

6. Education

Education, values, and personal experiences contribute to people's involvement and understanding of their communities. Learning and personal development are life-long pursuits that enhance quality of life and physical health. People with limited education often have fewer opportunities for employment and financial security.



6.1 Student/Educator Ratios

Student/educator ratios have an impact on the quality of education offered and received.

The Comox Valley School District #71 is responsible for the majority of students in the Comox Valley, and also includes a vibrant French Immersion program, alternate schools, and the North Island Distance Education School (NIDES). There are 27 reported public schools within School District #71 in 2008.¹⁵⁰ The following table depicts the student/educator ratios, or the number of students per educator: an educator is defined as a teacher, principal, or vice principal.

Table : Student/Educator Ratios – BC and Comox Valley School District #71

School Year	BC	School District #71
2002-2003	17.12	17.37
2003-2004	17.26	17.63
2004-2005	17.34	18.71
2005-2006	16.96	18.22
2006-2007	16.42	17.60
2007-2008	n/a	18.05

Source: BC Ministry of Education, School and District Data Summary Reports: Enrolment & Educators.

The Comox Valley has experienced declining student enrolment numbers since 2002 that has caused a complete reconfiguration of the school district, which has included school closures and reassessment of grade/class configurations. The reconfiguration changes that occurred in School District #71 over the last 4 years have had little impact on student/educator ratios. The student population forecasts until 2013 anticipate a further 15% decline in the Comox Valley student population.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ BC Ministry of Education. School and District Data Summary Reports: Schools List.

¹⁵¹ BC Ministry of Education. School and District Data Summary Reports: Enrolment.

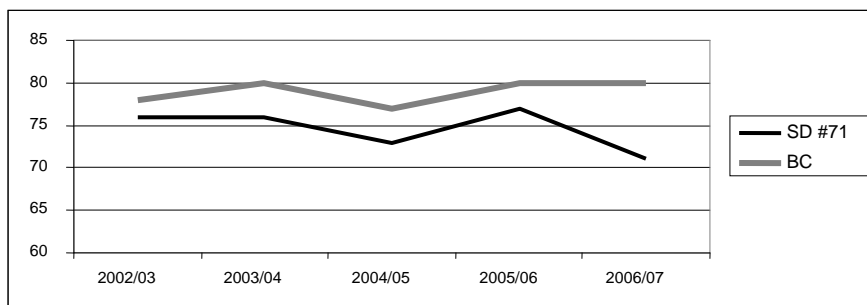


6.2 High School Graduation Rates

A graduate is a student who has completed provincially prescribed graduation requirements as stated in Ministerial Orders. The percentages do not include Adult Secondary Program students, or those students completing graduation through correspondence who are not registered in a public school.

The graduation rate, or six year Dogwood completion rate, is calculated by using the percentage of students who graduate within six years from the time they enrol in grade 8 and is adjusted for migration in and out of BC.

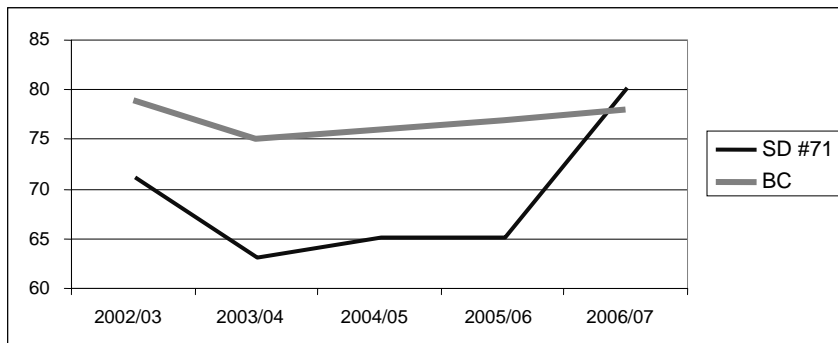
Figure : Dogwood Completion Rates for BC and Comox Valley School District #71



Source: BC Ministry of Education, District Reports 71 – District Data Summary 2002/03 – 2006/07, Graduation: Grade 12 Graduation Rates, and Student Statistics 2003/04 – 2007/08.

