BRITISH COLUMBIA | Ministry of Education

COVID-19
Student Impacts

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Executive Summary

The COVID-19 Context in Education

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students' learning and overall growth and development continues to unfold as BC and the world move into new phases of managing the virus and its variants. While it is still too early to draw definitive conclusions regarding if and how students have been and continue to be affected by the necessary and often urgent shifts and adaptations in the delivery of education during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are emerging indicators of potential priorities that will allow for measurement and the development of effective ways to address the identified impacts to student learning.

In understanding how education was addressed across Canada and around the world, there are strong signals that British Columbia's unique approach to the delivery of K-12 education during the pandemic could yield distinct results and outcomes. Specifically, BC students have experienced greater stability in their education than some other jurisdictions where there has been less opportunity for face-to-face learning. The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) anticipates that the approach taken by British Columbia will serve to mitigate potential negative impacts to students' learning and well-being.

When defining the scope of impacts to students due to the pandemic, we take the holistic view embodied in the Educated Citizen. This includes the perspective that not all impacts will be negative.

Our Goal

This report is Phase 2 of a multi-phase analysis on the effects of COVID-19, referred to as the *Impact on Learning Research Programme*. In this document, our goal is to better understand the medium-term impact from mid-March 2020 through June 2020 and the beginning of the 2020/21 school year (September 2020 through the beginning of February 2021).

The Phase 1 report documented the early and immediate impacts of the suspension of in-class instruction from mid-March 2020 through the end of May 2020, and the partial and voluntary resumption of in-class instruction in June 2020. The Phase 1 report was not released publicly.

A Phase 3 paper, planned for summer 2021, will address further evidence of potential impacts to students from the 2020/21 school year. Additional reporting is planned for the foreseeable future.

Key Research Questions

- Is there evidence of medium-term impacts to students from the spring of 2020?
- What changes were there to the delivery of education in the 2020/21 school year?

Methodology and Sources

As noted earlier in this document, the *Impact on Learning Research Programme* takes a holistic approach towards seeking evidence of impacts to students from the pandemic under the pillars of the Educated Citizen (intellectual, human and social, and career development).

Intellectual Development

Thus far, evidence of intellectual impacts to students relies on an analysis of provincial assessments. In this paper, there is an analysis of the June 2020 graduation assessments (page 24) and grade-to-grade transitions (page 25). The Phase 3 report will include subsequent graduation assessment analysis and the 2020/21 Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA).

Human and Social Development

The key Human and Social Development (HSD) measure is the annual Student Learning Survey (SLS) which is administered in the spring of each school year (January to April). The SLS is supplemented by primary data collection such as surveys of students and parents (e.g., July 2020 surveys; forthcoming surveys planned) as well as tracking COVID-19 school exposures (page 38, September 2020 onwards; weekly summary of exposure notices is posted publicly: http://www.bccdc.ca/schools/news-resources/school-exposure-notifications). It is not yet known if the changes that students are experiencing – the health and safety protocols, the physical distancing, cancellation of extracurricular activities, and other changes in their day-to-day lives – will affect their ongoing human and social development, but research (Zhao, 2021) indicates that it may.

Career Development

Career development indicators analyzed for this report include the 2019/20 completion rate (page 22), first-time grade 12 graduation (page 15), and the economic impacts of COVID-19 (page 14). Analysis of post-secondary transition rates will also be included in Phase 3.

The Delivery of Education in the 2020/21 School Year

The Phase 2 report includes the analysis of 2020/21 enrolment patterns (page 26), student absences (page 48) and workforce absences (page 56).

A particular emphasis was placed on discerning the impacts on students from traditionally underserved priority populations: Indigenous learners, students with disabilities and diverse abilities, and those with low socio-economic status. There is additional analysis being done regarding the impacts on children and youth in government care. Once this analysis has been completed, the information will be made available.

The Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports include a jurisdictional scan of the Canadian and global responses to education delivery during the pandemic as well as a literature review of published academic articles and media sources to better understand the context and challenges facing education systems.

Additionally, the Ministry of Education is employing external research partners who are pursuing related research on the best approach to measure and mitigate potential learning impacts resulting from the

pandemic. Together with the Ministry research, these external research projects will support an ongoing research programme on the impacts on learning.

Main Findings

1. **BC may have experienced fewer impacts than other jurisdictions**. Throughout the pandemic, British Columbia has had a lower COVID-19 prevalence relative to provinces such as Quebec, Ontario and Alberta. Accordingly, the province was one of two jurisdictions in Canada to resume in-class instruction in June 2020. In September, BC was able to resume in-class instruction province-wide; comparatively, in some provinces, students were out of the classroom from March 2020 to September 2020 or later (page 12).

2. **The students most impacted are likely within underserved populations such as Indigenous, those with disabilities and diverse abilities, low socio-economic status, and children and youth in government care.** The earliest findings indicate that fewer students from these populations are registered in standard schools in 2020/21 and that students from these priority populations have higher levels of absenteeism in comparison to students who are not from vulnerable populations. Provincial completion rates in 2019/20 increased slightly for all students and most sub-populations; it is unknown if grade inflation was a cause. Enrolment patterns suggest that those who did not graduate were disproportionately from vulnerable populations. Further analysis is required to determine if this represents a widening gap for vulnerable students that may be associated with the pandemic.

3. **There may be a delayed effect, both with intellectual development and mental well-being, that has not yet fully emerged.**
   The long-term impacts of students in transition programs, students who enrolled in distributed learning or registered in homeschooling, and students who were affected by decreased in-class instructional time remains to be determined. Additionally, the impacts of decreased in-person social time with peers and the effects on social-emotional learning and mental well-being are currently unmeasured.

Secondary Findings

<u>Enrolment</u>

- Enrolment in non-standard schooling such as distributed learning increased substantially in 2020/21 from previous years, as did registration in homeschooling.
- Proportionately more Indigenous learners transitioned from standard schools into DL schools and into registered homeschooling in 2020/21.

<u>Delivery</u>

- The newly-introduced district transition programs enabled students to maintain seats in programs and schools of choice; while more than 35,464 students began the 2020/21 school

year in a transition program, there are still 25,556 students in transition programs as of January 2021. Although transition programs are required to comply with the *School Act*, there are no set provincial standards for the implementation of these programs. As such, it is unclear what impact these programs may have on students' learning and development, and this could vary across districts.

- The implementation of learning groups or cohorts in 2020/21 required many districts to reconfigure timetables for students, particularly for secondary students. It is unknown if this has resulted in decreased in-class instructional hours.

Absences

- Student absences from in-class instruction appear to be higher than in previous years.
    - Absence rates vary considerably by district.
    - Indigenous students and students with disabilities and diverse abilities have higher absence rates than their peers, as do students from low-SES backgrounds compared to students not reflected in these cohorts. The year-over-year increased absenteeism in 2020/21 for these underserved populations was greater than the increase seen in non-vulnerable populations year-over-year in that time frame.
- Workforce absences are consistent thus far in 2020/21. Between September 2020 and January 2021, teacher and education assistant absences province-wide are relatively steady so far in this time period in the school year.

Rightsholder and Partner Feedback

The report's findings were discussed with the leadership of several rightsholders and partner organizations. There were several common themes shared by the representatives of these groups. They include:

1. Patterns of student absence should be examined in depth;
2. For some students, particularly vulnerable students, there were inequities in accessing education in 2020/21; and
3. Student and workforce mental health are areas of potential focus.

Who is a Rightsholder?

Indigenous people are rights and title holders, not stakeholders. Aboriginal title was first recognized by King George III in the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*. Indigenous people have constitutionally-protected rights to access to information on the educational outcomes of their children.

Next Steps

The planned Phase 3 research for summer 2021 will continue with a holistic approach to measuring and assessing learning impacts, grounded in the Educated Citizen; Zhao (2021) states that:

> "…the pandemic affected not only learning in reading and math but also the learning of each student as a whole person. The loss includes areas that are much more important than reading

and math, such as social emotional well-being, attitudes towards learning, interactions with friends, and physical and psychological development (p. 3)."

Phase 3 will include:

- Analysis of the provincial literacy and numeracy assessments (both FSA and graduation assessments);
- Student Learning Survey analysis;
- New COVID Impact on Learning survey for students; and
- Analysis of post-secondary transition trends.

In addition, a thorough incorporation of Indigenous perspectives is in scope (see page 47 for FNESC's input on Phase 2). Research on the impacts of the pandemic on students' learning and development will continue for the foreseeable future; the pandemic has offered education systems a rare opportunity to reflect on what was working well *prior* to the pandemic, what has been working well *during* the pandemic, and to take the best of both into the future.

List of Tables and Figures

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic may be one of the greatest challenges our provincial education system has ever addressed. In the spring of 2020, many governments around the world ordered schools to suspend in-person instruction for most of their students, requiring education systems to pivot almost overnight to online or remote teaching and virtual education. Classrooms moved into living rooms, bedrooms, hallways and kitchens and most teacher-student interactions were tied to the availability or strength of an internet connection. According to an Angus Reid Institute poll (May 2020), more than 80% of Canadian students surveyed said they were attending school online.

On March 17, 2020, British Columbia declared a provincial state of emergency due to the increasing number of cases of COVID-19. Public and independent schools in the province suspended in-classroom teaching in accordance with guidance from the Provincial Health Officer. BC was one of two K-12 educational systems in Canada to successfully restart in-class instruction in June 2020. In-class instruction was available to all students, with approximately 36% of kindergarten to grade 5 students and 16% of grades 6 to 12 students attending school in person on a part-time basis (school density targets in place; see text box below). Most students continued their learning remotely on a district to district (and/or individual independent school) basis.

At the time of the writing of this report (February 2021), there are jurisdictions across Canada and globally where schools have not yet reopened to in-person learning or have reopened only to close again in response to an increase in COVID-19 cases in the wider community.

This report reviews evidence of learning impacts from the 2019/20 school year and documents the delivery of education and its impacts during the 2020/21 school year (up to February 2021), to support government and partners who must manage the educational consequences of this global pandemic.

BC K-12 Education System's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic:

- March 17, 2020: Boards of Education, on the advice of the Provincial Health Officer, suspend in-class instruction.
- Mid-March to May 31, 2020: Stage 4 – Remote/online learning for most students; schools are open for children of essential service workers, students with disabilities and diverse abilities, and students who require additional supports.
- June 2020: Stage 3 – In-class instruction is resumed for K-5 students with 50% maximum capacity in schools, and grades 6-12 students with 20% capacity in schools.
- September 2020: Stage 2 – In-class instruction for all K-12 students for the maximum learning group size (elementary and middle schools: 60 students per learning group; secondary schools: 120 students per learning group).

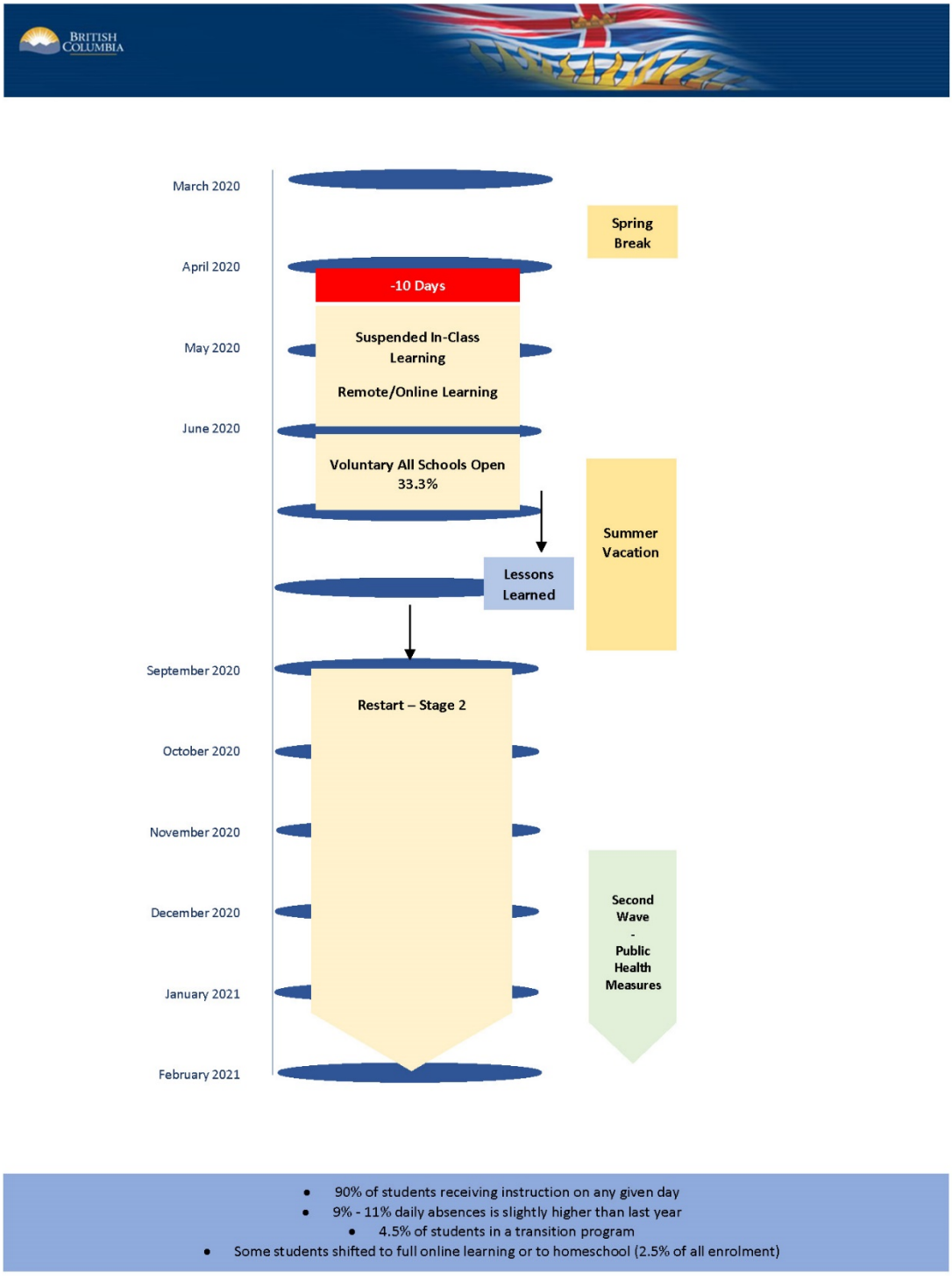


Figure 1: Timeline of BC's response to COVID-19 in K-12 education.

Overview of Phase 1 Research

Phase 1 research was conducted from mid-March 2020 through August 2020. It encompassed a jurisdictional scan to understand how other provinces and countries were adjusting their educational systems in the initial days of the pandemic. Researchers tracked school closures in response to COVID-19 in 194 countries, affecting 90% of all enrolled learners (1.5 billion students by April 5, 2020; United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2020). A literature review revealed a collective emergent response to document and respond to the global pandemic, the likes of which had not been seen in a century. The Organization for Economic Cooperative Development (OECD) published "*A framework to guide an education response to the COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020*" (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020), which detailed a rapid assessment of education needs and highlighted innovative practices in response to the pandemic.

Research began to examine the trade-offs of closing schools and determined that although school closures may result in mitigating rising case counts of COVID-19 in a community, they come with significant impacts on health, education, economic and social inequalities. The costs of missing school are massive (Kuhfeld and Tarasawa, 2020); for many students there is no adequate substitute for in-person learning. Students who need the extra support and structure that school offers will be disproportionately negatively affected by suspensions of in-class instruction (Dorn, Hancock, Sarakatsannis, and Viruleg, 2020). This includes those who rely on schools for access to meal programs, as well as those who don't have a quiet place to study, stable internet access at home, or the technology to access online learning resources.

Concerns were raised by researchers Schweingruber, Dibner, and Bond in their report *Schools and the Pandemic* (2020), that without careful implementation, virtual learning without any in-person engagement runs the risk of exacerbating disparities in access to high-quality education across different demographic groups and communities. Additionally, educators have pointed out significant challenges in transitioning primary students (K-3) to an online environment (Bennhold, 2020). Van Lancker and Parolin (2020) note that previous recessions have exacerbated levels of child poverty with long-lasting consequences for children's health, well-being and learning outcomes. In addition, research from Reimers and Schleicher (2020) indicates that students from economically disadvantaged or low-SES households are less likely to have access to a computer, to the internet, and to a quiet place to study.

Primary data sources collected and analyzed in the Phase 1 report included a student *COVID Impact on Learning Survey* administered to students in BC in grades 10 through 12 in July 2020; over 10,500 responses were received. A parent *COVID Impact on Learning Survey* was also conducted in July 2020, and over 26,400 responses were received. Additionally, the annual *Student Learning Survey* administration was extended until June 2020, allowing for six months of data collection and an analysis of responses received "pre-COVID" (January 2020 to mid-March 2020) and "during COVID" (mid-March 2020 through June 2020). Secondary data sources included the analysis of student attendance records from June 2020 with the recommencement of in-class instruction in Stage 3, as well as pertinent results from a survey conducted in May 2020 through the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC). Through these data sources, the voices of students, parents and educators were woven together to strengthen and reinforce insights.

One notable insight from the parent *COVID Impact on Learning Survey* (July 2020) was that parents of younger children reported a sharp increase in how often they had to help their child with their schoolwork and assignments, from 13.3% prior to mid-March to 70.2% during the suspension of in-class instruction, and then decreasing to 49.5% in June when classrooms reopened.

In the open-ended responses, a theme that emerged for parents of younger children was the challenge of balancing working from home as they supported their child's learning. Grades 10 to 12 students responding to the student *COVID Impact on Learning Survey* (July 2020) were less likely (than parents responding to the parent survey) to report needing help with their schoolwork and assignments, from 17% prior to mid-March 2020, rising to 38% during the suspension of in-class instruction, and then decreasing to 25% in June 2020. Parents of older students responding to the parent survey reported feeling ill-prepared to support their child's advanced lessons. These responses align with published research (Garbe, Ogurlu, Logan, and Cook, 2020).

The Phase 1 report documented the early and immediate impacts of the suspension of in-class instruction across BC's educational system from mid-March through the end of May 2020, and the partial and voluntary resumption of in-class instruction in June. It delivered important insights on how BC's students, parents and teachers had been coping during that time, and laid the foundation for the current paper.

"Build Back Better"

The "learning loss trap" is the lure of taking a negative approach to measuring and assessing learning impacts caused by COVID-19. Zhao (2021) cautions policy makers and government against focusing too heavily on assessing impacts to reading and numeracy to the exclusion of other important skills.

"We are used to assessing math and reading and to ignoring other school subjects and non-cognitive and long-term educational outcomes." Yet, Zhao continues, "the pandemic affected not only learning in reading and math but also the learning of each student as a whole person."

Zhao advocates for "building back better" – for continuing things that were working well during the pandemic into the future:

- Treat students as individuals, who have had different experiences of the pandemic.
- Work on *all* educational outcomes and in developing well-rounded students for a post-pandemic society.
- Personalize students' learning experiences; "engage learners as partners of change and owners of their learning."
- Continue to support parental involvement and engagement.
- Keep online/remote learning to encourage global connections.

Jurisdictional Scan

How have other provinces delivered education from September 2020 through January 2021?

Provinces across Canada adjusted their educational systems in response to the pandemic in different ways. As noted in the Phase 1 report, BC was one of only two provinces (Quebec being the other) to reopen classrooms in June 2020. The start of the 2020/21 school year occurred varied across Canada. In the Atlantic provinces, schools returned to full-day, in-person instruction. While most students returned to in-class learning in the rest of Canada, some jurisdictions offered remote learning as an alternative. Some implemented a province-wide approach to COVID-19 protocols, as BC did, while others adopted a regional approach, such as Ontario.

BC offered continuous in-person instruction onwards from September 2020 but in other provinces there were adaptations to increased COVID-19 community cases (e.g., Alberta) and extended Christmas holiday breaks (e.g., Manitoba, Ontario: see Table 1).

Location	
British Columbia	- Students returned to class on September 14, one week later than scheduled, to facilitate educator planning and preparation. Apart from school-specific exposures, in-class instruction continues uninterrupted. - Schools break on December 18; back to school on Jan 4, as scheduled.
Alberta	- A revised school re-entry plan was released in August 2020 consisting of three scenarios: full opening, partial opening and continued remote learning. K to grade 6 in-class instruction – as scheduled – until December 18. - Grades 7-12 moved online on Nov 30. - One week extension of break (Jan 4-8) for at-home learning (K-12). All students were welcomed back to in-class instruction, which resumed between January 11 and 18.
Saskatchewan	- Schools re-opened in September with re-start details determined at Division (school district) level. - Regina public schools moved to online learning for the week before (Dec 14-18) and for the week after (Jan 4-8) their scheduled winter break. Back on January 11.
Manitoba	- Schools re-opened on September 8 with full-time, in-class instruction for kindergarten to grade 8. Most secondary schools had a mixed model to ensure distancing. - K-6 students may choose remote learning or in-class instruction for the two weeks after winter break (Jan 4-15). - Grades 7-12 remote learning only for two weeks after winter break (Jan 4-15). - Full return to in-class instruction on January 18.

Ontario	- Schools re-opened on September 8 with remote learning options for students not returning to class. - Elementary schools re-opened with full-day, in-class instruction. - Secondary schools in designated boards (e.g. Greater Toronto, Hamilton, London) employed an adapted model of in-class instruction (e.g. 50% of instructional days). - Secondary schools in non-designated boards (e.g. Lakehead, Upper Canada) re-opened with full-day, in-class instruction. - Northern regions (K-12) and Southern regions (K-6) – online learning for first week after break (Jan 4-8); resume on January 11. - Southern regions (Secondary) – online learning for three weeks after break (Jan 4-22); resume on January 25.
Quebec	- Schools returned in September with mandatory classes. K to grade 9 were in full-day instruction. Students in grades 10 to 12 had the option of full-day instruction or a blended model. - One week extension of break (Jan 4-8) for online learning (K-12). - In-class instruction resumes on January 11.
New Brunswick	- School started in September with K to grade 8 in full-time instruction. - For grades 9 to 12, many students attended in-class every other day with online learning or directed projects on in-between days. - No change for K-12 – regularly scheduled break.
Prince Edward Island	- School started on September 8 with full in-class instruction. - No change for K-12 – regularly scheduled break.
Nova Scotia	- School started on September 8 with full in-class instruction. - K-12 schools went on break on Dec 18 (instead of Dec 22, as scheduled) and the break will be extended for one week (Jan 4-8). In-class instruction resumes on January 11. - No instruction provided from Jan 4-8 – teachers will receive five days of professional learning.
Newfoundland & Labrador	- School started on September 8 with full in-class instruction. - No change for K-12 – regularly scheduled break.
Yukon Territory	- Schools returned on August 24 with an in-class option and a remote option. - No change for K-12 – regularly scheduled break.
Northwest Territory	- No change for K-12 – regularly scheduled break.
Nunavut Territory	- Varies by region – all regions moved to online learning for K-12 on Nov 18, but some regions returned to full in-class or hybrid learning on Dec 2.

Table 1: Summary of school restart and adjustments to winter break.

How have other provinces/countries been measuring and mitigating learning loss?

