



Report on Education

from the Deputy Minister of Education

March 3, 2006

It has been said that doing things in the same way and expecting different results is the definition of insanity. To take that a step further, doing things in the same way in a changing environmental context and expecting to get better results is even more foolhardy. We, in British Columbia, have a rapidly changing context. We also have a very high performing public education system - one of the best in the world. If we want our system to prosper and improve, we will need to do things differently to achieve the results we want. I would like to provide some information about our system performance and our changing context.

BC consistently performs in the top 10% of industrialized nations on international achievement tests.

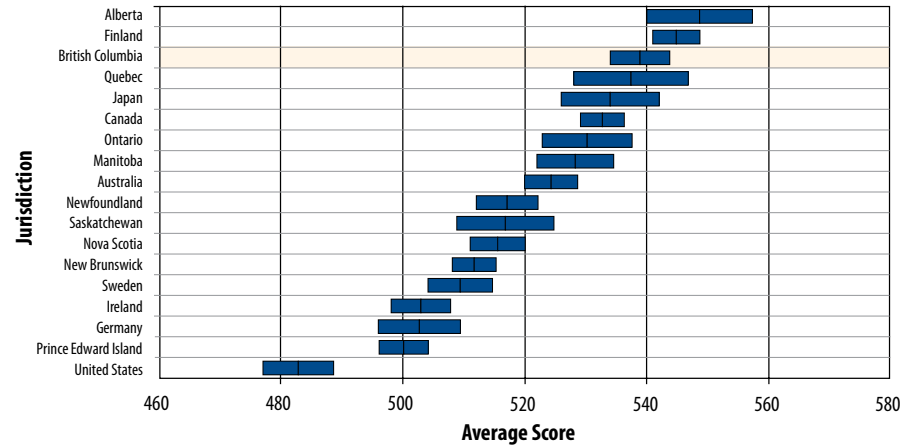
British Columbia's performance is a well kept secret! During the community consultation process that occurred this fall, this data was shown to participants. In many places surprise was expressed that BC was doing so well. As one community member put it, "I am amazed. I had no idea that BC was performing like this in education. Why doesn't the public know this - we think there are big problems in education!"

So why is this level of achievement widely unknown? In a recent study conducted by Dr. Neil Guppy for the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education, it was found that British Columbia has the lowest level of public confidence in education of all the provinces in Canada, although it is the highest performing province in many ways.

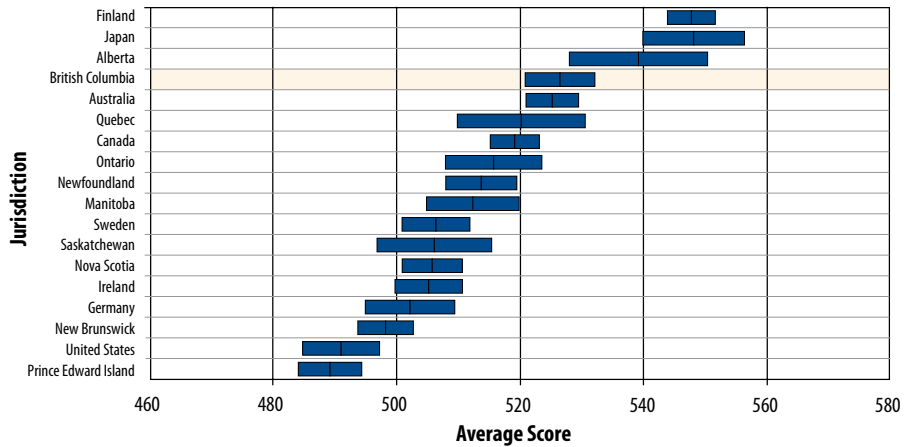
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PISA is one international assessment that demonstrates the achievement of British Columbia students.

