



# BCTF

**British Columbia Teachers' Federation** A Union of Professionals

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March 15, 2018

The Honourable Shane Simpson  
Minister of Social Development and Poverty Reduction  
PO Box 9933 Stn Prov Govt  
Victoria, BC V8W 9R2

Dear Minister Simpson:

The BC Teachers' Federation has long maintained the need for a poverty reduction plan with built-in targets and timelines. For far too long children living in poverty have struggled to fit in, and negotiate a system that neither meets their basic needs nor the needs of their families.

Over the last 15 years, the BCTF called on the previous government many times to develop a plan that included allowing those on social assistance to earn a wage up to the poverty line without decreasing social assistance payments. We have called on the provincial government to acknowledge the negative impact of poverty on the education, health, and well-being of the children of British Columbia. We have taken initiatives to heighten our members' awareness of the challenges faced by students living in poverty and made every effort to promote programs that keep our public education system free and accessible. Teachers have asked for, and continue to need, classroom strategies and supports to mitigate the systemic impact of poverty and its impact on children, youth, and families.

The BCTF provides its membership with workshops and resources developed by teachers to help classroom teachers move beyond the poverty that many students struggle with. The necessary changes will take the will and planning of government. The BCTF supports a living wage policy and a \$15 minimum wage policy, as well as affordable universal childcare. We also believe that increased investment in adult education is important. Each of these components will provide those in need with greater opportunities to rise from the detrimental effects of poverty.

Providing opportunities through adult education for young adults to complete high school, and/or requirements to enter post-secondary training, is an essential element of a poverty reduction plan. More needs to be done to identify and address barriers that prevent young adults from attending and completing adult education courses, especially young adults who are much less likely to complete high school, such as those living in rural areas, those who are Aboriginal, and immigrants from countries of origin with low graduation rates.

While the new government restored adult education funding and tuition-free access, school districts are not necessarily rebuilding programs nor establishing them where programs were not available before. A plan from the province, with co-ordinated support, would help address this.

The BCTF has concerns about the inadequacy of resources to address learning gaps of non-identified students, many of whom are experiencing poverty. Types of resources needed: extra staffing resources such as specialist teachers for students in need of extra learning support, psychologists and counsellors to provide emotional support to students and families, speech

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language pathologists, early-intervention literacy programs, and educational assistants. We also recommend that the government focus on improving classroom conditions, so teachers can address diverse learning needs (staffing ratios, class size).

The BCTF also recommends that the government significantly improve public education funding. Thus far, improvements to operation funding for school districts have mostly been due to enrolment growth and court-related restoration of services. Other outstanding needs remained unaddressed. As we saw under the previous government, cutting educational programs and services negatively impacts on students in need of extra learning support, many of whom live in poverty. There is a need for improved funding (such as inner-city schools project funding) for schools with students vulnerable to poverty, but which do not receive adequate funds to support these students. The BCTF also recommends that government fully fund meals programs, improve funding for counsellors to assist families to overcome poverty-related barriers, and eliminate school fees.

Rapidly rising housing costs are a significant factor driving poverty rates in BC. So, too, is the expansion of low-paying, insecure employment that results in some parents working at two or more jobs to make ends meet. Education can buffer family poverty, yet the rising cost of post-secondary education prevents many families from gaining the skills necessary to move out of low-wage employment. The BCTF strongly supports the measures announced in the 2018 budget. The new government should continue to take active steps to address all of these concerns.

A made-in-BC poverty reduction plan with targets and timelines is long overdue. The BC Teachers' Federation stands firmly behind the creation of this plan. We would welcome further dialogue with you on this important matter. Please find enclosed previous submissions made by the BCTF on the need for a poverty reduction plan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Hansman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Glen Hansman  
President

Attachments

GH:mho/tfeu

# BCTF Research Report

Part of the BCTF Information Handbook

SECTION XII  
2009-EI-01

## Poverty and Education Report

### Students are not to blame: Understanding the structural causes of family poverty

[bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630](http://bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630)

Margaret White, Research Analyst  
March 2009

### Introduction

In 2006, there were an estimated 181,000 low-income children in the province, with British Columbia reporting the highest before-tax child poverty rate (21.9%) in Canada (15.8%) for the fifth year in a row. This was the news in the *2008 Child Poverty Report Card* recently released by the First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. Many of these families lived on incomes that were at least \$11,000 below the before-tax low-income threshold (First Call, 2008a). These figures tell us that thousands of BC families are struggling economically, whose children are dealing with the effects of poverty. The current economic recession will further intensify the challenges many families face in earning an income sufficient to support their families.

Part 1 of this paper discusses why it is important for educators to challenge assumptions and beliefs about the structural causes of poverty. How we think, feel, and communicate about poverty makes a difference in how students feel about themselves and their school community. This section also draws on educational research to explore conceptual issues around the framing of poverty and children.

Part 2 of this paper draws on current policy and statistical reports to examine how economic, political, and social changes over the past decade have contributed to child and family poverty. Improving our understanding of the structural determinants of poverty can help to raise awareness of the external factors that undermine the efforts of many families to achieve economic security. The response of the British Columbia government to the issue of child and family poverty is compared to that of other Canadian provinces. This section concludes by describing poverty reduction strategies proposed by social policy advocates. Implications for the public education system are discussed throughout the paper.

## **Part 1: Challenging assumptions and beliefs about structural causes of poverty**

Challenging assumptions and beliefs about structural causes of poverty is essential to creating a sense of safety for low-income children who are dealing with poverty. In 2007, the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto released a research report on homelessness and education (Decter, 2007). The study found that students living in shelters had less of a sense of belonging to their school and tended not to participate in before- and after-school activities. They were reluctant to disclose their living situation for fear of being stigmatized, taunted, or bullied, which was in turn a barrier to receiving subsidies to assist with the cost of extra-curricular programs.

Donna Beegle's (2003) thesis research with university graduates who grew up in severe poverty reveals the extent to which students can internalize the blame for their economic situation. Students reported feeling shame and humiliation at school due to differences in appearance, living in substandard housing conditions, and having minimal food or food that was different from other students. Some tried to remain invisible to avoid negative reactions from others. They also reported feeling that their personal worth was judged by the type of work their parents did and believed that others perceived poverty to be their fault. They believed that their teachers could have done more to protect them from the ridicule of others.

### **Overcoming barriers to educational success**

What helped students overcome significant barriers and complete a university degree? Mentorship was important. Having a trusting relationship with an adult opened the door to sharing feelings and experiences. As a result of sharing, needs were identified. This opened the door to acquiring resources to overcome barriers and support their education (Beegle, 2003).

The study participants also told Dr. Beegle that gaining knowledge and understanding of the structural determinants of poverty helped them to overcome feelings of self-blame:

The participants [...] all felt that understanding root causes of poverty was instrumental in shedding the false burden of responsibility for the social condition of their youth. Yet discussions of the structural causes of poverty rarely occur in the school setting. (p. 17)

Applying the goals of anti-oppressive education, as stated by Kumashiro (2000), helps to articulate why addressing structural causes of poverty is important. He argues that partial or incomplete knowledge is harmful because it perpetuates stereotypes about a marginalized group in the school community and reinforces existing norms, especially if it goes unchallenged by those in authority. Exploring the external or underlying factors that contribute to poverty can help prevent the stigmatization of low-income children by challenging stereotypes and myths about poverty. It can also build empathy by increasing the understanding of external factors

pushing families and individuals into poverty, and can encourage advocates for change on issues related to education and income inequality.

Kumashiro also speaks to the importance of considering how one's position of privilege influences perceptions and behavior toward marginalized groups within the school community. Freiler and Cerny (1998) in their report *Benefiting Canada's Children: Perspectives on Gender and Social Responsibility* cite evidence that reveals the extent to which one's economic situation can shape perceptions of child poverty. They report on a 1997 poll by Ekos Research Associates that found economically secure Canadians tended to view child poverty as being due to internal factors under the parents' control such as lack of self-discipline, selfishness, or lack of parenting skills. In contrast, economically insecure Canadians tended to view child poverty as being due to external factors such as technological change, globalization, and bad luck.

These findings suggest that we all need to evaluate how our sense of economic security influences our perceptions and beliefs about why families are living in poverty. Not doing so may result in educators consciously or unconsciously blaming parents for their low-income situation. This risks students internalizing this negative message.

### **The language of poverty makes a difference**

In communicating about poverty, it is also important to be aware of the subtle meanings contained within labour-market terminology. How we define poverty can reinforce or challenge existing stereotypes. When we talk about poverty, we really mean economic poverty. Yet this is only one of many dimensions to the human experience including intellectual, physical, emotional, social, or spiritual well-being. Obviously these are interrelated and living in economic distress may compromise one's sense of well-being in other areas. But it is also the case that, while one suffers from economic poverty, he or she may have strengths in other domains which those with more material wealth may not.

A slight change in wording can also affect our perceptions and convey subtle messages. For example, "children living with the effects of poverty" does not objectify a child in the way that terms such as "poor children" might. Instead it creates an opening, implying that there is more to a person than their economic circumstances—that economic conditions may be a defining characteristic of a person's experience but they are not all of his or her experience.

Flessa (2007) documents the dominance of a deficit framework approach to poverty and education policy that emphasizes what students are perceived to be lacking. Underlying this approach is an assumption that low-income families and the communities they live in are to blame for poverty and its impact on educational outcomes.

Payne's (2003) framework for understanding poverty has widely influenced poverty education in the United States and to some extent in Canada. This framework has been criticized for using a deficit approach that focuses on "fixing poor people" and for perpetuating harmful stereotypes

about people living in poverty (Gorski, 2008; Sato & Lensmire, 2009). Payne (2009) responds by citing statistics linking poverty to gun violence, imprisonment, and child abuse. But making generalizations about a population based on risk factors is problematic and can easily lead to stereotyping. Just because a specific group is shown to be at higher risk of a behavior does not mean that the vast majority of individuals in that group engage in such a behavior.

Sato and Lensmire (2009) caution that while an increased awareness and communication about students affected by poverty is positive, teachers must challenge misinformation about poverty that reinforces stereotypes. They recommend a pedagogy that emphasizes students' competencies, focuses on teachers' cultural identities, and professional development that supports teacher collaboration.

### **Language and the framing of child poverty**

A 2002 report, *The Framing of Poverty as "Child Poverty" and Its Implications for Women* by Status of Women Canada, cautions that separating the issue of child poverty from poverty in general may have unintended negative consequences. Focusing exclusively on child poverty may reinforce perceptions and beliefs that parents are to blame, that adults who are poor are less deserving of support, and may obscure the effects of regressive social policies on adult poverty. The report advocates an approach that locates child poverty within the broader context of family poverty and gender inequality.

Changes in the terminology to define poverty in social and economic policy reports signals a shift in the framing of this issue. Neutral terms such as low-income children used by Statistics Canada describe an individual or family's economic situation relative to others. Terms such as income security and economic well-being, used in the report *Growing Up in North America: The Economic Well-Being of Children in Canada, the United States, and Mexico* (Canadian Council on Social Development, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, & Red Por Los Derechos de la Infancia en Mexico, 2008) remind us that the ultimate goal of eliminating poverty is to provide a sense of security and well-being to all individuals and families.

So, too, the Living Wage Campaign recently launched in Vancouver and Victoria by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria implies the right of all individuals and families to a living wage (Richards T., Cohen, Klein, & Littman, 2008). This is a more empowering use of language, shifting the poverty debate from a stance of neutrality or of powerlessness to a proactive concept that engages all parties in a hopeful way in a movement to improve the economic conditions of low-income individuals and families.

Educators may not be able to solve poverty, but they can influence how they and others in the school community respond to students dealing with poverty. By challenging attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate harmful stereotypes about poverty, educators have an opportunity to remove a significant emotional barrier limiting the educational success of low-income students.

## **Part 2: Understanding the structural causes of family poverty**

This section begins by looking at which families experience the highest poverty rates and in which geographic regions families are most vulnerable to poverty. The report then draws upon current policy reports to explore how economic restructuring has impeded the ability of many parents to earn an income sufficient to sustain their families. The extent to which education can help families move out of poverty is discussed, as is the role of government policy. This section ends by reviewing recommendations for reducing family poverty and addressing educational barriers related to poverty.

### **BC—highest rate of low-income children in Canada**

The province where children live is a major factor influencing their risk of living in poverty. Children in British Columbia are more vulnerable to poverty than in any other province in Canada.

On November 21, 2008, the First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition released its *2008 Child Poverty Report Card*. We know from this report that in 2006, there were an estimated 181,000 children in low-income families in the province, with BC reporting the highest before-tax child poverty rate (21.9%) in Canada (15.8%) for the fifth year in a row (First Call, 2008a).

This trend began early in the decade. Between 2001 and 2002, the child poverty rate in BC spiked, widening the gap between BC and Canada significantly. Since 2004, Canada's child poverty rate fell steadily, while BC's fluctuated, with the gap widening again in 2006 (First Call, 2008a).

Many of these families live in severe poverty. In 2006, the average income for low-income families in BC was \$11,000 or more below the low-income threshold (First Call, 2008a). These figures tell us there are thousands of BC families struggling economically, whose children are affected by poverty and may feel marginalized as a result of their economic situation.

### **Children in some areas of BC are affected by poverty much more than others**

Children in some areas of British Columbia are affected much more by poverty than others. Table 1 (page 6) shows municipalities in BC with above- and below-average before-tax child poverty rates, extracted from data published in a news release by First Call: BC Child Youth and Advocacy Coalition (2008b).

Major urban centres have among the highest child poverty rates. Richmond has the highest child poverty rate of all municipalities. Children in rural regions are also vulnerable. Port Alberni has a high before-tax child poverty rate, although the poverty rate falls significantly after taxes and transfers. Both the before-tax and after-tax poverty rate of children in Prince Rupert is well above the average (First Call, 2008b).

Table 1 also shows that child poverty is much less of an issue in some municipalities, even within the same geographic area. For example, the before-tax child poverty rate for Central Saanich (5.1%) is five times lower than for Victoria (26.6%).

While poverty may be less of an issue in affluent districts, low-income students are still vulnerable. Their needs may go unacknowledged and they may experience more stigma and social alienation in a community where vast differences in family incomes exist.

**Table 1: Ten highest and lowest child poverty rates in BC municipalities, 2005**

*(Note: The 2005 before-tax child poverty rate for all of BC=20.9%.)*

<b>Municipalities with the highest child poverty rate</b>	<b>2005 Before-tax child poverty rate</b>	<b>Municipalities with the lowest child poverty rate</b>	<b>2005 Before-tax child poverty rate</b>
Richmond	31.4%	Central Saanich	5.1%
Prince Rupert	29.6%	Colwood	6.6%
Burnaby	29.2%	Cold Stream	6.7%
Vancouver	28.7%	Oak Bay	7.9%
Victoria	26.6%	Fort St. John	9.1%
Port Alberni	24.2%	North Saanich	9.6%
Williams Lake and Coquitlam	23.1%	Comox	9.7%
Langley (city)	22.9%	Powell River	10.3%
Vernon	22.7%	Langley (DM)	10.6%
Courtenay	22.6%	Langford	11.0%

BCTF Research table created with Statistics Canada figures cited in First Call: BC Child Youth and Advocacy Coalition (2008b).

### **Aboriginal families especially vulnerable to poverty**

In *Growing Up in North America* (CCSD et al., 2008), the researchers reported that indigenous populations have the highest child poverty rates in Canada, the United States, and Mexico. Aboriginal parents may face many barriers to overcoming poverty including low graduation rates, lack of access to a culturally meaningful education, living in isolated, economically depressed regions of the province, systemic discrimination, and overcoming past and present oppressive conditions.

Statistics Canada recently published its 2006 *Aboriginal Children's Survey* (O'Donnell, 2008) which shows high poverty rates among young Aboriginal children in Canada. Almost half (49%) of off-reserve Aboriginal children and 31% of Métis children under six years of age were in low-income families in 2006, compared to 18% of non-Aboriginal children.

The survey (O'Donnell, 2008) also found that about half of off-reserve Aboriginal and 60% of Métis children had parents who rated their schools, nursery schools, and early childhood programs as "excellent" or "very good." In contrast, only 17% of off-reserve Aboriginal children and 16% of Métis children had parents who rated access to Aboriginal cultural activities as "excellent" or "very good." These figures suggest that additional educational resources are required to support the substantial numbers of Aboriginal children in the early grades who are

dealing with both the effects of poverty and the lack of access to a culturally meaningful education.

### **Families newly immigrated to Canada, or a member of a visible minority, at risk**

Families with children who are newly immigrated to Canada are more vulnerable to poverty. Children living in a family where the main income recipient recently immigrated to Canada comprised 26.1% of low-income children in 2004, up from 22.6% in 1989 (Fleury, 2008). The Canadian Council on Social Development et al. (2008) reported that poverty among immigrant families is increasingly concentrated in Canada's large urban areas, with 34% of visible minority children living in poverty in 2000.

Milton (2008) in her article on race, class, and academic achievement suggests that being both a visible minority and poor has resulted in "de facto school segregation based on income" (p. 18). She attributes this to social housing and urban planning policies that create neighbourhoods of dense poverty, citing Toronto as an example. Black students make up 12% of the total student population in Toronto with 60-70% concentrated in just a few schools because their families are more likely to be poor.

### **Family structure—the breadwinner model a thing of the past**

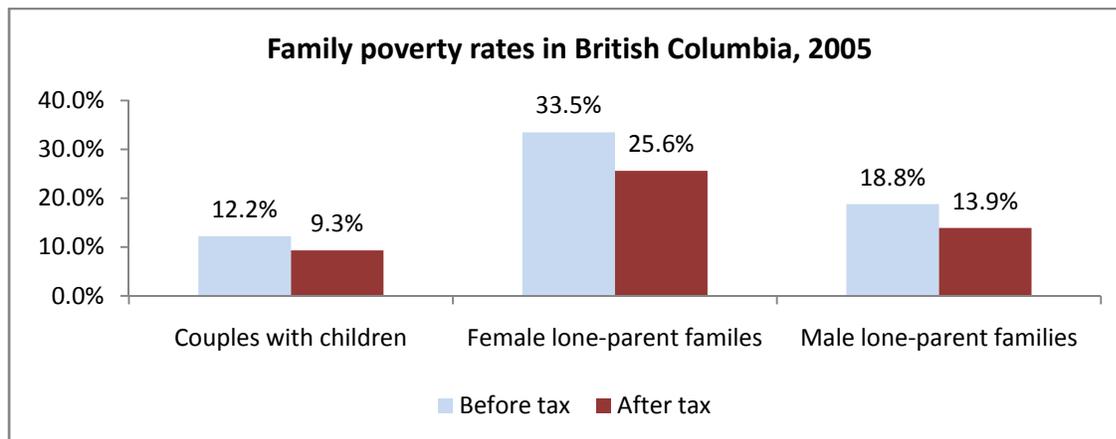
Families have undergone considerable changes in the past two decades. Lone-parent families are more prevalent as are blended families. Whether in a one- or two-parent family, mothers with young children are more likely to be working in paid employment than in previous decades. To fully understand how family structure influences poverty, it is important to consider both risk (the percentage of families living in poverty) and the number of families affected.

### **Lone parent families have highest poverty rates**

As Chart 1 (page 8) indicates, 2005 figures for BC reveal that female lone-parent families have the highest risk of poverty with a before-tax family poverty rate of 33.5% compared to 12.2% for couples with children. The before-tax female lone-parent family poverty rates are high across the province, the highest being in Prince Rupert (46%) and Terrace (47.2%). Only two census areas recorded a female lone-parent family poverty rate below 20%—Fort St. John (18.9%) and Salmon Arm (18.7%) (First Call, 2008c).

Children in female lone-parent families are a much higher risk of poverty than two-parent families. In 2006, the before-tax child poverty rate for children in BC living in female lone-parent families was 50.3% compared to 16.3% of children in two-parent families (First Call, 2008a).

**Chart 1: Family poverty rates in British Columbia by family type, 2005**



BCTF Research table created with Census figures cited in First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (2008c).

### **A number of structural factors may contribute to this high poverty rate.**

A lack of affordable, quality childcare is particularly an issue for lone-parent families. Even where childcare is available, a lone parent's employment opportunities will likely be restricted to day-time jobs with a Monday to Friday schedule. This shrinks the pool of available jobs considerably.

Gender discrimination in earnings and hiring practices may also be at play as the before-tax family poverty rate in 2005 for male lone-parent households was 18.8%, considerably lower than female lone-parent families (33.5%) in British Columbia (First Call, 2008c).

According to 2008 Statistics Canada data, a gender gap persists, with women earning about 84 cents for each dollar earned by their male counterparts in 2007 (Statistics Canada, 2008). Women still tend to be concentrated in sales, service, and non-professional office jobs in the private sector which tend to be precarious, low-paying, and non-unionized (Jackson, 2004).

Regressive welfare reform introduced in British Columbia placed limitations on parents with young children who receive social assistance benefits. These families are particularly vulnerable to living in severe poverty. In BC, a lone-parent family with one child under six years receiving social assistance in 2008, lived \$11,370 below the before-tax poverty line (First Call, 2008a).

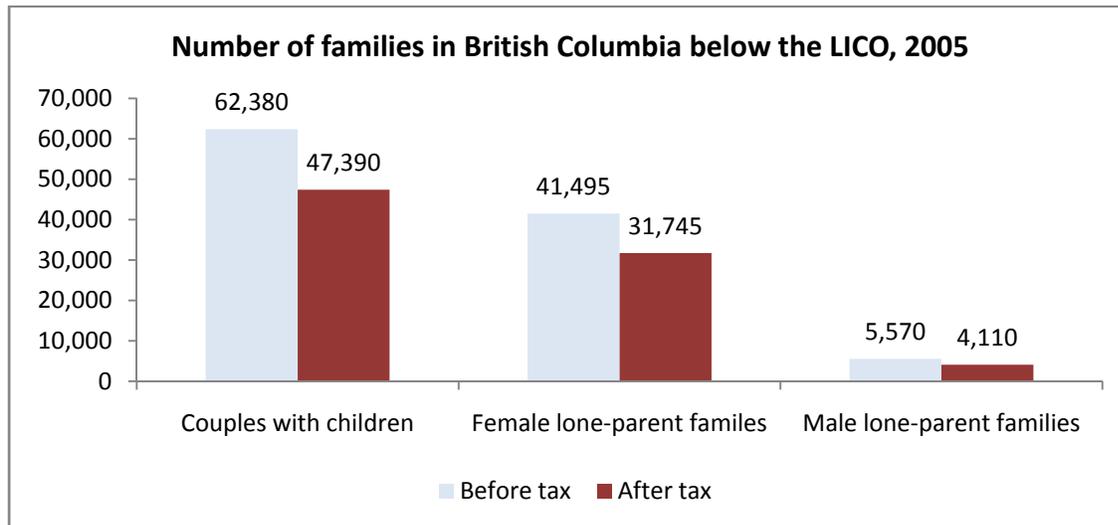
Child poverty has worsened in part due to benefits being eroded by inflation. A 2008 National Welfare Council report shows that between 1998 and 2007, inflation-adjusted annual income assistance benefits in BC fell by \$449 for a lone parent with one child and by \$1,474 for a couple with two children.

### **More two-parent families with children are affected by poverty**

While lone-parent families are at a much higher risk of poverty, the absolute number of children affected by poverty is higher for two-parent families because they comprise the majority of

families. In 2005, there were 62,380 couples with children in BC living below the before-tax low income cutoff and 41,495 female lone-parent families (First Call, 2008c). Both absolute numbers and percentages need to be considered in funding education and poverty programs. Otherwise, the needs of a substantial number of children may go unaddressed.

**Chart 2: Number of BC families below the before-tax low-income cut off (LICO), 2005**



BCTF Research table created with Census figures cited in First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition (2008c).

The poverty rate for children in two-parent families in BC almost doubled between 1989 and 2006 (First Call, 2008a). Many of these children may have one or both parents working in paid employment. Families in BC with one or more earners are more vulnerable to poverty than Canada as a whole. In 2006, the poverty rate in BC among children in families with full-time, full-year employment was the highest in the country—10.1% compared to 7.3% for Canada (First Call, 2008a).

The family poverty rate of couples with children is much higher in the Vancouver census metropolitan area (16.3%) than the rest of the province (12.2%). Three-quarters of couples with children in BC with incomes below the before-tax poverty line live in the Vancouver metropolitan area compared to just over half of all lone-parent families (First Call, 2008c).

Educators need to be aware of the unique barriers that lone parents may face in sustaining their families economically, while avoiding stereotypes that may stigmatize students. These statistics also suggest that educators be “attuned” to the “silence of poverty” and not overlook students in two-parent families whose needs may go unrecognized.

### **Economic restructuring eroded family income**

The report *Growing Up in North America* documents the erosion of real wages in Canada over the past 15 years, with families maintaining their income due to increased hours of work by

family members, mainly women. The authors note that economic growth has not necessarily translated into economic security for families:

Low wages result in low family incomes and high levels of economic insecurity, despite high levels of employment and rising rates of female participation. (CCSD et al., 2008, p. 27)

Fleury (2008) also concluded that while the increased work hours of family members provided a buffer against poverty, that employment of one or both parents is no guarantee of income security:

However, even parents' substantial work effort does not always protect children from low income if salary and working hours are insufficient. (p. 22)

These studies provide an overview of which families are most likely to experience the effects of poverty, and indicate the growing vulnerability of families in an economy that requires two income earners to attain a standard of living that used to be possible with one income earner.

### **The fewer the earners the higher the risk of poverty**

Labour market participation by one or more parents clearly has a significant impact on the economic well-being of families. Fleury's (2008) study that shows Canadian children who are in families with no wage earner are the most vulnerable to living in a low-income situation (71%), and families with one earner (23%) or two earners (5%) are the least vulnerable.

There are many reasons a parent may be unable to work including having a disability or other medical condition, language barriers, or having young children with no access to affordable, quality childcare. Parents who face systemic barriers such as employment discrimination are doubly vulnerable. Lack of access to affordable housing or adequate transportation also may prevent families from moving to areas where employment opportunities are available.

### **Economic restructuring increases income inequality among families**

The *Growing Up in North America* (CCSD et al., 2008) report identifies the growing income inequality between high- and low-income families with children as a significant factor affecting the well-being of children in the United States and Canada. Fleury's (2008) in-depth analysis of low-income families in Canada also reported growing income inequality over the past decade. She notes that the average income of \$21,400 for low-income families with children in 2004 was about 3.4 times lower than the average income of \$72,800 for non low-income families.

This disparity is particularly evident in BC. In 2006, the average family income of the wealthiest 10% of families with children was \$201,490. This represented an increase of \$47,591 since 1989, after adjusting for inflation. In contrast, the average family income for the 10% of families in the lowest income group was \$15,657, a decrease of \$1,309 since 1989 (First Call, 2008a). This

means that the *increase* in income between 1989 and 2006 for the wealthiest families was three times greater than the *total* income the poorest 10% of families lived on for all of 2006.

Growing income inequality among families has many educational implications. First, low-income students who attend schools in communities where these vast income disparities exist may feel especially marginalized. Second, many researchers have documented the adverse impact of socioeconomic factors on educational outcomes (Brownell, Roos, & Fransoo et al., 2006; Levin & Riffel, 2000)—these are likely to intensify with the growing income inequality between the wealthiest and poorest of families. Third, families in affluent communities are better able to raise school funds from other sources to compensate for shortfalls in education funding. Affluent communities are also most likely to actively recruit and attract international students, bringing millions of dollars in tuition fees into the district. Schools in areas most affected by poverty, with large numbers of vulnerable students, may be the most in need and the least able to protect the quality of education arising from inadequate funding.

