



# BCEdAccess

www.bcedaccess.com  
bcedcaccess@gmail.com  
@bcedaccess

March 18, 2019

The Honorable Rob  
Fleming, Minister of  
Education Parliament  
Buildings Victoria, BC  
V8V 1X4

## **Re: Accessible School Playgrounds**

Dear Minister Fleming,

We would like to thank you for providing funding for 50 new school playgrounds this year and 51 last year, with a commitment to ongoing funding of the Playground Equipment Program each year. We're very pleased that the provincial government recognizes the need for such costs, essential to learning, to be funded by the Province and not by parent fundraising.

**BCedAccess Society** is an organization serving families of school-aged children and youth with disabilities and complex learners, from all over British Columbia. Our parent/guardian support group has nearly 1700 members and continues to grow. We work together to provide support and to educate one another about the rights of our children to equitably access their education. In addition, we engage with other education stakeholders to make things better for children and youth with disabilities now and in the future.

## **Our Perspective**

We were especially pleased to see the number of accessible, inclusive playgrounds grow, from 25 last year to 30 this year - it's wonderful progress! Our support group members are disappointed, however, to see that a choice was given to the Districts

as to whether or not to purchase an accessible school playground. In 2019, accessible playgrounds should be the norm and not the exception.

While some schools may not currently have students who use wheelchairs or other mobility devices, there are still students who have other disabilities, both visible and invisible, who would benefit from an accessible, inclusive playground. There may be children in the larger community who would also benefit from using an accessible playground, and of course student enrollment can change at any time. When a school and/or its playground is not accessible, this can be used to exclude a child from their neighbourhood school. It's also important to remember that some staff, family members, and caregivers have disabilities and they, too, need to be able to engage with the children in their care.

*According to Physical & Health Canada, 38% of Canadian children with a disability almost never get physical exercise after school compared to only 10% of typically developing children.*

*53% of children with disabilities have zero or only one close friend, according to a report from Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital.*

Public education is about educating the whole child, and play is a big part of learning. The research shows that children with disabilities benefit from play like all other children, and having a playground that includes all children helps to break down barriers to access, and friendships.

All playgrounds on school properties need to be inclusive and it shouldn't be a choice. Any new school playgrounds being built should especially adhere to this standard. We are asking that you revise the criteria for the Playground Equipment Program such that accessible, inclusive school playgrounds are established as the baseline standard for this province.

Here's what it means to some of our members' children to have an accessible playground:

"What a kid at our playground said about K in his peer chair was as simple as 'so cool!!! Look. He's got his legs now and he's walking alone. Without you helping!!' That's what children see when they see children in chairs always being pushed/lead by adults. But when that child has some accessibility for independence, to have access to what the other kids have access to...they

see a friend. To be able to have a child who has specialized needs have access - it opens up a world of acceptance.”

"They're important for us to get out together as a family and just have less barriers to being able to do things that other families can do,"

“It’s a chance for building social relationships between kids of all abilities. Just showing kids, that kids are kids and play is play. No matter what they can or can’t do, it’s just having a place that they can do it at together.”

## **In Conclusion**

Children with disabilities in BC schools are disproportionately suffering as a result of too many years of fiscal restraint and austerity. This has resulted in the loss of programs and services and has had a considerable impact not only on the education of children with disabilities and complex learners, but even more notably on their mental health.

We believe that equitable access to education is a priority for the current government, and it would be a simple and significant step for the government to make an immediate commitment to make all school playgrounds accessible and inclusive going forward.

Sincerely,

Tracy Humphreys  
Founder and Chair, BCEdAccess Society

Cc: Andrea Sinclair, President - BCCPAC, Karen DeLong, Director of Inclusive Education - Inclusion BC, Paul Faoro, President - CUPE BC, Glen Hansman, President - BCTF, Sonia Furstenau, Green Party House Leader and MLA, Cowichan Valley, Dan Davies, Education Critic and MLA, Peace River North