
INFORMATION BULLETIN

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Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills

B.C. invests in planning for post-secondary education in Ridge Meadows

MAPLE RIDGE – People in Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows will benefit from a provincial investment in planning for the future of post-secondary education for the region.

The Province is investing \$250,000 for a feasibility study to help outline potential post-secondary educational opportunities in the area.

This builds on a previous needs assessment of post-secondary education and training in the region funded by the Province. That assessment concluded there is a perceived demand and need for increased access to post-secondary education and skills training in the area, and that the need is projected to grow over the next 20 years.

The needs assessment included engagement with 1,500 residents, students, parents and school district staff through surveys and community events, as well as consultation with a wide range of organizations, including local government, School District 42, TransLink, local First Nations, post-secondary institutions and the business community.

The feasibility study will be carried out by Kwantlen Polytechnic University in conjunction with Douglas College, the Justice Institute of British Columbia, and the University of the Fraser Valley. The study is expected to be completed by spring 2025.

This provincial funding is part of the Province's co-ordinated approach to address immediate and long-term workforce challenges across all sectors of the economy.

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CONSULTING

**RIDGE-MEADOWS POST-SECONDARY
NEEDS ASSESSMENT**

FINAL REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Ridge-Meadows area is one of the fastest-growing regions in Metro Vancouver, yet it remains one of the few communities in the Lower Mainland without a comprehensive public post-secondary education facility. In response, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Douglas College, the Justice Institute of British Columbia, the University of the Fraser Valley, and the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills worked together to assess needs for post-secondary education and training for residents of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows. The project was funded through a grant from the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills.

METHODOLOGY

The project looked to three central sources to determine if there was a need to improve access to post-secondary education:

1. Access to public post-secondary campuses, including estimates of time and cost of travel options to regional campuses
2. Statistical comparisons of post-secondary attendance and transition rates for 18 to 24-year-olds and adult learners (25-64) in Ridge-Meadows to provincial and Metro Vancouver rates, applied to current and projected future population numbers
3. Reported perceptions and experiences of residents, students, parents, local government, community organizations, local First Nations, and employers
4. Availability of post-secondary education and training programs leading to in-demand occupations

In order to determine if there is a need to improve access to post-secondary education, the project:

- **Interviewed representatives from 17 organizations**, including Kwantlen and Katzie First Nations, local and regional governments and services, business organizations, Post-secondary Institutions (PSIs), and provincial government and services
- **Engaged with over 1,500 Ridge-Meadows residents**, employees, students, parents, and school district staff through surveys and community engagement events
- **Reviewed relevant publicly available data** from Statistics Canada and reports from regional PSIs, School District 42 (SD 42), TransLink, and the B.C. Government; and
- **Analyzed data provided upon request** by the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills and the Student Transitions Project

Response rates for residents and secondary students were lower than expected. Contributing factors to the lower response rates may have been declining survey response rates in community surveys across North America and limitations in promotion and information sharing of the survey options, as well as sampling methods to reduce the likelihood of sampling bias.

KEY FINDINGS

Regional Campuses

- SD 42 is by far the largest of only eleven school districts in the province without a public post-secondary campus offering a range of programming¹.
- Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows are in the Douglas College region. Douglas College offered first- and second-year post-secondary courses in a wing of Thomas Haney Secondary School in Maple Ridge between 1992 and 2003. Post-secondary students were less attracted to attending courses at a high school than expected, and enrolment and course offerings in Maple Ridge decreased once the Douglas College Coquitlam campus opened in 1996, eventually resulting in the campus closing.
- Fourteen public post-secondary campuses across four college regions were defined as regional campuses for Ridge-Meadows, including Douglas College, KPU, UFV, JIBC, SFU, BCIT, and VCC.

Geographic Accessibility

- Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows are separated by waterways from the rest of Metro Vancouver to the south and the west, which limits the number of travel routes and can result in longer traffic delays during peak travel times.
- Ridge-Meadows residents most frequently commute into other parts of Metro Vancouver, or stay within Ridge-Meadows, rather than to the Fraser Valley. Residents of Maple Ridge, and women in the Ridge-Meadows area, are less likely to commute outside Ridge-Meadows.
- Across the Lower Mainland, driving is still the main mode of commuting, but younger adults (20-24) are more likely to use public transit.
- Ridge-Meadows residents can reach most regional campuses in an hour by car and an hour and a half by transit (one-way). By comparison, 82% of Metro Vancouver residents have one-way commutes of 45 minutes or less.

