

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.

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.

The Office of the Inspector of Independent Schools is responsible for the administration of the *ISA*, classification and funding of independent schools, home schooling, as well as certification of B.C. educational programs offered by authorities of offshore schools.

The Office functions as the regulatory agency of Government.

INDEPENDENT SCHOOL CLASSIFICATIONS

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

Group 1 schools

Group 1 schools receive 50% 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 British Columbia curriculum, meet various administrative requirements, maintain adequate educational facilities, and comply with municipal and regional district codes. There are currently 54,901 students enrolled in 252 Group 1 schools. These figures include 6335 students 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% level, because the school's per-student operating costs exceed the ministry grants paid to the local boards of education. There are currently 14,317 students enrolled in 66 Group 2 schools.

Distributed Learning schools

Distributed Learning (DL) 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 544 students enrolled in 19 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 B.C. Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood) if all teachers are B.C. certified, and these schools must be bonded. There are currently 943 students enrolled in 10 Group 4 schools.

ENROLMENT SUMMARY: 2009/2010 SCHOOL YEAR

Independent School System Enrolments:

Average annual enrolment growth over the last five years	1.1%
Average annual enrolment growth for 2009/10	1.7%
Percentage of B.C.'s K-12 population enrolled in independent schools	12%

Headcount Enrolment by Group:

Group 1 ¹ - funded at 50% of local school district's per student operating grant, including distributed learning independent schools	54,901
Group 2 - funded at 35% of local district's per student operating grant	14,317
Group 3 - not funded	544
Group 4 - not funded and bonded	943

Total headcount: 70,705

Number of Schools by Group:

Group 1 (includes 13 DL schools)	252
Group 2	66
Group 3	19
Group 4	10

Total school count: 347

¹ 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.

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:

FISA Membership Group	2009/10 Enrollments
Association of Christian Schools International – BC (ACSIBC)	8,930
Catholic Independent Schools (CIS)	20,517
Independent Schools Association (ISA)	12,221
Society of Christian Schools in British Columbia (SCSBC)	9,416
Total <u>funded and non-funded</u> headcount:	70,705

FUNDING: 2009/10 SCHOOL YEAR

The breakdown below represents independent school funding of \$249 million for the 2009/10 school year based on September 30 enrolment:

Per student operating grants to 318 Group 1 and 2 schools	\$202 million
Operating grants to 12 DL schools	\$18.3 million
Special education grants to Group 1, 2 & DL schools	\$29 million
Home schooling registration grants to Group 1, 2 & DL schools ²	\$0.4 million
Total independent school funding 2009/10:	\$250 million

To educate the 70,705 independent school students in the public system would cost \$548 million in operating grants to public school districts (based on the average 2009/10 school district per student operating grant of \$7,759) plus capital costs. This is \$301 million more than the total current operating grants allocated to independent schools.

Any increases in funding to independent schools are due to:

- modest increases in independent school enrolment. Over the past five years, independent school enrolment has averaged an increase of .98% annually;
- increases in public school district per FTE student operating grant amounts which results in increases to independent schools;
- expansion of the independent school distributed learning program.

² Independent schools registered 2,250 of the total 2,486 homeschooled students in British Columbia.
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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 2009/10 school year are estimated at \$29,000,000.

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;
- 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).

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 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 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% or 35% of the school district'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), 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."*