The Dogwood completion rate for School District #71 continues to decline, from 76% in 2002 to 71% in 2006, while the provincial average has risen from 78% in 2002 to 80% in 2006. The gap between the proportion of females and males graduating in the Comox Valley School District #71 has narrowed with 70% males graduating in 2006 compared to 72% females: both were still below the provincial average.

Figure : Percentage of Grade 12 Graduates Compared to Students Entering Grade 12



Source: BC Ministry of Education, District Reports 71 – District Data Summary 2002/03 – 2006/07, Graduation: Grade 12 Graduation Rates, and Student Statistics 2003/04 – 2007/08.

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The number of students graduating from grade 12 and those entering Grade 12 declined from 71% in 2002 to 65% in 2005, well below the provincial average of 77%. However, in 2006 the rate significantly increased to 80% and is now above the provincial average of 78%.

Related Indicators: Employment and Economy



6.3 Cost of Postsecondary Education

In 2005, Canada placed 22nd of 26 reporting countries in the share of public expenditures on post secondary education. At 55.1%, Canada's share was well below the OECD average of 73.1% and the EU average of 82.5%.¹⁵²

Undergraduate tuition fees increased 36.4% between 2000/01 and 2008/09. Since 1996/97, the rise in post secondary tuitions has exceeded the rise in the Consumer Price Index every academic year except 2005/06. Rates of increase vary across provinces because of their different tuition policies. The greatest increase has been in BC (93.8%).¹⁵³ Average graduate university tuition fees for full-time students in BC over the 2006/07 and 2007/08 periods increased by 17.4%. Other compulsory fees have also increased, up 14% in 2008 from 2006.¹⁵⁴

Students today are graduating with more debt. Under the Canada Student Loans Program, the total value of negotiated student loans in BC increased by 44.6% from 1996/97 to 2004/05.¹⁵⁵ Students with high levels of debt are less likely to complete their postsecondary education. Students with under \$1,000 of debt had a completion rate of 71%, while students with over \$10,000 of debt had a completion rate of only 34%.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵² Canadian Council on Learning, *Post-secondary Education in Canada: Meeting our needs?* (Ottawa: February 2009), Key Finding from the Report.

¹⁵³ Canadian Council on Learning, *Post-secondary Education in Canada: Meeting our needs?* (Ottawa: February 2009), p.73.

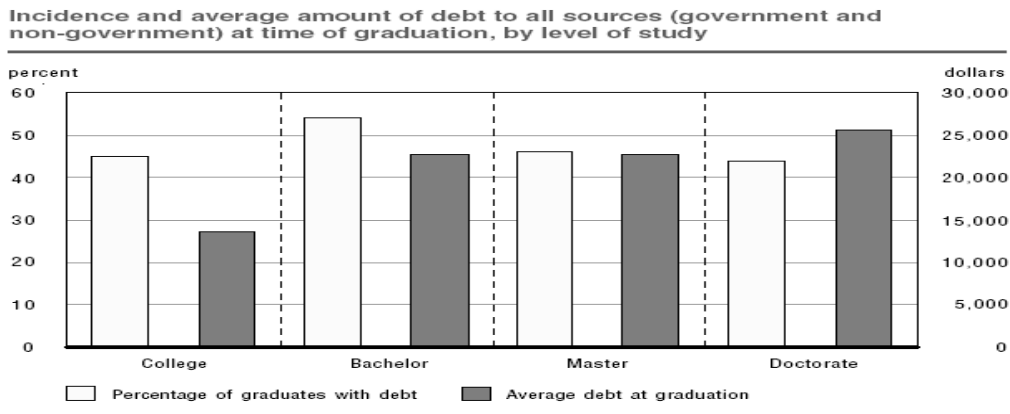
¹⁵⁴ Ibid, p.74.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, p.77.