### **Growth of precarious employment leaves families vulnerable to poverty**

The struggle for families with children to earn a living wage needs to be located in the context of economic restructuring within North America and globally. The report *Growing Up in North America* (CCSD et al., 2008) points to global restructuring and economic integration in North America as forces shaping the economic well-being of families. These market changes have resulted in a polarized labour market characterized by a growing pool of precarious low-wage employment in the sales and service sector and higher wage jobs in the knowledge economy, requiring technical and professional training.

The Fleury study (2008) revealed that the working conditions of low-income families with children were “less favourable than other workers” and that they tended to work 500 fewer hours, have atypical work schedules, earn less than \$10 per hour, be non-unionized, and be without benefits.

Uma Rani (2008), in a report that examines the impact of changing work patterns on income inequality, documents the expansion of part-time and temporary employment in advanced economies over the past fifteen years. Women are disproportionately located in part-time jobs, often to balance work and family responsibilities. The report notes that countries with supportive childcare policies and individual taxation saw a significant reduction in the incidence of part-time employment.

Temporary employment also increased across all age categories, with a higher share of these jobs held by women. Rani cites a number of factors underlying this shift, including increased competitiveness in product markets and the fragmentation and outsourcing of work due to technological change. Canada is listed as having the sixth highest incidence of temporary employment (about 12%) in 2006, out of 24 advanced economies (Rani, 2008).

According to MacPhail and Bowles (2009), the risk of working in temporary employment has increased more in BC than the rest of Canada. Their survey of casual workers in Vancouver and Prince George found that 80% do not choose temporary employment and are seeking permanent work.

Small business is often touted as the engine of the economy, yet Fleury (2008) found low-income children were more likely to live in situational poverty if a parent was self-employed. According to Statistics Canada, in 2005, average earnings from self-employment were \$12,000 for women and \$20,080 for men (2008).

Economic restructuring and market forces may also be making it increasingly difficult for new immigrants to move from an unstable to a stable employment situation after arriving in Canada. Statistics Canada (Ostrovsky, 2008) concluded that, based on earnings in the first four years after landing in Canada, earnings instability of immigrants who came to Canada between 1998 and 2000 was substantially higher than those who came to Canada in the early to mid 1980s. The study also found that earnings inequality increased over the last two decades among those newly immigrated to Canada.

### **Regressive government policy fosters expansion of low-wage employment**

The British Columbia government introduced regressive labour market policies which act to reinforce the expansion of the low-wage sector of the economy. Not only did the government resist calls by anti-poverty advocates to raise the minimum wage, they implemented a \$6 per hour training wage. The BC government also weakened labour-standard provisions for non-unionized workers which only served to foster the expansion of the low-wage sector and undermine the rights of these workers. MacPhail and Bowles (2009) raise this point in reporting on their research on casual employment in British Columbia.

The BC government also enacted legislation to replace unionized hospital service jobs that provided a living wage and benefits with low-wage jobs in the private sector. This was a significant setback for women workers, in particular. According to the Canadian Labour Congress (Jackson, 2004), unions have been instrumental in improving wages and working conditions for women in Canada. In 2003, union women earned 37% more per hour than non-union women. This reduced the gender-earnings gap with union women earning 90.6% as much as union men compared to 77.8% for non-union women and men. Union women also had a significantly lower incidence of involuntary job loss than non-union women in 2000. A new U.S. study by the Centre for Economic and Policy Research (Schmitt, 2008) reported that union membership improved wages and benefits for women, by as much as one additional year of education.

## **Lack of affordable housing contributes to family poverty**

The report *Growing Up in North America* (CCSD et al., 2008) also identifies the escalation of housing prices in the United States and Canada as resulting in rising shelter costs and poor housing conditions for low-income families. By 2000, about two-thirds (69.3%) of low-income families with children lived in unaffordable housing compared to 21.4% of all families in Canada (CCSD et al., 2008).

Barbara Ehrenreich (2001), in her book *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* argues that poverty persists in part because while “rents are exquisitely sensitive to market forces, wages clearly are not” (p. 201). Based on her experience working in minimum-wage jobs, she concludes:

So the problem goes beyond my personal failures and miscalculations. Something is wrong, very wrong, when a single person in good health, a person who in addition possesses a working car, can barely support herself by the sweat of her brow. You don't need a degree in economics to know that wages are too low and rents are too high. (p. 199)

## **Education makes a difference**

There is considerable evidence that education buffers families against poverty. Fleury (2008) found that the education level of a parent protected children from persistent poverty but not short-term poverty, indicating that education can help families to move out of poverty in the longer-term. Data published in the *Growing Up in North America* report (CCSD et al., 2008) shows that the child poverty rate in 2000 was five times higher for parents with less than a secondary education (27.6%) compared to parents who completed a university or college education (5.4%), and twice as high as families where a parent completed secondary/vocational or some post-secondary education.

Overall, education results in higher-than-average earnings. In 2007, employees with a Master's or Doctoral degree earned an average of \$30.44 per hour, 75% more than employees with just a high school diploma. Since 1997, the hourly wage in constant 2007 dollars declined for workers with no high school diploma, and increased by 5% for those with a post-secondary certificate. Wages stayed about the same for employees with a Master's or Doctoral degree (Statistics Canada, 2008).

While a gender gap in wages persists, it narrows with each level of education. In 2007, women with a bachelor's degree earned 85 cents for every dollar earned by men, while women with Grade 8 or less earned 72 cents for every dollar earned by men (Statistics Canada, 2008).

## **Aboriginal employment and education**

Completing a secondary education certificate almost doubles the employment rate for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginals (Richards, Hove, & Afolabi, 2008). Overall, graduation rates are

much lower for Aboriginal students, especially for those living on-reserve (Richards, 2008). The low graduation rate limits the employment opportunities of thousands of Aboriginal adults in BC, making them especially vulnerable to poverty. The employment rate for Aboriginal people who completed a university degree in 2006 was slightly higher than for non-Aboriginal people (Richards et al., 2008). These findings suggest that a comprehensive plan to address the barriers Aboriginal students face in completing their education is essential to reducing persistent high levels of child poverty.

### **Education is a buffer against poverty but no guarantee**

The authors of *Growing Up in North America* (CCSD et al., 2008) conclude that a lack of post-secondary education poses a significant barrier to moving between the low-wage labour market and the higher-paid jobs associated with the knowledge economy.

An exception to this trend is the high paying jobs in the primary resource sector, such as oil and gas extraction. A 2008 Statistics Canada report on Canadian wages revealed that about 12% of employees earning \$20 – \$29 per hour had less than a Grade 8 education. Recently, the Alberta government appealed to employers in the oil and gas industry not to hire young people who discontinued their secondary education to take high-paying jobs in northern Alberta.

Of more concern is that nearly 1 out of 7 Canadian workers with a university degree, aged 25 to 64 years earned less than \$12 per hour in 2007 (Statistics Canada, 2008). The 2008 report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance*, shows Canada having the highest proportion (18%) of highly educated individuals aged 25 to 64 years earning less than half the median wage—the worst record of 27 OECD countries.

Uma Rani (2008), of the International Institute for Labour Studies, cautions that the restructuring of labour markets in Western economies means that the quality, higher salaried, and more stable forms of employment are being reserved for a smaller pool of well-educated workers while the pool of low quality, insecure jobs are growing. Unless there is a trend away from this polarization, education in and of itself may not be enough for individuals and families to move out of poverty.

### **What did Canada do to mitigate the effects of economic restructuring on family income?**

On November 25, 2008, the Canadian Council on Social Development presented an overview of poverty reduction initiatives in Canada, concluding that the direct effect of the tax/transfer system on rates of low income and depth of poverty has remained unchanged since 1989. In other words, government policy initiatives to address poverty have not been sufficient to mitigate the effects of market restructuring on income levels.

The report *Growing Up in North America* (CCSD et al., 2008) noted that government spending as a percentage of GDP fell from 18.8% to 16.7% between 1990 and 2000. The researchers

identify three trends in Canadian government expenditures that affected family incomes—reduced social spending, reduced transfers to the provinces, and the introduction of more narrowly targeted programs. They note that the proportion of children in receipt of transfers has fallen as Canada moved to more narrowly targeted income-support programs.

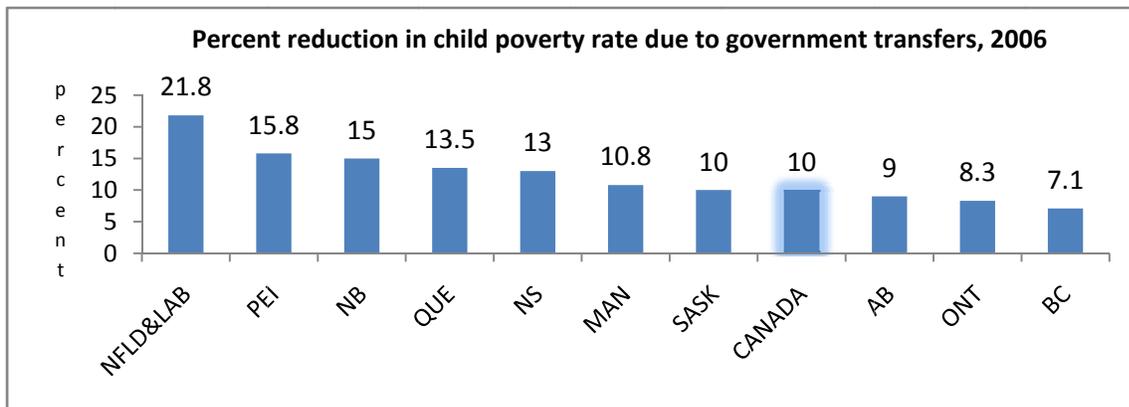
Fleury (2008) concludes that the effect of taxes and transfer payments targeted to children reduced the rate of low-income children in Canada by 8% to 9% each year since 1994. However, these policies did less to help families living in severe low income situations than ten years previously.

### Other provinces have acted

Perhaps most disturbing is how poorly BC fares in its efforts to reduce child poverty compared to other provinces. In its *2008 Report Card on Child Poverty, First Call* (2008a) published data to show how much higher the child poverty rate in each province would be without the taxes and transfers that are currently in place to improve income levels for families with children. Chart 6 (below) shows the amount by which each province reduced the child poverty rate in 2006. This provides a measure of the relative progress provincial governments have made in reducing child poverty.

Government transfers in BC reduced the market child poverty rate by only 7.1% in 2006, the lowest in the country. Chart 3 shows that several provinces have made remarkable progress in reducing child poverty rates with government transfers. Most notable are Newfoundland and Labrador (-21.8%), New Brunswick (-15.0%), Prince Edward Island (-15.8%), and Québec (-13.5%).

**Chart 3: Percent reduction in child poverty rate due to government transfers, 2006**



BCTF Research chart and calculations created with data cited in *First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition* (2008a).

Québec chose a different approach, implementing a comprehensive framework of “family-friendly” policies to address the underlying causes of family poverty. This approach seeks to reduce family poverty while supporting families to balance work and family responsibilities. To achieve this goal, Québec provided parents with universal access to affordable childcare,

expanded maternity and parental leave programs, and consolidated and increased income supports/benefits for one- and two-parent families. Working parents are also eligible for up to ten days leave per year for childcare (Krull, 2007).

Using a Market Basket Measure, which is most sensitive to provincial differences, the probability of a child being low-income in Québec in 2004 was 8% compared to 23% for a child in British Columbia (Fleury, 2008). The Québec example shows the rest of Canada that it is within our means, and a reasonable expectation, to make significant progress in improving the economic well-being of the families living in poverty.

Strong economic growth accompanied by budget surpluses has not resulted in a meaningful reduction in child poverty. Inflation-adjusted GDP in BC (November to November) grew by 4.4% in 2005 and 2006 (BC Ministry of Finance, 2008). In spite of this, British Columbia continued to record the highest child poverty rate in Canada. Between 2005 and 2006, the before-tax child poverty rate in BC increased from 20.9% to 21.9%, resulting in 7,000 more children living in poverty than the previous year. (First Call, 2007 and 2008a).

Meanwhile, several provinces less prosperous than British Columbia made significant progress in reducing child poverty rates. British Columbia has the resources to make a difference. What is lacking is the vision and political will to implement a poverty-reduction strategy to improve the economic well-being of over 180,000 children.

### **Educational vulnerability increases**

The effects of these policies will be felt in the British Columbia school system for years to come. Recent research suggests that the vulnerability of young children increased during a period of sustained high child poverty rates in British Columbia.

The Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) assesses the vulnerability of Kindergarten students on a number of indicators, using the Early Development Instrument. This instrument measures several dimensions of early childhood development including physical, social, and emotional well-being; cognitive/language skills; and communication skills/general knowledge (Hertzman and Irwin, 2007). HELP (2007) reported on a comparison of two periods in which these measures were taken—2001 to 2004 and 2004 to 2007. This comparison shows the Neighbourhood Vulnerability on one or more scales increased in 26 school districts and decreased in 7 districts between the two periods of data collection.

It is long past time for the provincial government to heed the call to develop and implement a poverty reduction strategy, following the lead of more progressive provinces in Canada. According to a poll commissioned by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in October 2008 by Environics, 87% of British Columbians say the Prime Minister and premiers need to set concrete targets and timelines to reduce poverty and measure their progress (Klein et al., 2008).

## **Pro-active solutions to improving the economic well-being of families**

The report *Growing Up in North America* (CCSD et al., 2008) recommends that a comprehensive poverty-reduction strategy include a mix of social and labour policies to provide income supports to alleviate and prevent child and family poverty, adjustment assistance programs to families affected by economic dislocation, and access to affordable housing and quality childcare. Reform of labour market policy is also needed to encourage the growth of better quality jobs as well as policies to improve access to education and health services.

Rothman and Noble (2008), researchers with Campaign 2000—a non-partisan, cross-Canada coalition of over 120 national, provincial, and community organizations—calculate that an increase of maximum National Child Benefit from \$3,271 to \$5,100 per child is necessary to achieve a significant poverty reduction. Campaign 2000 also recommends that the Canadian government expand eligibility for Employment Insurance, increase federal work tax credits to \$2,400 per year, implement a national housing plan with substantial funding for social housing, provide affordable and accessible early childhood education and care, develop an equity plan to address barriers to achieving equal opportunity for all children, and implement a specific poverty reduction strategy for Aboriginal families.

In December 2008, the BC Office of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released the report *A Poverty Reduction Plan for BC* (Klein et al., 2008). Recommendations include improved access and levels of income support for non-employed individuals, improvements to the minimum wage and restoration of employment standards protection, focusing efforts on groups most vulnerable to poverty, immediate expansion of affordable housing, universally funded childcare, an increase in funding for post-secondary training for low-income individuals, and an expansion of home-care support and residential-care services. The report suggests concrete targets and timelines for implementing each of these recommendations.

The Living Wage Campaign recently launched in Vancouver and Victoria by First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, drawing on the success of such a campaign in London, England holds much promise (T. Richards et al., 2008). To be successful, this campaign will need a government that can engage employers to take more responsibility for improving the economic security of families, and introduce social and labour policy supportive of families with children, such as those implemented in Québec.

## **Well-funded education plan is needed**

Finally, an essential component of a poverty reduction strategy is to develop a well-funded education plan for how best to support all students, including the growing number of vulnerable children entering the British Columbia school system.

Hertzman and Irwin of the Human Early Learning Partnership (2007) recommend universal access to programs to address the early learning needs of vulnerable children in British

Columbia, based on their assessment of early child development of Kindergarten students in BC. They concluded that:

While the highest risk of vulnerability is found in the poorest neighbourhoods, the largest number of children with developmental vulnerabilities is spread across middle-class neighbourhoods. (p. 4)

Levin and Riffel's (2000) research suggests that with the exception of some urban areas, few school districts have advocacy groups to effectively lobby on issues related to poverty and education. Without this political pressure, school districts and provincial governments have not made poverty a priority issue, either because policy-makers do not perceive it as their problem, or do not believe they can do anything about it. In an era of funding cutbacks, urban schools have increasingly had to defend funding for inner-city programs.

Levin and Riffel argue that while educators cannot solve poverty, there is much that can be done to support students. Potential solutions include whole school instructional approaches, schools working closely with parents and the broader community (e.g. community liaison workers), clothing and nutritional programs, the elimination of school fees, early learning programs, and community and economic development.

Brownell et al. (2006) make a number of recommendations arising from their population-based research in Manitoba on socioeconomic status and educational outcomes. They recommend a social program design be universal with a need-based focus and include early childhood programs, quality childcare, parenting programs, early school years intervention programs, as well as programs to address the gender gap and to prevent withdrawal from secondary education.

Flessa's (2007) comprehensive literature review on poverty and education for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario evaluates existing responses and potential solutions to address poverty and education concerns. He cautions that while schools support the concept of school-community connections, "difficulty arises in moving from generic interest to concrete policies and practices that make real connections between schools and homes" (p. 26). This is in part due to an unacknowledged difference in expectations, values, and socioeconomic position between predominantly middle class institutions and the community with which they are seeking to make connections. He argues that the deficit framework that has historically defined educational policy creates an adversarial relationship between school and community, and needs to be challenged for meaningful progress to take place.

## **Summary**

Research shows that BC has the highest child and family poverty rates in the country. Poverty affects students in both rural and urban areas. Educators across the province are increasingly challenged to help students overcome educational barriers related to poverty. This report encourages educators to challenge assumptions and beliefs about causes of poverty. Doing so can

build empathy and understanding, and prevent low-income students from internalizing the negative message that they are to blame for their economic circumstances.

The paper provides an in-depth look at structural factors which individuals lack control over that contribute to increasing family poverty rates. The erosion of family income over the past decade makes it difficult for families to survive on one income, yet maternity and childcare benefits in BC and Canada lag well behind European countries. Rapidly rising housing costs are a significant factor driving poverty rates in BC. So, too, is the expansion of low-paying, insecure employment that results in some parents working at two or more jobs to make ends meet. Education can buffer family poverty, yet the rising cost of post-secondary education prevents many families from gaining the skills necessary to move out of low-wage employment. Governments have not done enough to foster the expansion of quality jobs that provide a living wage. Minimum wage and other income supports for low-income families have not risen in proportion to the cost of living.

These are all structural causes of poverty. While they may not be under the control of an individual, all of these factors can be addressed through social and economic policy. Scandinavian countries have shown that economic productivity, family-friendly policies, and poverty reduction can successfully coexist. Some provinces in Canada have taken the lead, especially Québec, with promising results. If the British Columbia government is committed to having “the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent” (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 15), policy-makers can start by taking action to end family poverty, thereby removing a significant barrier to educational success.

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# British Columbia Teachers' Federation

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## ***2012 Poverty and Education survey: A teacher's perspective***

# **Overview of the findings**

This survey was conducted by BCTF Research  
in collaboration with the Anti-poverty action group  
of the Committee for Action on Social Justice

November 2013

## Contributions and acknowledgments

### **BCTF Research Department**

- Research design, data analysis, and reporting of survey results: Margaret White, Senior Research Analyst
- Assistance in all phases of the research project: Anne Field, Research Assistant
- Leadership and support for the project: Larry Kuehn, Director, Research and Technology Division

### **Committee for Action on Social Justice—Anti-poverty action group**

As staff and committee members have changed since the study began, we would like to acknowledge those who contributed, past and present, at various phases of the research project.

- Leadership, co-ordination, and survey promotion: Kathy Hartman, Assistant Director, Professional and Social Issues Division
- Leadership in the early phases of survey design: James Chamberlain, Assistant Director, Professional and Social Issues Division (up to August 2012)
- Pre-testing, survey promotion, and/or input into survey results: Amy Dash, Sue Spalding, Debbie Sabourin, Annie Ohana (current members as of May, 2013)
- Survey development and questionnaire design: Ilse Hill (former member of the CASJ Anti-poverty action group)

We would like to acknowledge former members of the CASJ Anti-poverty action group (Ilse Hill, Julia MacRae, Stacey Kemp), and Linda Young of the Vancouver Elementary School Teachers' Association Anti-poverty Committee, for their contribution to the focus-group research in phase one of the study. We also wish to acknowledge the contribution of all the teachers who took the time to complete the survey, assisted in the pre-testing, and the teachers who participated in the focus groups that led to the development of this survey.

We also wish to thank Adrienne Montani of First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, for taking the time to review a draft of the survey, and First Call for providing us with opportunities to share the research results with community groups across BC.

*We also wish to acknowledge the BC Teachers' Federation for supporting this project.*

# Overview<sup>1</sup> of the findings

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx> for detailed reports on each of the topic areas.

# Introduction

## Rationale for the study

Over the past decade, BC has experienced persistently-high child poverty rates, the worst of all provinces for most years. Between 2002 and 2009, BC recorded the highest *after-tax* child poverty rate for eight years in a row<sup>2</sup>. Child poverty appears to be worsening, with the most recent Statistics Canada data showing that BC's child poverty rate increased from 10.5% in 2010 to 11.3% in 2011, with 93,000 children living in poverty<sup>3</sup>. This means tens of thousands of BC families are struggling economically, whose children are dealing with the effects of poverty at home and at school. Considerable research exists on factors contributing to child poverty in Canada<sup>4</sup> and on the impact of socio-economic factors on educational outcomes<sup>5</sup>. Much less is known about how teachers in BC public schools perceive the effects of poverty on students, how they respond to poverty in the classroom, and what teachers view as necessary to support students to overcome educational barriers related to poverty. For this reason, the BC Teachers' Federation conducted a provincial survey of BC teachers on poverty and education issues.

## Purpose and objectives

The *2012 Poverty and Education survey: A teacher's perspective* was conducted by BCTF Research in collaboration with the BCTF Anti-poverty action group of the Committee for Action on Social Justice, building on the findings of focus group research that explored poverty and education issues with teachers in four school districts<sup>6</sup>. The purpose of the provincial survey was to assess whether and to what extent the focus group findings reflect teachers' experience across the province, to deepen our understanding of how poverty and education issues vary by regional, socio-economic, and school characteristics, and to identify what resources are most needed to address poverty within BC schools and the community.

The objectives of the survey were to document, from a teacher's perspective, the poverty-related needs of students, assess the adequacy of resources to meet these needs, and identify what is most needed to overcome educational barriers related to poverty. The survey also sought to learn what teachers view as priority areas for BCTF advocacy on poverty and education issues, and teacher recommendations for the provincial government.

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<sup>2</sup> First Call (2012), *2012 Child Poverty Report Card*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>3</sup> First Call: BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition. "Child poverty rate in British Columbia back to the worst, children of single moms hard hit." News release, July 5, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> See Albanese, P. (2010), *Child Poverty in Canada*, Oxford University Press, for a comprehensive review of Canadian literature and analysis of causes of child poverty, including p. 21, entitled "BC's Child Poverty Shame".

<sup>5</sup> See Brownell, M., Roos, N., Fransoo, R., et al. (2006), "Is the class half empty?: A population-based perspective on socioeconomic status and educational outcomes." *IRPP Choices*, 12(5), and Flessa, J.J. (2007), *Poverty and Education: Towards Effective Action: A Review of the Literature*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

<sup>6</sup> White, M., Hill, I., Kemp, S., MacRae, J., and Young, L. (2012). *Poverty and education: A teacher's perspective—Summary of the findings of the focus group research*. BCTF Research report available at: <http://www.bctf.ca/uploadedFiles/Public/Publications/ResearchReports/2012-EI-01.pdf>

# Study design

## Survey design

The survey instrument was developed by BCTF Research in collaboration with members of the CASJ Anti-poverty action group, with the themes identified in the focus group research informing the design and content of the survey questions. The survey was pre-tested extensively with teachers from regions across BC. The survey instrument addresses topics such as hunger and school meal programs, school fees and participation in school-related activities, awareness and understanding of poverty, adequacy of resources to support low-income students and families, priority issues for advocacy and training, and professional development on poverty and education issues.

The questionnaire is comprised of structured closed-ended questions and open-ended questions to elicit teachers' thoughts, concerns, and suggestions about poverty and education issues.

## Survey sample and response

The *2012 Poverty and Education survey: A teacher's perspective* was open to all teachers in the BCTF membership (public school teachers in the province of British Columbia) who work with school-aged students and have a continuing or term teaching contract. All teachers who met the eligibility criteria, agreed to be contacted by the BCTF, and had a current e-mail address, were identified from the BCTF membership database. BCTF sent an initial e-mail invitation and follow-up reminder, with a direct link to the online survey embedded in the message. The survey remained accessible online until February 18, 2013.

The survey results presented in this report are based on 778 valid survey responses. As teachers work in a variety of teaching situations, several questions provided the option of "Does not apply". These responses are excluded before calculating the percentage responses to the question, with the number of valid responses indicated in the relevant charts (denoted as "n=").

## Analysis and reporting

The characteristics of teachers responding to the survey are compared to provincial teacher characteristics to detect areas of non-response bias. The survey data is analyzed with descriptive statistics (frequencies, comparison of means) with SPSS statistical software. Key variables for the analysis include regional zone, grades taught, and socio-economic context. Qualitative descriptive analysis<sup>7</sup> is the method used to analyze open-ended responses with Atlas-ti software.

This report provides an overview of the findings of the survey for six key topic areas (Hungry students and adequacy of resources to support them, School fees and participation in school-related activities, School attendance and poverty-related barriers, Staff awareness and understanding about poverty issues, Adequacy of resources to address poverty-related needs at the school, and "What is most needed to support students and families?"). A detailed report for each topic is being prepared, and will be available online ([bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx](http://bctf.ca/PovertyResearch.aspx)) in the coming weeks. These topic-specific reports provide a more in-depth analysis of how the results vary by zone, socio-economic context, years of teaching experience, and grades taught. These reports also include a summary of the qualitative analysis of the responses teachers provided to the open-ended questions in the survey.

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<sup>7</sup> Sandelowski, M. (2000). Whatever Happened to Qualitative Description? *Research in Nursing & Health*, 23, 334–340.

