543,893	0.28%	2000-01	632,505	-0.47%
1976-77	535,967	-1.46%	2001-02	630,046	-0.39%
1977-78	527,771	-1.53%	2002-03	621,198	-1.40%
1978-79	516,967	-2.05%	2003-04	615,184	-0.97%
1979-80	511,671	-1.02%	2004-05	606,380	-1.43%
1980-81	509,801	-0.37%	2005-06	599,491	-1.14%
1981-82	503,327	-1.27%	2006-07	587,815	-1.95%
1982-83	500,336	-0.59%	2007-08	583,617	-0.71%
1983-84	497,352	-0.60%	2008-09	579,485	-0.71%
1984-85	491,085	-1.26%	2009-10	580,478	0.17%
1985-86	486,692	-0.89%	2010-11	579,110	-0.24%
1986-87	486,299	-0.08%	2011-12	569,734	-1.62%
1987-88	491,309	1.03%	2012-13	564,529	-0.91%
1988-89	500,088	1.79%	2013-14	558,983	-0.98%
1989-90	512,735	2.53%	2014-15	552,786	-1.11%

Year	Enrolment	+/- over previous year	Year	Enrolment	+/- over previous year
1990-91	519,958	1.41%	2015-16	553,376	0.11%
1991-92	550,275	5.83%	2016-17	557,625	0.77%
1992-93	571,205	3.80%	2017-18	563,243	1.01%
1993-94	588,013	2.94%	2018-19	568,984	1.02%
1994-95	603,753	2.68%	2019-20	575,986	1.23%

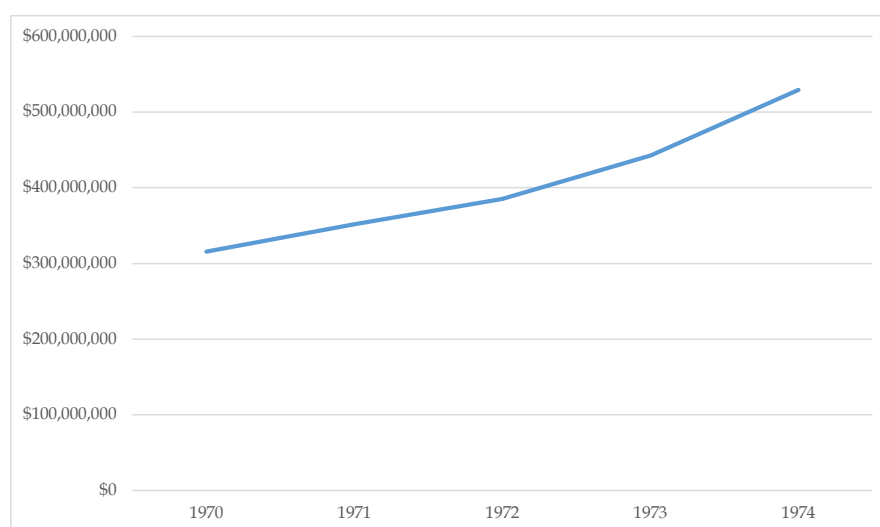
Figure 1 and Table 1 paint a picture of enrolment waves. Public K-12 enrolment in British Columbia crested in 1975 and declined significantly in the second half of the 1970s and throughout the first half of the 1980s. This occurred as births dropped and the provincial population greyed (Fleming, 2011). Enrolment recovered in 1987/88, mounting subsequently year over year from there, until it crested again in 1997/98. Then yearly declining enrolment returned for sixteen of the next seventeen school years. By 2014/15, there were 87,000 fewer students in British Columbia public schools than there had been in 1997/98. The most recent figure I have, for 2019/20, reports that the system has 576,000 students. This is just over 10 percent higher than the 1970 enrolment of 515,000. However, 2019/20's expenditures, as I wrote earlier, are 250 percent higher (inflation-adjusted) than 1970's.

Rising Expenditures in the 1970s and Early 1980s

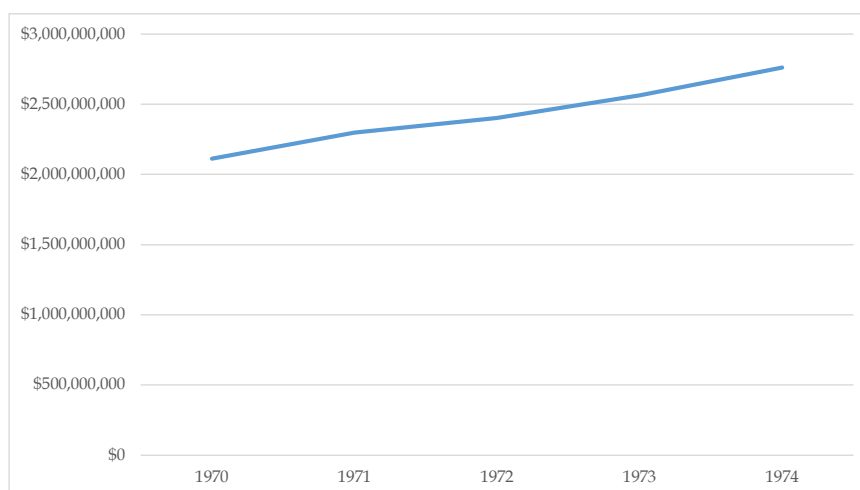
British Columbia increased spending on K-12 public schools considerably during the 1970s and early 1980s. (See Figures 2, 3, 4, 5; Tables 2, 3.) Every percentage in this paragraph is in inflation-adjusted (2020) dollars. Spending was up every year except one in the 1970s. The average yearly increase for 1971-74 was nearly 7 percent. For 1975-82, spending increased an average of nearly 4.5 percent per year.⁷ Some years saw dramatic increases, such as in 1975 when K-12 spending in constant dollars shot up approximately 13 percent from the previous year. The only year in this decade when spending fell from the year before was 1978 (-1.24 percent). Both the right-wing British Columbia Social Credit Party and the left-wing British Columbia New Democratic Party (NDP) governed during these years, with the NDP's 1972-75 period in power bookended by Social Credit governments.