Across Canada, provincial and territorial governments are in the early stages of understanding the impact of COVID-19 on student learning. For most, definitive data will not be available before the end of the school year, so there are efforts being made on what information could be accessed sooner such as standard assessments, report cards and attendance. For example, one province indicated an increase of

"needs development" scores in elementary school assessments. In others, an analysis of report card marks is under way.

Internationally, there are many studies examining the impact of COVID-19 on learning. For example, after an eight week lockdown in the Netherlands during the first COVID-19 wave in March 2020, learning loss was estimated as a fifth of a school year in terms of the typical progress made by a student in a typical year (Engzell, Frey & Verhagen, 2020).

A recent Australian study examined inclusive education during the COVID-19 pandemic (Page *et al*, 2021) and found that "despite the efforts of educators, students who have special educational needs can fall through the cracks and are at great risk of losing connection both academically and emotionally."

COVID-19 could have an impact on learning growth that translates into reduced economic opportunities with accompanying macroeconomic impacts. The OECD (Hanushek and Woessmann, 2020) estimated the effect of COVID-19 learning disruptions on potential lifetime earnings. It identified that students in grades 1 to 12 in G20 countries might earn 3% less in lifetime earnings even after schools return to pre-COVID-19 performance levels. The impact would be more drastic for disadvantaged students.

Economic Impacts

The onset of COVID-19 in March and April 2020 had sudden and severe negative impacts on the BC economy. Activities such as travel, dining out and making major purchases were drastically curtailed. As a result, economic activity in many sectors declined with some of the hardest hit industries being tourism, hospitality and retail.

These impacts were clearly seen in BC labour market reporting where employment fell by a combined 396,500 in March and April 2020, the most sudden drop on record. The unemployment rate peaked at 13.4% in May 2020. In all, an estimated 630,000 people age 15 and older were impacted by unemployment or reduced working hours in the first few months of the pandemic.

The impacts were felt strongly among young people and those with lower levels of education (Brunello and Schlotter, 2010). In May 2020, the unemployment rate for people age 15-24 was 30% and among high school age workers (15-19), the unemployment rate was 35%. Among all British Columbians, unemployment rates were highest among those with high school education or less.

The BC economy started recovering after May 2020 and over the next several months, employment increased so that by January 2021 employment had returned to 98.4% of pre-COVID-19 levels (i.e., 41,700 below February 2020). This is fourth among provinces (after Newfoundland & Labrador (99.1%), Nova Scotia (99.1%) and New Brunswick (99.0%)) and higher than the Canadian average of 95.5%. BC's unemployment rate is 8.0% which is higher than the range of 4% to 5% observed from 2017 to 2019.

In BC, every region of the province recovered to pre-COVID-19 unemployment levels by the end of 2020 except for the Lower Mainland where employment was 2.1% lower than in February 2020. The persisting impact of the pandemic is being felt by young people and those without post-secondary education. The sectors that are most sensitive to the pandemic are also sectors where students get most of their initial work experience. Employment among youth age 15-19 increased to 102,500 in February 2021, substantially higher than the April 2020 low of 64,800, with the unemployment rate falling to 14.2%.

Overall, BC is recovering from the unprecedented employment declines observed in March and April of 2020. Much of the province has re-established pre-COVID-19 employment levels, but the industries in which young people most commonly work are the most affected by strategies to reduce the spread of COVID-19. Young people can wait this out but may also be adapting by looking for work or volunteer experience in other sectors.

Learning Impacts From the 2019/20 School Year

Grounded in the pillars of the Educated Citizen (intellectual development, human and social development, and career development), we sought to look for evidence of learning impacts on educational outcomes from the 2019/20 school year. The following is an analysis of the 2019/20 first-time grade 12 grad cohort, the 2019/20 completion rate, and insights into the June 2020 Grade 10 Numeracy Assessment administration.

First-Time Grade 12 Graduates

In 2019/20, there were 48,110 first-time resident grade 12 students in the BC school system. Most of these students were in public schools (43,416 or 90.2%) compared to independent schools (4,694 or 9.8%).

- Over 80% of these students graduated, with
    - 36,721 (76.3%) who graduated and did not return to the K-12 system in 2020/21; and
    - 2,434 (5.1%) who graduated and returned to the K-12 system.
- Of the close to 20% who did not graduate,
    - 4,284 (8.9%) returned to the K-12 system in 2020/21; and
    - 4,671 (9.7%) did not return in 2020/21.

Students from underserved populations such as those who are Indigenous, those with disabilities and diverse abilities, are low-SES, and/or are in government care were less likely to graduate and less likely to return, but it is unknown if this is related to the ongoing pandemic (see Figure 2). Additionally,

intersectionalities of at-risk factors can exacerbate inequalities of outcomes (e.g., students in government care who have a disability or diverse ability compared to students who are not in government care and do not have a disability or diverse ability).

Of the 48,110 first-time grade 12s in 2019/20, 14.1% (6,809) had a disability or diverse ability ("special needs designation" or "designation").

- Almost one third (1,384 or 31.9%) of the 4,284 students who did not graduate in 2019/20 but returned in 2020/21 had a designation.
- Of the 4,671 students who did not graduate and did not return, 21.4% (1,000) of these students had a designation.

Likewise, 12.8% (5,467) of the first-time grade 12s in 2019/20 were Indigenous students.

- Almost one quarter (974 or 22.7%) of the 4,284 students who did not graduate in 2019/20 but returned in 2020/21 were Indigenous students.
- 984 Indigenous students (21.1%) did not graduate and did not return in 2020/21 (accounting for 21.1% of the 4,671 who did not graduate and did not return).

Of the 48,110 first-time grade 12s in 2019/20, 3.0% (1,428) were English Language Learners (ELL).

- Close to 10% of the 4,284 students who did not graduate but returned in 2020/21 were ELL (395, or 9.2%).
- 267 ELL students did not graduate and did not return (accounting for 5.8% of the 4,671 who did not graduate and did not return).

First-time grade 12 French Immersion students are far less vulnerable than the three subpopulations previously mentioned.

- Of the 48,110 first-time grade 12 students in 2019/20, 2,822 (5.8%) were in French Immersion.
- Fewer than one percent of the 4,284 who did not graduate but did return in 2020/21 were in French Immersion (34 or 0.8%).
- Lastly, of the 4,671 students who did not graduate and did not return in 2020/21, only 1.0% (49) were in French Immersion.

Figure 2 shows the lower levels of graduating students among underserved populations (e.g., ELL, Indigenous, and Disabilities and Diverse Abilities) and the higher levels of students who did not graduate or return to school in comparison to less vulnerable populations. Additionally, Figure 3 shows the outcomes for first-time grade 12 students by facility type.

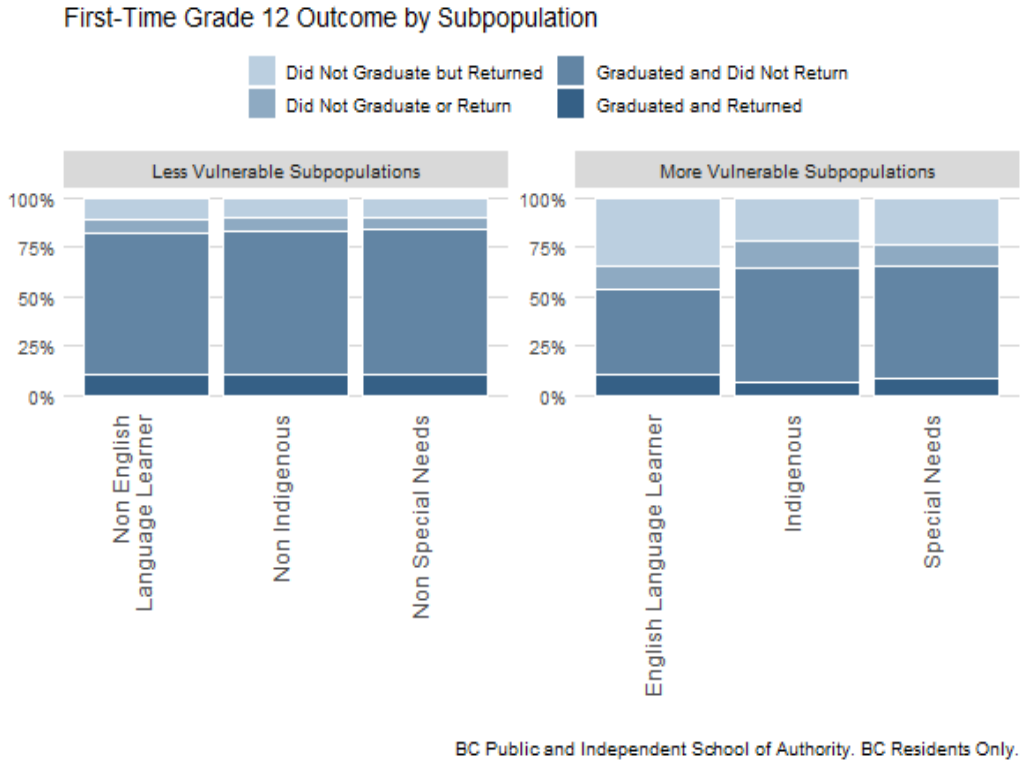


Figure 2: Distribution of outcomes for first-time grade 12 students by subpopulation (2019/20).

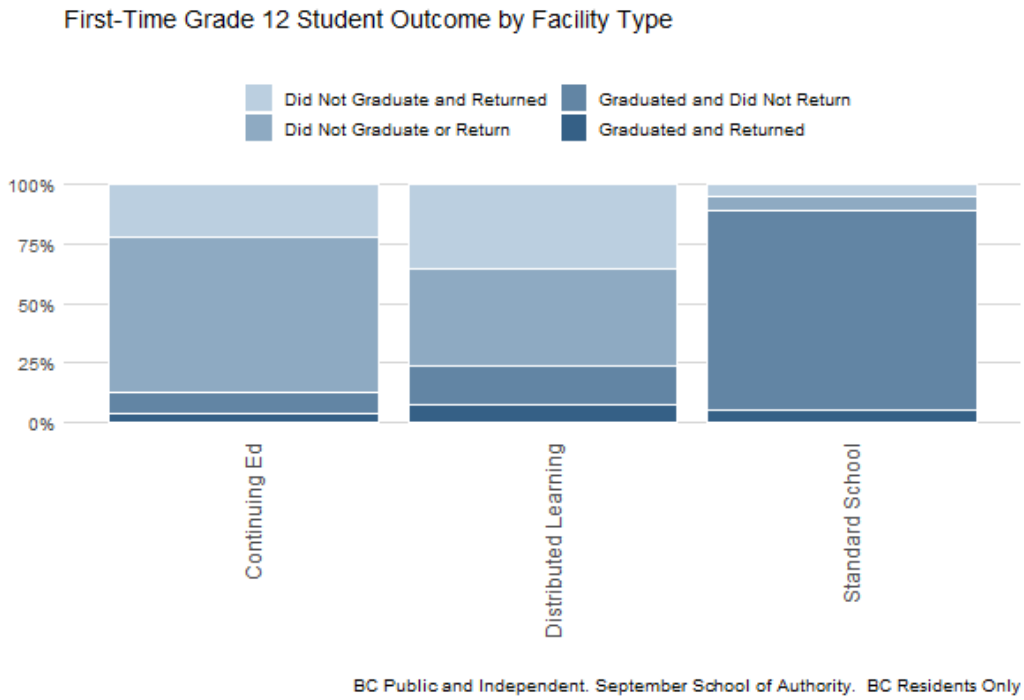


Figure 3: Distribution of outcomes for first-time grade 12 students by facility type (2019/20).

Nearly 9 out of 10 first-time grade 12 students in 2019/20 were enrolled in a standard ("brick and mortar") school (42,680 or 88.7%).

- About 1 in 20 (2,265 or 4.7%) were enrolled in distributed learning (DL) schools;
- 1,979 (4.1%) were enrolled in alternate schools; and
- 1,150 (2.4%) were enrolled in a continuing education school.

Of the 4,284 first-time grade 12 grads who did not graduate in 2019/20 but did return in 2020/21:

- Over half (2,304 or 53.8%) were enrolled in a standard school in 2019/20;
- 806 (18.8%) were enrolled in a DL school;
- 916 (21.4%) were enrolled in an alternate school; and
- 257 (6.0%) were enrolled in a continuing education school.

Of the 4,671 first-time grade 12 grads who did not graduate in 2019/20 and did not return in 2020/21:

- Over half (2,527 or 54.1%) were enrolled in a standard school in 2019/20;
- 917 (19.6%) were enrolled in a DL school;
- 474 (10.1%) were enrolled in an alternate school; and
- 746 (16.0%) were enrolled in a continuing education school.

These statistics indicate that **greater supports are needed for students enrolled in continuing education schools, alternate schools and DL schools compared to standard schools**.

There appears to be a slight linear trend between socio-economic status (SES) and average Grade Point Average (GPA) for first-time grade 12 students in 2019/20, suggesting that students from higher SES neighbourhoods tend to achieve higher average GPAs. However, there is significant noise in the data, reflecting the complexity of the relationship between average GPA and SES which likely involves other factors (see Figure 4).

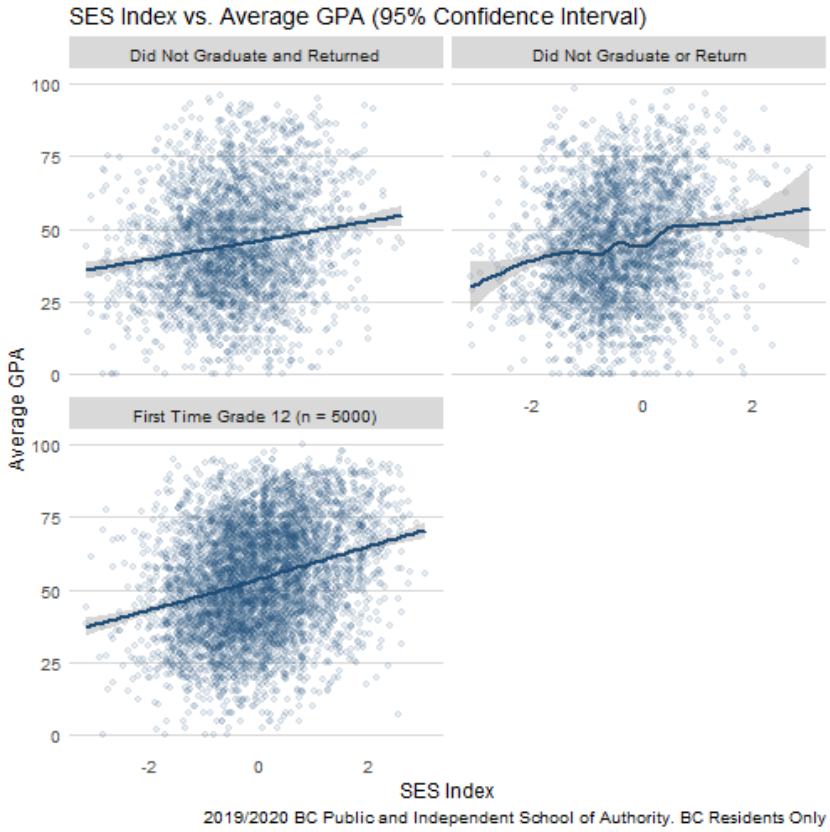


Figure 4: SES and average GPA scatterplot for first-time grade 12 students, aggregated by student outcome.

The distribution of first-time grade 12 students across three SES index categories (low, middle, high) is shifted left (negative) for those who did not graduate, and is similar for those who returned to school in 2020/21 with those who did not. This suggests that students who do not graduate are more likely to come from a low-SES neigbourhood. Of those who did graduate, students who came from a middle-SES neighbourhood were more likely to return to school in 2020/21 than those who came from a high-SES neighbourhood (see Table 2).

SES INDEX	
	Low (<-1)
	Middle (-1 to 1)
	High (> 1)

	Graduated			Not Graduated		
Returned	336 (13.8%)	1,812 (74.6%)	280 (11.5%)	1,026 (24.1%)	2,911 (68.4%)	319 (7.5%)
Did not Return	5,079 (13.9%)	25,877 (70.5%)	5,661 (15.5%)	1,102 (23.8%)	3,215 (68.4%)	317 (6.8%)

Table 2: SES index categories and outcomes for first-time grade 12s (2019/20).

Of the 2,434 first-time grade 12 grads who graduated and returned in 2020/21, there are certain school districts where more than 10% of first-time grade 12s graduated and returned: SD 69 – Qualicum, SD 62 – Sooke, SD 47 – Powell River, SD 64 – Gulf Islands, and SD 79 – Cowichan Valley (see Figure 5).

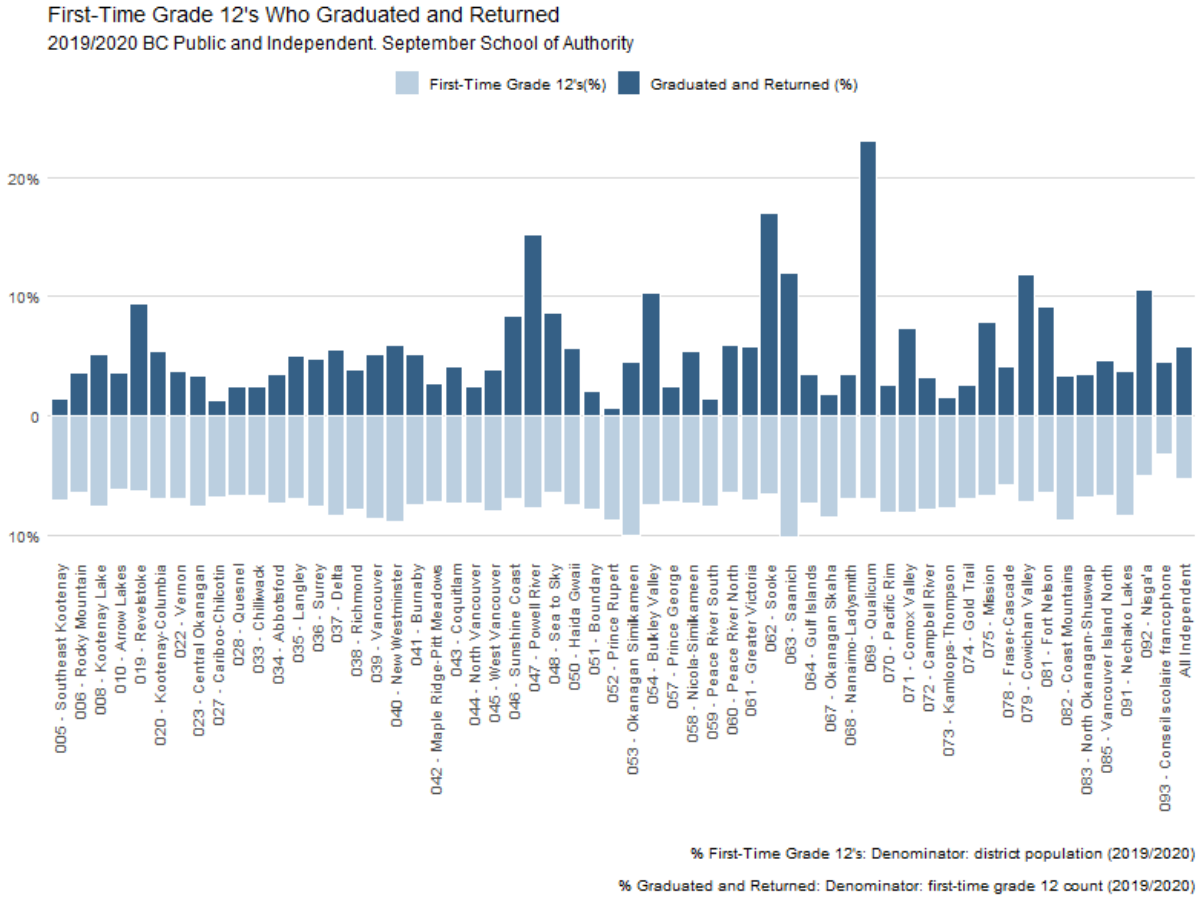


Figure 5: Proportion (%) of first-time grade 12 students in 2019/20 who returned to school in 2020/21 after graduating, by district. Lower bars indicate proportion (%) of first-time grads in each district.

Between 10% and 20% of first-time grade 12 students in 2019/20 in 17 districts did not graduate but returned in 2020/21. Six districts (SD 84 – Vancouver Island West, SD 40 – New Westminster, SD 91 – Nechako Lakes, SD 70 – Pacific Rim, and SD 47 – Powell River) saw between 20% and 30% of students not graduate, but return, and only one district (SD 87 – Stikine) saw the majority (over 70%) of their first-time grade 12 grads not graduate but return in 2020/21 (see Figure 6).

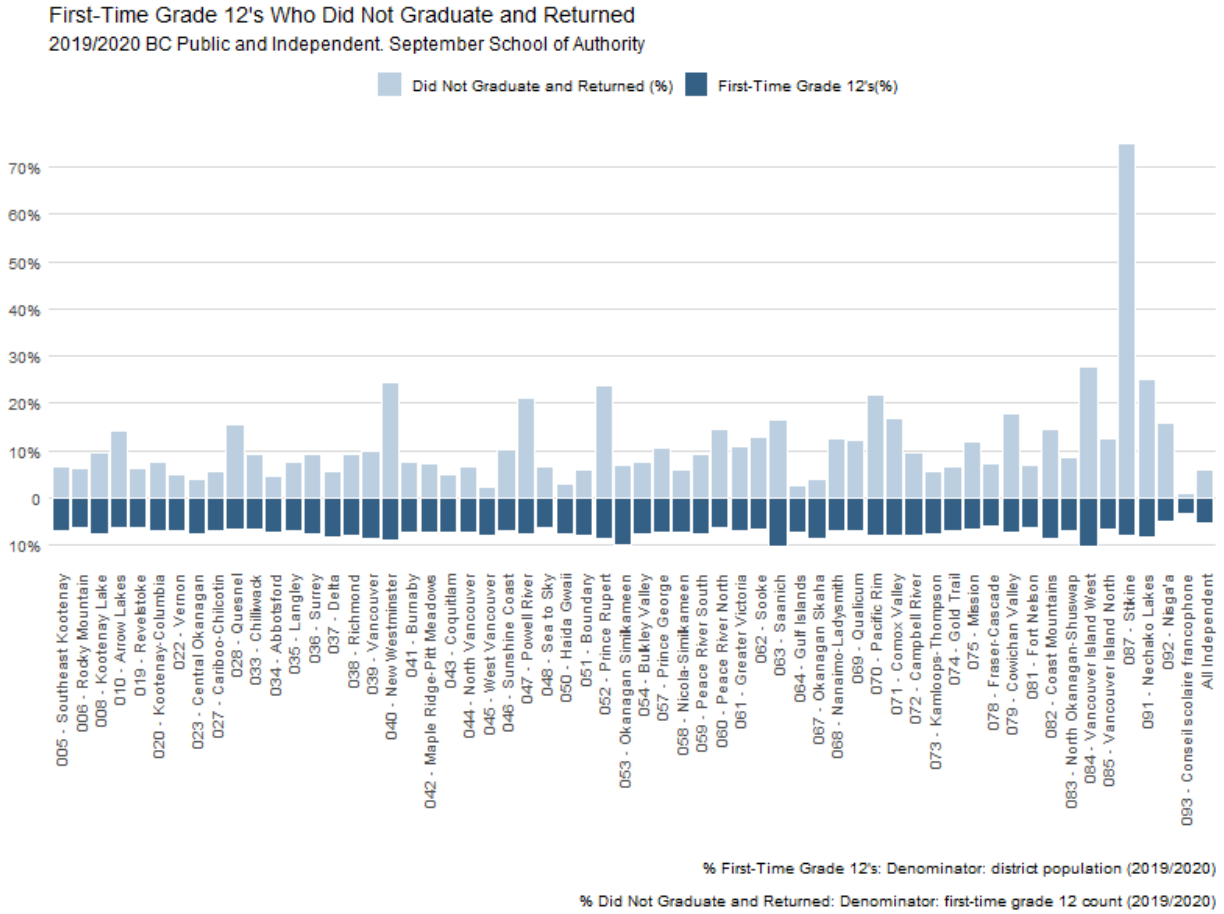


Figure 6: Proportion (%) of first-time grade 12 students in 2019/20 who did not graduate but returned to school in 2020/21, by district.

