

6. Education

Broadly speaking, an educated and trained population is essential to community well-being. When the type and level of education matches a person's capabilities and capacities quality of life for that person is high. When the population is educated and trained for the needs of the community that has a positive impact on all of us. Public school education is mandatory in this province but not post-secondary education. It's not free either. If the appropriate post-secondary education is denied a person for reasons of poverty, discrimination or a combination of social disadvantages the end result is an unfulfilled, possibly resentful, individual and a community collectively poorer for it.

Not unlike the health section of this report, this section could go in so many ways. Measuring the effects of education on the quality of life is not always easy. Organizations measure things in various ways, using different indicators, but hope for the same results. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities, for example, uses 5 indicators in its education section of its quality of life report: student/educator ratio, high school graduation rates, level of educational achieved, literacy and public library usage. (FCM, 2013) These indicators are not hard to measure and they are readily available. In fact, we use them in this report. The Canadian Index of Wellness uses education in its calculation of its quality of life index but it uses 8 indicators including childcare spaces, child development (using scales in 5 domains), the ratio of students and educators, an average of 5 emotional competency scores for 12 and 13 year olds, basic knowledge and skills index for 13 to 15 year olds, percentages on Programme International Students Assessment, percent of 20-24 year olds completing high school and the percentage of 25-64 year olds with a university degree. Other indices of wellness of quality of life use roughly the same indicators, but there are variations.



In this report we make a number of changes from our 2009 report by reporting on class sizes rather than on student/educator ratios, eliminating the section on francophone programs in the province but we do assess the success of local programs, and add a number of performance indicators. An article called *Measuring Quality of Life* tackles the issue of how to use various indicators to measure quality of life for Europeans in particular but the measurement scheme is globally applicable. It includes only 2 indicators: "...for education...only the lack of a diploma and recent vocational training were measured, whereas we could envisage, if this work were extended in future, including a measure of people's competencies (in written and oral comprehension and numeracy)." (Albouy, 2010, p. 6) The assumption in this article is that if a person does not have a diploma, degree or vocational training of some sort, their quality of life must be diminished. That may or may not be so in all cases. However, we do know that there is a close connection between income and education. As Statistics Canada notes:

High-income Canadians tended to be highly educated. Over two thirds (67.1%) of the top 1% had attained a university degree compared to 54.6% of the top 5%, 50.3% of the top 10% and 20.9% of all Canadians aged 15 and over. (Stats Can, 2011c)

We also know that Canadians in general who don't have a high school diploma have a 55% employment rate, while individuals with some post-secondary credential have an 82% employment rate. (Stats Can, 2013b) So, there is a close connection between education and personal economic wellbeing, however we look at it.

To start, we address the educational attainment of residents of the Comox Valley compared to the Cowichan Valley and the rest of British Columbia but also place our local performance in the context of Canada as a whole and OECD countries.

6.1 Educational Attainment (id)

In January 2014, Statistics Canada released a study: *Education Indicators in Canada: An international perspective, 2013*. It notes that about 90% of Canadians 25-64 had completed high school in 2011. That's higher than most OECD countries. BC, it reports, had a 92% completion rate. The Comox Valley is definitely in this range too although a bit lower than BC's average. BC and the Comox Valley also reflect the OECD and Canadian picture when it comes to residents (25 to 65 years of age) completing a post-secondary education in 2011 at 64%. Unlike most OECD countries Canada has an extensive college system so there will be more people with college credentials, including university level AA (Associate Arts) 2 year degrees, as well as technology, fine arts, business and science degrees. (Stats Can, 2013b) As an aside, BC's college system is actually modeled on California's and is different than Saskatchewan's for example with more university level academic courses on offer. The Comox Valley is pretty much in line with BC, Canada and the OECD countries on the major education indicators.

Table 6 below is complex and contains a great deal of information. It contains data for the Comox Valley Regional District alone. The data for the Cowichan Valley and the province of BC as a whole are in Appendix 2 for your reference. The top part of the table considers residents of the Valley 25 to 64 years of age, the working years.