Figure 2

British Columbia K-12 Expenditures in Real Dollars, 1970-1974



⁷ I divided this into different periods because the calculations come from two different data sets.

Figure 3*British Columbia Expenditures in Constant (2020) Dollars, 1970-1974***Table 2***British Columbia Public K-12 Expenditures, in Constant (2020) Dollars, Increase (+) or Decrease (-) from Previous Year, 1970-74*

Year	+/- over previous year
1970	
1971	8.76%
1972	4.55%
1973	6.71%
1974	7.73%

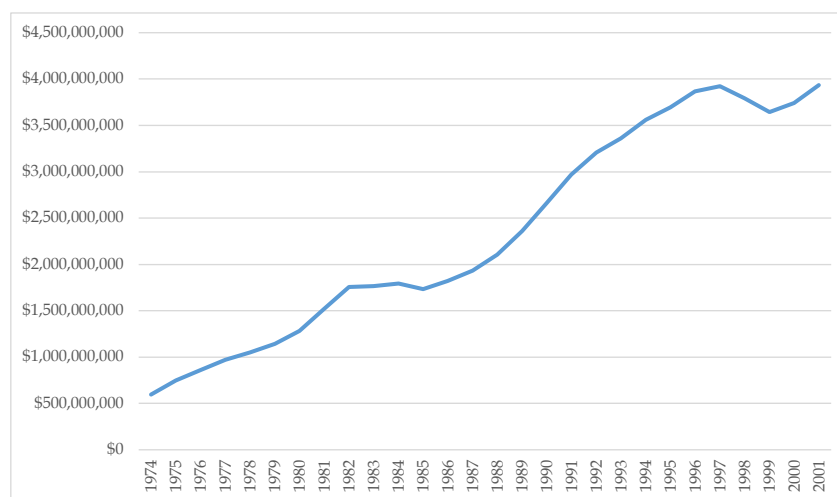
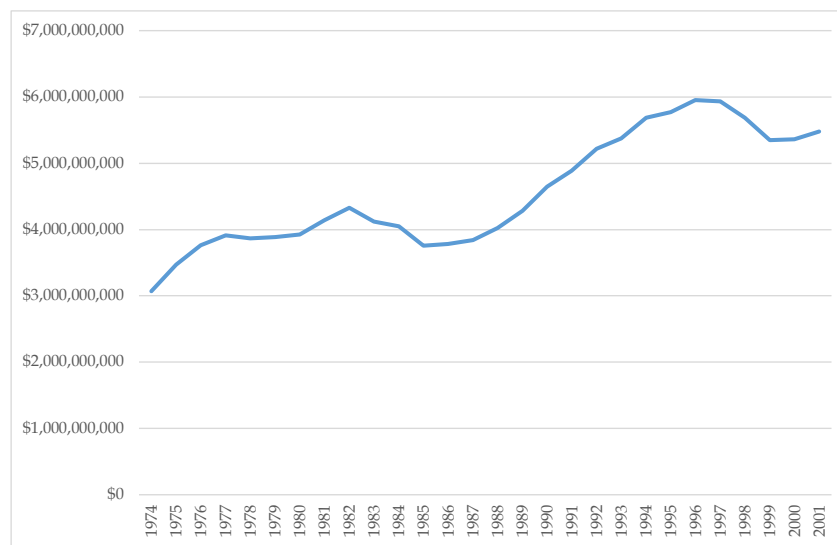
Figure 4*British Columbia K-12 Expenditures in Real Dollars, 1974-2001*

Figure 5

British Columbia K-12 Expenditures in Constant (2020) Dollars, 1974-2001

**Table 3**

British Columbia Public K-12 Expenditures, in Constant (2020) Dollars, Increase (+) or Decrease (-) from Previous Year, 1974-2001

Year	+/- over previous year
1974	
1975	13.03%
1976	8.42%
1977	4.09%
1978	-1.24%
1979	0.44%
1980	1.14%
1981	5.33%
1982	4.61%
1983	-4.82%
1984	-1.78%
1985	-7.25%
1986	0.71%
1987	1.60%
1988	4.76%
1989	6.52%
1990	8.37%
1991	5.19%
1992	6.82%
1993	2.95%

Year	+/- over previous year
1994	5.86%
1995	1.51%
1996	3.12%
1997	-0.37%
1998	-4.18%
1999	-5.86%
2000	0.16%
2001	2.23%

In British Columbia in the 1970s and early 1980s, hiring more teachers made education spending swell. Small yearly enrolment increases in the 1971/72 to 1975/76 years contributed the need for more teachers. The number of teachers the system used also grew in part because, initially at least, the provincial government committed to cutting class size as a way to improve education quality. In 1974, the NDP government implemented a policy of greater expenditures to reduce class sizes. It increased its provincial grant to districts considerably. The districts, for their part, did not reduce local taxes to offset the bigger inflow of provincial money. In fact, districts increased their take from local taxes. With more provincial and local revenue going into their coffers, the districts spent more, principally by hiring more teachers (Fleming & Anderson, 1984).

The number of teachers British Columbia districts employed continued to increase after the Social Credit Party returned to power in 1975. The number of teachers in the system rose by 6 percent from 1976 to 1981. This occurred even as enrolment declined province-wide by around 40,000 students. (See Figure 1.) Not surprisingly, the provincial pupil-teacher ratio tumbled. It was 22.5:1 in 1972 but fell to 19:1 by 1975. By 1981, it had dipped to 16.5:1 (Cutt et al., 1988; Fleming & Anderson, 1984). However, class sizes did not necessarily drop as the province had intended. This was because districts hired many of the new teachers not into regular classroom positions but into instructional support positions, like curriculum consultant, school counselor, or teacher-librarian (Fleming & Anderson, 1984).