In one third of school districts, between 10% and 20% of first-time grade 12 students in 2019/20 did not graduate and did not return in 2020/21. Four districts saw 20% to 30% not graduate and not return in 2020/21: SD 84 – Vancouver Island West, SD 63 – Saanich, SD 53 – Okanagan Similkameen, and SD 71 – Comox Valley (see Figure 7).

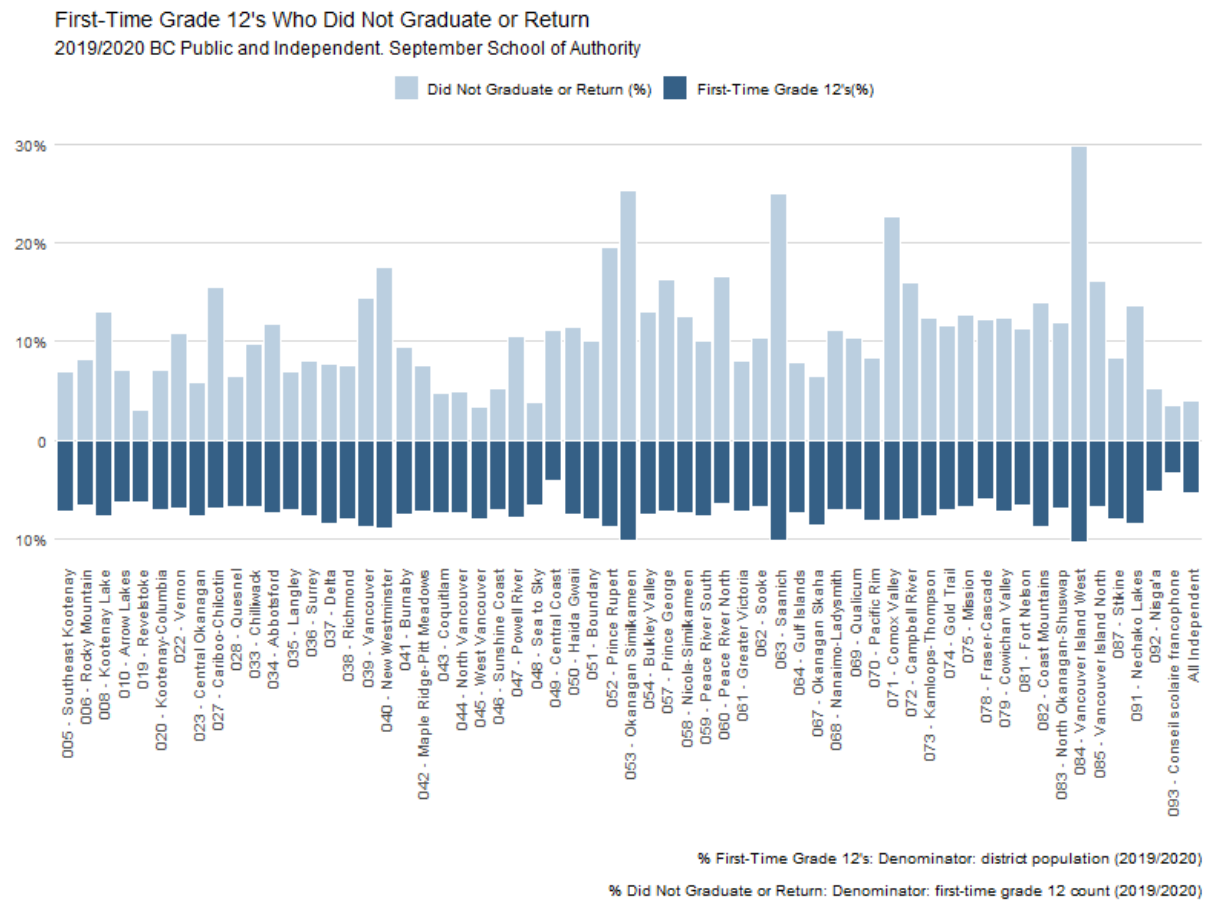


Figure 7: Proportion (%) of first-time grade 12 students in 2019/20 who did not graduate and did not return to school in 2020/21, by district.

In summary, the majority of first-time grade 12 students in 2019/20 went on to graduate.

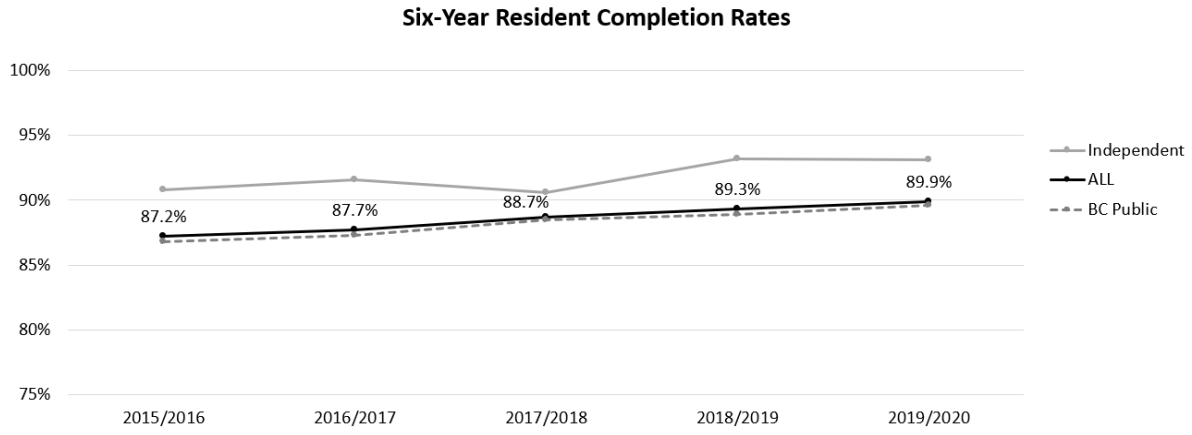
- Of those who did not graduate, 4,284 returned to the K-12 system in 2020/21 and 4,671 did not return.
- Groups of students who were less likely to graduate and less likely to return include students with disabilities and diverse abilities, Indigenous students and English Language Learners.
- Additionally, greater supports are needed for students enrolled in continuing education schools, alternate schools and DL schools compared to standard schools, as these students were less likely to graduate.
- First-time grade 12 students who did not graduate are more likely to come from a low-SES neigbourhood.
- Lastly, certain districts are anomalous in the numbers of grade 12 students who did not graduate but may or may not have returned in 2020/21.

Compounded, it appears that **students with vulnerabilities who are enrolled in non-standard schools and who come from low-SES neighbourhoods in certain districts will need greater support to graduate in their first-time grade 12 year**.

2019/20 Completion Rate

The six-year completion rate was developed to estimate the percentage of students entering grade 8 who graduate with a BC Certificate of Graduation ("Dogwood") or BC Adult Graduation Diploma ("Adult Dogwood") within six years. While most students will complete high school within the expected five-year period, a number of students will take longer to complete their Dogwood or Adult Dogwood (e.g., students who take a year off to play sports or study abroad, those who require an additional year to successfully finish one or two required courses, or those who may need extra time for other personal reasons). The Completion Rate cannot be calculated at school level, as outmigration estimates cannot currently be calculated for school-level cohorts.

The six-year resident completion rate for 2019/20 for all students (public and independent) rose slightly over the 2018/19 rate (89.9% vs. 89.3%, see Figure 8). The "resident" completion rate removes non-resident students in the completion rate cohort, as many non-resident students do not intend to remain in BC until graduation.



School Year	2015/2016	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019	2019/2020
ALL	87.2%	87.7%	88.7%	89.3%	89.9%
BC Public	86.8%	87.3%	88.5%	88.9%	89.6%
Independent	90.8%	91.6%	90.6%	93.2%	93.1%

Figure 8: Six-year resident completion rates 2015/16 through 2019/20.

There is variation in six-year resident completion rates across the 60 school districts within the province (see Figure 9). The 2019/20 rates varied from 41.4% to 100.0%. The yellow bars correspond to the BC

independent (93.1%), "All" (public and independent; 89.9%), and BC public rates (89.6%; see far right column in Figure 8).

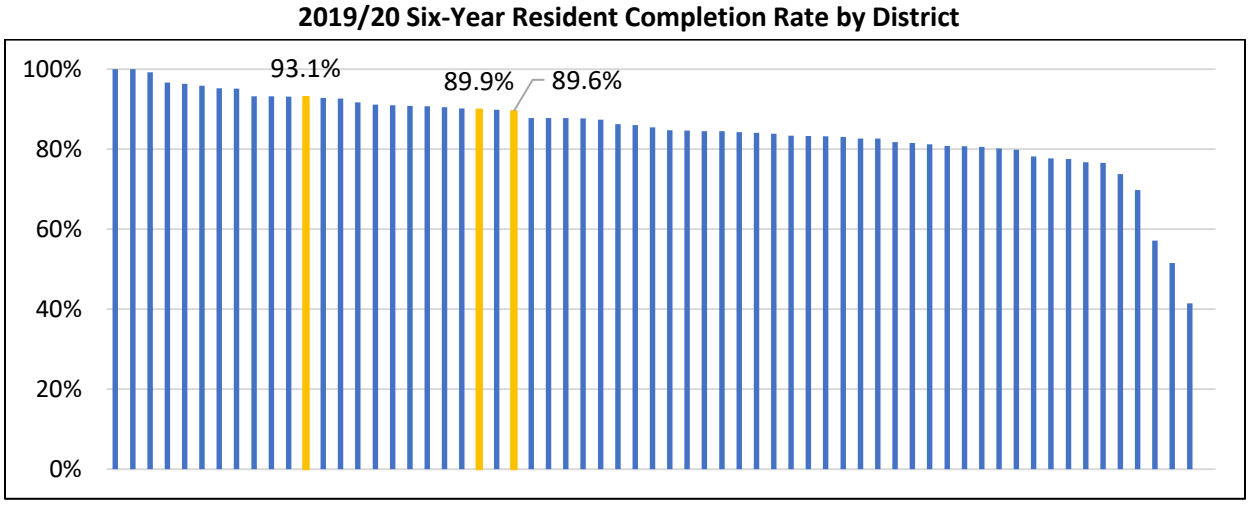


Figure 9: Six-year completion rate by district, 2019/20.

Completion rates for Indigenous students remain below those of their Non-Indigenous peers. While this gap is closing over time, there is still much work to be done towards equity for all students in the K-12 education system (see Figure 10).

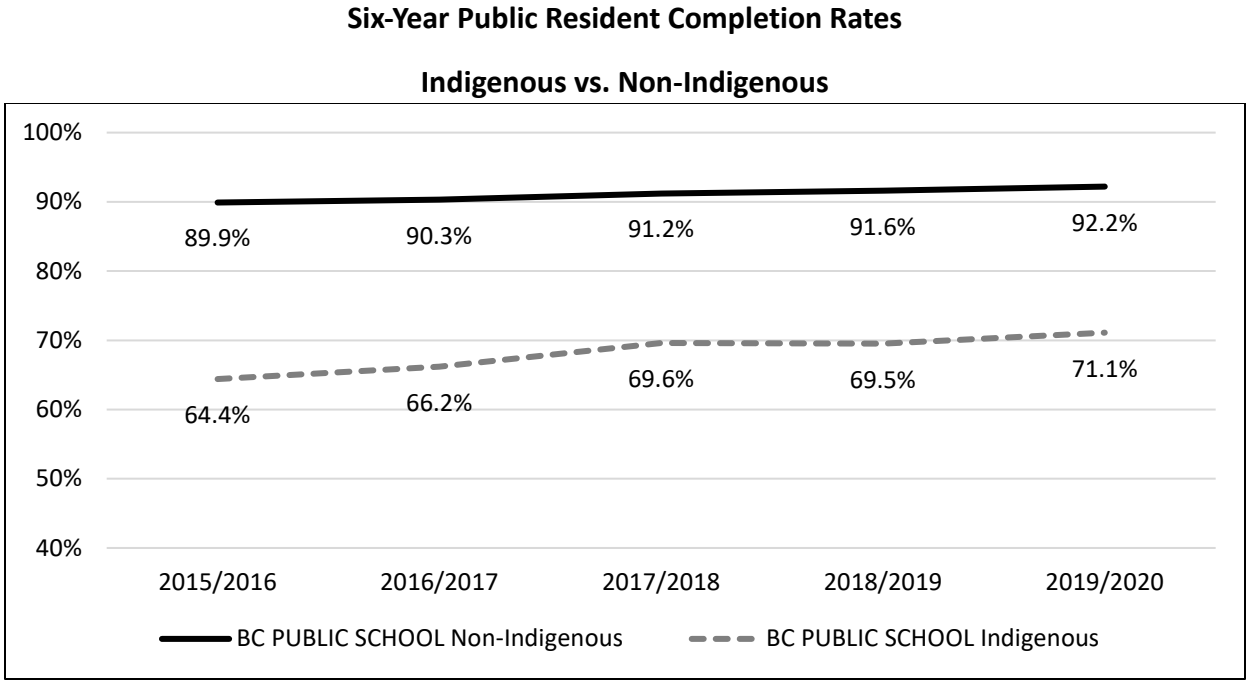


Figure 10: Six-year public resident completion rates, 2015/16 to 2019/20, for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students.

While the gap for completion rates between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous students is narrowing over time, there continue to be persistent gaps in completion rate outcomes for other student groups who

are chronically underserved by the system, students with intersectionalities of at-risk characteristics such as disabilities and diverse abilities, and children and youth in government care (see Figure 11).

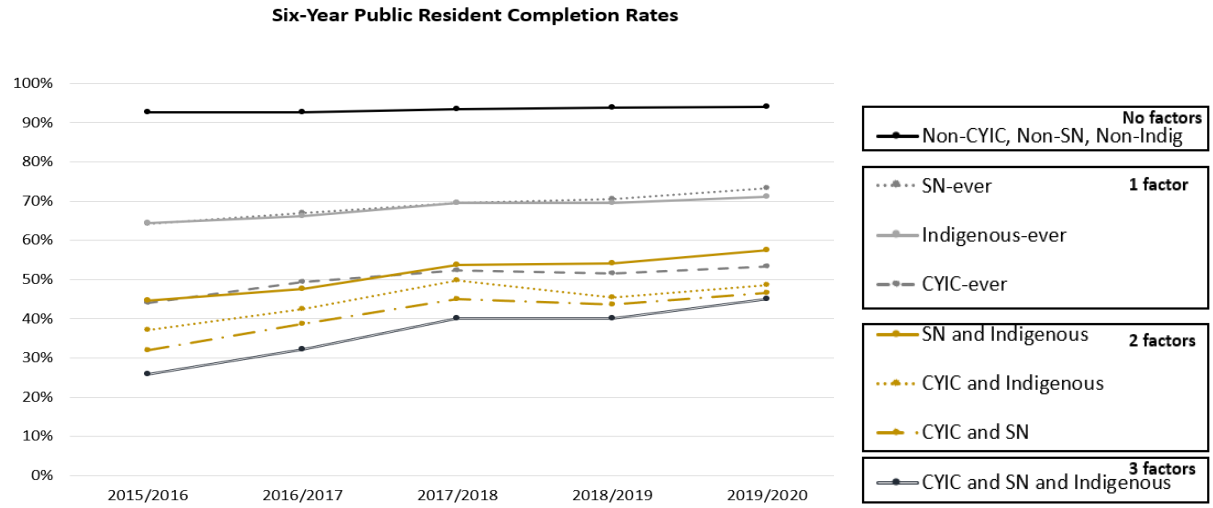


Figure 11: Six-year public resident completion rates, 2015/16 through 2019/20, by underserved population.

It is not apparent from the above analysis that there were significant system-wide impacts to the 2019/20 completion rate as a result of the suspension of in-class instruction from mid-March to May 2020 and the resumption of in-class instruction in June 2020, **although undoubtedly there were individual students whose graduation plans were directly impacted by the pandemic**.

June 2020 Grade 10 Numeracy Assessment

The Grade 10 Numeracy Assessment is a provincial assessment that assesses student proficiency in numeracy and is a graduation requirement. A June 2020 administration was added for grade 12 students who had not yet completed the assessment but needed it for graduation. Two thousand nine hundred and sixty (2,960) grade 12 students were registered in the June administration, of which 1,276 wrote the assessment and another 99 were granted aegrotat status. **Just over a thousand (1,003) students who wrote the June administration graduated with either Dogwood (1,001) or Adult Dogwood (2) graduation credentials**; two students who wrote the assessment received School Completion Certificates (Evergreens), and 271 students who wrote the assessment did not graduate.

The distribution across the proficiency categories differs between public, independent and "other" schools. "Other" includes offshore schools (n=46), federally funded First Nations Band Schools (n=1), and unknown school type (n=1). Writers of the assessment in BC public schools were less likely to be *Proficient* or *Extending* than were their peers in either BC independent or Other (see Figure 12). **Of the 955 writers of the assessment in public or independent who received either a Dogwood or Adult Dogwood, 603 (63%) were either *Emerging* or *Developing* (i.e., not yet proficient in numeracy at the grade 10 level)**.

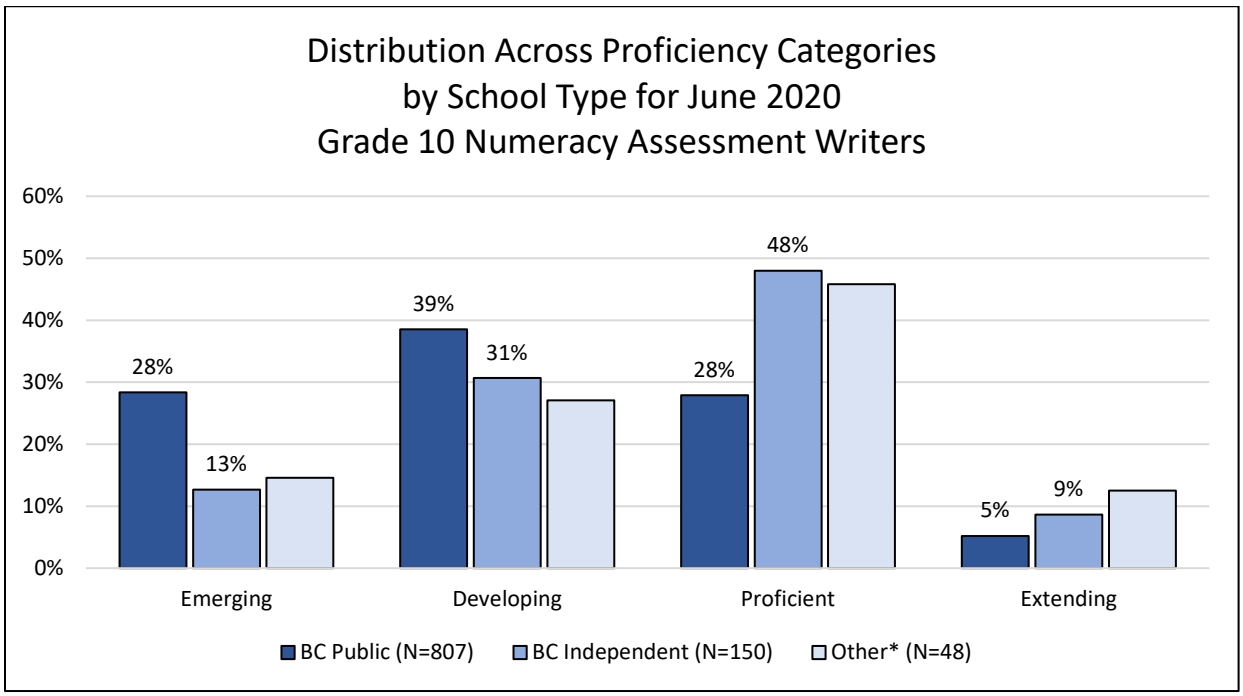


Figure 12: Distribution across proficiency categories by school type for June 2020 Grade 10 Numeracy Assessment writers.

Further analysis is required to understand the impacts of these results, but overall, **evidence from the 2019/20 school year is inconclusive in its determination of learning impacts resulting from the pandemic**.

Moving from discussion of the 2019/20 school year to the 2020/21 school year, it is important to understand what is known about how education is being delivered in the 2020/21 school year in BC, which continues to be affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Delivery of Education in the 2020/21 School Year

Grade-to-Grade Transition

Grade-to-grade transitions are relatively stable year over year, in particular for the elementary and middle grades (K through 8); the majority of students progress as expected. Because the grade-to-grade calculation does not include an outmigration estimate, interpretations must consider that a student may have left the province or may have moved from the public or independent school system into the federally funded First Nations band schools. According to *the School Act,* prior to 16 years of age, children and youth must remain enrolled or registered in an educational program in BC. Once of age, students can opt to withdraw from the K-12 education system. A withdrawal code should be entered into the student's record, but the grade-to-grade transition rates do not account for withdrawals.

Between 2019/20 and 2020/21, there are no substantive differences in resident grade-to-grade transition rates for grades K through 12, surveying the data from different facility types and priority student groups (e.g., Indigenous, Disabilities and Diverse Abilities; analysis for low-SES and children and youth in government care is underway).

Some rightsholder and partner organizations suggested an examination of grade-to-grade transitions in 2021/22 to see if there are unusual patterns of students repeating a grade or withdrawing from school.

Enrolment Patterns

In December 2019, there was a forecasted enrolment increase of 6,080 funded full-time equivalent (FTE) students, which would increase total enrolment in BC public schools to 553,923 funded FTE (school age) at the start of the 2020/21 school year. Actual enrolment was 547,633, a decrease of 229 funded FTE from the 2019/20 school year; this resulted in a -6,290 difference from what had been forecast the previous year (see Figure 13).

