


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The State of Educators' Professional Learning in British Columbia

By Sherri Brown, Anne Hales, Larry Kuehn, and Karen Steffensen



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THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

British
Columbia
Education
Collaborative
contributors

BC Association of School Business Officials
British Columbia Ministry of Education
British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association
British Columbia School Superintendents Association
British Columbia School Trustees Association
British Columbia Teachers' Federation
Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia
Learning Forward British Columbia



Learning Forward

504 S. Locust St.

Oxford, OH 45056

Tel: 800-727-7288

Fax: 513-523-0638

Email: office@learningforward.org

www.learningforward.org

Authors and affiliations

Sherri Brown, British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF)

Anne Hales, British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF)

Larry Kuehn, British Columbia Teachers' Federation (BCTF)

Karen Steffensen, Learning Forward British Columbia

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Designer: David McCoy

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The BC Education Collaborative Professional Learning in BC



SERIES INTRODUCTION

The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada

Globally, there is a focus on the importance of developing teachers as crucial for supporting students' learning and achievement. Canada has been recognized as a country with high educational performance, and there is interest in knowing about approaches to educators' professional learning in Canada. However, there are limited Pan-Canadian data and research available. Learning Forward funded *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada* study (Campbell et al., 2016) to address this gap in available research.

There are differences in details between and within provinces and territories, between and among different professional groups, across locations and contexts, and for individual educators' needs and their students' needs. Nevertheless, there are commonalities within Canada linked to features of effective professional learning: the importance of combining evidence, inquiry, and professional judgment to inform professional learning; the priority of developing teachers' knowledge and practices to support diverse learners' needs; the valuing of a broad range of students' and professionals' learning outcomes; the need for relevant, practical, and collaborative learning experiences within and beyond school walls differentiated to professionals' needs; and the role of system and school leaders in engaging in their own learning and supporting teachers' and students' learning.

There are also common challenges: time for professional learning integrated within the workday; inequities in access to and funding for professional learning; and contentions in the balance between system-directed and self-selected professional learning for teachers. Where there are persisting challenges, inequities, and issues, we need further dialogue and action across Canada to raise these priorities and seek solutions.

It is our collective responsibility to ensure that Canada's educators and students have access to, and engagement in, the highest-quality learning opportunities and experiences. The British Columbia Case Study is an important contribution to *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada* study. Thank you to all involved in the British Columbia Education Collaborative. I hope this report will stimulate further dialogue and actions.

Carol Campbell

Associate professor, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

Introduction

To learn more about the state of professional learning in British Columbia, including the experiences and values of teachers, administrators, trustees, school business officials, and other educators, education organizations formed the British Columbia Education Collaborative, whose members include the Association of BC Deans of Education, BC Association of School Business Officials, British Columbia Principals' and Vice-Principals' Association, British Columbia Teachers' Federation, British Columbia School Superintendents Association, British Columbia School Trustees Association, the Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia, Learning Forward British Columbia, and the British Columbia Ministry of Education. These organizations worked collaboratively to construct a comprehensive overview and analysis of British Columbia's education system and the state of professional learning in the province.¹

Professional Learning in British Columbia

EXEMPLAR PROGRAMS

The heart of the British Columbia Case Study is a collection of reports that highlight key professional learning initiatives across a diverse range of educational organizations in the province. Collectively, the organizational case studies portray and critically examine the landscape of British Columbia's professional learning culture in all its geographical and philosophical diversity, through its organizational strengths and tensions, and by highlighting promising practices and most pressing challenges.

The reports reveal that British Columbia teachers and educators avail themselves of a wide variety of professional learning opportunities. All teachers in public schools belong to the British Columbia Teachers' Federation — the largest provincial teachers organization — as a condition of their employment. Independent school teachers,

and school and district leaders, belong to their respective professional associations: principals and vice-principals belong to the British Columbia Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association; senior district educators belong to the British Columbia School Superintendents Association; and senior staff working in the area of school finance and operations areas belong to the BC Association of School Business Officials. Each of these associations offers robust programs of professional learning tailored to members' needs.

