



News Release

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BRITISH COLUMBIA'S CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE NEED BETTER SUPPORT TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL

VICTORIA – The provincial government must take action to reduce significant gaps in the academic achievement of children and youth in care, including the provision of specific funding to each school district dedicated to supporting the learning needs of these students, recommends a report released today by B.C.'s Representative for Children and Youth.

Room for Improvement: Toward Better Education Outcomes for Children in Care also recommends that the Ministry of Education strengthen accountability for the academic achievement of students in government care and that the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD) ensure that children and youth in care are supported to recover from trauma so that its impact on their learning is reduced.

“Public education should help to level the playing field for vulnerable children and youth, to provide all young people, no matter their family circumstances or challenges, with the knowledge and tools they need to thrive,” said Representative Bernard Richard. “But significant gaps persist and it is time that government, as the prudent parent of these children, takes adequate steps to close those gaps.”

Statistics compiled by the Ministry of Education for the RCY review show that children and youth in continuing care generally trail well behind other students on most academic measures. Such achievement disparities are often exacerbated when the student in continuing care is Indigenous or has a special need.

In the 2014/15 school year, only 34 per cent of B.C. Grade 7 students in continuing care met or exceeded expectations in numeracy. This compares to nearly 73 per cent of other students. Among Grade 10 students in the same year, 39.5 per cent of students in continuing care earned marks of C-plus or better in science, compared to 71 per cent of all other students.

Fewer than 51 per cent of B.C. students in continuing care who began Grade 8 in 2009/10 graduated within six years. This compares to nearly 89 per cent of the rest of the students in the province during the same time period.

“Students in care are not naturally under-performers,” Richard said. “But often because of their life circumstances – experiencing trauma and instability early on – many need extra supports in

order to succeed academically. They should be getting those supports and, too often, they don't."

In compiling this report, the Representative gathered input from more than 1,200 individuals in the school and care systems, including 162 youth in and from care, 497 teachers, 149 social workers and 121 foster parents. Those participants helped to identify a number of areas in which children and youth in care can be better supported in their educational achievement, including:

- More stability at home and school and adequate support when moves are necessary
- Positive and consistent relationships, both at school and home that support education
- Help with school work, including flexibility, goal-setting, celebrating success and support for special needs
- Adults sharing information and planning together, with the student, for the student's success
- Students' mental health needs addressed and help provided to heal from trauma
- Support for Indigenous students, including key cultural connections for these students and cultural content in class for all students.

The RCY report repeats a recommendation from the B.C. Auditor General's 2015 report on Indigenous education, calling on the Ministry of Education and its partners to develop and implement a system-wide strategy to close the gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student outcomes.

It also recommends that the Ministry of Education, school districts and MCFD work together to create positions dedicated to ensuring adequate information-sharing, coordination and advocacy in support of education outcomes for children and youth in care. And it calls on MCFD to assess the trauma-related needs of all children and youth coming into care and ensure that recovery supports are offered across all care settings, including schools.

Finally, the report recommends that MCFD ensure that caregivers are authorized to make decisions on the participation of children and youth in care in age- and developmentally appropriate activities, including those at school that require written permission.

The full report can be found here: <http://www.rcybc.ca/roomforimprovement>

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