

Position Statement

Access to K-12 Education for Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

Technical Version

Adopted September 2026

Introduction

Inclusion BC is a federation of members advancing the human rights and social inclusion of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Guided by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we affirm that people with disabilities have the right to lifelong learning on an equal basis, without discrimination, and with the supports needed to participate alongside their peers. K-12 education is a foundation for lifelong learning.

Our position statements aim to challenge racist, ableist, ageist, colonial and other unfair ideas about people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Our goal is to promote the inclusion of all members of the community, regardless of income, ethnicity, background, culture, religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, or disability.

We recognize and support Indigenous rights and titles throughout the province of British Columbia, the implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the 94 Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and the B.C. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act.

Position Statement

Children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to an inclusive K-12 education in their community schools, alongside same-age peers, with the supports and accommodations required to learn, participate, and contribute fully. This includes access to full-time education, learning environments, programs,

and activities¹ in which students with, and without, disabilities participate and learn together. Inclusive education benefits all students.

To ensure access to inclusive education, the provincial government and school districts must remove systemic barriers and apply universal design.² The government must also ensure that inclusive education for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit students is implemented with Indigenous leadership and respect for Indigenous ways of knowing.

As part of lifelong learning, this position statement addresses K-12 education and highlights the specific needs of children and youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

To skip the background and rights-based section and move directly to the calls to action, [click here](#).

Background

In the 1950s, many parents in British Columbia rejected institutionalization and organized local supports so their children with disabilities could learn in their communities. Since then, education has moved from exclusion and segregation toward inclusive education, where all children learn together and teaching reflects the diversity in classrooms.³ This approach recognizes that difference is a strength; teaching and supports adjust and adapt to meet the needs of all students.

Inclusive education has been mandated in BC's K-12 education system since 1989 through a Ministerial Order, and substantial progress has been made. However, BC's education system faces significant challenges in realizing the goal of inclusive education for all students. There is an urgent opportunity and need to take action to ensure all students can exercise their right to education.

¹ This includes, for example, field trips, clubs, sports, and theme-specific programs that are organized and led by the school.

² Universal Design means designing an environment so that it can be accessed, understood, and used as much as possible by all people. This is explained further in the Universal Design section of this document.

³ Moore, Shelley, Inclusion 2.0: Teaching to Diversity, online:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO3_UYaz1HE

Rights of Children with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

In British Columbia, the right to inclusive education is shaped by the [School Act](#), [Ministerial Orders](#), the [Inclusive Education Services Manual](#), [BC Human Rights Code](#), the [Accessible British Columbia Act](#), [Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act](#) (DRIPA), and Canada's obligations under the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#). Together, these frameworks require governments and school districts to identify, remove, and prevent barriers so students with disabilities can access education on an equal basis.

In 2016, the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities issued a [General Comment on Article 24](#). This comment affirms that children are right-holders and clarifies how the right to inclusive education should be implemented. It also references four international agreements and frameworks that have strengthened understanding of the right to inclusive education, while recognizing ongoing challenges, such as the denial of this right and its provision in inferior and isolated settings.⁴

The core expectation of the BC education system is clearly stipulated in the Preamble of the School Act, which says that the purpose of BC's education system is to enable **all learners** to develop their potential and acquire the knowledge, skills, and literacy needed to participate fully in society and the economy.⁵

Despite well-documented legal obligations, serious gaps persist. In its [2025 Concluding Observations](#), the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities highlighted concerns with the persistent discrimination of persons with disabilities in Canada, including:

- The prevalence of segregated educational systems,

⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2016), General comment No. 4, Article 24: Right to inclusive education, online:

<https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/crpd/2016/112080>. The Committee references the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the World Declaration on Education for All (1990), the UN Standard Rules on Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1992) and the Salamanca Declaration and Framework for Action (1994).

⁵ British Columbia, School Act [RSBC 1996], online:

https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/96412_02

- Inconsistent access to inclusive education across provinces and territories,
- The lack of culturally appropriate inclusive education for Indigenous persons with disabilities,
- Insufficient funding and qualified personnel for educational services for persons with disabilities, and
- The lack of adequate training and teaching approaches to guarantee inclusive education.

