



# SHARE YOUR STORY

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# INTRODUCTION



Dear Colleagues,

What underfunding looks like in our schools isn't abstract. We see it every day — in real moments in our classrooms; in the impacts on our students and our colleagues.

This small collection brings together anonymized, but real stories shared by Vancouver Secondary teachers. Each one captures a single moment from a single day. These individual moments show where the bigger, system-wide issues are being felt most clearly. Together, they offer a clearer picture of what teaching and learning feel like in our schools right now.

The VSTA [continues to collect](#) short, real classroom moments to help people outside our schools better understand what is happening in our classrooms and the impacts on students and their families.

If you've ever felt like you're being asked to do more with less; if you've found yourself pushed beyond your limits or working without the resources you need. We'd really like to hear your story, too. Your perspective is important, and it deserves to be heard.

By sharing these moments, we can:

- Shine a light on pressures that often go unseen
- Build a more complete picture of what's happening across our schools
- Strengthen our collective voice for students and staff

Every story helps. Together, these voices can make sure the reality of our classrooms is seen, understood, and taken seriously.

We've created [a quick survey](#). Tell us about one moment from one day this year:

- What happened?
- Who was involved?
- Just a few sentences are enough.

If you can, please take a few minutes to [share one moment from your classroom](#). Your story can help make visible what too often stays hidden—and it can help strengthen the case for the supports our students and schools need.

## **YOUR STORY:**

### **WHEN CLASS SIZE AND SHARED EQUIPMENT TURN A CLASSROOM UNSAFE**

I was teaching a multi-grade elective class that was at its intended class-size cap. Far too many students were sharing computers and equipment, and I was juggling a room with many IEP and ELL learners who needed more check-ins than one person can reasonably provide. That day, a student with a designation—and no Educational Assistant support—was having a hard day. I could see it building, but my time was split so thin that I couldn't sit beside them, check in, and support them practice self-regulation the way I normally would. As they became more frustrated, they were more and more dysregulated. In the moment, I felt the room shift from learning to safety management. I felt I had to get students out of the classroom because they were scared and I didn't feel I could guarantee their safety. I asked one of the older students to find the principal and a resource teacher because I couldn't manage the crisis alone.

#### **WHAT WAS MISSING IN THE MOMENT?**

- Adequate technology
- Educational Assistant / School Support Worker
- Manageable class size

#### **IF THE SCHOOL WERE FULLY FUNDED, WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED INSTEAD?**

Enrolment limits would be respected, students would have access to the equipment and tools they need, and in-class support would prevent moments like this from spiraling into crisis.

#### **TAKEAWAY**

When support is stretched too thin, safety is one of the first things to break.

## **YOUR STORY:**

### **WHEN TEACHING WORK SPILLS INTO EVERY WEEKEND**

On a recent Sunday, I spent most of the day prepping for the work week—again. It wasn't a rare crunch; it felt like the only way to survive what the week demands. After work most days, I stay behind to mark, photocopy, run a club, set up the room, or buy supplies I shouldn't have to buy. Even with a prep period, I can't keep up because I have four classes each semester and the work keeps multiplying. That Sunday, just for one class, I created multiple versions of handouts—one for each grade, one adapted for different learners, and one for ELL students. Three of my four classes are multi-grade, and meeting those needs responsibly requires constant adaptation. I also spent hours catching up on emails I didn't have time to answer during the week, marking older assignments, and contacting parents about overdue work. By the time I finished, it didn't feel like "planning"; it felt like my personal life being absorbed by my job.

#### **WHAT WAS MISSING IN THE MOMENT?**

- Classroom teacher preparation time
- Manageable class size

#### **IF THE SCHOOL WERE FULLY FUNDED, WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED INSTEAD?**

Teachers would have the time during the workday to plan and adapt lessons without sacrificing their weekends and wellbeing.

#### **TAKEAWAY**

Burnout isn't a personal failure -  
it's a funding problem.

# YOUR STORY:

## WHEN A STUDENT LOSES LEARNING TIME WITHOUT SSW SUPPORT

I taught a junior science class with a student who struggled to sit still, focus, and stay regulated. He disrupted others and often resisted instruction, especially during hands-on activities. Lab activities were especially hard because he couldn't focus on following instructions. Without consistent adult support, he was often sent out of the room for safety reasons and was therefore unable to participate in the most engaging parts of science. What hurt most was the sense that every removal reinforced the message that he didn't belong in the room. The student needed an adult he could trust—ideally a School Support Worker—to build a relationship and support his learning, not punishment and exclusion. But our school has only two SSWs, and they're already assigned to students with physical disabilities. We've been told it's almost impossible for the school to get another SSW, given our current population of students.