¹⁵⁶ Lori McElroy, *Student Aid and University Persistence — Does Debt Matter?*, p.15. (The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2005).

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Figure : Percentage of students and amount of debt on graduation, all sources.

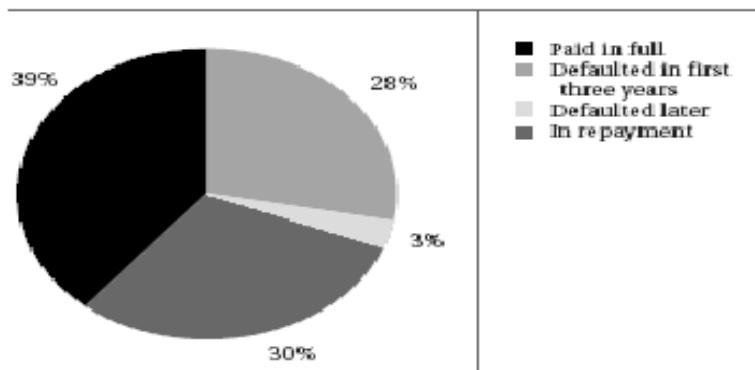


Source: Statistics Canada, National Graduates Survey (Class of 2005).

Source: Statistics Canada, *Graduating in Canada: Profile, Labour Market Outcomes and Student Debt of the Class of 2005*. Available at <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-595-m/2009074/c-g/c-g3.2-eng.htm>.

Between one-quarter and one-third of students with debt default during repayment.¹⁵⁷ In a 2005 report, UBC researcher Lori McElroy found that the average debt of graduates was \$17,135, considered a reasonable loan, even with interest added. However, graduates with the highest debts were not able to repay without undue hardship.¹⁵⁸

Figure : Status in September 2003 of Canada Student Loans Consolidated in 1994–95



Source: Kapsalis (2006).

Source: *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada – Third Edition* (The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2007), p.135.

¹⁵⁷ Joseph Berger, Anne Motte and Andrew Parkin, *The Price of Knowledge: Access and Student Finance in Canada – Third Edition* (The Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, 2007), p.127.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, p.v.

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About 45% of graduates with debts over \$25,000 had more difficulties repaying their loans. Over a quarter of graduates with medium sized debts reported difficulties. Difficulties are attributed to high debt service ratios: a crude monetary measure of financial burden expressed in percentages. Calculated as the ratio of debt payments to earned income, some graduates had higher ratios for different reasons, such as involuntary low income or voluntary high payments. A quarter of bachelor graduates with large government debt loads had debt-servicing ratios at or above 15%, followed by college graduates at 14%, masters at 13%, and doctorate graduates at 11%.¹⁵⁹

Related Indicators: Employment and Economy

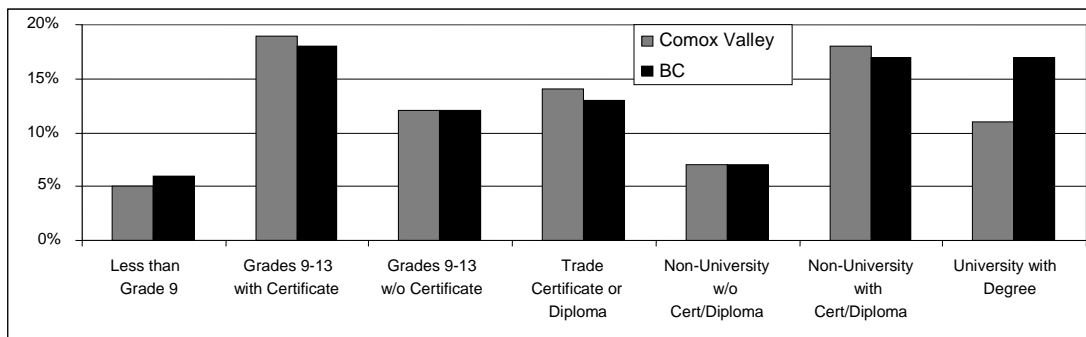


6.4 Education Levels Attained

Research indicates a direct relationship between educational attainment, socio-economic status and health. People with less than a grade 9 education tend to be dependent upon services provided by society, and often have a greater utilization of health services.

