

Educational Assistants

Policy Considerations

DRAFT

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DRAFT

1) OVERVIEW: EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS IN B.C. PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Scope of Practice

Educational Assistants (EAs) are paraprofessional support staff meant to work under the guidance of the classroom teacher to support a range of teaching and non-teaching tasks. The intended responsibilities of EAs are outlined in section 18 of the School Act:

- A board may employ persons other than teachers to assist teachers in carrying out their responsibilities and duties under this Act and the regulations.
- Persons employed under subsection (1) shall work under the direction of a teacher and the general supervision of a teacher or school principal.

The assignment of EAs' responsibilities varies depending on school districts:

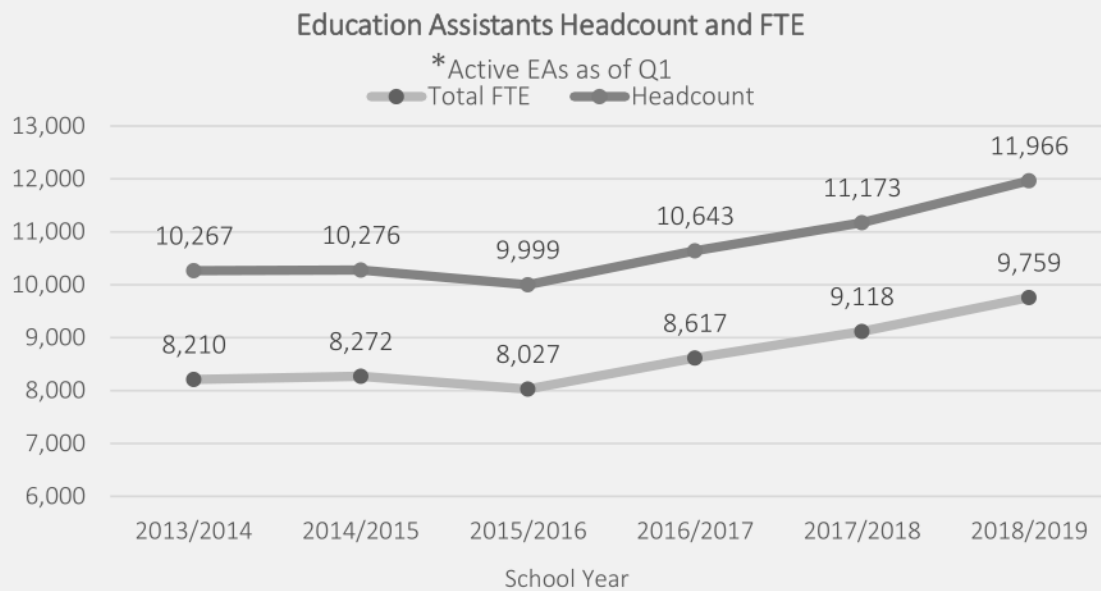
1. EAs can be assigned to an individual student, depending on students' needs. While this is common practice, some concerns have been raised with this approach. For example, some school districts have expressed that students who rely too heavily on their EA may not exercise their leadership and develop independence.
2. Some school districts assign EAs to an entire classroom with the EA being expected to work with all students (while sometimes focusing on a student in particular) under the direction of teachers and principals; and
3. In some cases, EAs are assigned to an entire school to provide flexibility for the school community and act as a resource for the whole school population.

During conversations with school districts, it was noted that even with these models, there are exceptional circumstances where an EA is assigned to an individual student (i.e. a student requiring tube feeding).

Workforce Characteristics

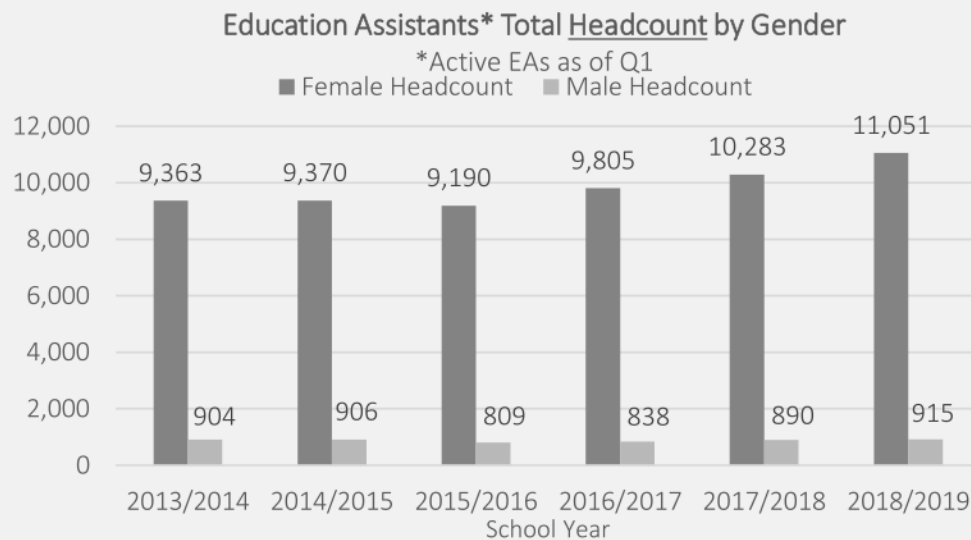
As of quarter 1 of 2018/19, there are just under 12,000 EAs. The EA workforce has grown by almost 20% since 2015/16. Figure 1 shows the EA workforce between 2013/14 and 2018/19, in both headcount and FTE; the ratio between the two has remained relatively static. Figure 1 also indicates that the system currently hires 1.24 individuals to meet 1 FTE which illustrates the part-time nature of EA work.

