

Earnings and Employment Trends ♦ April 2000

Teachers in BC – Are we facing a major shortage?

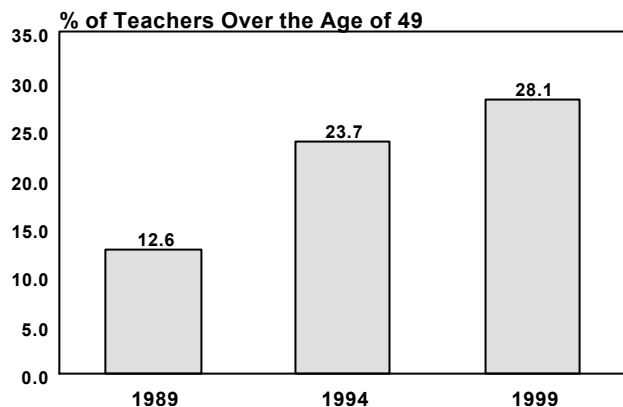
From all accounts, the BC workforce will experience large levels of outflow in the next fifteen years due to retirement. In 1999, 34 per cent of the workforce were over the age of 44, most of whom will be retired by 2014. Elementary and secondary school teachers are older still, where 47 per cent of them are over the age of 44. This article will look at the age structure of teachers and its likely impact on the demand for new teachers over the next ten years.

Teachers in BC, on average, retire at the age of 58.7 years, according to a study done by the Centre for Education Statistics¹. This means that we can expect that the number of teachers who are currently 50 years of age and over will not be teaching in ten years time². The chart alongside shows that 28 per cent of all BC elementary and secondary teachers are currently 50 years of age and over. This translates into an annual average retirement rate of 2.8 per cent over the next ten years. The same chart illustrates how extreme that is compared to historical retirement rates. The age structure 10 years ago showed that over the 1990's, the average retirement rate would have been less than 1.3 per cent per year, which is less than one-half of what is expected in the next decade.

¹ Published in Statistics Canada's Education Quarterly Review, 1997

² The retirement age of 58.7 years reflects the average so not all those in their early 50's will be retired as some will continue to work up to 65 years. However, balancing this out, there will be similar numbers of 45-49 year olds who will retire before the age of 58.7.

More than one in four existing teachers in BC will retire over the next ten years.

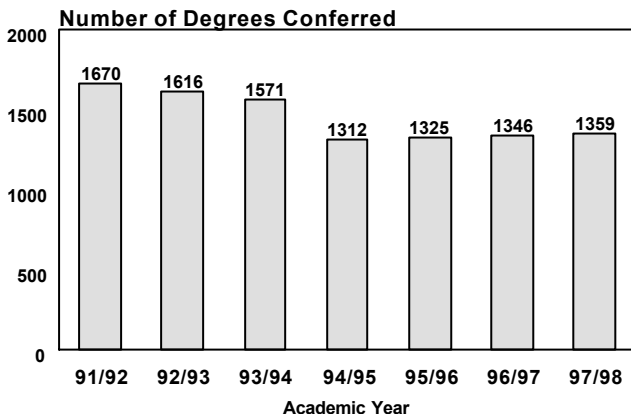


The impending retirement problem applies to both elementary and secondary teachers but the problem is more severe among secondary teachers. This appears to be the case right across Canada. Perhaps this is because more elementary teachers switch to secondary teachers part way through their career, at least more often than the other way around; or it may have something to do with the higher concentration of women in elementary teaching compared to secondary teaching. Women's lesser attachment to the workforce in their child rearing days may have provided more opportunities to hire younger teachers into elementary schools over the years. Whatever the reason, the numbers show that close to one in three BC secondary school teachers will retire in the next ten years compared to one in four elementary school teachers.

This is good news for young persons planning to be teachers. Recent years have been very difficult for new teachers with few opportunities to gain experience. Many have

had to resort to either substitute teaching or accepting jobs in remote locations subject to recruitment problems. The universities have rightly been limiting the number of students accepted into the education faculties.

Graduates with a Bachelors of Education Degree from BC Universities.



Source: University Presidents' Council of British Columbia, Annual Reports

As the previous chart shows, up until the 1997/98 school year, the education system had not yet responded to the expected increased demand for teachers. Fortunately, the training of teachers can be done in one year if the student already has a bachelor's degree. In recent years there has been no shortage in the number of people with bachelor degrees wanting to get into BC education faculties. Therefore, it is likely the system will be able to respond fairly quickly if there appears to be a teacher shortage on the horizon.

However, there remains a major unknown – the extent to which other well paid disciplines will be able to lure bachelor students away from a teaching career. Labour shortages are expected to be fairly wide-spread, particularly within the highly skilled occupations. Those that pay the highest salaries will win out. Similarly, labour shortages for teachers in other

in other provinces³ could lure BC teachers out of province if the price is right. In the next decade, the BC education system may be forced to raise teachers' salaries to ensure existing teachers remain in BC as well as to attract new university graduates into the profession.

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³ Teachers all across Canada are relatively old. However, BC teachers are older still – for example, 23 per cent of Alberta teachers and 26 per cent of Ontario teachers are over the age of 49 compared to 28 per cent for BC.