



## COMMUNITY INPUT

For Ministry of Education

[www.autismbc.ca](http://www.autismbc.ca)

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## Education Changes in BC

SEP 27TH, 2021

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## Immediate Attention & Action Needed Regarding Education Changes in BC

Did you know about the changes happening with schooling in BC?

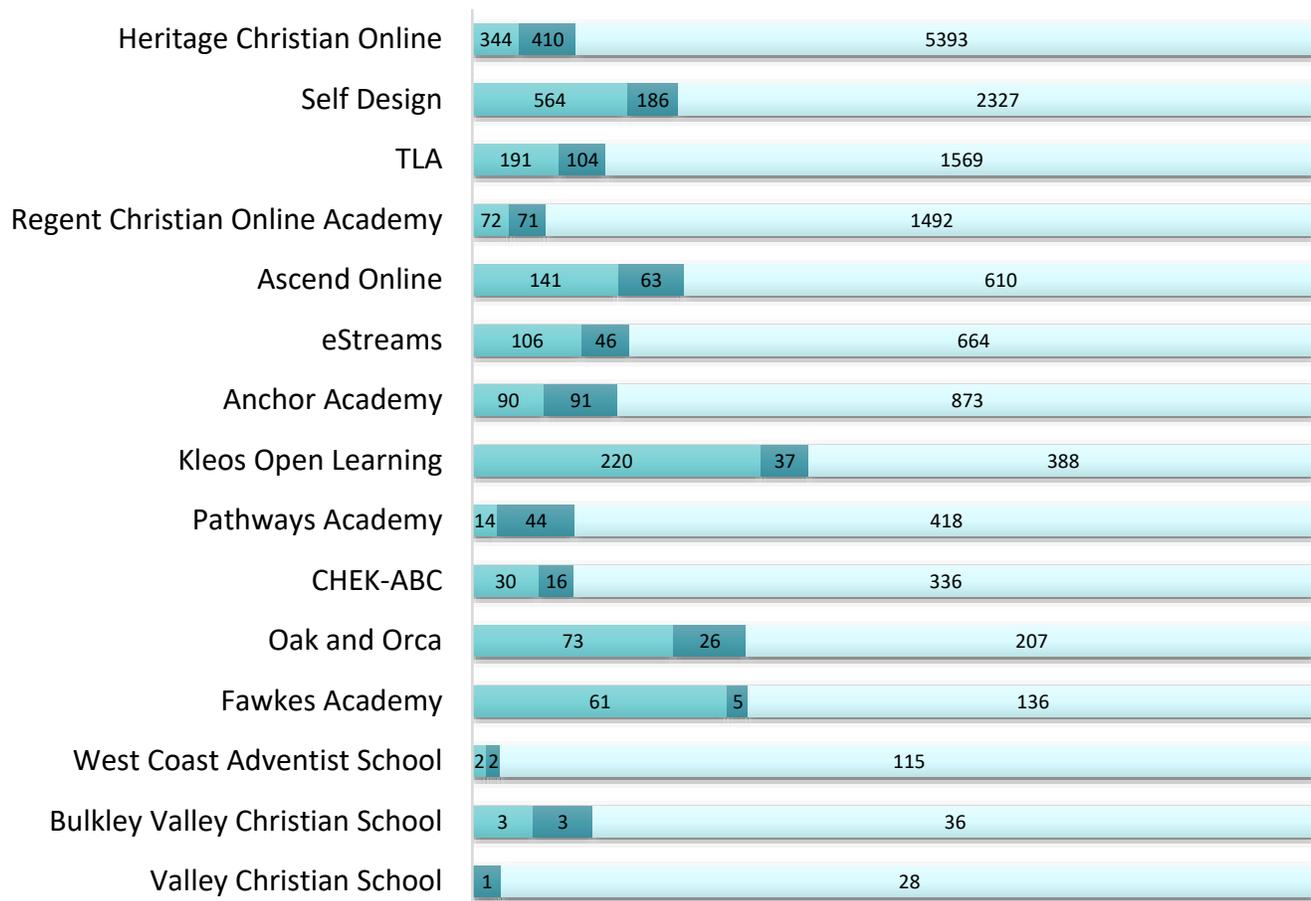
AutismBC is committed to inclusion and supporting our community. Our members have been asking us for information about the changes happening with schooling in BC. We strive to empower and support, so in an effort to help provide accurate information we reached out to the Ministry of Education and all Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) in BC.



## Independent School Composition



■ L2G - Autism ■ Designated SE ■ Enrolled Students



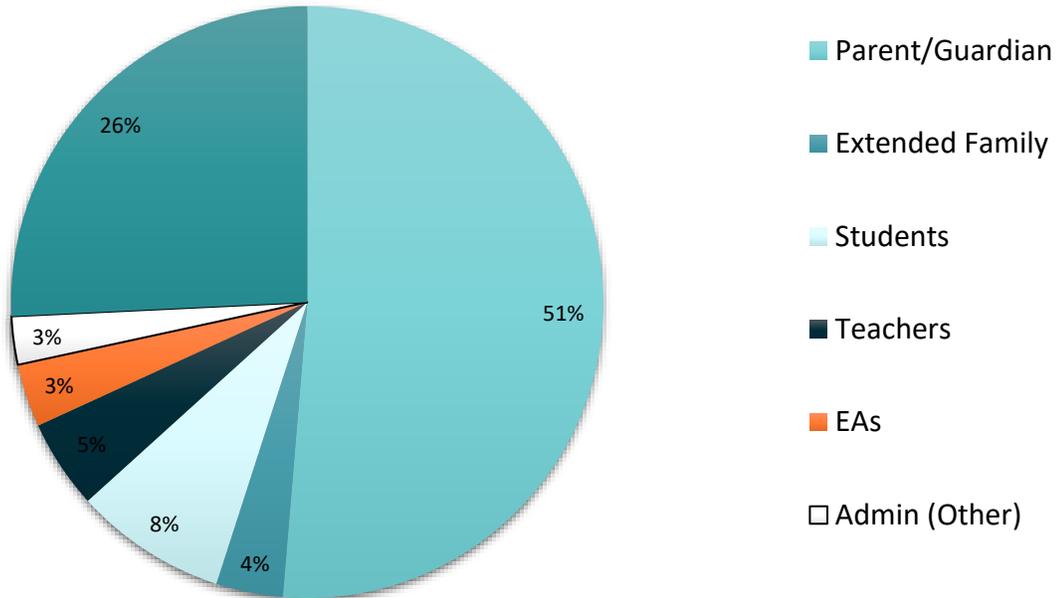
Over 14,592 students are currently enrolled/registered with independent schools in BC. Within that student population 1,105 have designated categories in special education with an additional 1,911 under the L2G – Autism category.