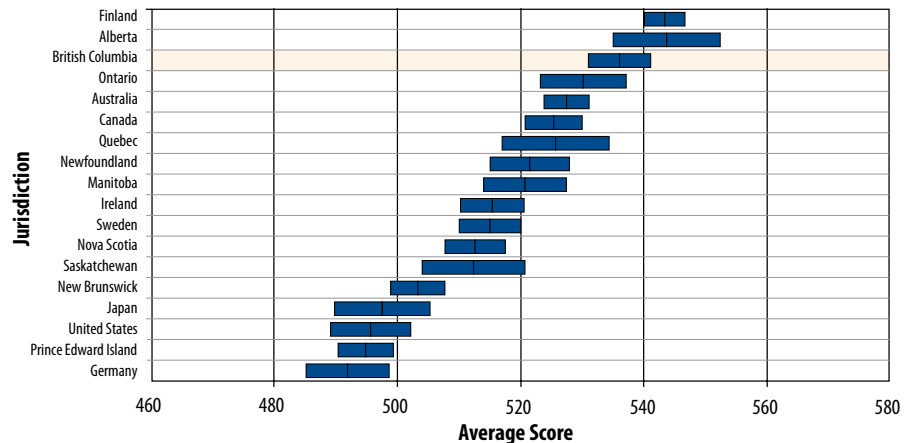
Mathematics - BC is among the top performers



Science - BC is second to Finland, Japan and Alberta



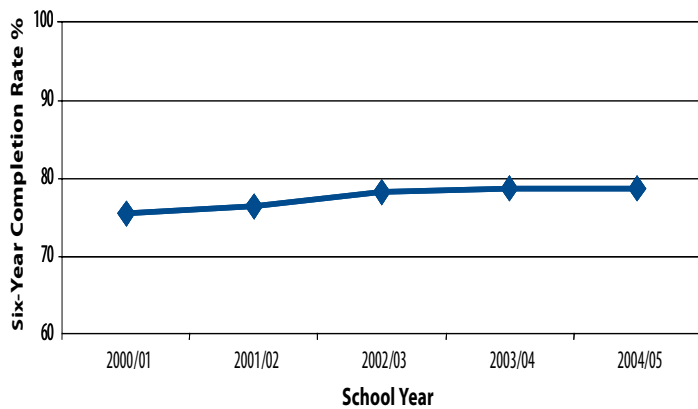
Reading - BC is again among the top ranked jurisdictions



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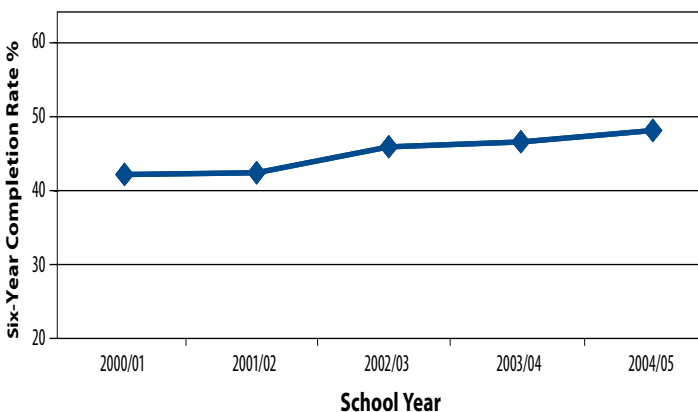
British Columbia has one of the highest graduation rates in Canada. The School Completion Rate (SCR) is one of our main measures of system success and improvement. The SCR tells us the percentage of students who graduate from Grade 12 within six years of entering Grade 8. The SCR has improved steadily to its highest ever level - 79%.

School Completion Rate – 2001 to 2005



British Columbia is the only province that disaggregates its School Completion Rate to show the SCR for Aboriginal students. While this rate has increased twice as fast as the all student completion rate, you can see we have much work left to do.

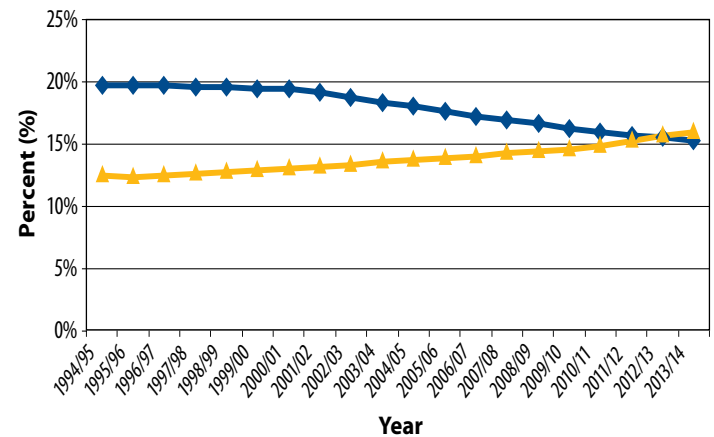
School Completion Rate for Aboriginal Students



It is clear from the evidence above that British Columbia schools are high performing and improving. Our challenge is to maintain this improvement in the face of significant change in the context of the province. What do we mean by those changes?