Figure 1: B.C. Public School Education Assistant Workforce Headcount and FTE



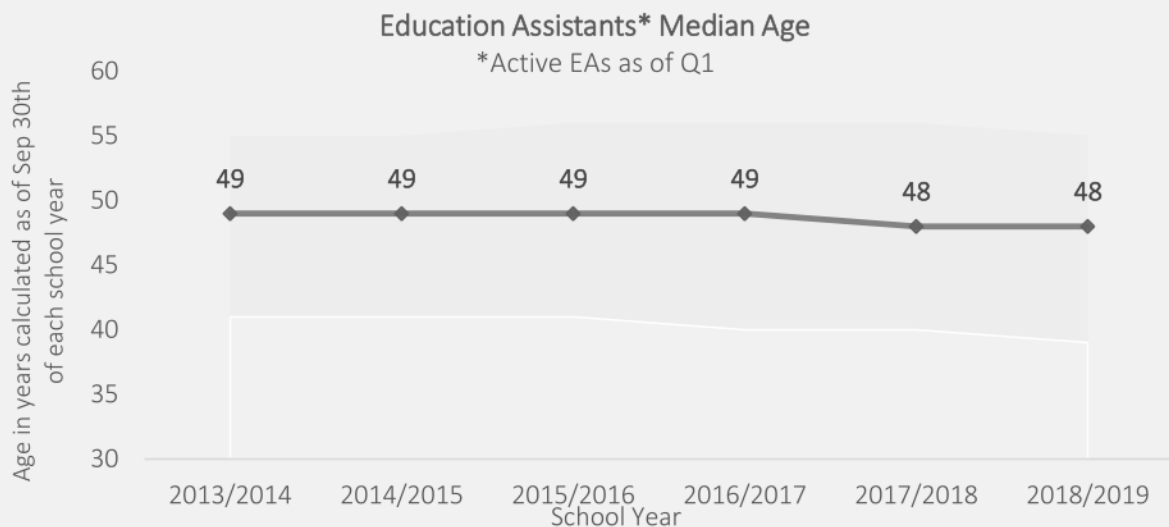
As shown on Figures 2 and 3, the workforce characteristics of gender and age have also remained relatively static since 2013/14. As of 2018/19, 92% of the B.C. EA workforce was female.

Figure 2: B.C. Public School Education Assistant Workforce Headcount and FTE



EAs' median age fluctuates between 48 and 49 years of age. In 2018/19, 40% of EAs in the system were 50 or older. (Teachers' median age was 43 in 2018/19, and 30% of teachers are 50 or older.)

Figure 3: B.C. Public School Education Assistants' Median Age



Understanding EA Demand and Supply

DEMAND

Student Enrolment

Like educators, the demand for EAs is driven by student enrolment, policy shifts and attrition. However, unlike teachers, EAs are unique; their demand is particularly impacted by the number of students with diverse needs and classroom composition language.

The population of students with special needs in B.C. has been growing at a faster rate than the overall student population: since 2004/05, the percentage of students with special needs has increased by 18% while the overall student population has decreased by 0.2% over the same time period.

Memorandum of Agreement

In the first quarter of 2018/19 school year, 9,759 EAs (FTE) were employed in B.C. public schools: up by 642 FTE (+7%) compared to 2017/18. This increase in the workforce is largely attributable to the

signing of the Memorandum of Agreement between the Ministry of Education, the Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat, the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation. The hiring of over 600 EAs kept pace and the ratio of EAs to special needs students remains similar to previous years.

Attrition

The attrition rate for EAs has remained relatively stable, around 10% during the 4-year period of 2013/2014 to 2016/2017.

SUPPLY

Graduates from EA Training Programs

There are 14 public post-secondary institutions in B.C. offering training programs for EAs (or special education assistant training programs). In 2018/19, about 450 EA credentials were awarded from post-secondary institutions in B.C. (as shown on Figure 4).

Figure 4: Number of EA Program Credentials Awarded from B.C. Public Post-Secondary Institutions

EA Program ¹ Credentials Awarded by Fiscal Year					
	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Credentials Awarded	380	415	385	490	450

¹ EA programs include Certificate and Diploma programs classified under CIP code 13.1501 - Teaching assistants/aides, general.

