

## education



# The ABCs in B.C.

## An introduction to the province's many schooling options

BY JANE MUNDY

In British Columbia, as in the rest of Canada, public education is free for Canadian citizens and permanent residents under age 20. Students in this province are spoiled for choice – educational options here include traditional or alternative schools, aboriginal education programs, French immersion, special needs, full-day kindergarten, pre-school, and a host of post-secondary programs.

For details on B.C.'s schooling choices, visit the School Choices website at [achievebc.ca/choices/search\\_about.aspx](http://achievebc.ca/choices/search_about.aspx). The database allows you to search the province's 1,809 public schools by name, city or level (elementary, middle, secondary) and all 5,662 specialty programs.

The elementary- and secondary-school year starts in September, the day after Labour Day, and ends the last Friday in June. Parents are encouraged

by the Vancouver School Board (VSB) to contact their neighbourhood school as soon as possible to enquire about space availability – due to population growth, some elementary schools, like University Hill, are full. To decide where your child can attend, boundaries have been established for each school. However, choices are possible throughout the province, provided space is available.

This year, British Columbia plans to eliminate the sale of unhealthy foods and beverages in all its schools. The Guidelines for Food and Beverage Sales in B.C. Schools were developed to improve the healthy food choices available to students in all school locations, including vending machines, school stores and cafeterias, and at fundraisers and other events.

### StrongStart

StrongStart BC is a free drop-in program

for preschool-aged children accompanied by a parent or caregiver; a qualified early childhood educator leads activities. All of B.C.'s 60 school districts (including a Francophone Education Authority) have the opportunity to participate in this new program. Plans are in the works to increase the number of StrongStart centres.

### Public School Board

Public education is government-funded, covering kindergarten through Grade 12. Fourteen English-speaking public school boards serve the Lower Mainland. Check [gov.bc.ca](http://gov.bc.ca) for details.

In Vancouver, VSB handles public education. For enrollment information, visit [vsb.bc.ca](http://vsb.bc.ca) or call 604-713-5000. If you're coming from abroad or if English isn't your first language, you'll likely have to enroll your child at VSB's District and Placement Centre (604-713-5999).

## Montessori

B.C. is the first province to include Montessori in the public school system. This early education program seeks to develop a child's natural interests and abilities. It follows the same curriculum province-wide. Visit [bcmontessori.com](http://bcmontessori.com) or phone 604-720-2505.

## Catholic Schools

Catholic schools follow a curriculum set by the province and receive half their operating costs from the provincial government. However, parents must cover additional attendance fees. There are currently 49 Catholic schools in the Lower Mainland: 40 elementary and nine secondary. Contact the Catholic Independent Schools of the Vancouver Archdiocese at 604-683-9331 or visit [cisva.rcav.org](http://cisva.rcav.org).

## French Education

In Vancouver, parents whose first language is French can have their children educated in that language. The Conseil scolaire de la Colombie-Britannique (B.C. Francophone Education Authority) provides French-as-first-language schooling throughout the province. Call 1-888-715-2200 or visit [csf.bc.ca](http://csf.bc.ca).

## French and Mandarin Immersion

French Immersion is an option for students whose first language isn't French. There are two programs of French immersion: In the early program, French is used exclusively in the classroom until Grade 4, when English instruction is gradually introduced; in the late program, immersion begins in Grade 6.

VSBC also offers a Mandarin (Chinese) Bilingual Program. Students learn the language in grade school and continue their secondary studies in combined Mandarin and English. For details, contact VSBC District Reception and Placement Centre at 604-713-5999 or visit [vsb.bc.ca](http://vsb.bc.ca) and click Programs.

## Post-Secondary Education

B.C. is planning to add 25,000 new post-secondary seats by 2010, expand the choice of universities beyond the big



## ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

B.C. wants to provide even more choice for parents and students, making available options like fine arts, electronic distance learning, less formal "storefront" schools and apprentice programs.

Home-schooled children are registered in a school within the district where they reside; their educational program is the responsibility of their parents or guardians. Visit [bchomeschool.net](http://bchomeschool.net).

Distributed Learning (DL) is for students enrolled in a public- or independent school-distributed learning program where they learn at a distance from teachers, whether the student is at home or connecting to teachers from another learning facility. DL is the responsibility of the public or independent school. Visit [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist\\_learning](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/dist_learning).

For those who can afford it and wish their children to attend an independent school that provides a particular religious, cultural, philosophical or educational approach, B.C.'s private and independent schools offer a wide range of choice, from boarding to secular day schools. Most private schools in B.C. are partially funded by the provincial government. Visit [www.bced.gov.bc.ca/independentschools](http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/independentschools).

three (The University of British Columbia, Simon Fraser University and University of Victoria) and include a greater variety of "special interest teaching universities". In addition, five colleges have been anointed with university designation. As well, the province has focused on making it easier for people to access education, by expanding spaces and allowing people to attend school while working.

Post-secondary credentials are available through distance education, conducted via mail or Internet. The Post-Secondary Application Service of British Columbia (PASBC) enables students to apply online to 25 post-secondary institutions. Visit [pas.bc.ca](http://pas.bc.ca).

Post-secondary schools aggressively recruit students from non-traditional sources and partner with trades. For example, Kwantlen College's Cloverdale Trades and Technology Centre provides leading-edge trades and technology training for over 900 students, while at The British Columbia Institute of Technology (BCIT), industry advisors keep every program active and current, including an Aerospace campus. For details, call 604-434-5734 or 1-866-434-1610.

For more information on post-secondary institutions, visit [www.aved.gov.bc.ca/institutions](http://www.aved.gov.bc.ca/institutions); call 604-775-0303 or 1-800-661-8773. **MTV**