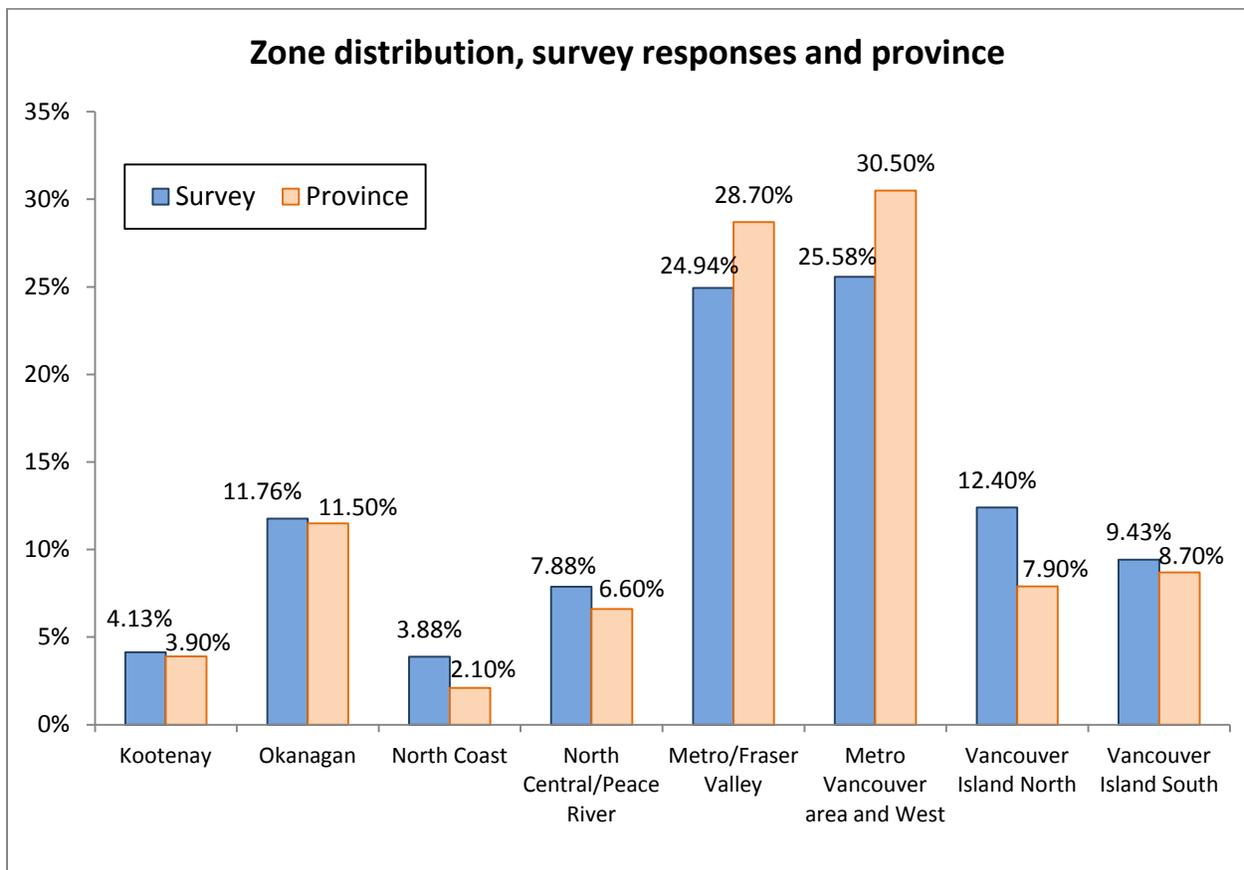
## Survey results

# Teachers who responded to the survey and the socio-economic context in which they teach

## Who completed the survey?

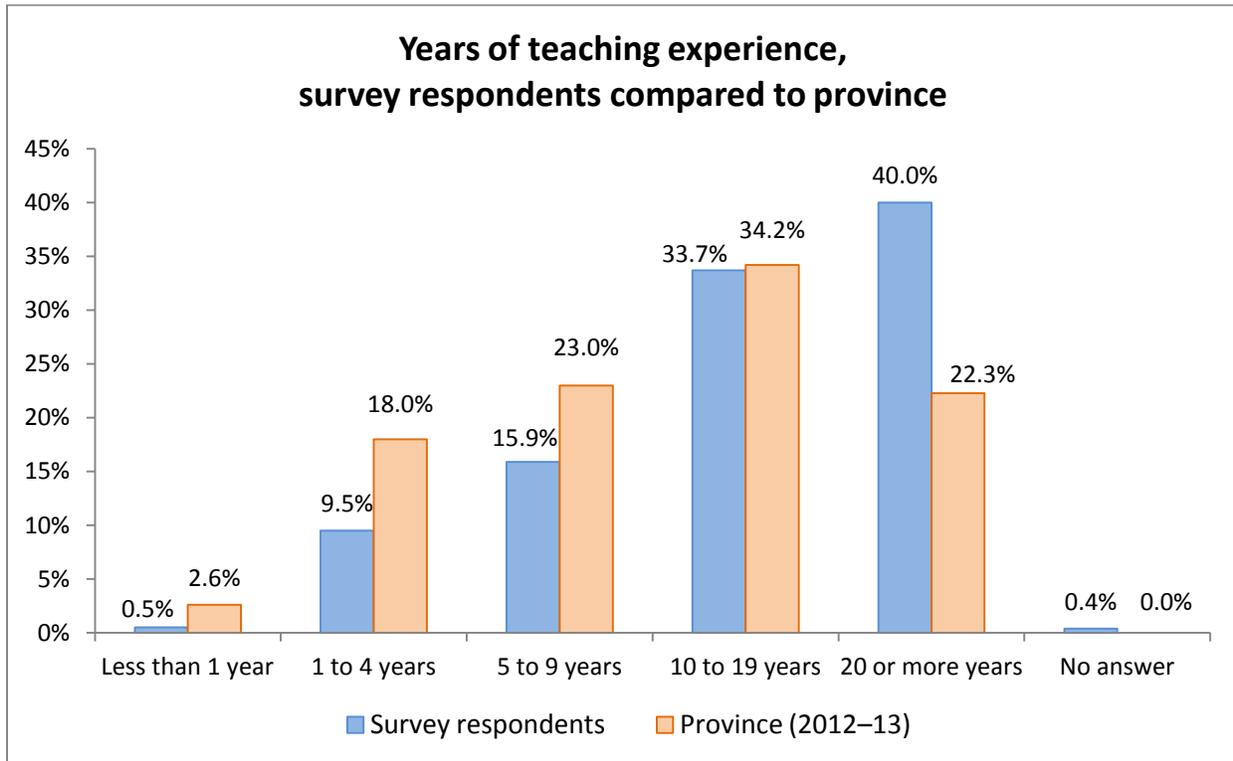
### Regional characteristics

The BC Teachers' Federation is a provincial organization, with representatives from 76 union locals and sub-locals in 60 school districts, grouped within eight regional zones across BC. A comparison of the distribution of survey responses to provincial membership data shows that all zones are well-represented in the survey. North Coast, North Central Peace, Vancouver Island North, and Vancouver Island South are slightly over-represented, and Metro/Fraser Valley and Metro Vancouver area and West are slightly under-represented in the survey. Almost half (42.8%) of survey respondents teach in urban areas, 28.4% teach in suburban areas, 22.4% teach in rural areas, and 1.9% teach in remote areas.



### Teacher characteristics

The majority of teachers responding to the survey have considerable teaching experience, with one-third (33.7%) having 10 to 19 years and 40% having 20 or more years of teaching experience. A comparison of the distribution of survey responses to 2012–13 provincial figures<sup>8</sup> for teachers by years of teaching experience indicates there is a bias that should be taken into consideration when interpreting results. Early-career teachers with less than 1 year experience (0.5% versus 2.6% in the province), 1 to 4 years experience (9.5% versus 18% in the province), and 5 to 9 years experience (15.9% versus 23% in the province), are under-represented in the survey responses. Late-career teachers are over-represented in the survey responses, with 40% having 20 or more years of teaching experience, compared to 22.3% of all teachers in the province.



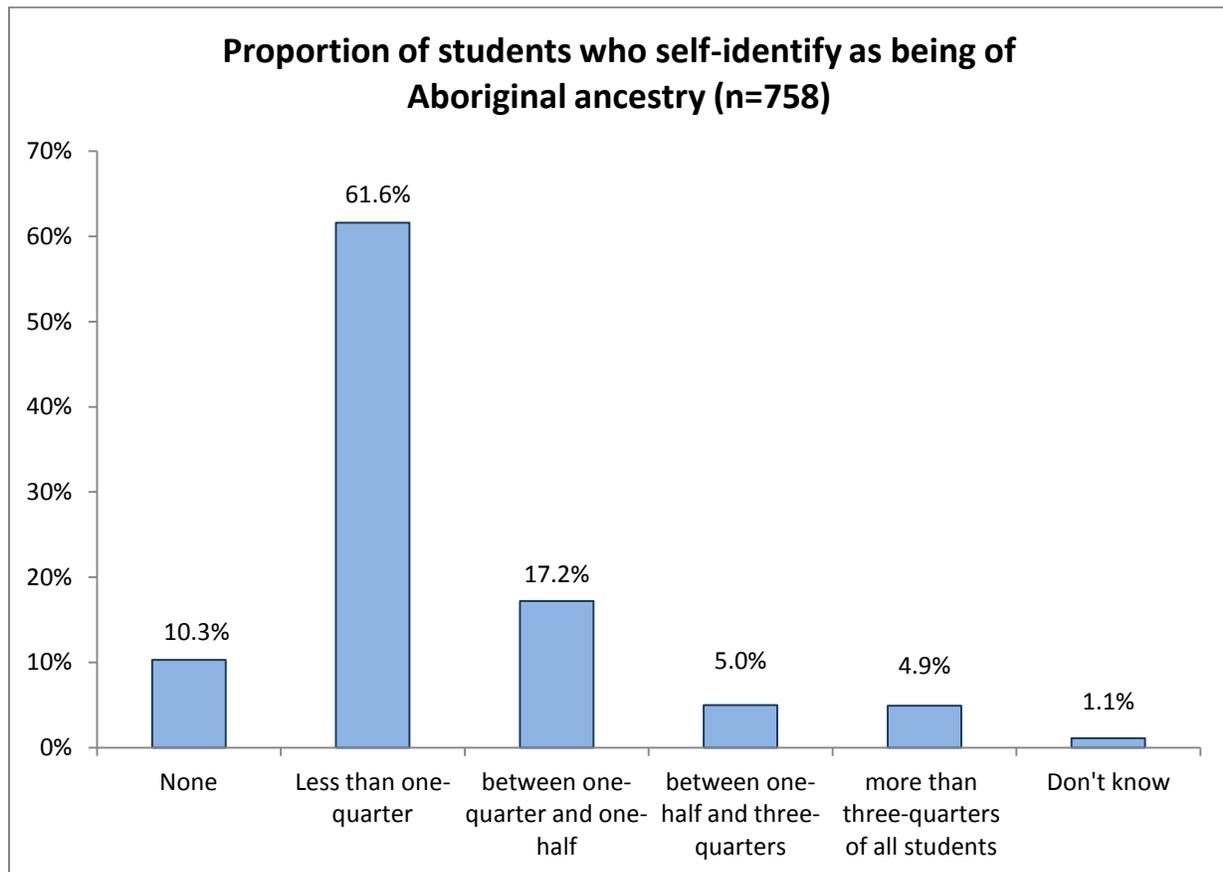
The survey respondents are distributed across all grade levels: 24% of respondents teach Kindergarten, 40.6% teach Grades 1 to 3, one-third (34.2%) teach Grades 4 to 7, 9.3% teach middle-school grades, and 30.7% of respondents teach Grades 8 to 12. About one-quarter of respondents (26.6%) have a teaching assignment as a learning specialist teacher, while 7.6% of respondents indicated they teach in an Alternate Education program.

<sup>8</sup> BCTF calculations based on figures in: Ministry of Education (2013). *Teacher Statistics—2012/13, Province—Public Schools*, January 2013, p. 3.

## Student characteristics

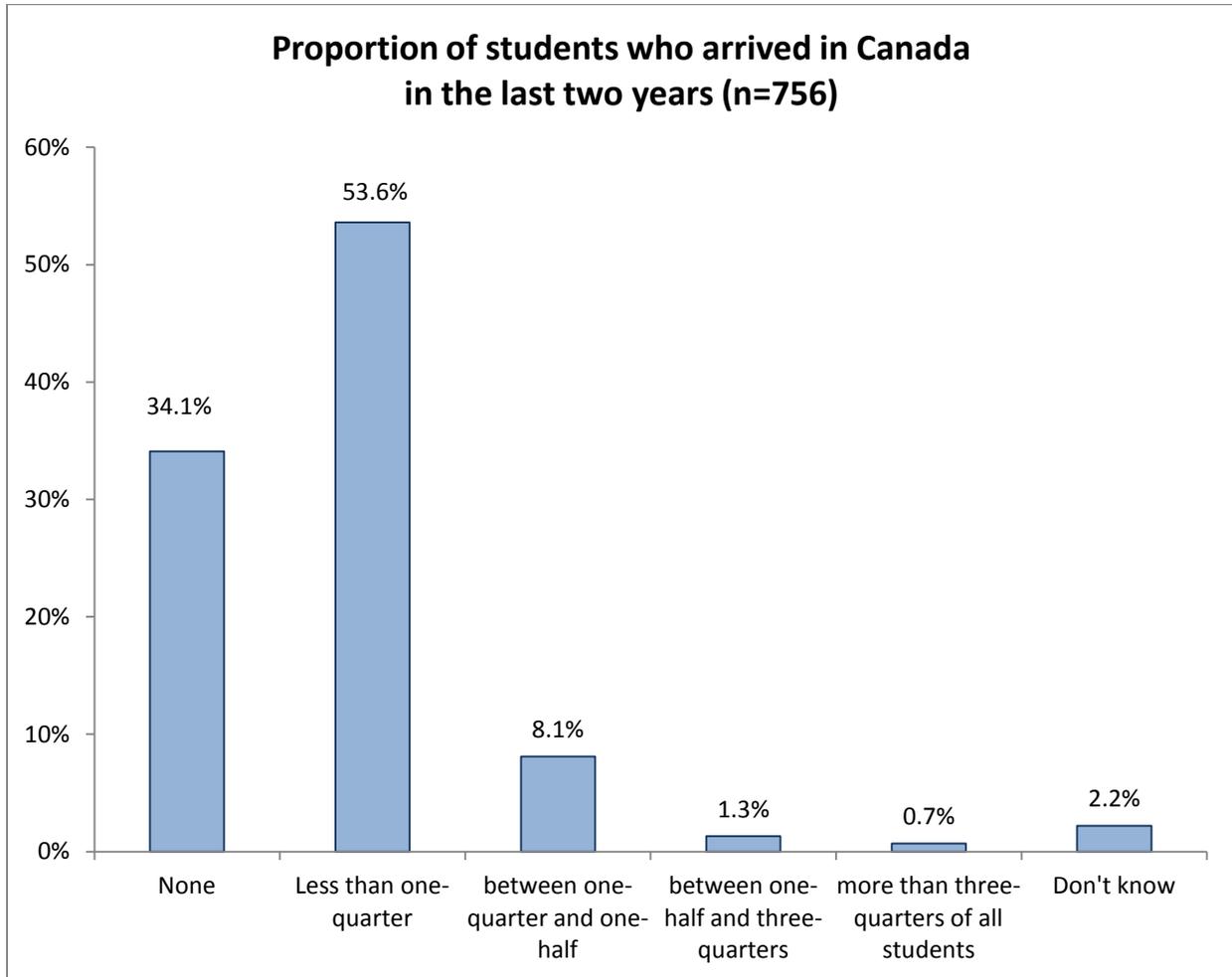
### *Students who self-identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry*

Most teachers responding to this survey have students in their class who self-identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry. Only one in ten (10.3%) respondents reported having no students self-identified as Aboriginal in the class they currently teach. About two-thirds (61.6%) of teachers indicate “Less than one-quarter” and 17.2% indicate “Between one-quarter and one-half” of the students they teach self-identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry. A small proportion of respondents teach in schools with a high Aboriginal student population, with 5% indicating “Between one-half and three-quarters” and 4.9% indicating “More than three-quarters” of the students they teach self-identify as being of Aboriginal ancestry.



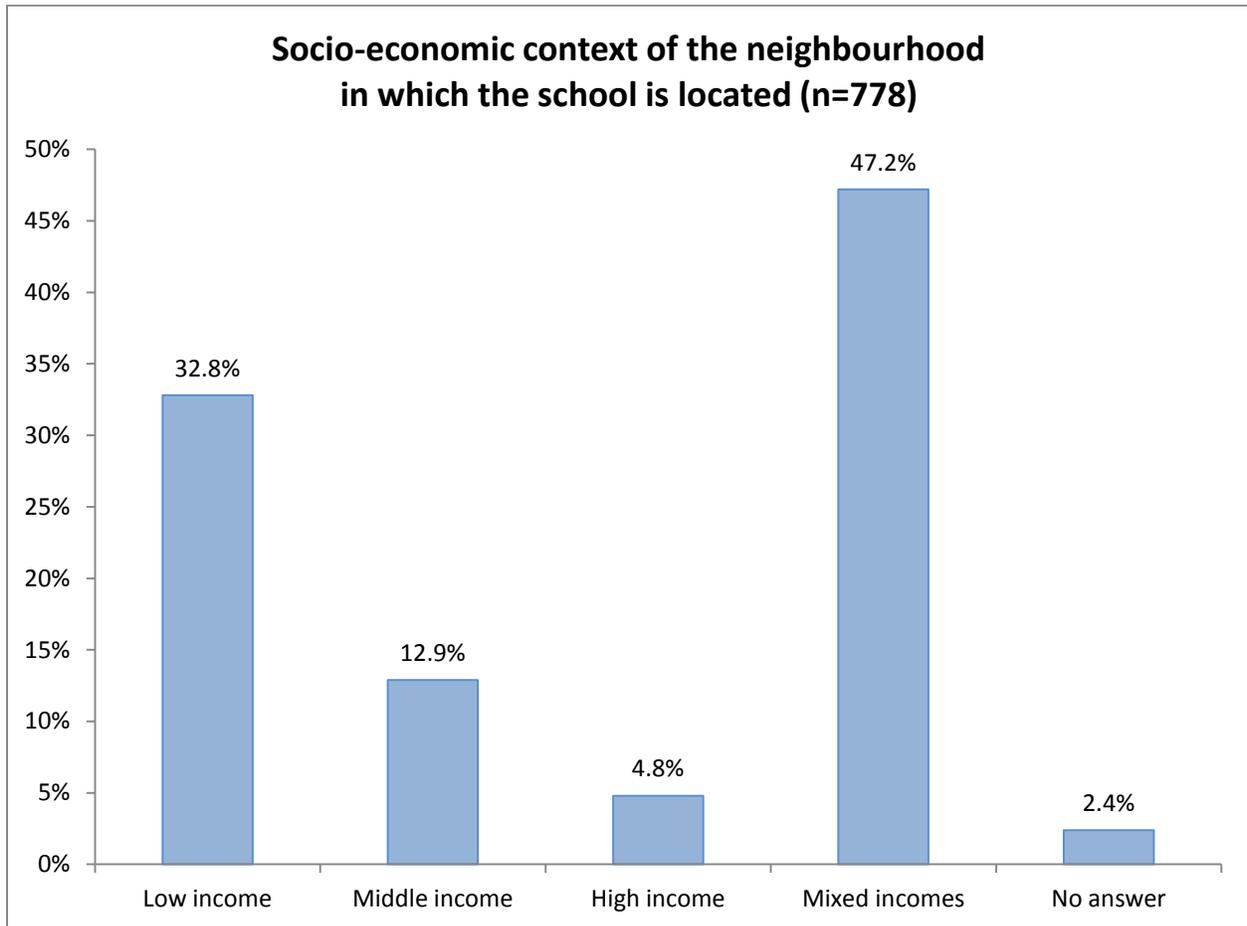
***Students who are newly immigrated to Canada***

One-third (34.1%) of survey respondents indicate having no students in their class who are newly immigrated to Canada. About one-half of respondents (53.6%) indicate having “Less than one-quarter” of students they teach who arrived in Canada in the last two years. In total, about one in ten respondents teach in classes with a high proportion of students who recently arrived in Canada, with 8.1% having “Between one-quarter and one-half”, 1.3% having “Between one-half and three-quarters”, and less than 1% having “More than three-quarters” of all students being newly immigrated to Canada.



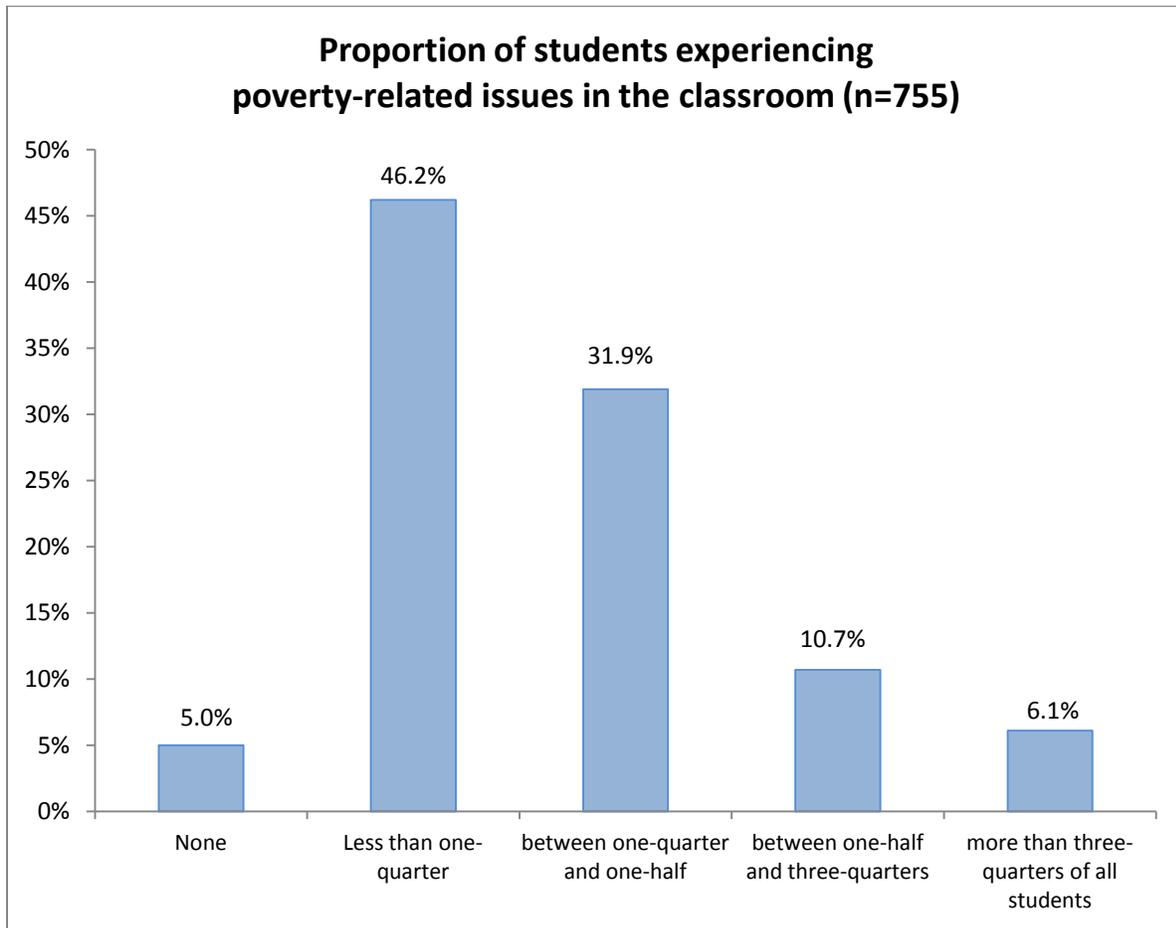
### Socio-economic context of the school

About one in three teachers (32.8% of the sample) teach in schools located in a low-income neighbourhood, almost half of respondents (47.2%) teach in schools located in mixed-income neighbourhoods, while 12.9% describe the socio-economic environment of their school as middle-income and 4.8% as high-income.



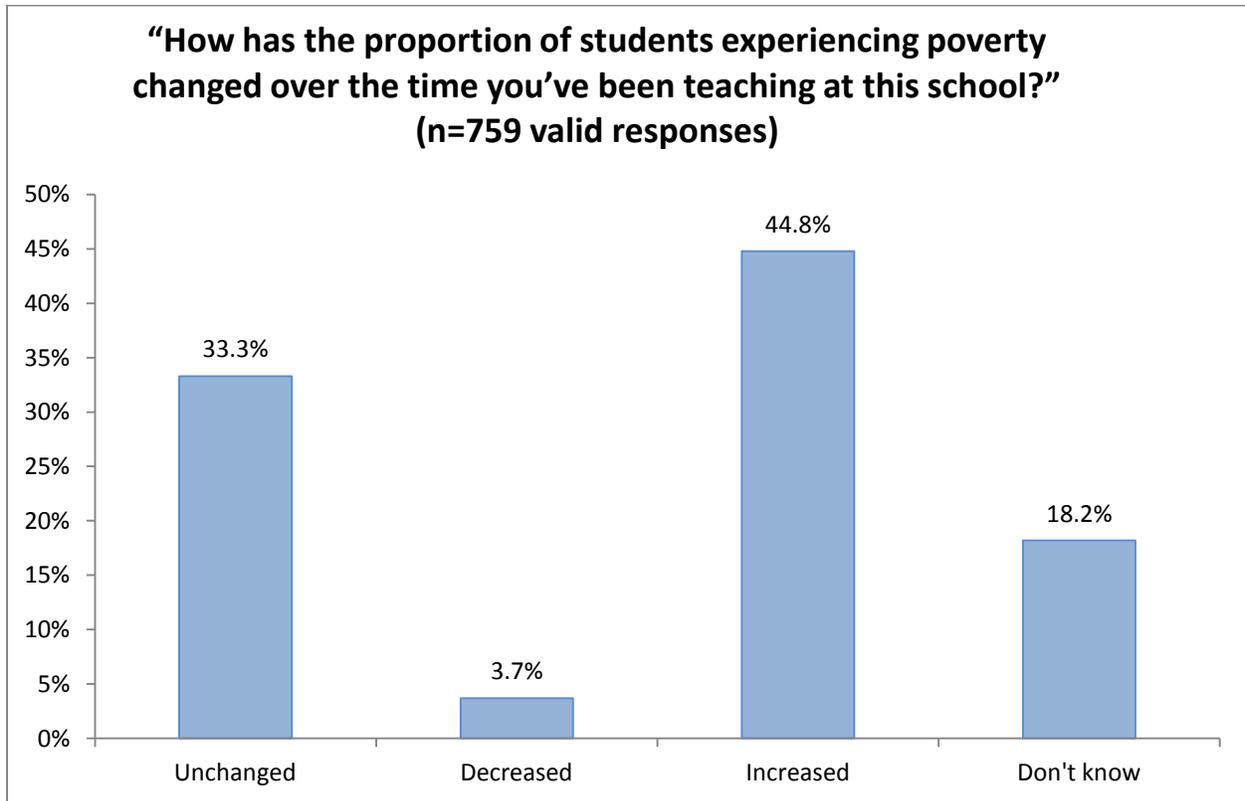
## Proportion of students experiencing poverty

Almost all teachers responding to the survey have students in their class who are experiencing poverty-related issues. Only 5% of teachers answered “None” of the students they teach are experiencing poverty. Almost half of the respondents (46.2%) are teaching in what could be characterized as lower-poverty schools, with “Less than one-quarter” of students experiencing poverty. The other half of respondents are teaching in what could be characterized as higher-poverty schools, with 31.9% indicating “Between one-quarter and one-half”, 10.7% indicating “Between one-half and three-quarters”, and 6.1% indicating “More than three-quarters” of all students experiencing poverty issues.



## Changes in proportion of students experiencing poverty

The survey asked teachers “How has the proportion of students experiencing poverty changed over the time you’ve been teaching at this school?” Almost one-half (44.8%) of the 759 teachers who responded to the question indicated the proportion of students experiencing poverty increased since they began teaching at the school. Only 3.7% reported a decrease in the proportion of students experiencing poverty, while one-third (33.3%) reported poverty remained unchanged. About one in five respondents (18.2%) did not know whether the proportion of students experiencing poverty had changed since they began teaching at the school.



The qualitative analysis provides insight into how the 2008 global recession, combined with high real-estate prices in urban areas, resulted in economic instability for many BC families with school-aged children. Teachers in non-urban areas described how the decline of local industries worsened the economic situation for many families. Teachers in urban areas tended to focus on the impact of high real-estate prices on family poverty. Some teachers described how these economic impacts are changing the socio-economic mix of their school as families move in search of stable employment and affordable housing. The comments also suggest that school closures, reconfiguration, and district policy on open school boundaries are contributing to changes in the socio-economic context of schools. One example given is low-income students having to move to schools located outside of their neighbourhood, and losing resources such as school meal programs as a result. Some teachers also described a trend of middle-income parents moving their children outside of the catchment area to schools located in more affluent areas.