The distributed learning programs in BC provide educational access and opportunities not otherwise available to families, many supporting students with diverse needs in vulnerable communities. With options and choice of program diverse as the learners they serve, Independent distributed learning (online learning) is an integral part of inclusive and accessible education in BC.

## AUTISMBBC SURVEY DATA

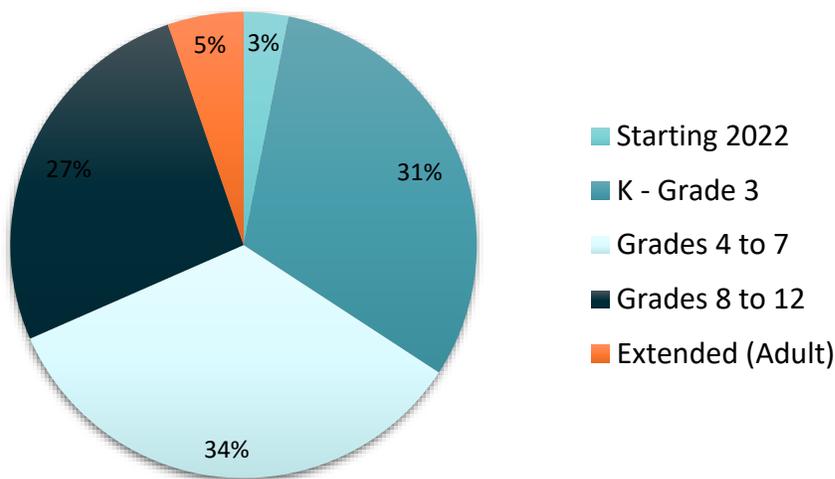
In a public survey of over 300 BC families concerned about policy changes in education 67% were currently enrolled or registered with an independent learning program and the remaining 33% with a public school.

### Survey Composition



More than 75% of those surveyed were parents, caregivers, or extended family members of BC students. A total of 66% represented students in intermediate, high school or extended education programs.

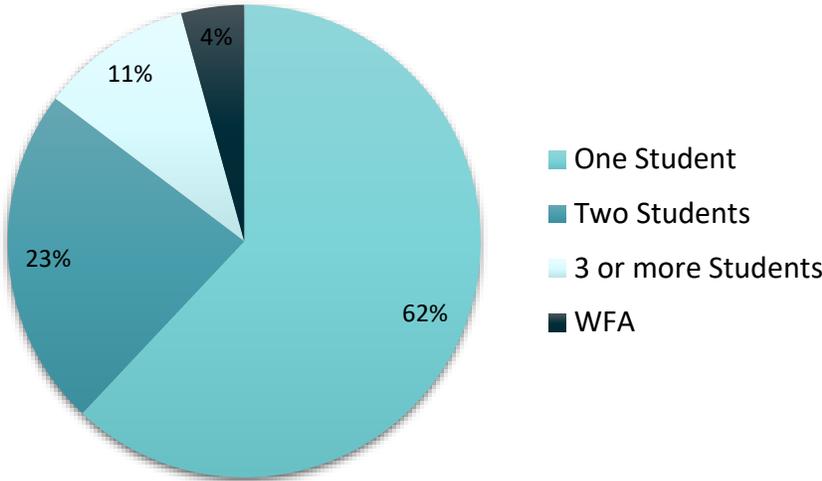
### Student Grade Level



## SPECIAL EDUCATION

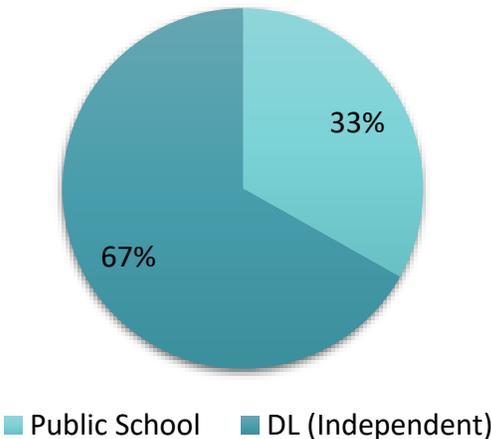
An overwhelming 90% of those surveyed had one or more students within the household in a designated category within special education (with an IEP), and 4% were waiting for assessment or starting an IEP this school year.

### Students with IEP (Designation)



67% of all designated students represented were currently enrolled/registered with an independent distributed learning program (online learning). The flexibility, accessibility and specialized programs offered by independent schools in BC is an integral piece of inclusive education with decades of knowledge in distance and alternative learning.