The UN Committee made strong recommendations to Canada specific to inclusive education:⁶

- To develop a national inclusive education action plan to transition from segregated education to quality, inclusive education, including:
 - Consistent policies on inclusive education through the provinces and territories,
 - Establish a database to capture comprehensive data on students with disabilities in the pre-school, primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education.
 - Ensure that inclusive education policies include and address the experiences and cultural context of Indigenous persons with disabilities, including regarding their representation in the school curricula,
 - Develop strategies to increase the enrolment of persons with disabilities at the secondary and tertiary levels of education.
- Amend the Accessible Canada Act and other domestic laws to explicitly incorporate the duty to accommodate as a legal obligation, with accountability mechanisms for non-compliance, and set a timeline for the issuance of regulations and their implementation, with clear indicators of progress.

Despite strong international, federal, and provincial protections, many children and youth with disabilities still do not receive full access to education, mainstream activities, or the supports needed to access the same opportunities provided to their

⁶ Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2025), Concluding observations on the combined second and third periodic reports of Canada - Advance Unedited Version, online: <https://docs.un.org/en/CRPD/C/CAN/CO/2-3>

peers. BC can show leadership by ensuring inclusive education is implemented consistently across the province.

Investigation by the BC Ombudsperson Office

Through Inclusion BC's Advocacy Line, nearly half of the 1,300 calls we support every year relate to barriers to inclusive education. Families from every school district in BC seek support to navigate district processes, Section 11 education appeals, and other recourse options like the [Ombudsperson](#) or [Human Rights Tribunal](#) claims. These processes place a significant burden on families, who must advocate for rights established in law but too often not realized in practice.

Despite our years of collaboration with the government, meaningful progress in addressing school exclusion and protecting the rights of students with disabilities has been minimal. In 2024, Inclusion BC raised these concerns directly with the Minister of Education and engaged the BC Human Rights Commissioner, urging a broader examination of inclusive education in BC.

In January 2025, the BC Ombudsperson launched [Fairness in BC's Public Schools](#), an investigation into school exclusion in the public education system. Inclusion BC was invited to contribute, and as of August 2026, we are awaiting findings and recommendations to strengthen inclusive education in BC.

Promises Yet to Be Fulfilled

Over the past nine years, the BC government has launched several initiatives with the potential to strengthen inclusive education. Despite their early promise, these efforts were not completed, and school districts' stated commitments to inclusion often remain unmet in practice, shaping the current context.

Education Funding Model Review

Many strong declarations of inclusion have not translated into investment or improved accountability in the BC school system. In 2018, the Ministry of Education appointed an Independent Funding Model Review Panel to examine how it allocates funding in the K-12 public education system. The review created an important opportunity to reconsider how BC's education system supports students with disabilities. The Panel released its [recommendations](#) later that year, and the Ministry began implementing a phased action plan through several working groups.

However, after the 2020 provincial election, work on the review stalled and was ultimately abandoned, despite repeated requests for clarity about its future.

The current funding model ties supplemental funding for school districts⁷ to students' designations, which some districts use as a condition to receive support. However, the *School Act*, its regulations, and human rights law do not require supports to depend on a designation. The model also intersects with class size and composition rules⁸ that limit how many students with certain designations can be placed in one classroom, creating discriminatory planning pressures even when districts try to avoid exclusion in practice.

Inclusive Education Policy Update

The Ministry's review of the *Special Education Services Manual (1995)* created an opportunity to modernize the inclusive education policy. Although draft updates generated optimism, the Ministry later chose not to publish the revised document in full and instead worked on partial changes. So far, only terminology has been updated, leaving the renamed *Inclusive Education Services Manual* largely unchanged.

In 2024, the Ministry established a working group to update the *Guidelines for Developing Individual Education Plans*, with the expectation that it would incorporate modernized guidelines into the *Inclusive Education Services Manual*. That work is not yet complete.

Educational Assistants in Each Classroom

In his 2024 campaign, Premier Eby recognized that classrooms needed more support across the province and promised that if his party formed government again, each classroom would have an educational assistant (EA). To date, there has been no further news or efforts indicating this will be implemented soon.

⁷ British Columbia, K-12 funding – Inclusive Education, online: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k-12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/k-12-funding-inclusive-education>

⁸ British Columbia Public School Employers' Association (2009), Guidelines for Implementing Class Size and Composition Provisions, online: <https://bcpsea.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/documents/ai2009-26-guidelines.pdf>

Structural Factors

International research has long shown that inclusive classrooms benefit students with and without disabilities.⁹ Although BC has been viewed as progressive on inclusive education, several structural factors must be corrected or strengthened for the province to meet its responsibilities.

