

Why is British Columbia so Different?

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The Seventh-day Adventist church operates a large school system around the world. As a denomination we have a common thread to everything we do and all of our schools exist for the same purpose. British Columbia, though, is often seen as “different.” Although it has been said that the west coast attracts a certain type of person, there are some unique and interesting government requirements that differentiate it from other conferences across Canada and the United States.



British Columbia has enshrined in legislation the uniqueness of its education system. The School Act applies to public schools in the province while The Independent School Act of 1989 mandates that all independent schools must satisfy certain basic requirements while giving the School Authority the right to design policies and procedures allowing that independence. All of our Seventh-day Adventist schools in British Columbia operate under this Act with the British Columbia Conference as the School Authority. One other requirement under both Acts is that all schools must have a minimum of ten students in order to exist.

Under the Act, Independent schools undergo regular government evaluations and participate in a schedule of governmental inspections. It is not required that schools accept government funding, but those who do must adhere to strict standards regarding teacher certification, instructional time and program requirements, and operational expenditures.

At the present time, all our Seventh-day Adventist schools in British Columbia are funded and are classified in either Group 1 or Group 2. The majority of our schools are Group 1 and they receive a government grant equal to roughly 50% of the local school district per student grant while schools in the other group receive 35%. The operational expenditure restrictions for schools in the first group require that they not spend more money per student than that of the local public school district; if they do, they fall into the second grouping. This is determined by dividing the total operational expenses for the year by the number of students in the school. Those in the second group do not have the same financial restrictions. For the 2008-09 year, our average cost per student across the province was \$7400.

In addition to regular Seventh-day Adventist auditing practices, each of our schools must undergo a student enrolment audit in May and a financial audit in the summer with all data sent to the Ministry of Education. Organizing our school attendance and financial records to approved standards has involved a significant investment of human resources.

The Federation of Independent Schools' Association (FISA) is a strong political watchdog organization that works to ensure the “independence” of independent schools. The BC Conference Superintendent sits as a director on the 15 member board.

Every teacher in British Columbia must be provincially certified. Some teachers who have worked for SDA schools in other jurisdictions unfortunately are not eligible to work in BC. Although a certificate is not always an indicator of the ability of a teacher, the standards required ensure that our teachers are among the best qualified in Canada.

Although our teachers must teach the BC Ministry of Education approved curriculum, we enjoy great independence and integrate our North American Division Learning Outcomes into all subject areas, taking care to substitute Canadian content in areas of strong American emphasis.

The last area of uniqueness in our conference is the geography. Although the road conditions sometimes challenge the traveler, we have some of the most beautiful scenery in North America and our schools are located in great communities throughout the province.

Although many things are different from other areas in North America, we still exist for a common purpose. All of our school communities and staff are working together for the same goal. We continue to educate our students to be productive citizens on this earth, but more importantly, we are daily introducing them to Jesus and preparing them for citizenship in the New Earth.