### IEP School Composition



*13% of students in BC independent schools have an autism diagnosis.*

**"We need to save our DL schools, it's the only way some of our kids can get an education and the supportive therapies they need to be able to thrive."**

*"This is our 8th year homeschooling. We chose our distance learning school based on their values and the excellent help our daughters receive based on their assessments and diagnosis. Our daughters wouldn't be as successful as they are if they'd continued in our local district public school system, in any format."*

**"It's appalling enough that the BC government made huge funding cuts to DL Schools last year, and EA cuts."**

*"It is not ok to keep us in the dark about the changes coming and not include our community in decisions about changes."*

**"We need to add ADHD to the list because we need more support and help for our children who have ADHD as well. Often, they are not being diagnosed with ASD due to bias and stigma. It creates more conflict because they don't receive any help. Left out with no support with high depression rates. We need to help these young people and we will see a huge decrease in the amount of mental health crisis and drug addictions. Let's help them now, this is not a wish, this is a NEED."**

*"I am concerned the BC Government is going to take away mine and other parents' ability to teach their children in a way that is flexible and impactful by forcing parents to use programs that do not work for all children. If I wanted a cookie cutter education, I would have stayed in public school. They did not allow freedom to learn at one's own pace and many gaps in education became evident quickly. This is not working for many students and families."*

**"Let us continue to urge the Ministry to ensure that our children are not harmed by their hasty actions."**

*"Everyone that is diagnosed should have a designated Educational Assistant (EA)"*



**"The Ministry of Education needs to demonstrate leadership when it comes to inclusion for children with special needs - end stop. There should be zero tolerance and the Ministry of Education needs to demonstrate their unbiased by including parents and community partners equally to that of educational counterparts, otherwise it's just education professionals militantly suppressing public need for access to fair and equitable education. I 100% disagree with any educational professional that would tout a lack of funding and resources while still accepting a pay increase."**

*"I have three autistic children who rely on the support given by Self Design in order to access a BC approved education, as well as the speech and occupational therapy they need to thrive. My youngest is non-verbal and has speech therapy twice a week. Because of Self Design's support, my eighth-grade son is working towards a Dogwood-track program. If we were forced back into the Vancouver School district program (a notoriously inflexible option) we would leave the school system entirely and he would not have this opportunity. It is 2021. We should be aiming for more diversity. Instead, BC wants to move towards greater standardization, one-size-fits-all, and forcing children with special needs back into the system that was unable to meet their needs before."*

**"I am a teacher with the PIE program and have seen so many positive changes in the lives of my students with designations who had previously been struggling in their brick & mortar schools and required the flexibility, connection and support that PIE offered them."**

*"We left our home district due to lack of supports (autism designation). We are with PIE now and they are super supportive. We have access to funding for teachers, art, drama; if we have to enroll in our catchment, I know the fight for supports will continue."*

**"Generally, when the government has gotten involved in DL's they have made it WORSE. They make it harder to get funding & to allocate it."**

*"These changes could directly impact my child's equitable access to education, and I am deeply concerned."*



**"Ministry DL programs are not as adaptable and supportive. If this option was not available, our son would have quit school outright.**

**Limiting the number of DLs available and the types that are available will only leave parents with less options, and cause school refusal or outright dropout to increase. Independent DLs fill a massive gap in our education system that the province does not provide services for. Properly trained EAs and teachers are vital to inclusion. Without proper support, some kids cannot attend school at all or at the very least receive such a suboptimal standard of education, that they may as well not be in the system at all. This is an added burden not only on families but also on the community as a whole when these kids eventually grow into adults that carry trauma and lack the skills to attain the level of independence that many may have been capable of. All children deserve to be educated in a safe and nurturing environment. Currently, there is nothing to account for how our Autism funding dollars are being utilized in the school system (for over 6 yrs. of age). We as parents deserve a bit more transparency for how this funding is being put to work towards the inclusion of our kids who are on the Autism Spectrum."**

*"I have two children with designations, one of whom is beginning her second year with PIE (public online school). In-person school was not a good fit for her. The flexibility and support she has received from PIE has significantly improved her life (her stress is much lower; she is excited about learning and able to work at her level). When she was in her brick-and-mortar school she was not given access to the supports she required, such as seeing a speech & language pathologist. Now that she is with PIE, she has one-on-one support from an EA that she is comfortable with two days a week to help her with her executive functioning, which has been amazing for her."*

**"For the last three years the Ministry of Education has hidden behind the "cooperative government" module while school boards and districts have excluded children with special needs from public education, all because of money. If a child without special needs has a right to access an education, then a child with special needs has a right to access an education - equally. End stop. No exceptions."**



*"We also need more services provided for afterschool care. Currently special needs aides are being paid less than workers at McDonalds. Parents need to be able to put their children into afterschool programs so they can go to work to support their families. What is available currently is ridiculous. I cannot quit my job to watch my children because afterschool programs refuse to pay fair wages and hire extra staff. Cutting off our 1 (in- person) teacher day a week while some kids are getting 5 teacher days a week is discrimination. Cut programming from kids/families who are getting more if you must. This is unacceptable."*

**"We do distributed learning. We do this as we can choose the best school that suits the needs of our children. This choice may be taken away from us. I am unable to plan the immediate future of our educational needs for our children because I don't know when we will be informed of these changes, and if we will be required to change schools. By the time we find out this information, it will likely be too late for us to look into new schools and retain our spot. Worried about the future of disturbed learning."**

*"I live in a very small low-income town with barely enough teachers to support the community, let alone aids/supports to assist special needs children. My son is currently in part-time Preschool and as recently as last week was not able to attend his class because there wasn't enough staff to help support him, even though he is supposed to have a designated one on one support that was designated to him last school year 2020-2021. We also don't have the basic resources to help these children, not enough experienced support staff. It has become quite frustrating; my son is supposed to start kindergarten in the school year 2022/2023. He has only been able to successfully attend school for one hour twice a week. Unlock the basic necessary resources to help these children progress. I am not capable of relocating to a place that is better equipped to work with us."*

**"Our eldest son would not be successful with working towards graduation without the Independent DL we are using. He will be completing grade 14 this year with an Adult Dogwood."**



*"I've written a letter to my MLA who also happens to be the Minister of Education. I have not heard a word back. I feel like this could be a conflict of interest and I feel like I have no one to represent my concerns related to my child. My child's independent online learning school is incredibly unique as it is a school that is committed to special education and has been for the last 10 years. This school's special education students make up nearly 70% of the school's enrolled students. They are a leader in special education and my son is about to lose access to this school where he has been thriving. This school cannot be replaced. I believe that special education students should still be allowed to enroll in the most suitable IOL school available in BC, not just the one in their district. My son's school is already servicing student's province wide and should be allowed to continue. These changes are extremely stressful and worrisome to parents of SE students"*