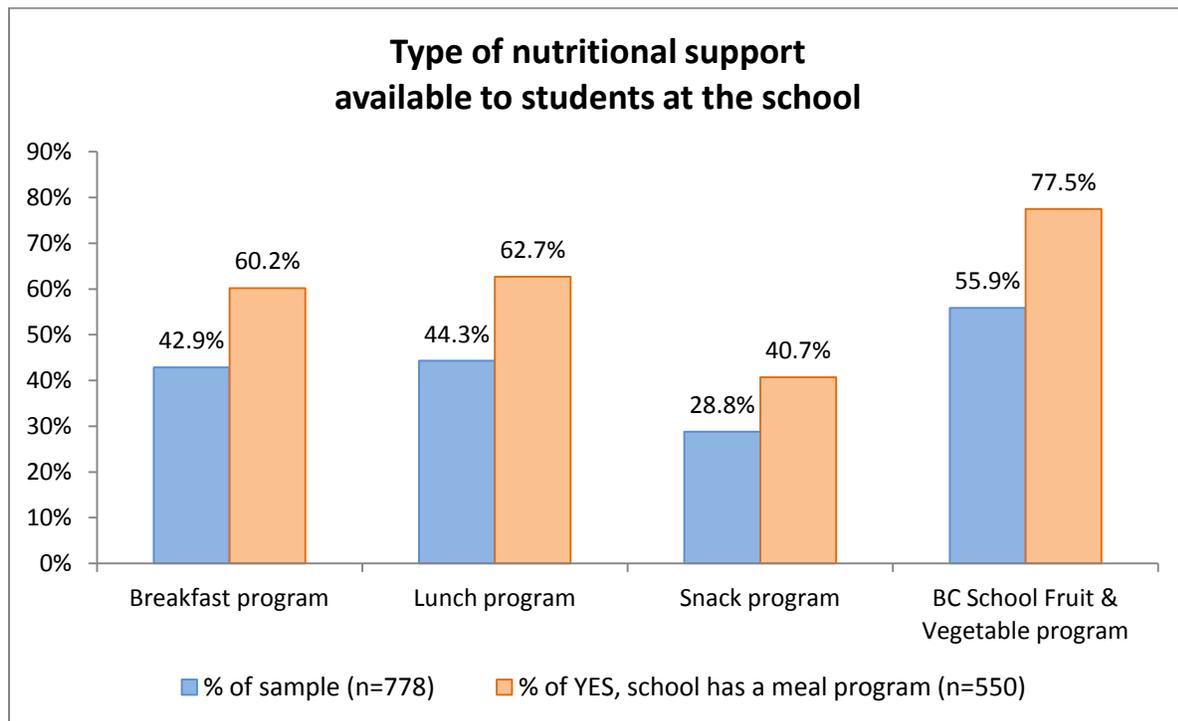
## Hungry students and adequacy of resources to support them

The objectives for this section of the *2012 Poverty and Education survey* are to document, from a teacher’s perspective, the extent of hungry students in BC classrooms, to assess the adequacy of school meal programs, and to explore reasons why families are sometimes reluctant to apply for financial assistance for school meal programs.

### Extent of hungry students and type of food programs offered

About 8 out of 10 teachers responding to the survey report having students in their class(es) who start the day hungry (80.6%) and who do not bring food for lunch and snacks (80.3%). Less than half of respondents indicated the school offers a Lunch program (44.3%) or Breakfast program (42.9%). About one-quarter (28.8%) of teachers indicated the school provided a Snack program (28.8%).

About one in five teachers indicated their school offered some other type of nutritional support. These included snack cupboards, sandwiches funded by donations from churches, community groups, firefighters, local businesses, and Parent Advisory Councils (PAC), with some offered only once or twice a week or on an emergency basis. Some schools have a cafeteria, providing vouchers to low-income students to purchase a lunch.



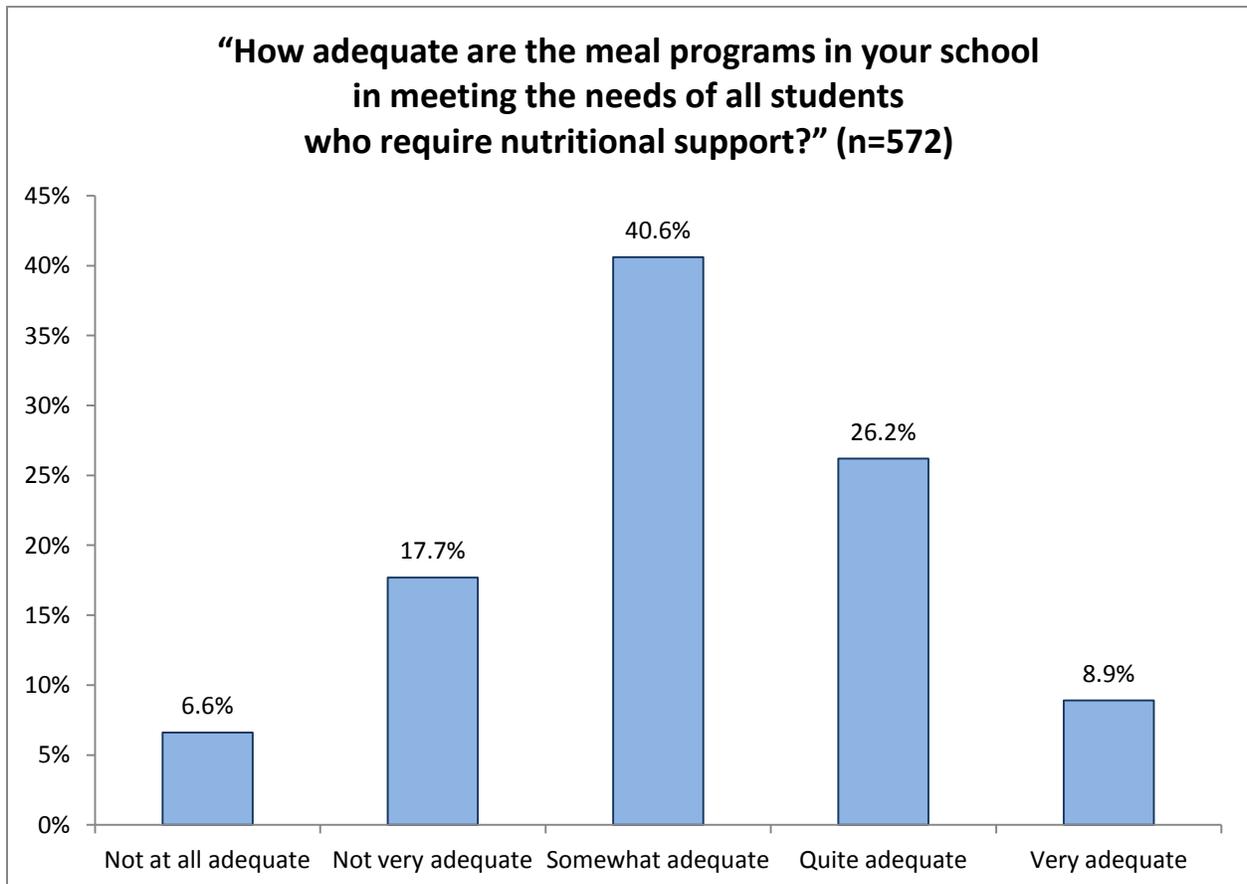
The survey findings suggest that when school meal programs fall short of need, many teachers are providing food for students. Several teachers commented that they bring food to school for students in need of breakfast, snacks, or lunch, or buy vouchers for students to participate in a meal program. Four in ten (40.2%) teachers indicated they bring food to school for students who

are hungry, spending an average of about \$30 per month (\$28.88) of their own money on food for students<sup>9</sup>.

Overall, the majority of teachers indicated their school provides some form of nutritional program, ranging from snacks to formalized meal programs. Of the 550 teachers (70.7%) who indicated some form of nutritional support at the school, half (50.2%) said they have students in their class who would benefit from school meal programs but do not participate. Reasons given by teachers as to why these students may not participate include the family cannot afford fee, the parent is not comfortable requesting financial assistance, the student is afraid of being judged by peers, and the food being served does not reflect cultural practices.

## Adequacy of school meal programs to meet the needs of students

Of the 572 teachers who rated the adequacy of school meal programs to meet the needs of all students who require nutritional support, about one-quarter (26.2%) rated the adequacy of meal programs as “Quite adequate” and 8.9% as “Very adequate”. About one in five teachers (17.7%) rated the adequacy of nutritional support as “Not very adequate”, and another 6.6% as “Not at all adequate”. The remainder (40.6%) rated the adequacy of school meal programs as “Somewhat adequate”.



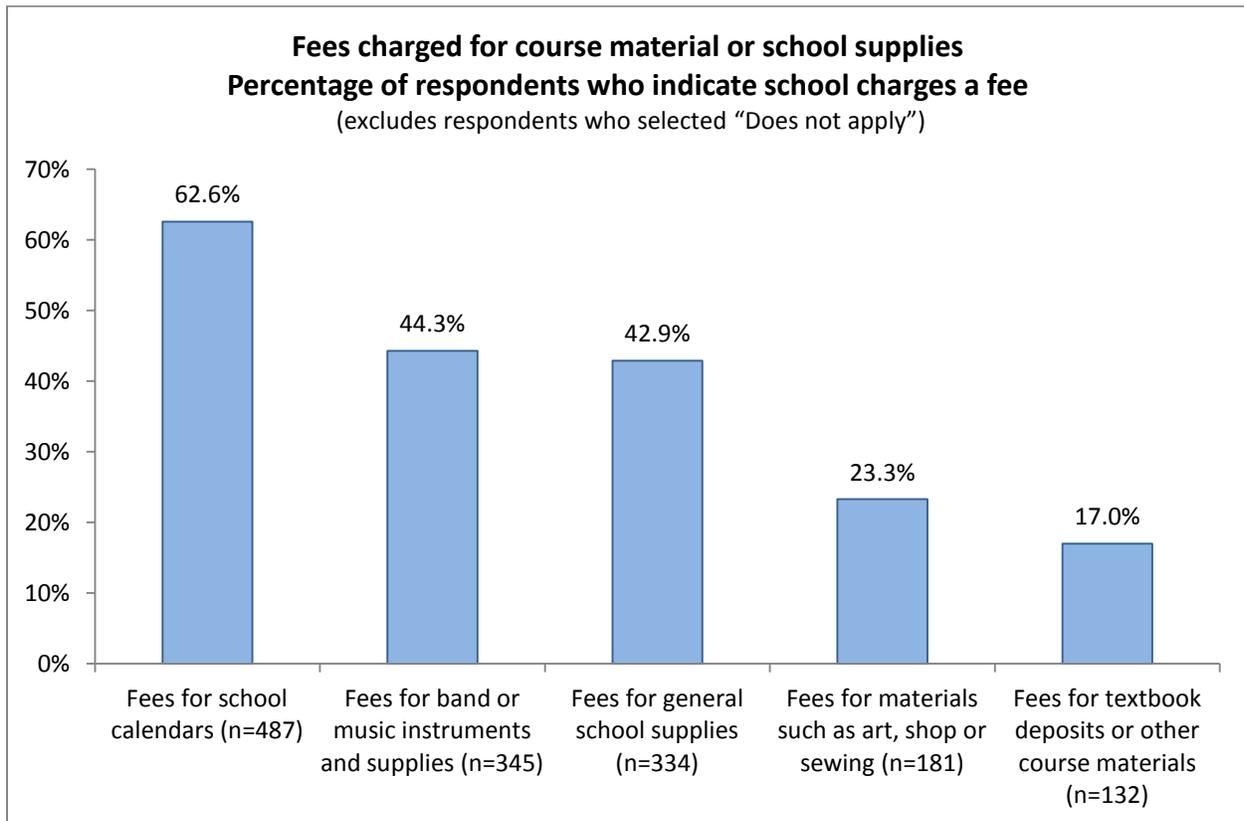
<sup>9</sup> Note: This average amount is based on figures provided by 291 respondents who indicated an amount spent.

## School fees and participation in school-related activities

The *School Act* requires schools to provide, free-of-charge to every school-aged student, the educational resources necessary to participate in the educational program, with a few exceptions. Boards may also charge a refundable deposit on educational resource materials. Where school boards are allowed to charge a fee for a program or materials, the *School Act* requires boards to have “established policies and procedures to facilitate participation by students of school age (resident of BC) who would otherwise be excluded from the course, class or program because of financial hardship”<sup>10</sup>.

### School fees and ability of families to pay fees

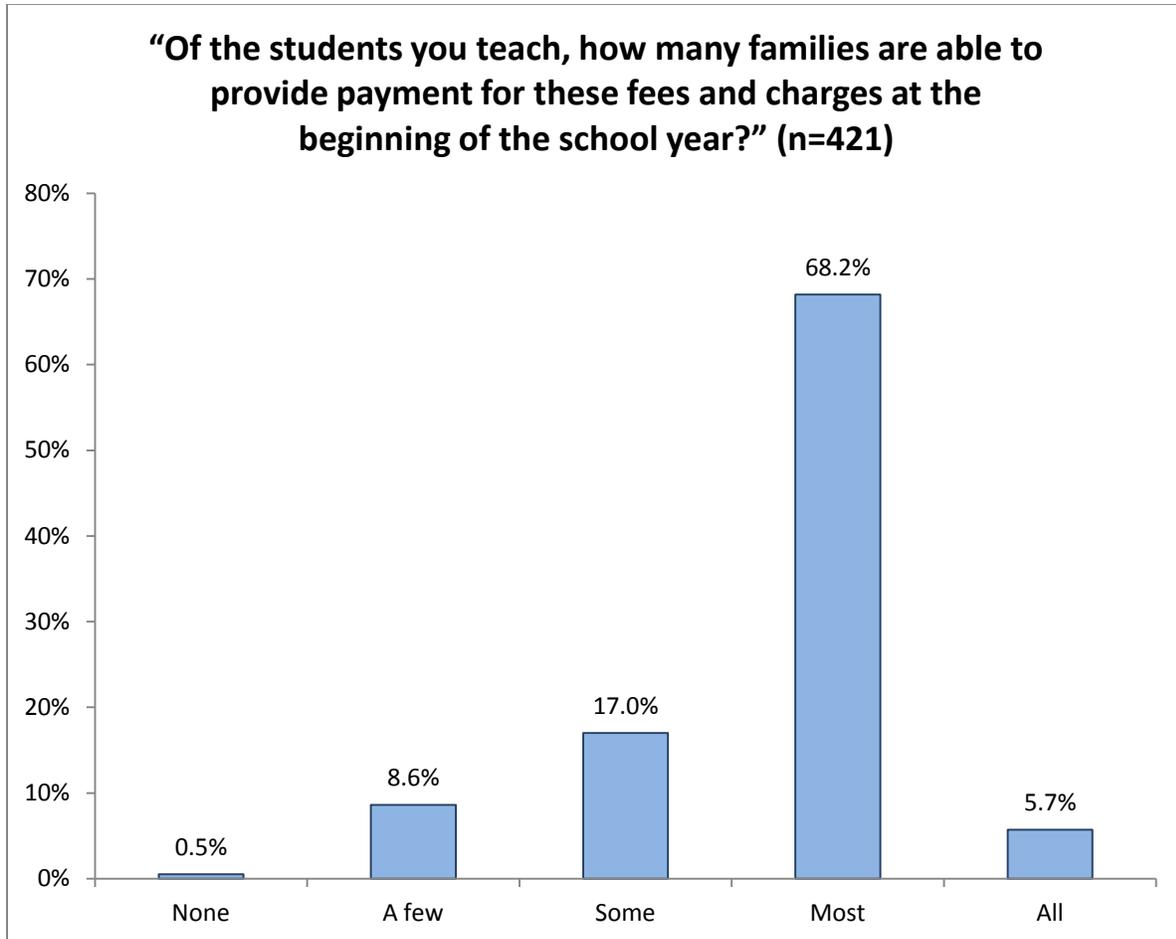
The survey asked teachers to indicate whether the school they teach in charges students a fee (or deposit) for course materials or supplies, if it applied to their teaching situation. Of those teachers for whom the situation applied, 62.6% indicated the school charged a fee for school calendars, 44.3% indicated the school charged a fee for band and music instruments and supplies, 42.9% indicated the school charged a fee for general school supplies, 23.3% charged a fee for materials for art, shop and/or sewing classes, and 17% for textbook deposits or other course materials.



<sup>10</sup> Reference: sections 82 and 83, inclusive, of the *School Act*, [http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws\\_new/document/ID/freeside/96412\\_00](http://www.bclaws.ca/EPLibraries/bclaws_new/document/ID/freeside/96412_00).

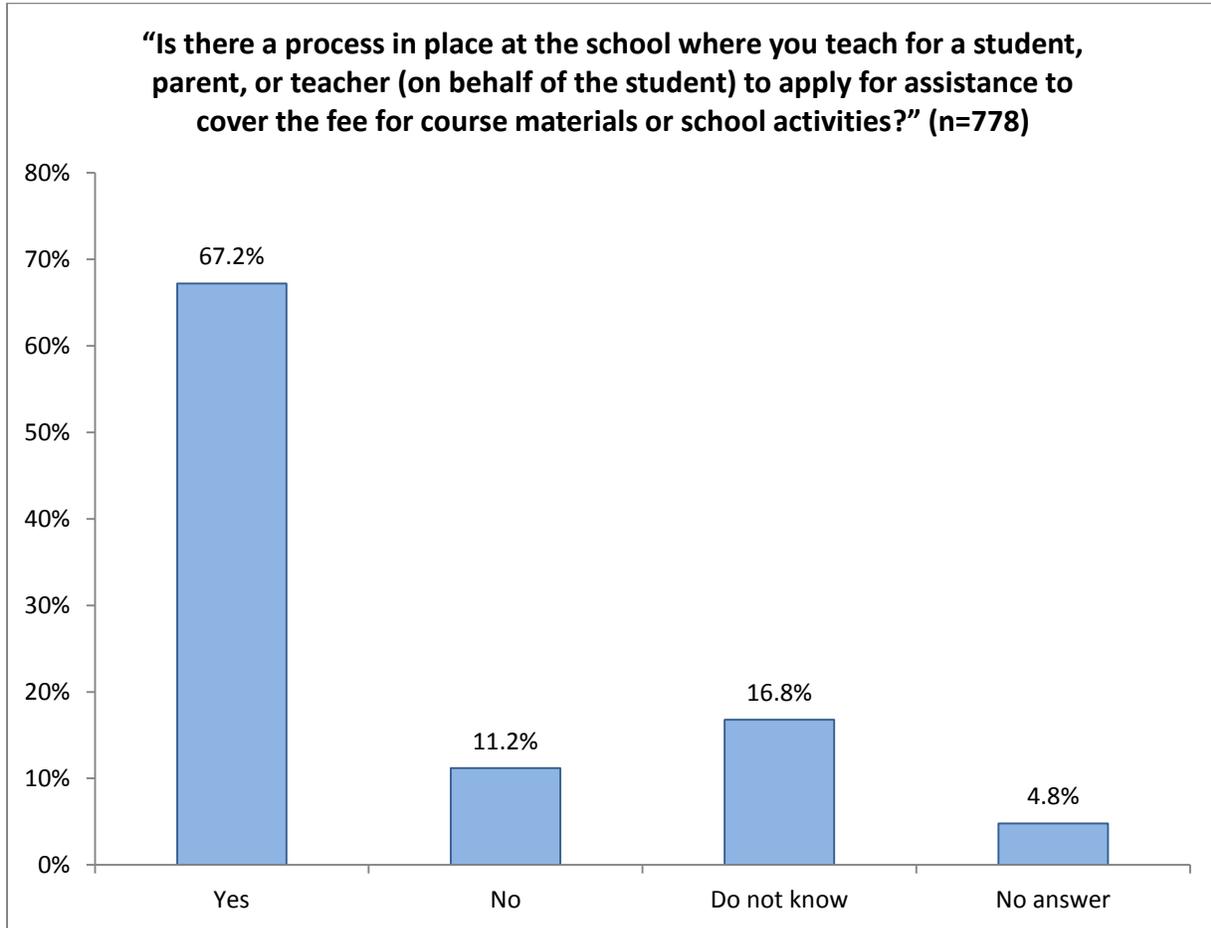
## Payment for these fees and charges at the start of the school year

Of the 421 teachers who said they are responsible for collecting money from parents for fees at the start of the school year, 68.2% indicated “Most” and 5.7% indicated “All” families are able to provide payment for these fees at the start of the school year. About one-quarter (combined percentage) of these teachers indicated only “Some” (17%) or “A few” parents (8.6%) were able to provide payment for fees at the start of the school year.



## Awareness of a process for requesting financial assistance

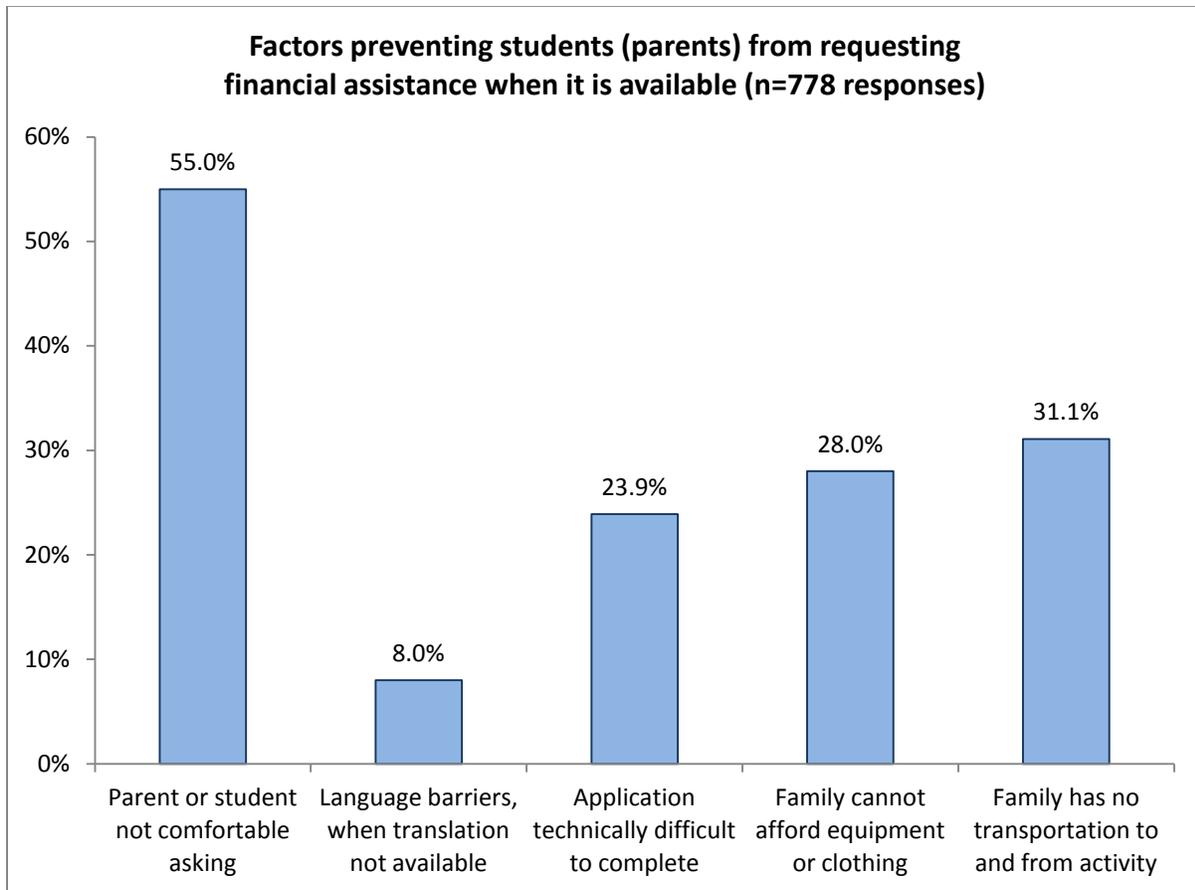
Two-thirds (67.2%) of respondents said they are aware of a process in place at the school for a student, parent, or teacher (on behalf of a student) to apply for assistance to cover the fee for course materials or school-related activities.



When asked to rate the level of awareness of students (or parents) that financial assistance is available to cover fees, 23.1% (of 523 teachers) rated families as being “Quite aware” and 8.4% rated them as “Very aware” of a process for requesting financial assistance. At the other end of the continuum, 24.7% rated awareness of families as “Not very aware” and 3.8% as “Not at all aware” of a process for requesting financial assistance.

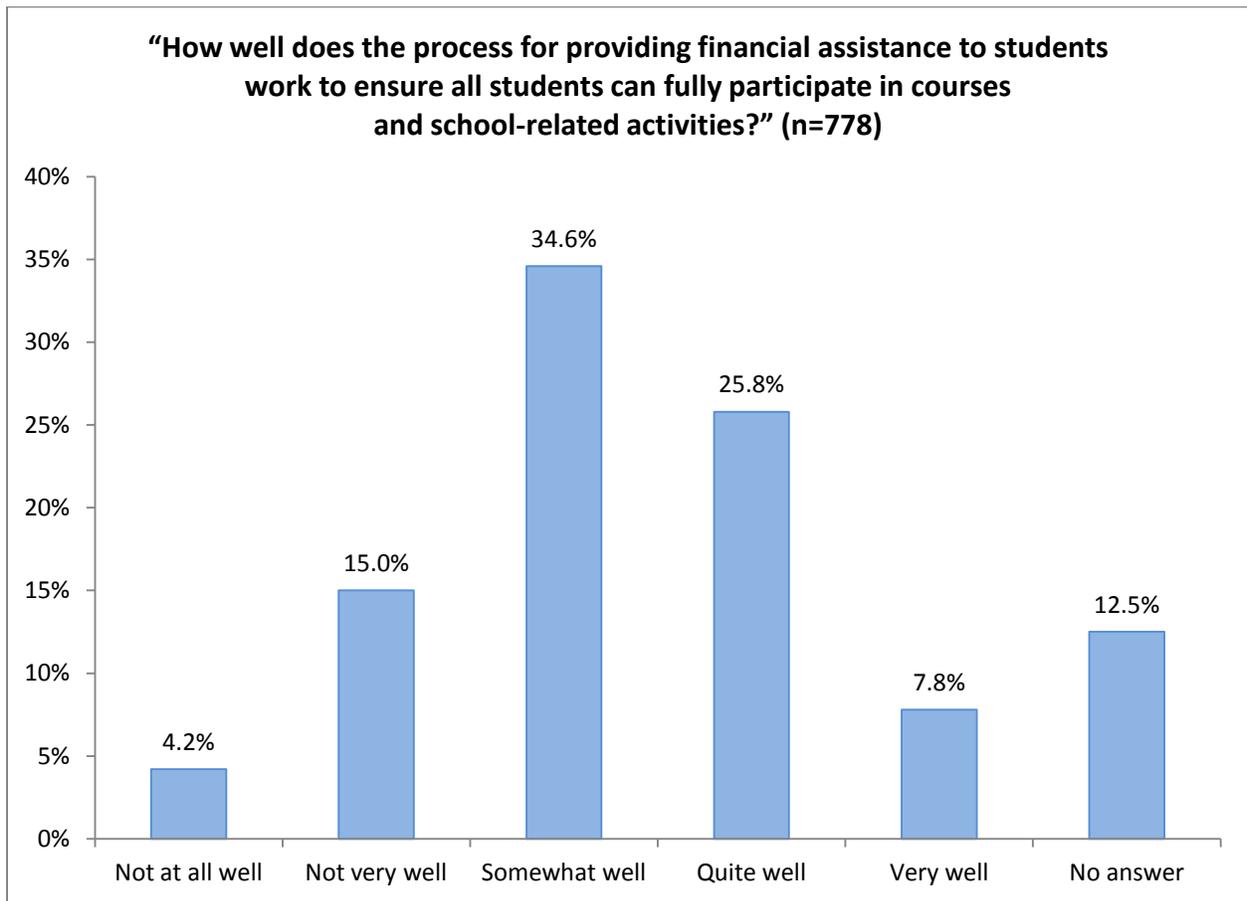
## Perceived barriers preventing families from applying for financial assistance for fees

The survey asked teachers to indicate which factors they feel prevent families from applying/asking for financial assistance when it is available. Over half (55%) of teachers identified “Parent and/or student is not comfortable asking” as a barrier to seeking financial assistance with school fees. Sometimes families are able to afford the fee, but not other associated expenses. About one-third (31.1%) of teachers indicated “Family has no transportation to and from activity”, and 28% indicated “Family cannot afford equipment or clothing” as barriers preventing families from applying for assistance with fees. Other barriers are related to the application process itself, with 23.9% of teachers indicating “Application technically difficult to complete”, and 8% indicating “Language barriers, when translation is not available” as factors preventing parents from applying for financial assistance with school fees.