An important shift in who possessed the power to determine the number of teachers the system employed was also underway in British Columbia. That shift, which gave the teachers' union greater say over the number of educators, was a factor as well in rising expenditures; however, the effects of this power shift were in the long term more than in the short. In British Columbia's K-12 system, there is a phrase, "class size and composition." Class size refers to the number of students in a class. Class composition refers to the different types of students a class may contain, typically the number of identified special education students (Greater Victoria Teachers' Association, n.d.). In many places, ministries of education or school districts, and often even principals, set class size and determine composition. These things are considered administrative matters. In other places, though this is less common, teacher unions negotiate class size limits and composition rules into teachers' collective agreements. Class size limits were somewhat common in American teachers' collective agreements at one time (McDonnell & Pascal, 1988). However, British Columbia is (with the exception of a few school districts in Manitoba) the only Canadian province where a teachers' union has successfully negotiated class size limits in a contract (British Columbia Public School Employers' Association, n.d.). In many British Columbia school districts, the teachers' collective agreement determines how many students and how many of what type of student can be in a classroom. Since it is not the nature of teacher unions to negotiate larger workloads (class sizes) for their members, the ability to bargain class size and composition has tended to create smaller classes. If classes are smaller, you need more of them. This means you need more teachers as well. More teachers cost more money. Being able to negotiate for more teachers effectively gives the provincial teachers' union a significant say in spending, with the leverage to increase it through contract negotiations.

The British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF), incorporated in 1919, is the union representing all teachers in British Columbia's K-12 public school system (Johnson, 1964). The BCTF has a history

of fighting for better compensation for teachers and for greater union control over things such as class size (Slinn, 2011). Since the 1950s, if not before, the BCTF has wanted the ability to sign contracts with school boards that included class size limits. However, provincial legislation until the 1980s prevented this. The Public Schools Act (not labour relations law) governed teacher negotiations with school boards. The Public Schools Act allowed the BCTF to negotiate only teachers' salaries. It did not permit the union to negotiate class size (Slinn, 2011).

In 1969, the BCTF discovered a way around the limitations the Public Schools Act placed on what the union could negotiate at the bargaining table with school districts. That year, in the Vancouver suburb of Burnaby and in one other British Columbia school district, the BCTF negotiated its first "working and learning condition" (or WLC) contract (London, 2005; Slinn, 2011). Under this workaround, the BCTF approached the school board with two contracts: a not legally binding WLC "contract" covering things such as class size limits and a legal contract covering salary and compensation. The BCTF requested the employer (the school district) to sign the WLC first. The BCTF told the district that it would not sign the legal contract until the district signed the WLC. The WLCs, law professor Sara Slinn writes, "were not legally enforceable," since the law at that time did not permit teachers to negotiate the things the WLCs contained, such as class size limits. Yet, school boards did not challenge WLCs at the time, and the BCTF had negotiated them with six districts by 1975 (Slinn, 2011).

By limiting class size, WLCs could require districts to hire more teachers, adding to costs. When provincial policy to reduce class size and the union's wishes to do the same are aligned – as they were in the 1970s – the effects of class size and composition contract language on expenditures are not as obvious. When they are out of alignment, as would be the case by the 1980s (and down to the present), the effects are quite noticeable, as class size and composition becomes a battlefield for cost control.

Teacher pay in British Columbia, and the number of teachers at higher pay grades on the salary grid, grew as well in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. This also contributed to mounting expenditures. In this period, the influx of teachers the districts previously hired when the province greenlighted reducing class size gained more experience and qualifications. This made them eligible for higher pay on a salary grid system that increased a teacher's base pay with each year of experience and additional recognized credential she or he acquired (Fleming & Anderson, 1984). What is more, in the early 1980s, British Columbia teachers negotiated high wage increases across the salary grid. The average negotiated yearly salary increases were 9.6 percent in 1980, 12.8 percent in 1981, and 17.3 percent in 1982 (Cutt et al., 1988). There was high inflation in this period, and other unionized employees in British Columbia made similar gains. Nevertheless, teacher hiring and teacher compensation – and not just inflation – appear to have had a sizeable effect on increasing spending (British Columbia Royal Commission on Education, 1988).

Legislating in the Early 1980s to Slow Spending

By the early 1980s, the provincial Social Credit government stated openly its wish to reduce education expenditures (Fleming, 2003). However, it would take until 1983 for the government to see the new result it wanted, when K-12 expenditures shrank by 4.83 percent (inflation-adjusted) (see Figure 5.) (Fleming & Anderson, 1984). At first, the provincial structure of educational finance made it difficult for the government to curtail spending. The government subsequently rolled out a mixture of interim and permanent legislation to change this situation. This drew the province and districts into conflict as the former tried to exert control over the latter's spending.

Before 1982, the provincial government used a "foundation program" to deliver its share of funding for public schools. Funding at that time was based on something called a "Basic Education Program" (BEP) amount. The province contributed a share towards the BEP amount in each district, and the district kicked in a share as well through local property taxes. Once the district had met its BEP obligation, it could continue to hike those taxes beyond that if it wished to spend more local taxpayers' dollars on schools to increase district service levels (Cutt et al., 1988; Fleming & Anderson, 1984).

In a foundation program, a *local* school board that spent in excess of its BEP amount by taxing property locally one year actually pushed up *provincial* spending on that district the next year as well. This was for the odd but simple reason that the province calculated its BEP amount for each district for the year on *total* school spending in that district the previous year: Total, as in the provincial BEP obligation, plus the local BEP obligation – and plus any excess the district had raised and spent above its obligation

(Fleming & Anderson, 1984). This system placed no ceiling on the provincial grant. It could attain new heights as the districts increased their spending. When districts hiked local taxes and spending in the early 1980s, they drove up the provincial BEP commitment under the foundation program (Fleming & Anderson, 1984). British Columbia districts increased local property taxes by 25 percent in 1981. School taxes in Vancouver in 1981 rose by 40 percent over 1980 levels. By coincidence, there were also changes to the provincial property assessment system that increased values and tax bills in their own right. This created distracting confusion about what was actually driving up taxes, the valuation changes or school board spending (Fleming, 2003; Fleming & Anderson, 1984), though it appears it was the latter.

