




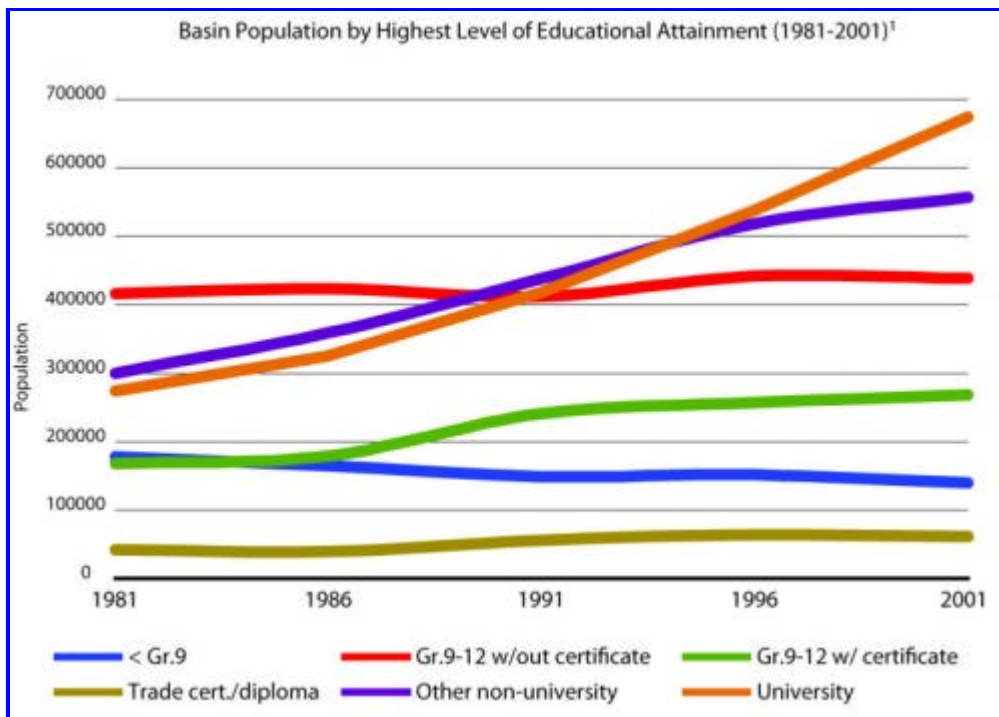
**SUSTAINABILITY HIGHLIGHTS**

---

Education and lifelong learning are vital to the social and economic well-being of Basin residents and therefore to the sustainability of our communities. Education is a bridge from the past to the present and from the present to the future that enables people to meet their basic needs, adapt to environmental, economic and social shifts in the world, and plan their lives. It is key to both individual and collective stability by supporting economic development, innovation and employment. Early education shapes a child's capacity to learn in school, during adulthood, and for a lifetime. Lifelong learning, in turn, helps people maintain competence and competitiveness in today's knowledge economy and enhances personal growth and fulfillment. The provincial government has adopted a goal to make BC "the best educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent."

- As of 2001, levels of educational attainment were high and had continually increased between 1981 and 2001 throughout the Basin. Educational attainment rates of Aboriginal people in 2001 were comparable with those of non-Aboriginal people for graduates of high school, college and trades, but there were fewer university graduates (by 50%).<sup>1</sup>

<b>Early Childhood Development</b>		<b>GETTING WORSE</b> - Since 2001, there are more 5-year-olds considered as having developmental vulnerabilities in terms of "readiness for school" in all regions.
<b>Index of Education Concerns</b>		<b>MIXED RESULTS/POOR</b> - Rural areas have higher educational concerns than urban areas.
<b>Student-Teacher Ratios</b>		<b>GETTING BETTER</b> - Since 2004, there are fewer students per teacher in all regions.