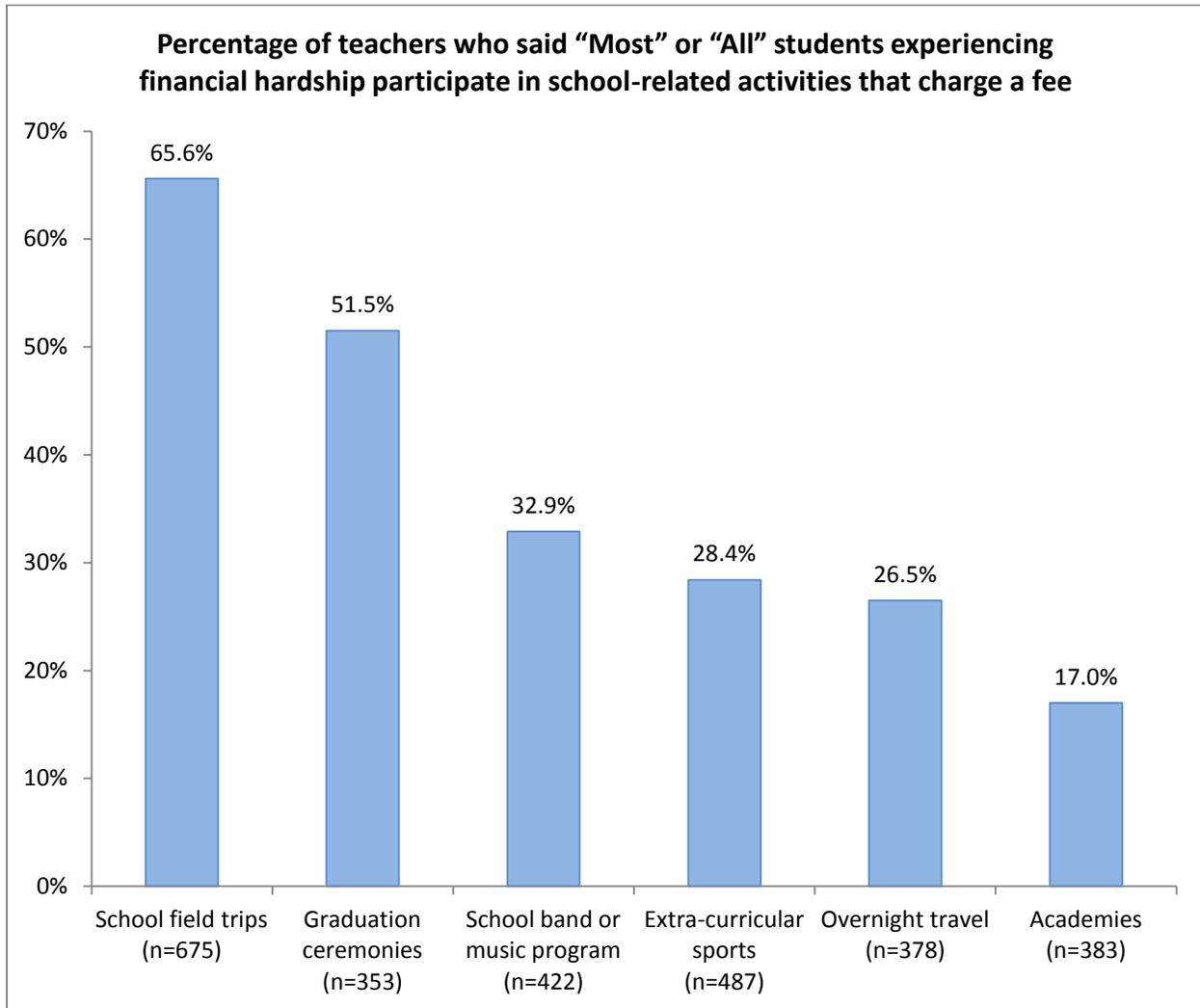
## How well does the process work for providing financial assistance to students?

The survey results reveal that a minority of teachers view the process for providing financial assistance to low-income families as working well. One-quarter (25.8%) of teachers rated the process as working “Quite well” and 7.8% as “Very well” for providing financial assistance to students to ensure that all students can fully participate in courses and school-related activities. The rest of respondents rated the process as working either “Somewhat well” (34.6%), “Not very well” (15%), “Not at all well” (4.2%), or did not answer the question (12.5%). The survey results suggest the process works the least well for schools in low-income areas and in the North Coast and North Central/Peace River areas of the province.



## School fees as a barrier to participation in school-related activities

The survey asked teachers, “Of the students you teach whom you know are experiencing financial hardship, how many participate in school-related activities that charge a fee?” Of the six types of activities, 65.6% of teachers (for whom the situation applied) indicated “Most” or “All” students experiencing financial hardship participated in field trips, 51.5% indicated “Most” or “All” participated in graduation ceremonies, 32.9% indicated “Most” or “All” participated in school band or music programs, 28.4% indicated “Most” or “All” participated in extra-curricular sports, and 17% indicated “Most” or “All” students participated in academies.

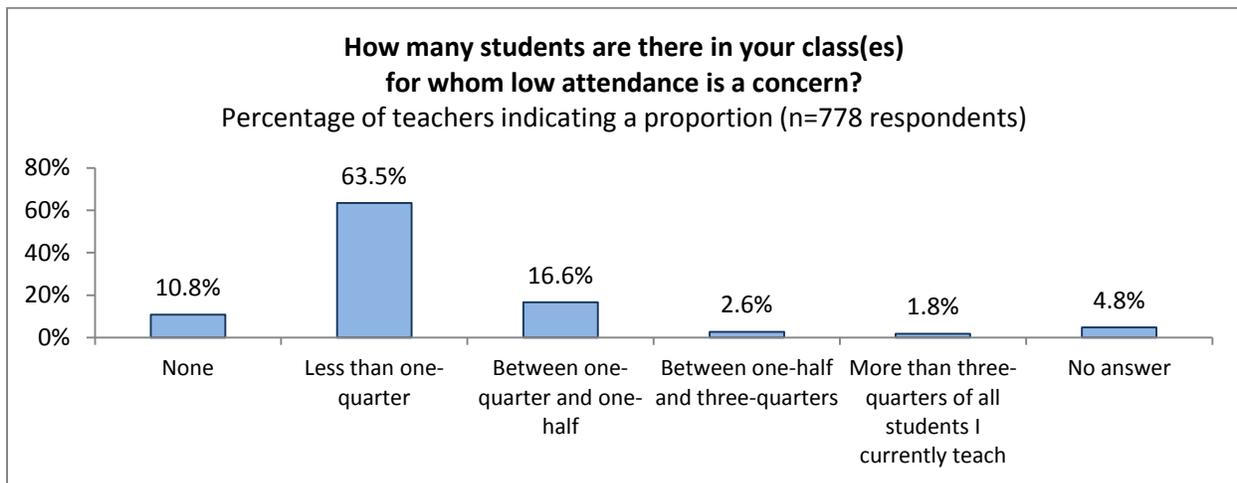


## School attendance and poverty-related barriers

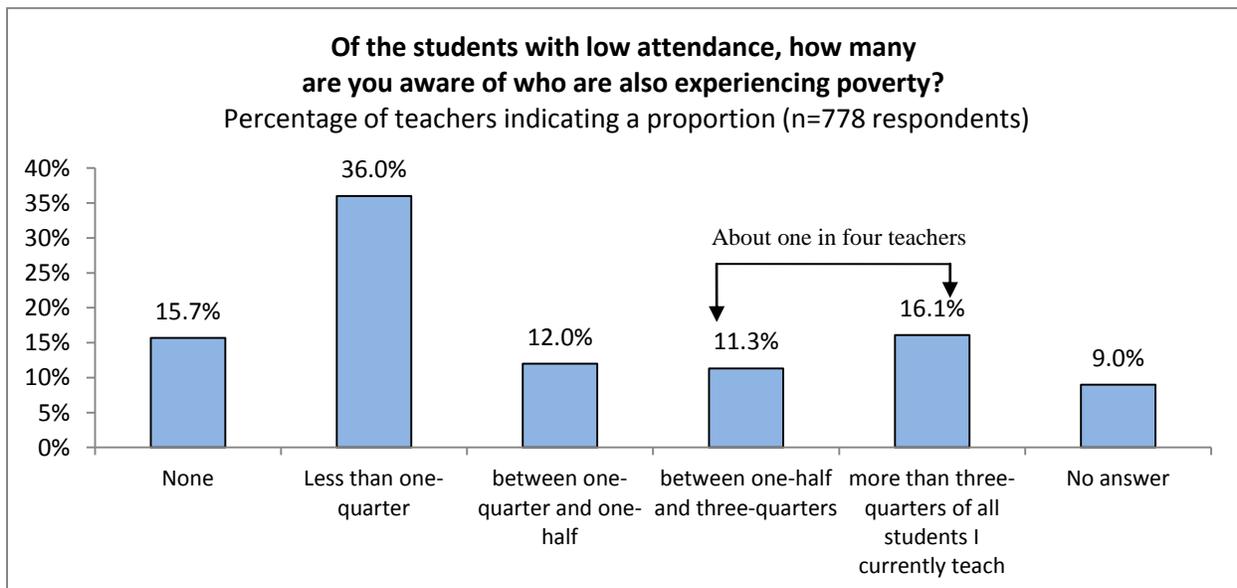
This section of the survey asked teachers about poverty-related barriers that can make it difficult for students to attend school, the approaches schools use to encourage attendance, and the challenges encountered by students who are working in paid employment.

### Is low attendance an issue of concern?

The survey asked teachers “How many students are there in your class(es) for whom low attendance is a concern?” Most teachers indicate having some students for whom attendance is a concern. Two-thirds of the respondents (63.5%) indicated attendance is a concern for “Less than one-quarter” of students, and 16.6% indicated it is a concern for “Between one-quarter and one-half” of students.



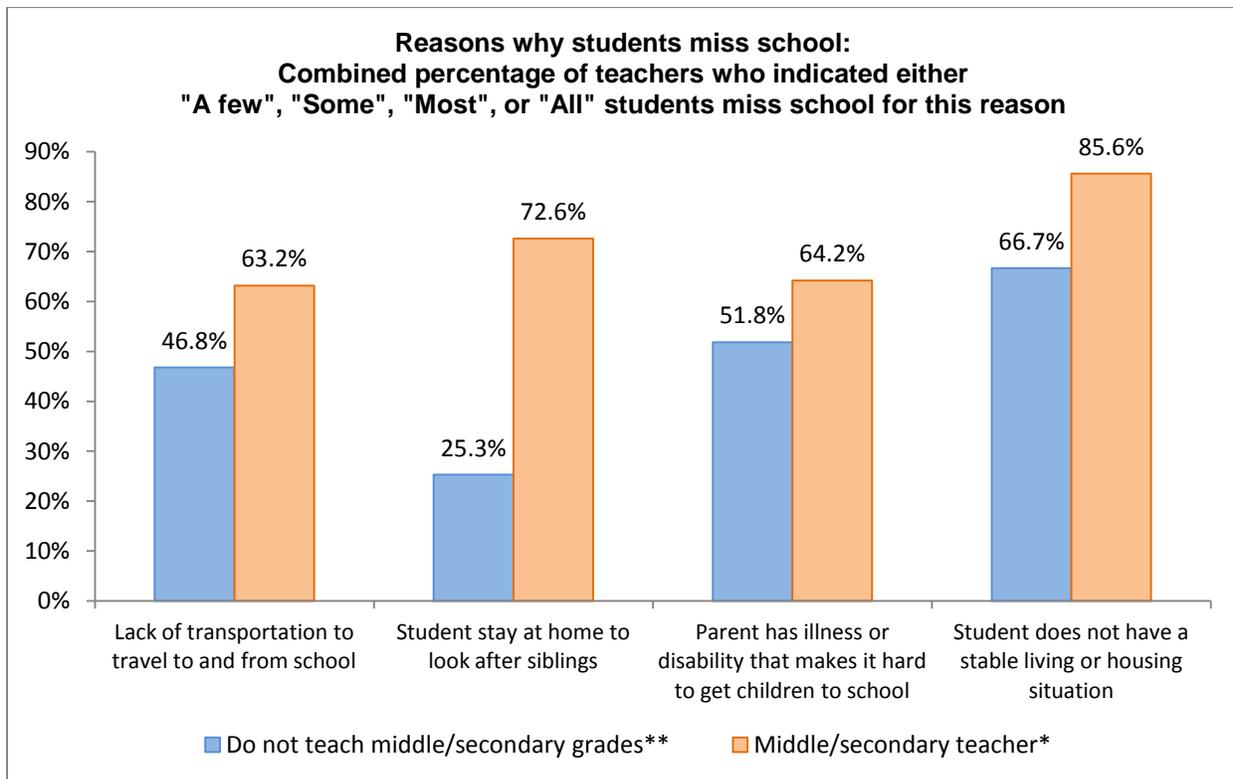
The survey also asked teachers, “Of the students with low attendance, how many are you aware of who are also experiencing poverty?” One-third of respondents indicated “Less than one-quarter” and 12% indicated “Between one-quarter and one-half” of students with low attendance are also experiencing poverty. About one in four respondents indicated at least one-half of the students for whom attendance is a concern are also experiencing poverty.



## Poverty-related barriers to attendance

The survey also asked teachers about whether students miss school for reasons that may be related to poverty. The survey results suggest the most significant poverty-related barrier to attending school is “Student does not have a stable living or housing situation”. Two-thirds of elementary teachers and 85.6% of middle/secondary teachers indicate “A few”, “Some”, “Most”, or “All” students in their class(es) miss school for this reason.

The data also suggest that these barriers are most significant for students in middle/secondary grades. Of the 307 middle/secondary teachers in the survey, about two-thirds or more indicate “A few”, “Some”, “Most”, or “All” of the students in their class(es) miss school for the following three reasons: “Stay home to look after younger siblings” (72.6%), “Lack of transportation to and from school” (63.2%), or “Parent has illness or disability that makes it hard to get children to school” (64.2%).



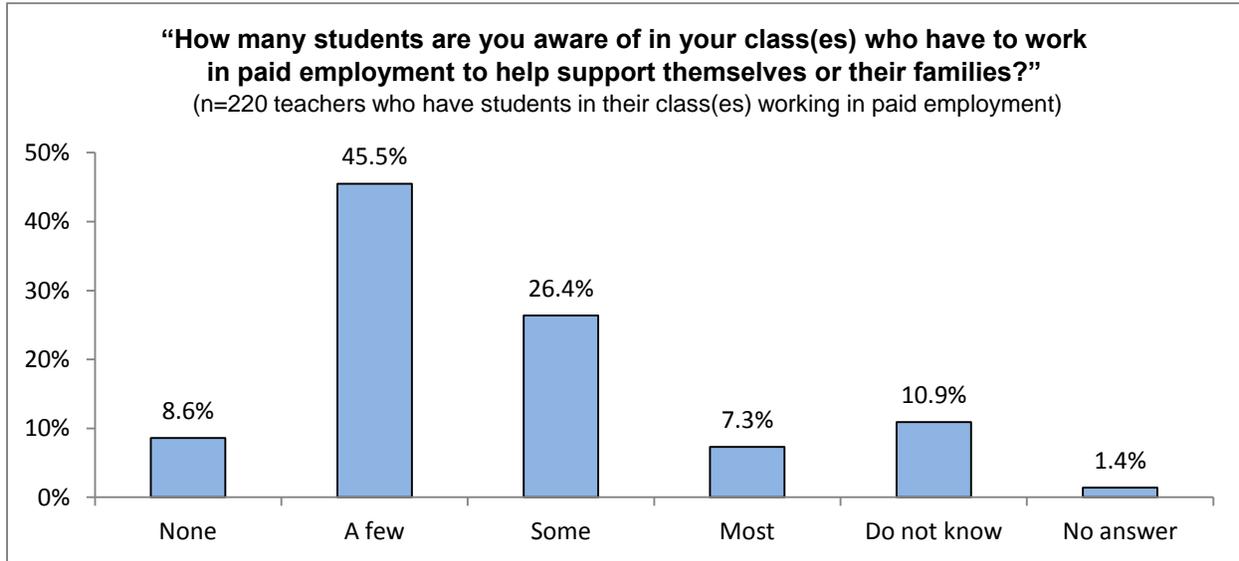
\* Percentages based on 307 teachers who indicated they teach middle and/or secondary grades

\*\* Percentages based on 423 respondents who do not teach middle/secondary grades. Almost all (99%) of these respondents indicate teaching elementary grades (K and/or Grades 1–3 and/or Grades 4–7)

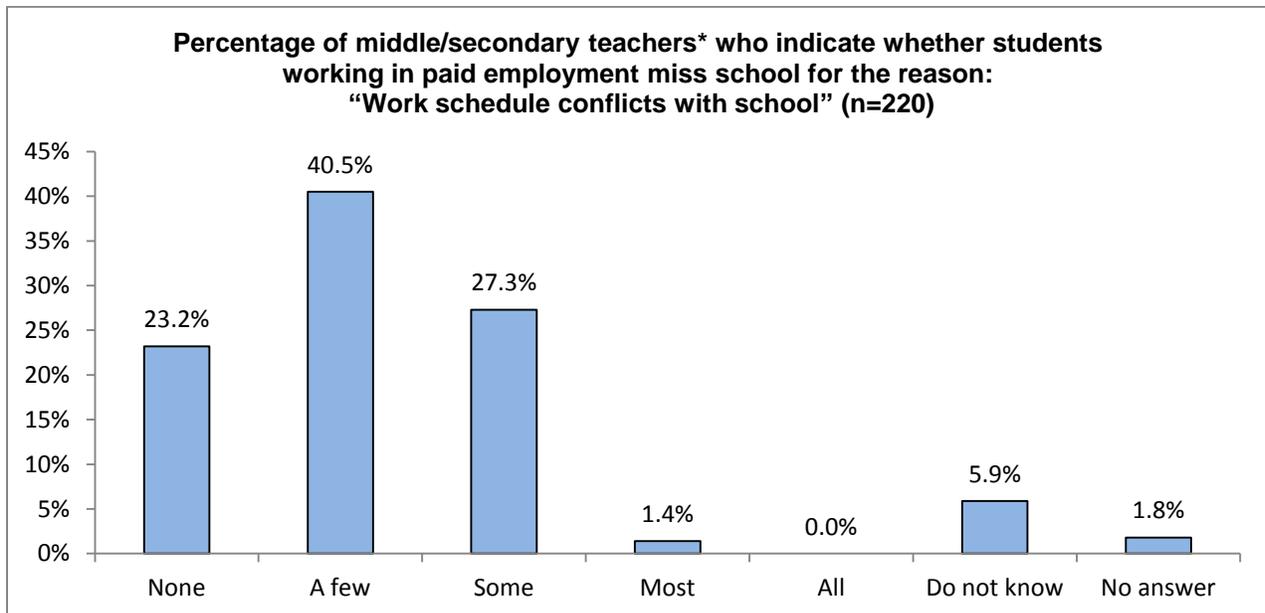
Note: These percentages reflect the combined percentage of teachers who indicated either “A few”, “Some”, “Most”, or “All” students in their class(es) miss school for each of the reasons listed in the survey question.

## Students working in paid employment

Of the 307 middle/secondary teachers in the survey, 71.7% (220 teachers) indicated they have students in their class who are working in paid employment. Of these 220 teachers, almost one-half (45.5%) indicated “A few” students, one-quarter (26.4%) indicated “Some” students, and 7.3% indicated “Most” students work in paid employment to help support themselves or their families.



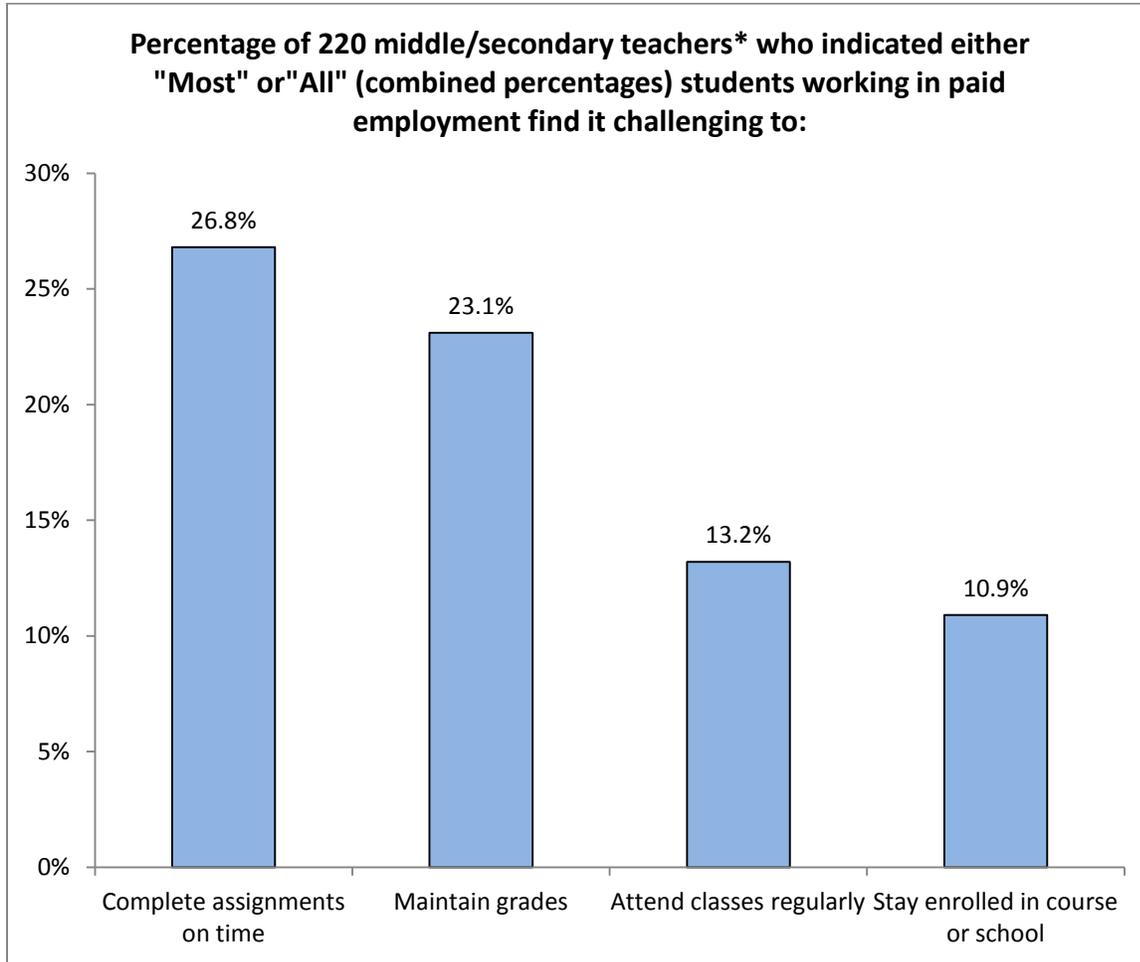
Of the 220 middle/secondary teachers with students in their class(es) working in paid employment, 40.5% indicated “A few” of the students, and 27.3% indicated “Some” of these students miss school for the reason “Work schedule conflicts with school”.



\* Percentages are based on 220 middle/secondary teachers who indicated having students in their class(es) who work in paid employment.

## Teacher observations of educational challenges for students working in paid employment

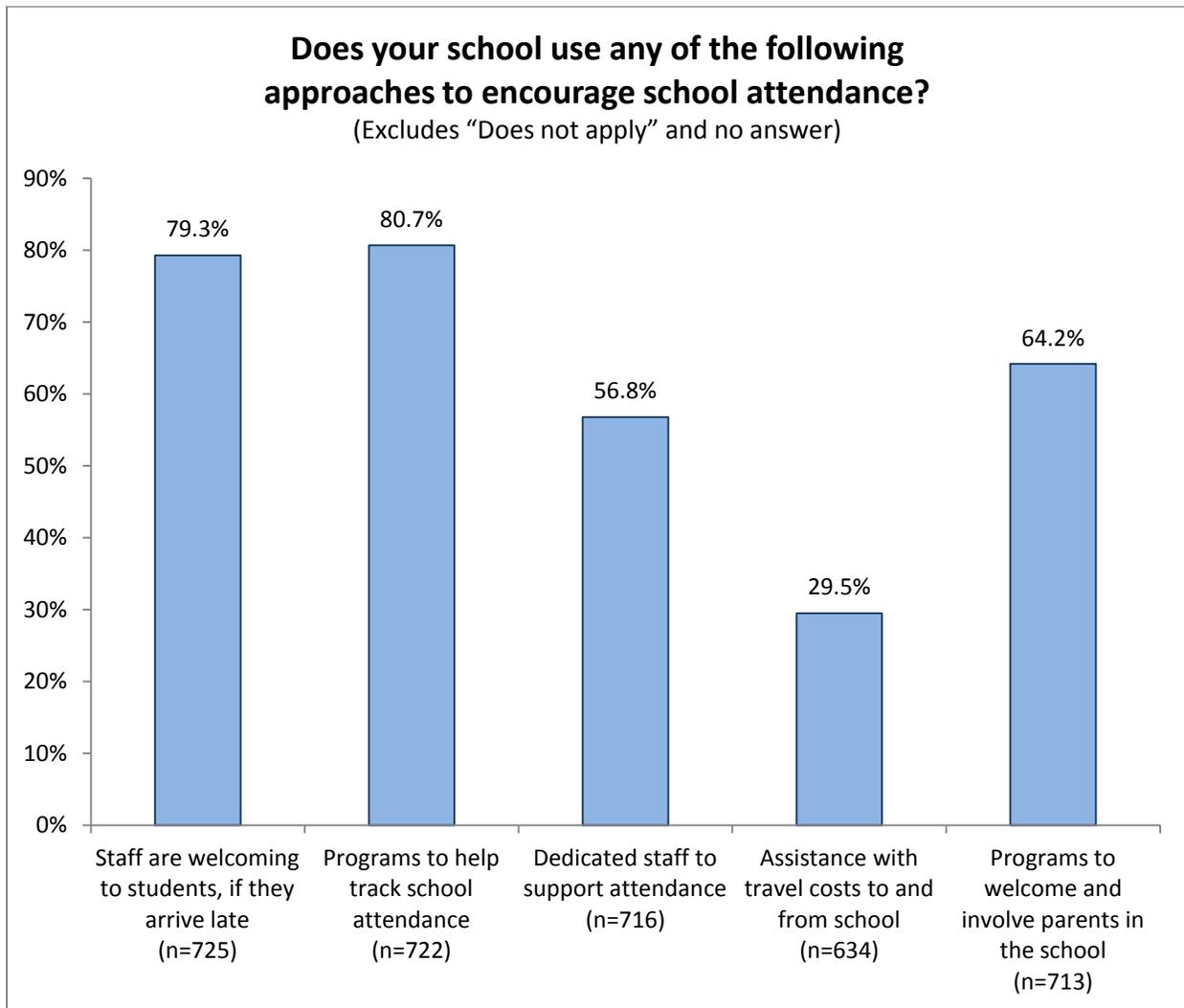
Of the 220 middle/secondary teachers who are aware of students in their class(es) who work in paid employment, about one-quarter indicated it is a challenge for “Most” or “All” students in their class(es) who are working in paid employment to “Complete assignments on time” (26.8%) and to “Maintain grades” (23.1%). About one in ten teachers indicated it is a challenge for these students to “Attend classes regularly” (13.2%) and/or to “Stay enrolled in course or school” (10.9%).



