



# CO-OPS IN SCHOOLS

## 2015-2016 ANNUAL REPORT

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**Final Report Prepared for:**

**British Columbia Co-operative  
Association**

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**British Columbia  
Co-operative Association**  
BUILDING A CO-OPERATIVE ECONOMY

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2015, the BCCA set out to build a youth program to increase awareness of co-ops and credit unions, to connect our membership to youth and schools, and to bring co-ops into the curriculum. The program was designed to unite and mobilize the sector and change behaviour. In its inaugural year, the Co-ops in Schools (CIS) program achieved these goals and more.

***We transformed the thinking of high school and university students across the province through the intensive yearlong CIS program of events, activities, and projects.*** CIS participants will retain the concept of co-ops and credit unions forever, integrating it into their consumer choices and career plans, injecting it into conversations, raising their hands in class to include it in the discussion. Students have been introduced to the concept of co-ops and credit unions and are now ready to understand, build, and act based on their knowledge.

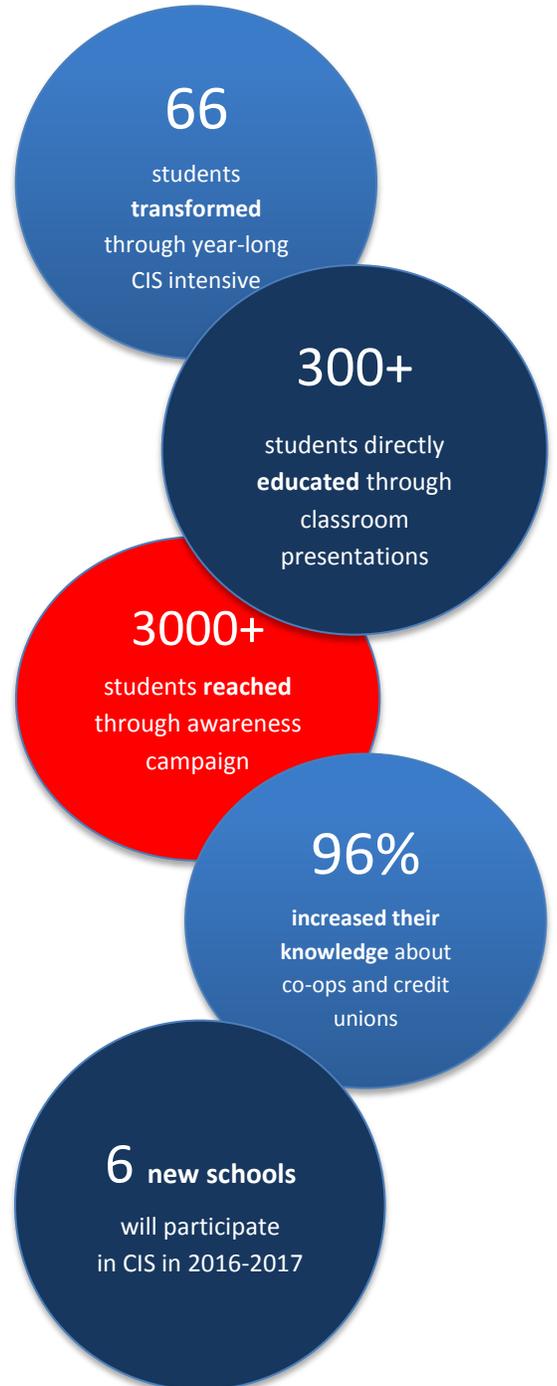
***We provided access to students, classrooms, and school districts that would otherwise not welcome individual co-ops and credit unions.*** Many schools and school districts vet incoming information and presenters to eliminate chances of marketing to their students. School officials clarify the non-profit status of the BCCA, the motives of our sponsors, and exactly who will be on the high school grounds.

***Twenty-two different co-operatives joined forces to contribute to the Co-ops in Schools program.*** This unprecedented co-operation among British Columbia co-operatives enables large and small enterprises to work to a common purpose of educating the next generation of co-operators. The program has a place for everyone to contribute, either through funding, people, or in-kind, and there is a space for all to bring their enterprise to the attention of young people in their community.

***We created a pool of new entrants into the co-operative economy.*** We've already seen evidence that several university students from CIS have applied to work in the sector and graduating high school students are asking to access the university CIS program. Many alumni stay connected with the BCCA, continuing the co-operative conversation and identifying themselves as part of this movement.

***Mentorship leaves an enduring impression on young people.*** Students are seeking support to transition from university to the working world. By providing objective advice and guidance to students in their professional development and by sharing stories of the often-imperfect paths that have nonetheless led each of us to some sort of success, we associate the co-op sector with the positive and re-assuring impact of mentorship.

***More schools and regions and co-ops want in***  
 New Region for 2016-17: Victoria  
 (Funded by Federated Co-operatives Ltd.)