In the interest of controlling spending, the provincial government subsequently replaced the foundation program with a fiscal framework that put a hard ceiling on the province's grant. The government also passed legislation that constrained districts' taxing and spending powers. These measures finally enabled the government to impose reduced education expenditures on the districts, as it had wished to do since about 1980. Replacing the foundation program was the fiscal framework. The key change was that under the framework, the government no longer calculated its grant on the district's total spending from the previous year, as it had done with the foundation program. Instead, the fiscal framework used a formula with a ceiling. Service level and cost criteria divorced from the district's spending the previous year were used to determine how much the province would contribute (Cutt et al., 1988). Local districts could no longer increase their yearly grant from the province by simply taxing and spending more locally.

With legislation called the Education (Interim) Finance Act that it passed in 1982, the province altered school boards' taxing and spending powers as well. It removed the ability of local school trustees to tax non-residential property for local school costs, though it continued to allow them to tax residential property for that purpose. The government did not just take away the school board's power to tax non-residential property. It took all of that power for itself – and it now captured all of the revenues from that tax for the provincial treasury and put them towards its education grant (Cutt et al., 1988). A 1985 amendment to the Education (Interim) Finance Act curtailed school boards' ability to replace the lost non-residential tax revenues with new residential tax increases. Now boards that wanted to raise supplementary funds to spend on local schools, which they could only do by increasing taxes on residential properties, had to put their proposed spending increase to local residents in a referendum (Education [Interim] Finance Amendment Act, 1985).

The Education (Interim) Finance Act (1982) also enabled the minister of education to “issue directives (a) limiting the amount of the budget of the school district in the calendar year” and compelling districts to present their budgets for ministerial approval. One early directive of this sort forced all seventy-five districts in the province to resubmit their 1982 budgets with spending cuts (Fleming & Anderson, 1984). The government used a second directive a few months later to compel another district budget cut. It also announced that it would reduce its grants to boards for 1983 under the fiscal framework (Fleming & Anderson, 1984). Although it only said the minister had to approve the budget, the provincial government, and the districts, appeared to interpret the ministerial approval clause as the government requiring districts to present balanced budgets to the minister, reducing spending if necessary to achieve this. By taking district taxation powers and revenues for itself, and by limiting the districts' taxing and spending powers as well, the government finally accomplished effectively completely its aim of imposing “budget ceilings” on education spending, to the dismay of school boards (Cutt et al., 1988).

Yearly spending fell significantly in 1983 by nearly 5 percent from the previous year (inflation-adjusted – as are all figures in this paragraph). That year, the provincial government announced it had a goal of “returning the education system to ... 1976 levels of service.” This was understood as a desire to return the pupil-teacher ratio from 17:1 back to 19:1 (Fleming & Anderson, 1984). Spending continued to fall in 1984 (-1.78 percent) and then dipped sharply in 1985 by over 7 percent from the previous year. The cuts had demonstrable effects on schools. Average class sizes grew from 1982 to 1985, and the pupil-teacher ratio increased as well. The latter rose from 17:1 to 18:1 (Fleming & Anderson, 1984), though this was still not the return to 1976 service levels (19:1) the government had hoped for. In fact, by 1984, there were more than 28,000 teachers in the system compared to just under 23,000 in 1972. Yet enrolment in 1984 was *lower* than in 1972 by some 30,000 students (Fleming & Anderson, 1984, see also Figure 1 in this text).

Districts did not easily accept the lower expenditures or the loss of their spending and taxing powers.

Trustees protested loudly, and there was significant conflict between school boards and the provincial government. In 1985, school trustees in the city of Vancouver, and in the Cowichan Valley on Vancouver Island, refused to make cuts to submit an approved district budget. The provincial government dismissed the trustees – who were elected – for not complying with the minister’s wish for a balanced budget. It replaced the Vancouver school board with a single appointed government trustee (Fleming, 2003; London, 2005). This would not be the last time the province would do this.

Teachers also protested against reduced education expenditures in the 1983-85 period and against the Social Credit government’s deep cuts to spending across the public sector. Teachers joined demonstrations in 1983, called Operation Solidarity, that the Social Credit government sparked by laying off around 2,000 public servants (Fleming, 2003). The government also passed legislation forcing teachers to take unpaid furloughs of one day in 1982 and five days in 1983. Still more provincial legislation, the Compensation Stabilization Act, limited public sector pay increases, including teachers’ pay (London, 2005). The BCTF called a province-wide strike in November 1983, which, even though it was illegal, lasted several days (Fleming, 2003; London, 2005).

Spending Increases Return in the Late 1980s and Early 1990s

By 1986, yearly spending increases were back. Provincial education spending in that year increased by a modest 0.71 percent over the previous year. Thereafter, increases ramped up. There were two reasons for this. First, the provincial government abandoned the interim finance acts after the economy recovered from recession, allowing school boards to resume increasing taxes on residential property to garner supplemental local funding without taking the increase to residents in a referendum. It also allowed boards to pass budgets without seeking ministerial approval for their contents. The government, however, kept for itself the sole ability to tax non-residential property that it had seized from the school boards in 1982. It also retained the fiscal framework. However, it increased the provincial grant under that framework by 8 percent in 1988 (Cutt et al., 1988; Education [Interim] Finance Amendment Act, 1986; School Act, 1989). Relatively large spending increases returned in 1988, when total spending (the provincial and local amounts combined) was 4.76 percent higher (inflation-adjusted) than the previous year. The yearly increases over the subsequent four years were even higher than that, even reaching over 8 percent (inflation-adjusted) in 1990.