Poverty of Expectations

Poverty of expectations is a form of systemic ableism that limits students with disabilities through watered-down curricula, reduced opportunities, and low expectations for what they can achieve. Instead of providing necessary supports, students are viewed mainly through a medical model that focuses on limitations and denies them pathways toward higher-level credentials such as the Dogwood Diploma and post-secondary education. This undermines their right to lifelong learning, their economic well-being, and the contributions they can make to our society.

To address low expectations and enrich opportunities for students with disabilities, school districts need to prioritize meaningful, strengths-based Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), move away from segregated classrooms, and ensure well-resourced learning environments that honour every student's right to achieve their full potential.

Fragmented Accountability

BC's education governance structure divides responsibility between the Ministry of Education and Child Care and 60 school districts. This has created diluted responsibility and limited accountability, allowing the legacy of an institutional mindset to continue and perpetuate harm. Even when the Ministry establishes promising guidelines or policies, inconsistencies and inequities in understanding and implementation persist across the province. A 2025 District Parents Advisory Council report found that some funds allocated for inclusive education were not spent for

⁹ Instituto Alana and Abt Associates (2016), A summary of the evidence on inclusive education, online: https://alana.org.br/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/A_Summary_of_the_evidence_on_inclusive_education.pdf

that purpose. Stronger accountability is needed to ensure districts use inclusive education funds as intended.¹⁰

The Representative for Children and Youth's lack of jurisdiction over education has left the province without an independent oversight body. Despite the 2022 formal [recommendation by the Standing Committee on Children and Youth](#) to expand the mandate of the Representative's Office, the Office of the Attorney General has not completed the necessary process to date. As a result, accountability for inclusive education remains fragmented and too dependent on local leadership, local interpretation and school-based practice.

Universal Design

Universal design is essential to inclusive K-12 education because it creates environments, services, and learning approaches that all students can access, understand, and use to the greatest extent possible.¹¹ In schools, this includes accessible buildings and playgrounds,¹² flexible service delivery, and Universal Design for Learning, which separates learning goals from the ways students achieve them.¹³

This inclusive approach supports the diverse needs of students with disabilities and enriches everyone's educational experience. When all classrooms embrace universal design, they cultivate a culture of acceptance and equality, setting the stage for a more compassionate and equitable society.

¹⁰ Inclusive Education Working Group, Vancouver District Parent Advisory Council (2025), Advocating for Equity - A Caregiver-led Examination of Inclusive Education in Vancouver Public Schools, online: <https://www.vancouverdpac.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/IEWG-report-Advocating-for-Equity-Final-January-23-2025.pdf>

¹¹ Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, National Disability Authority, online: <https://universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design>

¹² Ross, et al (2022), Creating Inclusive Playgrounds: A Playbook of Considerations and Strategies, online: <https://hollandbloorview.ca/sites/default/files/2022-07/Creating%20Inclusive%20Playgrounds%20Playbook%20%28July%202022%29.pdf>

¹³ Universal Design for Learning, What is UDL?, Paul R. MacPherson Institute for Leadership, Innovation and Excellence in Teaching, McMaster University, online: <https://mi.mcmaster.ca/universal-design-for-learning-what-is-udl>

Equitable Access

Equitable access is a responsibility of the education system recognized in the [Inclusive Education Policy](#), not an advantage for some students or a burden on schools. It requires supports that respond to each student's needs, including addressing the compounded barriers faced by students with disabilities who are Indigenous, racialized, 2SLGBTQIA+, new immigrants to Canada, or members of other equity-deserving groups.

In the [Moore decision](#), the Supreme Court of Canada established that inclusive education support “is not a dispensable luxury... it is the ramp that provides access to the statutory commitment to education made to *all* children in British Columbia.”¹⁴

Meaningful Consultation

Section 7 of the BC School Act recognizes parents' right to consult with teachers or administrative officers about their child's education. For students with disabilities, meaningful consultation includes ongoing, transparent involvement in IEP planning, review, and placement decisions, guided by student voice, family expertise, partnership, mutual respect, and open dialogue.¹⁵ Despite this recognized right and the updated guide developed by [the BC Council of Administrators of Inclusive Support in Education \(BC CAISE\)](#), parents continue to contact our Advocacy Line about the challenges they face when they are not meaningfully consulted or involved with the IEP process, or when their input is ignored in the development of their child's IEP.