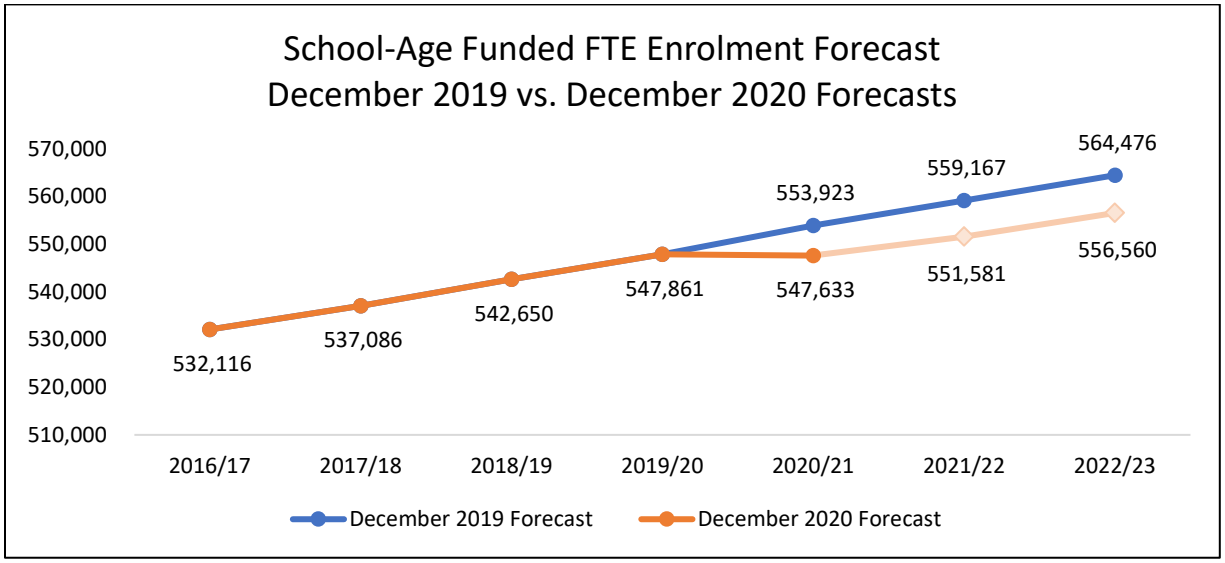


Figure 13: School-age funded FTE enrolment growth actuals and forecast, BC public schools.

The revised December 2020 forecast anticipates slightly lower enrolment growth for the 2021/22 school year. It is expected that the enrolment growth rate will return closer to the historical average in 2022/23.

The three school districts that experienced the lowest enrolment (relative to December 2019 forecasts) are: SD 84 – Vancouver Island West (-19.2%), SD 82 – Coast Mountain (-7.2%), and SD 74 – Gold Trail (-5.6%). The three school districts that experienced the highest enrolment (relative to December 2019 forecasts) are: SD 87 – Stikine (12.8%), SD 10 – Arrow Lakes (9.1%), and SD 71 – Comox Valley (8.9%). The three districts with the smallest changes (enrolment was most similar to the December 2019 forecasts) are: SD 69 – Qualicum (-0.1%), SD 52 – Bulkley Valley (-0.1%), and SD 42 – Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows (-0.1%).

Much of the difference between the enrolment forecast in December 2019 and the actual enrolment at the start of the 2020/21 school year was driven by lower-than-expected net migration to BC (5,912 vs. 2,714; see Figure 14). This is in part due to more students "leaving" the standard school system for homeschooling.

Many public school students transitioned to independent schools for the 2020/21 school year. Usually the number of students entering the public system from independent schools is net positive, forecast at 852 students incoming this year at last December. In this time frame, however, there was a net outflow of 231 students from public to independent schools.

The demographic driver was expected to be positive with 701 more students coming in as kindergarten students relative to those leaving after grade 12. However, there were 628 students this year due to fewer kindergarteners entering (more incoming kindergarten students than expected went into registered homeschooling) and more grade 12 students leaving. Retention was also substantially less than expected (-1,385 vs. -2,083) due to students in grades 10-12 taking fewer courses.

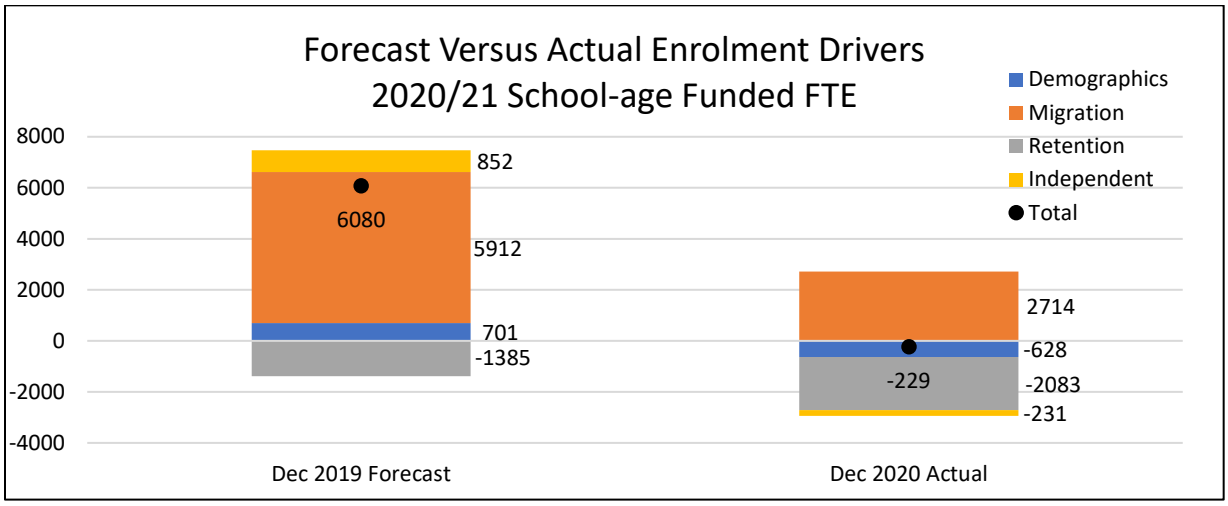


Figure 14: Impact on enrolment drivers.

Homeschooling Registrations

Homeschooling registrations in BC in 2020/21 increased by 126.2% from 2019/20, with over 5,000 BC resident students registering as homeschoolers (see Table 3) in this time frame. Of these 5,548 students, 2,275 (41.0%) were registered in the BC public school system and 3,273 (59.0%) were registered in the independent school system. Nine hundred and ninety-one (991) students (17.9%) were new to the BC school system in 2020/21 and 2,736 (49.3%) were enrolled as non-homeschoolers in 2019/20.

School Year	Count of Registered Homeschoolers	% Increase/Decrease Over Previous Year
2016/17	2,313	
2017/18	2,255	-2.5%
2018/19	2,309	+2.4%
2019/20	2,453	+6.2%
2020/21	5,548	**+126.2%**

Table 3: Count of registered homeschoolers, past five years with percentage increase/decrease over previous year.

Registered homeschooling under Section 12 of the School Act requires a parent or guardian to provide an educational program to a child. Parents can register their child with any public, independent, francophone or DL school in the province. Homeschooling is the full responsibility of the parent. It is not supervised by a BC certified teacher, is not required to meet provincial standards, and is not inspected by the Ministry of Education. Registered homeschooling should not be confused with enrolment in a DL program or school. Parents of registered homeschooled children are responsible for the complete education of their children, and to provide and supervise the educational program.

- Of the 2,736 students who transitioned from non-homeschool to homeschool, almost half (1,292 or 47.2%) registered in an independent school.
- The remaining 1,444 were dispersed amongst 593 public schools. Public school districts that saw the highest numbers of transitions included SD 36 – Surrey, SD 73 – Kamloops-Thompson and SD 35 – Langley, all large districts.
- Relative to district student population, the following districts saw the largest proportional increase in transitions: SD 84 – Vancouver Island West, SD 74 – Gold Trail and SD 50 – Haida Gwaii.

Figure 15 below shows that of the 2,736 students who transitioned from non-homeschool in 2019/20 to homeschool in 2020/21:

- 279 (10.2%) had a designated disability or diverse need in 2019/20;
- 524 (19.2%) were Indigenous;
- 226 (8.3%) were English Language Learners in 2019/20;
- 106 (3.9%) were enrolled in a French Immersion program in 2019/20; and
- 605 (22.1%) were from a rural community.

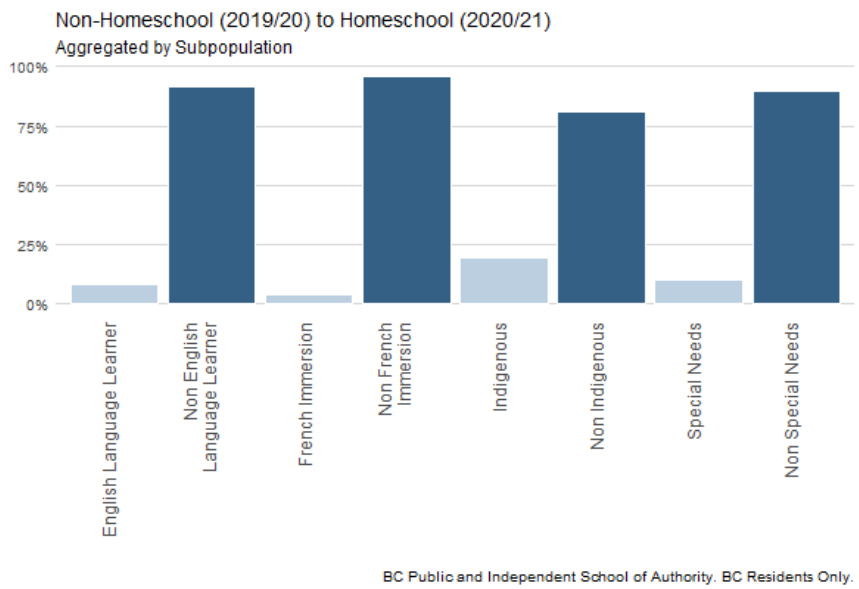


Figure 15: Enrolment counts by subpopulation of students who were enrolled as non-homeschool in 2019/20 and homeschool in 2020/21.

Most of the 2,736 students who transitioned from non-homeschool to homeschool were in K-6 in 2019/20 (85.7%). At the time of writing of this report (February 2021), students in K-6 are in the lowest risk school-age group for contracting and transmitting COVID-19. The grade distributions for males and females who transitioned were similar, both decreasing as grade level increased. While slightly more males transitioned to homeschooling in 2020/21, the gender gap was more significant for those who were registered in kindergarten or grade two in 2019/20 (see Figure 16).

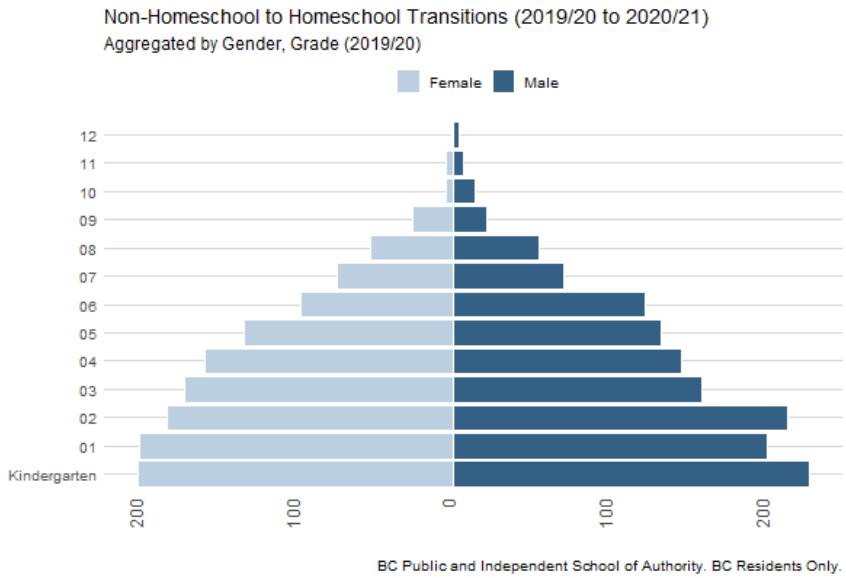


Figure 16: Enrolment counts by grade and gender of students who were enrolled as non-homeschool in 2019/20 and homeschool in 2020/21.

Of the 2,736 students who transitioned from non-homeschool to homeschool, 775 students transferred out of district. This includes 708 students who transferred from a public to independent school and 57 who transferred from an independent to public school. The independent schools that received the most transitioning students were: Pacific Spirit School (336 students), Heritage Christian Online School (237 students) and SelfDesign Learning Community (206 students). The public school that received the largest number of transitioning students was Central Interior Distance Education School (CIDES, 18 students) in SD 57 – Prince George. As with distributed learning enrolments (next section), **the increase in homeschooling registrations in 2020/21 appears to be directly influenced by the pandemic**.

Distributed Learning (DL) Enrolments

Along with the increases in homeschooling registrations, 2020/21 also saw an increase in the number of enrolments in Distributed Learning (DL) programs over previous years. **In 2020/21, 36,528 BC resident students enrolled in a distributed learning school; this is a 45% increase from 2019/20** when 25,184 students were enrolled in DL.

Of the 36,528 students enrolled in a distributed learning school in 2020/21, 22,042 (60.4%) were enrolled in a public DL program and 14,479 (39.6%) were enrolled in an independent DL program. By comparison, in 2019/20, 14,220 (56.5%) were enrolled in a public DL program and 10,964 (43.5%) were enrolled in an independent DL program. As a result, public DL programs saw a 55% year-over-year enrolment increase, and independent DL programs saw a 32% year-over-year enrolment increase from 2019/20 to 2020/21. Over seven thousand DL students (7,768 or 21.3%) were new to the BC school system, and 13,728 (37.6%) were enrolled in a standard "brick and mortar" school in 2019/20.

Of the 13,728 students who transitioned from a standard school to a DL program, almost a third (3,941 or 28.7%) registered in an independent DL program. The remaining 9,787 were dispersed amongst 55 public schools. Public school districts that saw the highest numbers of transitions were SD 71 – Comox Valley, SD 63 – Saanich, and SD 68 – Nanaimo-Ladysmith, all districts on Vancouver Island with local DL schools. Relative to district student population, the following districts saw the largest proportional increases of transitions: SD 47 – Powell River, SD 71 – Comox Valley, and SD 91 – Nechako Lakes.

Of the 13,728 students who transitioned from standard schools in 2019/20 to DL schools in 2020/21:

- 1,893 (13.8%) have a designated disability or diverse ability;
- 2,306 (16.8%) are Indigenous;
- 583 (4.2%) are English Language Learners; and
- 741 (5.4%) were enrolled in French Immersion in 2019/20.

By comparison, the proportion of students in standard schools with similar demographics are distributed as follows:

- 60,750 (11.3%) have a designated disability or diverse ability;
- 59,811 (11.1%) are Indigenous;
- 65,060 (12.1%) are English Language Learners; and
- 51,045 (9.5%) were enrolled in French Immersion in 2019/20.

Of the students who transitioned from standard schools in 2019/20 to DL schools in 2020/21, there are more students than expected who have a designated disability or diverse ability or who are Indigenous, and fewer students than expected who are English Language Learners or in French Immersion. Still, between 2018/19 and 2019/20, the demographic breakdown of students who transitioned from standard schools to DL schools is fairly similar to those who transitioned between 2019/20 and 2020/21, so **it is inconclusive if the demographics of the transitions between 2019/20 and 2020/21 from standard schools to DL schools were at all influenced by the pandemic**.

Of the 13,728 students who transitioned from standard schools to DL schools, most (10,031 or 73.1%) were in K-8, with a large proportion (1,923 or 14%) in grade 12 (see Figure 17). This apparent outlier in grade 12 is a consistent pattern with previous years (2018/19 and 2019/20). However, there were significantly more students in early grades who transitioned from standard schools to DL schools in 2020/21 than in previous years for those grades. The grade distributions for students who transitioned from standard into DL were similar for both males and females, consistently from kindergarten through grade 7. Slightly more females than males transitioned from standard to DL in the high school years, most notably in grade 8.

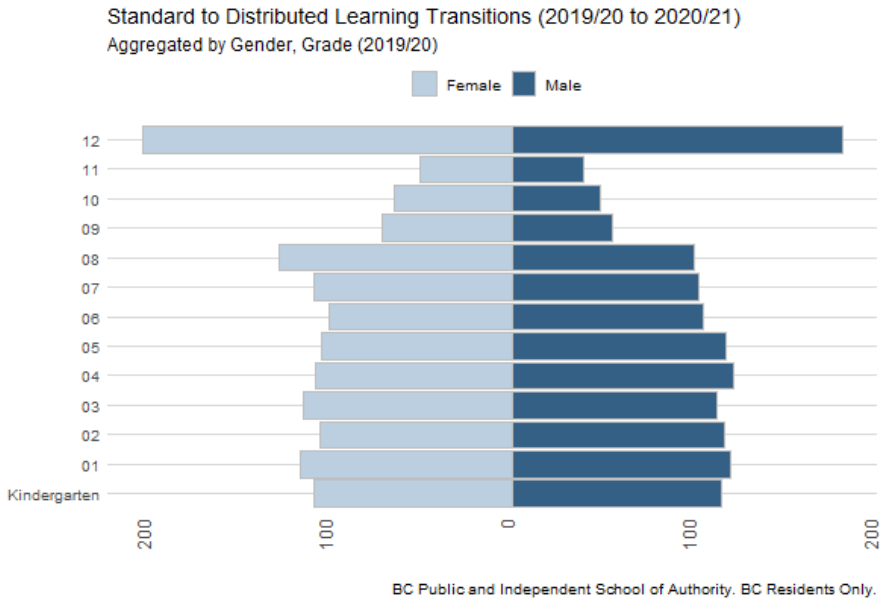


Figure 17: Enrolment counts by grade and gender of students who transitioned from standard (2019/20) to DL in 2020/21.

Almost half (6,435 or 46.9%) of the 13,728 students who transitioned from standard to DL transferred out of district. This includes 3,740 students who transferred to a public DL program from an

independent standard school and 2,695 who transferred into an independent DL program from a public standard school.

The public DL programs that received the largest number of transitioning students were Navigate/NIDES (North Island Distance Education School in SD 71 – Comox Valley with 1,404 students) followed by South Island Distance Education School (SIDES in SD 63 – Saanich with 747 students).

The independent DL programs that received most of the transitioning students were:

- Christian Online School (1,197 students);
- Traditional Learning Academy Online (643); and
- SelfDesign Learning Community (551 students).

Figure 18 shows the district transition counts of students who moved from standard schools in 2019/20 to DL programs in 2020/21 and the reverse (DL in 2019/20 to standard in 2020/21). There were more students in every district across the province transitioning from standard schools to DL programs than the opposite direction.

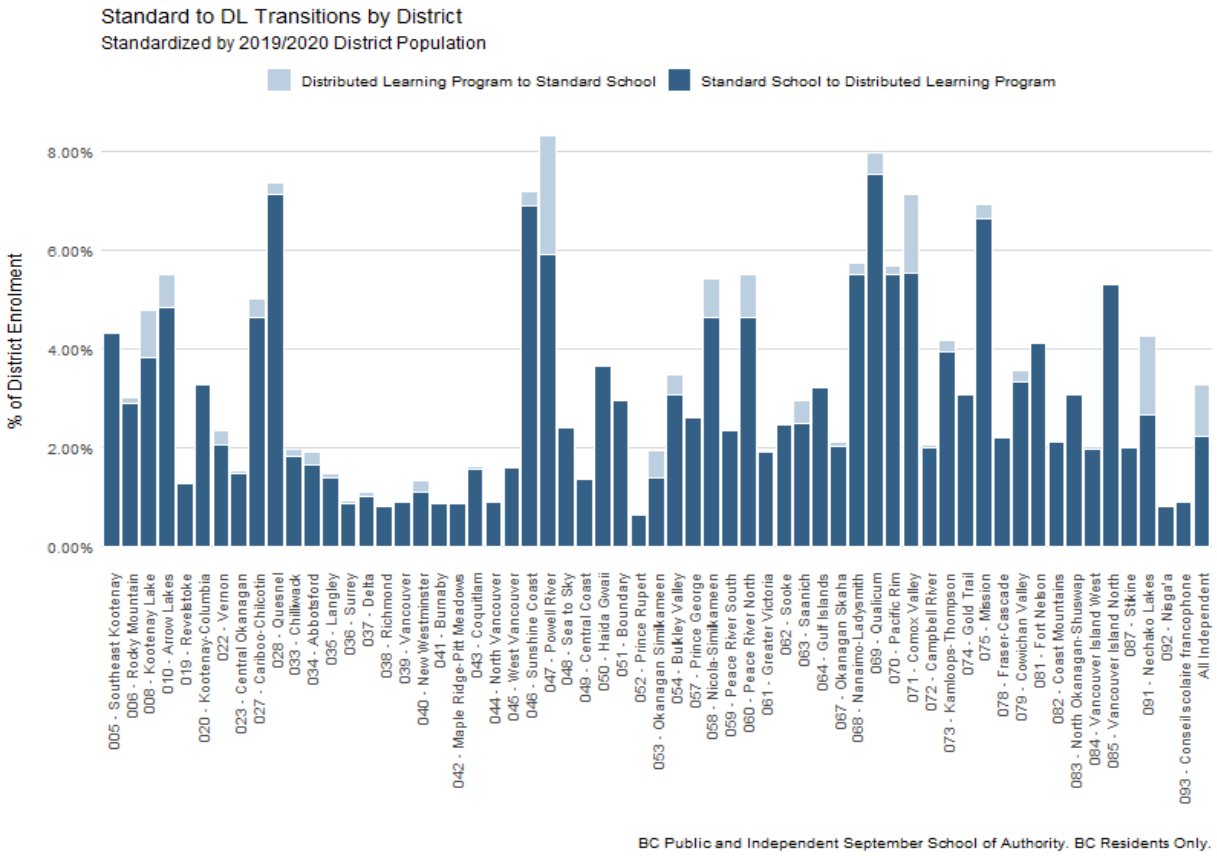


Figure 18: District transitions from standard schools in 2019/20 to DL programs in 2020/21 and the opposite (DL in 2019/20 to standard schools in 2020/21).

Cross-Enrolments

In 2020/21, the majority of BC resident students (644,081) – not including students who usually reside outside of BC ("non-residents") – were enrolled in a single school of authority; this means that they were taking the majority of their courses at a single school. There were 16,841 resident students cross-enrolled in at least one school of non-authority across the BC public and independent school system, including 16,122 students cross-enrolled in a single school of non-authority, 689 students with two non-authority schools, 27 students with three non-authority schools, and three students with more than three non-authority schools. The number of students cross-enrolled in a single school of non-authority has increased since 2018/19, after experiencing a drop from 16,565 to 14,798 between 2016/17 and 2018/19 (see Table 4).

	Count of Non-Authority Enrolments		
School Year	**# of Students with 1 School of Non-Authority**	**# of Students with 2 Schools of Non-Authority**	**# of Students with 3 Schools of Non-Authority**
2016/2017	16,565	589	16
2017/2018	15,899	518	22
2018/2019	14,798	555	17
2019/2020	15,042	571	22
2020/2021	16,122	689	27

Table 4: Counts of enrolment records for schools of non-authority (2016/17 to 2020/21).

