

Parliamentary Education Gazette

A Newsletter for B.C. Teachers

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Read Time: 8 minutes

Next deadline to apply:
February 1, 2026!



VICTORIA



The School Travel Program reduces financial barriers for B.C. school groups to visit the **B.C. Parliament Buildings**. Eligible school groups apply for the travel grant when booking their tour. Visit our website to learn more.



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The Parliamentary Education Office is pleased to report a successful launch of the new School Travel Program for British Columbia school groups. Depending on where school groups are travelling from, they may be eligible for funding to help support their trip to the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia – up to \$450.00 per student! So far, we have welcomed groups from Campbell River and Mayne Island, and in the coming months we hope to welcome groups from Merritt, Christina Lake, Houston, Vernon, and Fernie, B.C.!

Please scan the QR code to determine whether your school group is eligible to apply and to learn more about the program.

The deadline for applications for this year's School Travel Program is Sunday, February 1, 2026.



[Information Sheet for Teachers](#)

By: Adriana Ayers, Parliamentary Tour Officer, Parliamentary Education Office

The School Travel Program – Every B.C. Teacher’s New Year’s Resolution!

Season’s greetings from beautiful northern Vancouver Island!

As a member of the Parliamentary Education Office’s (PEO) Education Steering Committee, I knew of the incredible work being put into the School Travel Program, and I was keen to seize the first available opportunity to visit the Legislative Assembly of British Columbia with my own Law 12 students. We had just completed a unit on statutory law and a visit to the Parliament Buildings was the perfect hands-on experience my students needed to make the learning feel ‘real’.

The program subsidizes costs for students so that all can visit the Parliament Buildings. The amount of funding depends on where you are coming from – the further away you are, the more grant money you qualify for.

Applying for the School Travel Program was refreshingly simple. The process was clear, well-organized, and designed with teachers in mind. From the initial application to field-trip day, every step felt intuitive and efficient, allowing me to focus on planning an enriching day for my students rather than navigating paperwork.

Before setting foot in Victoria, our class had a virtual classroom session with the Parliamentary Education Office staff. During this session, students worked with Nicholas Guerreiro, whose expertise and enthusiasm brought the legislative process to life. He provided historical context, explained parliamentary procedures, and answered questions. He also connected our virtual lesson to our electoral riding and even our local MLA, including the work she is doing as Opposition Health critic. This preparation made our visit the following week far more meaningful, as students arrived with a solid foundation and a sense of anticipation.



A school group on a tour on the lawn of the Legislative Assembly of B.C.

For this reason, I highly recommend booking the virtual classroom before bringing your students to Victoria. Do keep in mind that booking a virtual classroom is a requirement in qualifying for any grant money through the School Travel Program.

The staff in the Parliamentary Education Office were not only knowledgeable but also incredibly accommodating. Adriana Ayers was our wonderful tour guide and met us at the building’s school entrance. Her ability to tailor explanations to the students’ level ensured that complex concepts became accessible and engaging. Our tour coincided with the Legislative Assembly’s Christmas tree delivery, so the building smelled incredibly festive. My students marvelled at what was for many of them the biggest Christmas tree they had ever seen in person, and some could not help snapping a photo. After admiring the tree, our tour continued to the rotunda as Question Period wrapped up for the day and none other than Premier David Eby came out to meet with our Campbell River students and pose for a photo!



The Legislative Chamber and gallery.

Another highlight was the opportunity to enter the Chamber and observe MLAs during the second reading of a health care bill. Imagine my delight having taught the students about the process of passing a bill into law, only for them to witness legislators engaging in the very process just weeks later. Students were engaged the entire time, with many asking Adriana follow-up questions. One student in particular was a tad annoyed because they had to leave their phone behind but had observed legislators scrolling on their own phones inside the Chamber while others were speaking! This then led to a wonderful conversation about quorum. Witnessing legislative procedure in real time gave students a firsthand look at parliamentary democracy in action – an experience no textbook, virtual tour, or video could replicate.

SIGNIFICANT DATES

JANUARY 24
1967

To honour the 100 year anniversary of the first sitting of a Legislative Assembly that was responsible for governing the area that is now British Columbia, a new session was opened at an ice rink in New Westminster, B.C., the first and only time a session was opened outside of Victoria.