**"I have 2 neurotypical children who are in a DL after seeing how the public system has failed to meet their needs. I am also a professional with clients who are autistic, who have chosen to move away from brick and mortar to a DL, after being either abused in the public system, being traumatized, not being provided with the support they require, having teachers with no experience, and being put into a classroom to be babysat instead of being taught. Not from lack of desire but lack of funding and overall training and ability to properly educate my clients. Families don't choose the harder path because they want to—they choose to go the DL route because the system that is meant to be easier and support them, has failed them."**

*"We've been battling the school system for 6 years (5 different schools) and have finally landed in a good place with Kleos/Pivot Point and now have to worry about THAT stability being lost! The stress and lack of resources in public schools (my son was drawing or playing LEGO all day - or at least the first couple of hours before I was called to come and pick him up) along with the constant changes of having to adapt is a struggle that adds to everyone's anxieties."*

**"This is shortsighted lunacy on the part of a government determined to ruin the lives of disabled people."**



*"For many kids with developmental disabilities, online learning doesn't work. They are learning at home because learning is wholistic and can be incorporated into learning life skills and managing anxiety. The big advantage of learning at home is it is very flexible. I am concerned that these changes will impact flexibility. Parents who are managing the learning would be stressed by a whole load of new demands for record keeping etc. I think the system could be improved, but not sure these proposed changes are improvement. Would like clarification."*

**"How can a district (SD52) with a 3MIL+ deficit be able to successfully roll out an online learning program when they can't meet the needs of students in-person. What about barriers like highspeed internet for families that are low income? How will an online learning program not be used to push students with designations out of the school system, as that is exactly what happened to us in SD68? We were told the school did not have the capacity to meet our son's needs, and sent to DL"**

*"I have a child who cannot focus on learning while in a crowd. She needs to move and talk to learn which mean she can be disruptive for others. She is a bright learner who learns deep in the areas of her interest. She needs lots of support and one-on-one or in small group of students who accept her for who she is and have patience with her. While learning at home, we can tailor education to her. It is not easy as we have to learn what works better for her but our IDL has been so resourceful and supportive. We are in tears that we might have the last year of this option. Please leave IDLs stay!"*

**"After 3 years of brick and mortar my daughter was left with no skills to read, write, do math and was continually excluded from social and academic situations. Happy to say with the help of her mother, teacher, and supports such as language, OT, and counselling our daughter now has the beginning foundational skills of reading, writing and other academic areas. On top of that she is also supported more emotionally and able to grow as a person and academically."**

*"Very concerned as the supports needed for my child were not being met for in-person learning and are finally being supported remotely. Also access to necessary funding to support SLP and tutoring."*



**"I am highly concerned for my child who is on the autism spectrum and has failed in public school. It took us two tries with different IDL's before we landed on Kleos. They have been able to uniquely manage my son's IEP so that his learning is tailored to his strengths. He is starting to flourish academically, and it's because of this school. I love Kleos because it is a smaller IDL that gets the time to know their students and families. My son would never be able to attend a cookie cutter online school. I'm so concerned because it's taken him this long to get to a good place academically/intellectually, and it seems just as the wheels are gaining motion, there is potential for a drastic shift that could through him off track. There has been much past anxiety and trauma for my child and our family, trying to fit in and find a school that understands him. I can't imagine in these times, during a pandemic no less, how these potential changes could negatively impact special needs students."**

*"If this change to send all DL students back into the school system happens, my son will not receive a proper education with the supports he needs. Not all choose to leave the public school system, it happens due to bullying, lack of proper training in staff, lack of understanding of diverse needs. The public school system is not set up for all kids. They do not have experienced enough staff. My youngest child fares well but please do not take what works away from the kids that needs it most. Please allow children to learn the best way for them and sometimes that is just not in a brick-and-mortar school. Consider the fact these children will not get what they need, their needs will not be met being sent home. Make this much more widespread knowledge and consult your community, I had no idea this was even on the table."*

**"We are a diverse group. If one size fit all, my kids would be in public school already. My kids don't learn online, can't take courses online. We do hands-on learning. Taking away our options will likely destroy my youngest son's chances of ever succeeding. Taking my elder child's options is just going to cost you money in looking after him more when he is 19."**

*"I am deeply concerned by the proposed changes in Bill 8 to independent DL schools and our child's future education choices."*



**"I have been homeschooling my son since he started school. I am not surprised the government is making changes that will negatively impact our kids in school. They are taking our rights away year after year. My hope is that we as Canadians can rise above and fight a good fight for our kids."**

*"Our son attended the local brick and mortar school K-3 and was grossly overlooked. Inclusion does not exist. Teachers are not equipped to help children with special needs and EAs are stretched amongst several kids. EAs are moved around with no consistency. Anxiety, depression, bullying, and physical assault were experienced by my child. He is happy in his IDL and I would never put him back in the local school. We have spent countless hours and tears finding him this safe and nurturing educational stream."*

**"I am an autistic parent of 4 ND children, two of which have IEPs (Cat G) and are part of independent DL/OLs. We live on Salt Spring Island, and one of my ND children attends a blended program offered by an OL/DL from outside our school district. These programs are all essential to my neuro-divergent children. Living in a remote community, we do not have many options for supports for our ND children. Removing the existing programs and supports would be devastating for our family. We have worked really hard to find educational assistants who can support my children at home and in the community, so they can continue to participate in activities and educational opportunities. We are really concerned about the lack of information from the government about how this will affect our children in the coming year."**

*"This is our 8th year enrolled with our IDL. My son received his autism diagnosis after being enrolled in IDL. Our local district told me we didn't have an active MCFD file and were not a high-risk family, so my sons didn't qualify for any assessments. The pediatrician said he was autistic, and the superintendent of the SD said she knows more about behavioral disorders based on her 30 years as a teacher and my sons didn't fall under the need for assessments."*

