

Vernon Monashee Teachers Survey

Response from BC NDP Candidate Harwinder Sandhu

1. As an MLA, what will you do to help improve the safety of educators' working conditions in Vernon Monashee Community? Right now, our members are facing concerns about proactive contact tracing and even just feeling safe within the cohort system that is falling short to do justice to the pandemic needs. How do you intend to address this post election?

The September safe school restart guidelines were developed in consultation with teachers, parents, administrators, trustees and public health officials and it is the BC NDP's expectation that these guidelines are being followed by districts. \$288 million in combined provincial and federal funding is being distributed to districts for the 2020/21 school year for COVID-19 related resource needs. These funds have gone towards technology upgrades, as well as hiring more teachers and support staff to better support alternative learning options. To date more than 600 new teachers have been hired, 100 new education assistants and more than 1500 custodial staff.

On top of this \$288 million in funding for the 2020/21 school year, a re-elected BC NDP government will make an additional investment of \$46.2 million for a total of \$344.2 million in funding. We understand that district needs differ across the province, so through our education partner COVID-19 working group that includes parents, teachers, administrators, trustees and public health professionals, we remain committed to navigating any issues or concerns that arise during this school year and beyond.

2. BCPEA shares a challenging bargaining history with BC educators. This remained evident to educators in the last round of contract negotiations. What does your party propose to do to ensure the best possible outcome for BC students and educators? Would your party consider reorganizing this team for the coming rounds of bargaining?

It is key to have a government that believes in and supports our public education system and in working with teachers - not fighting them - to create the best learning environment for our kids. The BC NDP believe that a strong public education system is the best way to ensure a fair and equitable society where opportunities are equal regardless of financial status. The BC NDP put in place the Sustainable Services Negotiating Mandate in December 2018 that works to balance the need for improved services for people, with fair compensation for public sector workers. We've made record investments into BC's education system over the last three years, which has led to the largest capital and operating budgets in the province's history. After more than a decade of cuts by the BC Liberals, we understand we have more work to do and the BC NDP remains committed to working with our education partners to address any concerns or issues that arise.

3. Do you support increasing education funding to ensure provincially mandated expenses are covered and that BC schools are funded to at least to the national average? If yes, what actions will you take to ensure a positive outcome?

In 2020/21, we are investing an extra \$166 million to operate K-12 schools, for a total Education budget of \$6.7 billion – nearly \$1.1 billion more than the BC Liberals provided in 2016/17. In our first three years, we have increased per-student funding by 20%, four times the national average over that same time. The funding the BC NDP has added to the education system amounts to an increase of \$1,900 in per-student funding. Special needs education funding has increased along with this growth. This school year, districts will receive an estimated \$627.4 million to support students with special needs, a \$162.8-million (35%) increase since 2016-17. We recognize that we have more work to do to reverse the years of cuts under the BC Liberals, and a re-elected John Horgan government remains committed to increasing support to school districts to continue to deliver a world class public education.

4. Our school district is facing serious recruitment and retention issues and there is a sustained teacher shortage in the Vernon-Monashee region. We have had many classrooms with no educators and specialised positions remain unfilled for many terms. What will your party do to ensure our district can recruit and retain more certified educators?

By fighting publicly with teachers, ripping up contracts and repeated cuts to funding, the BC Liberals waged a war against public education in this province for more than a decade. It made young people think twice about entering the profession and those already delivering a world class education in BC were pushed to the brink. But the BC NDP made different choices when forming government. We made our province's public education system a priority and made historic investments into capital and operating budgets which has led to the smallest class sizes in a generation. We've invested \$2 billion into more than 100 new school capital projects across the province. We've increased operational funding to record levels. While we have more work to do to reverse the course of the previous government, we are committed to making this province an attractive place for those who seek education as a profession.