In addition, there are many private organizations in B.C. that offer some type of EA training. Each training program is unique in the sense that program content and format vary from one institution/organization to another (i.e. qualifications of the instructors, length of training, tuition). Qualified candidates from other Canadian jurisdictions and other countries who move to B.C. also contribute to the supply of EAs in the Province.

Transfers from other Occupations

The EA supply source is not limited to graduates from institutions offering EA training programs. In discussions with school districts in summer 2018, many indicated they looked to attract Early Childhood Educators for EA positions or individuals with some post-secondary education and experience working with young people. There are currently approximately 26,000 registered ECE and ECE assistants in B.C. – which makes for a significant supply source.

Pathways to Teacher Certification for EAs

Options Directly Targeting EAs:

- Simon Fraser University's (SFU) Professional Linking Program (PLP)ⁱ

The PLP is a pathway to teacher certification that focuses explicitly on working paraprofessionals, student support workers; para-educators (e.g., education assistants, child and youth care workers, counselors, settlement workers); independent school educators; Francophone teachers working with letters of permission to become certified as teachers in British Columbia.

The program lasts four semesters, from January to April of the next year and is on-site at SFU. Classes are held in the evening and on weekends during the school year and full-time over the one summer to allow students to continue working (except for the last semester, when they do their practicum).

Options Not Directly Targeting EAs:

- Part-time options

Though the University of Victoria's Bachelor of Education Post-Degree Professional Program (PDPP) (Elementary Curriculum –East Kootenay Teacher Education) must be full-time if taken in Victoria, the program may be taken over three academic years if attending in Cranbrook.ⁱⁱ Neither option includes a summer session.

The University of Northern BC's Bachelor of Education program is a full-time study program, but the University may allow part-time attendance upon written request and approval.ⁱⁱⁱ

- University of Calgary's Community-Based Teacher Education Program

University of Calgary has also instituted a community-based teacher education program as part of a "grow your own teachers" strategy to train aspiring teachers in the districts where they

already live. The program began in 2015 and has since graduated their first cohort. So far, most students in this program are women between the age of 35 and 50 who live in rural and remote parts of Alberta and who have worked, or are working in schools, usually as an education assistant or an occupational therapist.^{iv}

Workforce Balance

During calls conducted by the Ministry over the summer 2018, 28 school districts (47%) mentioned facing challenges regarding EA recruitment and retention. Many indicated the MOA contributed to demand for EAs.

Six school districts have established in-house programs to establish a larger qualified workforce.

As of March 5, 2019, there were 209 support staff postings on Make a Future (31% of all postings). Of the support staff job postings, about 40% were for educational assistants.

Parents' Perspectives

To better understand parents' perspectives on educational assistants, the Ministry considered the views of several stakeholder groups. Key themes identified include:

- The importance of individualized, consistent support
- The role of school leaders in developing inclusive school cultures
- The importance of providing information to support parent understanding
- Clarity of EAs roles and responsibilities
- Engagement of EAs in student learning plans
- Professional development for EAs
- Stable working hours for EAs

The Importance of Individualized, Consistent Support

Based on the *School Act*, EAs are paraprofessional staff meant to work under the guidance of a classroom teacher, principal, vice principal or director of instruction.^v As such, some schools assign EAs to support a classroom or a school and as a resource for a group of students or an entire school community (under the direction of a teacher or a principal/vice-principal). Yet, stakeholders shared that many parents seem to believe EAs should be assigned to an individual student and expect the EA to exclusively support their child. Academic research demonstrates that the positive impact of

this 1:1 model on student outcomes is limited, but it was reported that parents tend to believe this personalized support will benefit their child.

Parents of children with diagnoses are also concerned about continuity of care. Though some districts attempt to provide continuity of care for certain students, it seems that many schools don't because they feel that supplying one EA over the span of a child's school years would not be beneficial as it does not promote self-autonomy and independence.

The Role of School Leaders in Developing Inclusive School Cultures

At the school level, parents deem the role of principals is essential in creating the conditions for inclusion and as such, parents identified the importance of inclusive school cultures.

Parents shared they believe that fostering a culture of inclusion is not solely the responsibility of the EAs but of every member of the community, including, and especially, school and district leaders and enrolling and non-enrolling teachers. They feel that ensuring leaders and staff are trained in inclusive education would help mitigate the pressures felt by educational assistants, parents, and the school community and support all students, including those with diverse needs, to thrive.

Information and Understanding of Support System Among Parents

When a child is diagnosed, parents may have limited understanding and misconceptions of how the system works, or what resources or supports are available. For example, stakeholder groups reported there is frequently a misplaced assumption that every child with a diagnosis automatically gets their own EA though there are many types of support that may be appropriate based on the unique profile of the student.

Clarity for EA's Roles and Responsibilities

Stakeholders reported that parents' perception of the role and responsibilities of EAs can vary across school districts. They shared that these variations in practice can lead to concerns when families move into a new school district and have expectations set by their previous EA experience.