**"As a neurodivergent family affected by this change, we would prefer to continue with our distributed online learning provider."**



*"My kids have SN and they are not being served well by our public school system. We chose DL last year and both kids came up 2/3 levels in math alone. B&M do not teach our unique kids, they babysit for the most part. Neither teachers or EA's are properly trained to educate our kids, they are unable to adapt or modify educational materials and there's not enough staff with the actual skills to encourage our unique learners."*

**"DL/Online learning has been crucial in our ability to access adequate educational supports for our autistic child. Without access to flexible learning models, and the ability to take an active role in our sons learning, we won't be able to properly advocate for the educational needs of our son. Being forced to change schools simply to satisfy restrictive and discriminatory legislation would adversely harm our son's education."**

*"There are currently no online/DL supports or programs for French Immersion. This was made perfectly clear over the past year. Even with public districts giving online options. With the gradual entry they dropped the ball. My autistic son was left with no option but to return to class. We couldn't get French online, and after a few months they took away his 30 minutes a week with a French EA attached to his school, and created more disconnect, while wanting him to return."*

**"My children both have funded designations. One child in particular is likely to be profoundly impacted by the proposed changes. As a student with hearing loss "accessible" education has specific requirements. Standardized resources and loss of specialized team would be detrimental."**

*"Students with special needs shouldn't be pushed into mainstream in-person learning. They need more support and alternatives such as online learning at the elementary level, tutoring resources and/or learning pods. My heart breaks every day for students whose needs are not being met by the current educational system."*

**"My three children are only able to receive an education because of the support provided by their online learning school and we are terrified that we may lose that option."**



*"My 6-year-old son is Autistic. He has ADHD, SPD, anxiety, and cognitive delays. Both he and I are immune compromised. When covid came I decided not to send him to public school. In looking into supports and services for my son, I realized very quickly public school is not going to work for my son and his needs. I researched DL's as they were able to provide funding for therapies and supports. Changes to DL schools will affect my son in a negative way. He will not attend brick and mortar school and as a single mom with mental health issues it makes it so difficult on me to be able to provide my son with what he needs. Please keep DL schools and the funding."*

**"My child had initially started Kindergarten in our catchment school and although his teacher was sweet and good, the school support system before starting Grade 1 completely failed him. He was masking a lot at school but suffering a lot of anxiety, needed to be academically challenged and to receive a social emotional support that the school was not able or willing to offer in an adapted way for his emotional and academic diverse needs. We were forced out of the traditional school system to make life changes that accommodate his needs for the sake of his wellbeing. Development is so important for any kid this age, even more with an autism, anxiety, and gifted designation. Since we made the change, he is able to access therapies and services he needs that are tremendously making a positive impact on him and our family which otherwise would not be happening."**

*"I am very invested in making sure that my son learns all that he needs to learn. We chose to homeschool him so that I can help him. He has difficulty staying focused so having a one-on-one session with me in learning his lessons would really help him. Children learn differently and the set up that we have right now with DL and supervised by a BC teacher is perfect. I believe the changes that the ministry is planning would directly impact families like ours in an unfavorable way."*

**"My daughter is thriving in her independent OL school. She won't fit in our district school. We need a learning environment that works for her."**



*"The only local public distance learning in my district told us that it rarely held students for longer than a year and was basically a steppingstone between brick and mortar and home learning. They were absolutely correct. Not only was the program completely out of date (pre internet), but the format was very strict. My child cannot deal with demands, and thus the only thing that works is to provide opportunities and resources to direct and explore his own interest."*

**"My autistic child does not do well with change and transition. Even with the most amazing support, he was still very anxious at school. When the staff changed and no longer had the support, it was traumatic for all involved. As a parent I can spend my time advocating to staff and administration who cannot support my child effectively enough so that he can feel safe enough to learn, or I can put my energy into teaching him myself in an environment where he is welcome to be himself and thrive."**

*"I'm concerned if our IDL is not approved at how little time we would have to move and what curriculum options would be available. A new school would not know my daughters needs and that is such a big and quick change for students like my daughter that need more structured transitions. I'm also concerned our District OL doesn't have a special needs department so I'm unsure about funding. I'm also concerned by the term online learning given my daughter does a mostly hands on curriculum and would not do well learning online. Lastly, I would like to know how students that did not do well on the standard curriculum would be served by these changes. My daughter progressed more in 1 year with an IDL than 4 years with the standard curriculum and full time EA support."*

**"I represent 25 students and their families as a learning consultant and "online" teacher. We are still distributed learning despite the name change and would like to stay current as my families are very stressed, very scared, and anxious. I have many concerns about my students and my personal employment."**

*"I am very concerned about the changes. My kids are thriving now at their DL school and with their teachers."*



**"Changing the distance learning to online learning and trying to force diverse kids to follow a curriculum meant for NT kids is a recipe for disaster, a violation of human rights and discrimination against a person with a disability. The public school want the money our kids bring to the public system plain and simple. We will not be letting a public school system try to force our son in a box he'll never fit in."**

*"My child went through exclusion in school. He is excelling through Distributed Learning now having access to what he needs to learn. To take his school and therapies away would cause huge issues for him and myself."*

**"Children with disabilities need easy access to education that suits their needs. For some, this is in person, but for others this needs to be via DL. Families need to be able to access DL services in person (tutoring, OT, SLP, Physio etc.) and online. Parents need choice so that they can determine which schooling options best suit their children."**

*"We have a child with special needs that will be evaluated for autism, but I am not sure yet if he is on the spectrum. I am highly concerned with the proposed changes. My son is thriving in online school with a public school outside our district. The one in our district was not a good fit for our two kindergarten children, especially my son with special needs. We can't go with in district online learning school next year. They cannot support my son's needs. EBUS, our current out of district school has been fantastic."*