Nearly all of the 16,122 students who are cross-enrolled in at least one school of non-authority are in the BC public system (15,347 or 95.2% compared to 774 or 4.6% in the independent system). Students in a DL school of authority are much more likely to cross-enroll than their peers in a standard school of authority (15,012 students (93.1%) from DL, compared to 885 or 5.5% in a standard school of authority).

Of the 16,122 students cross-enrolled in at least one school of non-authority, 1,847 (11.5%) have a designated disability or diverse ability, 862 (5.3%) are Indigenous, 7,021 (43.5%) are male and 9,097 (56.4%) are female, and 1,383 (8.6%) are enrolled in French Immersion.

The number of cross-enrolled students was evenly distributed across the higher grades in 2020/21. Approximately 5,300 students in each of grades 10, 11 and 12 are cross-enrolled in 2020/21. This uniformity was not seen in earlier years; the number of grade 10 students who were cross-enrolled dropped significantly between 2016/17 and 2019/20 (see Figure 19).

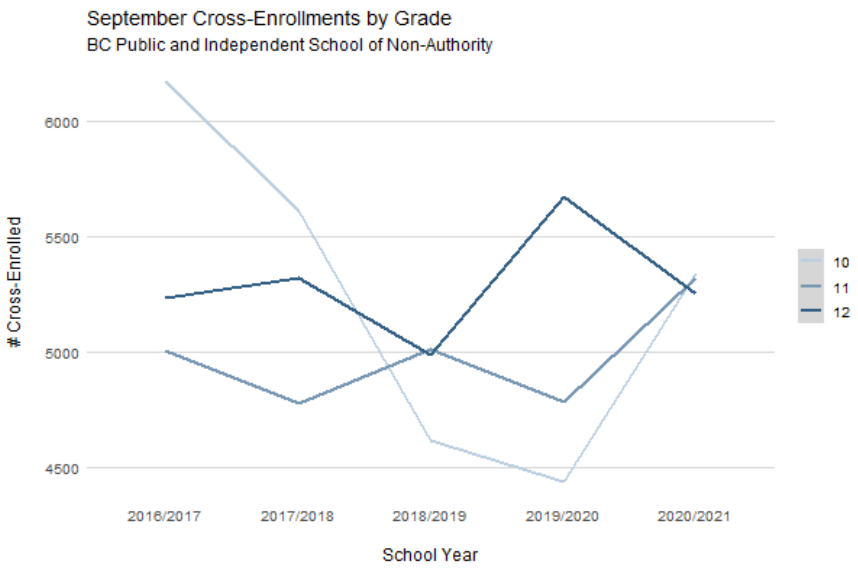


Figure 19. Distribution of cross-enrolled students across secondary grades (2016/17 to 2020/21).

Just over 40% of cross-enrolled students registered in a single school of non-authority in one of four public school districts. Vancouver (SD 39) saw the highest number of cross-enrolled students, followed by Coquitlam (SD 43), Comox Valley (SD 71) and Surrey (SD 36). Independent schools saw 4.8% of these cross-enrolled students register with them as a school of non-authority (see Figure 20). The top bars represent counts of students registered in a school of authority within the district. The bottom bars represent counts of students registered with a school of non-authority within the district.

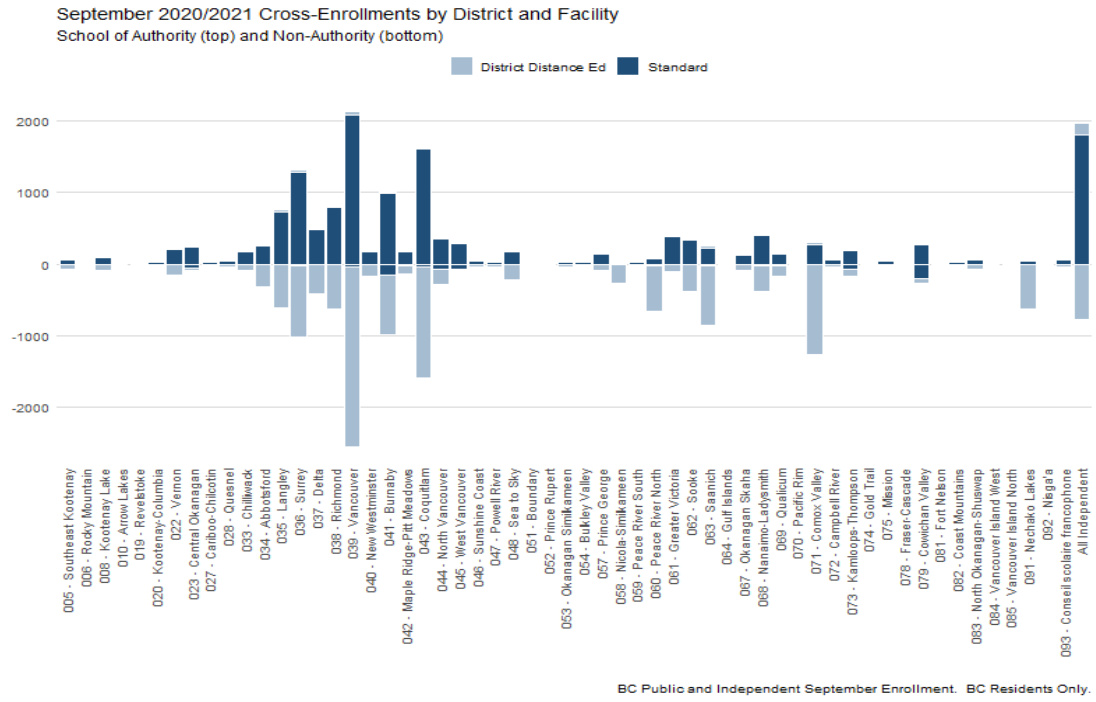


Figure 20: Distribution of cross-enrolled students across districts and facility type (2020/21).

Transition Programs

After the suspension of in-class instruction in the spring of 2020, not all families were ready for their children to return to full-time, in-class instruction in September 2020. In response to parents' concerns, many school districts offered remote learning or "transition programs" so that students could retain their seats in programs of choice. Transition programs did not exist prior to the pandemic. Although these programs enable students and families to secure in-class spots, there were no set provincial standards or success measures for these programs. As a result, it is unclear what impact these programs may have on learning, and this could look very different across school districts.

In November 2020 and again in January 2021, the Ministry conducted online surveys with the districts to better understand the state of transition programs created for families not ready to return to full-time, in-class instruction. These responses helped to clarify how many students were being supported, school districts' plans for these programs, and some key aspects of program delivery. All 60 school districts responded to the surveys including SD 93 – Conseil Scolaire Francophone, which has Francophone schools throughout the province and is the only geographically dispersed district.

Eight districts did not offer a transition program in 2020/21, some indicating that they were offering enrolment in their district's DL program as an alternative to returning to in-class instruction.

Another ten districts offered a transition program but closed the transition program between mid-October 2020 and early January 2021 (two in October, five in November, two in December, and one in early January).

Table 5 illustrates the student population in transition programs; as a percentage of all students in the grade groupings, elementary (K-7) participation was significantly higher in transition programs than was secondary (8-12) participation.

Transition Program Participation	All Students
Elementary (K-7)	6.8%
Secondary (8-12)	1.3%
All students (K-12)	4.5%

Table 5: Transition program participation, percentage of all students in grade groupings.

As of September 2020, there were 35,464 students in transition programs province-wide. This dropped by 5% to 33,671 by the end of October 2020 and dropped again to 25,556 by early January 2021. Students in grades K through 7 made up the largest proportion of students in transition programs (more than 32,500 students as of September 15th, see Figure 21).

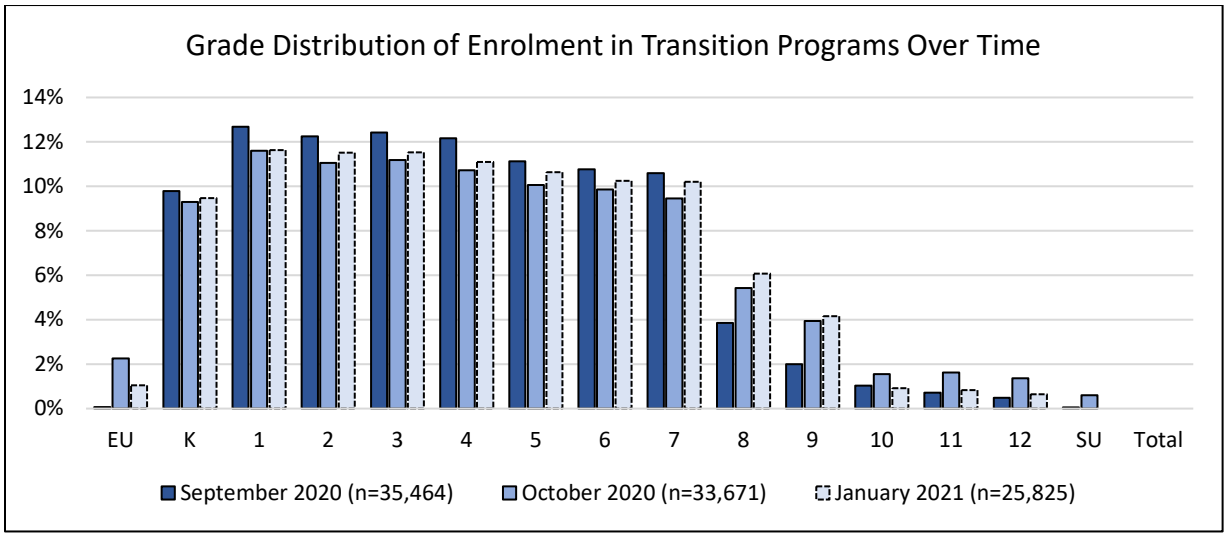


Figure 21: Grade distribution of enrolment in transition programs over time.

When asked in November 2020, more than half (55%) of the 52 districts offering a transition program had set an end date and expected a significant drop in transition program participation after the winter break (down to an estimated 21,000 students, representing a 37% decrease from September 2020 counts).

With the January 2021 survey, 52 districts reported having offered a transition program at some point during the 2020/21 school year, and 63% (38 districts) were still offering their transition program as of January 2021. When asked when their transition program was set to close, 27 districts were planning to keep the program open throughout the 2020/21 school year and another six were planning to close the transition program by spring break (mid to late March 2021).

Most students still enrolled in the transition programs were in grades K through 7, although K-7 numbers had dropped to 22,797 in early January 2021, a decrease of 36% from September 2020. Of the students who were no longer in the transition program, districts estimated that the majority (approx. 10,000) had returned to in-class instruction, others (approx. 3,000) had opted to enroll in their district's DL program, and a very small number (approx. 500) had opted to either enroll in a DL program outside of the district or to register as homeschoolers.

Of the 60 districts, 52 districts provided student counts for transition program enrolments in September and October 2020, and again in January 2021. Of these 52 districts, half saw decreased participation over that time frame, and 20% saw an uptick and then a decrease in participation during the same time frame (see Table 6).

Proportion of SDs	Participation Trends	Results
50%	↓ Decreased Participation	26 SDs reported *fewer* transition students from Sep → Oct → Jan
10%	↓ then --- Decrease then Plateau	5 SDs reported *fewer* transition students from Sep → Oct; followed by a plateau/same rate from Oct → Jan
1.5%	↓ then ↑ Decrease then Increase	1 SD reported *fewer* transition students from Sep → Oct; followed by a slight *increase* rate from Oct → Jan
20%	↑ then ↓ Increased in Autumn, decreased by Jan.	10 SDs reported an *increase* between Sep and Oct; followed by *fewer* transition students from Oct → Jan
17%	↑ Increased Participation	9 SDs (18%) reported an *increase* in transition program students (between Sep and Jan)
1.5%	↑ then --- Increase then Same	1 SD reported *more* transition students from Sep → Oct, followed by a plateau/same rate from Oct → Jan

Table 6: Participation patterns in transition programs from September 2020 through January 2021.

Eighteen districts offered a blended transition program incorporating in-class instruction with remote or online learning. Fifteen districts supported students in learning remotely at home, and another 11 reported having mainly online delivery of education in their transition program. A small number of districts (seven) indicated that the transition program varied by school or student, and two indicated that the families chose DL or homeschooling. Some districts offered multiple transition program options, along a continuum of in-person learning to remote/online learning. Some offered both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities, and others commented on putting together learning packages for their transition program students. Figure 22 below shows a word cloud of the open-ended text analysis from districts sharing details of their transition programs.

Figure 22: Word cloud of district responses in describing their transition programs.

When asked to describe the challenges in administering the curriculum or in assessing learning in the transition programs, responses varied around a few themes (see Figure 23):

- Parent anxiety and engagement;
- Student engagement;
- Assessment challenges;
- Concerns around increasing gaps for students who are low-SES, are in government care, are Indigenous, and/or have a disability or diverse ability;
- Workforce challenges;
- Access to technology;
- Challenges in offering full curriculum; and
- Mental health needs.

It should be noted that some districts reported no challenges around delivery of their transition programs.

Figure 23. Districts articulate any challenges with administering the curriculum or assessing learning in the transition programs.

The transition programs were created in response to parent concerns of exposure to COVID-19 in schools. Through the exposure notices posted publicly on the five regional health authority websites and with schools and districts sharing their letters of school community exposures, the Ministry has been able to track the public exposure notices in schools since September 2020.

In discussions with rightsholders and partner organizations, the question of whether students who transitioned out of public "brick and mortar" schools into DL or homeschool in 2020/21 would transition back in 2021/22 led to observations that while some students might come back, others may have flourished and will stay in DL and homeschool for the foreseeable future.

COVID-19 "Exposure Notice" Tracking

Schools in BC opened and have remained in Stage 2 during the 2020/21 school year. This includes the implementation of detailed health and safety guidelines and learning groups or cohorts to facilitate the efficiency of contact tracing in the event of COVID-19 exposures in a school community.

BC's Provincial COVID-19 Health and Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings align with current public health guidance from the Provincial Health Officer and the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) for K-12 schools. The K-12 Health and Safety Guidelines were updated in February 2021. Key changes included:

- Strengthened mask guidelines – K-12 staff and middle and secondary students are now required to wear masks indoors except in certain scenarios (e.g. when at their seat/desk, while eating and drinking); and
- Enhanced safety protocols for physical education, music classes and staff-only spaces.

All BC school districts are required to update and post their COVID-19 safety plans in alignment with the provincial guidelines, and ensure that all schools have completed the BCCDC Health & Safety Checklist.

Schools have overlapping layers of protection in the form of health and safety guidelines and measures to ensure that they remain safe places for students and staff. This includes but is not limited to staff, parents and students doing a daily health check before entering the school and staying at home when sick, organizing students into learning groups or cohorts, and enhanced cleaning and disinfecting protocols. Additional safety measures that are in place in schools include frequent hand hygiene, physical distancing and the use of non-medical masks where recommended. Combined, these measures are helping to mitigate the risk of COVID-19 exposure and spread in school settings.

In-person attendance in schools is important for a child's education and well-being. In-person attendance at school delivers a range of important services and benefits for children, including opportunities for social interaction, connection, support for social-emotional development, and access to supplies and resources, among others. The number of COVID-19 exposures in schools reflects what is happening in the broader community, and public health guidelines reflect the best available research that having schools open does not make the virus spread farther or faster in our communities. As noted in the Provincial COVID-19 Health & Safety Guidelines for K-12 Settings, "based on guidance from the Provincial Health Officer and experience to date within B.C. and other jurisdictions, schools continue to be low-risk sites for COVID-19 transmission, even with increased risk of COVID-19 in some communities" (p.8 of the guidelines).

Exposure notices posted by the five health authorities in the province detail when someone has been present in a school community when they have been infectious with COVID-19. School exposure notices are generally posted after contact tracing is complete and after close contact individuals have been notified. Exposure notices are posted on health authority websites, and schools or districts may also send letters to their students' families as well as to the Ministry. A weekly summary of the exposure notices posted by the regional health authorities is available at: http://www.bccdc.ca/schools/news-resources/school-exposure-notifications.

Exposure notice counts are not equivalent to the number of confirmed cases within a school. An exposure is where one or more confirmed cases were infectious while present at school. A confirmed case is someone who has a lab-tested positive result for COVID-19. There may be multiple exposure notices (e.g., early notification letter, self-monitoring letter, self-isolation letter) resulting from the same exposure.

While the dates of exposure notices in a school may overlap or when there are multiple exposure notices in a short time frame (i.e., within two weeks), this does not conclusively indicate in-school transmission of the virus, as it may be different learning groups or cohorts that have been exposed in separate instances. According to public health, the majority of COVID-19 cases involving K-12 staff or students have been linked to community (often household) transmission and have not resulted in further transmission within schools (i.e., it does result in a school exposure, but does not result in further confirmed cases within the school related to this exposure). This demonstrates the effectiveness of current health and safety protocols in schools. Between September 2020 and February 2021, it has been generally identified that transmission of COVID-19 occurs most commonly from adult to adult, and less frequently from adult to child, child to adult, or child to child.

A small number of schools have opted or been ordered by the health authority to cancel in-person classes; even when a school has cancelled in-person classes, the school may have offered remote learning options or other methods of learning support during the closure. Optional or mandated closures are sometimes due to a lack of staff (either as a result of required self-isolation or no back-up staff to continue regular operations), and/or may be in response to multiple exposures in a short time frame. At times, these types of closures are referred to as “functional closures” or “operational closures” and are only considered a cluster or an outbreak if determined to be so by the health authority. Independent schools are more likely to close temporarily in response to an exposure notice than are public schools. Between November 1, 2020 and February 1, 2021, there have been about two dozen school closures, most in December prior to the winter break, and most in independent schools. Some functional closures were as short as one day, but the majority were for two weeks and were voluntary (i.e., not ordered by the health authority). Of these two dozen closures, only four schools were ordered to close by regional health authorities.

The Ministry began monitoring school exposures in September 2020 through the health authority exposure notices posted publicly, triangulated with school or district letters going out to their school families. **As of February 2021, there have been exposure notices posted in 52 of the 60 public school districts, and 128 of 344 independent schools across the province. This represents 50% of the schools in the province having had an exposure notice between September 2020 and February 2021**. As mentioned earlier, the exposures in schools are reflective of cases in the wider community; just as there was an increase in cases in the community in November and early December, so did our schools in BC have an increase in exposure notices during this time (see Figure 24).

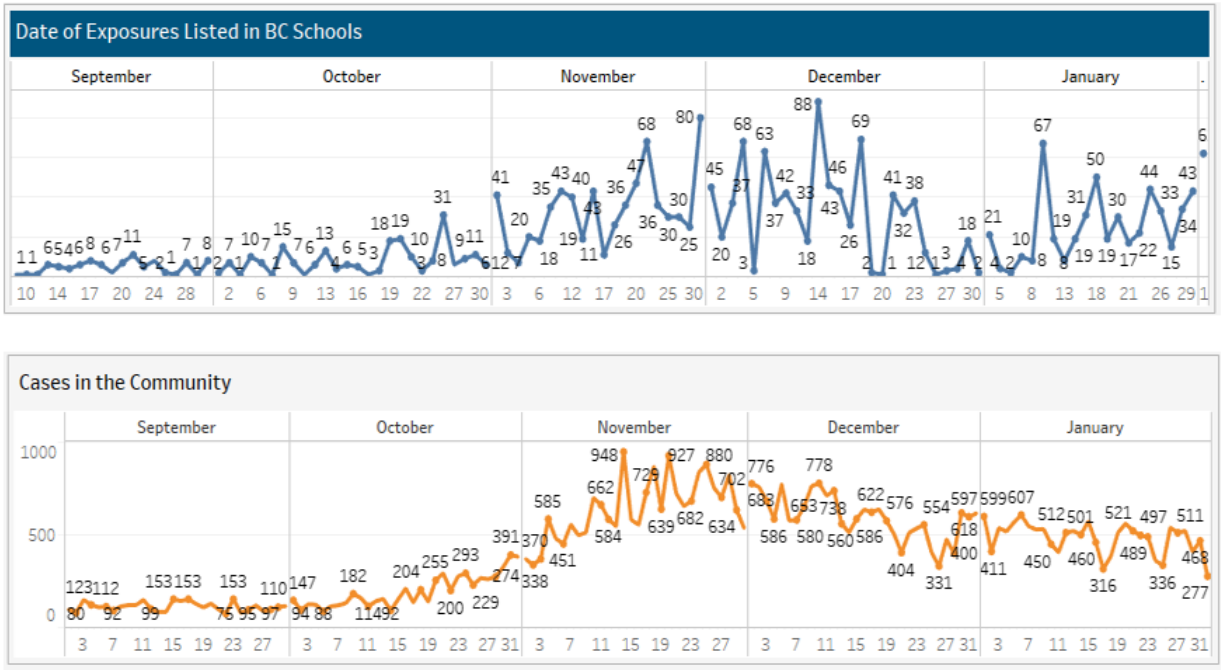


Figure 24. Counts of exposure notices in schools (top) and counts of cases in the public (bottom), September 2020 through January 2021.

As of February 2, 2021, there have been 2,430 exposure notices posted since September 1, 2020 for schools. The majority of these (84%) are in 14 districts. Schools in the lower mainland – Fraser Health Authority and Vancouver Coastal Health Authority; aligning with the Metro chapter and the Fraser Valley chapter of the BC School Superintendents Association (BCSSA) – account for 70% of the exposure notices (see Figure 25).

COVID-19 Exposures in Schools by Health Authority
September 1, 2020 to February 1, 2021

Public & Independent Schools

	No. of Schools with active COVID	Total No. of Schools	% Schools with Active COVID-19
Fraser	425	601	70.7%
Vancouver Coastal	202	365	55.3%
Northern	69	209	33.0%
Interior	119	377	31.6%
Vancouver Island	40	306	13.1%

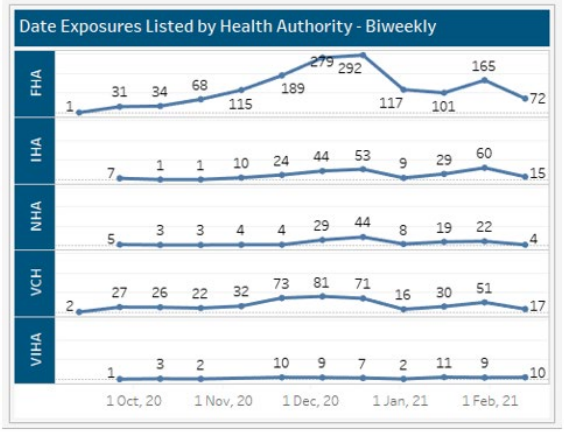


Figure 25: COVID-19 exposure notices in schools by health authority, September 2020 to February 2021.

Schools in BC remain safe; there are overlapping layers of protection in place, and in-person attendance is critical for a child's education and well-being. As one exposure notice may result in an undetermined number of cases in a school, it is difficult to obtain data to compare the number of cases in a school to the number of cases in the wider community. Through contact tracing, it is known that most confirmed cases within K-12 schools have been linked to community (often household) transmission and have not resulted in further transmission within schools. With only the exposure notices to represent potential cases in a school, the number of exposure notices in schools are approximately one quarter the case rate of the wider community (see Figure 26). This methodology is not flawless; however, without the number of cases resulting from an exposure notice in a school, it does provide an estimate.