Engagement of EAs in Student Learning Plans

EAs' involvement in the school planning and decision-making processes for students can vary by school district. One of the concerns parents expressed was EAs not being included in the Individual Education Plan discussions.

Professional Development for EA's

Parents expressed the importance of professional development supports for EAs. Concerns were shared about the variation in pre- and in-service training for EAs across school districts.

Stable Working Hours for EAs

A common theme shared by parent stakeholder groups is the need for EAs to have stable work hours. A shared belief is that stable work hours contribute to job security and better recruitment and retention.

2) RESOLUTIONS FROM PARTNER GROUPS

Government and the Ministry of Education have received some requests by external stakeholders over the past years to take action on the matter of professional standards for education assistants in B.C.

B.C. Coalition of Parent Advisory Councils

In May 2019, the B.C. Coalition of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) brought forward and passed the following resolution:

Resolution 2019.07 – Regulatory Body and Post-Secondary Programming for Education Assistants

"Be it resolved that BCCPAC request the Ministry of Education to create a regulatory body for Education Assistants that establishes consistent post-secondary programming to meet the needs of the education system."

In addition, this 2019 resolution echoed two resolutions BCCPAC passed in 2015:

Resolution 2015.23 – Regulation of Special Education Assistants

"Be it resolved that BCCPAC advocates for the creation of an organization similar to the Teacher Regulation Branch to oversee and regulate the conduct of Special Education Assistants."

Resolution 2015.24 – Standards for Special Education Assistants

"Be it resolved that BCCPAC advocates for provincially mandated standards and practices for Special Education Assistants and similar support staff that include training, conduct and discipline processes."

In June 2019, a meeting occurred between representatives from BCCPAC and Ministry of Education staff to further discuss this resolution. BCCPAC clarified they were not going to pursue this resolution at this time, as work on the EA workforce is already underway through the Ministry in collaboration with other education partners. During this meeting, BCCPAC emphasized that the role of EA has evolved over time and that school districts have different practices and expectations.

BCCPAC advised that when exploring needs and priorities pertaining to the EA workforce, the Ministry should approach this topic by asking the following question: what does support to students look like and how is it provided? This question would allow the beginning of a conversation by (re)defining EAs' functions and purpose to ensure a focus on children and their needs.

B.C. School Trustees Association

In April 2018, the B.C. School Trustees Association (BCSTA) brought forward the following resolution:

Resolution 28 – Development of Standards of Practice for Education Assistants by B.C. Ministry of Education

"That BSSTA call on the Ministry of Education to develop standards of practice for education assistants in British Columbia."

3) POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Key Considerations for the Establishment of a Regulatory Body

Regulatory bodies can take many forms. For example, teachers are regulated by government regulation whereas social workers are self-regulated by a regulatory college.

Key considerations of a regulatory model include:

- quality controls (code of conduct, enforced standards of practice, qualifications, required training);
- certification (consistent method of validating employee qualifications);
- mandatory registration (title protection);
- authority to investigate and respond to complaints including disciplinary and remedial action.

Determining the Adequate Number of EAs and Hours of Work

Based on school hours and students' needs, many EAs work part-time. In 2018/2019, 87% of EAs worked part-time. However, out of those part-time EAs, the clear majority worked 0.7 or more FTE last school year. School districts reported that full-time EA contracts usually represent 30 to 35 hours of work per week over 10 months annually. Because of this, it seems that many EAs work second jobs.

Some school districts shared that they try to offer full-time contracts to their EAs by adding supervision responsibilities (playground/lunch time) to increase EAs' work hours.

Linkages to Early Childhood Educators

As early childhood educators (ECEs) represent a potential supply source for EAs, it is important to consider regulation and standards of ECEs, as making changes to one employment group will likely have implications on others.

In BC, ECEs are required to complete a basic early childhood education training program from an approved training institution to be certified. There are currently 26,000 certified ECEs and ECE assistants in the province.

The ECE Registry, a branch of the Ministry of Children and Family development (MCFD), issues over 7,000 ECE certificates per year. The ECE Registry has grown significantly since 2018 with the focus of the current Government on universal childcare. The ECE registration oversees a certification team, a professional excellence and outreach team, practice consultants (responsible for policy and procedure development) and an investigation team.

While there is currently no provincial curriculum for ECE training, Government mandates a set of competencies that post-secondary institutions offering ECE training must meet for their students to become certified as ECEs. (Post-secondary institutions have flexibility on how to structure their ECE training program, but they are required to submit their curriculum to the ECE registry for review to ensure each competency is met.) The current competencies have been in place for about 20 years, and MCFD has been working with the sector since 2015 to review them.

