

## Overview of Independent Schools in British Columbia

### HISTORY

The first privately run school in British Columbia, open to the public, was founded in 1858.

Prior to 1977, independent schools were unregulated and received no grants. From the early 1950's schools were able to receive government-approved textbooks free of charge.

From 1977 on access to partial funding was provided to qualifying schools only.

From 1977 to 1989, schools that did not qualify for funding were unregulated.

In 1989, following the Report of the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education, a revamped *Independent School Act* came into being, which required the regulation of all independent schools, funded and non-funded.

The Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools is responsible for the administration of the *Independent School Act* (ISA), classification and funding of independent schools, home schooling, as well as certification of BC educational programs offered by offshore schools.

The Office functions as the regulatory agency of Government.

### CLASSIFICATION

In 1989, the *Independent School Act*, and later amendments, provides for the following classification of British Columbia independent schools:

#### **Group 1 schools**

Group 1 schools receive 50% of their local school district's per student operating grant on a per FTE student basis. They employ BC certified teachers, have educational programs consistent with ministerial orders, provide a program that meets the learning outcomes of the British Columbia curriculum, meet various administrative requirements, maintain adequate educational facilities, and comply with municipal and regional district codes. There are currently 54,092 students enrolled in 255 Group 1 schools. (These figures include Distributed Learning (DL) Schools. There are currently 5,631.31 students enrolled in 13 DL schools).

#### **Group 2 schools**

Group 2 schools meet the same requirements as Group 1 schools, and receive per-student operating grants at the 35% level, because the school's per-student operating costs exceed those of the local school district. There are currently 14,134 students enrolled in 64 Group 2 schools.

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**Distributed Learning schools**

Distributed Learning schools may be a Group 1 or 2 school and are required to meet the same criteria listed above.

**Group 3 schools**

Group 3 schools receive no funding and are not required to employ BC certified teachers or have educational programs consistent with ministerial orders. They must maintain facilities that meet all municipal and regional district codes. There are currently 632 students enrolled in 20 Group 3 schools.

**Group 4 schools**

Group 4 schools are non-funded schools that cater mainly to non-provincial students. They meet the same educational program requirements as Group 1, their graduates are eligible to receive the BC Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood) if all teachers are BC certified, and these schools must be bonded. There are currently 1,055 students enrolled in 12 Group 4 schools.

**SUMMARY OF STATISTICS - 2008/2009 School Year**

ENROLMENTS

Average annual enrolment growth over the last five years is 2%.

Independent schools enroll approximately 12% of BC's K-12 population.

**Headcount** enrolment by Group:

Group 1* - funded at 50% of local school district's per student operating grant (including DL FTEs funded at 50% of local school district's per student operating grant)	54,092
Group 2* - funded at 35% of local school district's per student operating grant	14,134
Group 3 - not funded	632
Group 4 - not funded and bonded	<u>1,055</u>
<b>Total headcount:</b>	<b>69,913</b>

\* (Group 1 and 2 schools may have a dual classification (1/3 or 2/3). Students enrolled in grades for which a group 3 classification is assigned do not receive funding but are included in the Group 1 and 2 headcount totals above)

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**NUMBER OF SCHOOLS**

Group 1 (includes 13 DL schools)	255
Group 2	64
Group 3	20
Group 4	12
<b>Total school count:</b>	<b>351</b>

**FUNDING 2008/09 School Year**

The breakdown below represents independent school funding of \$243.3 million for the 2008/09 school year based on September 30 enrolment.

- \$200.7 million in per student operating grants to 319 Group 1 and 2 schools
- \$16.4 million in operating grants to 13 DL schools
- \$25.4 million in special education grants to qualifying students in Group 1, 2 & DL schools
- \$.8 million in homeschooling registration grants to Group 1, 2 & DL schools for 2,464 registered homeschoolers. (Independent schools registered 2,464 of the total 2,744 homeschooled students in BC)

To educate the 69,913 independent school students in the public system would cost \$531 million in operating grants to public school districts (based on the average 2008/09 school district per student operating grant of \$7,595). This is 275 million more than the total current operating grants allocated to independent schools.

