

Insider's Guide to

K-12 EDUCATION IN BC

What every parent and educator needs to know

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David has spoken nationally and internationally on issues around community and refugee education. His schools have been featured by numerous media outlets. He is a Vancouver Canuck Community MVP Award winner and a member of the board of directors of Canada Scores Vancouver, a charity dedicated to providing literacy, soccer, and leadership opportunities to inner city youth.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACEbc	Association for Community Education in British Columbia
ACE IT	Accelerated Credit Enrollment in Industry Training
AIP	Annual Instructional Plan
AP	Advanced Placement program
BCASBO	BC Association of School Business Officials
BCCPAC	BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils
BCPSEA	BC Public School Employers’ Association
BCPVPA	BC Principals’ and Vice-Principals’ Association
BCSSA	BC School Superintendents Association
BCSTA	BC School Trustees Association
BCTF	BC Teachers’ Federation
CSF	Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
DPA	Daily Physical Activity requirement
DPAC	District Parent Advisory Council
EA	Education Assistant
ELL	English Language Learner
ESL	English as a Second Language (now referred to as ELL)
FSA	Foundation Skills Assessment
IB	International Baccalaureate program
IDS	Independent Directed Studies
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IRP	Integrated Resource Package
ITA	Industry Training Authority
MACC	Multi-Age Cluster Class
PAC	Parent Advisory Council
PLO	Prescribed Learning Outcome
SLP	Speech–Language Pathologist
SSA	Secondary School Apprenticeship
TOC	Teacher on Call
TRB	Teacher Regulation Branch of the BC Ministry of Education

INSIDE THIS BOOK

The following features will help you navigate the information in *Insider’s Guide to K–12 Education in BC*.

PART 3

Program and Schooling Options

KEY QUESTIONS

- What program and schooling options are available for my child?
- What are the benefits of each option?
- Is one of these options the right fit for my child?

Key Questions

Each part opens with questions addressed in the following pages to help you quickly find the information you need.

margins

balanced-calendar school: a school that operates on a year-round calendar, with classes typically in session for three months, followed by a one-month break

Glossary Terms

Key terms related to K–12 education are defined in the margins and at the back of the book on pages 124–126.

back of book

Links

The magnifying glass icon indicates that further information about the topic may be found in online resources listed at the back of the book on pages 127–133.

margins



Employee Group

Due to recent high unemployment rates among British Columbians that the labour market is not absorbing all that common. That said, labour days lost to strike action, illness, ex

PART 1 How the School System Works

GOVERNANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Ministry of Education

BC Ministry of Education: <http://www.gov.bc.ca/bced/>
BC Ministry of Education *Manual of School Law* (includes links to *Teachers Act*, *Independent School Act*, and *First Nations Education Act*): www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/administration/policy/manual-of-school-law

BC Ministry of Education—Teacher Regulation Branch: <https://www.bcteacherregulation.ca/>

Board of Education

BC Ministry of Education—Directory of BC K–12 School and Districts: <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/apps/imcl/>

BC Ministry of Education—Discover Your School: <http://www.discoveryourschool.gov.bc.ca>

School

BC Teachers’ Federation (BCTF): <http://www.bctf.ca>

back of book

INTRODUCTION

School administrators get a *lot* of questions about how things work in the school system, for example: *How do I choose the right school for my child? There are so many options available, from French immersion to International Baccalaureate; how do I choose the right one for my child? What happens if my child needs extra support at school? and How is my child's learning assessed?*

Like any field, education has its own jargon, procedures, and practices. Those of us immersed in it sometimes forget that schools and schooling can be complicated, and that the way we do business can be mystifying, confusing, and unclear—until now.

Insider's Guide to K–12 Education in BC is your guide to understanding the structures, choices, and issues you're likely to encounter in the school system. You will learn how the school system works and discover educational choices you may not have known about. With this knowledge, you will be in a position of strength to advocate for and support your children as they navigate through the school system.

This book is organized into six parts.

Part 1: How the School System Works

The first section outlines how the overall school system works; how schools and districts are run and funded; how schools are organized; and what curriculum students are taught.

Part 2: Choosing a School

Part 2 explains what makes a good school *good*, and what you should consider when choosing a public or independent school for your child. It also outlines the steps for enrolling a child in your chosen school.

Part 3: Program and Schooling Options

This section provides you with information about the wide variety of schools and programs of choice that exist in both the public and independent schools of British Columbia. It can help you decide what programs would be a good fit for your child.

Part 4: Learning Support and Behaviour Interventions

Part 4 explains the important topics of special needs, learning assistance, English language learning, bullying, and behaviour interventions.

Part 5: Assessment and Evaluation

This section explains how teachers assess and evaluate student learning. It provides an overview of report cards, performance standards and letter grades, the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) tests, and provincial exams.

