



# PART 1

## How the School System Works

### KEY QUESTIONS

- How is the school system governed? What are the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry of Education, school districts, and schools?
- How is the school system funded?
- How are grades and schools organized in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K–12) system?
- How is the school year organized?
- Who determines what students are taught?

## GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

In Canada, education is governed at the provincial level. Like most public and private organizations, the British Columbia school system is based on a hierarchy:

- At the top is the Ministry of Education, led by the Minister of Education and senior ministry officials.
- Below the Ministry of Education are the school district boards of education (usually called *school boards*), headed by locally elected school trustees. Boards of education are headed by superintendents.
- Schools operate under the direction of the school boards and are usually led by a principal, with input from a Parent Advisory Council (PAC).

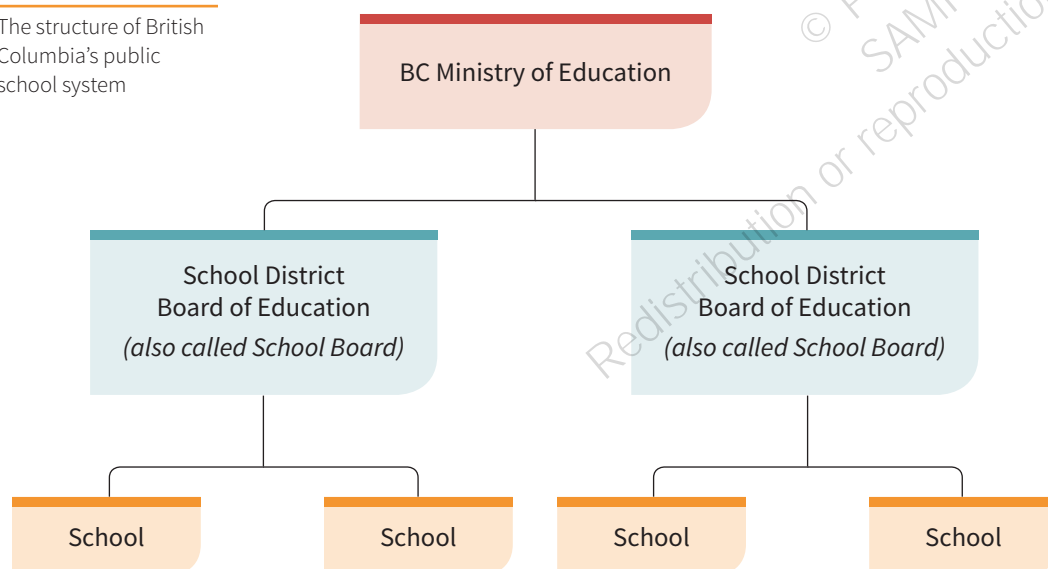
There are variations to the governance structures within school districts and schools. The following pages describe the laws, regulations, and policies under which all of British Columbia's public schools must operate.

### Ministry of Education



The BC Ministry of Education serves two functions: political and professional-educational.

The structure of British Columbia's public school system



### Political Functions

The **Ministry of Education** is headed by the Minister of Education, who is a member of the cabinet of the government of British Columbia and an elected member of the legislative assembly. He or she is responsible for

- ensuring that the government's education platform is implemented
- the management, updating, and revision of legislation that governs schools throughout the province
- aligning political promises and ideology with law outlined in British Columbia's *Manual of School Law*

Included in the Manual of School Law are four pieces of legislation:

- **School Act:** the rules by which the entire system is run
- **Teachers Act:** the rules concerning certifying and regulating teachers
- **Independent School Act:** the rules that govern how independent schools work
- **First Nations Education Act:** the rules that recognize the rights of First Nations peoples over education in their traditional territories

### Professional-Educational Functions

The Ministry of Education's professional-educational staff works under the direction of the Minister of Education, and is responsible for the overall administration of education throughout British Columbia. The most senior unelected ministry official is the Deputy Minister of Education, who leads the ministry staff. Among other duties, the staff has responsibility for overseeing

- required curriculum and program delivery
- required examinations and marking
- graduation from high school and certification
- assessment and evaluation of student learning
- information technology in school programs
- management of student and school data
- strategic projects, such as improving environmental footprints and career program initiatives
- teacher qualification and certification (administered through the **Teacher Regulation Branch** of the Ministry of Education)

**Ministry of Education:** the body designated by the provincial government to oversee K–12 education

**Teacher Regulation Branch (TRB):** the body of the Ministry of Education that governs teacher certification and discipline



## Board of Education



**school district:** a geographical area, as defined by the *School Act*

**board of education:** a board of school trustees that oversees the district's public schools; usually called a school board

Public schools across the province are organized into **school districts**, usually grouped by city or region. Districts are directed by **boards of education** (usually called *school boards*) made up of school trustees. School trustees are, by law, elected to a three-year term during the November municipal elections held every three years. There are currently 60 school districts in British Columbia.