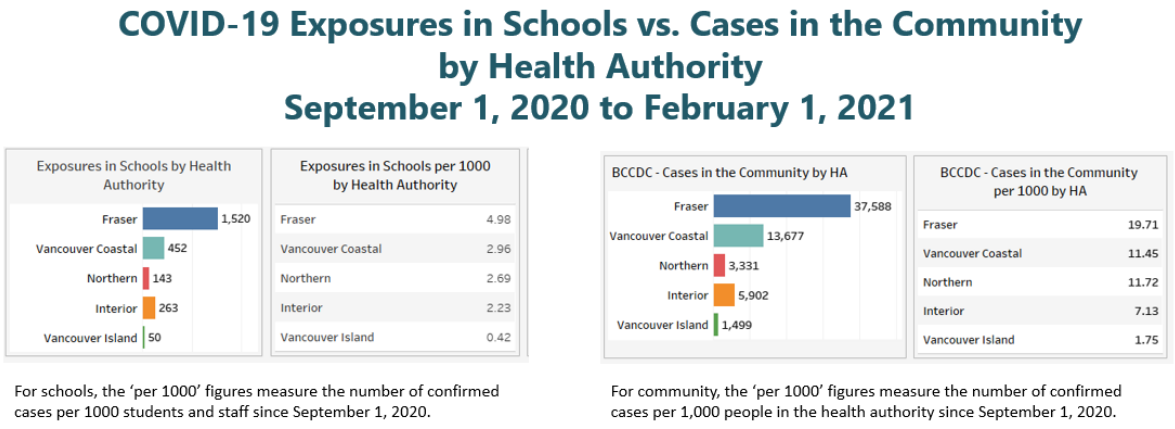


Figure 26: Counts of exposure notices in schools compared to cases in the community by health authority, September 2020 through February 2021.

Although elementary schools account for 60% of all schools in BC, they only represent 45% of all COVID-19 exposure notices in schools. Middle schools account for 10% of all schools in BC and only represent 8% of all COVID-19 exposure notices. Elementary/secondary schools, which represent 9% of all schools in BC, only have 7% of all COVID-19 exposure notices. It is the **secondary schools, which account for 20% of all schools in BC, that had 39% of all COVID-19 exposure notices** (see Table 7). As of February 4, 2021, updated health and safety guidelines have been ordered for schools.

School Level	Number of Exposures	Number of Schools	Percentage of Provincial Exposures	Percentage of all schools
Elementary	1,114	1,119	45%	60%
Middle	207	189	8%	10%
Secondary	964	380	39%	20%
Elementary-Secondary	170	171	7%	9%
TOTAL	2,455	1,859		

Table 7: Number and percentage of COVID-19 exposures by school level, as a percentage of all schools.

Overall, schools and in-person classes and programs offer critical services to children in supporting their learning and overall growth and development. The negative impacts of broad, extended school closures outweigh the risks of having schools open. With overlapping layers of protection in place, schools continue to be safe spaces for children to learn.

International Student Arrivals

With extended international travel restrictions in place during the pandemic, it has been challenging for international students learning in BC schools to travel home and then return to school. **Prior to the pandemic, there were on average 20,000 students in BC who normally resided outside the province** (see Table 8). In some cases, these are students who live on the provincial border and travel relatively short distances to attend BC schools, but in many cases these are students who arrive in BC from other provinces or countries. **This average decreased by 45% between 2019/20 and 2020/21 to 11,477 due to the pandemic.**

School Year	Number of International/Non-Resident Students	Year-Over-Year % Change
2015/16	18,710	
2016/17	20,437	+9.2%
2017/18	21,131	+3.4%
2018/19	21,271	+0.6%
2019/20	20,868	-1.9%
2020/21	11,477	-45.0%

Table 8: Year-over-year change and count of international/non-resident students.

When the announcement to suspend in-class instruction was made in mid-March 2020, what would happen going forward was unknown. Around the same time, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was calling Canadians abroad to urgently return home and international travel restrictions were put in place.

Students returning to BC for K-12 have had to self-isolate upon arrival and monitor for symptoms of COVID-19. Only students who had their student visas in place prior to mid-March were able to return, as the processing of student visas during the pandemic has been greatly constricted. Approximately 13,000 international students have arrived to learn in BC between July 2020 and December 2020 (see Figure 27), with many of these students coming from China. Very few of these international students have had to extend their two-week self-isolation.

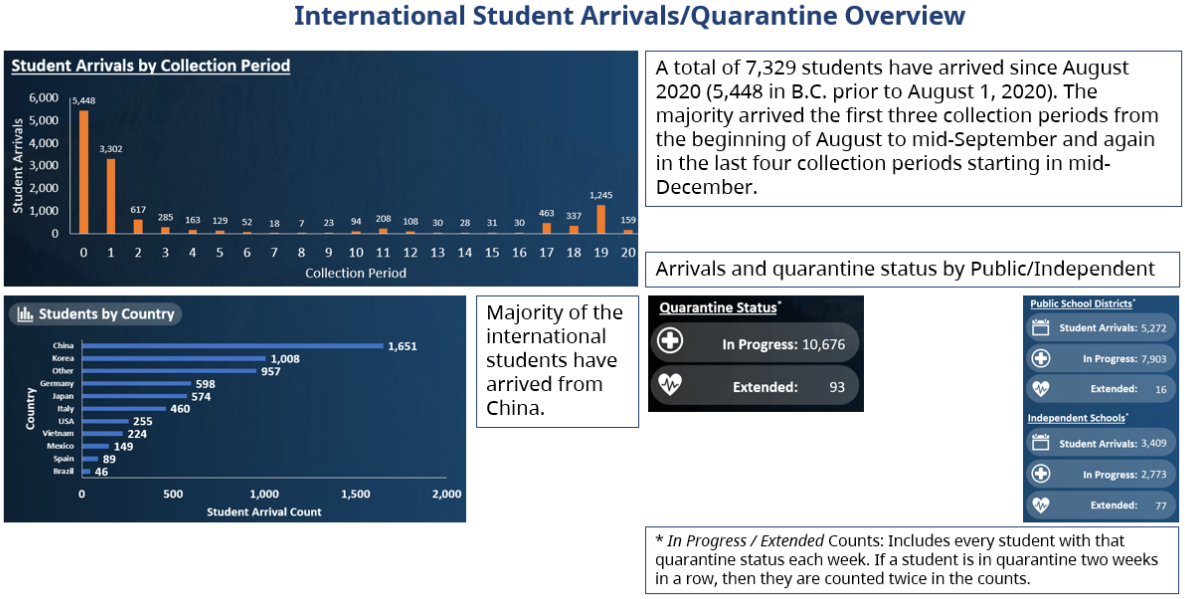


Figure 27: Tracking of international student arrivals July 2020 through December 2020.

Impacts to Indigenous Learners

COVID-19 is a disruption that may disproportionately affect learners facing existing systemic inequities, especially those who exist in multiple priority groups as defined earlier in this document. Table 9 and Figure 28 represent the counts of overlapping vulnerabilities in the student population in BC.

Headcount		& Indig	& D&DA
All Students	568,983	X	X
Indigenous (Indig)	70,161	X	X
Disabilities and Diverse Abilities (D&DA)	64,864	14,539	X
Children and Youth in Government Care (CYIC)	5,799	3,659	2,931
All three (Indig, D&DA and CYIC)	1,852		

Table 9: Distribution of students in priority groups.

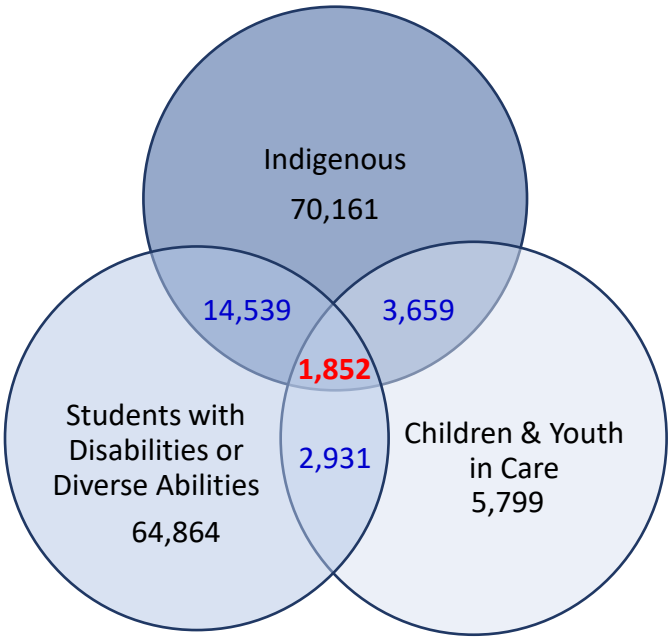


Figure 28: Distribution of students in priority groups.

To layer in an additional aspect of marginalization which may be further exacerbated by the COVID-19 context, the following chart (see Table 10) outlines socio-economic status patterns among the previously noted priority groups. Socio-economic analysis is an important aspect, as COVID-19 has created a substantial economic disruption for those already facing economic insecurity. Identifying priority groups alongside the additional layer of socio-economic status (SES) is necessary for delivering effective, appropriate and non-stigmatizing support for learners experiencing vulnerabilities amplified by COVID-19.

Arriagada, Hahmann and O'Donnell (2020 (a)) outline vulnerabilities to the socio-economic impact of COVID-19 upon urban Indigenous people:

> "Financially vulnerable individuals and groups are exposed to greater risk of negative socioeconomic consequences of interventions aimed at curbing COVID-19 transmission (United Nations, 2020). For those already experiencing economic disadvantages, staying at home often means lost income for basic needs such as rent, transportation, and food. It may also limit children's ability to undertake at-home learning if they do not have access to a computer or the internet.
>
> According to the market basket measure (MBM), Canada's official poverty line, approximately one-quarter (24%) of Indigenous people living in urban areas in the provinces were in poverty. By comparison, 13% of the Non-Indigenous population in these areas were in poverty."

For the following visualizations, zero represents average socio-economic status within BC, and negative values represent lower socio-economic status.

Priority Group	Average SES
All public school students	-0.109
Indigenous	-0.774
Disabilities and Diverse Abilities	-0.202
CYIC	-0.613
Indigenous & Disabilities and Diverse Abilities	-0.748
Indigenous & CYIC	-0.730
Disabilities and Diverse Abilities & CYIC	-0.528
Indigenous CYIC with Disabilities and Diverse Abilities	-0.622

Table 10: Average SES of various priority groups.

Overall, most students in the BC public school system are from communities with lower than average SES. **The greatest degree of socio-economic marginalization is seen in the Indigenous learner population**. Aside from the all-student population, the priority population with the least degree of socio-economic marginalization is Disabilities and Diverse Abilities.

Along with socio-economic impact, COVID-19 has had a negative effect on mental health for Indigenous people. Arriagada, Hahmann and O'Donnell (2020 (b)) had the following findings:

> "Higher proportions of Indigenous participants reported fair/poor mental health than Non-Indigenous participants (38% compared to 23%). Higher proportions of Indigenous participants also reported that their mental health is "somewhat worse" or "much worse" since the start of physical distancing (60% compared to 52%). Regarding stress and anxiety, 40% of Indigenous participants described most days as "quite a bit stressful" or "extremely stressful" and 41% reported symptoms consistent with moderate or severe anxiety. This is compared to 27% and 25% of Non-Indigenous participants respectively."

The pandemic is placing additional stresses upon Indigenous peoples in BC, including but not limited to:

- Education programs and supports for learners living on-reserve have been inconsistent across the province where districts have taken months to provide technology, connectivity and/or staff necessary to adequately support learning.
- Transportation challenges related to the provision of safe and reliable transportation in the COVID-19 context.
- Increased COVID-19 transmissibility concerns given the greater prevalence of multigenerational households (StatCan, 2020). In Canada, over 25% of on-reserve First Nations households are multi-generational, compared to 6.1% of Non-Indigenous households.
- Protection of elders and language-keepers, most of whom are in high-risk age ranges.
- Higher rates of pre-existing conditions and chronic disease, which is a risk factor for COVID-19 complications.

- Inadequate housing is an issue disproportionately affecting Indigenous people, especially those living on-reserve. In particular, overcrowding is associated with an increased risk of the spread of infectious diseases (StatCan, 2020).
- Food security is disrupted through necessary COVID-19 adaptations to existing breakfast and lunch programs.
- Barriers accessing healthcare, including racism, as evidenced by the death of Joyce Echaquan (Godin, 2020), and the *In Plain Sight Report* (2020) addressing Indigenous-specific racism and discrimination in BC health care.
- Tragic history of pandemics having severely disproportionate effects on Indigenous communities, especially in the territory now known as BC.
- COVID-19-specific racism against communities, such as that faced by Cowichan Tribes (Times Colonist, 2021) opioid crisis, an ongoing public health emergency since 2016, has a disproportionate impact on Indigenous people (FNHA, 2018). COVID-19-induced isolation protocols, which impacts both mental health outcomes and unsafe drug consumption practices, contributed to 2020 having the highest-yet overdose death toll in BC (Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General, 2021).
- Difficulties meeting the increased demand for mental health support for community members.
- Necessity of urgent and time-sensitive government decision making curbing meaningful engagement with Indigenous Nations.

The above factors are once again evoking the incredible strength of Indigenous peoples, but with enormous emotional cost and insufficient settler acknowledgement. While Nations have taken the precautions necessary to keep their communities, elders and children safe, they have not been adequately or consistently supported in their efforts, at the expense of learning for their children and youth.

Figure 29 takes a closer look at the student level, allowing for a better understanding of the variation of socio-economic status within a priority population. Amongst the populations, there is relatively little variation in the bottom SES quartile (bottom whisker). In contrast, much greater variability exists for the top SES quartile (top whisker). The boxes are similarly sized across all populations, meaning that the middle half of each population covers a similar range as other populations, although the ranges have varying start and end points. All students and those with disabilities and diverse abilities are notably higher SES than other populations. Indigenous populations show the lowest SES of all of the priority populations, both by average and socio-economic variability. This intersection of factors is likely partially attributable to the systemic and centuries-long exclusion of Indigenous peoples from land-as-asset-based intergenerational wealth accrual.

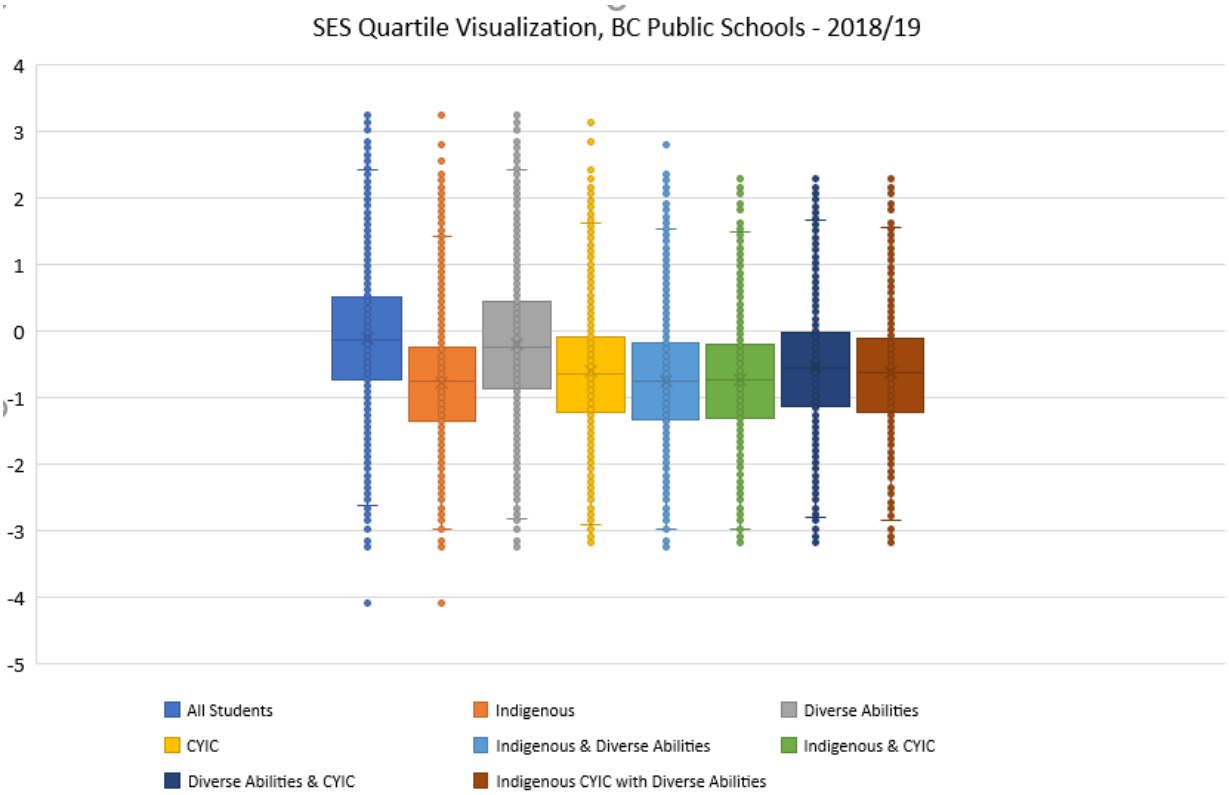


Figure 29: SES quartiles for priority groups, BC public schools, 2018/19.

Ongoing partnership with the First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) during the pandemic has been essential for ensuring that the Indigenous priorities are reflected in research and reporting. When approached for input for this report, FNESC shared the following perspective:

> *"Throughout the pandemic, First Nations have expressed concern about the lack of supports and accommodations provided to First Nations learners, including but not limited to:*
>
> - *A lack of understanding of the unique risk that pandemics pose to First Nations, meaning that parents and communities may be reluctant to send students back to schools.*
> - *A lack of accommodation for First Nations learners not attending in-person classes and the learning loss that occurs as a result.*
> - *A lack of engagement and transparency on the use of the federal Safe Return to Class Fund.*
>
> *Going forward, it is important that planning and accommodations be required and jointly-developed with First Nations to ensure the needs of First Nations learners and communities are appropriately addressed."*

FNESC and the Ministry are proactively planning a broader collaboration for the upcoming Phase 3 report. Moreover, Indigenous partners remind the Ministry to take, wherever possible, a holistic definition of "learning," including a lens on cultural prosperity, spiritual learning, personal identity and

growth, physical learning, and interconnectedness with the teachings of the land. We will further explore these themes in our Phase 3 report.

Attendance – Public Schools

The 2020/21 school year got underway in Stage 2 of the Framework for K-12 Education. The Ministry asked public schools to record daily student absences and whether they were learning online or offsite.

For the period of September 2020 to January 2021, the key findings of the daily attendance data are:

- 10% to 11% of students in the public system are absent on any given day (in previous years, estimated absence figures across all students were 5% to 10% per day);
- 8% to 9% of students in the public system are marked online/offsite on any given day;
- **Accordingly, in the first half of 2020/21, an estimated 80% to 82% of students are learning in-class on a given day;**
- There is wide variation in average daily absences between school districts (the lowest average daily absence rate for a district is 4% and the highest is 35%);
- Rural districts tend to have higher rates of absences than urban districts; and
- Grades 2 and 3 have the lowest absence rates, and grades 9, 10 and 11 have the highest rates of absence.

Attendance reporting is not yet standardized across the province; some schools will report period-based attendance, others will report half-day or full-day. In this analysis, there are references to daily absences and to monthly absences. These figures differ slightly in that the daily average refers to the proportion of individual students who are marked absent on a given day. The monthly absences refer to the proportion of instructional days on which an individual student is absent in each month.

Every rightsholder and partner organization to which we spoke indicated that student absences should be a priority for in-depth analysis in subsequent phases of research. Based on these discussions, there are additional areas that need further inquiry. For example, patterns of excused and unexcused absences linked to exposure notices and case counts would provide more refined insight into mandated absences and patterns coinciding with (and lagging behind) increased case counts. From there, the links between students who were frequently absent, achievement and mental health could be examined.

Attendance – Indigenous Learners

Students with higher attendance have better educational outcomes (Gottfried, 2009; Hancock, Shepherd, Lawrence, and Zubrick, 2013; Santibanez and Guarino, 2020). Students in priority groups – Indigenous (especially on-reserve), disabilities and diverse abilities, and children and youth in government care (CYIC) – experience lower rates of "on-track"/"proficient" and "extending" on provincial literacy and numeracy assessments, lower completion rates, and lower rates of transition to

BC public post-secondary institutions, among other outcomes. To ensure equity of opportunities, all students must be supported to attend school. Some of the systemic barriers facing students in priority groups include transportation, a lack of available supports and services in the educational setting, and for some First Nations, "shelter-in-place" orders implemented to protect the First Nations community from COVID-19 transmission.

Between September 2020 and January 2021, Indigenous students have had higher absences amongst all students in BC (see Figure 30); note that "All Students" includes Indigenous, so absenteeism for Non-Indigenous students is even lower than for "All Students". Disaggregating Indigenous into those living on-reserve and those living off-reserve, students living on-reserve have significantly higher absenteeism during this time. As noted in the last paragraph, this may be related to "shelter-in-place" orders; further investigation is required to determine if students who are sheltering in place are being marked absent, even if they are learning remotely during that time (e.g., this analysis does not disaggregate absence into unexcused and excused). December 2020 recorded the highest absenteeism rates, but attendance for "all students" was largely stable across the five months analyzed whereas on-reserve students had their highest absenteeism rates in December.

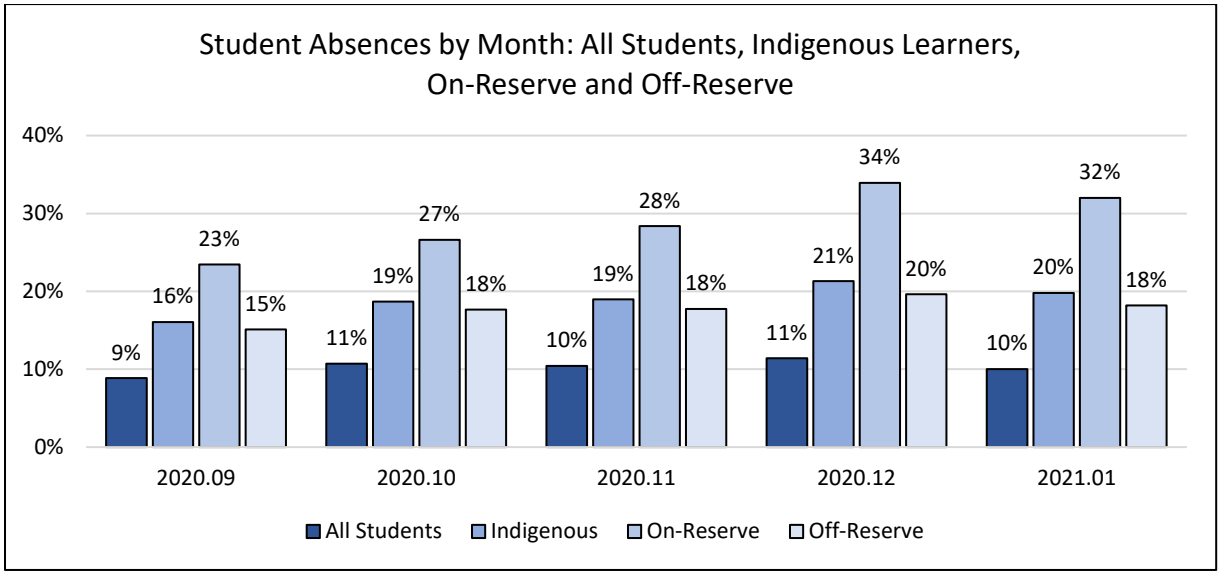


Figure 30: Student absences by month – all students, Indigenous learners, on-reserve and off-reserve.