Part 6: Frequently Asked Questions

The final section of the book answers a variety of questions about schooling, including: *What input can I have in my child's class placement? What happens on professional development days? and How can I support my child's learning at home?*

Insider's Guide to K–12 Education in BC answers your questions before you even ask them. Parents will find the information they need to make the best decisions for their children, at any stage of their Kindergarten to Grade 12 education. Educators will find the information they need to help parents navigate the school system. This book is not about educational theory: it's a practical guide, with real-life answers to real-life situations.

School's in! It's time to get to work!



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 grade levels 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

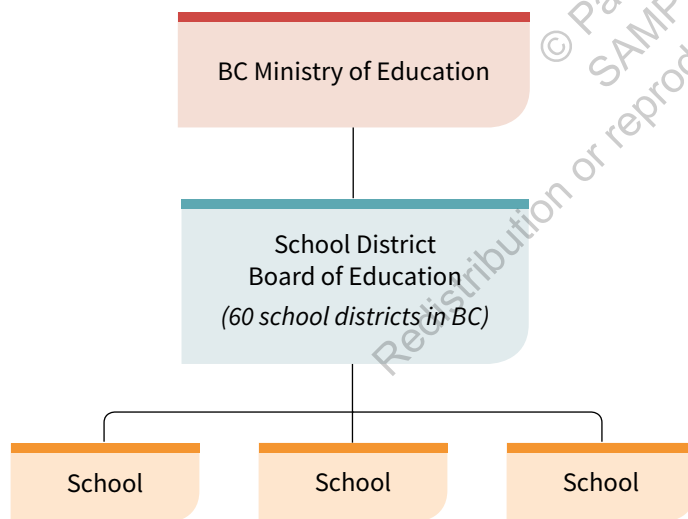
In Canada, education is governed at the provincial level. Like most public and private organizations, the British Columbia school system is based on a hierarchy:

- 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 (often called *school boards*), composed of locally elected school trustees. Boards of education appoint superintendents to oversee the programs and operations of the school district.
- 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
- managing, updating, and revising legislation that governs schools throughout the province
- aligning political promises and ideology with the law outlined in British Columbia's *Manual of School Law*

The *Manual of School Law* includes the following pieces of legislation:

- **School Act:** the rules by which the entire system is run
- **Teachers Act:** the rules concerning teacher certification and regulation
- **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 work under the direction of the Minister of Education, and are 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 are responsible for

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

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



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*

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

Board of Education

Public schools across the province are organized into **school districts**, usually grouped by city or region. Districts are directed by **boards of education** (school boards) made up of school trustees. School trustees are, by law, elected to a four-year term during municipal elections. 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.



Responsibilities

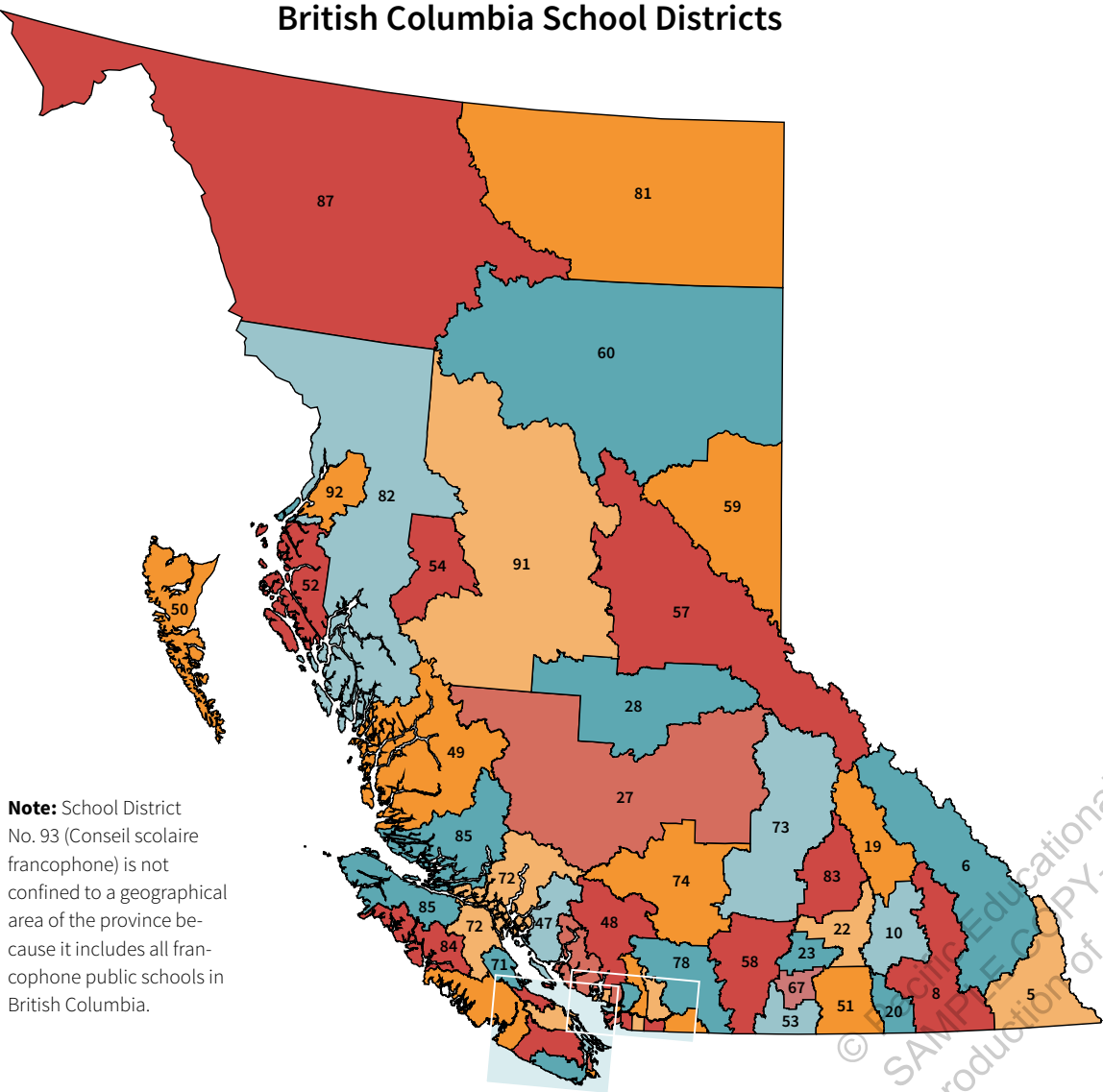
The school board sets the overall direction of the school district, including any local initiatives or policies. Decisions are made by vote. The structure of a school district mirrors the political/professional-educational model of the Ministry of Education. Trustees are the political wing and control governance and policy. Day-to-day operations of the school district are delegated to the **superintendent** and other 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 35 for more information about graduation requirements.)
- **Policies**
School boards may 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 government has introduced Bill 11: *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.