\* Percentages are based on 220 middle/secondary teachers who indicated having students in their class(es) who work in paid employment.

## Approaches used by schools to encourage school attendance

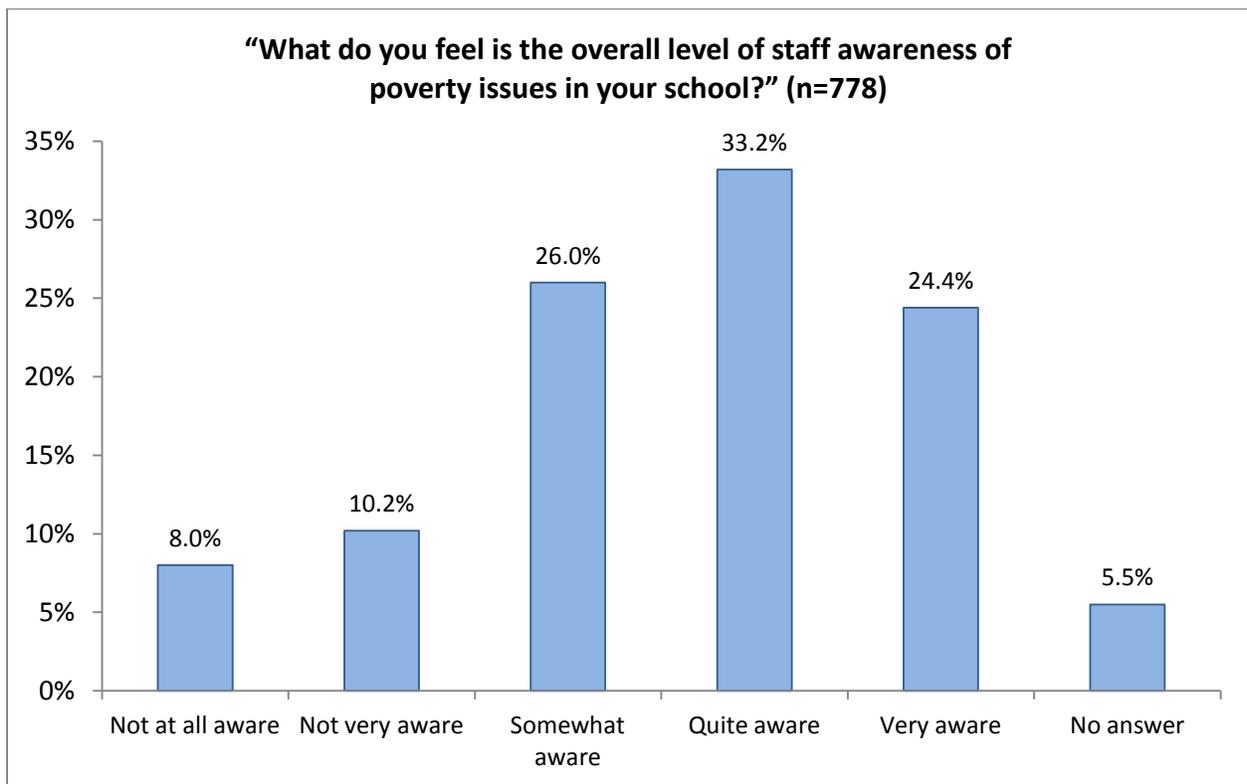
The survey asked teachers about what approaches the school uses to encourage and support students to attend school. Of those who answered the question (and for whom it applied to their teaching situation), eight in ten teachers indicated their school uses strategies such as “Staff are welcoming to students, if they arrive late” (79.3%), and “Programs to help track school attendance” (80.7%). About two-thirds (64.2%) of teachers indicated the school has “Programs to welcome and involve parents in the school”. About one-half (56.8%) indicated the school has “Dedicated staff to support attendance”, and less than one-third (29.5%) indicated the school provides “Assistance with travel costs to and from school”.



## Staff awareness and understanding about poverty issues

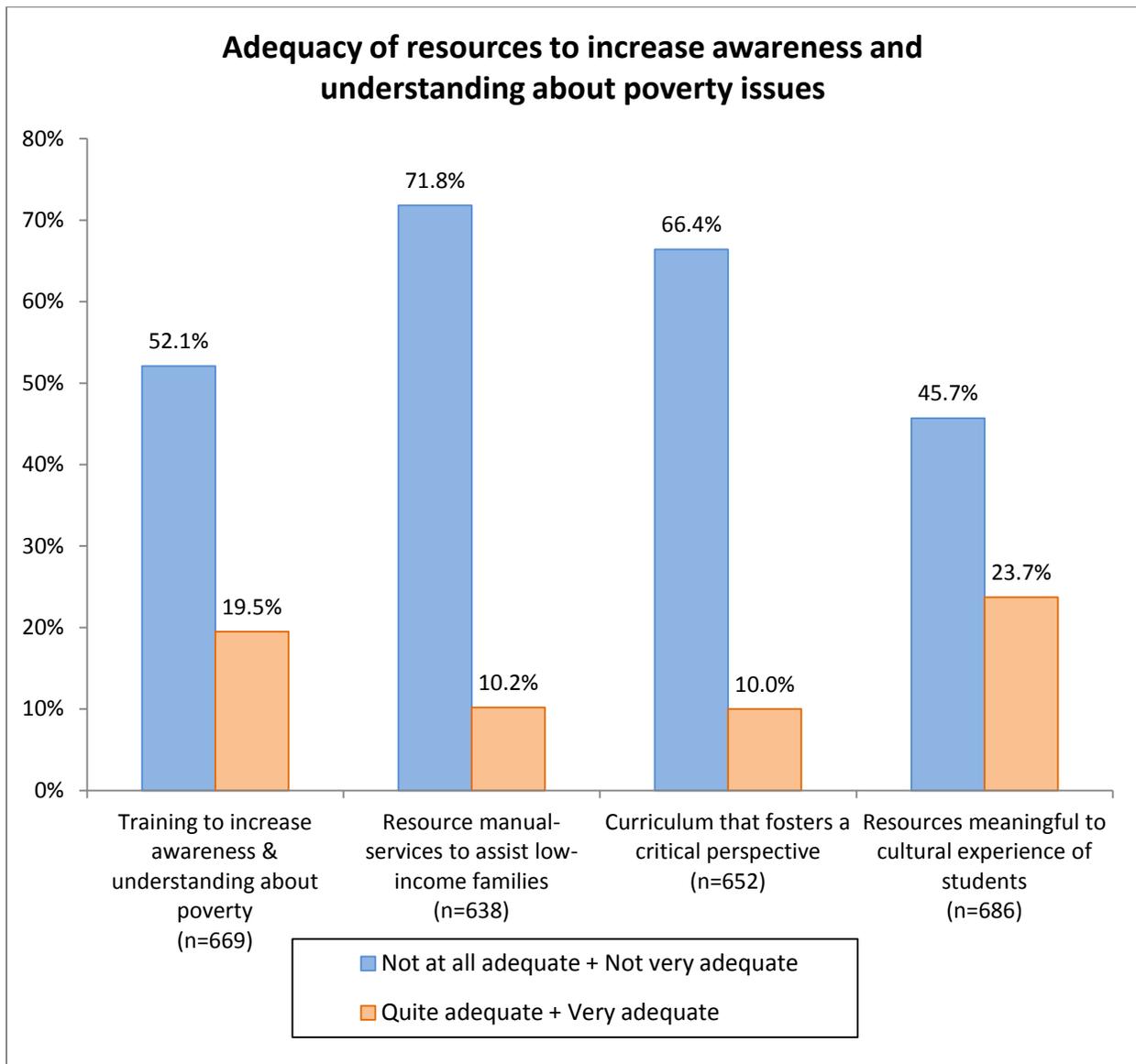
The purpose of this section of the survey was to document teacher perceptions of staff awareness of poverty issues. One-quarter (24.4%) rated the level of staff awareness of poverty issues at their school as “Very aware”, one-third (33.2%) as “Quite aware”, and 26.0% as “Somewhat aware”. A small proportion of respondents rated the level of staff awareness as “Not very aware” (10.2%) or “Not at all aware” (8.0%), and 5.5% did not answer the question.

Teachers in schools situated in suburban areas rated the level of staff awareness of poverty issues at the school the lowest, and teachers in schools situated in remote areas rated staff awareness the highest. Teachers in schools situated in high-income neighbourhoods rated the level of staff awareness of poverty issues the lowest, while teachers in schools situated in low-income neighbourhoods rated staff awareness the highest. Middle and secondary teachers rated the level of staff awareness of poverty issues at their school lower than did elementary teachers.



## Adequacy of resources to increase awareness and understanding about poverty issues

Teachers were asked to rate the level of adequacy of a range of resources identified by teachers in focus group research<sup>11</sup> as being important to increase awareness and understanding about poverty issues. The majority of teachers (if it applied to their teaching situation) rated “Resource manual on services to assist low-income families” (71.8%), “Curriculum that fosters a critical perspective on poverty” (66.4%), and “Training to increase awareness and understanding of poverty issues” (52.1%), as either “Not very adequate” or “Not at all adequate”. In terms of “Resources meaningful to the cultural experience of students”, about half (45.7%) of teachers (for whom the situation applied) rated this resource as either “Not very adequate” or “Not at all adequate”.

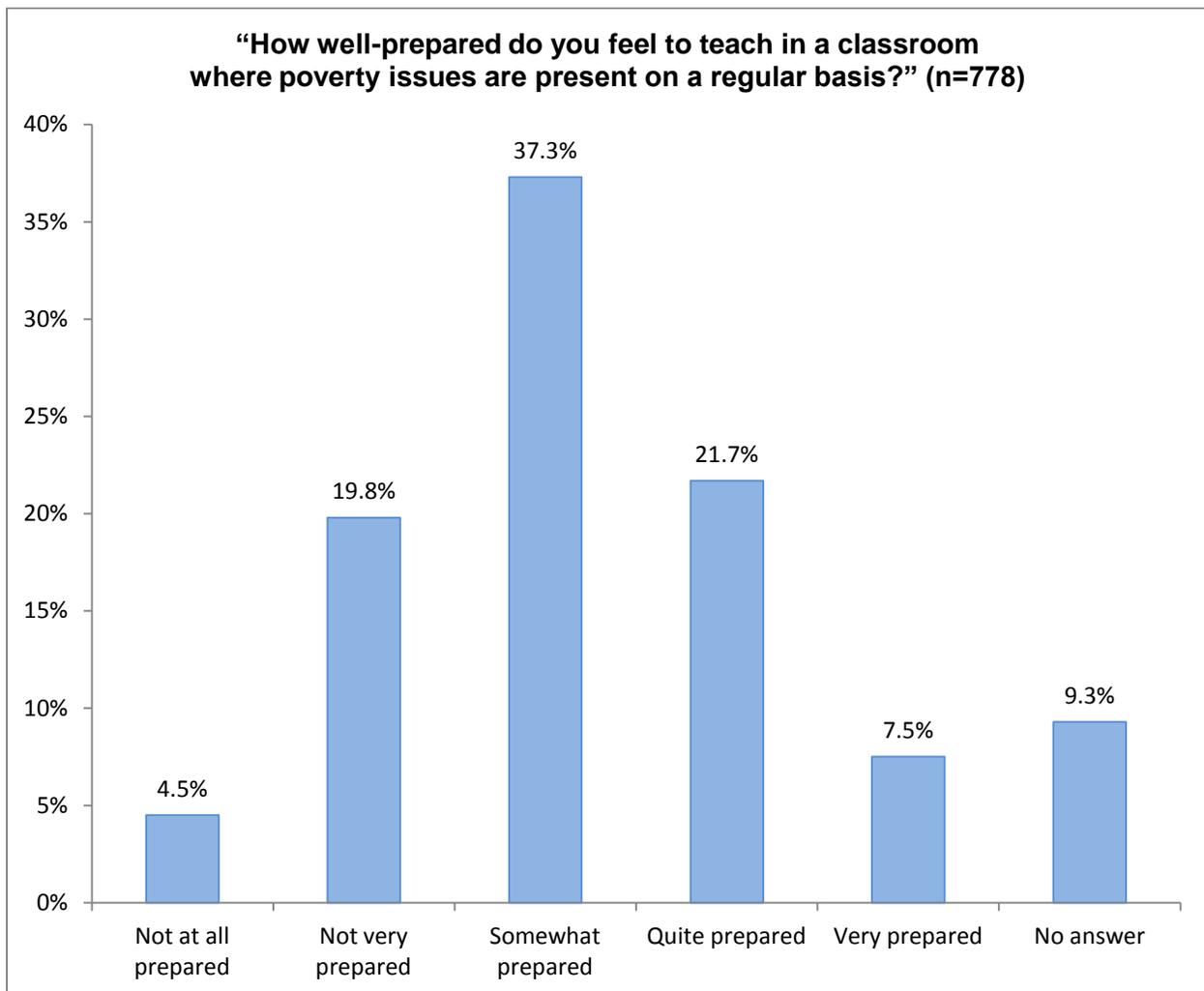


<sup>11</sup> Percentages are calculated after excluding “Does not apply” responses and are based on valid responses (excludes those who did not answer the question).

## Preparation to teach in a classroom where poverty issues are present

The survey results suggest that most teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach in a classroom where poverty issues are present. Only 21.7% of respondents said they feel “Quite prepared”, and 7.5% “Very prepared”, to teach in a classroom where poverty issues are present on a regular basis. About one-third (37.3%) of teachers reported feeling “Somewhat prepared”, 19.8% “Not very prepared”, and 4.5% “Not at all prepared” to teach in a classroom where poverty issues are present on a regular basis. One in ten respondents (9.3%) did not answer.

On average, teachers who work in a school located in a low-income neighbourhood feel the most prepared to teach where poverty issues are present, while teachers in schools in high-income neighbourhoods feel the least prepared. Teachers in North Central/Peace River and North Coast feel the most prepared to teach where poverty issues are present, while teachers in the Fraser Valley and Metro Vancouver area and West feel the least prepared.

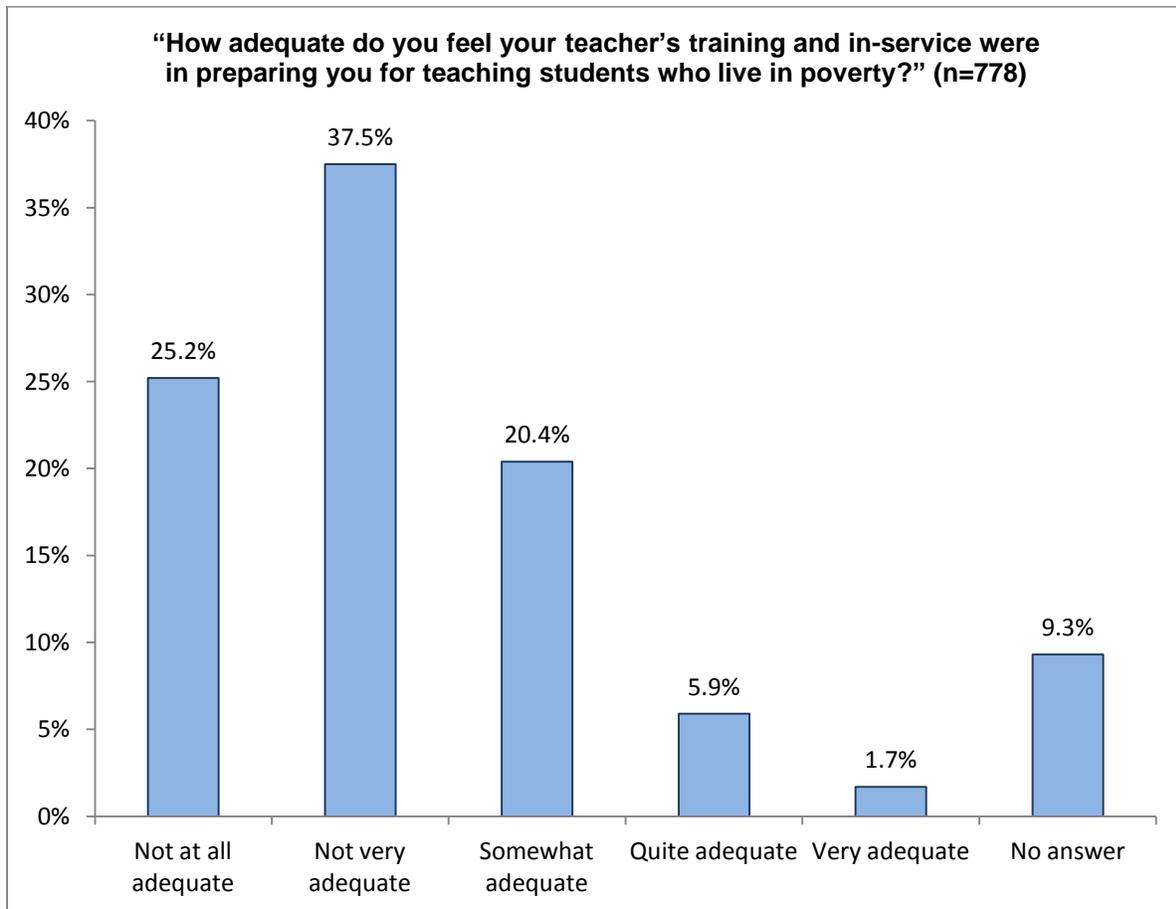


## Teacher training and Professional Development

### Adequacy of teachers’ training to prepare teachers for teaching students who live in poverty

The survey results suggest that many teachers do not feel their teacher training and in-service adequately prepared them for teaching students who live in poverty. It should be noted that training for mid- and late-career teachers 10 to 20 years ago is not necessarily reflective of current teacher training programs or of the social and economic conditions in classrooms at that time.

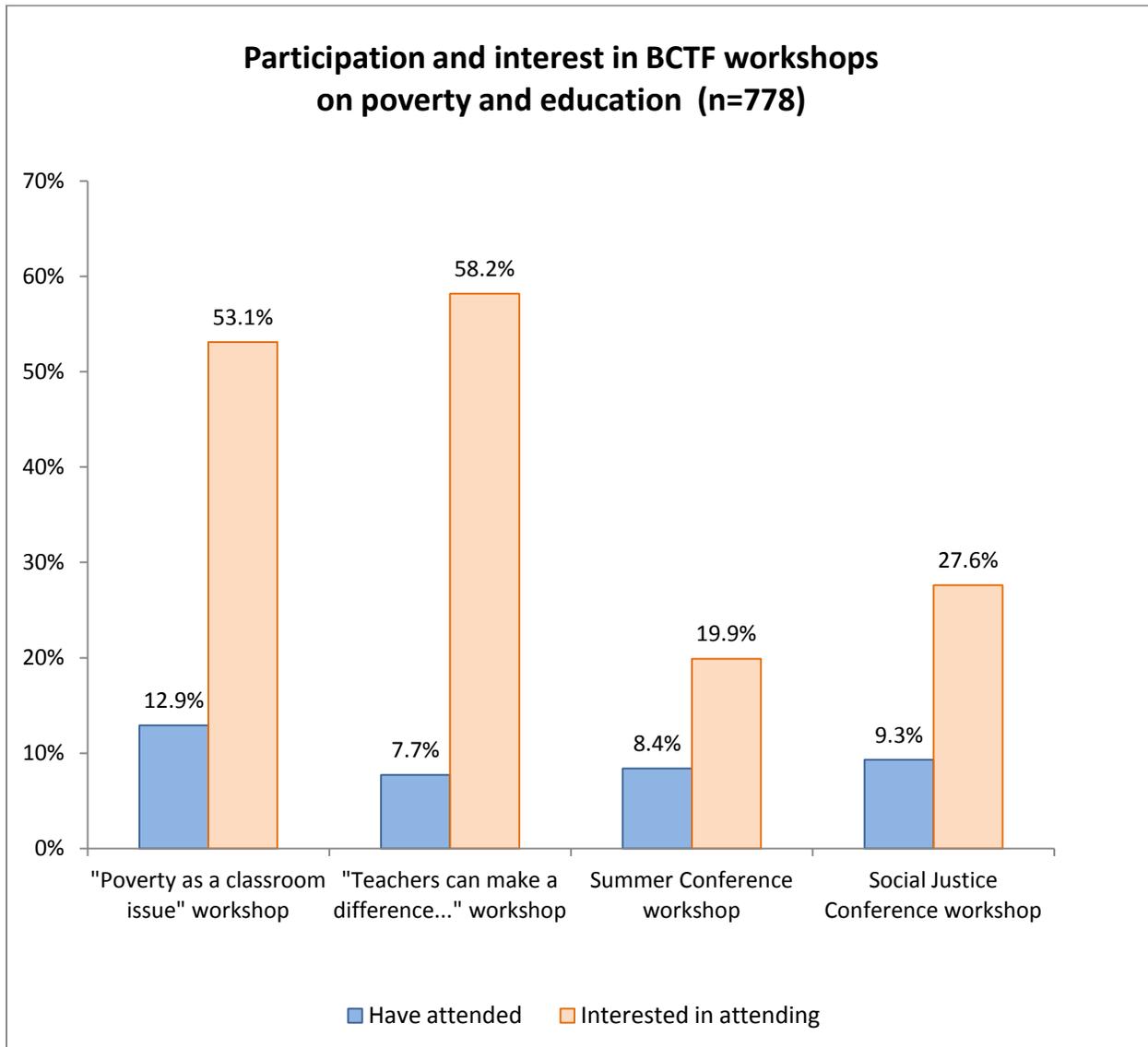
Very few respondents rated their teachers’ training and in-service as “Quite adequate” (5.9%) or “Very adequate” (1.7%) in preparing them to work with students who live in poverty. One in five teachers (20.4%) rated their teacher training and in-service as “Somewhat adequate” in preparing them to work with students who live in poverty, one-third (37.5%) as “Not very adequate”, and about one-quarter (25.2%) of respondents rated their teacher training and in-service as “Not at all adequate” in preparing them for teaching students who live in poverty. The remainder (9.3%) did not answer the question. On average, early-career teachers rated their teacher training and in-service higher than did those with ten or more years of teaching experience.



### BCTF workshops on poverty and education issues

Many more teachers are interested in attending BCTF workshops pertaining to poverty and education issues than have attended to date, based on the survey results. A small proportion of respondents said they have attended the “Poverty as a classroom issue” workshop (12.9%), the “Teachers can make a difference for children living in poverty” workshop (7.7%), the Summer Conference workshop (8.4%), and/or the Social Justice Conference workshop (9.3%).

At least half of respondents indicated an interest in attending the “Poverty as a classroom issue” workshop (53.1%), and/or the “Teachers can make a difference for children living in poverty” workshop (58.2%), offered in the local where teachers teach. Some teachers also expressed interest in attending workshops on poverty issues at the Summer Conference (19.9%) and the Social Justice Conference (27.6%).