## ISSUES AND TRENDS

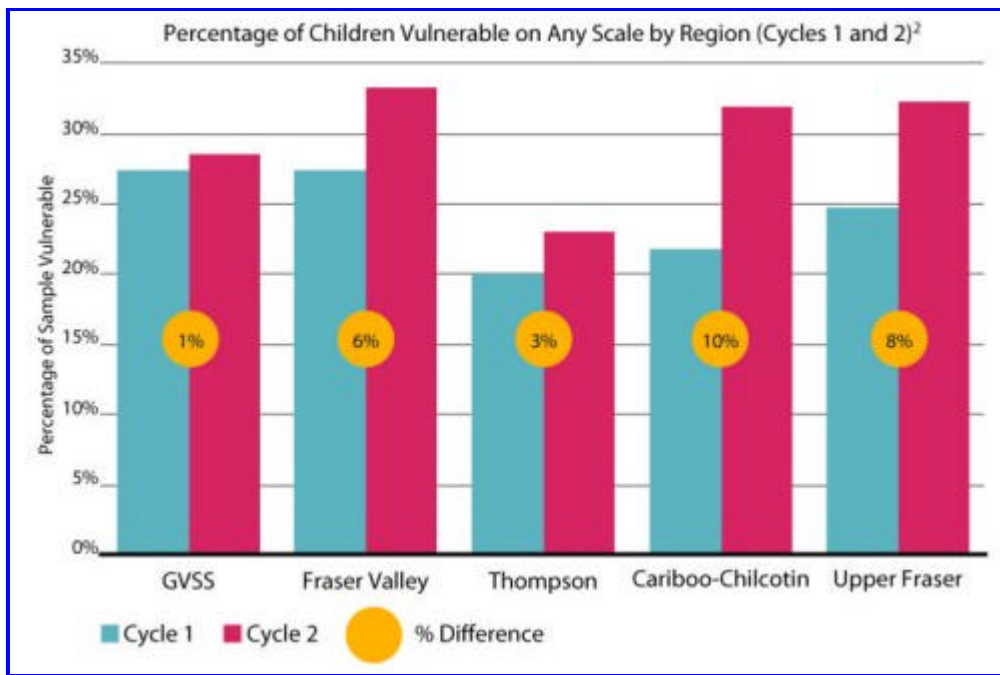
---

### Early Childhood Development (2001-2006) <sup>2</sup>

Research has shown that a person's capacity for lifelong learning is fundamentally shaped by development in the first five years of life. The earliest years of a child's life are also critical to his or her long-term physical health, well-being, competence and coping skills.

The Early Development Instrument is a survey tool that examines the developmental status of five-year-old children across the province and gauges their "readiness for school" as they enter kindergarten. The survey has now been conducted twice in all but three school districts in the Basin.