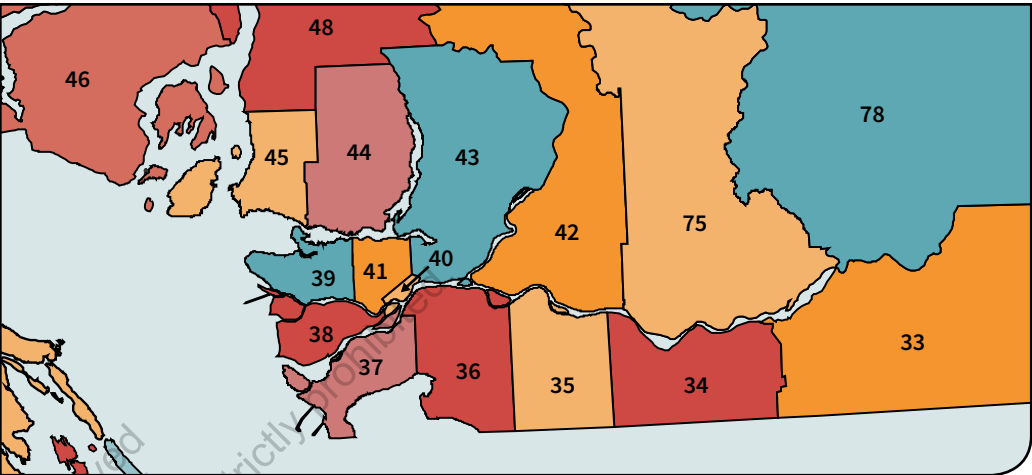
superintendent: the chief administrator of a school district, as designated by the school board

British Columbia School Districts



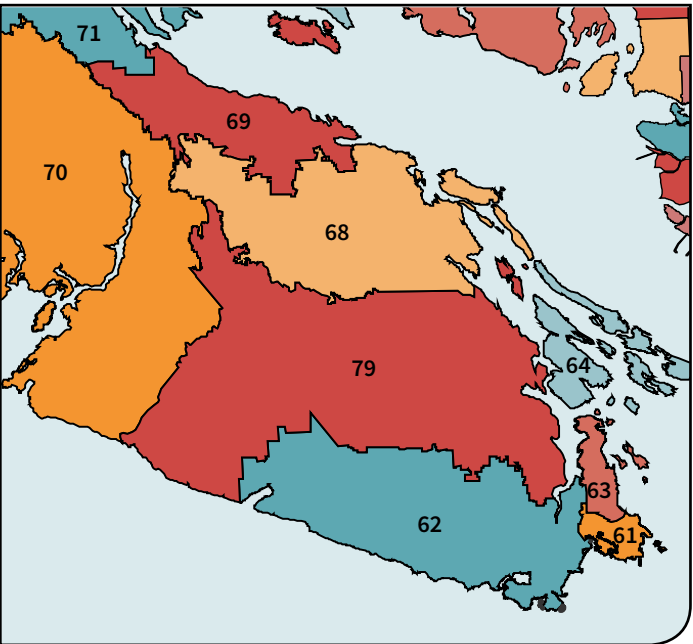
Note: School District No. 93 (Conseil scolaire francophone) is not confined to a geographical area of the province because it includes all francophone public schools in British Columbia.

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------|
| 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 Westminster | 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 |