For most levels of schooling, the Comox Valley is keeping pace with provincial averages, and has remained relatively consistent since 2001.

Figure : Education Levels Attained as a Percentage of Total Population Over 19 Years.



Source: Invest Comox Valley, Comox Valley Statistical Profile: Infrastructure.

Census data shows that the number of University degree holders in the Comox Valley is relatively steady at 12% in 2001 and 11% in 2006, but falls significantly below the BC average of 17%.

Related Indicators: Early Development Instrument – Employment and Economy – Health

¹⁵⁹ Statistics Canada, 2009. Graduating in Canada: Profile, Labour Market Outcomes and Student Debt of the Class of 2005, Catalogue no. 81-595-M — No. 074.



6.5 Literacy¹⁶⁰

Fundamental literacy skills, including reading, writing, and mathematics, are essential for active learning, active citizenship, and active labour force participation. Increased literacy skills improve employment prospects and income, reduce dependence on social assistance, promote health, and reduce criminal offending.¹⁶¹ Literacy skills raise productivity, and are crucial for capturing and sustaining the knowledge advantage as the economy and labour market evolve. A one percent rise in adult literacy scores is associated with an eventual 2.5 % relative rise in labour productivity and 1.5% rise in GDP per head (\$18 billion).¹⁶²

But around 40% of adults in BC – and over 35% of working age people – do not have the literacy skills they need to achieve their goals, to function and thrive in the modern economy, and to develop their knowledge and potential.¹⁶³ Most vulnerable are senior citizens, immigrants, and Aboriginal Canadians.¹⁶⁴

Life long learning is a continuous process by which we all acquire the basic literacies necessary to better perform our roles as active citizens, effective parents and family members, productive workers, informed consumers and creative learners.¹⁶⁵ Literacy and learning begins *in utero* and extends through a person's life. Investments in the pre-natal to pre-school period of infants' lives is crucial to their development as healthier, more intelligent and productive youth and adults. Additionally, investments in parent education directly affect a child's success in school.¹⁶⁶ Intergenerational family literacy is where the cycle of learning begins, where the attitudes of elders about learning become the learning values of their children.

The Comox Valley Literacy Now Committee has written a Community Literacy Plan (July 2008) that highlights the strengths and challenges in the area of learning and literacy within the Comox Valley. Literacy Now is a community-based planning process

¹⁶⁰ Thanks to Danielle Hoogland, Comox Valley Literacy Now Coordinator, for writing this section.

¹⁶¹ Literacy BC. For more information see www.literacybc.ca

¹⁶² C.D. Howe Institute, Coulombe & Tremblay, 2005.

¹⁶³ Literacy BC. more information see www.literacybc.ca

¹⁶⁴ Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, Maxwell & Tremblay, 2007.

¹⁶⁵ Ron Faris, 2010 Legacies Now Community Literacy Planning Guide, pg. Vi – Appendix, 2007.

¹⁶⁶ Canadian Language and Literacy Research Network, Maxwell & Tremblay, 2007, p.22.

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designed to address local literacy needs. Throughout this process community members and organizations collaborate to build on existing literacy work and address important gaps¹⁶⁷.

Comox Valley Literacy Now Committee Objectives as outlined in the Comox Valley Literacy Plan (July 2008):

1. Build a collaborative learning community
2. Generate awareness and promote learning and literacy in the Comox Valley
3. Support new and existing community based workplace literacy initiatives
4. Continue to support and build the capacity of Family and Cultural Literacy services and initiatives
5. Identify the means to implement our action plan

The School District, the Aboriginal Education Council, North Island College, CALLS Adult Learning Centre, and the Vancouver Island Regional Library are organizations whose mandates include raising the literacy abilities of Comox Valley citizens.