ⁱ Overview—Faculty of education—Simon Fraser University. (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2019, from <http://www.sfu.ca/education/teachersed/programs/plp/overview.html>

ⁱⁱ 16. 0 bachelor of education post-degree professional program(Elementary). (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2019, from <https://web.uvic.ca/calendar2019-09/undergrad/education/prof-elementary.html#>

ⁱⁱⁱ Education (Bed program) | University of Northern British Columbia. (n.d.). Retrieved December 4, 2019, from <https://www.unbc.ca/calendar/undergraduate/education>

^{iv} Gereluk, D., & Burns, A. (2018, September 26). Community-based teacher education | education canada. Retrieved October 11, 2019, from EdCan Network website: <https://www.edcan.ca/articles/community-based-teacher-education/>

^v School act. (1996). Retrieved November 26, 2019, from http://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96412_03#section18

Education Assistant Training Programs

Although there are no provincial standards or credentials established for EAs, there are 14 public post-secondary institutions in BC offering training programs for EAs (or special education assistant training programs). In 2018/19, about 450 EA credentials were awarded from post-secondary institutions in BC.

Number of EA Program Credentials Awarded from BC Public Post-Secondary Institutions

EA Program¹ Credentials Awarded by Fiscal Year

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Pathways to Teacher Certification for EAs

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The program lasts four semesters, from January to April of the next year and is on-site at SFU. Classes are held in the evening and on weekends during the school year and full-time over the one summer to allow students to continue working (except for the last semester, when they do their practicum). Criteria for admission includes a minimum of two years of paraprofessional experience in their current role in the school setting and be working a minimum of 3 days per week at the time of application; they must be working at least 3 days a week with children and

youth at the age level for which they are applying to the program (i.e. Elementary or Secondary); and they must meet the minimum admission requirements (which consist of at least a Bachelor of education, or working towards one) for the age level they wish to teach.

- Proposal for Expanding NITEP's Post-Degree Pathway to Teacher Education to Indigenous Educational Assistants

NITEP – UBC's Indigenous Teacher Education Program is currently seeking funding to support a post-degree pathway to teacher education for Indigenous students already possessing a post-secondary degree, with a focus on Educational Assistants (EA's) holding a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Child and Youth, or Bachelor of Early Childhood Education. This post-degree pathway will be a 16-month program, supporting 18 Indigenous students who will take a set of NITEP teacher education pre-preparation courses (15.0 credits) prior to entering UBC Faculty of Education Teacher Education Program.

Options Not Directly Targeting EAs:

- Part-time options

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EAs' Role and Responsibilities

The assignment of EAs' responsibilities varies depending on school districts:

- In most school districts, EAs are assigned to an individual student, depending on students' needs. While this seems to be the most common practice, several of the school districts consulted by Ministry staff mentioned the negative consequences of such a practice; the main concern is that students who rely too much on their EA may not exercise their leadership and learn to become independent. While this is the most common practice among school districts currently, academic research does not support the 1:1 model and this is not in alignment with the legislation.
- Some school districts assign EAs to an entire classroom with the EA being expected to work with all students (while sometimes focusing on a student in particular) under the direction of teachers and principals; and
- In some cases, EAs are assigned to an entire school to provide flexibility for the school community and act as a resource for the whole school population.

Both the second and third model aim to support student independence. During conversations with school districts, it was noted that even with these models, there are exceptional circumstances where an EA is assigned to an individual student (i.e. a student requiring tube feeding).

With this in mind, parents perceive the role and responsibilities of EAs as varying greatly from one school district to another. They mention wide differences in the scope of practice among school districts which result in different experiences for students. This can be especially problematic for students who need consistency and routines in order to feel safe and ready to learn. These differences can also lead to great confusion for parents about the role of EAs, and some frustrations when families move into a new school district and have expectations set by their previous EA experience.

Research shows that the model of assigning EAs as classroom facilitators can greatly improve outcomes for all students, regardless of ability or disability. Within this model, teachers remain responsible for the whole-class instruction and can focus attention on students who need additional educational support, while the classroom-assigned EA supports the lessons by focusing on the learning of students who need the least support.

With this model, any instruction provided by EAs is supplemental, not primary or exclusive to the teacher. Literature suggests that a best practice is for EAs to work from professionally prepared plans developed by teachers or special educators and have some support from them to implement these teacher-developed plans. The role of the EA as classroom facilitator is to:

- Supervise learning for groups of students who can work relatively independently;
- Answer questions from students as necessary;

- Keep students on task;
- Collaborate with the teacher;
- Assist with supportive behaviour management;
- Monitor and provide feedback to teacher on student progress;
- Provide feedback to teacher on students to enable teacher to communicate student issues to families;
- Assist with goal setting for Individual Education Plans (IEP) (if appropriate);
- Attend IEP meetings (if appropriate- if responsible for personal care of student or attending to specific supports);
- Attend professional development training;
- Complete assigned clerical paperwork duties that free time for special educators to collaborate with teachers and work directly with students.

