



What Makes B.C.'s Education System Successful?



We asked 30 well-respected education leaders what makes B.C.'s education system one of the best in the world. Here's what they told us.

Today, there are more than 1,900 schools across the province and our education system consistently ranks among the top ten to top three in international assessments of reading, science and math¹. As such, B.C.'s education system is considered a high performing system and the outcomes of B.C. students on international assessments demonstrate a high level of equity among students².

What factors have contributed to this success?

The Ministry undertook a research project in advance of a gathering of education stakeholders and leaders from 40 countries for the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's Future of Education and Skills 2030 meeting in Vancouver. As part of this research project, the Ministry conducted interviews with 30 stakeholders in the provincial education system, asking them:

- how to define success in education
- the factors that have contributed to making our K-12 system successful
- the challenges we are facing
- the elements to focus on for B.C. to remain a global leader in education in the years to come

¹ CMEC (2016). Measuring up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study. The Performance of Canada's Youth in Science, Reading and Mathematics. Retrieved from <https://www.cmec.ca/publications/lists/publications/attachments/365/pisa2015-cdnreport-en.pdf>

² Ibid



The in-depth interviews, combined with an extensive literature review, uncovered three distinguishing characteristics that contribute to the strength of B.C.'s education system:

1. A compelling vision and deep-rooted values
2. A collaborative and qualified workforce
3. An evidence and data-driven system

A compelling vision and deep-rooted values

B.C.'s K-12 system has a collective mandate to provide a quality education system that helps develop human potential and improves the well-being of each individual. This mandate has been enshrined in legislation since 1989 through the *School Act* and the Educated Citizen. Those interviewed repeatedly stated that B.C.'s educators are united in a shared commitment to support each individual learner and honour the diversity of all students. Among their response were:

- "We believe that all kids can learn, and that there's a place for all kids in our communities and in our schools and in our classrooms." – Shelley Moore, PhD candidate and inclusion advocate
- "B.C. has many more pedagogical practices that are child-honouring." Dr. Leyton Schnellert, associate professor at U.B.C.'s faculty of education
- "We want every kid in B.C. to have that experience in school where they're respected, and they feel safe, and that they have a purpose – that school has really created the space for them to move into adulthood well prepared." – Dr Judy Halbert, Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education, TELP program at U.B.C.
- "We value the unique nature of all of our learners and we welcome them into our schools. [...] We have refugees and immigrants that we welcome into our communities and value and embrace the cultural and ethnic diversity that they bring [...]. We think of our First Nations heritage and how rich of a history we have as we work towards reconciliation." – Suzanne Hoffman, Superintendent, Vancouver school district
- "B.C. and Canada [have a] pretty strong international reputation in terms of K to 12 education [...] If you look at the performance of students who come from wealthier families versus kids who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, the gap between those two scores is far smaller than most other countries, and that is very unique globally." – Dr. Jerry Mussio, education and assessment consultant

Another important thread that emerged in conversation with interviewees was the holistic vision of student growth and development that extends far beyond academic performance. As Kim Schonert-Reichl, a professor at U.B.C.'s Faculty of Education said, "British Columbia and its Ministry of Education is unique in the world. It's one of the few jurisdictions in which the explicit attention is given to promoting the social and personal competencies of students."



Collaborative and qualified workforce

Some studies suggest that 30 per cent of the variance in student achievement can be attributed to teachers³. Our Province is fortunate to have passionate educators who are dedicated to working towards high standards. Over the years, B.C.'s educators, education rights holders and stakeholders have developed a strong collaboration culture to respond to the unique needs of students. Interviewees cited the commitment of educators, high standards for the teaching profession, the professional agency of teachers and a co-governance model that fosters collaboration as key factors contributing to success.

In 2016, B.C. was identified – along with three other jurisdictions – as one of the world's top-performing systems in terms of teacher professional learning⁴.

Some representative comments from interviewees include:

- “I believe we have a very strong engaged professional teaching force in British Columbia. And I use the term teaching broadly because that would include principals and superintendents who are all part of the education enterprise in the Province.” – Dr. Jerry Mussio, education and assessment consultant
- “At the end of the day, I would say...what matters most to educators is to make a positive difference in the lives of the young people we serve.” – Suzanne Hoffman, Superintendent, Vancouver school district
- “Since the beginning, there's been a commitment from, not just teachers, but all the adults that work in the education system to continue to push, continue to do more.” – Glen Hansman, former President of the B.C. Teachers' Federation
- “We create networks [because] we know that it is what gives people the strength, the energy, the commitment to work together. That it is that rich web of partnerships and relationships that really leads to strength and to innovation.” – Dr. Judy Halbert, Networks of Inquiry and Indigenous Education, TELP Program, UBC.
- “I think one of the biggest aspects to B.C.'s education system is having that relationship with a staff member [...] to go to an environment where there's these people that do care about you and that will always be there every day.” – Luke Gray, former student in the Vancouver school district

³ Hattie, J.A.C. (October 2003). *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?* Retrieved from http://research.acer.edu.au/research_conference_2003/4/

⁴ Jensen, Sonnemann, et al. (January 2016). *Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performing Systems*. Retrieved from <http://ncee.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/BeyondPDDec2016.pdf>