Depending on the school district, a trustee may represent a civic political party or a particular region of a rural school district that is geographically large. For example, school trustees in School District No. 39 (Vancouver) represent political parties, while School District No. 78 (Fraser-Cascade) has trustee representation from the communities of Agassiz, Hope, Harrison Hot Springs, and Boston Bar, guaranteeing each town in the district representation on the board.



Burnaby Central Secondary School is in School District No. 41 (Burnaby).

## Responsibilities

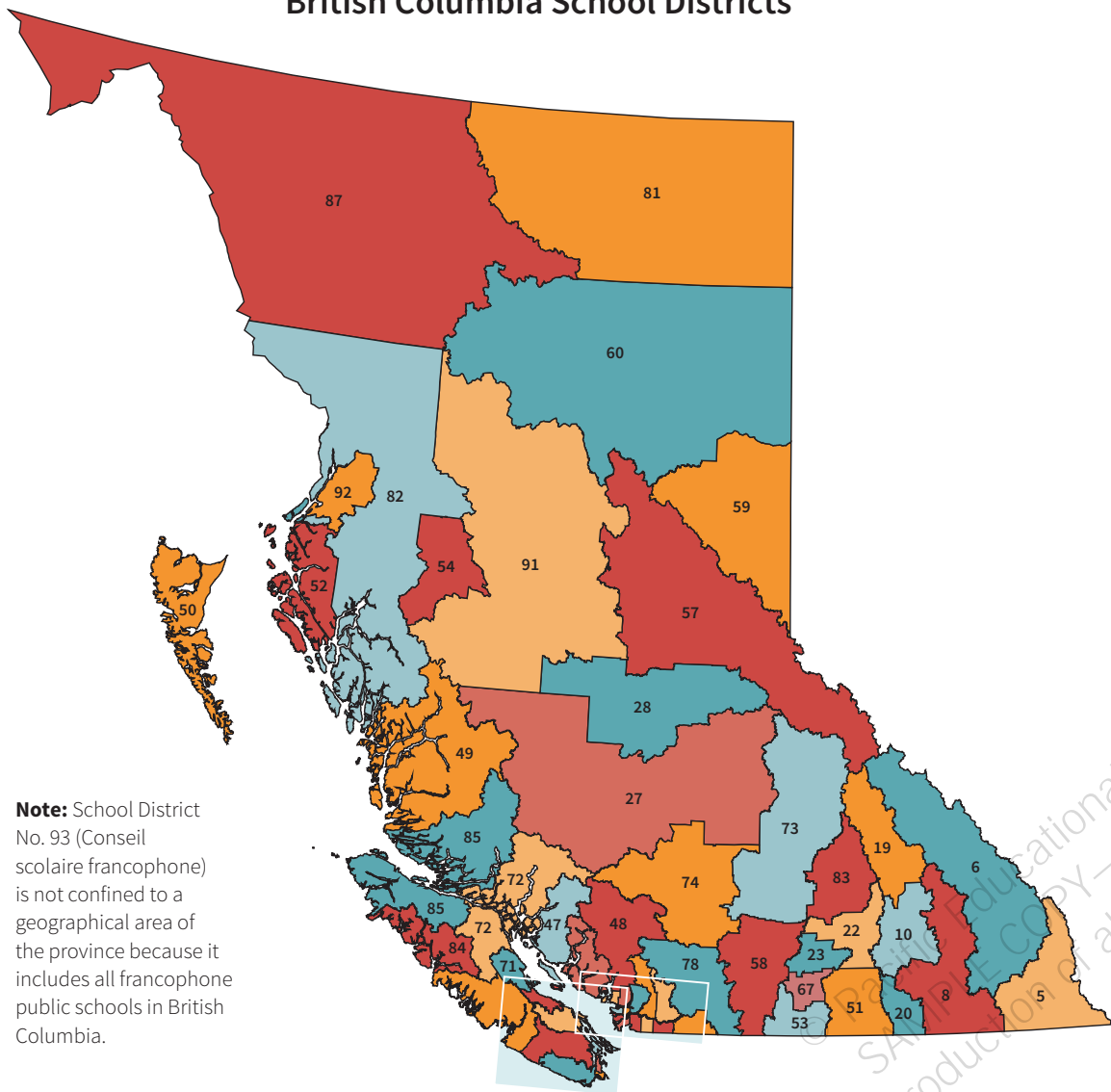
The school board sets the overall direction of the school district, including any local initiatives or policies. Decisions are made by vote. The structure of school districts mirrors the political/professional-educational model of the Ministry of Education. Trustees are the political wing and control governance and policy. Day-to-day operations of the school district are the responsibility of the **superintendent** and other senior district staff, including secretary-treasurers and assistant superintendents.

