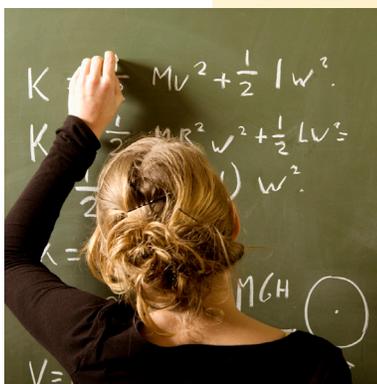


October 2012

Wait Lists for Independent Schools in British Columbia's Lower Mainland

by Jason Clemens



Key findings

- Public school enrolment decreased by 11.3 percent since its peak in 1997-98, but in that time, independent school enrolment increased by 22.4 percent, which indicates that parents are clearly demanding education outside of the public system.
- In a survey of independent schools in the Lower Mainland, 57.3 percent of respondents indicated they had a waiting list in 2011-12.
- Almost four-fifths (78.2 percent) of the schools responding with wait lists indicated that the current wait list was “normal” for the previous three years.
- 2,172 students were identified as being on a wait list in the Lower Mainland, which represents, on average, 14.3 percent of the total number of students attending a school reporting a wait list.
- Schools reporting wait lists indicated that, on average, 57.9 percent of grades in their school had a wait list and 27.3 percent indicated a wait list covering every grade in their school.

Studies in Education Policy

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Executive summary

Primary and secondary (K-12) education in British Columbia is delivered by a mix of public and independent schools. In 2011-12, the most recent academic year for which data are available, there were 365 independent schools with almost 72,000 students, representing 11.6 percent of total student enrolment in the province. Since its peak in 1997-98, the overall number of students enrolled in British Columbia has declined 8.4 percent and public school enrolment has decreased by 11.3 percent. However, during that time independent school enrolment increased by 22.4 percent, indicating a clear demand from parents for education provided outside of the public system.

Independent schools in British Columbia are a vibrant, critically important component of both the K-12 education system and the communities within which they operate. However, there is insufficient information and understanding about the demand for such schools, the barriers that hamper existing independent schools from expanding and new ones from being created, and how existing rules could be revised to encourage such ends. This study was designed to begin answering some of those questions. It is based on surveys of independent school principals and administrators as well as direct, one-on-one interviews with various school association leaders.

Independent school survey results

A total of 96 surveys were received from independent schools throughout the Lower Mainland—a response rate of 67.1 percent. Participating independent schools were compared against the total in the Lower Mainland across five broad characteristics (grades covered, religious affiliation (if applicable), nature of non-religious schools, school size by number of students, and geographic location) and found to be generally representative.

Wait list results

A total of 55 schools representing 57.3 percent of respondents indicated they maintained a wait list.

There were 2,172 students on wait lists for independent schools in 2011 in the Lower Mainland. On average, the wait list represented 14.3 percent of the total number of students attending a school reporting a wait list.

Schools reporting wait lists indicated that, on average, 57.9 percent of grades in their school had a wait list. A little over one-quarter of reporting schools (27.3 percent) indicated that there was a wait list for every grade in their school.

Almost four-fifths (78.2 percent) of the schools with wait lists responding to the survey indicated that the current wait list was “normal” for the previous three years.

A more specific statistical analysis of the data regarding school characteristics and their influence on wait lists determined that there was a higher probability that Catholic schools had a wait list and a lower probability that independent schools in the Fraser Valley had a wait list.

Wait lists and religious schools

The religiously-oriented schools (the majority of independent schools) provided additional insights into the depth of wait lists. Religious schools prioritize their potential students according to a variety of criteria including whether they have a sibling at the school, whether they are active in the affiliated religious institution (mosque, parish, synagogue, etc.), whether they're active in the associated faith of the school, etc. It is telling of the demand for religiously-oriented schools that 51.6 percent of independent schools responding to the survey indicated a wait list for children whose parents are active in the school's affiliated faith institution. Furthermore, nearly one-third of religiously-oriented schools indicated that they have a wait list for siblings of children already attending the school and whose parents are active in the affiliated faith institution. Finally, almost two-thirds of the responding religious schools indicated they had a wait list for students whose parents were active in their faith.

The percentage of non-religious students attending religious schools provides additional insight into the depth of parental demand for independent schools. A total of 52 of the 74 reporting schools with a religious affiliation answered the survey question on this topic. Of the religious schools responding, 38 schools (73.1 percent) indicated they had students attending their school who were of a different religious background or who were non-religious.

Accommodating wait lists

Only 27 percent of the reporting schools indicated they were able to accommodate between 90 and 100 percent of the students on their wait lists. Sixty-one percent of responding schools indicated they could only accommodate up to half of the students on wait lists. In fact, almost 40 percent of the responding schools indicated they could only accommodate between 1 and 20 percent of the students on wait lists.

School responses to parental demand

Twenty-eight schools (50.9 percent of responding schools with wait lists) indicated they had expanded their operations or renovated their facilities to make better use of them during the last five years.

The survey asked respondents to identify and list barriers to expansion. Forty-two of the 55 schools reporting wait times (76.4 percent) responded. They listed three principal barriers: the cost of acquiring land and building (61.9 percent), fundraising (38.1 percent), and zoning laws (35.7 percent). Regarding the latter barrier, respondents included both local and provincial zoning laws, although they gave the former much more prominence.

Recommendations

The demand for independent school education in British Columbia is clear and growing. While the primary focus of this study has been to document and understand the presence of wait lists for independent schools and to identify the barriers independent schools face in responding to this demand, a number of practical recommendations have emerged from the study that are worth considering.

