



December 1, 2022

To the Honourable David Eby, Premier

We would like to offer our congratulations on becoming the Premier of the province of British Columbia. We have seen your commitment to justice and human rights in your years in government and we have faith that you will continue to pursue that path as you work for the people of this province to make things better.

The BCEdAccess Society is an organization of families of children and youth with disabilities and diverse learning needs with an online community of over 5000, serving all families from all over the land, air and water now known as British Columbia. We champion and support these students to reach their full potential in BC education, and in all aspects of their lives.

As such, we are writing to request that you explicitly include students with disabilities and diverse abilities in the Minister of Education and Child Care's mandate letter.

We know that the contents of the mandate letter are the direction for the work of each Ministry. Past mandate letters for this Ministry from the NDP government have brought important incorporation of Indigenous curriculum content and improved success for Indigenous students, more capital funding to build new schools and update old ones, new accessible playgrounds, and work on food security and mental health. Also included in the recent mandate letter was specific direction around Truth and Reconciliation and anti-racism. Disabled children, youth and adults have intersecting identities which often results in greater inequity for those who are systemically oppressed across their identities. The work so far has helped some of these students and their families, but barriers to access continue because they are not the subject of Ministry focus.

The specific mention of disabled students will allow the Ministry of Education and Child Care to bring the focus onto these students and their success. 12% of students (over 80 thousand) have a disability designation from the Ministry. Many others are on waitlists for diagnosis and are otherwise not yet identified. Statistics Canada data shows that 22% of Canadians 15 or up are disabled. Completion and graduation rates for disabled students lag significantly behind those of other learners across the province—and that reporting is done in a way that confuses completion and graduation, with only one leading to a diploma. Specific attention is needed to ensure that students with disabilities and diverse learning needs are able to access their human right to equitable access to education.

Exclusion of disabled students from their education is the number one cited issue by our online community of more than 5000 families. We are now in our 5th year of formally tracking exclusions, and we have learned:

- In 2021/22 there were an estimated 4,760 incidents of exclusion reported



- 14.5% of respondents reported Exclusion lasting “Longer than 4 months” in 2020/21
- The majority of exclusions reported were students who are only allowed to attend school for part of the day, or are excluded entirely for long periods of time, from weeks to months
- Nearly 78% of the 34 students who responded to the survey themselves said the school did not inform them why they were being excluded.
- Over 4 years, students with multiple systemically oppressed identities were reported as having been restrained and/or secluded with high frequency, sometimes disproportionate to population numbers for those identities, eg. autistic students, students with mental illness, who are Indigenous, Black, South Asian, and families with income under \$25K annually.
- Many families are paying privately for assessments, specialized therapies and support that should be provided through the schools (see ‘Special Education’ Policy Manual, Section D); other families can’t afford to pay, so their children go without needed services.

We have added a list of action items that could be included in the mandate letter, and that we are advocating for:

- EA Standards of Practice
- The release of the new Inclusive Education Policy Manual
- An update to Ministerial Order m150/89 so that it no longer allows for Exclusion.
- A pilot of an annual audit of the outcomes of IEPs for students
- Legal Aid funding increases to support families of children and youth with disabilities in cases going to the human rights tribunal
- Changes to Area Standards and accessible building standards and practices for schools and child care spaces
- A ban on the use of restraint and seclusion in schools

BCEdAccess would be glad to support the government in the implementation of any of these items which would improve the lives of British Columbians. Children with disabilities and diverse learning needs have families, and those families are often significantly impacted in their finances, their relationships and their mental health because of inequities in systems. We would also encourage you to include disability explicitly in the mandate letters for the Ministry of Children and Family Development, the Ministry of Advanced Education and Training, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions, the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, the Parliamentary Secretary for Accessibility, and the Attorney General. Leaving out disability excludes 22% of our province’s people.

Sincerely,

Tracy Humphreys, she/her
Executive Director, BCEdAccess Society



BCEdAccess carries out our mission 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. We run a well respected annual parent/guardian advocacy conference, bringing together families, self-advocates, educators and allies of children and youth with disabilities. We also do research into the exclusion of students with disabilities from school and community, and other disability issues impacting children and youth. We advocate to local and provincial government on behalf of families to improve accessibility in all aspects of the lives of children and youth with disabilities.

The function of BCEdAccess is to facilitate the following main goal with its supporting objectives:

- to advance education for families of children with disabilities and barriers to social inclusion by:
 - offering instructional seminars, conferences, workshops and webinars to the general public on a part-time basis
 - organizing and operating an annual conference on inclusion in public education
 - providing instructional seminars on topics related to disability and social inclusion
 - providing opportunities for families to take part in peer support groups, forums and events or exchange ideas, develop coping skills, gather resources and build knowledge about inclusion
 - conducting research on best practices related to inclusion in education and disseminating the results of the research to the public
 - researching, highlighting and developing information and resources, including through social media, online support groups and public affairs, to help families and the public learn about inclusion in education and the effects of exclusion, both in the past and present

BCEdAccess works collaboratively with other not for profit organizations and charities to assist them in their goals such as inclusion and equitable access to resources, emphasizing educational as well as other social supports. BCEdAccess also works constructively with the British Columbia Ministry of Education and Child Care, the Ministry of Child and Family Development, and other Ministries related to children and youth, to identify gaps and other areas of service that require attention and improvement. The feedback provided to these ministries is received from both the immediate community they serve as well as the general public seeking help on acute matters of educational concern.