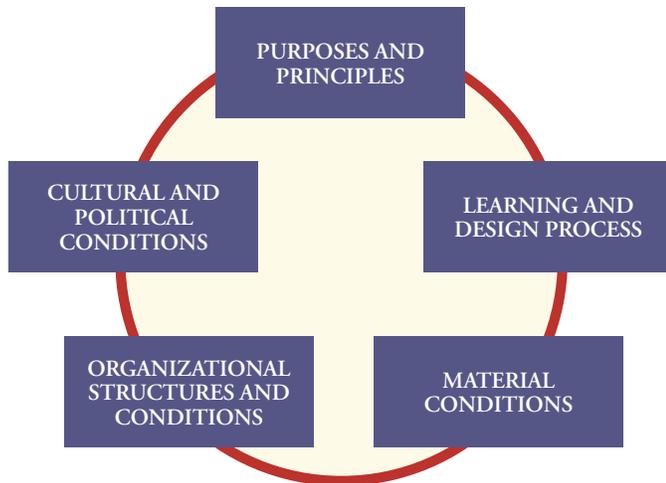
Post-secondary institutions in British Columbia, Canada, and the United States are significant providers of professional learning for British Columbia teachers and educators. British Columbia teachers and educators also avail themselves of learning opportunities from private providers and through informal networks at the school, district, provincial, and international levels.

¹ The complete case study document, *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in British Columbia*, is scheduled for publication in January 2017 and will be available online at www.learningforward.org.

Professional Learning in British Columbia

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Conceptualizing Professional Learning
in British Columbia



In addition to descriptive reports, the British Columbia Education Collaborative undertook quantitative (an online survey on professional learning values and experiences of British Columbia Teachers' Federation and BC Association of School Business Officials members in September 2016) and qualitative (focus groups with British Columbia Education Collaborative member participants) research to identify and characterize British Columbia teachers' and educators' professional learning experiences, challenges, and promising practices to inform future dialogue and organizational planning. Summary findings, drawn from participation of multiple education organizations, capture numerous broad patterns, trends, and perspectives in professional learning values, experiences, opportunities, and challenges in British Columbia. These include:

1. There is broadly held consensus that meaningful professional learning addresses student achievement, learning needs, and social and cultural contexts; cultivates knowledge generation and mobilization; and builds professional capital and human capacities.
2. Effective professional learning is characterized as purposeful in its design, content, process, and application stages, and striving to attain alignment and balance between individual/personal and community/systemic needs.
3. There is consensus that effective professional learning design is long-term, embedded in one's work context, and incorporates high-quality facilitators who are knowledgeable, engaging, and skilled, and who ground their approaches in research-based content and practices.
4. There is strong acknowledgment that tangible resources required to support the intentions and implementation of professional learning principles and activities are essential for a healthy professional learning culture. Participants identified lack of time, funding, and resources as the most significant material **challenges** regarding professional learning initiatives.
5. Participants expressed the need for **cultivating a supportive culture** for quality professional learning — acknowledging the diversity of interests and needs of participants and providing a wide range of choices and entry points for developing knowledge, skills, and critical understanding.

These findings align in large part with research literature and case studies gathered from across Canada regarding the nature of educators' professional learning, as synthesized in the national study. However, as Campbell, et al., (2016) point out, a survey of Canada's provinces and territories acknowledges "a mosaic" of distinctive educational, political, and cultural jurisdictions within which professional learning takes place. Therefore, the British Columbia Case Study also includes a summary description of provincial demographics, education governance, and funding structures, as well as sections describing the teaching profession in British Columbia, to provide an overview of this particular western Canadian educational jurisdiction.

The Education System in British Columbia

DEMOGRAPHICS, GOVERNANCE, AND FUNDING

In 2015-16, there were 635,037 K-12 students in British Columbia, the large majority of which (87%) were in public schools, with 81,659 students in independent (private) schools (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016b). A little over half (53%) of British Columbia's 4.7 million people reside in the Vancouver census metropolitan area (BC Stats, 2016a). Total student enrollment has declined over the past 15 years; however, public school enrollment in the 2015-16 school year increased and demographic trends project future annual enrollment increases (Schaefer, 2009; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016b; BC Stats, 2015).

The British Columbia School Act provides the provincial legislative framework for public education in British Columbia. The School Act establishes provisions for student, parental, school personnel, and school trustees' rights and obligations, teachers' collective agreements, establishment and governance of school boards, the responsibilities and obligations of publicly elected school trustees, and taxation and grants (Government of British Columbia, 1996b).