Affordability

- Driving from Ridge-Meadows can add \$400 to \$750 to students' monthly budgets, and also generates an average estimated 2 tonnes of CO₂ per student.
- The higher cost and lower availability of rental housing is increasing the numbers of students staying home while attending post-secondary across B.C.
- Approximately half of B.C. post-secondary students listed employment while studying as one of top three sources of funding for their post-secondary education. Balancing part-time work while in school is made more difficult with longer travel times.

¹ Note: Communities with regional campuses may still experience below average post-secondary attendance/transition rates, as is the case with Chilliwack and Mission

Post-Secondary Attendance

- Fewer 18 to 24-year-olds in Maple Ridge (40%) and Pitt Meadows (48%) attended post-secondary in 2020/21 than in Metro Vancouver (57%) or the province (50%) as a whole. The difference in attendance reflects approximately 650 Ridge-Meadows 18 to 24-year-old residents who do not attend post-secondary.
- Ridge-Meadows (5%) has a lower percentage of adult learners (25 to 64-years-old) attending B.C. public PSIs than in the province overall (7%). If the adult learner rate in Ridge-Meadows matched that of B.C., the annual headcount of adult learners in Ridge-Meadows attending public post-secondary would increase from 3,000 to an estimated 4,400.
- A lower percentage of Ridge-Meadows (1.2%) adults (23+) newly enroll in B.C. public PSIs each year than in B.C. as a whole (1.9%). If the Ridge-Meadows adult learner new enrollment rate matched that of B.C. as a whole, that number would be increased by an estimated 600.

K-12 Transition Rates

- The most common metric pointed to as evidence of the need for increased post-secondary access for Ridge-Meadows residents was that SD 42 has the lowest percentage of graduates who register at a B.C. public post-secondary within one year of graduation of any Metro Vancouver school district. Between 2015/16 and 2019/20, SD 42 averaged a 44% immediate transition rate, compared to Metro Vancouver (56%) and B.C. (52%).
- The gap between SD 42 (61%) and the province (68%) remains when looking at 3-year cumulative delayed transition rates.
- The immediate transition rate does not count dual credit pre-graduation post-secondary enrollments, but these students do begin post-secondary education.
- SD 42 graduate GPAs and graduation rates have been steadily increasing, which increases graduates' post-secondary options.
- Looking at the K-12 transition rates helped identify two potential groups who may be particularly underserved with Ridge-Meadows' current access to post-secondary:
 - Across the province, male graduates have 6% lower immediate transition rates than female graduates, though the gender gap in transition rates closes within 5 years of graduation. In SD 42, the gender difference in immediate transition rates is noticeably more pronounced (15%).
 - Across the province, Indigenous graduates have lower immediate transition rates than non-Indigenous graduates, but the difference narrows within five years of graduation. This is not the case in SD 42, where the difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous transition rates widens over time, indicating that in addition to barriers to immediate transition, Indigenous K-12 graduates in Ridge-Meadows may not be receiving sufficient support for later transitions to post-secondary.

Perceptions of Access to Post-Secondary

- The clear message shared through the assessment from across the Ridge-Meadows community was that increased access to post-secondary is needed. Many noted that this has been a long-standing discussion in the community, with some expressing frustration about the lack of action in the last 20 years.
- The majority of participants in each survey (residents, parents, students and SD 42 staff) felt that access to post-secondary needed to be improved for Ridge-Meadows.
- Local and provincial elected officials from Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows felt strongly that access to post-secondary needs to be improved for Ridge-Meadows residents and employers.
- City elected representatives and staff said that a public post-secondary campus would support economic and community development, and address the demand from their growing populations for education opportunities close to home.
- School district elected representatives and senior management noted that longer commutes were creating affordability barriers for students as well as limiting students' post-secondary experiences.
- Business organizations noted that increased access to post-secondary would support the economy to grow and make labour force training more accessible.
- Representatives of the Katzie and Kwantlen First Nations reported that geography had limited impact on access to post-secondary for their members.

Experiences with Post-Secondary Access

- When asked to rate factors for their impact on the ability for Ridge-Meadows to attend post-secondary, four of the top five factors survey respondents rated most highly were related to the distance to PSIs, including:
 - The higher cost of living away from home
 - Transit to nearby institutions takes too long
 - Driving to nearby institutions costs too much
 - Program availability or schedule

Population Growth

- The population in SD 42 has grown by 41% over the last 20 years and is projected to grow by another 41% over the next 20 years.
- Lower housing prices, availability of industrial lands, and access to the natural world relative to Metro Vancouver will continue to contribute to and shape Ridge-Meadows growth.
- In the last 20 years, the population of 5 to 18 year-olds grew by just over 1,300, but in the next 20 years B.C. Stats projects that the same group will grow by over 3,000.