The Comox Valley Adult Literacy and Learning Society offers four programs: Family Literacy (34 students 2008/09), English as a Second Language (26 students 2008/09), Adult Tutoring (75 students 2008/09), and Immigrant Settlement Services.

North Island College (NIC) Upgrading services offers Adult Basic Education, English as a Second Language (Beginner, Intermediate, Advanced, and College Preparatory), and the BC Adult Graduation Diploma program. Additionally, NIC Access Services supports students by making accommodations for learning or physical disabilities. Enrolment at NIC in Adult Basic Education was 534 students (2008/9). Enrolment for the English Language Services for the Adults (ELSA) program was 46 students (2008/9).

In addition, the Comox Valley International College offers several configurations of ESL courses and attracts students from all over the world. Vancouver Island Regional Library services are continually expanded and include story time programs, author readings, summer reading programs, literacy kits, children's literacy stations, and e-audio and e-books.



6.6 Public Library Usage

The Comox Valley has five Vancouver Island Regional Library (VIRL) branches: Courtenay, Comox, Cumberland, Union Bay and Hornby Island. The library provides the

¹⁶⁷ For more information and to download the community literacy plan go to www.cvliteracy.ca.

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community with access to a wide variety of informational, recreational, and independent learning materials, and services for people of all ages.

As of 2006, the Vancouver Island Regional Library collection system contains 1,394,347 catalogued items, over 3000 magazine, newspaper and database subscriptions, and uncatalogued items estimated at 338,750. Vancouver Island residents have access to all Vancouver Public Library holdings through interlibrary loans.

Table : Comox Valley Public Library Branches' Items

Year	Circulation	Reference	Program Attendance	Catalogued & Uncatalogued Items	Newspaper/ Magazine Subscriptions	Registered Borrowers
2002	684,780	32,936	2,953	1,315,592	3,621	185,790
2004	470,548	24,837	2,608	1,286,799	3,676	208,201
2006	697,395	22,932	4,356	1,394,397	3,879	217,927

Source: Annual Report 2006 Vancouver Island Regional Library, Table II.

Table : Comox Valley Public Library Branches' Collections

Year	Courtenay	Comox	Cumberland	Hornby Island	Union Bay	Totals
2000	62,533	34,290	22,406	12,001	6,462	137,692
2002	97,502	32,963	22,952	12,379	7,322	173,118
2004	103,324	30,637	24,039	11,888	7,965	177,853
2006	107,297	29,788	24,173	11,528	7,314	180,100

Source: Annual Report 2006 Vancouver Island Regional Library, Table IV.

Library circulation, items, and registered borrowers show an increase at most branches. Services are continually expanding and include story times, author readings, summer readings, literacy kits and shut-in services. Newer programs are AskAway Virtual Reference, Every Student a Library Card, and BC One Card. Visit the VIRL web site at <http://www.virl.bc.ca/> and look under "Library Resources" at the end of the sidebar.

North Island College announced the launch of its community borrower program in January 2009. Residents 16 years of age or older can get a free Community Library Card. Patrons can borrow up to five items in person from any of NIC's four libraries, located at the Campbell River, Courtenay, Port Alberni and Port Hardy campuses. Access does not include NIC's online databases and journals, and NIC's video/DVD collection because of licensing restrictions. Visit any campus library for additional information, or phone 1-800-715-0914, and ask for the Library. Visit the NIC library online at <http://library.nic.bc.ca>.