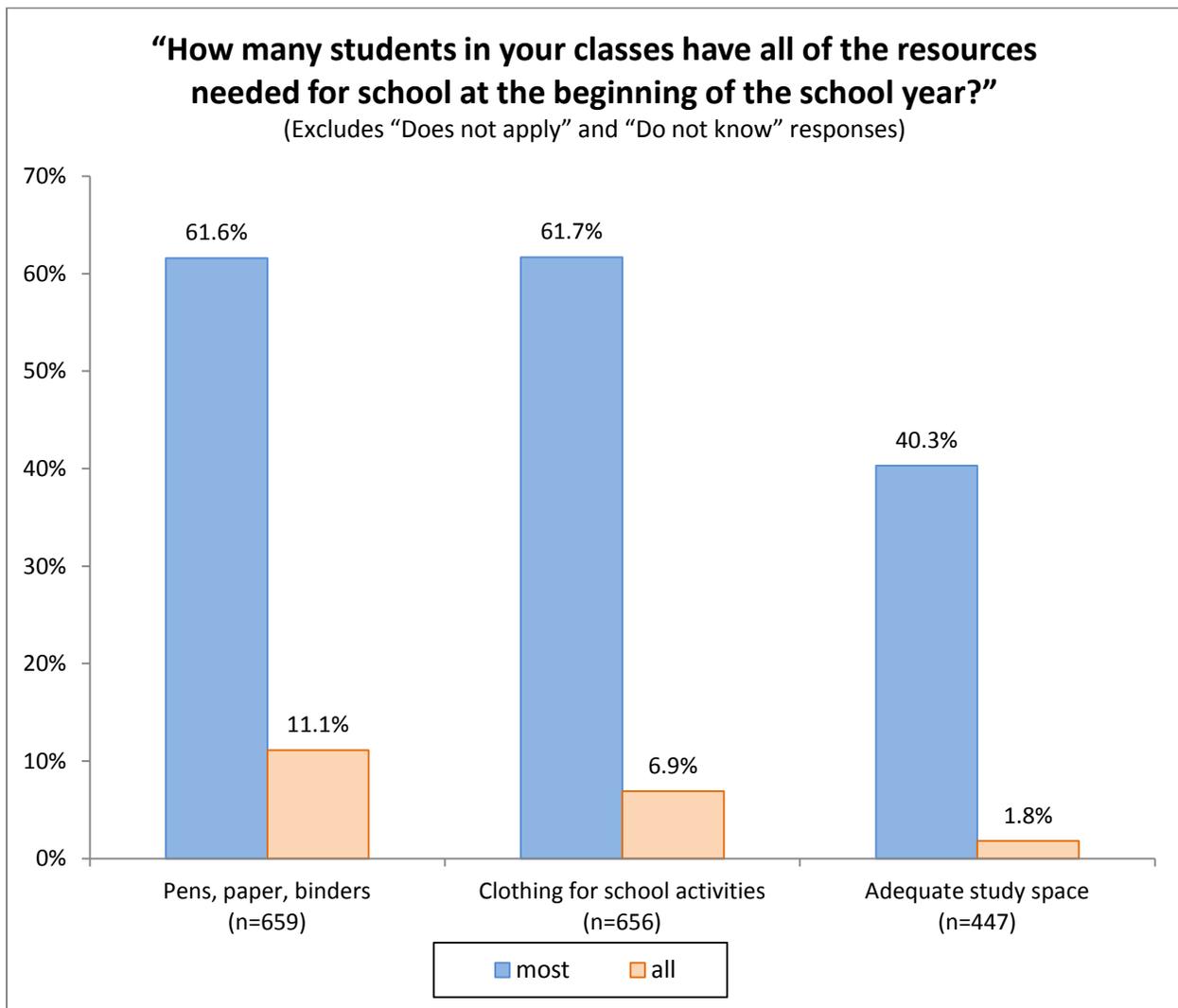


# Adequacy of resources to address poverty-related needs at the school

## Basic resources

### Access to basic school supplies and clothing for school-related activities

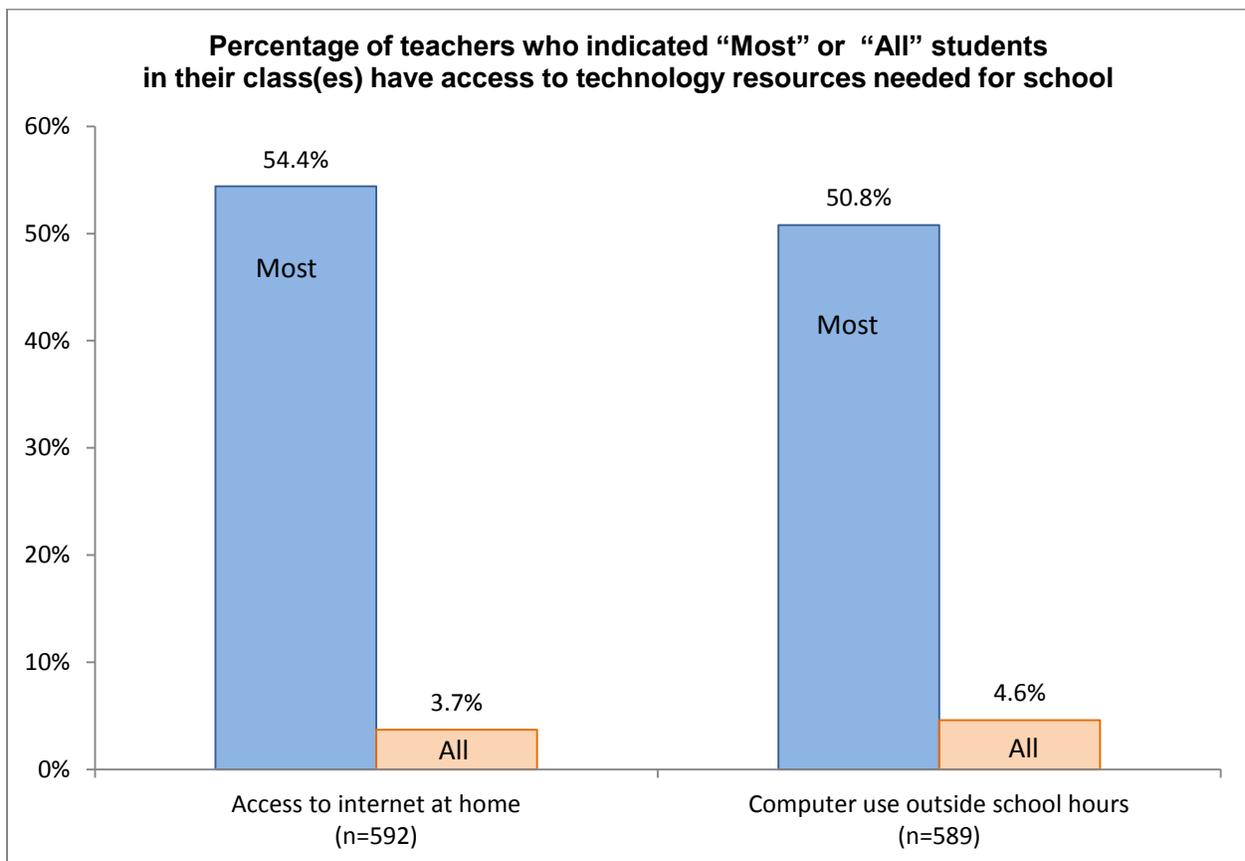
The survey asked teachers to indicate how many students in their class(es) have all of the resources needed for school at the beginning of the school year (or term), if it applied to their teaching situation. Of the teachers who provided an answer, 72.7% (combined) indicated either “Most” or “All” students have basic school supplies and 68.6% (combined) indicated either “Most” or “All” students have the clothing required for school activities at the start of the school year. Over two-thirds (68.1%) of teachers said they use their own material or monetary resources to provide school supplies/resources that students need to complete assignments.



## Access to technology resources

The survey also asked teachers (if it applied to their teaching situation) how many students in their class(es) they are aware of who have access to technology resources at home or outside of school hours. Of those who estimated<sup>12</sup> an amount, about half (54.4%) indicated “Most” and 3.7% “All” students have access to internet at home. Half of respondents (50.8%) indicated that “Most” and 4.6% indicated “All” students have access to computer use outside of school hours.

Teachers were asked to comment on how the increased use of technology in learning affects students who do not have access to internet and computers at home. Teachers’ comments indicate that not all families are able to afford internet service and computers and that some rural areas do not have reliable internet service. Teachers expressed concern about the widening gap between students who have access to the latest technology and those who do not. Some teachers said they limit the type of homework assignments so a computer is not required, and leave the classroom open for computer use at lunch to help address this inequity. Some teachers commented that outdated technology and limited hours for students to use technology at the school can further restrict access. Teachers noted students without access to technology are disadvantaged in completing assignments, skill development, and social opportunities (school blogs, group-work, social media). Some primary teachers expressed concern about the effects of overuse of technology at home on student well-being.



<sup>12</sup> Percentages are calculated after excluding “Does not apply” or “Do not know” responses and are based on valid responses (excludes those who did not answer the question).

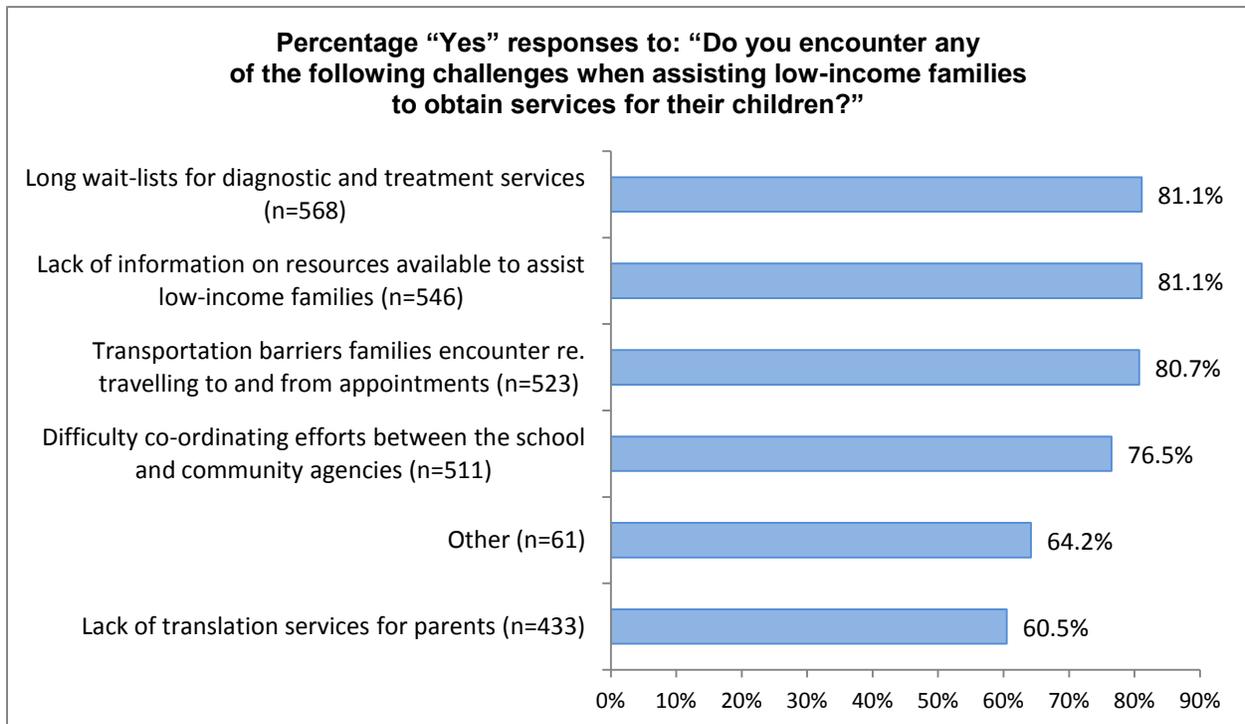
## Access to health and community services

One objective of the survey was to document whether and to what extent teachers across the province have students in need of services for speech and language, vision, and hearing care, and to what extent they experience challenges assisting low-income families to obtain services.

The following percentages are based on those teachers for whom the situation applied, who estimated an amount<sup>13</sup> of students for each type of health-care service. The survey data suggest the greatest need is for speech and language services, with 83.6% (combined percentages) of teachers indicating either “A few” or “Some” of the students they teach are in need of access to speech and language services, 76.8% (combined percentages) indicated “A few” or “Some” of the students they teach are in need of vision-care services, and 64.8% (combined percentages) indicated either “A few” or “Some” of the students they teach are in need of hearing care.

## Barriers to accessing health and community services

The survey data indicate that most teachers encounter multiple challenges when assisting low-income families to obtain services for their children. Of the teachers who responded to the question (excludes “Does not apply” and no answer), eight in ten respondents indicated that “Lack of information on resources available to assist low-income families” (81.1%), “Long wait-lists for diagnostic and treatment services” (81.1%), and “Transportation barriers families encounter re. travelling to and from appointments” (80.7%), are a challenge when assisting low-income parents to obtain services for their children. Other barriers included “Difficulty co-ordinating efforts between the school and community agencies” (76.5%), and “Lack of translation services for parents” (60.5%).

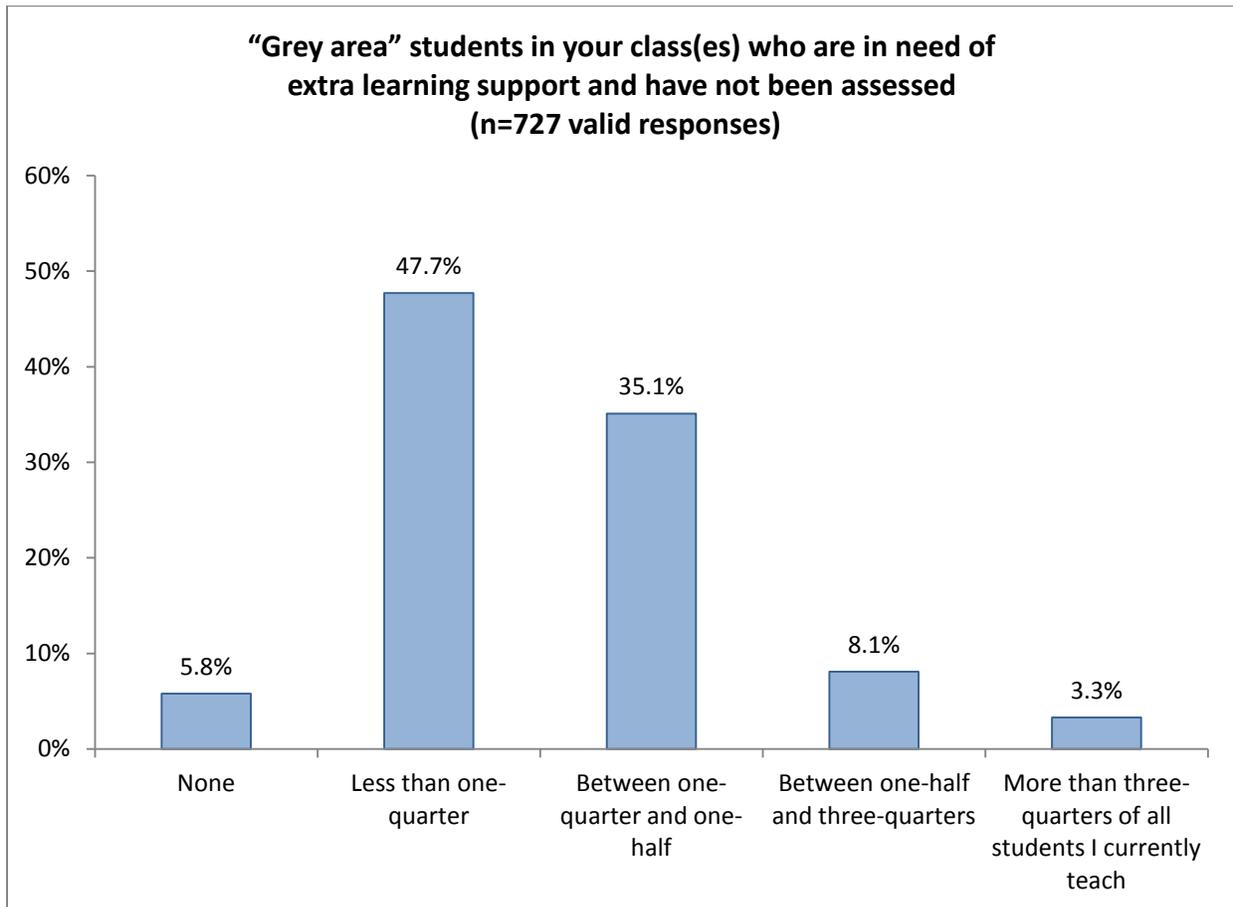


<sup>13</sup> Percentages are calculated after excluding “Does not apply” or “Do not know” responses and are based on valid responses (excludes those who did not answer the question).

## Students in need of extra learning support to address learning gaps

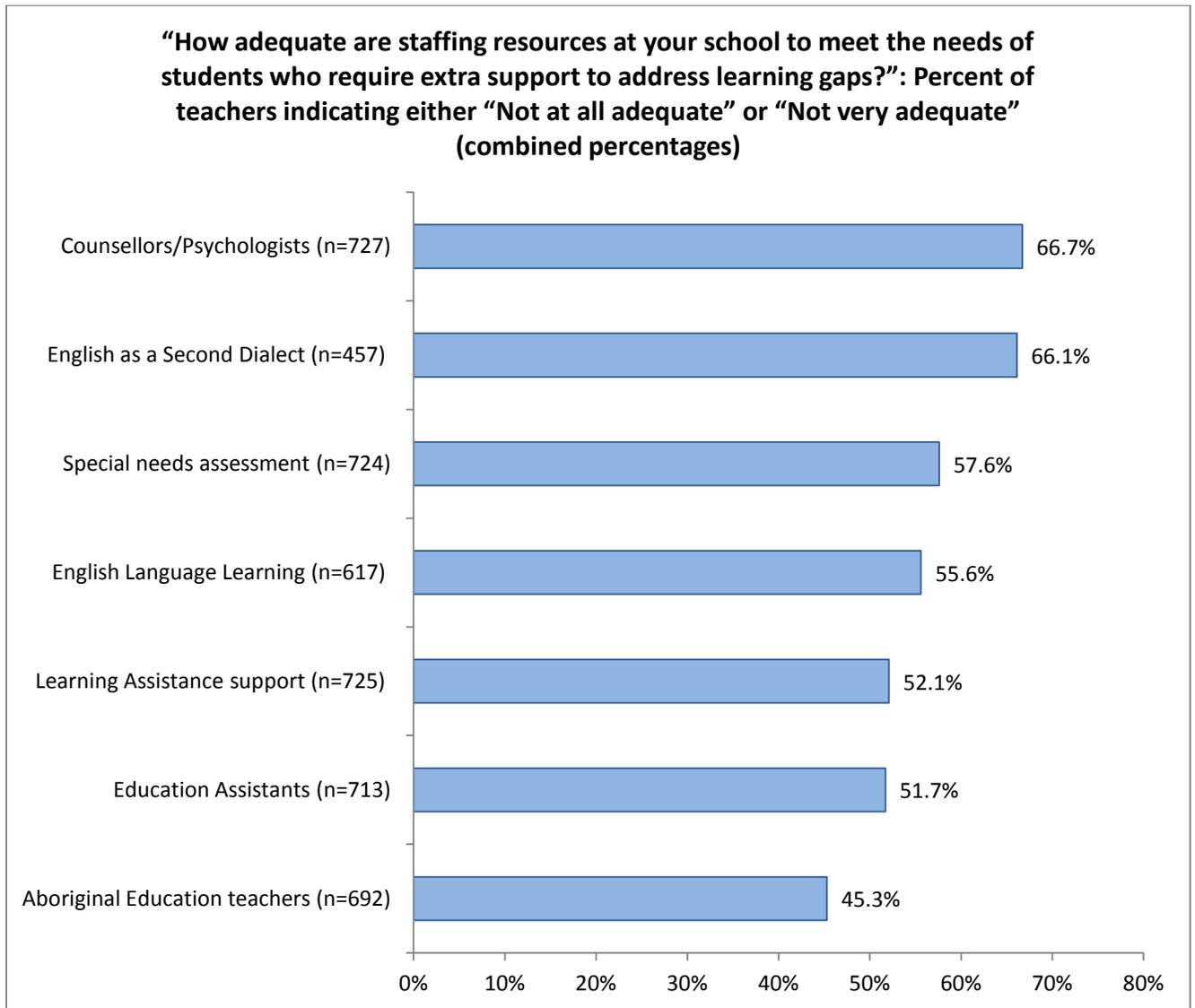
### “Grey area” students

Most teachers indicated having at least some students they would consider to be “grey area” students who are in need of extra learning support and have not been assessed. Of the 727 teachers who responded to the question, 47.7% indicated that “Less than one-quarter”, 35.1% “Between one-quarter and one-half”, 8.1% “Between one-half and three-quarters”, and 3.3% “More than three quarters” of the students they currently teach are “grey area” students in need of extra learning support and have not been assessed.



## Adequacy of staffing resources to address learning gaps

The survey results suggest that the majority of teachers do not feel the current level of staffing resources is adequate to meet the needs of students who require extra support to address learning gaps. At least half of the teachers (for whom it applied to their teaching situation)<sup>14</sup> rated each type of staffing resource as either “Not at all adequate” or “Not very adequate” (combined): Counsellors/Psychologists (66.7%), English as a Second Dialect (66.1%), Special needs assessment (57.6%), English Language Learning teachers (55.6%), Learning Assistance teachers (52.1%), and Aboriginal Education teachers (45.3%). Half of teachers (51.7%) rated the staffing levels of educational assistants as either “Not at all” or “Not very” adequate.

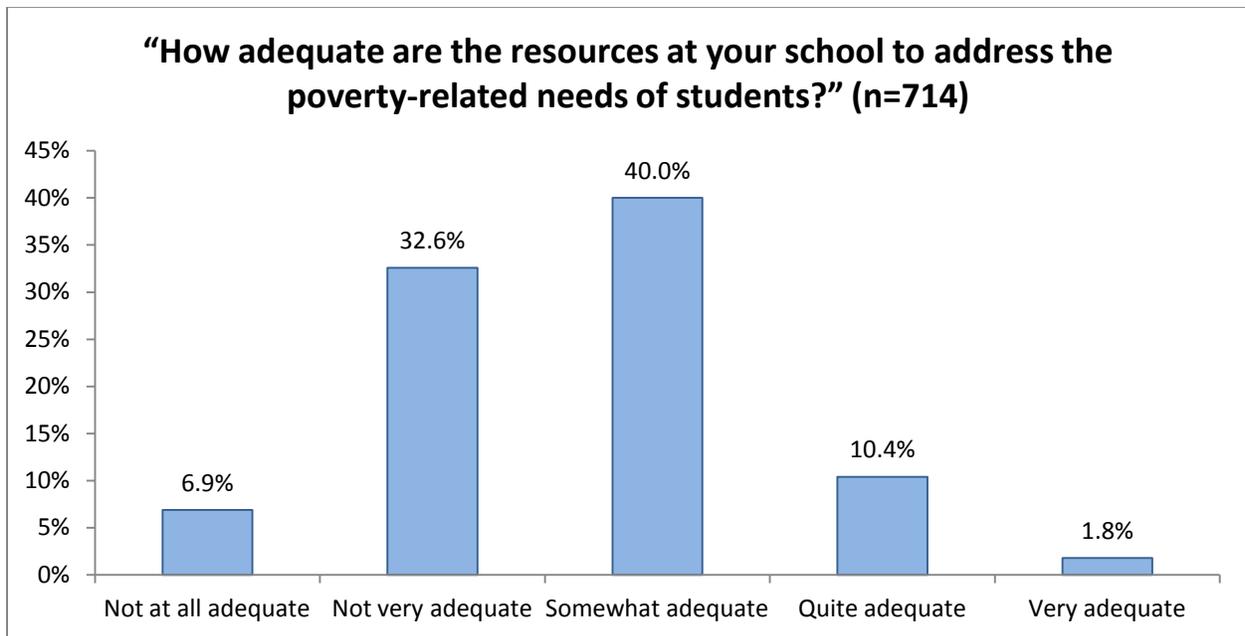


<sup>14</sup> Percentages are calculated after excluding “Does not apply” responses and are based on valid responses (excludes those who did not answer the question).

## Overall adequacy of resources at the school to address poverty-related needs of students

The survey asked teachers to rate the overall level of adequacy of resources at the school to address poverty-related needs of students. Of the 714 teachers who answered this question, only 10.4% rated the adequacy of the resources at their school to address the poverty-related needs of students as “Quite adequate”, and 1.8% rated it as “Very adequate”. One-third (32.6%) rated the adequacy of resources as “Not very adequate” and 6.9% as “Not at all adequate” to address the poverty-related needs of students at the school. The remainder (40%) rated the adequacy of resources as “Somewhat adequate”.

On average, teachers in schools located in low-income areas rated the adequacy of resources at the school to address the poverty-related needs of students the lowest, and teachers in schools located in high-income areas rated the adequacy of resources the highest.



## Funding to support low-income students and their families

The survey asked teachers “Does your school receive any of the following types of funding to provide services to ‘vulnerable’ students?” The most prevalent type of funding source that teachers are aware of is Parent Advisory Council (PAC) fundraising (70.4%), followed by Aboriginal targeted funding (51.7%), and CommunityLINK funding (29.6%). Some schools also received Private individual or corporate donations (20.8%), Community Schools funding (19.2%), Breakfast for learning BC (17%), and/or Inner-City Schools Program funding (14%).

Two-thirds of teachers (67.7%) indicated that their school depends on fundraising for field trips, and half indicated their school depends on fundraising for Library resources (51.4%) and the School playground (51.9%).

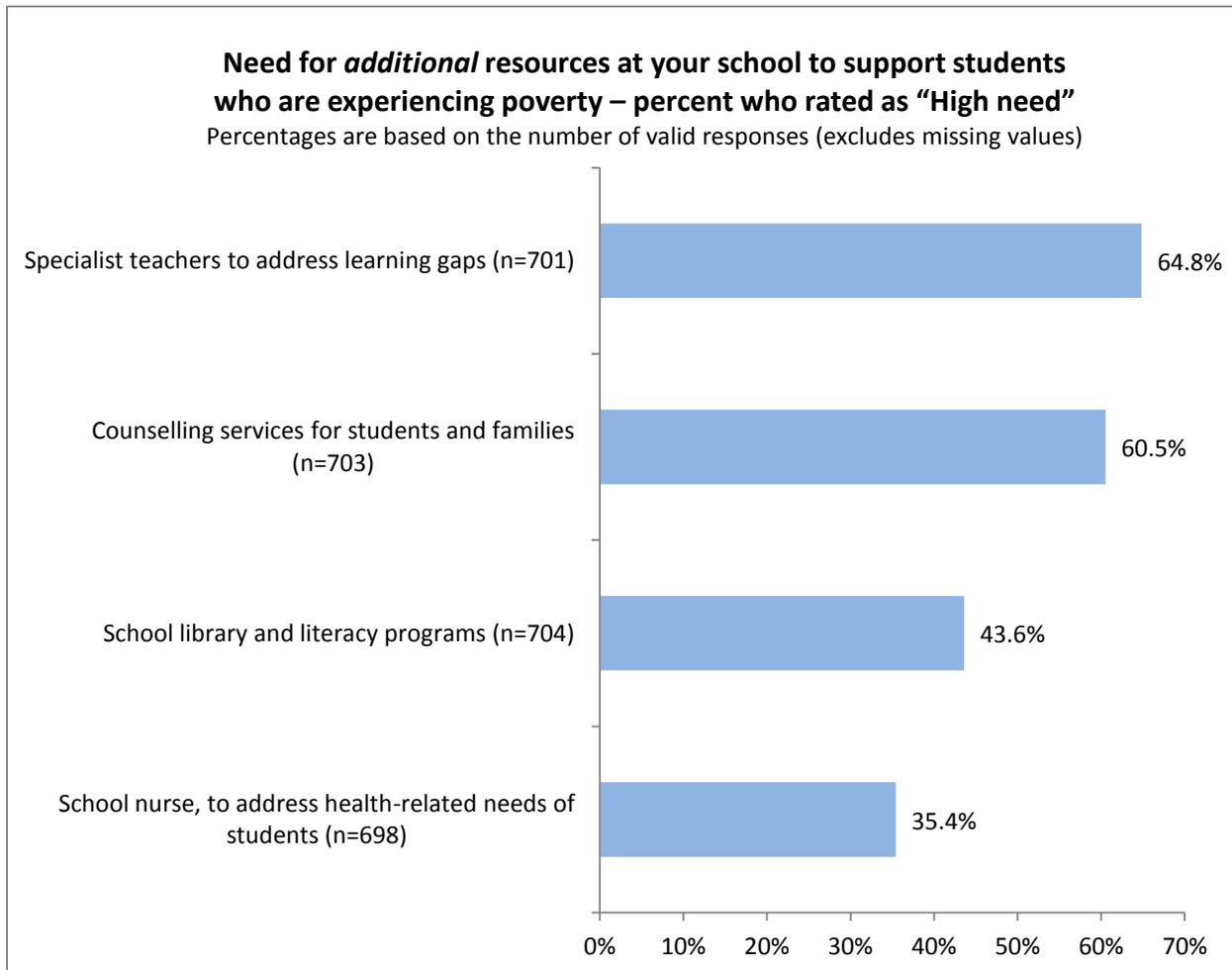
# What is most needed to support students and families?

The survey asked teachers to indicate the level of need in their school for a range of staffing and other resources to support students who are experiencing poverty—“For each of the following, do you consider there to be no need, a low need, moderate need, or high need, for *additional* resources at your school to support students who are experiencing poverty?”

## Professional staffing resources

Of those teachers for whom the resource applied to their teaching situation, 64.8% indicated a “High need” for “Specialist teachers to address learning gaps”, 60.5% a “High need” for “Counselling services for students and families”, 43.6% a “High need” for “School library and literacy programs”, and 35.4% a “High need” for a “School nurse to address health-related needs of students”.