Besides the provincial government restoring most school board taxing and spending powers and increasing its grants to districts, the second reason that educational expenditures swelled relatively significantly from 1988 to 1992 was the BCTF’s big successes in local contract negotiations. This spanned two governments. Social Credit governed until the NDP defeated it in the 1991 provincial election. BCTF success came initially because of changes to labour law. In 1987, the Social Credit government finally made the BCTF a full-fledged labour union. The province gave the BCTF that status because it believed that the courts would soon rule that the new Charter of Rights and Freedoms that Canada had adopted in 1982 invalidated the decades-old system of the province dealing with the teachers’ contracts under the Public Schools Act. Provincial government lawyers at the time thought the old system violated what they presumed was teachers’ constitutionally protected right to bargain collectively and strike. (In fact, the courts ruled in 2007 that collective bargaining and the right to strike were protected constitutionally.) To pre-empt the courts ruling against it, the government granted the BCTF union status and placed teachers’ collective bargaining under the provincial labour relations system. As a result, teachers gained two new and important rights: the right to bargain more than just salaries (that is, to also bargain class size and composition) and the right to strike like other employees under the Industrial Relations Act (Slinn, 2011).⁸ These new rights had significant implications for educational spending in the province for the next several years at least.

The BCTF capitalized quickly on its new rights. In the period 1987 to 1993, the union instigated a strategy of “whipsawing” contract negotiations. Each of the province’s seventy-five school districts bargained individually with the local of the BCTF their teachers belonged to. The BCTF strategically coordinated its locals from a provincial “war room”; the districts had no provincial strategic coordination. Here was the whipsaw: the BCTF would find a district where it thought the employers’ negotiators were weak. BCTF provincial head office would target that district and advise the BCTF local there to exploit

⁸ The legislation also affected other aspects of teachers’ work, leading to controversy. Most notably, it created the British Columbia College of Teachers that was a huge source of acrimony.

the weakness, with the threat of a strike if necessary, in order to sign a new contract that achieved significant gains on a specific issue the provincial office had identified. With one agreement like this signed, the BCTF head office would tell the other locals across British Columbia to ask for the same contract language on that issue in their subsequent negotiations with their districts, pointing to the agreement that the initial local had signed as precedent (Slinn, 2011).

Between 1988 and 1993, there were nearly fifty teacher strikes in British Columbia (and three lock-outs) as the BCTF used the whipsaw to make gains. In the late 1980s, wages were nearly always the strike issue. But by the early 1990s, strikes over working conditions (class size and composition) were increasingly common (British Columbia Public School Employers' Association, 2012). "Teachers made the most of the expanded scope of bargaining," Slinn (2011, p. 54) writes. "In the first round [1988-89] ... many locals secured class size limits and significant salary increases. In subsequent rounds [1990-93] more locals obtained these provisions, and some won limits on class composition."

It is difficult to know how precisely whipsawing and the resulting wage and class size and composition settlements contributed to increasing education spending between 1987, when local bargaining under the Labour Relations Act began, and 1993, when the government centralized bargaining (as the next section explains). Enrolments climbed in this period as well, with enrolment in 1993/94 nearly 100,000 students higher than in 1986/87. The system added between 1 and 4 percent more students yearly in this stretch. Nevertheless, the average yearly percentage increase in education spending for the period was higher still, at 5.2 percent (inflation-adjusted).

Legislating Fiscal Discipline (Again) in the 1990s

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, spending increases were on again. Then, once more, the provincial government interceded in educational finance to choke the flow of funds and legislate things back to fiscal discipline. It embarked on two separate, major legislative changes.

The first change was to amend the School Act in 1990 to replace the fiscal framework with a block grant. The province's introduction of a block grant gave it even greater control over what costs it would support. The province also removed permanently the ability of school boards to tax property. The block grant consisted of a per pupil amount the province paid out to school boards. The minister, not the boards, determined what the amount was, and only the minister could adjust it to account for cost "variations" between districts. Districts had to present their budgets to the minister. The minister did not allow them to run deficits. To fund the block grant, the provincial government took from the districts nearly all of their ability to tax residential and commercial property. These powers went to the provincial government and the revenues they garnered into the provincial treasury (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990; School Amendment Act, 1990).

The only taxation power that the province left districts was the ability to hold a referendum to ask taxpayers for permission to tax residential property to fund supplemental expenditures above the provincial block grant. The districts could not use the referendum to raise funds to eliminate a deficit that occurred when the board spent in excess of what the province provided through the block grant. The referendum was to raise supplemental funds for special programs, new buildings, or new initiatives in existing programs only. The referendum result was valid for one year. If the district wanted supplemental funds again, it had to hold another referendum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1990; School Amendment Act, 1990).

After nearly a decade of trying, the provincial government had finally succeeded in legislating control of nearly all education operating spending and most property taxation for education, only the referendum notwithstanding. An Education Funding Review Panel that the government convened in 1992 to look at block funding and educational finance generally in British Columbia did not recommend significant changes to the block funding program (British Columbia Education Funding Review Panel, 1992).

After amending the School Act in 1990 to bring in the block grant and constrain the districts' spending and taxing powers, the provincial government turned to legislation to control spending that contract negotiations with teachers had been driving up since the late 1980s. This was the second major set of legislative changes the government attempted in order to reduce spending in this period. The Education Funding Review Panel (1992, p. 13) had noted that,

clearly, the Province cannot automatically 'rubber stamp' collective bargaining outcomes by increasing provincial funding to match bargaining outcomes; to do so would exert no discipline on the bargaining process. But neither can the Province 'bury its head in the sand'; the outcomes of collective bargaining are the costs that school boards face.

Consequently, the NDP government stepped into BCTF–district bargaining to stop whipsawing. It passed a law in 1993 ordering striking Vancouver School Board teachers back to work and forcing binding arbitration on them. More than that, the government's back-to-work legislation, the Educational Programs Continuation Act, also enabled the government to appoint a mediator in other teacher contract disputes and to hold the mediator's report to be the collective agreement instead of a negotiated contract (Slinn, 2011).

