



Minister Singh's Perspective:

Supporting BC School Communities

by
The Honourable Rachna Singh
Minister of Education and Child Care
Province of British Columbia

As we settle into a new school year, I want to acknowledge the work that Principals and Vice-Principals do to ensure that B.C. schools are safe, welcoming, and inclusive spaces where all students can learn and thrive. Many of you are the first to arrive at your schools each morning, and the last to leave them at night. Since becoming Minister of Education and Child Care, I have had the privilege of connecting with several of you during my visits to schools throughout the province, and I have appreciated the time you've taken to talk candidly with me about both the challenges and success stories in your school communities. I look forward to making these personal connections with more of you this school year.

B.C. is in the midst of a population boom. In part because of our internationally renowned public education system, people from around the world recognize our province as a desirable place to work, live, and raise a family. In the past two years, almost 250,000 people have chosen to make B.C. their home, which is why most of you are seeing major enrolment growth at your schools. I want you to know that our government is focused on building and expanding schools throughout B.C.'s fastest growing communities. To date, we've funded the creation of 23,000 new student spaces in B.C. and have made over 33,000 seats safer through seismic upgrading. We will continue to add more new and safer seats this year.

As leaders in your school communities, you are acutely aware of the inequities that some students and families are facing right now, as global inflation increases cost pressures at home. Many of you have turned to us, asking for the Province's support. In response, this past Spring, our government announced the new Feeding Futures program, which will support districts and schools in building and expanding local school food programs. With \$214M in funding over three years, the money will be used for purchasing food and hiring dedicated staff to co-ordinate meals and snacks for students. This is the largest investment in school food programs in B.C.'s history, and complements the work that a

number of you are already doing to address student hunger.

We continue to learn about the impacts of the toxic drug crisis in every community across Canada. This public health emergency remains top of mind for me in my work as Minister, and I will continue to work collaboratively with you as you support students and their families in understanding the risks of substance use. The Ministry's ERASE (expect respect & a safe education) website includes educational resources for students, families, and educators on the topic of substance use. I encourage all schools and families to make use of these materials to help students make decisions that will keep them—and their communities—safe. As part of our Mental Health in Schools strategy, our government is also investing nearly \$175 million to integrate mental health and substance use prevention programs into our education system.

We continue to strive to ensure our schools are places where all students, staff, and families feel like they belong. In 2016, the B.C. Human Rights Code was amended to ensure that gender identity and expression are protected. All schools must comply with the B.C. Human Rights Code and ensure that discrimination against any student, regardless of their background, identity or belief, is prohibited. All of B.C.'s 60 school districts have codes of conduct in place that align with the B.C. Human Rights Code, and all districts and many independent and First Nations schools participate in the B.C. SOGI Educator Network. While SOGI-inclusive education is not a mandatory requirement in the provincial

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curriculum, it provides resources that can help create an inclusive learning environment for all students.

We are also working to create an anti-racist education system where everyone feels represented, respected, and hopeful for their future. Every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, or faith, deserves equal opportunities in our schools. In January 2023, I was honored to visit School District 73 (Kamloops-Thompson) to launch the K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan, which was developed to identify and address racism in school communities. The action plan will create change in B.C. schools by raising awareness and creating resources to improve the school experience for racialized students, staff, and families so that everyone feels a strong sense of belonging. To help this work along, the Ministry of Education and Child Care released "Anti-Racism: A Guide for Teachers" in February 2023 to give educators the opportunity to take action on anti-racism education within their school communities.

Recently, our government introduced a new Indigenous-Focused Graduation Requirement which takes effect this school year and will ensure all students complete Indigenous-focused coursework before they graduate from B.C.'s K-12 education system. Having a broader knowledge of Indigenous worldviews, histories, and cultures will help to build a culture of understanding and respect for Indigenous Peoples across the province.

As a parent and as B.C.'s Minister of Education and Child Care, there is nothing more important to me than the well-being of our children. Every child should grow up with a sense of security and well-being – this is my highest priority and the highest priority of my ministry. Thank you for continuing to place students at the centre of everything you do.

Rachna Singh
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