The totals in the first column and their accompanying percentages in the next column show that 63.3 % of the residents of the Valley 25 to 64 years old have some kind of post-secondary credential. That leaves 37.7% with grade 12 or less. Some 3,525 residents have no credential at all. Of the residents with some post-secondary education or training, 15.3% have an apprenticeship or trade certificate or diploma. These are mostly men (68.8%). Just 6.8% have a Master's degree or doctorate of some kind.

Comparing males and females, men and women, on this table it's clear that women are much more likely to get some form of education and training than men. That's not just the case for the Comox Valley, that's true for the whole province (see appendix 2) and in the Cowichan Valley. In every category except apprenticeships and vocational training, women in the Comox Valley are better educated than their male counterparts. That doesn't mean they make more money as we shall see in section 11 of this report.

In the bottom half of this table, we consider what people have studied in their post-secondary experience. This is for the total population of the Valley 15 years and over so the top and bottom part of this table are not comparable. Considering this population, it seems that women outnumber men in the Valley by about 2,000 individuals. About 45% of people aged 15 and over don't have any post-secondary credential at all, but we shouldn't expect 15 year olds to have gone to university or college. Still, the data in this table are relevant because it may be that people who are retired still use their credentials and expertise in volunteer work. To start with, the table considers broad areas of employment rather than specific jobs. So, for example, in the health and related fields, only 15.1% of the 5,175 individuals in category are men, and 84.9% women. Without looking at the data more closely, it seems likely that the men in this category trained more frequently as doctors and the women as nurses. There are a few other glaring comparisons to be made looking at this table. What is it about architecture, engineering and related fields that attract so few women whereas over 70% of teachers are women? The only category with any kind of gender balance seems to be in the physical and life sciences and technologies but there's no indication from this table just what jobs fit into this category. If you are curious about that information, check this source: (Stats Can, 2011d) or use the link in the footnote below.²⁷

Table 6: Educational Attainment in the Comox Valley Regional District, 2011

	Total		♂*		♀*5	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Total population aged 25 to 64 years by highest certificate, diploma or degree	34,055		15,950	46.9	18,100	53
No certificate, diploma or degree	3,525	10.4	2,065	58.6	1,460	41.4
High school diploma or equivalent	8,965	26.3	3,955	44.1	5,010	55.9
Post-secondary certificate, diploma or degree	21,560	63.3	9,925	46.0	11,635	54.0
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	5,225	15.3	3,595	68.8	1,630	31.2
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate of diploma	8,325	24.4	3,080	37.0	5,240	62.9
University certificate or diploma below Bachelor level	1,685	4.9	550	32.6	1,135	67.4
University certificate at Bachelor level or above	6,325	18.6	2,700	42.7	3,625	57.3
Bachelor's degree	4,010	11.8	1,685	42.0	2,330	58.1
University certificate, diploma or degree above Bachelor level	2,315	6.8	1,020	44.1	1,300	56.2
Total population aged 15 years and over by major field of study	53,430		25,665	48	27,765	52
No postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree	24,050	45.0	11,475	47.7	12,580	52.3
Education	2,795	5.2	835	29.9	1,960	70.1
Visual and performing arts, communications technology	1,030	1.9	380	36.9	650	63.1
Humanities	1,280	2.4	460	35.9	820	64.1
Social and behavioural sciences and law	2,335	4.4	770	33.0	1,565	67.0
Business management and public admin.	4,895	9.2	1,400	28.6	3,495	71.4
Physical and life sciences and technologies	1,075	2.0	545	50.7	530	49.3
Mathematic, computer and information services	480	0.9	280	58.3	200	41.7
Architecture, engineering and related technologies	6,790	12.7	6,500	95.7	290	4.3
Agriculture, natural resources and conservation	1,040	1.9	680	65.4	360	34.6
Health and related fields	5,175	9.7	780	15.1	4,395	84.9
Personal, protective and transportation services	2,490	4.7	1,555	62.4	930	37.3

Source: Statistics Canada, National Housing Survey Community Profiles (Stats Can, 2011b)

In summary, it seems that the Comox Valley pretty much mirrors the province in the broad distribution of credentials in the labour force and in the categories of employment. Looking at the table above and those in appendix 2 and it seems that the labour force in the Comox Valley is more 'gendered' than in the province as a whole in terms of education. Women are certainly better educated than their male counterparts, but how this affects their quality of life is uncertain. Now, let's consider public education.