**"I am the founder of a preschool, school and DL program for autistic students and those with other developmental disorders. If the public system had been committed to this population, they would have done something years ago. It is critical that these students have their own "district" or DL school that is committed to their unique needs and not driven by typical education practices."**

*"This new change means our students have nowhere to go, they can't go to the public school and online learning does NOT work for them. They need the 1:1 support that Fawkes Academy Richmond is able to provide."*



**"My child has not had access to the curriculum while registered with and attending a brick-and-mortar school. The only time he has had the same access as his NT peers has been online with a temporary program put in place last year by our district and with our chosen DL provider which is outside of our district. Our district does have a DL program, but it offers no supports for diverse learners and offloads all of the responsibility onto the parents. It essentially offers less than the classroom while keeping all of the funding."**

*"I am both a service provider for autistic children who have been neglected and abused, educational needs not been met in the public system AND a parent of a gifted child, whose needs were repeatedly not met in the public system. Our children left the public system at the start of the pandemic and will not be returning after seeing our child thrive in the right educational environment with supports that meet his needs. We are tired of fighting a system that continues to reject all best practices for gifted children as well as for autistic children. The DL/OL system has provided us with the best learning environment for our children and for my clients and it's terrifying to know this may be taken away. The public system has proven through the pandemic how they do not know how to do DL well, and DL should be left to those who have worked tirelessly for decades to learn how to do this well in an effort to help children who are being left behind in the public system."*

**"These changes will negatively affect many of the students and families enrolled and those who would potentially enroll in the future. Please listen to everyone who has concerns and really take them seriously. They know their child(ren's) and their needs better than anyone. More access and more fixing to specialized online schooling are needed, not less. We were fortunate to find a school that works the best for our son and his unique learning style. Changing access to that would greatly impact his education."**

*"My child attends cross district special school, has IEP and is unable to learn online. This is the only school that was able to take us. Bill-8 is harming my son. He needs to attend in person not online."*



**"The communication about these changes has been very slow to roll out to parents. While my child who receives inclusive education services is not identified on the autism spectrum, over 100 students at his public online school are. 92% of the students in our school are from out of district. And restriction on choosing a school of record - public or independent - stands to negatively impact many, many families. We need to retain the option to choose the school that best matches our learners needs, and to cross enroll in courses or programs that support their ongoing learning and development. Anything else's is contrary to the intentions of the BC Education Plan."**

*"I am concerned that this bill does not consider the varying individuals that our online independent schools can offer to people all over the province. Everyone deserves a right to education and some students are unable to learn in "classic" environments."*

**"It's wrong what the Ministry is trying to do. People that do not have children with Special Needs have no idea what we as parents or children go through in the Public School System. Will the Ministry pay for damages done to our children re: PTSD, emotional challenges, learning disabilities, etc.?"**

*"My son loves his school. He wants to finish all the way to grade 12. He is currently in grade 9. The small group setting is great for all the kids there. They learn a lot of life skills as well as their education. He has no desire to go back to public school and would not be able to handle the large class sizes and the noise. If we didn't have Claro, then he would have to be Homeschooled and would not get all the social interaction that he needs."*

**"Bill 8 may impact our Learning Centre as we work in partnership with Kleos Open Learning in Kelowna and may have to find a new online school if Bill 8 makes it so we can only work with schools in our area. This would mean we may have to raise fees for our families, many of whom are financially strapped."**

*"The upcoming changes are very concerning for families of all IOL students, but the largest concern our family has is for my autistic child."*



**"My son excels in the independent online program he's under and could not under the public online offerings. His learning differences mean he needs to input and output in the ways that work for him. He can learn at an exceptional rate, but if forced to a public online learning platform we would have to homeschool for him to learn."**

*"My child cannot handle the sensory input of a brick-and-mortar school. There have been no accommodations that have worked to help her. We have chosen a DL school, so I no longer have to pick her up on the side of the Trans-Canada highway when she gets overwhelmed and leaves school property, she is 9!"*

**"You are ripping an autistic child away from an education format that he thrives in. How are you going to absorb these kids, especially those with IEPs into your cookie cutter mega school system?"**

*"Both my children were in an IDL during the 2020/2021 school year on IEPs. This school year I placed my youngest back into public school. He has an IEP but has very low support needs. My oldest child has high support needs and with great work is remaining on grade level where the public school was not going to allow him to enter the school full time. I use his funding from the IDL to pay for therapy and supports that optimize the way he learns and ensure he stays on track. This flexibility has no doubt changed the course of his life and stopped all his self-injury. It is my hope to remain in a IDL for his schooling career."*

**"My autistic child has a PDA profile, which means that school practices have been extremely harmful to her intrinsic motivation. When I started homeschooling her, I saw that motivation come back, and she is now extremely self-directed and motivated in her studies. She needs flexibility and a unique, interest-led approach, that the DL we are with (Oak and Orca) does allow, but they are not in our district, and I am concerned we would not be able to continue with them. A change at this point would be extremely detrimental for her education, her mental health, and our entire family's well-being."**



*"Home schooling is only way my son would have learned to read and write. Public school stuck him a room by himself when he started middle school. I watched my child regress. He was so stressed. I pulled him out and started with Kleos school, hired a professional to teach him the work and he is now working at a grade 6/7 level after 3 years. When we started, he was at a 4-year-old level the public school told me. I disagreed with their assessment. The people who worked with my son in public school didn't have the training or capacity. They did more damage than good. Home schooling saved us. My son is happy and progressing. He is 17 now."*

**"We left our school district when they refused to help our son and only would allow him to attend school 1 hour a day. We cannot go back to a school (online or otherwise) for our son and his younger brother. This would greatly affect us."**

*"Being forced into a district school situation will not ever work for my son as not only is he autistic but ADHD, FASD and DCD. So, with his complex issues he needs to learn through play and be able to go outside and run when HE needs too, which will never work in a public-school setting. Currently he is thriving in his current plan of education so he will be able to be all he can be one day and not put in modified classes and be referred to as a seat warmer."*