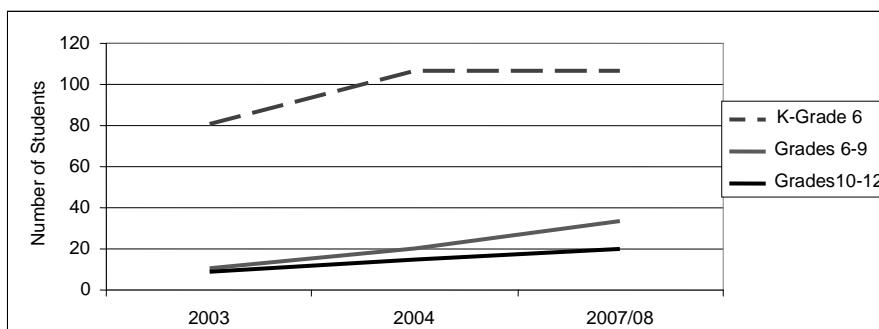
6.7 Francophone Programs

The Charter of Rights and Freedoms grants all Canadian citizens and landed immigrants residing in BC the right to educate their children in a francophone program, if they meet one of these following conditions: the first language learned and still understood is French, they received their primary school instruction in Canada in French (excluding French Immersion), or they have a child who has received or is receiving primary or secondary school instruction in Canada in French (excludes French Immersion).

Created in 1995, *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique* offers educational programs and services aimed at fostering the growth and cultural identity of the province's francophone learners. An active partner in the development of BC's francophone community, the Conseil has presently in its system, and distributed across 78 communities in the province, over 4,000 students and 39 schools, of which 21 are homogeneous schools.

Francophone education in Comox-Courtenay and across the province of British Columbia is expanding. The *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique* School District 93, is one of the few school districts in BC benefiting from a constant growth in its enrolments. The usual growth rate exceeds 4.5 to 5% a year. This growth is linked to the migration or immigration of francophone citizens (from Canada and around the world) to the Comox area and across the province.

Figure : Growth of Francophone Program Students in School District 93



Source: *Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique* School District 93.

In 1996, 87 students were in the francophone program in Comox. In only ten years, the program has doubled: the francophone programs in Comox had 163 students in

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September 2007.¹⁶⁸ Growth and expansion of francophone education in Comox and BC is expected to continue.



6.8 Early Development Instrument

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a province-wide assessment that measures the developmental health of five-year olds as they enter kindergarten. Research on early child development confirms that children with little or no access to environments that nurture their development will face more lifelong challenges in their health and well-being.¹⁶⁹ The EDI measures a child's development in five areas, or domains:

1. Physical health and well-being
2. Social competence
3. Emotional maturity
4. Language and cognitive development
5. Communication skills and general knowledge

A summary of the EDI results for School District #71, comparing the two waves of research from 2001 to 2004 (Wave 1) and 2005 to 2007 (Wave 2), list the following concerns¹⁷⁰:

- The Comox Valley is among the more vulnerable districts in the province and overall vulnerability has increased between Wave 1 and Wave 2.
- All domains of development had an increase in vulnerability.
- All but one area, Glacierview/Vanier, had increases in their vulnerability between Wave 1 and Wave 2.
- Four areas had more than 35% of children vulnerable on at least one domain of their development.
- South Courtenay had 60% of children within the vulnerable range.
- There were no neighbourhoods that had less than 20% of children vulnerable.

¹⁶⁸ Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, School District 93.

¹⁶⁹ Schroeder, J., Harvey, J., Razaz-Rahmati, N., Corless, G., Negreiros, J., Ford, L., Kershaw, P., Anderson, L., Wiens, M., Vaghri, Z., Stefanowicz, A., Irwin, L.G., Hertzman, C. (2009). *Creating communities for young children. A toolkit for change*, p 2. Vancouver, BC: Human Early Learning Partnership.

¹⁷⁰ Joanne Schroeder, Community Liaison Manager. *Mapping Early Child Development: Comox Valley (SCHOOL DISTRICT #71) Community Summary*, Fall 2007, p 6.