Related indicators: Incomes, income security

6.1 Class sizes (n)

It's generally agreed that the number of students in a classroom per teacher will have an impact on the quality of schooling. The ratio of educators to students is often used as an indicator of the quality of learning in the classroom. For this report we move away from the broadly based student/educator ratio to class size as one indicator of quality of education in the kindergarten to grade 12 system. It also has its drawbacks as an indicator of quality of learning given that some students in a class may have special needs and the presence or not of an educational assistant will make a significant difference to the quality of learning in the classroom. There is also the issue of the quantity and quality of classroom resources and ancillary support services. That said, there are 'objective' indicators of how well students are doing and we discuss those below. But, first, class sizes.

Table 6.1: Class Sizes Comox Valley School District 71 and BC Averages

School Year	Kindergarten		Grade 1-3		Grade 4-7		Grade 8-12	
	SD 71	BC	SD 71	BC	SD 71	BC	SD 71	BC
2007-2008	17.6	17.4	20.9	20.4	25.4	25.8	25.7	24.4
2008-2009	17.7	17.7	20.4	20.6	26.2	25.8	24.2	24.4
2009-2010	18.5	17.8	20.7	20.7	26.6	26	25.6	24.8
2010-2011	18.8	18.3	20.8	20.7	24.5	25.9	25.3	25.1
2011-2012	18.8	18.5	20.9	20.6	25.9	25.9	25.2	25
2012-2013	19.8	19	21.4	21.1	26.1	25.4	24.7	23.3
2013-2014	19	19.3	21.6	21.5	24.1	25.7	24.2	23

Source: BC Ministry of Education, Provincial Reports, Class Size Summaries

Across the board, School District 71 is very close to the provincial average for class sizes. That's not true for all school districts in the province. For example, in 2013-2014, the range is from 11.3 on the Central Coast for grades 8-12 and 26.1 in Nanaimo-Ladysmith for all 60 reporting school districts (public schools only). Class sizes seem to be increasing for kindergarten and grades 1-3 but decreasing moderately for the other grades. The Ministry of Education considers all but 5 school districts in the province to be under capacity, including SD 71 at 10% under capacity. Some of the remote, sparsely populated districts are as much as 60% under capacity. The Conseil Scolaire Francophone (SD 93) is considered to be 20% over utilized as are some of the fastest growing districts in the province like Surrey (+1%) and Sooke (+5%) (BC Ministry of Education, 2013c)

6.2 High School Graduation Rates (=)

Table 6.2 addresses graduation rates (as a percentages of those enrolled) in 6 BC school districts, including the Comox Valley. The BC Ministry of Education collects a lot of data from the school districts. The key summary report runs to over 100 pages. Obviously graduation rates are important to any school district but looking at the provincial statistics overall it's difficult to escape the conclusion that social factors have a great deal to do with how successful students are and how many manage to graduate. The provincial graduation rate is around 80%. Cowichan, Qualicum and Campbell River are close to that. Alberni and the Comox Valley are below by 16% and 10% respectively. There is no obvious reason why this is the case in the Comox Valley. Fort Nelson is an aberration; it has few graduates, but reports huge improvements in the last 4 years or so.

Table 6.2: Graduation Rates in Various School Districts

District	2008/2009			2009/2010			2010/2011			* 6
	♂	♀	Total	♂	♀	Total	♂	♀	Total	
069 Qualicum	70	78	74	76	78	77	78	79	79	430
070 Alberni	60	66	63	60	69	64	57	71	64	361
071 Comox Valley	64	71	67	71	71	71	67	72	70	954
072 Campbell River	70	79	75	75	84	79	78	86	82	551
079 Cowichan Valley	66	74	70	71	79	75	74	81	78	704
081 Fort Nelson	63	79	71	48	74	61	91	99	95	77

Source: BC Ministry of Education, Provincial Reports, 2008 to 2011 (BC Ministry of Education, 2014)

Table 6.3 shows that graduation rates for aboriginal students are lower than for other grads, but we'll come to those again in a special section of this report called the Aboriginal Report Card. French Immersion Students generally graduate at a higher rate than their fellow students although at 75% in the Comox Valley that's substantially lower than the provincial rate of 93% and the lowest of the districts in the table. English as a Second Language Students (ESL) lag behind their fellow students in terms of graduation rates.