Education Assistant Workforce

Educational Assistants (EAs) are paraprofessional support staff meant to work under the guidance of the classroom teacher to support a range of teaching and non-teaching tasks. The intended responsibilities of EAs are outlined in section 18 of the School Act and include the following:

- A board may employ persons other than teachers to assist teachers in carrying out their responsibilities and duties under this Act and the regulations.
- Persons employed under subsection (1) shall work under the direction of a teacher and the general supervision of a teacher or school principal.

Collective agreements for EAs and other support staff are negotiated and ratified at the local level. There is a total of 69 local collective agreements for support staff in B.C. school districts. Through its Bylaws, the B.C. Public Schools' Employer Association (BCPSEA) has delegated the authority to negotiate collective agreements with support staff unions in B.C. to individual boards of education or groups of boards. The role of BCPSEA under this model is to help boards with research, coordination and where requested, direct involvement in the negotiations or dispute resolution. (An agreement negotiated between a board and its support staff union must be ratified by the BCPSEA Board of Directors.)

In order to help guide negotiations, BCPSEA and the K-12 Presidents' Council and Support Staff Unions provide local unions with a Provincial Framework Agreement, the purpose of which is to recommend a framework for inclusion in the collective agreements with local Support Staff Unions. While this framework agreement was endorsed by the K-12 Presidents' Council and Support Staff Unions, local unions are free to use it or not, depending on their own views and agendas. (Currently, all unions but the Teamster local in Abbotsford have chosen to use the Provincial Framework Agreement.)

While the Provincial Framework Agreement provides high-level guidelines (i.e. term, percentage of wage increases based on the negotiating mandate, funding to support local bargaining), the terms and conditions of each collective agreement are negotiated locally. As such, there are variances in the content of collective agreements from district to district (i.e. salaries, benefits, hours of work).

The current Provincial Framework Agreement (July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2022) includes a section about the Support Staff Initiative for Recruitment & Retention Enhancement (SSIRRE). The objectives of this initiative are to:

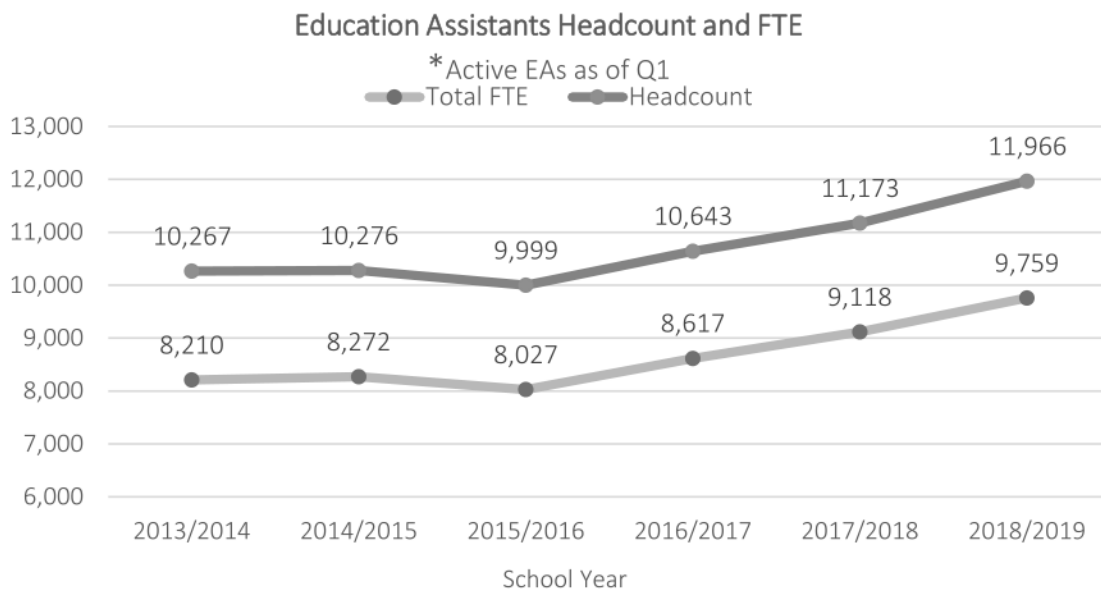
- Gather data on support staff recruitment and retention challenges, projected demand in the sector, as well as existing offerings for post-secondary and vocational programs;
- Identify potential gaps in program offerings to meet projected demand;
- Partner with post-secondary institutions and training providers to promote support staff positions in school districts;

- Market support staff opportunities within the sector (i.e. through Make a Future); and
- Provide targeted support for hard to fill positions.

A budget of \$300,000 has been allocated to this initiative during the term of the current Provincial Framework Agreement (July 1, 2019 - June 30, 2022). This initiative is to be discussed at the Provincial Labour Management Committee to select a consultant to conduct the work pertaining to SSIRRE.

