

Are there more students with special needs in public school classrooms today than in 2001?

- There are actually fewer students with special needs students this year than in 2001.
- In 2000-01, there were 66,530 students with special needs in B.C. public schools. This year, there are 61,277.
- While there are fewer students with special needs, the number of 'low incidence' students – those requiring more specialized assistance and custom equipment – has increased.

Why are there more 'low incidence' students with special needs?

- The number of low incidence students with special needs has increased as the result of improved screening and diagnostic programs, and the discovery of new syndromes and health conditions that affect learning.
- The increasing number of low birth weight babies who later develop complex special needs has also contributed to a higher number of students with special needs.

Are there fewer resources for students with special needs?

- In fact, overall funding for students with special needs has increased this year by more than \$45 million – \$38 million for public schools and \$7.5 million for independent schools.
- Most of this funding is part of a \$150-million increase in education funding for school districts earlier this school year.
- At least 20 school districts have indicated they are investing some of the additional funding to enhance and support programs for students with special needs:
 - SD 34 (Abbotsford) is spending \$2.77 million to increase support to special needs students. This includes funding for libraries and additional Kindergarten classes.
 - SD 35 (Langley) is spending \$790,000 for additional services and resources for special needs students.

- SD 36 (Surrey) has added \$180,000 to its service and supply budget for 2005/06 for special education. The district has added 67.85 FTE Specialist Teachers and Support Staff, bringing the Special Education positions total to 841.697 FTE for students with special needs.
- SD 38 (Richmond) has used \$1.7 million for an additional 23.2 FTE. Of that, 19.1FTE will assist in programs for students with special needs.
- SD 39 (Vancouver) is spending \$1.6 M on additional support for students with special needs. This includes 30 FTEs for teachers and support staff.
- SD 43 (Coquitlam) is spending \$1.05 M to add 4 FTE special education teachers at secondary schools, 5 FTE youth workers and to provide additional resources to schools with the most vulnerable students.
- As well, \$1.2 million was invested this year for more for speech equipment.

Has the Province cut funding for students with special needs?

- No. Overall funding for students with special needs this year is more than half a billion dollars. That includes an increase this year of more than \$45 million:
 - A \$37-million increase in funding to school districts for Level 1, 2 and 3 students with special needs (by \$2,000, \$1,000 and \$2,000, respectively).
 - About \$1 million will go to school districts for any students with special needs who have transferred into a district or who have been identified as a student with special needs after the September 30 enrolment report.
 - An additional \$7.5 million to fully fund Level 1, 2 and 3 students with special needs at independent schools. Previously, independent schools received half of the funding provided to public schools for students with special needs.
- Level 1, 2 and 3 special needs students include those who are physically dependent, deaf, blind, deaf-blind, autistic, have profound intellectual disabilities or chronic health impairments or have severe behaviour problems.

How will the \$150-million increase in education funding be used to support students with special needs in classrooms?

- The funding can be used for such things as:
 - Hiring special education teachers
 - Hiring teachers' assistants to support students to participate in education programs
 - Purchasing equipment and specialized resources
 - Training staff

- Our number one priority is student achievement for all students – including students with special needs.

- School boards must identify all students with special needs, and consult with school planning councils on the allocation of staff and resources in a school.

- Since 2000-01, the Province has increased funding to B.C. public schools by nearly \$460 million (\$305 million in operating grants and \$153 million in one-time grants). At the same time, there are 30,000 fewer students.

Is it true that teachers are having a hard time coping with a high number of ESL and special needs students in a classroom?

- Every class, every school, every community is unique and has unique priorities. There is no magic number of students, or composition of students in a classroom.

- The composition of a class depends on a number of factors: who the students in the class are, the additional resources that may be available to assist the teacher, and the subject matter being taught.

- It's important that discussions about class composition take place at the district and school level and involve parents, teachers, principals and trustees – not just union and school district negotiators.

There is a perception that ESL is underfunded in British Columbia. Is this true?

- Government recognizes that providing ESL services to new immigrants is an important service and we committed in the Throne Speech to increase our support for English as a Second Language training in the coming year.

- We are providing ESL funding to school districts in 2005-2006, based on \$1,100 per student, to support ESL programs and services provided by the 59 school boards and the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie Britannique.

- In 2005-06, the ministry provided \$63 million to school districts for ESL services.
- The Ministry of Education provides extra funding to school boards to help them provide ESL services to approximately 57,000 students. School boards are in the best position to decide how to spend that money based on local needs.
- It's up to districts to determine the number of ESL teachers and other staff at their schools.
- ESL students outperform non-ESL students when it comes to high school completion.
- In 2004-05, 83 per cent of ESL students completed high school, compared to 79 per cent of non-ESL students.
- Since 1997-98, ESL high school completion rates have increased by 10 percentage points.
- Almost all of the federal money for language and settlement services that goes into general revenues in B.C. is spent on ESL training for adults.