Looking specifically at high absence in December 2020, Figure 31 identifies the districts where overall Indigenous absenteeism exceeds 25%. The breakdowns of on-reserve and off-reserve absences could enable follow-up discussion at the district level to identify potential mitigation measures and service gaps. Many of the districts identified are smaller and remote, which may speak to a potential underlying factor, such as transportation issues. District numbers/names are: SD 49 – Central Coast; SD 82 – Coast Mountains; SD 87 – Stikine; SD 85 – Vancouver Island North; SD 54 – Bulkley Valley; SD 52 – Prince Rupert; SD 84 – Vancouver Island West; SD 91 – Nechako Lakes; SD 74 – Gold Trail; SD 81 – Fort Nelson; SD 70 – Pacific Rim; SD 79 – Cowichan Valley; and SD 68 – Nanaimo-Ladysmith.

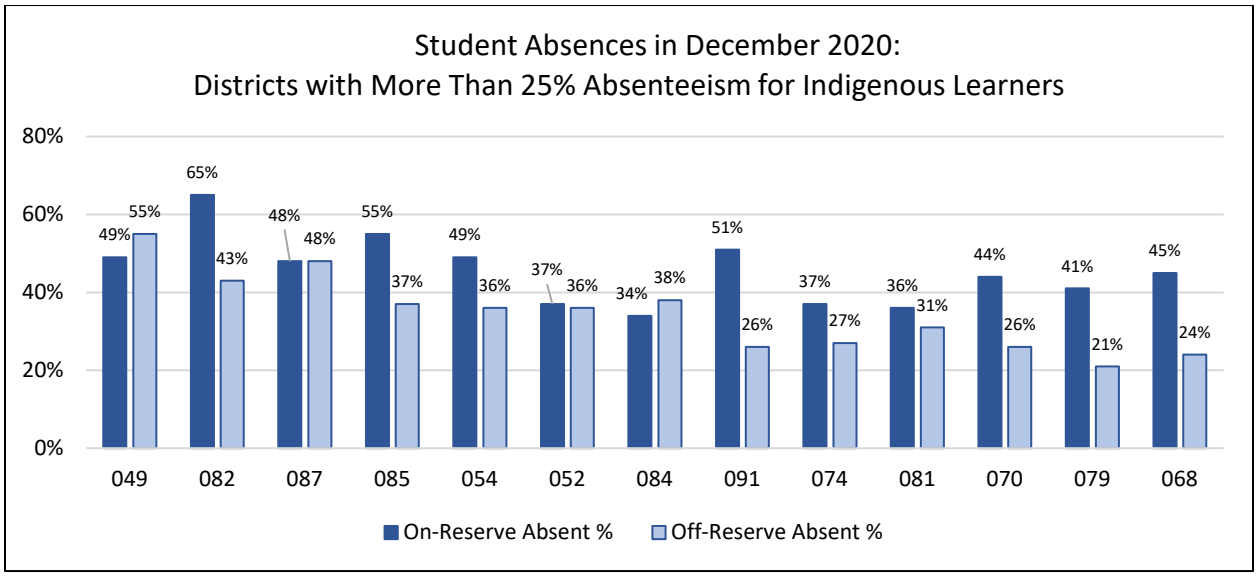


Figure 31: Student absences in December 2020 – districts with greater than 25% absenteeism for Indigenous learners.

Earlier in this document, completion rates by facility type were reviewed. Outcomes for students in non-standard facility types were poorer than for students in standard schools. In September 2020, student absences were generally lowest for Non-Indigenous learners across most facility types (see Figure 32). Student absences are generally higher for on-reserve Indigenous learners, across most facility types. Alternate schools have the highest absence rates for all groups, but a relatively small gap between learner types. Continuing Education shows very low absence rates for all populations. With Non-Indigenous having the highest absences for this facility type, and on-reserve Indigenous having the lowest, continuing education inverts the pattern seen in other facility types. Standard schools show the greatest variability in absence rates among learner groups. This variability will need to be examined further to assess potential service gaps and mitigation measures.

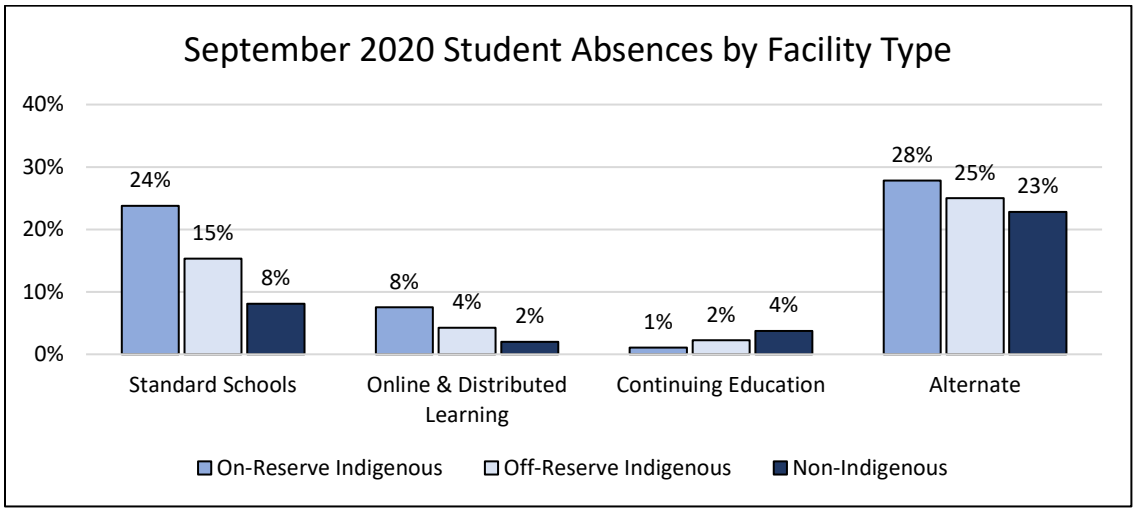


Figure 32: September 2020 student absence by facility type.

Like September 2020, the January 2021 absence rates show the largest gap between learner groups in standard schools (see Figure 33). For alternate education schools, absences increased for all groups and the gap between groups widened slightly. For other facility types, absences decreased and the gaps between groups was reduced.

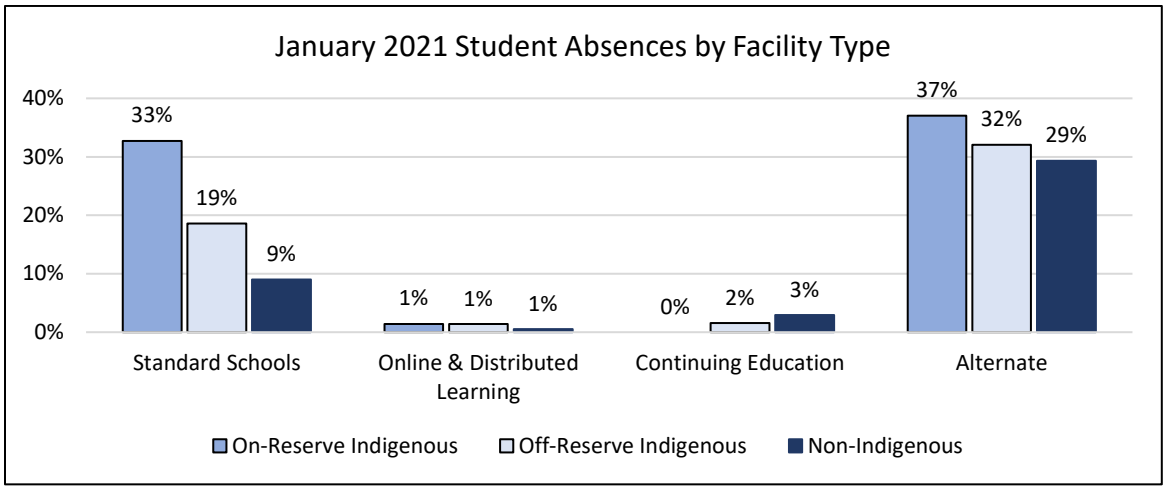


Figure 33: January 2021 student absence by facility type.

Monthly absence rates for all public school students averaged 11.3% since September 2017 (see Figure 34). Monthly absence rates for Indigenous students are considerably higher than Non-Indigenous students. The average monthly absence rate is 26.0% for on-reserve Indigenous students and 16.9% for off-reserve Indigenous students. This compares to the 10.4% average absence rate for Non-Indigenous students.

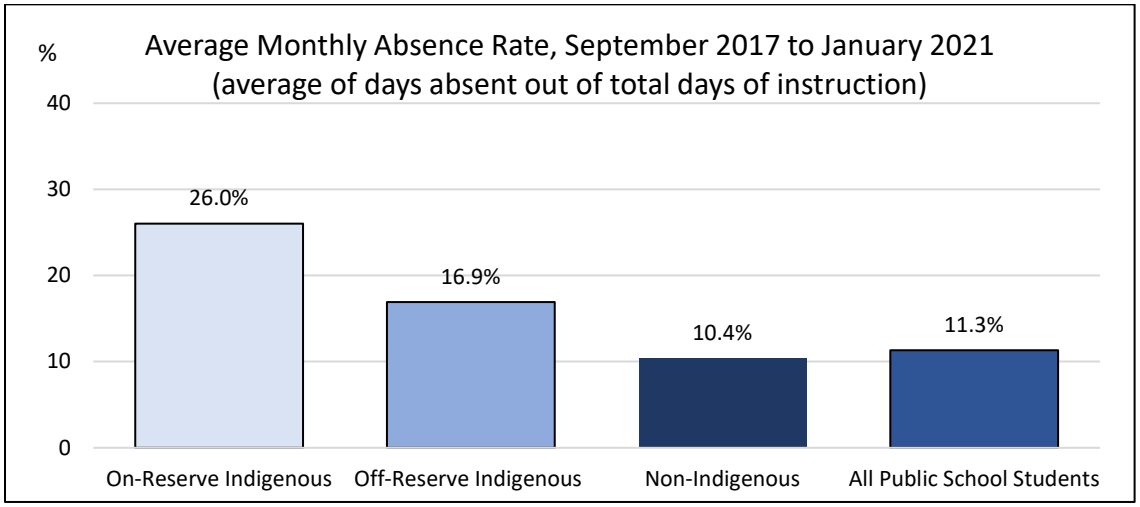


Figure 34: Average monthly absence rate over last four school years (2017 through 2021).

There has been a noticeable increase in Indigenous student absenteeism in the 2020/21 school year (see Figure 35); systemic barriers to attendance may be exacerbated by the pandemic. Absence rates for on-

reserve Indigenous students averaged 23.8% in September 2020 compared to 20.2% in September 2019. For off-reserve Indigenous students, absence rates increased from 13.3% in September 2019 to 15.3% in September 2020. This increase was not seen for Non-Indigenous students: absence rates remained the same at 8% in September 2019 and 2020.

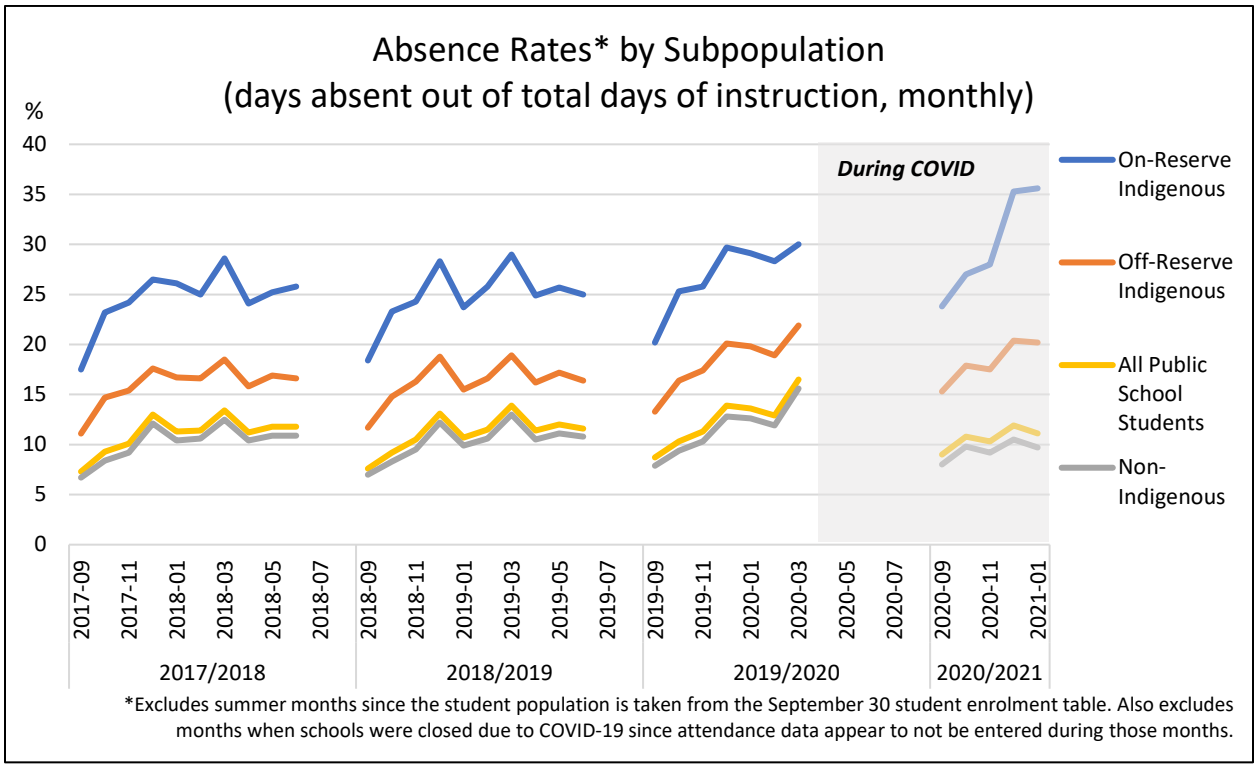


Figure 35: Monthly absence rate over last four school years by Indigenous learner group.

Attendance – Disabilities and Diverse Abilities Learners

As noted earlier in this report, students in priority groups, including learners with disabilities or diverse abilities, experience lower educational outcomes. To ensure equity of opportunities, supports and services must be in place to allow students access to in-class learning.

Figure 36 shows that over the past four school years, students with disabilities and diverse abilities have had higher absenteeism rates than students without disabilities and diverse abilities. There may be systemic barriers to attendance which are exacerbated during the pandemic, further inhibiting in-class attendance for students with disabilities and diverse abilities.

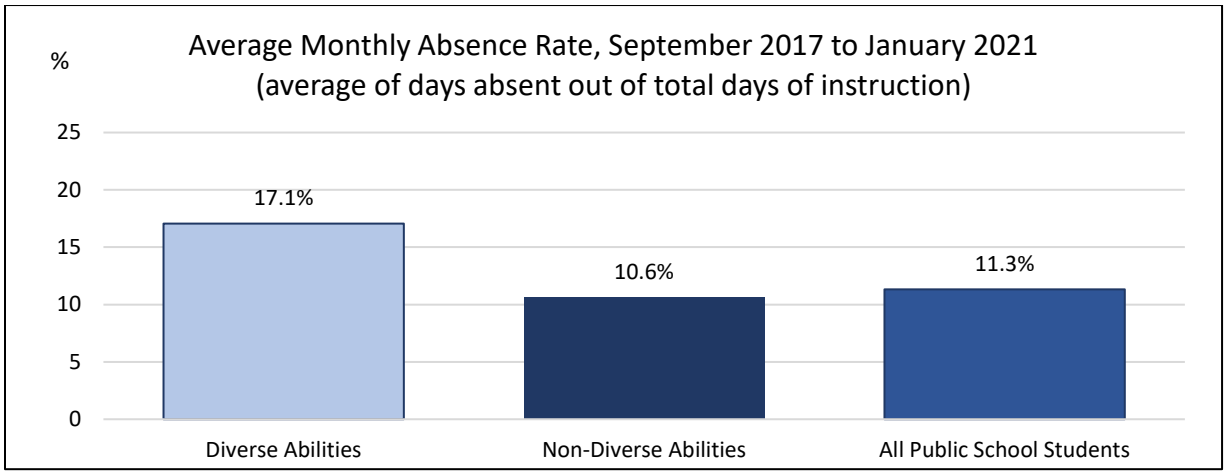


Figure 36: Average monthly absenteeism for students with disabilities and diverse abilities and their peers.

Monthly absence rates for students with disabilities and diverse abilities are much higher than for students without disabilities and diverse abilities (see Figure 37). The average monthly absence rate for students with disabilities and diverse abilities is 17.1%, compared to 10.6% for students without disabilities and diverse abilities.

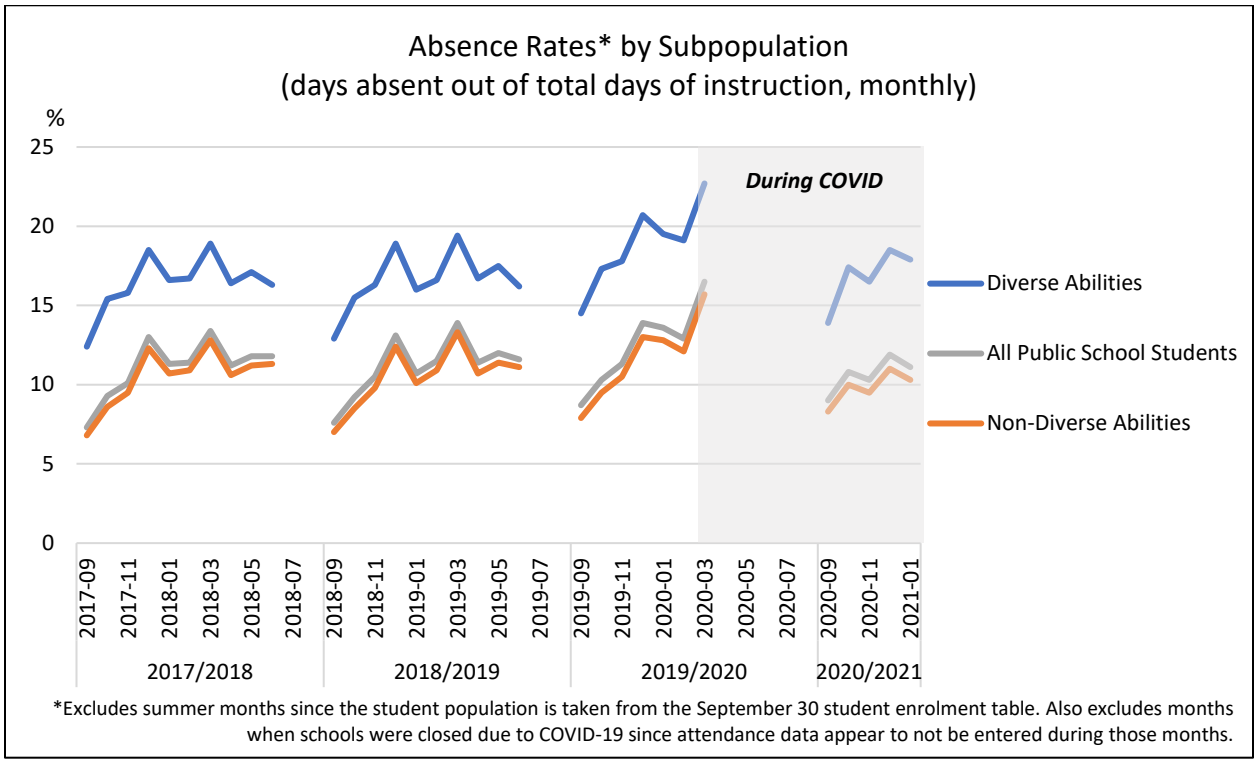


Figure 37: Monthly absence rate by disabilities and diverse abilities student group, last four school years.

Attendance – Low-SES Learners

Neighbourhood socio-economic status (SES) is based on an index created using census information. It shows that student absenteeism is related to the socio-economic neighbourhood status of a student, and that patterns of attendance over time are largely consistent across SES groups. Annually, there is a spike in absenteeism across SES groups in December each year, for example. In the "during COVID" period, all SES groups have lower absence rates relative to the pre-COVID period except for the lowest SES group, which continues to have the highest absence rate at about 16%-17% average monthly days absent (see Figure 38).

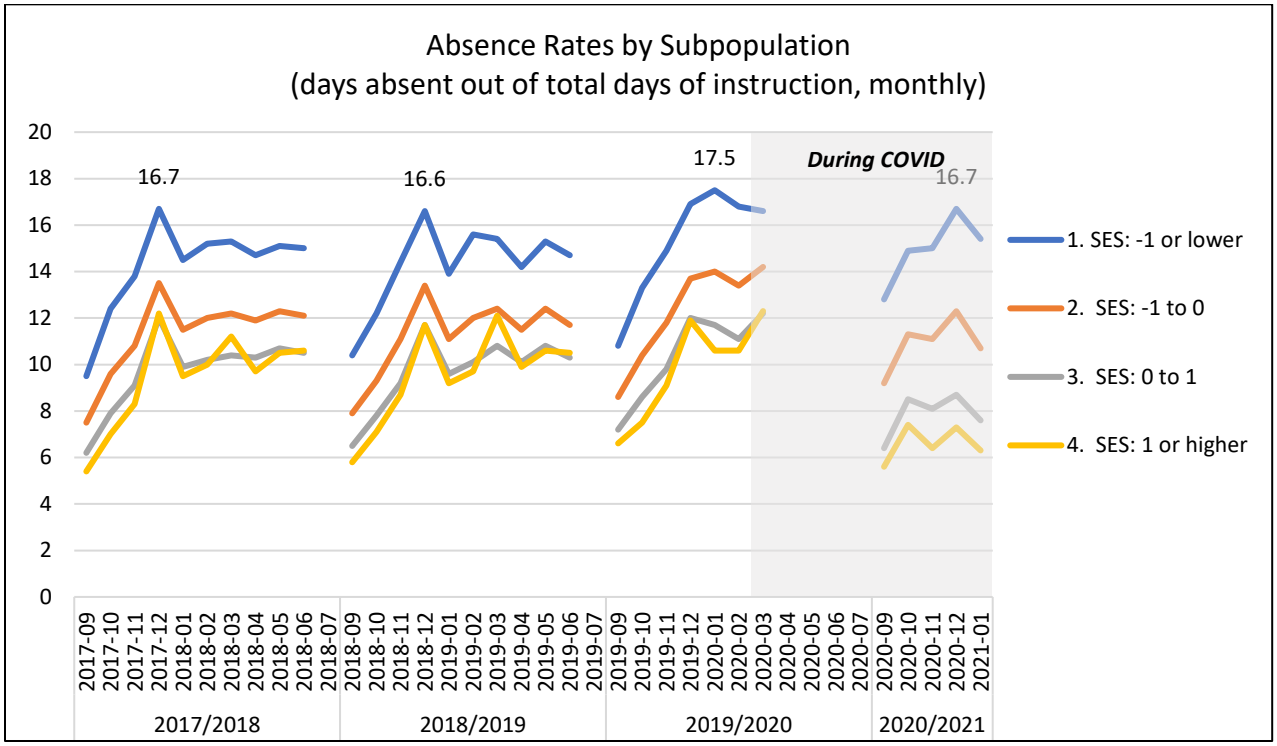


Figure 38: Monthly absence rate of students by SES, last four school years.