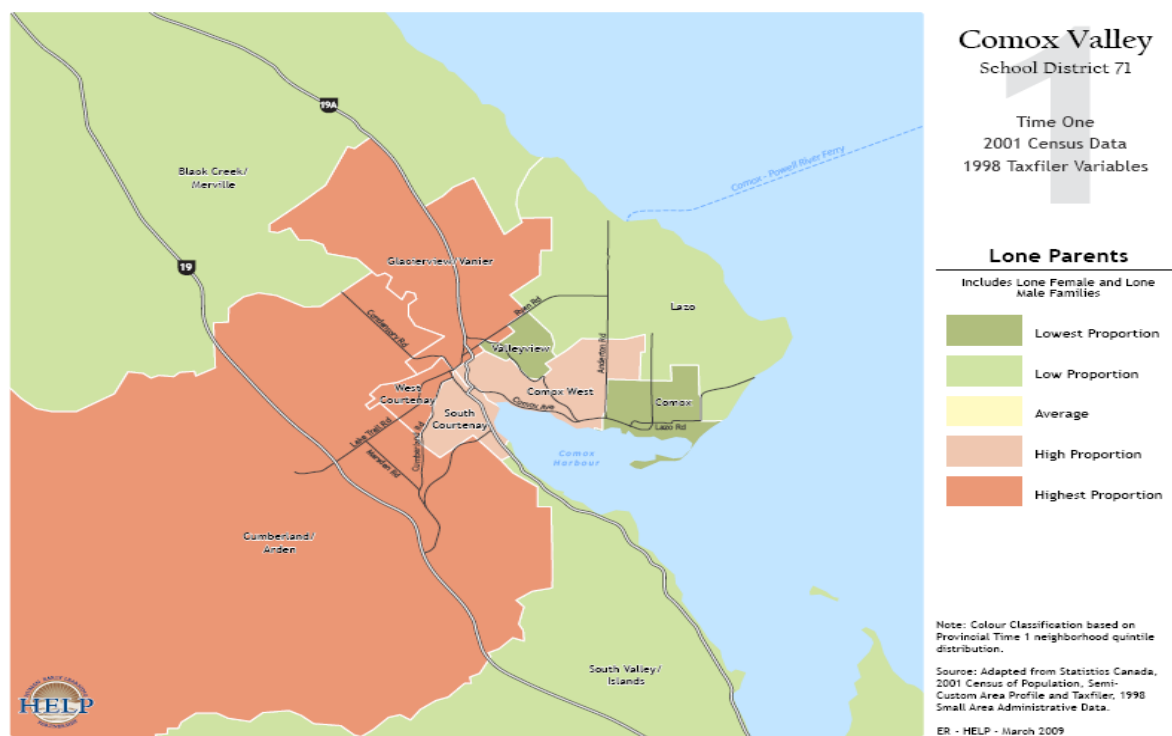
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- Both the largest increase and the highest proportion of vulnerability were found in the Social Competence domain.
- The lowest proportion of children vulnerable was in the Communication Skills and General Knowledge domain and the smallest increase between samples was in the Language and Cognitive Development domain.
- The results do indicate large disparity or difference between neighbourhoods, reflecting that children within the district have had disparate qualities of experience before school entry.

Social and economic disparities and socio-economic inequity affect children's developmental outcomes, also. The SES (Socio-Economic Status) Mapping Package for School District 71 reveals other factors in children's environment that may contribute to development vulnerability, such as family income, parental education, neighbourhood socio-economic differences, and access to quality child care.¹⁷¹

The 2001 and 2007 maps make it easy to see how neighbourhoods have changed in the Valley. For example, Figures 35 and 36 illustrate the distribution in lone parent families.

Figure : Lone Parent Families in School District 71, 2001.