FEBRUARY 10
1898

Lieutenant Governor T.R. McInnes formally opened the new Parliament Buildings in Victoria.

The School Travel Program – Every B.C. Teacher’s New Year’s Resolution! (Cont'd)

Finally, students had the opportunity to meet with MLA Harman Bhangu, who spoke from the perspective of being a new legislator and what it is like working in the Legislature. He covered a variety of topics from his background working for his father’s construction company to the bills and issues he is focused on. He was very friendly and accommodating to the students, and the setting was in the incredible parliamentary library.

The PEO made every effort to ensure that students had a holistic experience at the Parliament Buildings. They were not just visitors “passing through” but were indeed interacting with the people in the building. There was a tangible sense that their presence mattered and that they were welcome.

Place-based learning is a cornerstone of effective education. Bringing classroom lessons into real-world settings builds curiosity and wonder and fosters critical thinking in our students. It gives them a unique experience to reflect on, with stories to tell their families. Importantly, place-based learning builds connections, and I believe that, now more than ever, we need citizens connecting to our democratic institutions.

Moreover, this aligns beautifully with First Nations Education Steering Committee’s (FNESC) First Peoples Principles of Learning, which emphasizes experiential and land-based education.

Standing in the historic Parliament Buildings, students not only learned about governance but also reflected on the layered histories and voices that shape British Columbia today.

For educators seeking to inspire their students with authentic, hands-on learning, the School Travel Program is an unparalleled resource. It combines accessibility, expert guidance, and immersive experiences that leave lasting impressions. I had parents and even colleagues commenting on how my students enjoyed the experience. They could not stop talking about it. Other students at my school have asked me if I am planning another trip next semester. I wholeheartedly recommend that other B.C. teachers take advantage of this unique opportunity to bring civics education to life. It truly was an unforgettable experience for our Campbell River students, and I wish that every B.C. student gets to personally experience everything the Parliament Buildings have to offer.

So, when drafting New Year’s resolutions, consider including a trip to the Parliament Buildings (through the School Travel Program) on your list!

By: Alexander F. Mader, humanities teacher, Carihi Secondary School, Campbell River, B.C.

B.C. Teachers’ Institute on Parliamentary Democracy Resources

From October 21 to 25, 2025, the Parliamentary Education Office hosted the 26th British Columbia Teachers’ Institute on Parliamentary Democracy (BCTI). We had 23 participants and three returning teachers in the role of facilitator, and it was a roaring success.

At each BCTI, our teachers are divided into groups with a facilitator to develop a classroom activity based on their new-found knowledge about parliamentary democracy and citizenship. This year, we had several classroom activities developed, and four of them are now available on our [website](#). They range from consensus building to reconciliation. They have also been translated into French, and there are more to come soon, so check back in February.

We would like to express our gratitude to the amazing facilitators, Michele Cumberland, Justin Hummel, and Ursula Neuscheler, for their leadership and thank the inquisitive teachers who took the time to immerse themselves in all things parliament.

Our next Institute will be October 20 to 24, 2026, and applications will open online in May.

By: Karen Aitken, Director, Parliamentary Education Office



Parliamentary Trivia

Q: What year did a woman first serve as Attorney General in B.C.?

The first correct answer will win a prize from the Parliamentary Gift Shop! Email PEO@leg.bc.ca to submit. Good luck!

Access Learning Resources

NEW CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

[Golden Jubilee Past Present Future](#)

[Reconciliation in Parliament](#)

[The Shared Plate/Consensus in the Kitchen: Creating a Healthy Meal Together](#)

[Symbolism in the Parliament Buildings](#)

Find more learning resources [here](#).



2025 BCTI Participants in the Legislative Chamber

Making Democracy Live in Your Classroom

Teachers who attended the October 2025 BCTI heard Michael MacKenzie present on ideas from a book we (Paula Waatainen and Michael MacKenzie) are writing for teachers called *Teaching Democracy Across the Curriculum*. Our book will balance theory and practice, as we develop both a model for teaching democracy and a series of classroom activities and assessments that are designed to have applications across disciplines, topics, and grade levels.

We received a great question from one of the teachers who was at this talk: "How can we democratize the classroom so teachers don't teach democracy, but live it in their classrooms?"

