

HISTORY

The first privately run school in B.C. open to the public was founded in 1858.

Prior to 1977, independent schools were unregulated and received no grants, though from the early 1950s they could receive free government-approved textbooks.

From 1977, access to partial funding was provided to qualifying schools.

From 1977 to 1989, those that did not qualify went unregulated.

Since 1989, following the Report of the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education, an updated Independent School Act (ISA) requires the regulation of all independent schools, funded and non-funded.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL CLASSIFICATIONS

After 1989, and later amendments, the ISA offers these classifications:

Group 1 schools — Group 1 schools receive 50 percent of their local boards of education per student operating grant on a per FTE student basis. They employ B.C.-certified teachers, have educational programs consistent with ministerial orders, provide a program that meets the learning outcomes of the B.C. curriculum, meet various administrative requirements, maintain adequate educational facilities, and comply with municipal and regional district codes. There are currently 56,062 students enrolled in 249 Group 1 schools. These figures include 6,815 FTEs enrolled in 12 distributed learning (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 percent level, because the school's per-student operating costs exceed the ministry grants paid to the local boards of education. There are currently 14,352 students enrolled in 67 Group 2 schools. These figures include 9.75 FTEs enrolled in 2 distributed learning (DL) schools.

Distributed Learning schools — Distributed Learning schools may be a Group 1 or 2 school and are required to meet the same criteria listed above. Under section 8.1 of the ISA, distributed learning may only be offered with the prior agreement of the Minister.

Group 3 schools — Group 3 schools receive no funding and are not required to employ B.C.-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 539 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 and their graduates are eligible to receive the B.C. Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood) if all teachers are B.C. certified. These schools must be bonded. There are currently 1,061 students enrolled in 11 Group 4 schools.

ENROLMENT SUMMARY: 2010/2011 SCHOOL YEAR

Independent School System Enrolments:

Total enrolment growth over the last five years	8.7%
Enrolment growth for 2010/11	1.85%
Percentage of B.C.'s total K-12 population enrolled in independent schools	11%

Headcount Enrolment by Group:

Group 1 ¹ - funded at 50% of local school district's per student operating grant, including distributed learning independent schools	56,062
Group 2 - funded at 35% of local district's per student operating grant	14,352
Group 3 - not funded	539
Group 4 - not funded and bonded	1,061
Total headcount:	72,014

Number of Schools by Group:

Group 1 (includes 12 DL schools)	249
Group 2 (includes 2 DL schools)	67
Group 3	20
Group 4	11

Total school count: 347

Diversity in the Independent School System:

Schools are self-identified through the Federation of Independent Schools Association (FISA) membership, and represent diverse communities within the independent schools system. Independent schools can be based on faith (Catholic, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Mennonite, Seventh-Day Adventist, etc.), educational philosophy (Waldorf, Montessori), educational offerings (International Baccalaureate, university preparation), or specific programs or focus (ecological/environmental focus, equestrian programs); and, lastly, independent schools include some parent-led community schools.

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.

FUNDING: 2010/11 SCHOOL YEAR

The breakdown below represents independent school funding budget of \$258 million for the 2010/11 school year based on September 30 enrolment:

Per student operating grants to 318 Group 1 and 2 schools	\$204 million
Operating grants to 12 DL schools	\$22 million
Special education grants to Group 1, 2 & DL schools	\$32 million
Home schooling registration grants to Group 1, 2 & DL schools ²	\$.3 million

Total independent school funding 2010/11: \$258 million

To educate the 72,014 independent school students in the public system would cost \$564 million in operating grants to public school districts (based on the average 2010/11 school district per student operating grant of \$7,833) plus capital costs. This is \$306 million more than the total current operating grants allocated to independent schools.

Any increases in operational funding to independent schools are due to:

- modest increases in independent school enrolment. Over the past five years, independent school enrolment increased by 5,779 students, a total growth of 8.7 percent;
- increases in public school district per FTE student operating grant amounts (because of enrolment decline) which results in increases to independent schools;
- expansion of the independent school distributed learning program.

SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

Supplementary special education grants are provided to schools so that students with special needs receive a quality education. Total special education grants for Group 1 and 2 independent schools in 2010/11 school year are budgeted at \$32,000,000.

Increases in special education grants over the past several years are primarily due to:

- An overall increase in enrolment to independent schools;
- The opportunity initiated in 2006 for funded independent schools to apply in mid-year for special education funds to cover costs for special needs students new to the school or recently diagnosed with a fundable special needs designation;
- Expansion of the criteria for Autism in July 2006 to include Autism Spectrum Disorder;

² Independent schools registered 2,057 of the total 2,244 homeschooled students in British Columbia.

- The Fall 2007 expansion of the eligibility criteria for Physically Disabled/Chronic Health Impairments funding category to encompass Complex Developmental Behavioural Conditions, which include fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD);
- March 2010 increases to the grant amounts for special needs FTEs to assist public school boards of education and independent school authorities in meeting the needs of their special needs students.

RIGHTS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The ISA 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 all independent schools 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 B.C. Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood) must meet the learning outcomes of the B.C. 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 Group 1, 2 and 4 independent schools must be B.C. certified (ISA Schedule, sections 3(1)(d) & 4; and ISA, section 11(2)), and employment practices must be in compliance with the Employment Standards Act. In hiring staff or admitting 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 an amount equal to 50 percent or 35 percent of the local board of education's per-pupil operating grant (Independent School Regulation, section 4). Any additional costs to deliver programs, beyond the grant amount, may be covered by tuition and donation.

CHOICE IN EDUCATION

Government strongly supports a public system of education that provides a publicly funded quality education for all. 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), co-signed 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.”