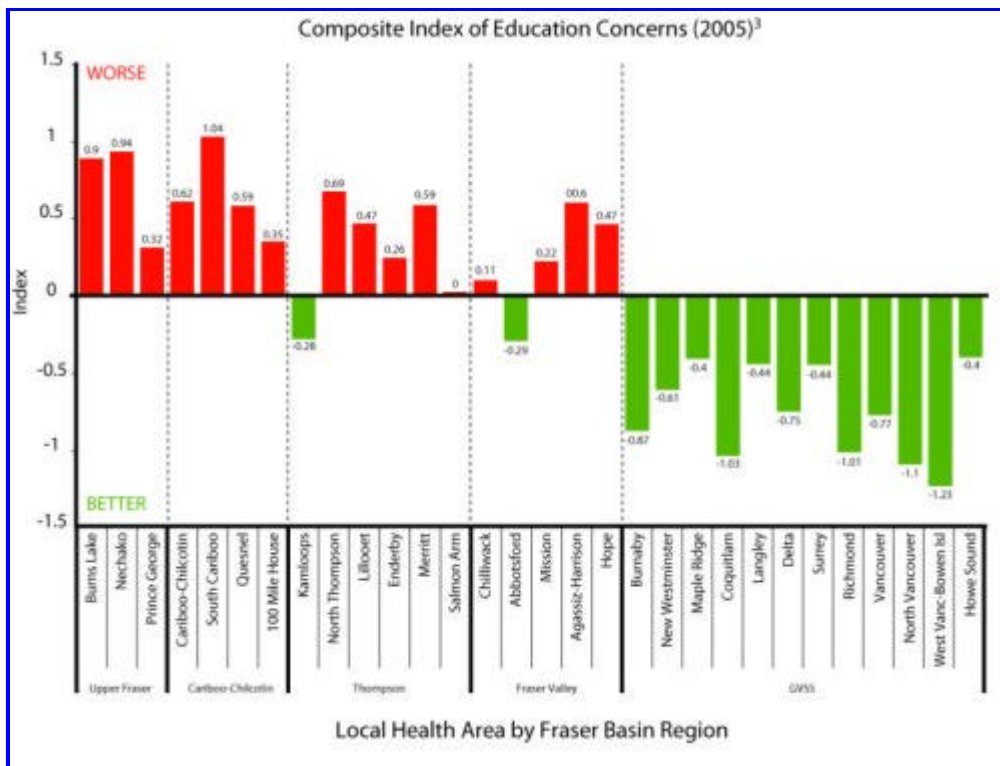
The most recent survey cycle showed that between 23% and 33% of kindergarten students in the Basin were "vulnerable" in one or more of the following five developmental domains: 1) physical health and well-being, 2) social competence, 3) emotional maturity, 4) language and cognitive development or 5) communication skills and general knowledge. The Fraser Valley Region had the greatest average proportion of vulnerable children, followed closely by the Cariboo-Chilcotin and Upper Fraser regions. In every region, the proportion of children deemed to be "vulnerable" increased between the two survey cycles, with the greatest increases in the Cariboo-Chilcotin and Upper Fraser regions.



### Index of Education Concerns (2005) <sup>3</sup>

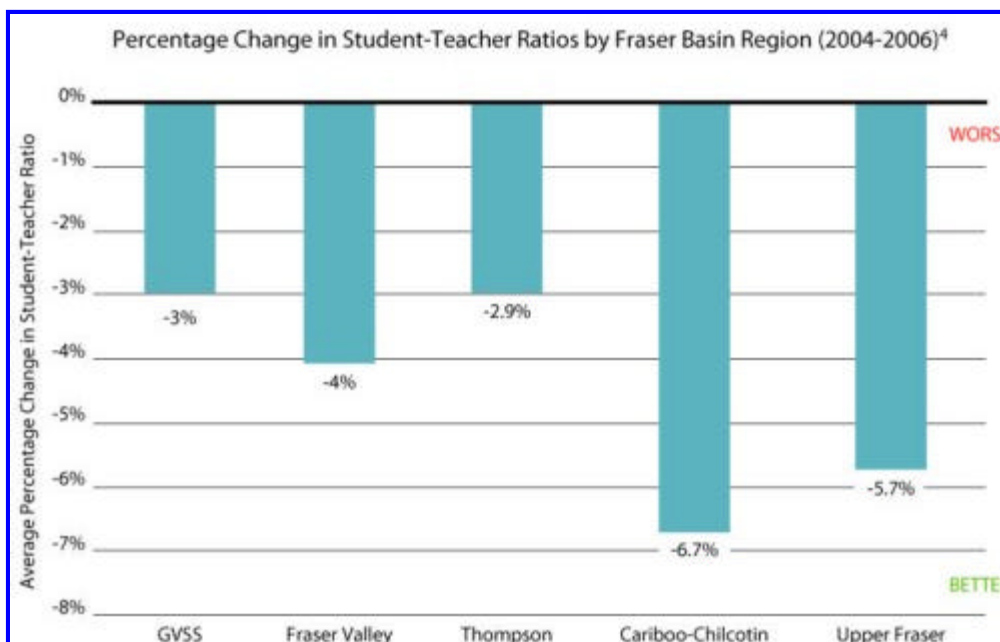
The Index of Education Concerns, developed by BC Statistics to measure the education well-being of the population, suggests that there are considerable discrepancies in learning environment and educational attainment levels in the different regions. The index incorporates data on the home and community learning environment, the educational status of 18-year-olds in the community, the quality of graduates, and the academic achievement scores of children currently in the school system. Because the index measures concerns, a higher index score indicates poor performance, while a lower number suggests fewer concerns and a higher level of educational well-being.