Funding for public and independent schools comes from residential, nonresidential, and other school taxation revenue collected at the provincial level and provided to school districts and independent schools based on an allocation formula. Funding of public schools is primarily provided from provincial government general revenues. Government funding is allocated on a per-pupil basis. Other formulae generate additional funding in recognition of the diverse geography of the province and student characteristics (e.g. special needs, English language learners, Aboriginal status). Total estimated public expenditures for K-12 education in 2015-16 totaled \$5.4 billion (Government of British Columbia, 2016).

Eligible independent (private) schools in British Columbia receive public funding, provided as

per-student grants. The Independent School Act in British Columbia governs grant allocation for independent schools as well as requirements and oversight of independent schools operating in British Columbia (Government of British Columbia, 1996a). Independent schools receive grants according to their group classification: Group 1 schools receive 50%, and Group 2 schools receive 35% of the local district's per-student grant (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016a). British Columbia is unique among Canadian provinces in that Catholic schools are part of the independent rather than the public system. There is no capital funding for land, buildings, and equipment for independent schools in British Columbia. In 2015-16, grants awarded to independent schools totaled \$310.5 million.

Sixty (60) elected school boards govern the delivery of educational programs in public school districts. Fifty-nine (59) of these districts represent distinct geographic areas, and the 60th encompasses all francophone schools throughout the province. Student enrollment in francophone schools numbered 5,333 in 2015-16 (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016b). School districts have specific areas of authority, including budget setting, hiring of personnel, and maintenance of district capital assets, but they have limited authority over the terms of conditions of the work of teachers, curriculum, assessment, and taxation (Government of British Columbia, 1996a).

In addition to public and independent schools, there are 128 First Nations-controlled schools in 67 First Nations communities throughout British Columbia (First Nations Education Steering Committee & First Nations Schools Association, 2015). The schools "are founded upon First Nations cultures and languages, and they strive to reflect the values and traditions of the communities they serve" (p. 10).

BRITISH COLUMBIA'S TEACHERS

The Teacher Regulation Branch of the Ministry of Education administratively supports regulatory decisions makers in carrying out their responsibilities under the Teachers Act for licensure and discipline of persons holding teaching certificates. The Teacher Regulation Branch reports that about 70,000 people currently hold valid teaching certificates (Teacher Regulation Branch, 2016). Certificate holders include teachers and administrators in both the public and independent systems. Nonpracticing educators are able to maintain certification through payment of an annual fee. The Teacher Qualification Service classifies teachers for salary purposes based on qualifications. The Teacher Qualification Service is jointly funded and governed by the British Columbia School Trustees Association and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation.

Most teachers in British Columbia begin their careers with a baccalaureate degree and one year

of teacher education, which places them on Category 5 on the salary scales. From 2010 to 2015, 9,000 of 33,008 teachers upgraded to higher categories through further formal qualifications, not including Teachers Teaching on Call (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016c; Teacher Qualification Service, 2007-2016).

British Columbia's teachers are highly academically and professionally trained and certified. With the exception of fewer than 100 people who are granted annual permission to teach for a limited period in specified teaching areas under Letters of Permission issued by the Teacher Regulation Branch, the province's teachers possess undergraduate degrees that align with curriculum content areas and have completed teacher education programs that meet certification requirements for work in the education sector.

Conclusion

The British Columbia Education Collaborative members view *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in British Columbia* report as a starting point for dialogue about the complex conceptual and practical elements of educators' professional learning, both in British Columbia and within a Pan-Canadian context. Here are questions for further consideration about enabling and challenging conditions and as potential points of comparison and contrast with neighbouring Canadian provinces:

1. How might educational organizations more effectively identify, share, and learn from the many promising practices currently in play throughout British Columbia's geographic regions, and across role groups — whose participants encompass not only teachers and administrators but also school business officials, trustees, and higher education faculty?
2. How might professional learning stakeholders work collaboratively toward improving systemic coherence and alignment while acknowledging and respecting the diversity of individual educators' needs, contexts, and aspirations?
3. Having identified lack of time and resources as systemic obstacles to achieving high-quality, sustainable professional learning experiences, how might British Columbia's professional learning communities respond in organizational, material, and policy terms to address these disabling conditions?

*The complete case study document, *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in British Columbia*, is scheduled for publication in January 2017 and will be available online at www.learningforward.org.

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Learning Forward

504 S. Locust St.

Oxford, OH 45056

Tel: 800-727-7288

Fax: 513-523-0638

www.learningforward.org