The NDP government also used legislation to end the practice of local bargaining between the BCTF and individual school districts, the practice that had permitted whipsawing leading to higher costs and spending. In 1992, the government struck the Korbin Commission (Commission of Inquiry into the Public Service and Public Sector). In her report, Korbin recommended more centralized bargaining on the employer side in BCTF–school district negotiations. As part of a larger labour reform bill, the government passed a new law in 1994 that created the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA). The law made the BCPSEA the bargaining agent for the employer side, replacing the seventy-five separate districts that each bargained with a BCTF local. It also made the BCTF main office the bargaining agent for teachers. The act forced the BCTF and BCPSEA to negotiate just one contract for teachers provincially and allowed only province-wide strikes, not the local strikes that the BCTF had used in its whipsaw strategy. Under the law, the provincial contract had to cover "all cost provisions," including pay, benefits, leaves, and workloads (Slinn, 2011, pp. 58-60).

In a process that began in 1990 with block funding's arrival and concluded in 1994 with the government creating the BCPSEA, the provincial government acquired the legislation and policy power it needed to slow spending. However, the NDP government appeared reluctant to use the new provincial bargaining regime to control teacher contract costs as the legislation intended. Political considerations intervened, causing the government to sidestep the BCPSEA it had created. Instead, the government negotiated two provincial collective agreements with the BCTF essentially directly (Slinn, 2011). This reluctance stands in contrast to the 1980s when the government had fewer legislative tools to control spending, but used them more frequently.

Spending increased on average 5.8 percent yearly (inflation-adjusted) from 1990 to 1994, growing more quickly than enrolment. The average yearly increase in enrolment in these years was only 3.3 percent. In 1995, education spending growth slowed (+1.51 percent, inflation-adjusted), but so did enrolment growth (+0.91 percent in 1995/96). Spending and enrolment rebounded the next year. (A 3.12 percent increase in inflation-adjusted spending in 1996; a 2.27 percent increase in enrolment in 1996/97.) Finally, education spending then fell – for three consecutive years (1997-99). The first year of the twenty-first century saw a marginal increase. The increase the next year, 2001, was a healthier 2.23 percent. However, after the system gained 2.64 percent more students in 1997/98, enrolment entered a new trough in 1998/99, falling that year and nearly every year for the next decade and a half. (See Figure 1 and Table 1.)

The 2000s: Using Legislation, but Still More Spending

In the 2001 British Columbia general election, the right-wing BC Liberal Party defeated the two-term NDP government. The new government promised strict fiscal discipline. At least initially, it was willing to brandish the tools to constrict district spending that the previous government possessed but was reluctant to use. The BC Liberals froze the block funding operating grant (Poole & Fallon, 2015). Since school boards no longer had taxation powers to generate supplemental funds for themselves, they were forced to accept what the government offered. With inflation, K-12 education spending decreased in the first three years of the new government's first mandate by approximately 1.5 to 2 percent yearly. This was only the third time since 1970 that education spending fell for three consecutive years (in inflation-adjusted dollars). During the BC Liberals' three mandates (2001-17), there were eight occasions when spending (inflation-adjusted) fell from one year to the next (see Table 4). This amounted to many more cutback years

than in any previous period since 1970. Compared to the free-spending days of old, it must have felt like austerity to some. In fact, in 2016 the Vancouver School Board trustees refused to pass a balanced budget, which the minister required of them, saying that they would not make budget cuts. The province dismissed the trustees and replaced them with its own appointee (Goldner, 2017). Nevertheless, the average yearly spending change over the BC Liberals' time in power was still an increase, if a modest one – +0.05 percent (inflation-adjusted). Spending increased under the BC Liberals, and it stretched further, since, in nearly every one of the party's years in power, the number of students declined from the previous year.

Figure 6

British Columbia Provincial Full-Year Operating Grant Total (Public Schools) in Real Dollars, 2001/02 – 2019/20

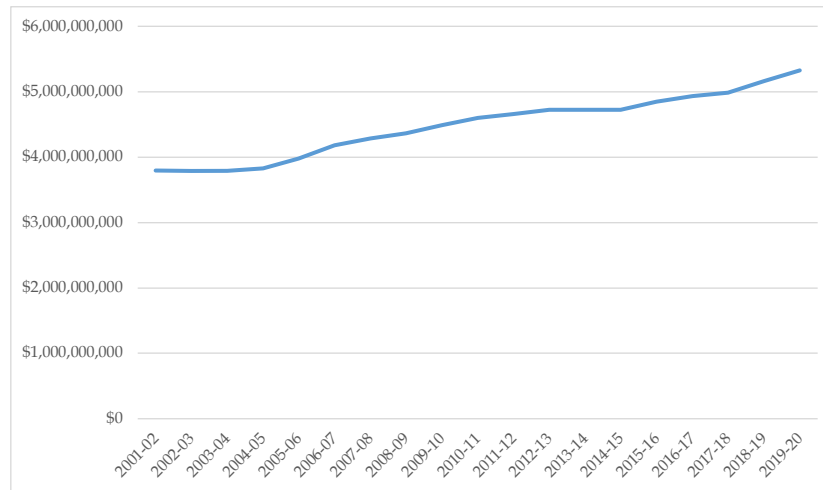


Figure 7

British Columbia Provincial Full-Year Operating Grant Total (Public Schools) in Constant (2020) Dollars, 2001/02 – 2019/20

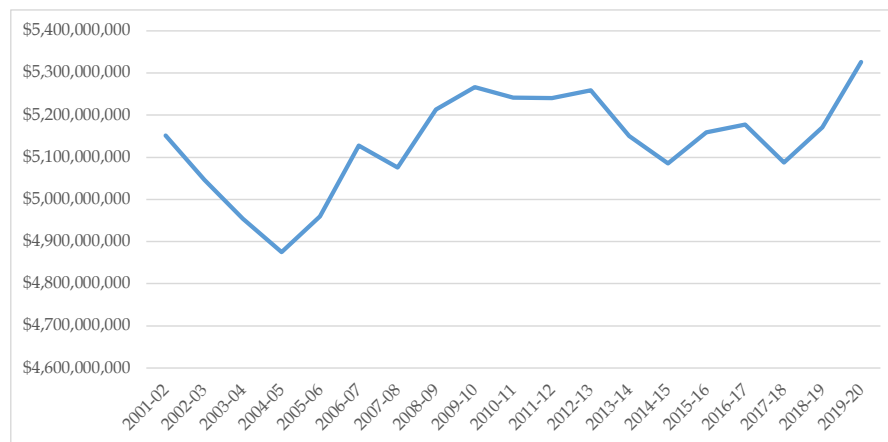


Table 4

British Columbia Public K-12 Expenditures, in Constant (2020) Dollars, Increase (+) or Decrease (-) from Previous Year, 1974-2001