New Schools for 2016-17: 4 high schools, 1 college (Langara), 1 university (UVic)

**AWARENESS**

CIS built awareness of the co-op sector and its impact on communities and the economy. Sixty-six high school and university students completed the full yearlong program of in-depth learning. Over 300 students were reached through in-class presentations, over 3,000 students attended career fairs where we were present and visible and

engaged in more than 200 individual conversations at our booth, and many thousands of students were reached with targeted email messages, electronic job postings at the universities, LinkedIn connections and more.

*"Thank you for bringing this amazing opportunity to us! We have all really enjoyed learning about co-ops and sharing our knowledge with the [high school] students. We've also all learned a ton from our mentors, and will recommend the program to the next round of UFV students!"*

*~ University of the Fraser Valley Team*

CIS provided education about the co-operative business model and principles, promoted co-ops and credit unions as solutions to consumer needs, and showcased our members' work by using them as examples. CIS highlighted to youth how co-ops address community development, sustainability challenges, and economic constraints.

Initial student baseline knowledge was low. Only 29% of university students in the program surveyed at the start had membership in any co-operative of any kind. Their understanding of credit unions was vague and often incorrect. "A credit union specializes in credits" was a typical flailing answer, while many others thought credit unions to be some sort of regulatory body, such as in this comment: "A credit union is an NGO acting as an umbrella company to oversee branch firms."

*"CIS has given students, who are otherwise unaware of the benefits of the co-operative enterprise model, a practical understanding of the triple bottom line through case analysis where students develop a hands-on approach to tackling real life business problems."*

*~ Deborah Zhang, Business & Computing Science Major, UBC*

*"Besides learning about how businesses operate in general and how co-ops operate in particular, students also learned communication and collaboration skills...I think the students that participated to the end got a very valuable learning experience unlike any in their classrooms."*

*~ Michelle Myers, Rick Hansen Secondary School Teacher*

By the end of the program, 96% of university student respondents expressed increased understanding of co-ops and 100% of university respondents would recommend the program to a friend, citing

reasons of increased co-op knowledge, personal growth, and the benefits of mentorship and networking.



**ACCESS**

As a non-profit representing the co-op sector, the BCCA was able to introduce the co-op message and its members into schools and school districts that otherwise restrict access. By offering desirable programming, such as mentorship and professional development to the university students and skill building activities and near-peer coaching to the high school students, we were welcomed by schools and students who likely wouldn't be exposed to the co-operative sector otherwise.

*"The Co-ops in Schools program provided an opportunity for our credit union to be involved within the school – generally something that we have not been able to accomplish – and with a clear objective of helping students learn about another business model. It is a positive step forward in helping schools understand that our motive is to assist in educating students about financial well-being and not, as some might feel, "sell" products and services."*

*~ Gene Creelman, Senior Vice President, Member and Community Engagement, Interior Savings Credit Union*



*"We are often approached by employers and organizations about ways for them to better connect with our students, however these requests are typically focused solely on increasing brand awareness. "Co-ops in Schools" is different in that it takes a truly development approach to increasing awareness of the co-operative movement - one that is consistent with a triple bottom line approach! From a university perspective, I love that participating students will receive formal training AND participate in interesting and authentic events AND be matched with high school students who they can mentor and support. It's hard to imagine any other program offering so much."*

*~ Tony Botelho, Manager, Career and Volunteer Services, SFU*

*"I was able to not only expand some of the skills I already had, but I was also able to learn new skills. I believe this is a great opportunity for university students looking to expand their knowledge and abilities and also learn more about co-ops. It is also a great opportunity for high school students who are ambitious, eager to learn and are being mentored by people close to their age. The tri-mentorship effect was great and it was definitely felt throughout."*

*~ Michelle Ndizeye, Sociology-Communications-French Major, UFV*



**UNITING & MOBILIZING THE SECTOR**

Eight co-ops joined to sponsor the CIS program in five regions across the province, also providing 34 mentors to work with the students. We heartily thank these essential partners, who contributed greatly to our successful program!

**Co-operative Housing Federation of BC  
Coast Capital Savings  
The Co-operators  
The CUMIS Group**

**Interior Savings  
OGO Car Share  
Prospera Credit Union  
Vancity**



An additional 14 co-ops participated through partnering for the Case Co-opetition, the Co-op Crawl, judging, donations, and prizes. These co-ops include:

BC Libraries Co-operative  
BC Tree Fruits  
Devco - FWC Development Co-operative  
Federated Co-operatives Ltd.  
Glen Valley Organic Farm Co-op  
Kootenay Boundary Food Producers  
Mountain Equipment Co-op (MEC)

Mount Lehman Credit Union  
Otter Co-op  
Realize Strategies  
Sustainable Solutions Group  
Terminal City Glass Co-op  
Victory Gardens Co-op  
Wood Shop Workers Co-op

## LEARNING

Feedback from our program evaluations and post-program reflection exercises yielded a few clear themes:

High school students LOVED the Co-op Crawl field trip, where they visited three co-ops in their region. 100% of them said it was their favourite part of the CIS program, as did several of the teachers. Next year, the Crawl will be an October kickoff event.