Last week, the following demographics on our senior population were presented.

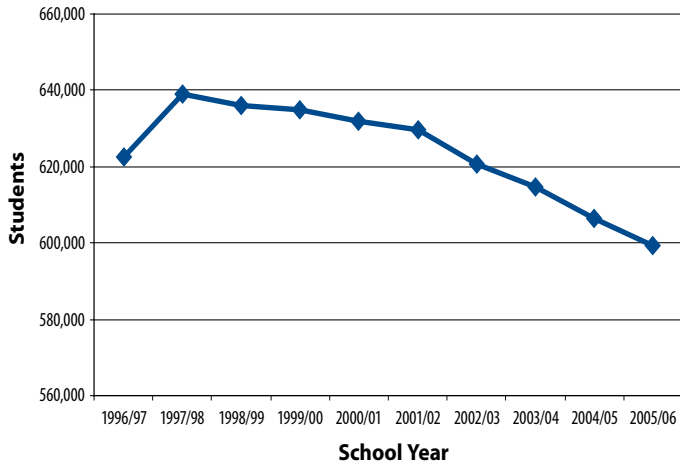
Seniors will outnumber school age students for the first time by 2012



We will have a shrinking work force with increasing demands by those no longer of working age. Every graduating student will be sought after to contribute to the workforce and the economy in a significant way, and each student must be prepared to participate. This convinces me that we cannot afford to have 21% of our students not complete school – we need to do some things differently if we are to address the needs of this group.

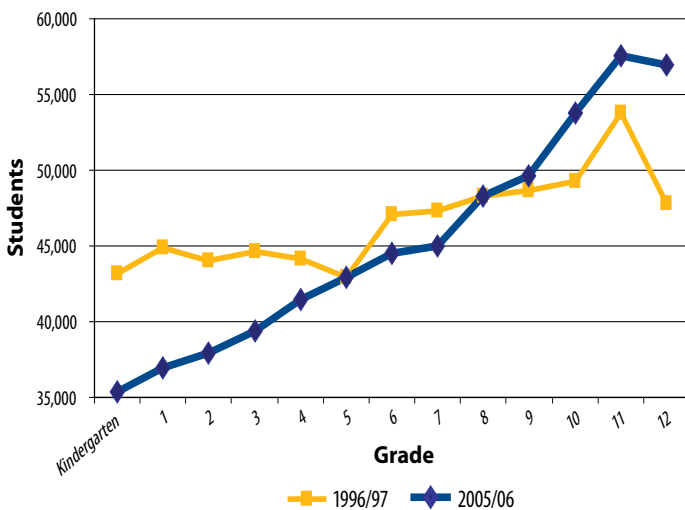
What else is changing? The public school system is getting smaller, a reduction of over 6,300 students last year and over 30,000 since 2001. Is it any wonder that you hear of schools closing and buildings being sold or used for other purposes?

Enrolment of Public School Students



The enrolment of students by grade poses another challenge and confirms what most of you will already know. Primary and elementary grade enrolment is much smaller than secondary grade enrolment. As this cohort of students advances through the system over the next few years, total enrolment decline will become a fact of life. This year we have close to 56,000 students in Grade 12 but only 36,000 entering Kindergarten.

Enrolment by Grade



These student enrolment pressures are not felt equally in the schools and school districts in the province. Enrolment reductions are far more acute in most of rural BC than they are in urban areas. However, even in urban areas, particular school communities are affected differently by student enrolment growth or decline.

Changing student enrolment and age demographics are powerful forces that will affect schools in significant ways. How do we maintain and improve our achievement in the face of these forces? How do we make quality education programs accessible to all learners so that British Columbia will prosper and citizens will enjoy a high quality of life?

The Summary of Key Information is a provincial level summary of important school system data compiled from the student, school and teacher data collections.

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reporting/levels/prov_key.php

Next week – another aspect of change. We will turn our attention to changes in the demographics of those who teach in schools and the impact those changes have on student achievement.