Year	+/- over previous year
2001-02	
2002-03	-2.03%
2003-04	-1.82%
2004-05	-1.61%
2005-06	1.75%
2006-07	3.38%
2007-08	-1.01%
2008-09	2.70%
2009-10	1.02%
2010-11	-0.47%
2011-12	-0.01%
2012-13	0.34%
2013-14	-2.07%
2014-15	-1.25%
2015-16	1.44%
2016-17	0.37%
2017-18	-1.74%
2018-19	1.64%
2019-20	3.00%

Provincial governments in the 2000s and 2010s showed no willingness to surrender control of school district taxing and spending powers that the province had acquired gradually starting in the early 1980s. The government simplified the block grant format in 2002/03. This did not affect spending significantly (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2003). The most recent review of provincial education finance, completed in 2018 with an NDP minority government in power, did not recommend fundamental changes to the system of government block grants to districts either (Independent Funding Model Review Panel, 2018).

However, the government did introduce one historic change to school district finance in this period, although the change's effects on spending were mild. In 2002, the BC Liberal government passed a law encouraging school districts to raise their own revenues – not through taxes as before but by being “entrepreneurial” (Poole & Fallon, 2015, p. 347). The School Amendment Act (2002) permitted districts to essentially sell educational services and use the profits to enhance their local programs. Twenty-two of sixty districts started school district business companies in 2002. The companies did things like operating provincially accredited schools overseas and selling district-developed software and curricula. Districts also could charge international students market-rate tuition to attend British Columbia virtual schools and even actual public schools in the province.

The entrepreneurial policies were unprecedented for Canada and controversial because people labelled them “privatisation” (Poole & Fallon, 2015, p. 341). Yet districts profited relatively little from them. By 2010, only eight districts still had private companies. However, many more districts continued to generate revenue by bringing in international students and charging them tuition. Nevertheless, two researchers found that private revenue – from every source – comprised just 2.7 percent of all British

Columbia school districts' revenue in 2011/12 (less than \$200 million [in a \$4.7 billion budget]) (Poole & Fallon, 2015). Most (60 to 90 percent) private revenue that districts collect is from international student tuition (Poole & Fallon, 2015). It takes money to make money, and the profit margin on international students is bound to be thin. Even if they get the revenue, the districts must also *spend* money to instruct these students in the same schools as domestic students (and presumably at a similar cost).

In the 2000s, in addition to limiting districts' spending, the BC Liberal government was also eager to use provincial power to control teacher salary costs, something the previous NDP government did more reluctantly. The BC Liberal government targeted class size and composition clauses in teacher collective agreements. In late 2001 and early 2002, the BCTF and BCPSEA were negotiating a new collective agreement for teachers. As talks stalled, the provincial government intervened. Instead of the government bypassing BCPSEA and then settling with the union directly, as the previous NDP government had done, this time the BC Liberal government cut off negotiations with the union and legislated a contract instead (Slinn, 2011).

The government also passed a sister law at the same time, the Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act (2002). It overrode class size and composition language in collective agreements that the teachers' union had negotiated with employers (Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act; Slinn, 2011). The new law "explicitly provided" that the employer had the sole right to determine class size and composition as a policy matter, regardless of what contracts said (Slinn, 2011, p. 67). The teachers called this "contract-stripping" (p. 65). The BCTF filed in court saying that the government had violated its members' Charter right to freedom of association when it effectively rewrote their contracts to remove class size and composition and excluded these things from the scope of future bargaining as well. The BCTF later expanded its court case to include still more legislation the province passed in 2006 that further defined class size and composition and that caused the BCPSEA to decline to negotiate these things with the BCTF (Slinn, 2011).

Slinn (2011) writes that the Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act, and related legislation that prevented the union from negotiating class size and composition,

was not so much about cost control, but an attempt to finally end what had been an ongoing struggle between governments of all stripes and the BCTF for control over what the government regarded as matters of managerial discretion and public policy. (p. 67).

Perhaps, but by taking control of these things, the province had at last gained the free hand it needed to limit the number of teachers the system employed. This latitude, and the ability to control school district expenditures that the government was using already, were absolutely key to controlling costs somewhat successfully over the following decade.

The BCTF won a Charter challenge against the government's Public Education Flexibility and Choice Act and related legislation in 2016, with the Supreme Court of Canada finding that the legislation infringed on teachers' freedom of association and also finding that the government had not consulted with the teachers in good faith (*British Columbia Teachers' Federation v. British Columbia*, 2016). The remedy that the court imposed revealed the hefty fiscal significance of class size and composition. The settlement reinstating the class size and composition limits stripped from collective agreements forced the districts to hire thousands of additional teachers. (The NDP government funded districts to hire around 3,700 extra teachers in 2018 alone) (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018a). The cost to the provincial treasury to comply with the Charter ruling was between \$380 million and \$465 million per year (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2018b, 2019, 2020b). These additional expenditures – which Table 4 and Figures 6 and 7 above do not include and reflect – mean that the real increase in operating spending was greater in these years than the figures and table show, by around 0.5 percentage points per year. Class size and composition remain an unresolved issue in the collective agreement that the BCTF and BCPSEA signed in March 2020 for the 2019-22 bargaining period (British Columbia Public School Employers' Association, 2020; British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 2020).

Conclusion

Spending on K-12 public schools in British Columbia has increased dramatically over the past five decades. In the 1970s, the provincial government spent to lower class size. This provincial willingness to spend, the ability of school districts to set their own spending, and the BCTF's success at bargaining class size, coincided with inflation-adjusted yearly increases for much of the decade that were over 5 percent, even reaching 13 percent in one year. Starting in the early 1980s, the provincial government restricted spending somewhat. To do this, it changed the foundation program to a fiscal framework that gave it more ability to impose spending limits. The government followed this with interim, and then permanent, legislation in the 1980s and 1990s that slowly but surely constricted the districts' ability to tax and raise revenues and spend as much as they liked. Today, the provincial government (an NDP majority government since 2021) has nearly complete authority over school taxes and district expenditures, and it shows no signs of wishing to relinquish this to districts.

