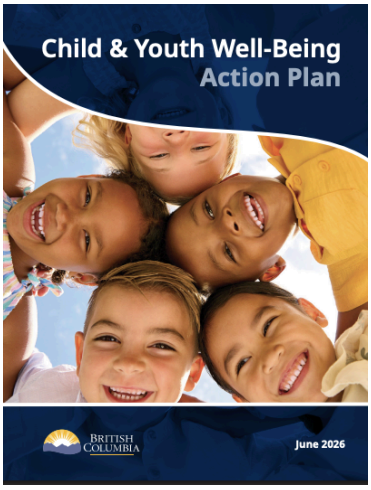
BCEdAccess

Don’t build a system around exclusion



Submission on the Child and Youth Well-Being Action Plan

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Child and Youth Well-Being Action Plan and Outcomes Framework.

BCEdAccess supports the stated goals of earlier help, better coordination, family-centred services, Indigenous self-determination, and reducing the burden on families who are currently forced to navigate fragmented systems. Families absolutely need services that communicate with each other. They need practical help before a crisis. They need support that does not require them to retell their story repeatedly, chase waitlists, or become experts in multiple ministries simply to keep their children safe, housed, learning, and connected.

However, we are deeply concerned that the plan risks building a more coordinated system around exclusion without clearly naming, measuring, or stopping exclusion itself.

The example of Rebecca and Cole is important. Cole is a disabled eight-year-old whose access to school is reduced to two days per week because of “behaviours.” The plan then describes a future where navigators, early-help specialists, assessments, benefits, behavioural supports, therapists, and school-based coordination help the family stabilise.

Some of those supports could be very helpful. But the starting point is still that a school has reduced a disabled child’s access to education. That should not be treated as an ordinary system pressure to be managed around. It should be treated as a serious failure of accessibility, inclusion, and accountability.

Families do not need a better route around inaccessible schools. They need accessible schools!

We gathered feedback on the Action Plan from BCEdAccess members, many of whom are parents and caregivers of disabled children and youth in British Columbia. This is a difficult time of year for families, especially those facing school exclusion, failed transitions, year-end meetings, summer care gaps, and exhaustion from ongoing advocacy. This submission should therefore be read not as representing all families, but as reflecting the views of members who had capacity to respond within a short and difficult window.

Their feedback was consistent and urgent: the plan must commit to ending school exclusion, support children based on need rather than diagnostic status, hold systems accountable for IEP implementation, address funding and staffing honestly, and set concrete timelines for action. We offer this feedback not as a rejection of coordinated services, but as a warning that coordination cannot become a substitute for access, rights, and accountability.

Feedback

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The plan must explicitly address school exclusion

Partial days, informal removals, “behaviour” days, room clears, shortened timetables, unrecorded absences, and home-based work packages are not minor administrative choices. They are lost learning opportunities. They are a lost sense of belonging. They often mean lost income for parents. They can push families toward housing instability, job loss, burnout, and child welfare involvement.

The plan should commit to:

- ending disability-related exclusion from school except where a genuinely temporary, documented, safety-based measure is necessary;
- requiring districts to document every reduced timetable, partial day, room clear, informal send-home, and school-directed absence;
- publicly reporting lost instructional time by district, grade, disability-related need or designation where known, Indigenous identity where appropriate and safe, and other relevant equity markers;
- requiring a written re-entry and support plan with timelines whenever a student’s school day is reduced;
- prohibiting reduced schedules where the real barrier is unavailable staffing, training, or services.

A plan about child well-being cannot treat lost school access as background noise.

Diagnosis and assessment must not become the gate to support

The plan repeatedly points to assessment, navigation, and documentation as routes to help. Assessment can be useful, but children should not have to wait months or years for a diagnosis before schools accommodate known needs.

Families already report that support is often delayed because a child is not yet designated, not yet assessed, or not yet eligible for a particular program. This is especially harmful for children who cannot tolerate assessment, who are in burnout, who have complex communication needs, or whose families face barriers to medical and psychological documentation. It is also a major concern for rural or geographically isolated families, who may not have access to the assessment professionals required.

The plan should clearly state that schools must respond to functional needs now. A child's access to school should not depend on whether a family can obtain a diagnosis, complete paperwork, or secure a place on a waitlist.

IEP reform must focus on implementation

The plan's K–12 commitment to new IEP guidelines and resources is not enough.

Families do not mainly need prettier IEPs. **They need schools to do what IEPs already say.** Many families spend years advocating for goals, accommodations, sensory supports, communication plans, literacy interventions, or predictable adult support, only to discover that the plan is not being consistently implemented.

New guidelines will not solve this unless they are paired with accountability.

The plan should require:

- a clear implementation standard for IEPs;
- regular review of whether supports listed in the IEP are actually being delivered and a designated person accountable for delivery;
- meaningful parent and student consultation before supports are changed or withdrawn;
- consequences where districts repeatedly fail to implement documented accommodations;
- audits that examine student need, access, and outcomes, not merely whether paperwork is tidy.