**"Our special needs children are going through hard times as it is. There is so much anxiety, insecurity. The only thing they have is their home, safe environment where they can be themselves and thrive at the same time. Our children need their existing online learning. It was carefully chosen for them by us parents and only parents know what the best for their child is."**

*"Our son was incredibly well supported in his program at RCOA. He would not have the success that he does now without the supports of the special education team, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists and they all spoke very highly of the program that was outlined for him."*

**"The variety of programs offered match with the variety of children we have. We need to embrace variety, not push to standardization. There are many ways of knowing."**



### TRACY

"As parents without the option to pull our son out of public school to do online learning, we have endured the public school system over the years. From a functional perspective he does better in the structured school environment - he is in the evergreen stream and is registered mainly in trades elective courses in grade 11. This year I distinctly remember driving back to my home office after dropping him off one morning not long after school started and couldn't help thinking about how absolutely exhausted, I am after so many years of trying to advocate for him. Just a few things in point form:

- Consistency in resource teacher support – don't know that we have had the same resource teacher any more than two years in a row, and more times than not, it seems our resource teacher is in an "itinerate" position. Makes it hard to develop good, long-lasting relationships.
- It feels like every single year we start from scratch with the resource teacher – it leaves the impression that his file is not being reviewed; each and every year we are having the same "get to know [our son]" conversation to get things rolling.
- Our son is verbal, and we feel he is consistently mistaken for a child that processes normally because he can respond with a yes or no, or in broken sentences. He does not 'rock the boat' and presents as calm at school, further giving the impression that he is handling things well when the complete opposite is actually true and we see the volatility of him holding his emotions inside, when he gets home. When we inform the school of his severe anxiety and meltdowns, it is always met with surprise because of how he presents at school, and that is exhausting. Again, it speaks to the inconsistency in anyone (besides a couple of his CEA's) really getting to know him, and in the resource team having the time, energy and resources to customize support.
- School psychologist resources – why are there not more?? I inquired about a functional assessment for our son to transition to adulthood and was informed of the very long wait lists – stressful for parents who are unable to pay for assessments out of pocket as well.



- Social skills – COVID has presented such a challenge in providing options for working on social skills and peer related activities. We have inquired about tapping into a group of kids that our son very much wants to be friends with (but is too shy to speak to), to set him up for success but there was no real support in putting any steps in place to address it. Instead, the resource teacher offered to start working on social skills with him around the resource room. Appreciated the offer to help, but it was deflating to realize that no extra energy would be spent ensuring he was learning how to build meaningful relationships with kids outside of the resource cohort.
- Our son has Type 1 Diabetes and self manages only at school due to having a dedicated care plan (does little to no self-management at home). I was informed a few weeks ago that at the end of this year, he would be discharged from the care plan. When I asked about what that would mean for CEA support, the resource teacher needed to do a bit of researching and then informed me that there would be CEA support in the classrooms that our son is in next year – but no indication that he would have dedicated support as he does with his medical care plan. There will be support to help remind him of blood sugar testing times but at best, his additional diagnoses of Autism, Intellectual Disability, Anxiety, and Auditory Processing only get him shared support.

I think the long and the short of it is a serious lack of resources to ensure that kids with special needs are experiencing inclusive and safe public-school environments. So many administrators and systems just continue functioning on the status quo instead of thinking outside the box and being innovative in how to meaningfully support this group of children. And resources, resources, resources – for staff, for functional supports, for therapists. I don't put blame on the resource staff; with the exception of a few, we've made a point of working professionally and respectfully with them, knowing the current constraints and in some cases rigid systems.

It saddens me that I am in a place of just wanting this school journey to be done; that in some ways, I have become a bit complacent, just trying to make sure that our boy is as happy and safe as possible."



## CHERYL

"To be very honest, and I know many can relate, reliving some of these experiences (even if only through words) is still really hard for me. The start of our child's grade 2 year caused me a lot of frustration and hurt, it amplified my anxiety, and I believe left me with some PTSD. After having such success with kindergarten and grade 1, our experience with his grade 2 year left me with a horrible taste in my mouth for the public school system.

To premise, we attended a typical preschool for 2 years successfully, with support, prior to entering elementary school. Before starting each school year, we did as much prep work as we could: classroom and teacher visits prior to the school year starting, 'About Me' info letters for the teacher and classmates, passing along age-appropriate books about autism for his class, just to name a few. We were very fortunate, as the Resource Teacher (at the time) lived a couple doors down from us. She was able to make our transitions easy and was very accessible to us. It was amazing. He had the same CEA for kindergarten and grade 1.

What we know now, but not at the time, was that she went above and beyond for him throughout the entire day. She spent her breaks, recess, and lunch with him. He was never without support. We were extremely fortunate. Although school was challenging for him, he progressed and succeeded, and made wonderful gains. He was truly liked by his peers, and we received positive reports from his teachers and support staff. Even when Covid shut down the end of his in-class grade 1 year, he still received online support from his CEA. She even made time to speak with him via Zoom throughout the week.

During the summer before grade 2, we discussed some concerns we had about the effects that the Covid closures and school shutdowns may have had on him with the Resource Teacher. We thought maybe a hybrid of in-class and home learning may be beneficial, to ease him back into a routine. We also discussed a distance learning scenario through an IDL. The Resource Teacher was adamant that he would benefit the most by continuing in public school (brick and mortar) with his peers, that it was a familiar part of his routine, and that his grade 2 year would be the last year with his long-time CEA as she was going to retire at the end of the school year. After some discussion, we were convinced that this was the best option. All of his same supports were in place, and his previous years had gone quite well.



We prepped for his grade 2 year with our familiar methods - he met his teacher and visited his classroom. I passed along our autism books to his teacher, inviting her to read them as well as pass them along to anyone she felt would benefit. Towards the end of August, the Resource Teacher informed us that she had accepted another position somewhere else and would no longer be involved with the school district. She gave us her replacement's contact information and advised us to follow up with her. Although we were sad, we felt confident that the transition to a new resource person would be fine.