- The largest growth in K-12 graduates is expected to happen in the next three years, after which growth slows and then levels stabilize. By 2026, the number of Grade 12 graduates is projected to increase from 1,030 in 2019/20 to 1,509, and depending on the immediate transition rate, between 680 and 860 of those will be enrolling in post-secondary. Post-secondary sector partners should anticipate and prepare for a surge in demand for increased access to post-secondary from recent graduates to happen in the short-term.
- A growing population of immigrants indicates potential for higher post-secondary demand as their children complete K-12. Studies show that students with immigrant parents are much more likely to participate in post-secondary education than students with domestic-born parents, even amongst students with lower secondary school grades.
- In 2021, assuming that the post-secondary attendance (including private and institutions outside B.C.) reflected the provincial rate, the number of Ridge-Meadows adult learners attending any PSI was 4,185. With population growth, this could increase to 5,725 or as high as 6,255 if the attendance rate increased to meet the Metro Vancouver rate.
- In 2020/21, the headcount of Ridge-Meadows residents 25 to 64-year-olds at B.C. public PSIs was 2,940. By 2041, this number could increase to between 4,400 and 6,150.

Institution Type Demand

- With the current levels of access to post-secondary for Ridge-Meadows, students at all ages are less likely to be attending universities than students across B.C.
- 18 to 24-year-old residents of Maple Ridge and Pitt Meadows are also less likely to attend university than other 18 to 24-year-old Metro Vancouver residents.
- There is a notably lower percentage of people with degrees or higher in Maple Ridge (24%) and Pitt Meadows (26%) than in Metro Vancouver (43%), or any other Metro Vancouver municipality.
- Maple Ridge (12%) and Pitt Meadows (10%) both have higher percentages of residents with trades certificates than in Metro Vancouver (6%) or B.C. (8%).

Field of Study Demand

- When asked what field of study they or their children intended to pursue, survey respondents shared a wide range of fields², though Engineering and Computer Science were notably high.
- For the high-opportunity occupations in the Lower Mainland, the programs which are least geographically accessible to Ridge-Meadows residents are trades, education, and information technology occupations which require degrees.

² Note: a regional campus would not be able to provide the complete range of programming that is desired.

Online Learning

- Internet connectivity is available, but financial barriers to online learning remain. Estimated costs for home internet service are \$70 per month, in addition to one-time costs of approximately \$1,000 for a computer meeting online learning requirements.
- Some students prefer in-person learning. This may be partially due to the technical skills required for online learning. Digital literacy supports help students gain these skills, but some may be reluctant to ask for help or access supports.
- Demand is less for asynchronous, online only programs than for a flexible delivery mix of online and in-person courses within a hybrid program.
- K-12 students expressed less interest in online training than adult learners did.

Participant responses on increasing access

- The most common suggestion was to increase the number of post-secondary programs delivered in Ridge-Meadows, ideally through a dedicated public post-secondary campus.
- Improvements in transit were identified as important for increasing participation in post-secondary, improving the experience of current students, and reducing traffic for all Ridge-Meadows commuters.
- A number of respondents suggested offering shuttles instead of transit.
- Another common theme of participant suggestions includes strengthening access to career education and academic supports in the K-12 system.

Conclusion

- The needs assessment has demonstrated that there is currently a demand and need for increased access to post-secondary education and training in Ridge-Meadows, and that the need is projected to grow substantially over the next 20 years.
- Following this needs assessment, exploration of potential solutions requires a feasibility study.
- The needs assessment has estimated the current scope of unmet need³ for both 18 to 24-year-olds (between 760 and 1,545) and 25 to 64-year-olds (between 1,285 and 1,350). The range in unmet need estimates depends on whether Ridge-Meadows is being compared to the B.C. or the Metro Vancouver attendance rates.
- Even if there were a regional campus in Ridge-Meadows, a regional campus would not be able to provide the range of programming desired for all residents, nor is it a guarantee of average post-secondary attendance or transition rates. However, an increase in access to post-secondary education in Ridge-Meadows could be expected to gradually increase the numbers of residents enrolled in post-secondary.

³ This calculation of unmet need assumes that a regional campus could bring post-secondary attendance rates up to the Metro Vancouver or BC averages