Table 6.3: Six-year Completion Rates⁷ for Aboriginal, ESL, and French Immersion Students, 2010/11

District	Aboriginal Students			French Immersion	ESL
	♂	♀	Total	Total	Total
069 Qualicum	63	70	66	91	68
070 Alberni	32	37	34	78	25
071 Comox Valley	54	57	56	75	61
072 Campbell River	54	46	50	100	57
079 Cowichan Valley	57	52	55	87	43
081 Fort Nelson	100	99	100	msk*	msk*

Source: BC Ministry of Education, Key Summary Reports (BC Ministry of Education, 2014)

*msk means 'masked' because the numbers are too small to report.

6.3 Foundation Skills Assessment (n)

The BC Ministry of Education monitors the skills of students on the basics of reading, writing and numeracy. According to the FSA website: "The assessment is administered annually to Grade 4 and 7 students in public and provincially funded independent schools." (BC Ministry of Education, 2014).

Table 6.4 takes a broad picture of the skills of students in the Comox Valley²⁸ compared to other school districts on the island, and BC. SD 71 is consistently behind the provincial average when it comes to reading comprehension, writing and numeracy. We haven't determined if these differences are statistically significant, but they are consistent. When looking at the province as a whole, patterns emerge. West Vancouver comes ahead or at the top in all categories whereas small, rural areas like the Stikine, Nisga'a, and Central Coast always score the lowest. Across the table, it seems that the scores drop slightly from grade 4 to grade 7.

Table 6.4: Foundation Skills Assessment, SDs 69, 70, 71, 72, BC, High and Low Scores

Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) 2010/11 (out of 100)						
District	Grade 4			Grade 7		
	Reading	Writing	Numeracy	Reading	Writing	Numeracy
069 Qualicum	63	62	66	60	61	60
070 Alberni	66	67	59	67	64	59
071 Comox Valley	63	62	62	61	67	50
072 Campbell River	59	59	56	48	48	43
BC Average	69	73	67	66	72	62
High	90	91	90	85	92	89
Low	14	23	9	39	37	4

Source: BC Ministry of Education, Provincial Reports.

6.4 Access to Post-Secondary Education (id)

We know that access to post-secondary education is just a dream for many people. As we just observed in 6.2, high school completion rates are a real barrier, although it's true that colleges offer high school equivalency courses to prepare people to enter the trades even though they don't have a Dogwood Certificate (what you get when you complete grade 12 in this province). Upgrading will be necessary for many young people hoping to get into a college trade or vocational program. Colleges, of course, offer a 'bridge' from high school to university. The point of the BC college system is to provide open access to anyone interested in learning and improving their credentials. North Island College (NIC) offers two year programs that are part of a university education but without the high fees incurred by going to one of the 'big' universities in BC, or even one of the new ones like Vancouver Island University, formerly Malaspina College.



Still, a significant barrier to entering college is the cost.

Tuition fees at NIC are among the lowest in the province yet they go up every year by 2%, which is the maximum the province allows. Part-time work is always an option to help pay for tuition, books and other living expenses, but work interferes with study time and can lead to lower grades overall. Getting student loans is also possible and more people in Canada are getting student loans than ever before. The Bank of Montreal, in a recent survey reported that more than half of Canadian students are taking out student loans to pay for their education, expecting to graduate with a \$34,886 debt load in BC (BMO, 2013) which they expect will take some 10 years to pay off. In BC, worry over their financial situation topped all other sources of stress for students. Women were more stressed out than men partly because they incur more debt and will take longer to pay it off.