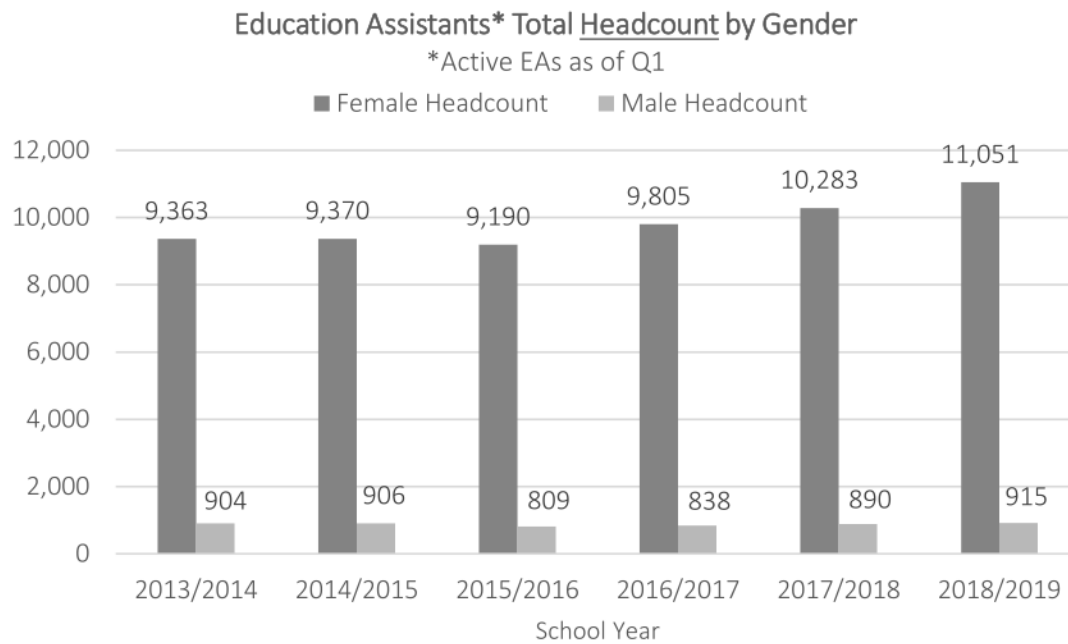
As of quarter 1 of 2018/19, there was just under 12,000 EAs. The EA workforce has grown since 2015/16 both in FTE and headcount. In fact, the workforce has grown by almost 20% since 2015/16. Figure 1 shows the EA workforce year over year between 2013/14 and 2018/19 in both headcount and FTE and that the ratio between the two has remained relatively static. Figure 1 also indicates the system needs to hire 1.24 individuals to meet 1 FTE which illustrates the part-time nature of EA work.

Figure 1: B.C. Public School Education Assistant Workforce Headcount and FTE



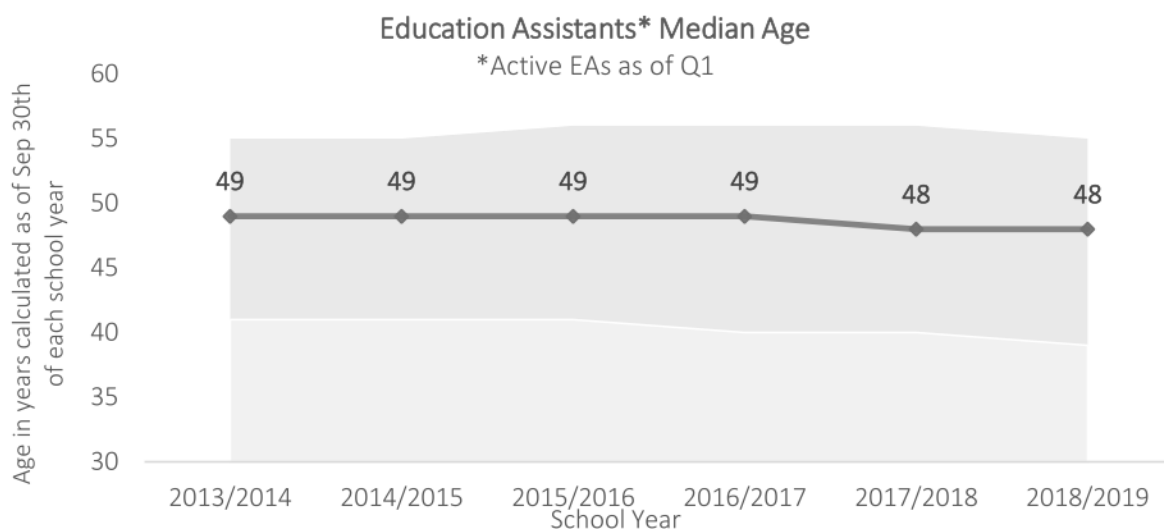
As shown on Figures 2 and 3, the workforce characteristics of gender and age have also remained relatively static since 2013/14. B.C. EA workforce is made up predominantly of females. In fact, 92% of the workforce as of 2018/19 was female.