5. In the Vernon Monashee area, many educators do not have enough sick leave to stay home if they are told to self isolate because of a COVID-19 exposure or if they are experiencing COVID-19-like symptoms. Do you support a specific leave for COVID-19 in these circumstances? If yes, what actions will you take to ensure a positive outcome?

Even prior to the pandemic, John Horgan and the BC NDP were vocal in their advocacy for an enhanced national sick leave program. When the pandemic hit, John Horgan reached out to Prime Minister Trudeau to renew his call for a national program and in July the federal government announced a \$1.1 billion national program that will give 10 days of paid sick leave to all British Columbians. A re-elected BC NDP will continue to work with the federal government to implement this program in the province as soon as possible.

6. The Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) does not help students learn or educators teach and the results are misused by a private organization. What is your position on eliminating the FSA?

The BC NDP cancelled the Foundation Skills Assessment scheduled for this fall as we felt that it was important for educators and students to have greater capacity to adapt to the changes that a school year during a pandemic has brought. We realize it's important that student progress is monitored by teachers, administrators, parents and the Ministry of Education. A re-elected BC NDP commits to continue the conversation with our education partners on whether the Foundation Skills Assessment is the best way to monitor that progress.

7. Schools have an impact on the mental health of our students and the people who work in our schools. How do you educate yourself on the needs of people who learn and work in our school system? What will you do to see that appropriate supports are available within our school communities?

Currently as an advocate in Health care and a mother with children in the school system i always want to talk to the people that provide the services as they have first hand knowledge of the needs within the system. That need to know and understand the issues will not change when i become an MLA.

8. Our Education system, like our other colonial-based public systems, often fails to meet the needs of Aboriginal learners and their communities. How will you support educators and the system within which we work to better understand the needs of our Aboriginal learners and provide the necessary support for them to succeed within a system that was not designed by or for them?

9. How will you work with the Vernon Teachers' Association and the BCTF to ensure educators' concerns and issues are part of your caucus' and party's priorities?

Collaboration with all parties involved is a must to develop priorities. As an advocate for patients i know it's important to know and understand the needs of all involved when developing a plan that is going to work.

10. Racist propaganda has been circulated outside of our schools. There are growing racist attitudes and actions in our community. How does your party plan to address these issues?

The BC NDP are proudly committed to enhancing and strengthening initiatives in BC schools that promote Diversity and Inclusion, Anti-Racism and SOGI education. In the last three years the BC NDP:

- Expanded the ERASE anti-bullying strategy to include resources on mental health and wellness, and sexual orientation and gender identity with an additional \$3 million in grants.
- Embraced reconciliation by being the first province to adopt the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and enshrined it in law in 2019. We've

implemented new First Nations history curriculum and expanded course offerings in Indigenous languages. There are 17 First Nations languages that have been approved to be taught in schools and six more in development.

- Led the way as the first jurisdiction in Canada with a tripartite agreement to ensure equitable education for First Nations students, no matter where they live.

If re-elected the BC NDP will re-double its efforts towards strengthening and supporting these important initiatives so that all children, teachers and support staff feel safe and supported in our education system.

11. What do you think is the number one issue facing our schools right now and what will you do in the Legislature to help address it?

The top issue facing our schools this election is having a government that believes in and supports our public education system and in working with teachers respecting the work they do - not fighting them- to create the best learning environment for our kids. The BC NDP believe that a strong public education system is the best way to ensure a fair and equitable society where opportunities are equal regardless of financial status. As MLA I will be a strong supporter of our schools and the people who learn and work in them - and a re-elected John Horgan government is committed to continuing to invest in our kids and the smallest class sizes in a generation, to build on our record investment of \$2 billion over three years for new schools, expansions, and seismic upgrades, and to making sure the people who work and learn in our schools are now getting the support they need.

I believe that COVID is probably seen as the number one issue but i think if the respect is there no matter what the issue is we should be able to work together to solve the problems. We have a lot of work to do to rebuild the relationships that were destroyed by the Liberal cuts to public services.