**DIVERSITY**

Diverse communities operate independent schools

Associate Member Group (AMG)*	20,821
Association of Christian Schools International –BC (ACSIBC)	8,930
Catholic Independent Schools (CIS)	18,699
Independent Schools Association (ISA)	11,726
Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia (SCSBC)	9,737
Total <u>funded and non-funded</u> headcount:	<b>69,913</b>

(schools are self identified thru the Federation of Independent Schools Association (FISA) membership)

\* Associate Member Group refers to all non-aligned independent schools, these include First Nations, parochial Christian Church Schools, Jewish, Mennonite, Montessori, Muslim, Seventh-day Adventist, Secular, Sikh, Special Education, Waldorf, etc.

## RIGHTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The *Independent School Act* balances an independent school authority's autonomy with provincial standards the independent school is required to meet. Provincial requirements establish a framework within which independent schools have freedom to operate. The greater the degree of certification and funding provided by the Ministry, the greater the requirements that the school must meet.

For example, independent schools have freedom to address the curriculum from their own religious, cultural, philosophical or pedagogical perspectives, but they are bound by section 1 of the Schedule of the *ISA*, subsection 1(a) which reads:

*"Before issuing or renewing a certificate of group 1, group 2, group 3 or group 4 classification to an authority the inspector must be satisfied that*

- (a) no program is in existence or proposed at the independent school that would, in theory or in practice, promote or foster doctrines of*
- (i) racial or ethnic superiority or persecution*
  - (ii) religious intolerance or persecution*
  - (iii) social change through violent action, or*
  - (iv) sedition."*

Independent schools have freedom to approach the curriculum from their own perspectives but the programs of Group 1, 2 and 4 certified schools must meet the specified learning outcomes of the British Columbia curriculum for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies and French (or another choice of mandatory second language) from Kindergarten - Grade 9. In Grades 10 - 12 subjects that contribute to British Columbia Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood), must meet the learning outcomes of the British Columbia curriculum (see Ministerial Order 302/04 Graduation Program Order and the Educational Standards Order).

Independent schools may employ teachers who reflect their schools' various perspectives, but all teachers in certified independent schools must be British Columbia - certified (*ISA*, Schedule sections 3(1)(d) and 4, *ISA*, section 11(2)), and employment practices must be in compliance with the *Employment Standards Act*. In hiring of staff, or admission of students, independent schools may grant preferences to teachers and students whose religious affiliation matches those of the school (*Human Rights Code* - section 41).

Independent schools may purchase property and construct buildings to meet their specific needs, but the school must be in compliance with all provincial and municipal codes and regulations (*ISA* Schedule, section 1).

Group 1 and 2 independent schools receive 50 % or 35 % of the school district's per-pupil operating grant (*Independent School Regulation 4*). Any additional costs to deliver programs, beyond the grant amount, are the responsibility of the authority and are generally raised through tuition and donations.

## CHOICE IN EDUCATION

Government strongly supports a public system of education that provides a publicly funded quality education for all. In a democratic society, however, parents have a right to choose from various educational alternatives for the education of their children, such as distributed learning, homeschooling and independent schools.

- Partial funding of independent schools recognizes the contributions these schools have made to the education of children in our province. It also impacts tuition fees set by authorities, thereby increasing options for more parents to select schools of their choice. These choices often reflect the goals, educational pedagogy, culture/religion and values parents desire for their child(ren).
- Parents are increasingly demanding more choices regarding their children's education. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), cosigned by Canada, states: *"Parents have the prior right to choose the kinds of education that shall be given to their children."* First Protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights, co-signed by Canada states: *"No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure that such education and teaching is in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions."*
- The Sullivan Royal Commission concluded that, *"We therefore deem it proper that non-public schools should continue to receive provincial financial assistance, such aid we believe to be a normal tangible manifestation of the freedom of thought, belief, opinion, and expression guaranteed by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. To assume otherwise would be to deny accommodation of social diversity and multiculturalism, the recognition of individual differences and the rights of parents to participate in educational choice - all principles which remain fundamental parts of the democratic system we hold dear."*