Barriers to Inclusive Education

Based on the experiences of our federation members across BC, the trends identified by our Community Inclusion Advocacy Program, and the community conversations we hosted as part of the [Community-Led Collaboration Project](#), the following are key barriers to inclusive education for students with disabilities.

¹⁴ Moore v. British Columbia (Education), 2012 SCC 61.

¹⁵ BC Council of Administrators of Inclusion Support in Education (2025), A Guide to Meaningful Consultation, online: <https://bccaise.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/BCCAISE-Meaningful-Consultation-2026.pdf>

- **Exclusion:** Students with disabilities are being placed on partial-day schedules or excluded from mainstream education for reasons that do not align with their right to education.¹⁶ The Ombudsperson has recognized this as a repeated experience across the province and launched an investigation. Partial-day schedules and exclusion are sometimes justified as a way to prevent more serious incidents. However, escalation often results from failure to implement a student's IEP or strategies recommended by parents and professionals. Additionally, many students with disabilities are not supported or are discouraged from participating in mainstream high school classes or pursuing a Dogwood Diploma. Instead, students are placed on a path toward a School Completion Certificate (Evergreen), without meaningful consultation.
- **Ableism:** Attitudinal barriers¹⁷ and low expectations continue to frame students with disabilities through a medical model that focuses on deficits rather than capabilities. Inclusion decreases as students transition to high school, and segregated programs remain common across BC. These programs can limit opportunities for learning and growth throughout K-12 and beyond. [Graduation rates](#) for students with disabilities still lag, and there are no public data or reports available that show progress or work ahead to address these forms of discrimination. Ableism also impacts parents with disabilities who are not accommodated in their interactions with the schools.
- **Inclusive education treated as optional:** Too often inclusive education supports are treated as an option or a burden, rather than a right and a responsibility. This is reflected in school district budget surveys and parent reports of inadequate support.¹⁸ When school districts lack the resources to meet students' needs, unproductive disputes over resources occur between school districts and the Ministry of Education and Child Care.
- **Teacher training:** Inclusive education is not a core component of teacher education in post-secondary institutions, leaving new teachers underprepared to support students with disabilities and IEPs. Although ongoing professional development is available, participation is uneven, and opportunities vary across the province.

¹⁶ The Exclusion Tracker is a grassroots effort started in BC that, for eight years, has been using self-reporting to show how prevalent school exclusion is. Exclusion Tracker history online: <https://exclusiontracker.com/report/history/>

¹⁷ Attitudinal barriers are behaviours, perceptions, and assumptions based on false ideas or stereotypes about what people with disabilities can or can't do. These stop people with disabilities from taking part fully and equally in society.

¹⁸ Inclusive Education Working Group, *supra* note 10.

- **Limited teachers' collaboration and Educational Assistant support:** Research has shown that combining teachers' knowledge and expertise benefits all students.¹⁹ Although most teachers want to collaborate in teaching teams, limited time and support make it difficult to do so. Additionally, classrooms lack educational assistants to properly support students' needs. Educational Assistants are not receiving the training they need, and the new [Competency Framework](#) is optional, which will delay implementation and create further disparities across BC.
- **Accountability and accessibility:** Since 2023, all school districts have been required to establish an Accessibility Plan. While this requirement has increased the visibility of accessibility, some plans are not sufficiently informed by students' accessibility needs and lack effective accountability mechanisms that ensure barriers are removed.
- **Inaccessible playgrounds:** While the [Playground Equipment Program](#) has been a welcome investment, the progress to ensure accessible playgrounds in all schools is moving too slowly. No planning mechanism requires consultation with people with lived experience or other accessibility professionals. The standards still allow manufactured woodchips, which exclude children with mobility challenges.
- **Restraint and seclusion:** Despite the [Provincial Guidelines](#), physical restraint and seclusion continue to be used,²⁰ putting students with disabilities at demonstrated risk of physical and emotional harm. Furthermore, accountability measures in provincial guidelines and district policies are not consistently followed or provincially monitored.
- **Complex appeal processes:** School district complaints, conflict resolution, and appeal processes are often unclear, complicated, and administratively unfair. A student's right to equitable access to education should not depend on their parents' ability to navigate complex systems or devote countless

¹⁹ Moore, Shelley (2017), One without the other: Stories of unity through diversity and inclusion, Portage & Main Press.

