

Dawn Lang, Chair
Board of Education
School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake)

Dear Dawn Lang and members of the Board of Education of School District No. 8 (Kootenay Lake),

Thank you for allowing us the opportunity to respond to your questions. Please find a joint response from BC NDP candidates Steve Morissette and Brittany Anderson below.

Question #1 – What specific strategies will you implement to eliminate employment barriers for Early Childhood Educators and Education Assistants, and how do you plan to support professional development opportunities to create a more diverse and inclusive workforce in our schools?

We know that a tight labour market for teachers and educators is a reality, not just in BC, but throughout Canada and internationally. With BC's highest enrollment growth in over 35 years, demand for new teachers and education assistants is up significantly. Sustained action is needed to support school districts in hiring more education assistants, in order to meet this increased demand, and build a strong, sustainable education workforce that students and families can rely on, now and in the future.

That's why we're funding nearly 350 additional training spaces in our province for teachers and education assistants. Targeted initiatives like our Future Ready Plan, which focuses on the recruitment and retention of teachers and education assistants in high-demand areas, are also boosting hiring efforts. And, after years of underfunding by the previous government, we're providing significant wage increases to retain qualified educators by bringing salaries into line with other provinces. We're increasing support for students in the critical kindergarten to grade 3 years by staffing each classroom with an education assistant to support complex needs, and to support before- and after-school care programs. As well, we're increasing support for kids with learning disabilities and their families by working with teachers to identify kids who are struggling early and support those kids with strategies to learn, as well as expanding services and interventions for kids with dyslexia and other learning differences.

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

John Rustad wants to take us right back to those days, by promising at least a 20% increase in class sizes. We know how important quality learning environments are for students and parents. And that's why Rustad's plan is so risky – we know from experience that overcrowded classrooms hurt students and their learning.

Question #2 – Given the urgent need for increased Annual Facilities Grants and equitable capital funding, how will you advocate for a comprehensive funding strategy to address maintenance in aging school facilities, particularly in rural and remote communities.

We believe that no matter where people live in the province, their kids should have access to a high-quality school. British Columbia is growing rapidly. We added 180,000 people to our province just last year, including many who are arriving with children and need access to schools. We must ensure that we are building the schools to meet our growing province's needs.

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

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

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

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

Our commitments stand in stark contrast to those of our opponents. John Rustad proposes to address our growing population by increasing class sizes by at least 20% – which will lead to worse learning outcomes for kids, and greater challenges for teachers and support workers to maintain control in the classroom while providing support for children with additional needs. And the last time he was in office, his government froze school construction funding for eight straight years as the province grew rapidly, causing a massive deficit of school spaces. That's a risk nobody in BC, urban or rural, can afford.

Question #3 – What commitments will you make to ensure adequate funding for programs support new immigrant and refugee students, as well as neurodiversity training for educators, to foster an inclusive environment that meets the needs of all students.

David Eby and the BC NDP completely agree that diversity is key to BC's strength and our province is made better when everyone is welcome and valued.

Since 2017, we have more than doubled funding to school districts, helping kids who need additional support to meet their full potential. In addition, we have launched K-12 literacy screening and learning supports, helping all students, especially those with dyslexia and other learning disabilities, get the support they need to achieve their best.

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

And, through our *Safe Access to Schools Act* – opposed by John Rustad's BC Conservatives – we've taken action to ensure schools remain inclusive, safe, and accessible places for learning. In addition, our K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan empowers students, educators, and school district

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

We are also providing more school meals and snacks to help families with costs and help ensure students are fed and ready to learn. This includes launching the Student and Family Affordability Fund so teachers and principals can help families who need extra help with school supplies, field trip costs and meals and snacks. And we are building child care spaces on school grounds so families can count on one pickup and drop-off location.

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