### WHAT WAS MISSING IN THE MOMENT?

- Educational Assistant / School Support Worker

### IF THE SCHOOL WERE FULLY FUNDED, WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED INSTEAD?

With adequate staffing, students who need consistent support could stay in class, feel safe, and experience success rather than repeated exclusion.

### TAKEAWAY

Availability of support staff influences which students get to learn.

## **YOUR STORY:**

### **WHEN COUNSELLORS ARE OVERLOADED AND TEACHERS STEP IN**

A senior student quietly shared that their family's life had been shattered by conflict and that they felt overwhelmed by hopelessness about the world. They spoke about their concerns and their worries; it was obvious that classroom activities were the last thing on their mind. I checked to make sure they had professional supports. But in that moment none of the counsellors were readily available; not surprising given that they are often overloaded and stretched thin. So I did what teachers do: I listened, I tried to steady them, and I carried the weight of what they shared while also holding the rest of the day together. It's hard to explain how heavy it feels when a young person is asking for help and the system's support isn't immediately there. These are not rare moments anymore. Underfunding means the safety net has gaps, and teachers end up filling them as best we can—on top of everything else we're already doing.

#### **WHAT WAS MISSING IN THE MOMENT?**

- Accessible, timely counselling support

#### **IF THE SCHOOL WERE FULLY FUNDED, WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED INSTEAD?**

When students are in crisis, a counsellor is available and teachers don't need to be relied on to fill the gap.

#### **TAKEAWAY**

Care shouldn't depend on  
if someone happens to be free.

# YOUR STORY:

## AN ELECTIVE CLASS WHERE SAFETY DEPENDS ON LUCK

In my Grade 8 elective class, I had a student who genuinely wanted to learn to use the equipment. He needed one-to-one support to follow instructions and complete tasks safely, but in a class of 28 students there was no way to stay beside him while also supervising everyone else. When he had to wait too long, he became bored and started doing unsafe things – to experiment with the equipment, using it in ways that it wasn't supposed to be used. I felt torn between wanting to give him the support he needed and needing to keep the rest of the room safe and moving forward. One day, I was able to get a School Support Worker in the room, and it was a completely different experience: the student was successful, engaged, and proud. But that support was available for only 1 day of a 14-day rotation. The other 13 days were visibly frustrating for him and exhausting for me, because the need didn't disappear – only the support did.

### WHAT WAS MISSING IN THE MOMENT?

- Educational Assistant / School Support Worker
- Manageable class size

### IF THE SCHOOL WERE FULLY FUNDED, WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED INSTEAD?

Students who need one-to-one assistance would receive it consistently, so learning doesn't depend on chance.

### TAKEAWAY

Hands-on learning needs hands-on support.

# YOUR STORY:

## TEACHING WITHOUT ENOUGH BOOKS FOR STUDENTS

Trying to teach without enough current, relevant textbooks is demoralizing in a way that's hard to explain until you live it. Students are sharing old, waterlogged, ripped books with graffiti etched into them. Some materials are obsolete, and there still aren't enough copies to go around. It creates a constant undercurrent of frustration: students can't take a book home when they need it, they can't annotate freely, and they can't rely on the text being intact. Instead of focusing on learning, we spend time improvising around shortages that should never exist in a school classroom. The message students absorb is quiet but clear: their learning doesn't deserve the basics. And when you're trying to build confidence and engagement, that message matters.

### WHAT WAS MISSING IN THE MOMENT?

- Current classroom materials and textbooks

### IF THE SCHOOL WERE FULLY FUNDED, WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED INSTEAD?

Students should have access to their own up-to-date learning materials so effort can go into learning, not making-do.

### TAKEAWAY

Learning shouldn't depend on worn-out resources.

# YOUR STORY:

## ONE-TO-ONE SUPPORT THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

I teach an ELL Level 1 and 2 science class with a very diverse group of learners across multiple grades. One student also has a designation for Diverse Learning needs with one-to-one, and they usually have a School Support Worker for at least part of the class. On a day when the support person was away and there was no replacement available; the other SSWs were already assigned elsewhere. We had prepared supports that we had worked on together the previous class—but the student refused to use it, rushed through the activities, and wasn't successful. I could see the train coming, but I couldn't stop it: I had to supervise and support the rest of the class who were also engaged in the activity. The next day, the SSW was present. The student used the supports and experienced success. The contrast was immediate and painful because it wasn't about effort, ability or 'smarts' – it was about whether the support necessary were in the room. When support is inconsistent, students learn the wrong lesson: that success depends on luck and staffing, not on their learning.

### WHAT WAS MISSING IN THE MOMENT?

- Consistent Educational Assistant / School Support Worker



### IF THE SCHOOL WERE FULLY FUNDED, WHAT SHOULD HAVE HAPPENED INSTEAD?

Students who require one-to-one assistance should have it reliably, not only when staffing happens to align.

### TAKEAWAY

Support turns preventable frustration into success.