Attendance – Independent Schools

While nearly all public school districts use a platform called My Education BC (MyED) to enter student data (e.g., attendance), not all independent schools in the province use MyED. A weekly data collection of attendance for those independent schools who are not yet on MyED began in September 2020, moving to monthly in January 2021. Schools reported a single day of attendance for the week (typically Wednesday). A template was created and for each grade, schools were to report the number of students enrolled, in class, absent and receiving remote support (i.e., in a "transition" program). Further disaggregated data was not collected.

On average, 135 independent schools submitted the template weekly during the fall of 2020, representing 69% of independent schools not on MyED and 37% of all independent schools. Between 15% and 20% of the weekly independent attendance reports required data verification. On average, there were 36,300 students enrolled in the surveyed independent schools on any given week, with 32,000 (88%) receiving in-class instruction and 2,300 (6%) receiving remote support (see Figure 39). These numbers were consistent between September 2020 and December 2020, which prompted the move to a monthly attendance data collection beginning in January 2021.

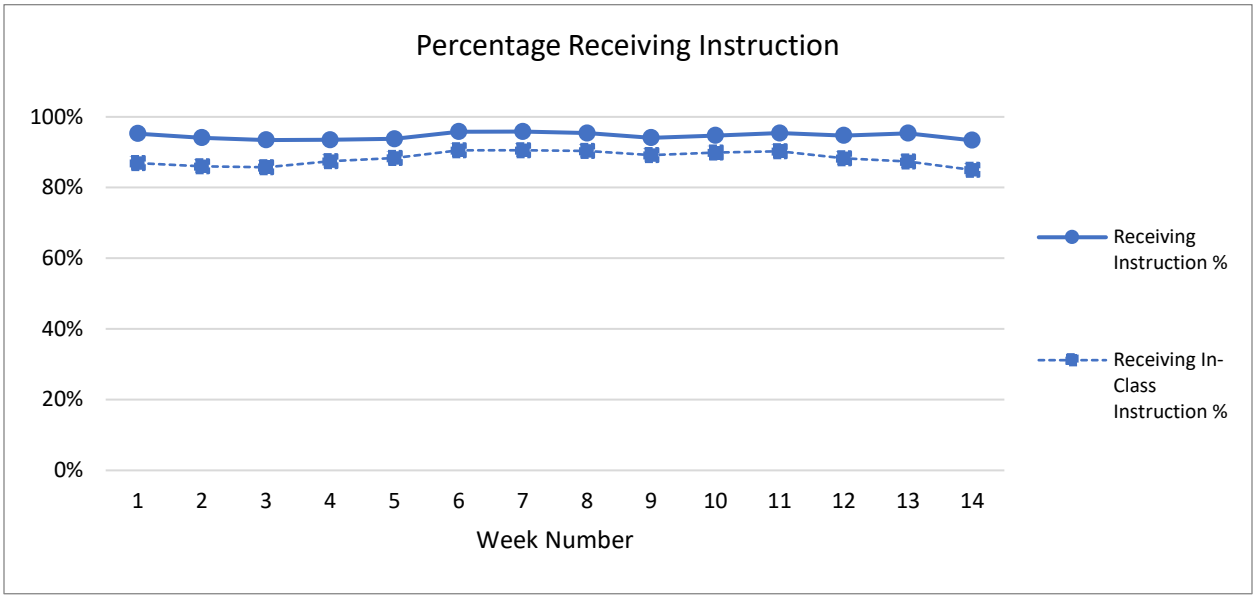


Figure 39: Weekly attendance reporting patterns for independent schools.

Attendance in independent schools is consistent across grades, with the most variation arising in students enrolled as "Graduated Adults" (see Table 11). The number of students receiving some form of instruction (in-class or remote support) has stayed relatively stable over time. Where there is some variation, elementary grade students tend to be in class less frequently than secondary school students; 85% of grades 1 to 3 students were receiving in-class instruction compared to 90% for grades 8 through 12. Younger students had slightly higher rates of remote instruction than those in secondary school. Most schools followed this trend, although there were some notable outliers, both in overall percentage of students receiving *either* remote or in-class instruction, as well as the percentage *only* receiving in-class instruction. As noted earlier, however, independent schools were more likely than public schools to voluntarily close in response to a COVID-19 exposure notice, or to have a functional or operational closure due to a lack of availability of staff because of self-isolation requirements.

*HS: Homeschooling; *EU: Elementary Ungraded; *SU: Secondary Ungraded; *GA: Graduated Adult

Percentage Receiving Instruction	Grade																	
Week	**KF**	**01**	**02**	**03**	**04**	**05**	**06**	**07**	**08**	**09**	**10**	**11**	**12**	***HS**	***EU**	***SU**	***GA**	**Average**
1	93%	93%	96%	95%	94%	95%	96%	96%	97%	96%	96%	97%	96%	57%	93%	80%	6%	87%
2	93%	93%	93%	94%	93%	94%	94%	95%	95%	95%	94%	96%	94%	100%	93%	85%	93%	94%
3	92%	93%	92%	94%	93%	94%	94%	94%	90%	91%	96%	96%	96%	100%	93%	96%	93%	94%
4	92%	92%	93%	93%	93%	92%	93%	93%	93%	95%	95%	96%	96%	100%	86%	83%	94%	93%
5	94%	94%	95%	95%	93%	93%	93%	93%	94%	93%	94%	94%	93%	100%	92%	100%	97%	95%
6	95%	96%	97%	97%	96%	96%	96%	95%	97%	96%	95%	96%	96%		95%	84%	87%	94%
7	96%	96%	97%	96%	96%	96%	96%	95%	96%	96%	96%	96%	95%	93%	97%	100%	74%	95%
8	94%	96%	96%	96%	96%	96%	95%	95%	96%	95%	94%	95%	95%	93%	98%	100%	88%	95%
9	94%	94%	94%	93%	95%	94%	94%	94%	95%	95%	95%	94%	95%	98%	80%	89%	100%	94%
10	94%	95%	95%	95%	94%	94%	96%	94%	96%	96%	95%	94%	94%	100%	90%	84%	79%	93%
11	95%	96%	95%	95%	95%	95%	96%	94%	96%	95%	96%	96%	95%	100%	96%	98%	85%	95%
12	94%	95%	95%	95%	95%	95%	94%	94%	95%	95%	95%	96%	94%	100%	96%	95%	71%	94%
13	94%	95%	95%	96%	96%	96%	95%	96%	96%	96%	94%	96%	95%	100%	94%	84%	100%	95%
14	92%	93%	94%	93%	94%	95%	94%	94%	96%	94%	91%	94%	91%	100%	92%	74%	83%	92%
AVERAGE	**94%**	**94%**	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**	**94%**	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**	**95%**	**93%**	**89%**	**82%**	**94%**

Table 11: Weekly independent school attendance by grade, September 2020 to December 2020.

While Table 11 shows aggregate weekly independent school attendance by grade, overall individual independent school attendance rates rarely dropped below 75% attendance between September 2020 and February 2021. Of the schools that responded weekly, City Vancouver Academy had the overall lowest attendance rate, averaging just over 80% of students receiving instruction (either in-class or remote) from September 2020 to December 2020. Other schools reported high rates of remote learning support; Columbia Academy had on average only 7% of students receiving in-class support (and 0% in November and December 2020), while averaging over 95% of students receiving some form of instruction. Likewise, Pythagoras Academy and Vancouver Nour Danesh Farsi School also averaged below 50% in-class instruction, with the latter dropping over time.

Attendance – Workforce

Beginning in September 2020, a new data collection on workforce attendance was instituted with the co-operation of the school districts. **The proportion of teachers absent (for all reasons) on a given day in BC public schools has held steady at around 8% daily** (see Figure 40). As this is a new data collection, year-over-year comparisons are not yet available.

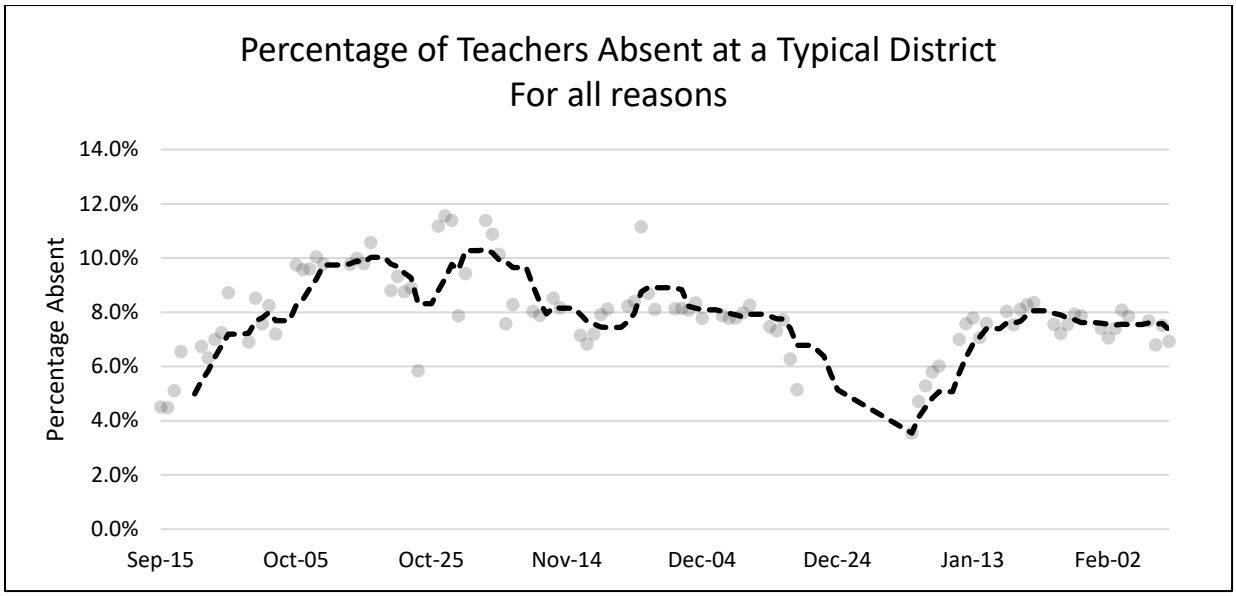


Figure 40: Percentage of BC public school teachers absent.

Districts belonging to the Northern Health Authority (which largely align with the districts of the Northern BCSSA chapter), with the exception of SD 27 – Cariboo-Chilcotin (in Interior Health Authority) and SD 49 – Central Coast (in Vancouver Coastal Health Authority), have a higher rate of teacher absenteeism relative to other areas in BC (see Figure 41).

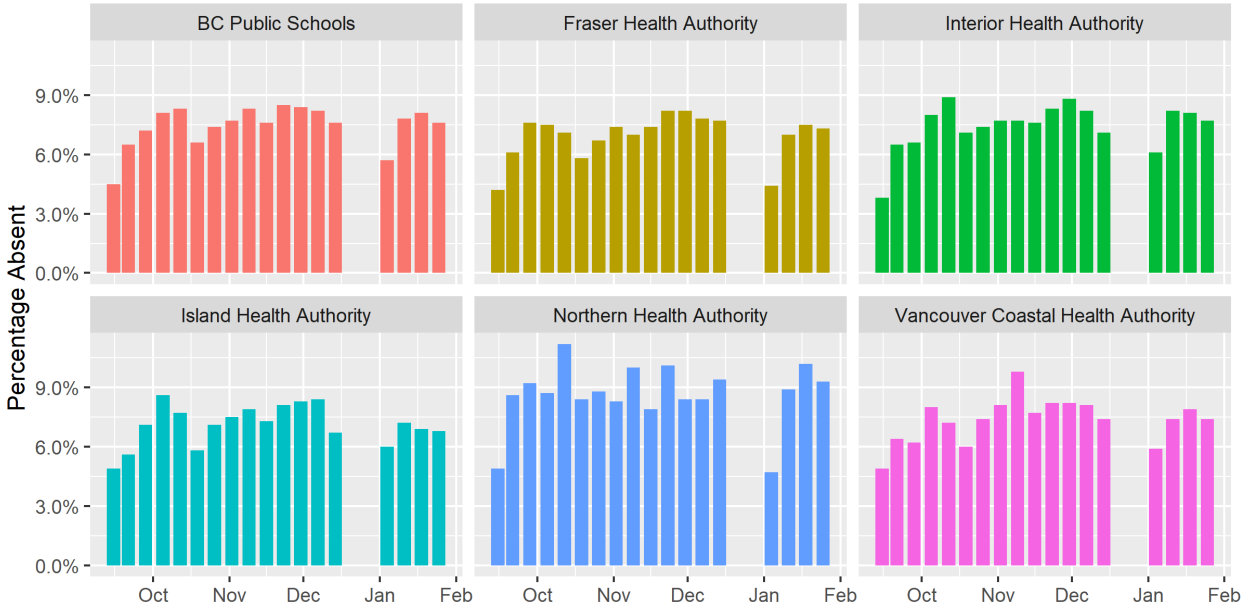


Figure 41: Percentage of BC public school teachers absent by health authority over time.

Earlier in the report, it was observed that students with disabilities and diverse abilities have higher absenteeism than their peers without disabilities or diverse abilities. **On any given day in BC, there are between 10% and 15% of educational assistants (EAs) absent in public schools** for reasons including

sick leave, personal leave, vacation and any COVID-19-related leave (see Figure 42). Further research is needed to determine if there is a correlation between the attendance patterns of students with disabilities and diverse abilities and attendance patterns of EAs. Districts belonging to the Fraser Health Authority and Northern Health Authority have a higher rate of EAs absenteeism than elsewhere. As noted earlier, districts in the lower mainland have seen most of the exposure notices.

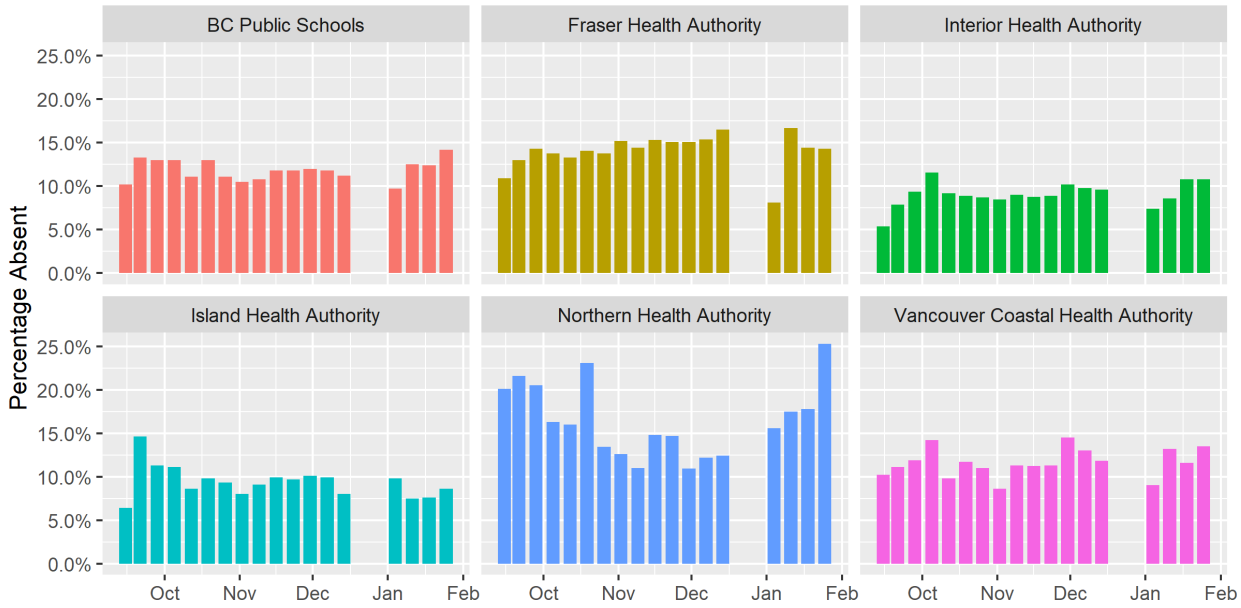


Figure 42: Percentage of public school educational assistants (EAs) absent by health authority over time.

As noted earlier, although elementary schools account for 60% of all schools in BC, they only represent 45% of all COVID-19 exposure notices in schools. Additionally, elementary-age students are deemed by public health to be at a low risk of contracting or transmitting COVID-19. Secondary schools account for 20% of all schools in BC, yet 39% of all COVID-19 exposure notices. Despite this, as shown in Figures 43 and 44, **teacher attendance has been impacted more in elementary schools than in secondary schools within the Metro Vancouver school districts**.

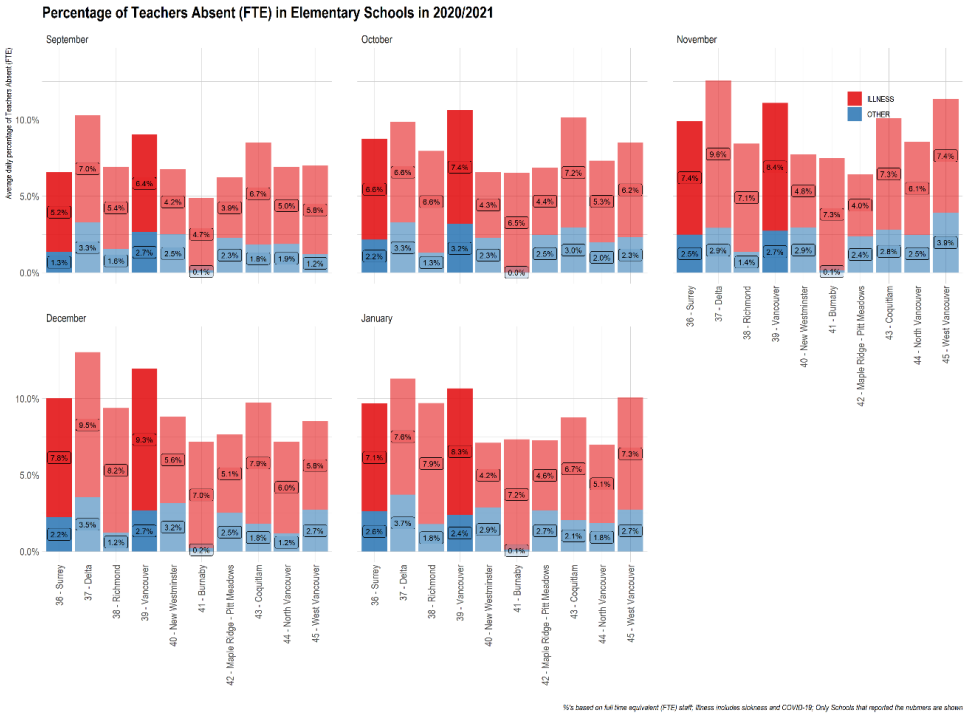


Figure 43: Percentage of elementary school teachers absent in Metro Vancouver school districts.

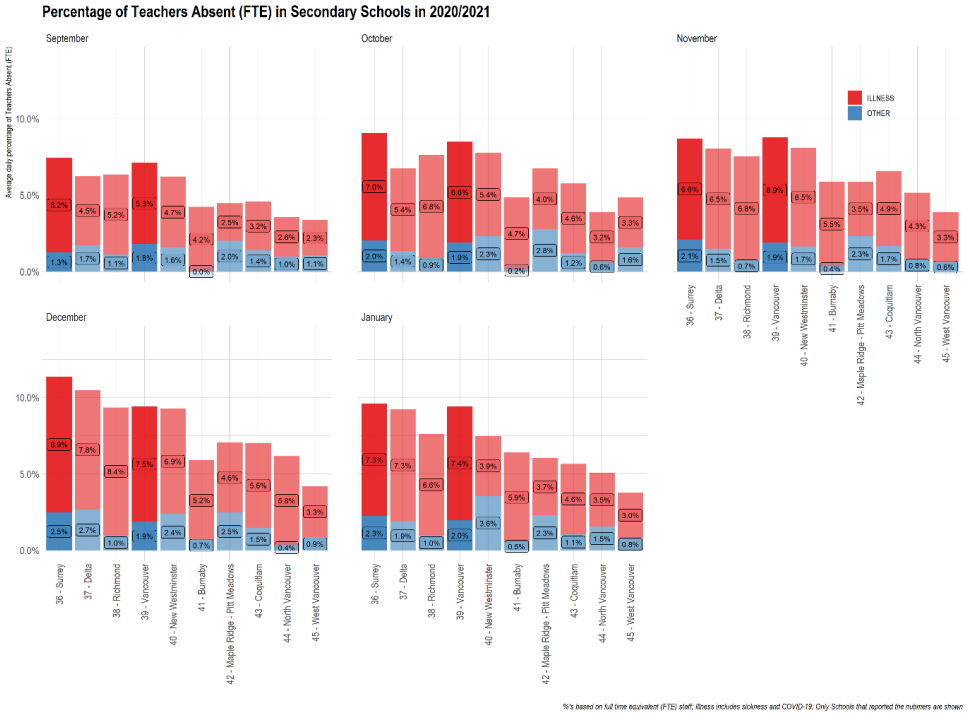


Figure 44: Percentage of secondary school teachers absent in Metro Vancouver school districts.

Summary

The impacts of COVID-19 on student learning continue to unfold and it is expected that there will be analysis of these impacts in the foreseeable future.

To-date, there are three key categories of findings from the research that has been undertaken:

1. The findings of the analyses and the external research undertaken point to potential increased disparity for priority student groups including Indigenous students, students with disabilities or diverse abilities, students from a lower socio-economic status and children and youth in government care. Research suggests that nothing can replace in-person learning for most students, and that COVID-19 could widen the gaps in educational outcomes due to issues such as disengagement and an inability to access technology.

2. Impacts on learning are not confined to specific populations. We will continue to monitor the educational pathways and outcomes of students who were in district transition programs, who transitioned into DL schools or into homeschooling during the pandemic, students in priority groups who are traditionally underserved by the system, as well as students in non-standard facility types. Research will continue on the mental health and well-being of students.

3. BC's commitment to learning continuity and its effort to keep schools open is expected to have a positive impact in mitigating the risks from findings 1 and 2 above. Indeed, the unique approach to addressing the pandemic in BC's K-12 education system may result in less impact to students' learning than in other jurisdictions across Canada. Early indicators and qualitative input from educational professionals and other stakeholders suggest that there is more that BC can do to support the learning impacts arising due to COVID-19. Additionally, it will be important to monitor outcomes over the next few years to ensure that any short-term efforts are effective and produce positive outcomes.

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