There are relatively low levels of concern in the Greater Vancouver-Sea to Sky region; however, the Cariboo-Chilcotin and Upper Fraser regions exhibit among the highest composite index ratings in the province.



**Student-Teacher Ratios (2004-2006) 4, 5, 6**

Over the past decade, 10 of the 24 school districts in the Basin experienced increases in student-teacher ratios. However, this trend has reversed since 2004 in all but one school district, signalling a positive trend for student learning. A lower student-teacher ratio means that teachers and aides generally have fewer children in their classes and more time to spend with each. Recent legislation now requires school districts to limit average class size (19 children in kindergarten and 30 children in Grades 8-12). Individual class size is also now capped at 30 students for Grades 4-7. <sup>5</sup>



## INSPIRED ACTION

---

### **What is being done?**

- In an effort to increase access to post-secondary education, the provincial government has committed to adding 25,000 new student spaces in BC's colleges, university-colleges, universities and institutes between 2004 and 2010. 12,000 of these seats have already been established. <sup>6</sup>
- In the fall of 2005, a Learning Roundtable was created in BC as a forum for teachers, government, parents, trustees, superintendents, principals and vice-principals to discuss and address issues related to learning conditions such as class size, school funding, libraries and services for children with special needs.
- The BC Chapter of the Sierra Club of Canada offers environmental education programs for elementary and secondary school students, including topics such as climate change, rainforest and interior ecosystems, stewardship and sustainability: [www.sierraclub.ca/bc/programs/education/index.html](http://www.sierraclub.ca/bc/programs/education/index.html).

### **What else can be done?**

- Basin residents, government and organizations can support early literacy outreach programs, such as story times for young children and particularly those for families in which English is a second language to help them to become comfortable and familiar with the rhythm and structure of language.
- Businesses can support their employees in the pursuit of lifelong learning by allowing them time and opportunities for professional development.
- As individuals, we can take advantage of the rich array of classes, programs and skills workshops offered by school districts, community centres and public libraries.

### Early learning to last a lifetime

The early years are formative years. Children who are talked to, sung to and read to by their parents and caregivers exhibit more advanced language skills than those children who received little verbal stimulation. Books for BC Babies is an innovative program that encourages parents to read to their newborns. A partnership between the BC government and the BC Library Association, Books for Babies provides babies born in the province with a book-in 2006 *Baby Beluga* by Raffi-and an accompanying CD of songs.



### REFERENCES

1. Statistics Canada. Population Census and Custom Tabulation for Aboriginal People from the Population Census. (2001).
2. Human Early Learning Partnership, Early Childhood Development Index (Data from Cycle 1 and 2): [www.earlylearning.ubc.ca](http://www.earlylearning.ubc.ca).
3. BC Statistics. Socio-Economic Indices-Index of Education Concerns (2005): [www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca](http://www.bcstats.gov.bc.ca).
4. BC Ministry of Education. Analysis & Reporting Group: Enrolment Educator Ratios (1996/97-2005/06).
5. Education (Learning Enhancement) Statutes Amendment Act, 2006: [www.leg.bc.ca/37th3rd/3rd\\_read/gov33-3.htm](http://www.leg.bc.ca/37th3rd/3rd_read/gov33-3.htm).
6. BC Ministry of Education. *The Facts About Post-Secondary Education in BC*. Sept. 6, 2006: [www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/For\\_the\\_Record/index.htm](http://www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/For_the_Record/index.htm).