

B.C. Green party would extend education system to three-, four-year-old preschoolers ^[1]

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The B.C. Green party would extend the province's education system to include preschool for three- and four-year-old children, party leader Andrew Weaver announced today.

"The economy is changing and so, too, must our education system," Weaver said. "We have promised all along that education would be our top priority. ... Learning does not begin in kindergarten and neither should our education system."

Three- and four-year-old children would get up to 25 hours of free early childhood education each week in a public preschool program, Weaver said. That's about the same amount of time kids attend elementary school.

The Green party's plan also calls for free daycare for working parents with children younger than three or a \$500 per month credit for families with a stay-at-home parent of a child younger than three.

Those changes, which would be phased in over four years, would cost about \$4.239 billion over four years, the party said. Ontario offers all-day optional kindergarten for children beginning the year they turn four years old.

Weaver said the return on spending on early childhood education is greater than the return on any other type of expenditure. When asked how the Greens would fund the plan, he promised a balanced budget over his government's term in office and said a fully costed platform that will be released later in the campaign. When asked about tax changes, Weaver would only say the tax system would be simplified.

B.C. voters go to the polls on May 9.

The Green party pledges to increase funding for public schools, over and above the \$330 million recently committed by the government to cover the cost of the Supreme Court of Canada decision restoring class size, class composition and specialist teacher ratios to teachers' contracts. It would also review the per-student funding model, Weaver said.

Weaver would not commit to a date for the completion of seismic upgrades, saying it wouldn't be truthful to name a date past the mandate of the next government. He said he supports a byelection for the Vancouver School Board, but that he doesn't think political parties have a place in civic politics. The Greens would continue to fund private schools, Weaver said, but his "dream" would be that the public system is the envy of the private system.

In 2014, the B.C. government cut funding for upgrading of high school courses for students who have graduated. Since then, schools have had to charge tuition for these courses, something the Green party says has meant a 38-per-cent reduction in enrolment in such courses.

The Green party said it would restore funding of \$10 million a year for adult basic education and that its promises would mean an extra \$1.48 billion for education by 2020. It would also provide \$140 million over three years to train teachers on the new curriculum.

Post-secondary students were not left out of the Green promises — the party said it would bring in grants for post-secondary students and provide tax forgiveness of up to \$2,000 a year for five years to repay tuition-fee debt. These promises would cost \$10 million over three years, the party said.

A Green party government would also spend \$65 million on co-op and work-experience programs for high school and post-secondary students, the platform says.

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