



5<sup>th</sup> March 2020

**Dear Minister Fleming,**

Disabled people experience bullying at higher rates than the rest of the population. Children and youth with ADHD are bullied up to 4 times more often than their peers, and children with specific language impairment (SLI) are up to 3 times more at risk for victimization in schools. This is to name just two examples.

Bullying of disabled children and youth correlates to deep concerns around depression and self-esteem. BCEdAccess hears frequent reports from their community of families with children as young as 6 with suicidal ideation after being bullied. Bullying often begins in childhood but continues throughout a person's life.

Here are a few of the stories that youth and adult self-advocates with BC People First have shared with us:

- Dara Watson - "I was bullied in school and called every name in the book, I was laughed at for the way I talk and look. I have also been bullied at work because of my disability. It makes me sad and I cry but I can get through it because of support from my family and friends'.
- Mike Gauthier - "When I went to school there was a guy that bullied me so badly that it even made the teacher cry. When I think of bullying it makes me really emotional".
- Jo-Anne Gauthier - "When I get bullied I feel like I am nobody. I feel like I should just keep my mouth shut because people make fun of me when I talk, because I don't speak well they think I don't know how to do anything. But I have my own thoughts, dreams, and feelings. I am married now and I have kids, I live on my own. It is not right that people bully me for how I look or sound. It happened a lot in school growing up".

We are writing this letter to request a joint meeting between the Minister of Education, BC People First, and BCEdAccess, where we would like to discuss the following issues:

- Updating the Erase website to more specifically address issues of bullying and safety with regard to students with disabilities.
- Creating and implementing disability-specific curriculum resources for schools.
- Creating guidelines, similar to those for seclusion and restraint, to guide districts to have a clear and specific anti-bullying policy and procedure.



BC People First and BCEdAccess also plan to undertake a deeper research project in order to find out the current state of bullying in our British Columbia schools and in our community for people labelled with a disability, and to explore best practices.

We thank you in advance for your time and support.

Sincerely,

BCEdAccess Society & BC People First Society

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**About the BC People First Society:**

The BC People First Society (BCPF) is a non-profit provincial organization that is part of a national movement. We work to make sure that people with a developmental disability are respected and included in communities as full citizens. We do this by supporting each other to speak up for ourselves and others. Our vision is a diverse community where all people are: included and involved; honoured and respected; seen for their abilities, and supported to participate.

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**About the BCEdAccess Society:**

BCEdAccess champions and supports children and youth who have disabilities and who are complex learners to reach their full potential in BC education, and in all aspects of their lives. This is achieved through supporting families, sharing information, providing education to families, allies, professionals and students, providing community engagement and awareness,

and other activities to promote equitable access to education and inclusion for all.

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