6.5 Literacy

Almost 600,000 working British Columbians — over one quarter of those currently employed — do not have the literacy skills required to fully participate in a knowledge economy. Forty percent of youth aged 15 have insufficient reading skills and one student in five does not complete high school in the expected time. Thirteen percent of people aged 25 to 64 have not completed high school. In order to build our workforce, adults who may not have finished high school or who need to upgrade their skills must be given a second chance at learning.²⁹

Literacy means something very different in today's digital world than it did in the resource-based economy of British Columbia fifty years ago. Different skills and knowledge beyond print literacy are now required, including oral communication, problem solving, analysis, computer use, working with others and numeracy. Continuous learning is necessary to keep up with a rapidly changing world.

Literacy work extends beyond school and college classrooms. Community-based literacy organizations, such as the public libraries, the Adult Learning Centre (ALC), Comox Valley Lifelong Learning Association (CVLLA) etc. offer free and accessible programs and services that formal organizations do not. These non-formal learning programs are often gateways to more formalized learning and training opportunities.

In 2010 CVLLA assessed the need for increased literacy support for hard-to-reach families and for young adults transitioning into the workplace, post-secondary education and into adulthood. The Family Literacy Outreach Advisory Committee and the Essential Skills Partnership were created in response to this identified need and they continue to advocate, support and create literacy programs and resources for hard-to-reach families and young adults. The Adult Learning Centre continues to support adults in their learning pursuits through one-to-one tutoring. The following is a description of the three recognized groups (families, young adults, and adults) in our community that need support.³⁰



Family Literacy Outreach Programs:

Investing in a parent's or guardian's learning is a direct investment in their children's literacy abilities. Family literacy outreach (FLO) programs focus on a child's early learning development, parent-child learning together, and adult education. A series of four FLO programs were offered in 2012-13 and were supported by multiple community partners including Comox Valley Family Services, School District 71, LUSH Valley, Creative Employment Access Society, North Island College, CVLLA and ALC.

Family literacy outreach also includes distributing books to families. In 2012/3, CVLLA distributed over 1700 free books to families through family programs or through events such as Books for Treats (Hallowe'en), Family Literacy Day (January 27th), and Aboriginal Day (June 21st). Access to books is of vital importance for the development of children's reading behaviour; hence our commitment to getting books in the homes and hands of families.

29 Decoda Literacy Solutions <http://decoda.ca/communities/how-you-can-help-support-community-literacy-in-bc/>

30 To read the SD#71 District Literacy Plans, the Comox Valley Community Literacy Plan, or for more information about Comox Valley Lifelong Learning Association, go to www.cvlifelonglearning.ca.



Young Adults and Essential Skills

Young adults (aged 15-25) who have left the school system and who are un/underemployed require community support and service in their educational and employment pursuits. The Young Adult Essential Skills program connects young adults to employers, educational opportunities, and community supports. Participants also work on their essential skills which include literacy and employability skills. The Comox Valley Essential Skills Partnership successfully ran three programs between 2012 and 2013 with resounding success. Most participants either became employed or enrolled in an educational program.



Adult Literacy

The Adult Learning Centre has been serving adults for 20 years to improve their literacy. The ALC offers free one to one tutoring and mentoring for adults in need of assistance, from 19 years old to seniors. The ALC offers specialized tutoring in a variety of subjects including math, reading, ESL, computer, basic skills and support for students taking college courses. The ALC is also home to the English as a Second Language Settlement Assistance Program.

6.6 Public Library Usage (+)

For many of us a good quality of life is dependent on the ability to access reading materials in the form of books of all kinds, periodicals, reports and newspapers. However, public access to the internet in 1992 with the first internet browser, Netscape, released a flood of possibilities for access to information. Libraries have had to adapt to the new reality of the digital world and they have done so in admirable fashion. Librarians have had to learn how to use computers for research and for access to audio-visual materials and have had to learn how to teach people how to use computers too! The Vancouver Island Regional Library continues to grow and much of that growth is in the provision of computer access to the internet and other resources.