The authority of a school board is limited by a number of factors:

- **Budget**  
The school board determines how to spend the money it receives from the provincial government, but with most of the funding dedicated to salaries and staff benefits, there is little discretionary spending. To generate additional funds, many school boards recruit tuition-paying international students.
- **Curriculum**  
School boards may authorize locally developed courses in subject areas that are not covered in the Ministry of Education curriculum. These courses may count toward elective course credits for graduation. (See page XX for more information about graduation requirements.)
- **Policies**  
School boards enact policies specific to their district, but they must not conflict with provincial laws or regulations such as the *School Act*, or with rights guaranteed by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.
- **Directives from the BC Ministry of Education**  
At the time of publication of this book, the ministry has introduced Bill 11: *The Education Statutes Amendment Act*, which is expected to pass into law. The Act specifies that the minister may issue directives to school boards, which may include implementing special programs and projects or using a designated supplier of materials or equipment. Failure to comply with a minister's directive could result in an elected school board being replaced with a ministry-appointed official trustee.

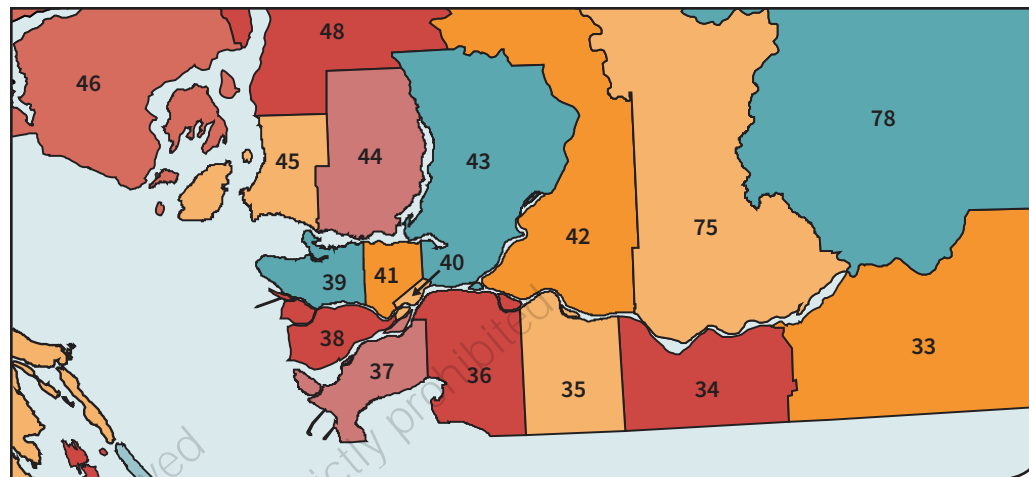
**superintendent:** the chief administrator of a school district, as designated by the school board

### British Columbia School Districts



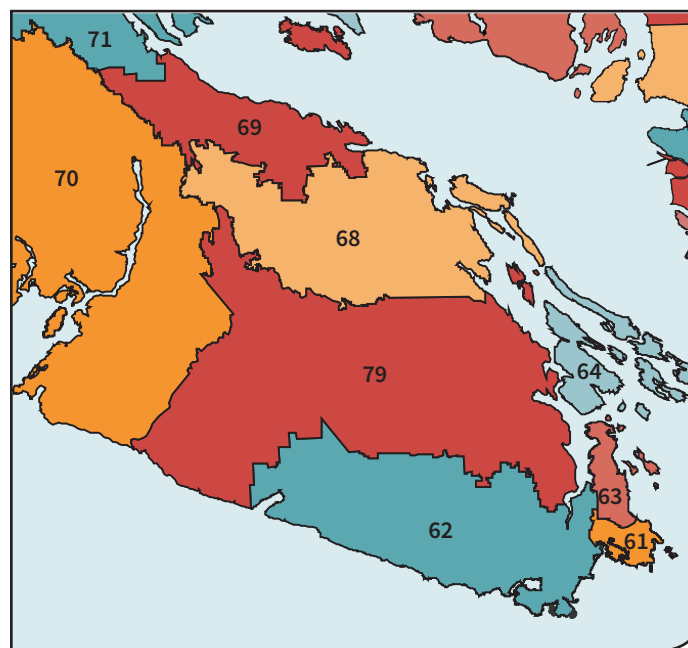
**Note:** School District No. 93 (Conseil scolaire francophone) is not confined to a geographical area of the province because it includes all francophone public schools in British Columbia.