Figure 2: B.C. Public School Education Assistant Workforce by Gender



EAs' median age fluctuates between 48 and 49 years of age. In 2018/19, 40% of EAs in the system were 50 or older. (Teachers' median age was 43 in 2018/19, and 30% of teachers are 50 or older.)

Figure 3: B.C. Public School Education Assistants' Median Age



Supply and Demand

Student Enrolment

Like educators, the demand for EAs is driven by student enrolment, policy shifts and attrition. However, unlike teachers, EAs are unique; their demand is particularly impacted by the number of students with diverse needs and changes in classroom composition language.

The population of students with special needs in B.C. has been growing at a faster rate than the overall student population: since 2004/05, the percentage of students with special needs has increased by 18% while the overall student population has decreased by 0.2% over the same time period. This has resulted in the demand for more EAs in the system to support the growing number of students with special needs.

Memorandum of Agreement

In the first quarter of 2018/19 school year, 9,759 FTE EAs were employed in B.C. public schools: up by 642 FTE (+7%) compared to 2017/18. This increase in the workforce is largely attributable to the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement between the Ministry of Education, the Public Sector Employers' Council Secretariat, the British Columbia Public School Employers' Association and the British Columbia Teachers' Federation. The hiring of over 600 EAs kept pace and the ratio of EAs to special needs students remains similar to previous years.

Attrition

The attrition rate for EAs has remained relatively stable, around 10% during the 4-year period of 2013/2014 to 2016/2017. However, it should be noted that this is significantly higher than the attrition rate for educators (around 4%).

Considerations Pertaining to Linkages with Early Childhood Educators

s.13

In BC, ECEs are required to complete a basic early childhood education training program from an approved training institution to be certified. There are currently 26,000 certified ECEs and ECE assistants in the province.

The ECE Registry, a branch of the Ministry of Children and Family development (MCFD), issues over 7,000 ECE certificate per year. The ECE Registry has existed for about 30 years but has grown significantly since 2018 with the focus of the current Government on universal childcare. MCFD oversees ECE certification, a professional excellence and outreach team, practice consultants (responsible for policy and procedure development) and an investigation team.

While there is currently no provincial curriculum for ECE training, Government mandates a set of competencies that post-secondary institutions offering ECE training must meet for their students to become certified as ECEs. (Post-secondary institutions have flexibility on how to structure their ECE training program, but they are required to submit their curriculum to the ECE registry for review to ensure each competency is met.)

The current competencies have been in place for about 20 years, and MCFD has been working with the sector since 2015 to review them. The intent is to update them to reflect today's reality and bring more focus on inclusion as well as on Indigenous perspectives (specifically in relation to the commitments from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission). MCFD has been involved in extensive consultations with the sector to put forward recommendations to support higher quality in terms of ECE training. As part of this, consideration is being given to current professional standards.

Changes to qualification requirements for ECE's could create consequences to the EA profession as many school districts consider ECE certification a foundational requirement for an EA role.

A change of this nature could limit the supply source for the EA profession. Conversely, introducing standards and regulations for EAs could have a similar impact on the ECE supply source.

Policy Considerations Regarding a Potential Standardization of the EA Profession & the Establishment a Regulatory Body

There are currently no provincial standards required in B.C. for EA positions, nor is there an enforcement body for regulation. Similarly, based on the Canadian Information Centre for International Credentials, there is not any Province or Territory that has specific standards or regulations for the profession of EA at this time. (Ontario considers the role of EA as a trade and regulates the profession in this capacity.)

There are 14 post-secondary institutions offering EA training programs in BC, as well as some programs built in-house within school districts but these programs vary form one another (duration, cost, content, etc.)

This absence of regulation provides school districts with great flexibility regarding the selection of those entering the profession, thus ensuring a broad supply source which the district can leverage in cases like the increased hiring that resulted from the MOA. However, this greater flexibility also means there is less consistency across the Province.

While hiring practices vary among school districts, many school districts do not require a specific certification in order to be hired as an EA. For the ones that do, the minimum requirements tend to include:

- Completion of Grade 12;
- Completion of an EA training program from an educational institution recognized by the school district;
- Between one and two years of related experience; and
- First aid or medical training/certificate.

A study conducted in 2009, published by CUPE B.C., suggested that only 48% of 4,000 EA participants had specific training for the role of EA.

Key Considerations for the Establishment of a Regulatory Body

Regulatory bodies can take many forms. For example, teachers are regulated by government regulation whereas social workers are self-regulated by a regulatory college. Determination would need to be made regarding the type of regulatory model required.

Key considerations of a regulatory model include:

- quality controls (code of conduct, enforced standards of practice, qualifications, required training);
- certification (consistent method of validating employee qualifications);
- mandatory registration (title protection);
- authority to investigate and respond to complaints including disciplinary and remedial action. Though monitoring, investigating and remediating concerns about the competence and conduct of EAs in the Sector protects students, it also requires the establishment of a regulatory body and staff to oversee this work.

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