We believe that the best way to learn democracy is by doing democracy. Doing democracy with our students is essential, authentic, and pressing work. Teaching about democracy while not giving students opportunities to practice it is a missed opportunity on too large a scale. Our remedy is not to carve out extra time for civic education *per se*. Instead, it's to design activities that engage students in doing a little democracy while they are learning everything else that's also important.

Back to the question: how can we democratize the classroom? Our overarching goal is to engage students in collective decision-making in small but authentic ways across disciplines and over time. Collective decision-making is at the heart of our model because democracy involves using different processes to decide what should be done when people disagree. We want to empower students through these processes, and we want them to have fun at the same time.

You could – but you don't have to – include your students in decision-making on almost everything, from what they learn to how they are assessed to how to shape their classroom community.

We call this democratic pedagogy – learning democracy by doing it. There are examples of schools where this approach is fully embraced. You can read up on "free school" movements or listen to this podcast about the Brooklyn Free School: <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/424/kid-politics/act-three-5>

Last semester, Michael experimented with democratic pedagogy. He began a course in democratic theory with a blank syllabus, and together with his students discussed the topics they wanted to study. Michael guided them in selecting some issues, and the students brought forward other ideas that were important to them, including a look at K-12 civic education. He then found appropriate readings and activities to support their choices. The students also deliberated and then voted on the course assessments, with majority support landing on a project to help a sitting MLA write a private member's bill and, somewhat surprisingly, a final exam. Powerful democratic work? Yes. Challenging to do, time-consuming, and pedagogically useful? Yes, all these things.

You may not want to go as far as Michael did last semester, but a great question to guide your practice is "what decisions do I tend to make, as the teacher, that my students could make collectively?" In our model, we talk about collective decision-making on internal and external issues.

The first are issues that are internal to the classroom. These issues are political because they involve disagreements amongst students, but they are not always connected to real-world, "external," political topics. What field trips should we take? Should we revise a classroom policy? How should we arrange the seating plan this month? What sports or games should we play as a class? Who should represent us on the student council?

Making Democracy Live in Your Classroom (Cont'd)

Teachers can engage students in making these, and many other, collective decisions democratically, using different political tools such as deliberation, negotiation, representation, and voting. As these processes tend to also build students' literacy, numeracy, and core competencies in authentic and engaging contexts, the time commitment to this work is worthwhile.

Of course, we also democratize our classrooms by making them places where we do the hard and essential work of grappling with "external" political issues. These are all the "real-world" political issues outside our classrooms. There are science and social studies issues that are hotly contested and ideological. And there are issues, such as whether we should install speed bumps in our neighbourhoods, that are of authentic importance in our communities. Students can make collective decisions on external political issues that are actionable, such as which issues or organizations to raise money for.

Other external issues lend themselves to games and simulations of decision-making processes. Some of these activities involve portraying powerful political leaders, while others involve ordinary people. For example, in our activity "Deliberation Dinner Party," primary students pretend to be family members deliberating on what kind of pet to get, while Socials 10 students pretend it's October 1995, and deliberate on whether, as Quebecers, they should vote *Oui* or *Non* in the sovereignty referendum.

Some external issues, such as how we should regulate artificial intelligence (AI) and whether we should send people to Mars, are complex issues that must be grappled with in carefully designed lessons and activities that do not necessarily involve actionable collective decisions.

One primary aim of democratic pedagogy is to help students (and everyone else) become more comfortable with the complexity, uncertainty, nuance, and diversity that are necessary, challenging, and beautiful parts of living our lives together. If this approach to democratic pedagogy were widely adopted, students might participate in hundreds of democratic processes – discussions, deliberations, votes, and simulations – over the course of their educations in many different subjects including gym, drama, English, science, geography, math, and, of course, social studies. Our book will give teachers reasons, ideas, tools, and activities for making this happen.

We'd love to hear from you if you'd like us to come speak and field test activities in your district, if you have questions, or if you'd like to get onto our mailing list for book updates. Please feel free to connect!

By: Dr. Michael MacKenzie, Professor of Political Studies & Jarislowsky Chair in Trust and Political Leadership, Vancouver Island University

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TERRITORIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We wrote this newsletter in the Parliament Buildings, that are located on the traditional territory of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples. Now known as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, these Coast Salish peoples have a rich culture and history dating back thousands of years.

We are thankful to live and work here.



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