- |                      |                         |                           |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 5 Southeast Kootenay | 50 Haida Gwaii          | 74 Gold Trail             |
| 6 Rocky Mountain     | 51 Boundary             | 78 Fraser-Cascade         |
| 8 Kootenay Lake      | 52 Prince Rupert        | 81 Fort Nelson            |
| 10 Arrow Lakes       | 53 Okanagan Similkameen | 82 Coast Mountains        |
| 19 Revelstoke        | 54 Bulkley Valley       | 83 North Okanagan-Shuswap |
| 20 Kootenay-Columbia | 57 Prince George        | 84 Vancouver Island West  |
| 22 Vernon            | 58 Nicola-Similkameen   | 85 Vancouver Island North |
| 23 Central Okanagan  | 59 Peace River South    | 87 Stikine                |
| 27 Cariboo-Chilcotin | 60 Peace River North    | 91 Nechako Lakes          |
| 28 Quesnel           | 67 Okanagan Skaha       | 92 Nisga'a                |
| 47 Powell River      | 72 Campbell River       |                           |
| 48 Sea to Sky        | 73 Kamloops/Thompson    |                           |
| 49 Central Coast     |                         |                           |



Lower Mainland Inset

- |               |                             |                    |
|---------------|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| 33 Chilliwack | 39 Vancouver                | 44 North Vancouver |
| 34 Abbotsford | 40 New Westminister         | 45 West Vancouver  |
| 35 Langley    | 41 Burnaby                  | 46 Sunshine Coast  |
| 36 Surrey     | 42 Maple Ridge-Pitt Meadows | 48 Sea to Sky      |
| 37 Delta      | 43 Coquitlam                | 75 Mission         |
| 38 Richmond   |                             | 78 Fraser-Cascade  |



Southern Vancouver Island Inset

- |                     |                      |                    |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| 61 Greater Victoria | 64 Gulf Islands      | 70 Alberni         |
| 62 Sooke            | 68 Nanaimo-Ladysmith | 71 Comox Valley    |
| 63 Saanich          | 69 Qualicum          | 79 Cowichan Valley |

### **School Board Office**

Professional staff in the school board office leads and oversees the operation of the school district. Their job is to supervise school-based staff, manage the district and its resources, and implement policies and programs as directed by the district's school board or the provincial government.

Employees of a school board office have a wide array of responsibilities, including

- resolution of concerns not settled at the school level
- maintenance of all facilities within the district
- human resources management
- financial management of all district resources, including budgeting and accounting

### **School**

The vast majority of decisions governing the day-to-day operation of the school are, in fact, made at the school itself.

#### **Administrators: Principal and Vice-Principals**

Within the school, authority rests with the principal or delegate. Under the *School Act*, every public school must have at least a principal, vice-principal, or director of instruction who is directly responsible for the school. The principal or delegate is responsible for a variety of school-based decisions, including

- organization of classes, classrooms, and teaching areas
- allocation of resources (including monies, books, supplies, equipment, furniture, and so on) given to the school from the district office
- health and safety of students, teachers, and other personnel
- repairs and maintenance of the facility and equipment
- supervision of teachers and support staff
- student behaviour and deportment
- communication and liaison with families and community
- liaison with support agencies
- management of school budgets and expenses
- compliance with directives and policies of the Ministry of Education and school board

### **Teachers**

Ultimately, most educational and learning decisions are made directly by classroom teachers, the professionals who work most closely with students. Teachers work with a great deal of individual authority and responsibility, and generally have the autonomy to make a wide variety of decisions, including

- planning and implementation of individual lessons and units of study
- methods of instruction
- selection of instructional resources
- methods of assessment and evaluation
- management of student behaviour

Teachers must cover the required learning outcomes and comply with regulations of the *School Act* and other provincial laws, as well as any policies enacted by the local school board.



Effective teachers instill in their students a love of learning and challenge them to achieve their best.