Some university students gave highest marks to the mentorship, whereas some found (often to their surprise) that they gained most through teaching the high school students. They were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about their experience and rated the program highly: 32% rating it “excellent,” 36% “very good,” 27% good and the remaining 5% had no answer.

Mentors were more measured in their responses but 96% of them still rated the program as either “good” or “very good.” The two regions that did not get a mentorship kickoff event at the start (Kelowna and Surrey) both noted that this was an impediment and expressed a need for that initial training session. Every region will have a mentor training session next year.

All participants hoped there would be tighter organization, which is not a surprising result from a pilot year. We are attending to that, setting dates ahead of time and incorporating our learning from this year into next year’s documentation and training.

## MENTORSHIP

100% of the high school student respondents indicated that they liked working with their university coaches. Their teachers also appreciated the bridging that such a relationship provided for these students as they prepared for their transition from high school to post-secondary studies. School officials frequently cited stronger ties between the high school and local university as an asset of CIS.

For the university students in the program, both mentorships – the one received from sector professionals and the one provided to high school students – were the most notable part of the program. Here are a few of their comments:

Why would you recommend this program to a friend?	One example of something you learned from your mentor?	Give one example of an idea from your mentor that became an action?
The opportunity to have a mentor is difficult to get and this program literally gives you a mentor to connect with!	Changes in a career are not a bad thing	Discussed “I don’t know what I don’t know!” So I shadowed workers.
It allows you to connect with an industry professional in a friendly, no pressure environment while gaining insight into co-operatives firsthand.	How to achieve a work-life balance	I confronted my team regarding conflict
	Time management skills	Ways of teaching co-op value
I took a lot from my mentor and teaching the students was great	She gave me tips to overcoming barriers of communication	Applied to the Vancity internship
I enjoyed talking to my mentor and learning from her advice	How to present my strengths	Résumé review, applied for co-op jobs

When a Carnegie Corporation Report asked young people how they would most like to spend their free time, the majority answered, *"Long talks with trusting and trustworthy adults who know a lot about the world and who like young people."*\* This method of supporting young people in their quest for growth – and doing so from a co-operative community structure – has great value in the long run, as these students reflect on who helped them get where they were going. If we help them get where they are going, it is more likely that the destination will include co-operatives.

## MOVING FORWARD

With one new region (Victoria), four more high schools (Burnaby Mountain Secondary, Hugh McRoberts Secondary in Richmond, Mount Douglas Secondary in Victoria, and North Surrey Secondary) and four additional post-secondary teams to partner with them, including from two new post-secondary partners (UVic and Langara College), we are expanding for next year. To support this, we have a summer student assisting now and will hire a part-time program assistant in the fall. We will implement the suggestions for improvement noted above and also continue to develop opportunities to keep past participants engaged in the co-op sector as well as explore new ways to further spread the co-op message.

## IMPACT

The 2016 BC Co-operative Sector Labour Market Environmental Scan points out the need for the co-op sector to educate the public about the co-op value proposition and how their organizations differ from other businesses, given the growing interest in values-based employment. This also holds true for values-based consumer decisions. The Deloitte Millennial Survey of 2016 warns that this growing segment of the workforce demands that their employment have purpose beyond profit and that employers unable to rise to this loyalty challenge will suffer as they begin to compete for new workers. Co-ops are well situated to answer that demand, to attract young staff and consumers who want to work and shop in a values-based environment, who want to support their communities, and who want to work and shop alongside people with a shared world-view. The co-op sector must get the message out to the next generation that co-ops and credit unions provide what they seek.

One of the three recommendations that came out of the major 2016 BC Co-operative Sector Labour Market Environmental Scan was:

*Post-secondary institutions and others need to develop more programming that develops workers directly for the co-op sector and should introduce and discuss the co-op model alongside other forms of enterprise in high schools, universities, and colleges.*

Through CIS, the BCCA has already taken this challenge head-on. Thanks to the support of our sponsors, the partnership of our members, and the BCCA's belief in an audacious vision, our reach out to students and into the BC education sector has grown further than anyone could have predicted a mere year ago. We have developed a unique niche in the growing space of experiential learning and university-community collaboration. Our innovative program brings co-operative enterprise into high schools, universities, and colleges, where we are developing a new generation of co-op champions. With the continued support of the co-operative community, we have only just begun.

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\* A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours, 1992