²⁰ Lund, Lila (2025), Breaking the Silence on Violence in Schools: An Inquiry into the Prevalence of Violence in the Workplace, Use of Restraints and Seclusion, and Trauma-Informed Practices in BC Schools, online:
<https://www.viurrspace.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/4b52de4e-03f2-4c2e-90d1-8d9aa3ee961b/content>

hours to advocacy. Instead, inclusive education should be driven by proactive planning, adequate resources, meaningful consultation, effective IEP development and implementation, and Universal Design for Learning.

- **Lack of cross-ministerial collaboration:** Inclusive education intersects with disability services, health, child care, and mental health. While it is encouraging to see a commitment to cross-ministerial collaboration at the ministry level, frontline staff should be empowered to collaborate effectively, rather than leaving it to families to bring systems together.
- **Limited career planning:** Students with disabilities, particularly students with intellectual disabilities, often receive little or no career planning in high school to prepare them for post-secondary education, employment, or lifelong learning. This stems from persistent low expectations and attitudinal barriers. [A longitudinal study](#) in BC highlights the educational trajectories of students with designations. The province and school districts can use it to better understand their experiences and improve educational outcomes that shape students' lives beyond K-12.²¹

These barriers have worsened over the past five years. With strong leadership, transparency, and accountability, BC has an opportunity to reverse this trend and become a leader in inclusive education.

Calls to Action

Inclusion BC calls on the provincial government and school districts to implement a consistent, rights-based approach to K-12 education through universal design, equitable access, meaningful consultation, transparency, and accountability. These actions should form part of a **Provincial Disability Strategy**.

Equity and Inclusion

- Require **school inclusion plans** in all schools to promote inclusion and belonging, rather than segregated environments, and establish ministerial

²¹ Lloyd, J.E.V. & Baumbusch, J. (2024), From Kindergarten to Post-Secondary: Educational Journeys of British Columbia's Students with Disabilities and Learning Exceptionalities, University of British Columbia, online: <https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/facultyresearchandpublications/52383/items/1.0438759?o=2>

guidelines and accountability measures for implementation at all levels of the education system.

- Meaningfully include **education in the Child Wellbeing Plan** to ensure children and youth with disabilities have timely, coordinated access to the supports they need to fully participate in education on an equal basis with their peers. This includes school-based therapy interventions, not only consultation, as well as nursing, disability services, child care, health, and mental health supports. Ensure community partners, including people with lived experience and families, are meaningfully involved in the Plan's development and implementation.
- Ensure all students with disabilities in high school receive **meaningful career planning and work experience** and are supported to explore post-secondary options, employment, and opportunities for lifelong learning.
- **Ban the use of physical restraint and seclusion** across public and independent schools with public reporting to support accountability.
- Increase investment in the Playground Equipment Program to ensure all **school playgrounds are fully accessible**, improve the applicable standards, and set a deadline for school districts to complete upgrades.
- Ensure students and their families receive sufficient support to **transition** into kindergarten and from high school into adulthood.

Accountability and Oversight

- Create accountability measures to report on **quality outcomes** from the implementation of Individualized Education Plans.
- Establish **public accountability and transparency measures** for the use of funds designated to meet the needs of students with disabilities.
- Follow through on expanding the **mandate of the Representative for Children and Youth** to include education as per the 2023 recommendations by the Standing Committee on Children and Youth.
- Commit to **implement the recommendations** that come out of the public investigation by the Ombudsperson of BC.
- Strengthen **accountability for accessibility plans** by requiring school districts to develop bi-annual action plans that identify, address, and eliminate barriers students with disabilities face in accessing their education. Action plans

should include measurable outcomes, ongoing evaluation, and meaningful feedback from students with disabilities and their families.

Teacher Support, Training, and Workforce

- Ensure all **teacher education programs** include the foundations of inclusive education as a mandatory requirement.
- Ensure all teachers, educational assistants (EAs), and administrative staff receive **quality training and professional development** opportunities to deliver inclusive education. Including training to prevent the use of restraint and seclusion, such as Collaborative and Proactive Solutions or Low Arousal.
- Ensure teachers have ongoing access to the **resources and teaching teams** to support the inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream classes across the K-12 grades.
- Develop a **coordinated workforce strategy** to address staffing needs in both education and child care.
- Ensure the Educational Assistants Competency Framework is mandatory and ensure that trained **educational assistants** are available as needed in classrooms and are appropriately matched with the students.

Students with disabilities in BC have the right to quality education and the supports needed for equitable access, achievement, and excellence. The province must act now to uphold this right and fulfill its responsibilities.