As we reported in 2009, there are 5 branches of the Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) in the Comox Valley: Comox, Courtenay, Cumberland, Hornby Island and Union Bay. The Cumberland branch celebrated its move into a new facility in 2013. (VIRL, 2013) Libraries, it seems are more popular than ever. System-wide, VIRL offers 3,760 programs attended by 73,502 people and 4,586 stories were read. People are still attracted to print materials like books and periodicals, but there's more and more use of computers in library branches to the point where in 2013 there were 340,053 public computer sessions VIRL wide. The 2012 VIRL Annual Report notes that there was a 73% rise in eBooks downloaded and a 42% rise in connections to the library's high-speed wireless service. (VIRL, 2013a) (See Table 6.5)

Given the greater use of computers in our libraries, we have modified our approach for this report. We still report 2013 numbers on circulation (but break it down to physical items and eLibrary items). The library no longer reports numbers of reference items, at least not in the profiles we have access to, but it does report the number of public computer sessions, the number of eLibrary downloads and the number of hours public computers are used. We also report on literacy station sessions and the number of library visitors. VIRL has 188 public access computers in all of its branches.

According to the VIRL in 2013 its members downloaded 996,668 books from the eLibrary (a 15% increase from 2012) but physical circulation also remained high at 4,320,637. (VIRL, 2014)

Table 6.5: Profile of Comox Valley Branches of the Vancouver Island Regional Library 2014

	Collection Size	Physical Circulation	eLibrary	Total Circulation	Computer Sessions	Literacy Station Sessions	Internet Stations - Hours Used	Library Visitors
Comox	35,697	199,881	46,108	245,989	9,474	1,669	3,851	101,894
Courtenay	72,988	411,694	94,968	506,662	39,122	4,706	16,064	266,502
Cumberland	11,534	36,297	8,373	44,670	2,492	773	841	25,353
Hornby Island	8,173	40,283	9,292	49,575	951	n/a	352	16,498
Union Bay	4,347	10,101	2,330	12,431	156	n/a	47	5,315

Source: Vancouver Island Regional Library

Libraries provide an invaluable service for people in all communities, but they are especially important for people who cannot afford a home computer or buy books. We feel that the libraries in our region contribute greatly to the quality of life for all of us.

6.8 Early Development Instrument (EDI) (+)

We included a section on EDI in our 2009 report even though it had not been part of our 2004 or 2002 reports. The use of the EDI as a tool to accumulate evidence for policy development is unprecedented so we felt we had to include it in our report. The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is an assessment tool produced and administered by a research team at UBC called the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP). It “measures the developmental health of five-year olds as they enter kindergarten.” (CVSPS, 2009, p. 66) This team has data on 2000 Canadian neighbourhoods many of them in British Columbia. “Research on early child development confirms that children with little or no access to environments that nurture their development will face more lifelong challenges in their health and wellbeing.” (CVSPS, 2009, p. 66) The EDI measures a child’s development in five areas or domains:

1. Physical health and wellbeing
2. Social competence
3. Emotional maturity
4. Language and cognitive skills
5. Communication skills and general knowledge. (CVSPS, 2009, p. 66)

In our last report we provided information on Waves 1 and 2 of the administration of the EDI. The EDI has now been administered in a fifth Wave. EDI Wave 5 happened in the 2011/12 and 2012/13 school years. It included data on 1005 children. Kindergarten teachers fill out the questionnaire (104 questions) on each of their students in February. The results, however, are not used to evaluate individual students, but to assess population-based vulnerabilities. (HELP, 2014)

We included in our 2009 report data from the SES (Socio-Economic Status) Mapping Package for SD 71 which was also put together by HELP. Based on data from Statistics Canada taxfiler data and available on a neighbourhood basis, this information tells us a lot about where poor families and lone parent families live, parental education, access to good quality child care, etc. In fact, our report focused mainly on these data in 2009. This report focuses more in the results from Waves 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the EDI for the Comox Valley. This is not to say that socio-economic status is not important, but the EDI results can tell us a lot about the social conditions in which children grow up. The results for the Comox Valley tell us a lot about the distribution of wealth and resources in the Valley. There seems to be a ‘geography of opportunity’ in the province as a whole but also in the Comox Valley. This is not unexpected of course. It’s clear on the basis of simple observation that there are concentrations of large homes with relatively wealthy people inhabiting them in some areas (especially in Comox and Area B), and other areas with concentrations of relatively cheaper homes with lower income people in them. The old cliché about living on the ‘wrong side of the