We decided to start attending only three times per week, so that he could have the other two days for therapy. We felt this was the best mix in order to set him up for success, especially at the start of a new school year post-Covid. So, this is where things start to go poorly, and I will try to recall as much detail as I can. Within 2-3 weeks of school starting, our long time CEA informed us that she would be retiring early, and that her last day was the end of that week. She was not able to tell us who her replacement would be, nor what transition meetings (if any) were happening. We were shocked and saddened, especially because we had already lost our trusted Resource Teacher prior to school commencing. And to be honest, had we known there would be even the possibility of a premature departure by his CEA, we would have chosen differently for this school year (as mentioned above).

Once his CEA retired, there was no replacement. He would have the occasional 'helper' check in on him, but due to Covid requirements, they were not able to share CEAs outside of his cohort. He was without proper, designated support for weeks. And that meant no support in the classroom, on breaks, recess, as well as lunch. Over the next three months, they eventually hired a replacement, who ended up quitting within 2 weeks. I believe another substitute replacement came in shortly after the first one left. But she wasn't there for long. Sometime in December, he finally received an experienced CEA. I'm not sure if she was pulled from another classroom, but she was amazing.

Unfortunately, by the time she came on board, we had had enough. Through the course of four months, our son had gone through periods of no support at all, or semi-occasional support when it was actually available. There was zero consistency or routine. As a result, his anxiety increased, as did negative behaviours. We were in constant contact with the new Resource Teacher, trying to resolve any issues that came up. We had meetings with our Behavioural Consultant and team, so that we could pass along ideas and possible solutions. We offered suggestions, while begging and pleading for support regularly. The teacher, in our opinion, was extremely unhelpful. She seemed so frustrated with us every day, almost as though



it was his fault for his behaviour. Not once did she seem to sympathize with his situation or ours. She even told me one day after school that I needed to 'advocate for my son', as though we hadn't been doing that tirelessly for weeks. I was heartbroken, and I cried that entire evening.

We felt let down, isolated, and scared for our son's mental health. How could our experience go downhill so quickly? How did he go from being involved in classroom activities, to being cooped up in the resource room for hours at a time? I still struggle with thinking about how confused and scared he must have felt. How unfair that experience was for him. How, even though the school had his funding AND he was only attending three days a week, he received ZERO support for so many days. Thankfully, we were able to connect with a Distance Learning Facility that took him into their program starting January 1st. We were able to get some of his funding back (thankfully), and we've been distance learning ever since.

I don't have much more to add. We are still saddened with everything that transpired. It was, and continues to be, a very exhausting and emotional story to tell. But I know I'm not alone, and that this is a widespread systemic issue for many families. It would be helpful to have supportive choices and options, so we do not feel alone and left out.

*"Our local DL does not work with our child's learning style and abilities.*

*Change is very hard, and after many trauma filled years in brick-and-mortar school, even some with fantastic support, it doesn't even touch what his current IDL has allowed. Losing this would be detrimental to his will to live."*



## LISA

Our son entered grade 11 at the same school as last year. He has an autism diagnosis as well as a global developmental delay. Due to changes in his staffed resource (he is in a Special Needs Agreement) we decided that he would start school the week after school began and that he would go for partial days to start. On his first day of school, he damaged a feminine hygiene dispenser (as they had him using a different washroom this year from the one he was used to). He also destroyed a chrome book. A Chromebook was damaged in the spring of 2021 so I'm not sure why they decided to offer him another Chromebook, but they did. Also, on leaving the school he damaged a vehicle.

After that occurred on his first day, we were told he couldn't attend the Thursday or Friday going forward as a meeting had to happen. The meeting happened on Friday and his dad, me and the staffed resource were on Teams. In the classroom at the school there were 2 Vice Principals, School Principal, Director of Student Services, successor to the Director who is set to retire, SD Occupational Therapist, 2 Resource Teachers and Student Services Support Person. It honestly felt like we were being ganged up on by a group of mostly privileged, middle aged white men. I can't even imagine the salary costs involved with facilitating such a meeting. Even though our goal was for him to attend on the Monday we were told by the head of Student Services that another meeting would be required between the school and the staffed resource to collaborate further. Our staffed resource wasn't available until Tuesday, so they finally met on Tuesday. Our son was finally able to attend on Wednesday (a full week after the incident).

Our son is in a care agreement as his needs, we do acknowledge, our extraordinary. However, if he wasn't how are families expected to work and parent when their children with high support needs are not going to the school for let's face it what is often glorified respite. My son doesn't learn a lot at school, but he enjoys going. His being turned away constantly is causing trauma and doing damage to his self-esteem.

The following week our son went to grab his Education Assistant. My understanding is he didn't actually make contact, but we were told that he could not attend on Monday as they would need to reformat the Student Response Plan. We had a Student Response Plan that was revised in June 2021 because of a similar behaviour. I was livid that they had to meet yet again to revise a plan that should have not required more tweaking as it was already in place.



The next month our son grabbed his staffed resource worker by the wrist. School staff have been able to dictate that he can not attend unless he is regulated. School staff made the decision on that day that he wasn't regulated and advised he couldn't attend that day. I think the staff that are with my child 24/7 should be able to decide if he is regulated, not school staff that have seen him a handful of times since the school year began. He has gone less than half of the instructional days this year and I don't believe that the school staff are experts on our son's regulation.

We have had numerous meetings with the school and his staffed resource and us as parents are hopeful that things will change. However, I don't have a lot of faith in our public education system. I hear from families every week that feel that their neurodiverse child is being excluded from the public education system. No wonder so many families have already pulled the plug on public education and sought out other alternatives.

The public education system in BC is not working and needs an overhaul in my opinion. I do not believe it is set up for students that are neurodiverse to be successful.

*"I'm very concerned about what the new changes will mean for special needs children. I have two children with IEPs and our online school has been an excellent support for us."*