Source: *Mapping Early Child Development: Comox Valley (SCHOOL DISTRICT #71) Community Summary, Fall 2007, p. 15.*

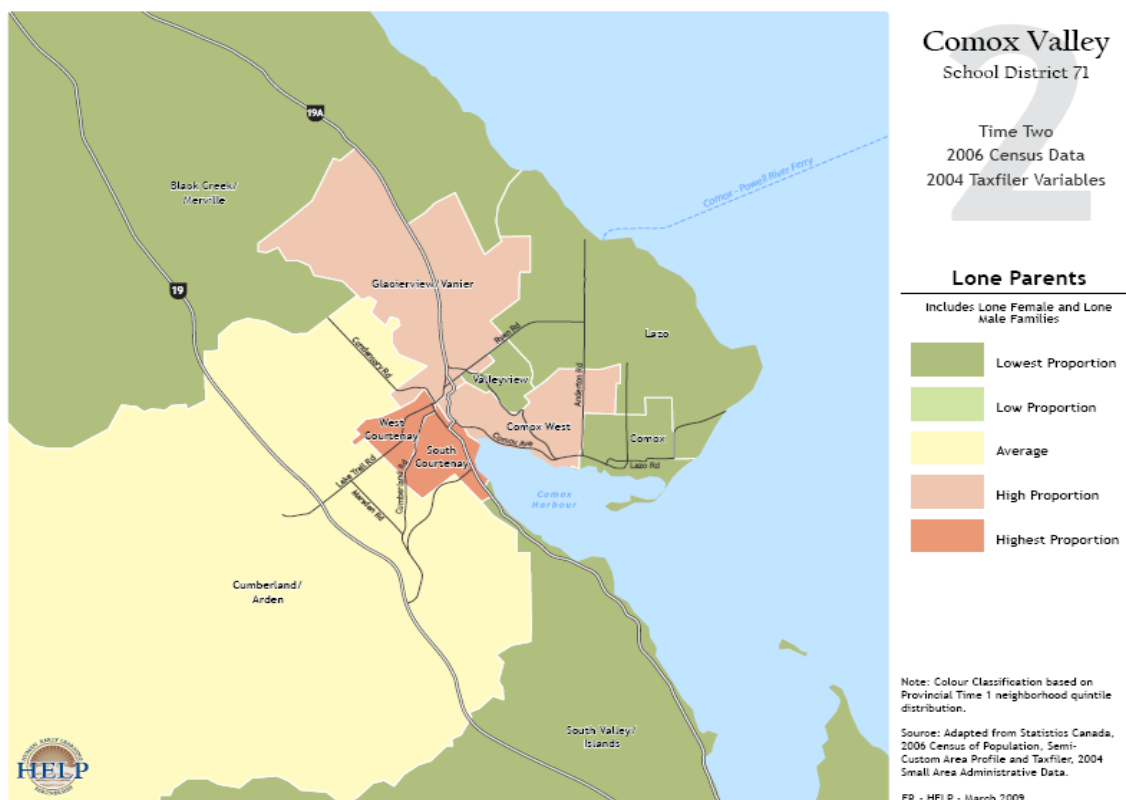
¹⁷¹ Emilia Ristaniemi, April 2009. *Mapping Early Child Development: Comox Valley Community Summary*, p 4. Vancouver, BC: Human Early Learning Partnership.

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In the 2001 period, most lone-parent families lived in Cumberland, Courtenay and Comox West. The lowest numbers of lone-parent families were in Comox and the Valleyview area. The rest of the Valley had an average distribution of lone-parent families. By 2006, that all changed dramatically.

In the map below, the bulk of lone-parent families shifted to West and South Courtenay, close to the downtown core. Comox West's proportion remained high, and the Glacierview/Vanier area dropped from the highest to a high ratio. Cumberland and area now have an average distribution, but all the other areas have joined Comox in the lowest range.

Figure : Lone Parent Families in School District 71, 2007.



Source: *Mapping Early Child Development: Comox Valley (SCHOOL DISTRICT #71) Community Summary, Fall 2007, p. 16.*

There are many reasons why lone-parent families choose to live in particular neighbourhoods: affordability, access to schools, access to daycare, access to work. Why there was a mass exodus could be attributed to lack of or a sudden loss of affordability, schools, daycare, and/or work. In essence, children's mental health and well being are more compromised than ever, particularly in lone-parent families. That is disturbing news in a community as resourceful as ours.