tracks' is almost virtually true in the Valley. What's less obvious is that over 38% of children are considered vulnerable according to the research by HELP. (HELP, 2014) That's significantly higher than the provincial average of 32.5. The vulnerability rate has risen slowly in the Valley since the first Wave of research 10 years ago. We conclude in 2009 that there have been some fairly significant movements of lone parent and low-income families in the Valley over the years. The lack of affordable housing has to be a major push factor in figuring out why people move but there are pull factors too like access to services, schools, daycare, work, etc. Given that we live in a society that prides itself on equal opportunity, it seems that some neighbourhoods are more equal than others in preparing children for the future.

6.9 Aboriginal Report Card (n)

The BC Ministry of Education collects numerous statistics on schools, children and teachers, administrations, special educational programs and aboriginal children among others. Performance on Ministry-driven tests is front and centre in many of these reports while districts are made to report extensively on finances, resources, class sizes and many other indicators. Graduation rates, exam performance rates and participation rates are all included. A special Aboriginal Report Card for the province as a whole and for each district is released for every school year. (BC Ministry of Education, 2013a). The following compares School District 79 (Cowichan Valley) (BC Ministry of Education, 2013b) with School District 71 (Comox Valley). (BC Ministry of Education, 2013a)

Students are measured on foundation skills, exam completion, high school completion rates, scholarships and awards and the education experience of children in care. The report also contains the results of a satisfaction survey. In 2002-3, both of these districts had a total student population of just over 10,000. By 2012-13 there were 7906 students in SD 79 and 9877 in SD 71 meaning that SD 79 lost over a thousand more students in that period than SD 71. SD 79 in 2012-13 had 1602 aboriginal students, 20.3% of the student body whereas SD 71 had 1320 aboriginal students, 13.4% of the student body. Strangely enough, aboriginal female students outnumber male students in SD 79 by about 100 whereas the reverse is true in SD 71 where male students outnumber females by about 40 students. In 2012-13, many aboriginal students in SD 79 lived on reserve, 691 to 951 off reserve. In SD71 only a tiny number of students (16) lived on reserve of the 1304 aboriginal students in the district. That's a very significant difference between the two regional districts. It's worth checking out the aboriginal report cards for school districts in the province and comparing them. We won't compare aboriginal and non-aboriginal students in each district on all indicators, but we can say that there are generally more aboriginal students in special needs classes than aboriginal students except in the case of gifted students. In terms of foundational skills in **reading**, in grade 4, about 60% of aboriginal and non-aboriginal students in both districts are meeting expectations except in SD 79 where only 42% of students are meeting expectations. Very few aboriginal students exceed expectations in either district. In terms of **writing** skills in grade 4, aboriginal students lag behind their non-aboriginal counterparts although all students in SD 71 do significantly better than the students in SD 79. In SD 79 only 34% of aboriginal students in grade 4 in 2012-13 met expectations as far as **numeracy** skills are concerned. In SD 71 it was 53%. For non-aboriginal students it was 58% and 63% respectively. So aboriginal students in SD71 weren't that far behind their non-aboriginal counterparts in SD 79 and 10 percentage points behind non-aboriginal students in SD 71.

...results show conclusively that aboriginal children do not perform as well as non-aboriginal children across the board except that in SD 71 they do not lag as far behind as in SD 79 and we can report that in some significant ways things are improving or the trend is in the right direction...

Unfortunately, when they get to **grade 7** we see a serious drop in **reading** skills for aboriginal students in SD 79 where only 24% of them are meeting expectations. Aboriginal children in SD 71 are holding their own. In terms of **writing** skills, the situation is not much different than for reading skills with aboriginal students in SD 71 performing close to their non-aboriginal counterparts in SD 79 although significantly behind their peers in SD 71. Nobody does well in grade 7 on average on **numeracy** skills although aboriginal children in SD 79 drop down to 21% meeting expectations. All non-aboriginal students and aboriginal students in SD 71 hover around 50% meeting expectations. Only 3% exceed expectations in SD 71 and 79 for non-aboriginal students and no aboriginal students do.