When the BCTF achieved full union status in 1987, it used its newfound bargaining rights and its strategy of whipsawing to achieve contract gains. This coincided with a period of increased spending. The government used legislation again to try to control these costs, creating the BCPSEA and intervening in contract negotiations. BC Liberal governments in the 2000s showed more willingness than their NDP predecessors to use provincial government powers to cut off education spending. The provincial government froze spending in 2002 but lifted that freeze and increased spending later. Even in the 2001-2017 BC Liberal government period that many remember for austerity, the average yearly change in K-12 operating spending was +0.5 percent – inflation-adjusted.

Indeed, empirical historical research shows that British Columbia's K-12 public school spending has increased in most years over the past five decades. Today, spending is 250 percent of what it was in 1970 (inflation-adjusted). However, 2020 enrolment is only 110 percent of 1970 enrolment. The massive growth in spending relative to much smaller enrolment growth is obviously noteworthy on its own. However, to assess the full meaning of a spending increase of this size requires further research. That research should address the effects of spending on educational quality and equity in British Columbia. It would be helpful if researchers also systematically looked at factors that influence spending, such as the business cycle, the electoral cycle, and fiscal rules, drawing upon political science and finance literature to do that (Mou et al., 2018; Simon & Tatalovich, 2014; Tapp, 2013; Tellier, 2006; Tellier & Imbeau, 2004). Readers should not interpret my argument in this article about spending increase as me calling for reduced provincial K-12 public education spending. Saying that spending is up considerably is not saying it should not have increased. It is not saying either that spending should not rise further in the future. Rather it is saying that the simple story of neoliberalism, especially regarding cutbacks in education spending, over recent decades needs much more empirical and analytical work.

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Appendix

Original and inflation-adjusted data for spending figures and tables

Year	Real dollars	Inflation-adjusted (2020) dollars
1970	\$315,665,000	\$2,112,645,756
1971	\$351,689,000	\$2,297,701,467
1972	\$385,215,000	\$2,402,340,818
1973	\$442,815,000	\$2,563,469,114
1974	\$529,358,000	\$2,761,517,779

Source. Statistics Canada & Wiesenthal, M. (n.d.). *Financial statistics of education*, Section W, Education (n.d.). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-516-x/sectionw/4147445-eng.htm>

Year	Real dollars	Inflation-adjusted (2020) dollars
1974	\$596,017,000	\$3,069,711,617
1975	\$747,092,000	\$3,469,545,898
1976	\$859,421,000	\$3,761,682,971
1977	\$968,887,000	\$3,915,561,032
1978	\$1,049,991,000	\$3,866,902,339
1979	\$1,142,456,000	\$3,883,783,424
1980	\$1,281,663,000	\$3,928,139,396
1981	\$1,519,146,000	\$4,137,634,235

Year	Real dollars	Inflation-adjusted (2020) dollars
1982	\$1,756,640,000	\$4,328,411,511
1983	\$1,765,267,000	\$4,119,958,756
1984	\$1,795,930,000	\$4,046,750,164
1985	\$1,734,169,000	\$3,753,256,761
1986	\$1,820,931,000	\$3,779,811,318
1987	\$1,934,075,000	\$3,840,119,928
1988	\$2,105,460,000	\$4,022,984,937
1989	\$2,361,673,000	\$4,285,419,881
1990	\$2,664,455,000	\$4,644,151,845
1991	\$2,970,197,000	\$4,884,957,851
1992	\$3,207,015,000	\$5,218,064,786
1993	\$3,360,589,000	\$5,372,236,791
1994	\$3,561,518,000	\$5,686,806,131
1995	\$3,695,262,000	\$5,772,530,148
1996	\$3,867,087,000	\$5,952,706,955
1997	\$3,922,189,000	\$5,930,903,896
1998	\$3,791,511,000	\$5,683,118,239
1999	\$3,643,509,000	\$5,350,061,447
2000	\$3,743,067,000	\$5,358,413,574
2001	\$3,934,550,000	\$5,477,981,199

Source. Statistics Canada. (n.d.a). Table 37-10-0064-01 School board expenditures, by function and economic classification (x 1,000). <https://doi.org/10.25318/3710006401-eng>

Year	Real dollars	Inflation-adjusted (2020) dollars
2001-02	\$3,793,878,997	\$5,151,252,949
2002-03	\$3,790,399,854	\$5,046,499,320
2003-04	\$3,790,284,553	\$4,954,856,715
2004-05	\$3,825,334,945	\$4,875,078,023

Year	Real dollars	Inflation-adjusted (2020) dollars
2005-06	\$3,975,520,925	\$4,960,349,424
2006-07	\$4,181,076,295	\$5,128,088,204
2007-08	\$4,283,333,343	\$5,076,268,754
2008-09	\$4,364,634,939	\$5,213,208,253
2009-10	\$4,485,985,485	\$5,266,324,006
2010-11	\$4,602,510,973	\$5,241,429,786
2011-12	\$4,659,443,289	\$5,240,917,328
2012-13	\$4,725,363,400	\$5,258,934,084
2013-14	\$4,725,363,400	\$5,150,157,405
2014-15	\$4,725,636,400	\$5,085,720,242
2015-16	\$4,846,204,605	\$5,158,741,499
2016-17	\$4,932,046,042	\$5,177,703,508
2017-18	\$4,983,602,032	\$5,087,581,806
2018-19	\$5,163,489,425	\$5,171,038,386
2019-20	\$5,326,126,003	\$5,326,126,003

Source. British Columbia. Ministry of Education. (2021) Operating Grants. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/resource-management/k-12-funding-and-allocation/operating-grants>