Changing the format of IEPs will not help if the institution is allowed to ignore the content.

Behaviour language needs to shift to barrier analysis

The plan uses *behaviour language* in ways that risk locating the problem inside the child. Families repeatedly experience this in schools: "behaviour" is named, while the environment, staffing, sensory conditions, curriculum demands, trauma, communication barriers, disability-related regulation needs, and adult responses disappear from view.

A child who is overwhelmed in an inaccessible environment is not the root cause of the system's failure. Behaviour is information. It should trigger a serious review of unmet needs and environmental barriers, not a reduced school day.

The plan should require public systems to use a barrier-removal lens when children are described as having behavioural needs. That means asking:

- What support was missing?
- What environmental demands were too high?

- What communication needs were unmet?
- What sensory, relational, instructional, or staffing changes were required?
- What did adults do before the situation escalated?
- What must change so the child can belong and participate?

Without this shift, the plan may reproduce the same ableist logic under softer language.

Funding and accountability both matter

Families and staff are right that chronic underfunding has damaged inclusive education. Schools cannot provide meaningful inclusion without enough trained adults, specialist support, planning time, accessible spaces, mental health supports, and timely OT, SLP, behavioural, literacy, and counselling services.

But funding cannot be the only answer. Two schools with similar constraints can make very different choices. Districts also make decisions about staffing, administration, legal spending, surpluses, program closures, and whether they treat inclusion as a right or an optional aspiration.

The Province should not allow districts to point to provincial underfunding while avoiding scrutiny of their own practices. Districts must allocate resources equitably while meeting their legal obligations to individual disabled students. That requires public transparency about how funding, staffing, specialist services, waitlists, program closures, exclusions, legal spending, and accumulated surpluses affect students' access to education. The plan should include both adequate provincial investment and district-level accountability for how existing resources are allocated and whether students' rights are being upheld.

Avoid service bottlenecks

A more integrated system could help families if it is properly funded, locally accessible, culturally safe, disability-affirming, and designed around actual family needs. But families are understandably concerned that "hubs" or renamed hub-like models will simply create another access point with another waitlist.

Professionals are already stretched. Families already wait too long. A plan that promises faster help without new capacity, workforce commitments, timelines, or funding will not be credible.

Families also raised concerns that hub-like models may disrupt relationships with trusted providers while still remaining inaccessible to the children most harmed by existing systems — especially those with histories of institutional harm, school exclusion, or broken trust.

Coordination matters, but it cannot substitute for actual staff, actual appointments, actual school support, actual child care inclusion, actual respite, trusted relationships, and implementation.

Consultation fatigue is real

Families are tired of surveys, consultations, frameworks, and plans that do not change daily life. Many children will age out before long-term system transformation reaches them. Others are losing school access now.

While the government continues to describe historic investments in public services, many families of disabled children experience the system as retracting. Support is harder to access, trusted relationships are disrupted, waitlists remain long, school inclusion is increasingly conditional, and parents are asked to absorb the gaps through unpaid labour, reduced employment, and constant advocacy.

That perception gap matters. A plan that promises transformation, but does not name timelines, resources, responsibilities, and remedies, risks deepening families' belief that government measures progress by announcements rather than by whether children can actually access school, services, and community life.

The plan needs timelines, named responsibilities, public reporting, and remedies when systems fail. It should be clear who is responsible for each commitment, when families can expect change, how progress will be measured, and what happens when a child continues to be excluded despite the plan's stated goals.

Requested changes

On behalf of our members, BCEdAccess calls on government to strengthen the plan by adding:

1. A specific commitment to end and publicly track disability-related school exclusion.
2. Mandatory reporting of partial days, informal removals, room clears, shortened timetables, and other lost instructional time, disaggregated by district, grade, disability-related need or designation where known, and other equity markers where safe and appropriate.
3. A clear statement that schools must accommodate functional needs without waiting for diagnosis, designation, or assessment.
4. Accountability for IEP implementation, not only new IEP guidelines.
5. Barrier-removal language to replace child-blaming behaviour framing.
6. Dedicated funding and workforce commitments for inclusive K–12 education and community-based supports.
7. District-level accountability for inclusive practice, resource allocation, and outcomes.
8. Timelines, named responsible ministries or agencies, public reporting, and enforceable follow-through.
9. Assurance that integrated service models will not replace school obligations or become another waitlist.

10. Meaningful involvement of disabled children, families, Indigenous communities, and frontline workers in implementation, not only consultation.

The Action Plan identifies real problems: fragmentation, crisis-driven responses, long waits, inaccessible systems, and families being left to hold everything together. But the plan will fail disabled children if it improves navigation while leaving exclusion intact.

The goal should not be to help families survive inaccessible schools. The goal should be to make schools accessible, accountable, and safe places of belonging for disabled children from the start.