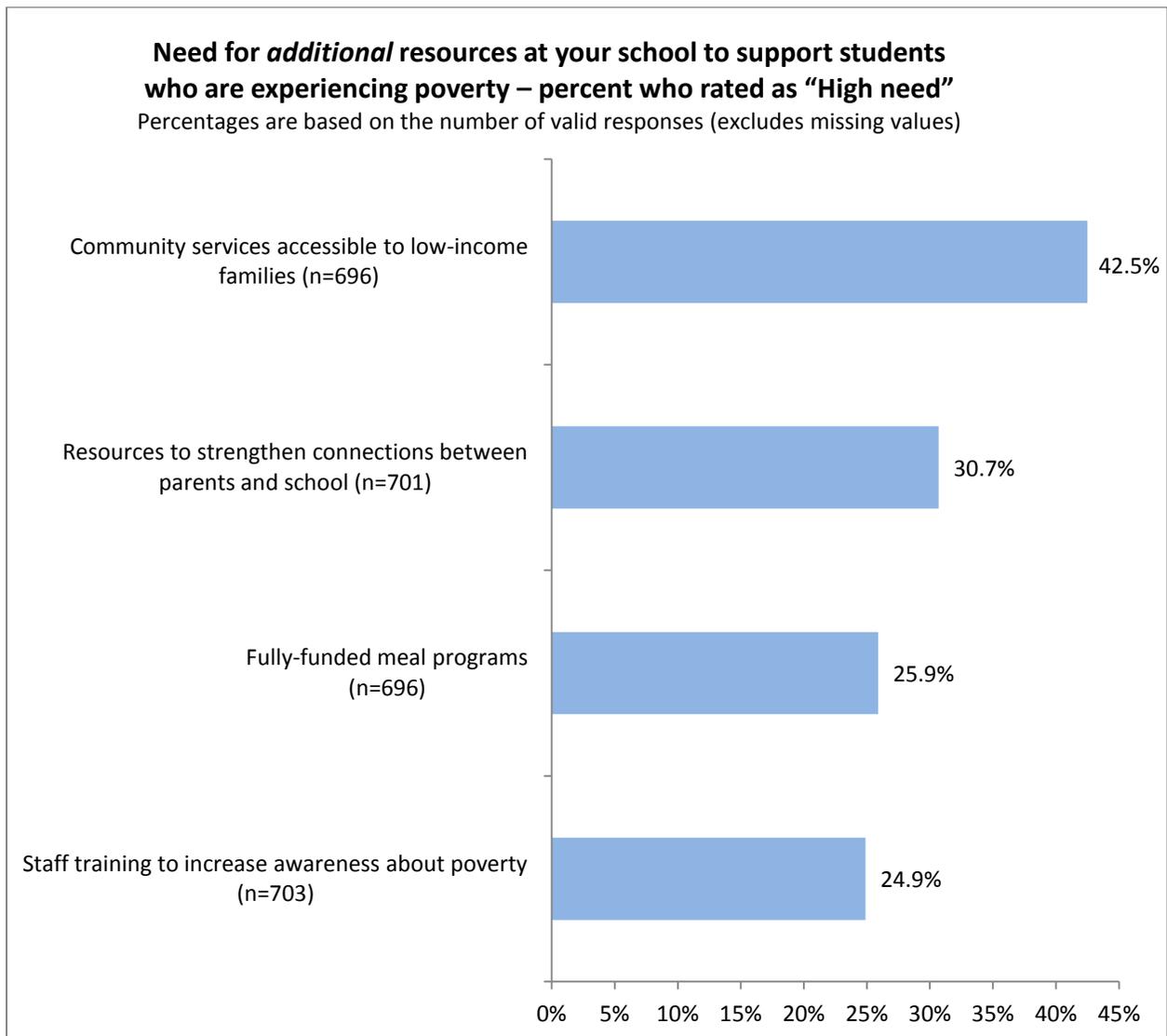
A comparison by socio-economic context of the school shows that the need for all four types of professional staffing resources is rated the highest by teachers in schools located in low-income neighbourhoods, and rated the lowest by teachers for schools located in high-income neighbourhoods.



## Programs and resources to support and strengthen school community

Of those teachers for whom the resource applied to their teaching situation, 42.5% indicated a “High need” for “Community services accessible to low-income families”, 30.7% a “High need” for “Resources to strengthen connections between parents and school”, 25.9% a “High need” for “Fully-funded meal programs”, and 24.9% a “High need” for “Staff training to increase awareness about poverty”.

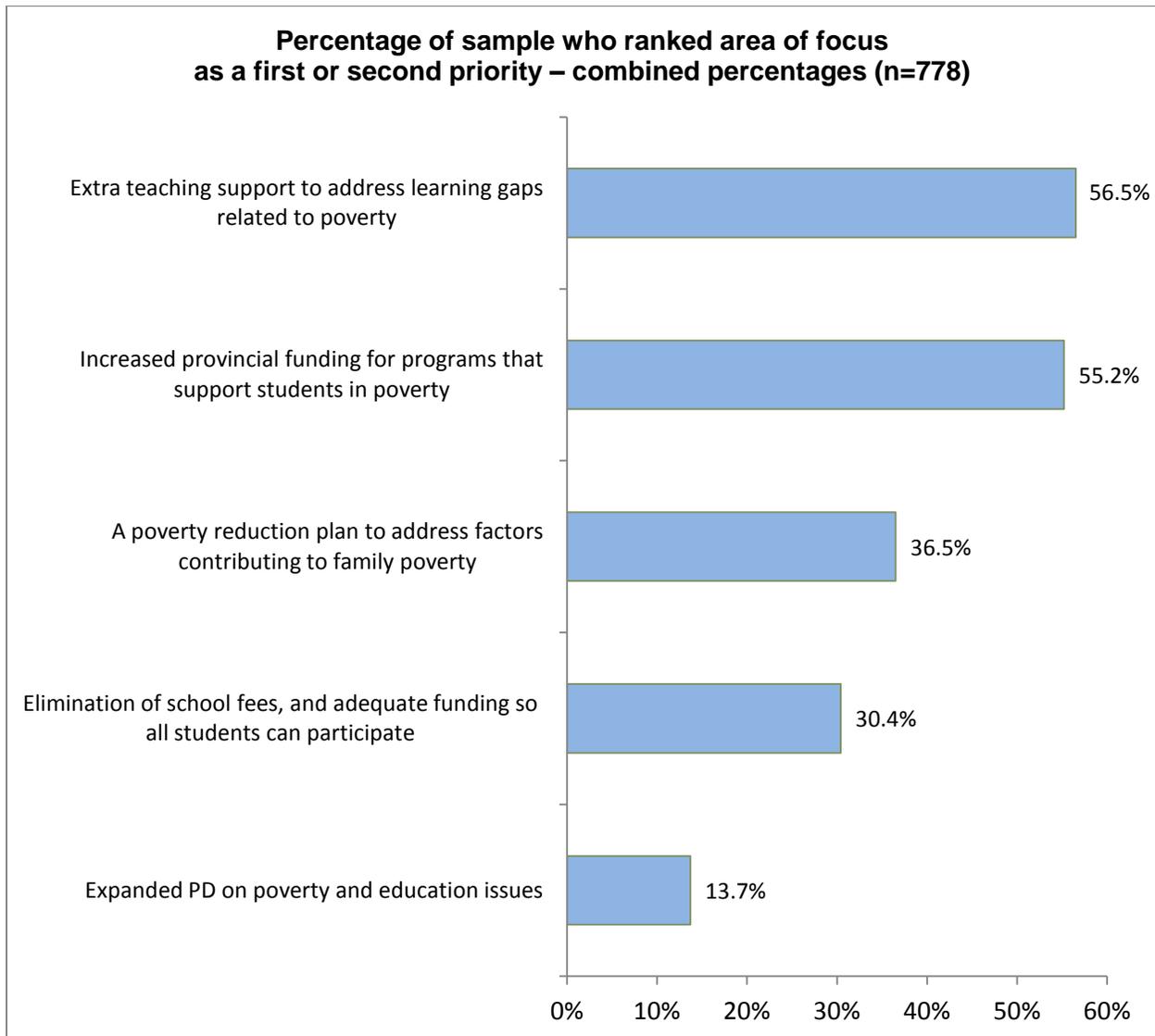
A comparison by socio-economic context of the school shows that the need for all four types of programs and resources is rated the highest in schools located in low-income neighbourhoods, and rated the lowest in schools located in high-income neighbourhoods.



## Priority areas for the BCTF to focus on in advocating for the needs of students who are experiencing poverty

The survey asked teachers to rank the following five areas of focus, from highest (1) to lowest (5), with regard to how important they consider each as a priority area for the BCTF to focus on in advocating for the needs of students who are experiencing poverty.

Of the five areas of focus listed, the percentage of teachers who chose the area as either a first priority or second priority is as follows: “Extra teaching support to address learning gaps related to poverty (56.5%), followed by “Increased provincial funding for programs that support students in poverty” (55.2%), “A poverty reduction plan to address factors contributing to family poverty” (36.5%), “Elimination of school fees and adequate funding so all students can participate fully at school” (30.4%), and Expanded PD on poverty and education issues (13.7%).



## Teachers' recommendations for the provincial government

The survey asked teachers if they had recommendations for what the provincial government could do to improve learning conditions and address poverty-related barriers for students. About one-third of respondents made recommendations, which can be grouped in four thematic areas:

### 1. Provide extra resources to address learning gaps

Many teachers expressed concern about the inadequacy of resources to address learning gaps of “grey area” students, many of whom are experiencing poverty. Teachers described the types of resources needed as: provide extra staffing resources such as specialist teachers for students in need of extra learning support, psychologists and counsellors to provide emotional support to students and families, speech language pathologists, early-intervention literacy programs, and educational assistants. Some teachers specifically recommended the government focus on improving classroom conditions so teachers can address diverse learning needs (staffing ratios, class size).

### 2. Improve education funding to address poverty-related barriers

Several teachers recommended the government fully fund public education. Some teachers commented that cutting educational programs and services negatively impacts on students in need of extra learning support, many of whom live in poverty. Many comments indicated a need for improved funding for schools with students vulnerable to poverty but which do not receive extra funds to support these students, such as “inner city schools project funding”. Some teachers recommended the provincial government address funding inequities that arise between schools due to differing capacities to fundraise. Other recommendations made by teachers to government about funding include to provide fully-funded meals programs, improve funding for counsellors to assist families to overcome poverty-related barriers, and eliminate school fees.

### 3. Address underlying causes of poverty

Some teachers recommended the government address underlying causes of poverty by implementing poverty reduction strategies. Teachers' suggestions for policies for reducing family poverty include: raise the minimum wage, implement a living wage, raise social assistance and disability rates, improve training and jobs in remote areas, and provide access to affordable, quality childcare, including out-of-school care. Teachers also recommended that the government address the shortage of affordable housing, and improve access to health services in rural areas.

### 4. Increase government awareness and understanding of poverty and education issues

Some teachers recommended that government increase their awareness and understanding of poverty and education issues by listening to teachers' ideas about what is needed to address poverty-related barriers, visiting schools in low-income neighbourhoods to learn about the challenges experienced by families and schools, increasing awareness of the poor housing conditions for families in low-income areas, and visiting rural schools to better understand the unique issues of these schools.

### 5. Other recommendations

Other recommendations by teachers include: address hunger and nutritional needs, improve mental health services and community programs for students and families, co-ordinate efforts between schools and social agencies, and improve access to technology for low-income students.

# **BCTF Research Report**

Part of the BCTF Information Handbook

RR2013-02

## **Adult education: An essential element in a poverty reduction plan to improve economic opportunities for low-income individuals and families**

*[www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630](http://www.bctf.ca/publications.aspx?id=5630)*

By Margaret White, Research Analyst  
BCTF Research Department  
January 2013

Part 1 provides evidence, drawing on Statistics Canada reports, that Canadians without a high-school certificate are most at-risk of unemployment, low earnings, and poverty. Young adults are especially hard hit, with significantly higher unemployment rates and lower average earnings than high-school graduates. Part 2 cites research that shows the high-school graduation rate in BC improves significantly after taking into account young adults (20 to 24 years) who complete high school, after the age of 19, in adult education programs. The data also show that some groups of young adults are at much higher risk of not graduating, suggesting they face multiple barriers to attending adult education courses. Part 3 concludes that adult education programs that are responsive to the needs of young adults facing multiple barriers to high-school graduation are essential to reducing the risk of high unemployment and low earnings that contribute to poverty.

## **Part 1: Education: Impact on earnings, unemployment, and poverty**

Research shows that young adults without a high-school diploma have lower average earnings and higher unemployment rates than graduates—both risk factors for poverty. And family poverty rates are significantly higher for families where a parent has less than a high-school education.

### **Family poverty rates and level of education**

There is considerable evidence that education buffers families against poverty. A 2008 Statistics Canada study found that higher levels of education of a parent protected families from persistent poverty, suggesting that pursuing further education can help families to move out of poverty (Fleury, 2008). The *Growing Up in North America* report (CCSD et al., 2008) shows that the child poverty rate in 2000 was five times higher for parents with less than a secondary education (27.6%), compared to those of parents who completed a university or college education (5.4%), and twice as high for families where a parent completed secondary/vocational or some post-secondary education.

### **Average earnings and level of education**

When young adults (20 to 24 years) with less than high school are employed, they work longer hours for less pay than high-school graduates, according to a recent Statistics Canada report<sup>1</sup>. In 2009–10, young adults without a high-school certificate working full-time worked 0.7 hours more per week and earned \$70 less per week, on average, than high-school graduates in the same age group. The gap in median weekly earnings for 20- to 24-year-old, full-time workers is even wider, with non-graduates earning \$97 less per week than high-school graduates. Over time, inflation-adjusted average earnings decreased for workers without a high-school diploma. Since 1997, the hourly wage in constant 2007 dollars decreased for workers with no high-school diploma, and increased by 5% for those with a post-secondary certificate (Statistics Canada, 2008).

### **Unemployment rates and level of education**

Young adults who do not complete high school are especially vulnerable to unemployment. In 2011, the unemployment rate of Canadians with less than high school was double that of high-school graduates, and four times as high as for those with a university degree<sup>2</sup>. This section draws on Statistics Canada reports to examine the impact of education on unemployment rates, and identify which groups are most at-risk of unemployment.

The figures in Table 1 show that the unemployment rate in Canada decreases steadily for each level of education. This relationship has been consistent over the last twenty years. Canadians with less than a high-school education had an unemployment rate about three times as high as those with a university degree in 1990, 2000, and 2010.

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<sup>1</sup> Gilmore, J. (2010, November). *Trends in drop-out rates and the labour market outcomes for young drop-outs*. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 81-004-X.

<sup>2</sup> Wannell, T. and Usalcas, J. (2012). Labour Force Survey: 2011 year-end review, *Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Statistics Canada: March 23, 2012, p.11.

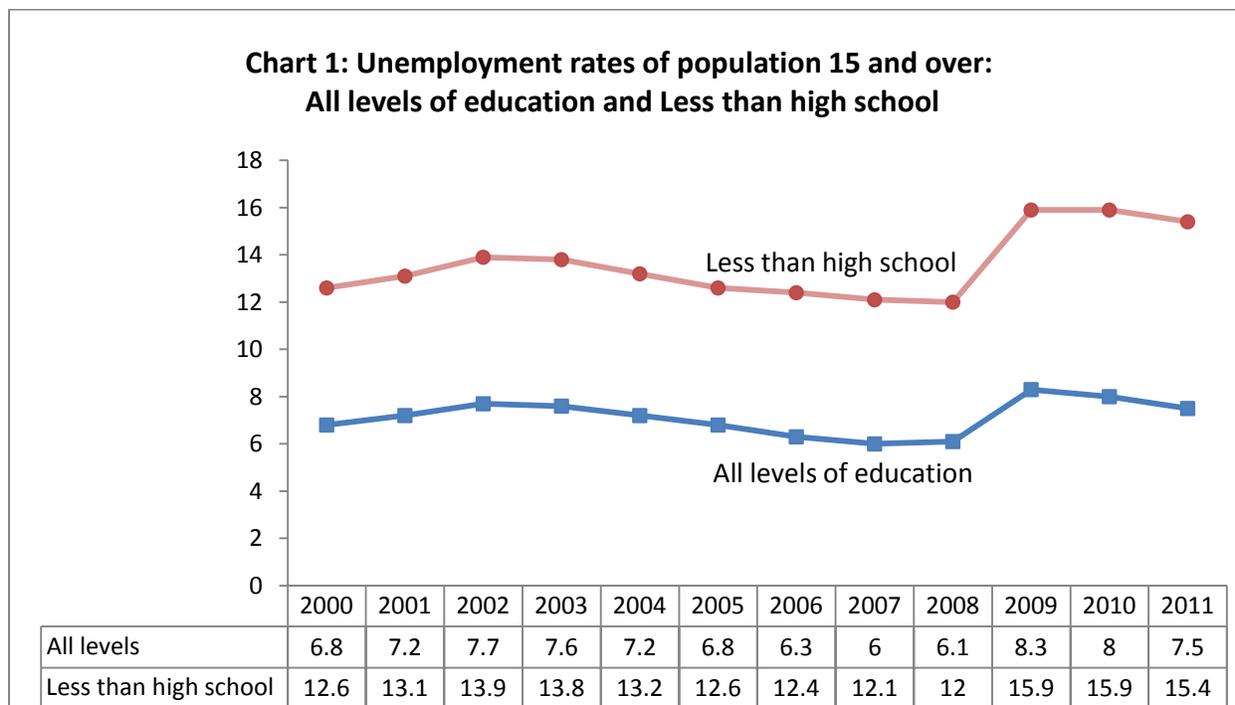
**Table 1: Unemployment rate by level of education, Canada: Select years—1990 to 2010**

	All levels	Less than high school	High school	College or Trade	University
1990	<b>8.1</b>	12.4	7.8	6.3	3.8
1995	<b>9.5</b>	15.1	9.6	7.9	5.0
2000	<b>6.8</b>	12.6	7.0	5.2	3.8
2005	<b>6.8</b>	12.6	7.1	5.3	4.6
2010	<b>8.0</b>	15.9	9.0	6.5	5.2

BCTF Research table with data from Statistics Canada (2012). Table E.3.1, Unemployment rates of population aged 15 and over, by educational attainment, Canada, 1990 to 2011; <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-582-x/2012001/tbl/tble3.1-eng.htm>

What appears to be worsening is the unemployment rate for those with less than high school relative to all levels of education. Chart 1 graphs the unemployment rate for individuals with less than high school and the average unemployment rate (all levels of education) between 2000 and 2011 (Statistics Canada, 2012a).

Between 2000 and 2008, the unemployment rate for individuals with less than high school was about 6% higher than for all levels of education. At the start of the global recession, unemployment rates increased for all groups, but more-so for those with less than high school. The gap in the unemployment rate widened at the start of the recession and has remained so since then. By 2011, the unemployment rate for individuals with less than high school was almost 8% higher than for all levels of education.



BCTF Research chart with data from Statistics Canada (2012). Table E.3.1, Unemployment rates of population aged 15 and over, by educational attainment, Canada, 1990 to 2011; <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-582-x/2012001/tbl/tble3.1-eng.htm>

## Aboriginal unemployment rate for non-graduates three times the national average

Aboriginal (Off-reserve) individuals are especially vulnerable to unemployment. Table 2 shows the unemployment rate by education level for All Canadians and for the Off-reserve Aboriginal population. In 2011, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people was 12.9% compared to 7.5% for all Canadians. The unemployment rate for Aboriginals with less than high school (22.5%) was considerably higher than for all Canadians with less than high school (15.4%), and three times as high as the national unemployment rate (7.5%). While the Aboriginal unemployment rate decreases with each level of education, it is higher than the average, except for university.

**Table 2: Unemployment rate and educational attainment—Canada (All) and Off-reserve Aboriginal population (Ab): 2007 to 2011**

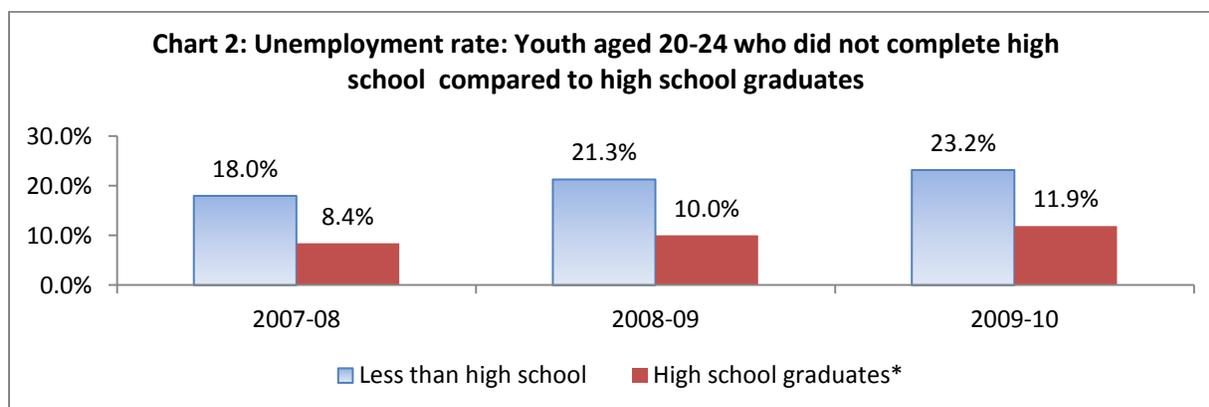
	Less than high school		High school		College or Trade		University		All levels of education	
	All	Ab	All	Ab	All	Ab	All	Ab	All	Ab
2007	12.1	17.1	6.4	9.5	4.9	8.4	3.7	5.1E	6.0	10.7
2008	12.0	16.3	6.6	9.9	4.8	7.5	4.1	5.7E	6.1	10.3
2009	15.9	23.6	9.3	13.9	6.8	10.4	5.0	3.7	8.3	13.8
2010	15.9	24.1	9.0	13.8	6.5	10.8	5.2	5.5	8.0	14.3
2011	15.4	22.5	8.4	13.6	5.9	9.1	4.9	4.4E	7.5	12.9

Note: “E” is a notation used by Statistics Canada to denote “Use with caution”.

Figures are from Statistics Canada (2012). Table E.3.3, Unemployment rates of population aged 15 and over, by educational attainment, off-reserve Aboriginal population, 2004 to 2011, and Table E.3.1, Unemployment rates of population aged 15 and over, by educational attainment, Canada, 1990 to 2011.

## Young adults with less than high school are most vulnerable to unemployment

Young adults (20 to 24 years) with less than a high-school education are most vulnerable to unemployment. Chart 2 shows that before the global recession (2007–08), the unemployment rate was double for young adults aged 20 to 24 years with less than high school (18%) compared to high-school graduates (8.4%). By 2009–10, the unemployment rate increased for both groups, but more-so for young adults with less than high school (to 23.2%, an increase of 5.2%) compared to high-school graduates (to 11.9%, an increase of 3.5%). (Gilmore, 2010)



\* Defined as “high school graduates of the same age who were not enrolled in an educational institution”.

BCTF Research chart with figures from Gilmore, J. (2010, November). *Trends in dropout rates and the labour market outcomes of young dropouts*, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 81-004-X.

## Part 2: Adult education programs make a difference

Although typical high school graduates will finish their secondary education by the age of 18, some do not, for a variety of reasons. Some return to school, taking advantage of ‘second chance’ opportunities for completing high school that are available across the country. However, by the age of 20 to 24, they typically have decided to return to complete their high school education or not.

Jason Gilmore, Statistics Canada (2010)

### Adult education opportunities boost the overall graduation rate

Statistics Canada data<sup>3</sup> show that many students who do not complete high school by 19 years do so by the age of 24 years. In British Columbia, 80.5% of youth aged 18–19 years graduated from high school in 2009–10. But this measure does not take into account the young adults who successfully complete high-school requirements after 19 years of age. For this reason, Statistics Canada calculates “the share of 20- to 24-year-olds who are not attending school and who have not graduated from high school”.

Using this measure, Statistics Canada figures for British Columbia (Table 3) show that 92.7% of young adults (20–24 years) are “high-school graduates”, 6.3% are “not a high-school graduate and are not attending school”, and 1% are “not a high-school graduate and are attending school”.

**Table 3: High-school graduation status, by age group, British Columbia, 2009–10**

	<b>16 to 17 years old</b>	<b>18 to 19 years old</b>	<b>20 to 24 years old</b>
High-school graduate	7.8%	80.5%	92.7%
Not a high-school graduate, attending school	88.1%	13.4%	1.0%E
Not a high-school graduate, <i>not</i> attending school	4.1%	6.1%	6.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

Note: “E” is a notation used by Statistics Canada to denote “Use with caution”.

Source: BCTF Research table with figures from a Statistics Canada report by McMullen and Gilmore (2010). *A note on high school graduation and school attendance, by age and province, 2009/10*, Appendix–Table A.1.

<sup>3</sup> McMullen, K. and Gilmore, J. Statistics Canada (2010). A note on high school graduation and school attendance, by age and province, 2009/2010; <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-004-x/2010004/article/11360-eng.htm>

## BC has the highest graduation rate for young adults 20 to 24 years

Table 4 shows that the percentage of 20- to 24-year-olds who are high-school graduates is significantly higher than the graduation rate of 18- to 19-year-olds for all provinces, notably so for Nova Scotia. British Columbia (92.7%) has the highest percentage of young adults (20 to 24 years) who are high-school graduates of all provinces, based on 2009–10 figures.

**Table 4: High-school graduation rate: 20 to 24 years old by province, 2009–10**

Province	18 to 19 years old	20 to 24 years old
Newfoundland and Labrador	81.2%	92.5%
Prince Edward Island	78.6%	91.2%
Nova Scotia	68.5%	88.7%
New Brunswick	77.0%	90.2%
Quebec	80.6%	85.4%
Ontario	75.5%	91.0%
Manitoba	73.9%	86.9%
Saskatchewan	72.1%	88.3%
Alberta	73.7%	89.0%
British Columbia	80.5%	92.7%
<b>Canada (national average)</b>	<b>76.9%</b>	<b>89.5%</b>

Source: BCTF Research table with figures from a Statistics Canada report by McMullen and Gilmore (2010), *A note on high school graduation and school attendance, by age and province, 2009/10*, Appendix-Table A.1.

## Some young adults are more vulnerable to not completing high school

In 2009–10, 8.5% of young adults aged 20 to 24 years in Canada were not high-school graduates, with a slightly higher rate for young men (10.3%) and lower for young women (6.6%). First Nations people living off-reserve (25.8%) and Métis (18.9%) aged 20–24 years show the highest non-completion rate. Richards (2011) reported the “dropout” rate for those living in rural areas (15.5%) was almost double that of those living in large cities (7.9%) between 2007–08 and 2009–10.

Statistics Canada data (Gilmore, 2010) shows that 6.2% of young adults in immigrant families were non-graduates in 2009–10, considerably lower than the rate for young adults born in Canada (9.1%). Research suggests this varies by country of origin. Richards (2011) cites data that shows the proportion of youth aged 15 to 24 years with incomplete secondary studies is above the national average for Haitian, Portuguese, and Jamaican youth and below the national average for youth from East and South Asia.

## Part 3: Discussion and implications

This report provides evidence that adult education programs can make a significant difference in improving the high-school completion rate, removing a significant barrier to overcoming poverty. Many young adults take courses leading to graduation after the age of 19, and graduate between the ages of 20 to 24 years. These data also tell us that young adults who live in rural areas, or who are First Nations or Métis, or are members of some immigrant groups, face the most barriers to enrolling in and completing high-school requirements. Offering adult education programs for non-graduated adults that are flexible and responsive to the needs of these young adults so they can complete high school and pursue further education can remove a significant barrier to moving out of poverty.

Many adults have completed a high-school certificate but do not have the course requirements to apply to post-secondary programs. Completing a post-secondary education further increases labour market opportunities and average earnings, and reduces the risk of unemployment. Data cited in this report show that the unemployment rate decreases with each level of education, and over time, inflation-adjusted earnings increase for individuals with a post-secondary certificate but decrease for those with less than high school. The authors of *Growing Up in North America* (CCSD et al., 2008) conclude that a lack of post-secondary education poses a significant barrier to moving between the low-wage labour market and the higher-paid jobs associated with the knowledge economy.

Providing opportunities through adult education for young adults to complete high school, and/or requirements to enter post-secondary training, is an essential element of a poverty reduction plan. More needs to be done to identify and address barriers that prevent young adults from attending and completing adult education courses, especially young adults who are much-less likely to complete high school, such as those living in rural areas, those who are Aboriginal, and immigrants from countries of origin with low graduation rates.

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