- “Our teachers tend to think relationship first. To do relationship well means understanding the person you're working with. [...] It's all about understanding the individual and the individual's life space. We do a particularly good job of developing that kind of an attitude within our teachers.” – Dr. Kris Magnusson, Dean, SFU's Faculty of Education

An evidence and data-driven system

B.C. endeavours to maintain high standards and support students to be prepared for their future by establishing rigorous methods to monitor the system's efficiency, supporting investments that clearly demonstrate better outcomes for students and adopting an approach of continuous improvement. The third theme that emerged from interviews was the value of an evidence and data-driven system. Interviewees cited the importance of using data and evidence to prompt discussions, inform decisions and guide interventions as needed to support and enhance student learning opportunities. Among their response were:

- “I think one dimension that's really helped make B.C. successful in the education system is the collaboration among the researchers and the educators and the policymakers all together.” – Dr. Kim Schonert-Reichl, professor, UBC's Faculty of Education
- “[There is] a relationship with school districts in terms of information they provide to the Ministry and the dialogue that occurs in relation to some of the key indicators of a particular student success. And within school districts, school districts and schools typically have again, a relationship and sharing of information that focus on student progress and linking that to strategies that are designed to again, try to ensure that all students are successful.” – Dr. Jerry Mussio, education and assessment consultant
- “Paying attention to data is a significant part of what has made our success. For example, looking at where we are achieving and where we are not, identifying where there are fundamental gaps. It shapes our policy and the direction of the system.” Don Avison, Executive Director and Chief executive officer at Law Society of B.C.
- “Data helps us not only with understanding who the learners are that are coming into our system, but it helps us gauge whether or not what we're doing is effective.” – Jo Chrona, Curriculum Manager, First Nations Education Steering Committee



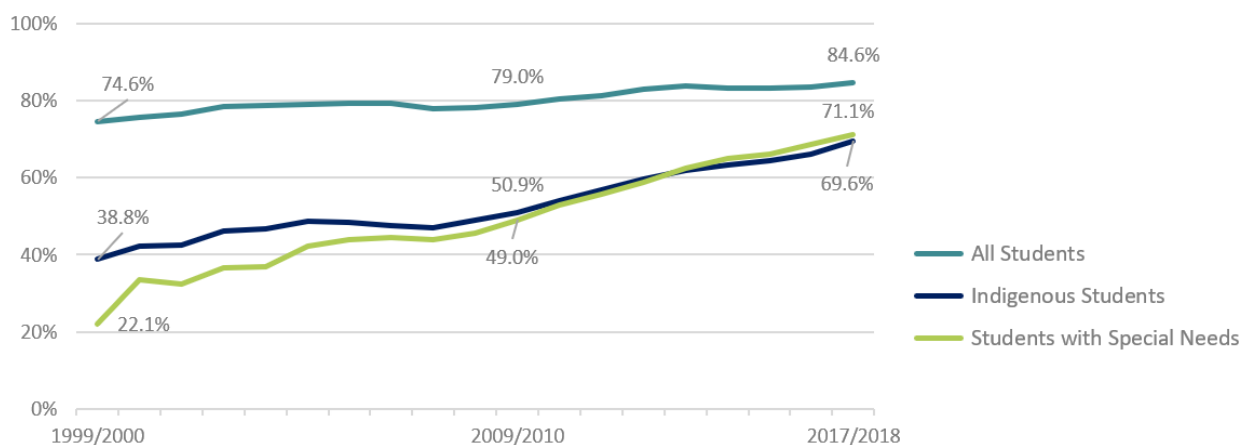
Going forward and doing better

By many measures, our education system is doing many things right and there is much to be proud of. This reflects the vision, commitment and hard work of educators across the province, in classrooms, schools and district offices.

Yet, there is always room for improvement. Most would agree with Mike Roberts, chief executive officer of the B.C. School Trustees Association, who said in an interview: “You are never done.”

As an example, while great progress has been accomplished over the last 10 years to support student towards graduation (as shown in the graph below), a gap still exists between student graduation rates and more needs to be done to support greater equity in graduation outcomes.

Evolution of Six-Year Completion Rates



The interviewees who participated in the research paper pointed to the need to continue to focus on the following actions:

- support Indigenous students by acknowledging their needs and continuing to work towards reconciliation
- foster student diversity and ensure students receive the support they need to succeed
- continue to focus on students' social and emotional well-being to allow them to thrive
- remain committed to B.C.'s redesigned curriculum
- support new teachers, and all educators, in developing professionally
- continue to work on creating greater equity across the province
- remain accountable



The Ministry recognizes the importance of focusing on these areas and remains committed to continuing and improving efforts for each. There are currently initiatives underway targeting each of these goals, such as updating the Policy of Student Success to focus on developing the whole student, performing province wide equity scans, implementing the Framework for Student Success to improve accountability and many more. Our education system is the sum of many individual parts, and these actions are as essential at a province-wide or system level as they are in our communities, classrooms and districts.

There are many elements that have contributed – and will continue to contribute – to our success, but perhaps most importantly is the shared vision of an inclusive and collaborative system. Through dozens of interviews, research, data, and literature, B.C.'s success can be most attributed to fostering an inclusive system in which stakeholders are committed to working together to support student success through an evidence-based approach.