



Today's BC Liberals

1. What is your position with respect to the current *Independent School Act* and its accompanying Regulations and Orders? Will your party be proposing amendments and, if so, what will be the content of these amendments?

The BC Liberal government believes that parents should have as much choice as possible when making decisions about their children's future – and this includes decisions around their education. Students in general, and the province as a whole, benefit a great deal from having a range of educational opportunities from which to choose. This approach recognizes the diversity of families throughout the province. In September 2012, Premier Christy Clark appointed MLA Marc Dalton as Parliamentary Secretary for Independent Schools to acknowledge the important role independent schools play in B.C.'s education system.

The *Independent School Act* provides a level of autonomy with respect to the operation and educational services provided in independent schools. From time to time, changes are considered for both the independent school sector and the public school sector to make improvements for students and families.

For instance, the BC Liberal government changed the funding formula for special needs students in 2005 in order to provide 100% funding of students with special needs in both the independent and the public school systems. This significant policy change was instituted on the basis of fairness and equity – so that all special needs students would be funded at the same rate. More recently, changes were implemented in order to provide greater equity for non-graduated adult students to pursue their graduation requirements through an independent school on the same basis as students in the public school system. When changes are contemplated in either school system, the Ministry of Education conducts a range of consultations in advance of decisions made.

2. Does your party support parents' right to choose an education, public or independent, that is appropriate for their children?

The BC Liberal government supports the rights of parents to choose from various educational alternatives for the education of their children, such as distributed learning, homeschooling and independent schools. Unlike public schools, independent schools may provide educational programs from a cultural or religious perspective as long as they are consistent with the *Independent School Act*.

The *Independent School Act* provides an appropriate balance between an independent school's autonomy with the provincial educational standards that all schools are required to meet. Since 2001, British Columbians have seen an increasing range of opportunities available to parents for their children's education, in both the independent and public school systems. Choice is a cornerstone of the BC Liberal government's educational policy agenda.





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3. What is your position on the status of funding levels for independent schools? Will you maintain the current funding formula, or will alternative proposals be made?

Our record in funding support for independent schools is significant. Between 2000/01 and 2012/13, funding levels for the independent school sector have increased by 86% with a corresponding increase in students from 59,743 to 76,377, a 22% growth. The BC Liberal government is committed to supporting the funding levels for independent schools so that they continue to make an important contribution to students in all parts of the province. The continued growth of the independent school sector during the past decade is testament to the commitment of both parents and government alike in ensuring choice in education is a key component of our overall educational policy.