We could go on, but results show conclusively that aboriginal children do not perform as well as non-aboriginal children across the board except that in SD 71 they do not lag as far behind as in SD 79 and we can report that in some significant ways things are improving or the trend is in the right direction as is evident in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 High School Completion Rates in SD 71

Six-Year Completion Rate* (Aboriginal Status And Gender)						
	Aboriginal			Non-Aboriginal		
	All			All		
	Students	♀	♂	Students	♀	♂
School Year	%	%	%	%	%	%
2008/09	42	47	35	71	75	67
2009/10	56	63	50	73	73	74
2010/11	56	57	54	72	74	69
2011/12	73	78	68	77	77	78
2012/13	67	62	72	76	79	72

Source: BC Ministry of Education, District Reports.

Females, both aboriginal and non-aboriginal outperform their brothers on many measures since 2008 but in terms of the six-year completion rate in the 2012/13 school year aboriginal male students outperformed their female counterparts.

As students complete grade 12 and contemplate post-secondary education, many choose to attend a community college. In SD 71, for those students who graduated in 2007-08, more aboriginal students than non-aboriginal decided to attend college over the next 6 years starting with 31.9% in 2008-09 when 27.8% of non-aboriginals chose college. It was our bet that many more non-aboriginal grads end up at university than aboriginal grads. The numbers bear us out. (BC Ministry of Education, 2013a) (BC Ministry of Education, 2013b)

The last thing we want to consider in this section of the report is the satisfaction survey. Not surprisingly, children in grades 3 and 4 are much more satisfied with their school experience than their older counterparts. This holds true for both SD 71 and 79. There seems to be a consistent downward curve in satisfaction measures as students get older. One question that got our attention is the one in Table 6.7. It seems that grade 10 students are not confident that school is preparing them for a job in the future, nor are they satisfied that school is preparing them adequately for post-secondary education. (Table 6.8) Many factors may go into this dissatisfaction but it's worth exploring further. On the satisfaction survey, aboriginal students are marginally less satisfied across the board on both SD 71 and 79 although they are less satisfied in SD 79 than in SD 71. Their sense of satisfaction on these two questions does not improve as they get to grade 12.

Table 6.7: SD 71 Grade 10 student survey about preparation for future job

Are you satisfied that school is preparing you for a job in the future?	School Year	Aboriginal Respondents	All of the time or many times		Non-aboriginal Respondents	All of the time or many times	
		#	#	%	#	#	%
	2008/09	89	30	34	508	251	49
	2009/10	75	23	31	544	215	40
	2010/11	64	28	44	447	160	36
	2011/12	56	19	34	362	131	36
	2012/13	67	22	33	385	133	35

Source: BC Ministry of Education, Reports

Table 6.8: SD 71 Grade 10 student survey about preparation for post-secondary education

Are you satisfied that school is preparing you for post-secondary education (for example, college, university, trade school)?	School Year	Aboriginal Respondents	All of the time or many times		Non-aboriginal Respondents	All of the time or many times	
		#	#	%	#	#	%
	2008/09	89	40	45	503	261	52
	2009/10	74	33	45	539	261	48
	2010/11	64	24	38	446	202	45
	2011/12	58	26	45	359	165	46
	2012/13	65	29	45	388	187	48

Source: BC Ministry of Education, Reports

Related indicators: income, income security, population, health

So, educational attainment hasn't changed much in the province or the Valley in recent years. The educational system is still 'gendered' and the distribution of credentials still reflects that. The EDI data are disturbing but not surprising given that we live in a world with unequal distribution of wealth and privilege. The fact remains that many kindergarten children, otherwise very capable children, are disadvantaged for reasons beyond their control or the control of their parents for that matter. Many will carry their disadvantage into their later years. That is true for First Nations students in general. Of course there will always be exceptions to the rule but that doesn't negate the rule. Students don't seem particularly confident that the school system is preparing them for work or for future study. That may be just a question of youth angst, but the percentages are disturbing. School district 71 students are not performing to provincial averages even though they may be performing better than in other areas of the island. Food for thought.