

Parent Involvement

- How are parents informed of student progress, both formally and informally?
- Are families encouraged to participate in school activities?
- Is there a strong, positive relationship between staff and the Parent Advisory Council (PAC)?
- Is information readily available about the School Planning Council?
- How does the school communicate with families (e.g., newsletters, phone calls, school web site, feedback from parents)?

Practical Considerations

- Is before- and after-school care nearby?
- Is it convenient to get to the school? Is there a school bus service?
- What is the school calendar? Schools can now provide school holidays for different periods of time. Is recess offered? How long is lunch hour? When do classes start and end?
- When is the deadline for registering? In many districts it is early spring. What are the catchment rules for the school?²

What is the School's Identity?

- Are there ways in which this school is unique?
- What are the sources of school pride and inspiration?

Use as many sources of information as possible to get the best understanding of a school.

More information is available at your local school district. Contact information for all B.C. school districts can be found on the AchieveBC web site at: www.AchieveBC.ca

How is the School Performing?

There are many ways of finding out about a school's performance. You can gather information by:

- contacting the school, the district or a trustee for current information or at the school visit
- talking with other parents, including the Parent Advisory Council (PAC)
- looking at performance information on school, district, AchieveBC (www.AchieveBC.ca) and Ministry of Education web sites. The Ministry:
 - reports on student performance by school and district in Grades 4, 7 and 10 in reading, writing and arithmetic in reports called "Foundation Skills Assessment"
 - conducts satisfaction surveys, and
 - collects information on provincial examinations and scholarships.



BRITISH
COLUMBIA
Ministry of Education



BC Confederation of
Parent Advisory Councils



British Columbia
School Trustees Association



Choosing a School in British Columbia A Checklist for Parents



What kind of school do you
want for your child?

² Government has amended the *School Act* to require school boards to establish catchment areas around schools in their districts. For additional information on catchment rules please discuss with the school and/or district.

Choosing a School

As a parent you want the best education for your child. You may also want to choose a school or program because of your child's specific learning needs or interests.

The Government of British Columbia has responded to parents' demand for more choice. In addition to existing choices within public schools, independent schools and homeschooling, recent changes to the *School Act* and funding now support school districts in offering more educational choices in the public K-12 education system.

As of September 2003, students can now attend any school in the province where there is space. That means students can attend a school in their "home" district or in any other district.

Many parents choose a local neighbourhood school for their child:

- it is convenient, and
- school friends are close by.

When considering a neighbourhood school or another school for your child, you have the right to ask questions about those schools and find out more information.

What Are the Choices?

All school districts offer some choices and most districts offer a number of choices, such as: traditional and alternative schools, Aboriginal education, French immersion, schools with a fine arts or athletic focus, and distance electronic learning where students can learn at home.

Researching a School

How do you find out about the choices available?

There are many ways of finding out more information about the schools that interest you:

- Contact the school, the district or a trustee for current information about schools.
- Districts may also share information through: web sites, brochures, advertisements in local publications and education fairs.
- Talk to other parents, friends, co-workers, neighbours, community members and the Parent Advisory Council (PAC).

You can use the checklist below as a starting point for exploring choice options for your child.

A School Visit

One of the most important things a parent can do is to visit the schools you are considering.

You will be welcomed. Staff want to share their enthusiasm and knowledge about their school and its programs, and can accommodate parents in a variety of ways including information sessions at the school or scheduled visits.¹

When you visit the school, consider the following:

- Do you feel comfortable in the school and in the classroom?
- Does the principal welcome parents?
- Do you feel that staff and students are comfortable with each other and respect one another?
- Does the school display recent samples of students' work?

Other considerations include:

The School's Philosophy and Approach

- What is the school's approach to education?
- Does the school support your child's learning style?
- What is the school plan and what are the school's specific goals for student achievement?
- What methods does the school use to teach students about safety and respect for each other?
- What are the school's rules and expectations? What is the code of conduct?
- What is the school's policy regarding homework? Are there strategies to help families support learning at home? What assistance is available for students who need extra help?
- How are children encouraged to have a healthy lifestyle?
- What programs are offered for students with a particular interest?

School Resources

- What extracurricular activities are available?
- Does the school have links with community organizations and businesses? Support from these groups?
- Is the library well-stocked? Is it inviting?
- Are computers used in the school? Is this important?
- Is the school well-maintained?

¹Please call the school for an appointment.