1) Facilitate the use of idle public school facilities by independent schools

Respondents to the independent schools survey identified three principal barriers that hamper them from better responding to parental demand. Interviews with school association leaders corroborated their views. To varying degrees, the obstacles all pertained to the costs associated with purchasing and developing land for school facilities. Any policy that reduces these costs, even marginally, would help independent schools respond to parental demand. One obvious option is to encourage independent schools wishing to expand their facilities to use idle and vacant public school facilities.

2) Review policies on operating and capital funding and on access to low-interest loans for independent schools

Independent schools in British Columbia do not receive any direct or indirect financial support for capital expenditures. Neither do they have access to preferential interest loans as public schools do. The combination of these two policies means that capital costs pose a particular barrier for independent schools. That said, increasing the operating funding levels or providing independent schools with access to capital funding or low-interest rate loans is not a panacea and must be considered very carefully. First, and perhaps most importantly, it is paramount that the schools retain and preserve their independent status. Additional reliance on government funding, including for capital expenditures, could jeopardize or erode their current levels of independence. Second, there is a material difference between the assets developed by public schools and those developed by independent schools, even though they serve the same purpose: those paid for and developed by the public school system remain

publicly-owned assets; those developed by the independent school system are ultimately privately-held assets.

This paper recommends a thorough review of both policies—funding (operating and capital) and access to low-interest rate loans—by the provincial government, school associations, and other interested parties. In terms of the recommended review, the study suggests paying particular attention to other jurisdictions with independent school sectors such as Alberta, Australia, Sweden, and parts of the United States.

3) Undertake a broad review of legislation and guidelines for independent schools

The data collected on wait lists for independent schools in the Lower Mainland indicates significant parental demand for alternatives to the public education system. With over half the independent schools in the Lower Mainland maintaining wait lists (representing, on average, 14 percent of existing students) and with many schools struggling to accommodate parents, it is imperative that the provincial government review and possibly revise provincial legislation and regulations governing independent schools to help schools respond flexibly to parental demand.

Introduction

Primary and secondary (K-12) education in British Columbia is delivered by a mix of public and private (independent) schools.¹ In 2011-12, the most recent academic year for which data are available, there were a total of 365 independent schools educating almost 72,000 students. Independent schools in British Columbia are a vibrant, critically important component of both the K-12 education system and the communities within which they operate.² Yet there is little information or understanding about parental demand for such schools, or about the barriers that prevent existing schools from expanding or new independent schools from being created to respond to parental demand (assuming it exists), or how existing rules could be revised to encourage such ends.

This research project was designed to begin the process of answering such questions. In the spring of 2012, formal surveys were sent to independent schools in the Lower Mainland to collect information about the schools, their wait lists, the barriers they experience, and other information germane to understanding parental demand for independent schools and the obstacles that inhibit them from responding to that demand. In addition, interviews were conducted with leaders in the independent school community to learn what they felt were the obstacles impeding independent schools from responding to perceived demand. A survey of existing research was also completed, which revealed that very little empirical work has been completed on this important topic.

This study is organized into several distinct sections. The first provides some basic background information on the K-12 education system in British Columbia³ as well as an overview of the study's methodology. The second section summarizes the results of the independent school survey of the Lower Mainland. The report's third section summarizes the individual interviews of independent school community leaders. The final section provides conclusions and offers a set of recommendations.

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- 1 For a general overview and statistics regarding British Columbia's K-12 education system, please see British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2011. Downloadable data for both public and independent school enrolment from the BC Ministry of Education is available at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/student_stats/prov.xlsx.
 - 2 There has been some research, for example, on the relationship between religious education and civic participation and engagement (see, for instance, Dee, 2003).
 - 3 Independent schools exist right across British Columbia, but due to budgetary constraints, this study focuses exclusively on the Lower Mainland. Please use caution when drawing generalizations about the broader independent school sector in the province from any of this study's results.

1 Background on K-12 education and independent schools in British Columbia

In British Columbia, a mix of public and independent schools delivers primary and secondary education (K-12). Prior to 1977, independent schools⁴ in BC were unregulated and received no government financial support. Beginning in 1977, the government began providing partial funding to qualifying independent schools. In 1989, following the Report of the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education,⁵ an updated Independent School Act (ISA)⁶ was implemented that regulated all independent schools, both those receiving funding and those foregoing funding.⁷

British Columbia's public education system looks like its Canadian provincial counterparts in many ways. It is managed by both the Ministry of Education and locally-elected boards of education. British Columbia's public schools are non-religious and employ a traditional approach to basic educational instruction. Unlike Alberta, British Columbia does not have charter schools, which are a sort of hybrid of public and independent schools.⁸

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- 4 For information about independent schools in British Columbia, please go to the website of the Federation of Independent School Associations—British Columbia (<http://www.fisabc.ca>). FISA-BC is an umbrella organization that assists and coordinates both independent schools and representative associations for independent schools in British Columbia.
 - 5 For a discussion of the Sullivan Royal Commission on Education and its applicability to independent schools, see <http://www.fisabc.ca/stats-resources/royal-commission>.
 - 6 For information on the Independent School Act (ISA) see http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/independent_school_act_contents.pdf.
 - 7 The provincial government saves money when students attend independent schools, even though it may provide those schools with grants of up to 50 percent of operating costs. The budget estimates for 2012 for British Columbia indicate that funding for independent schools will represent roughly 5 percent of the ministerial budget, even though independent schools cover almost 12 percent of enrolled K-12 students in the province (see Froese, 2012: 3).
 - 8 For a broad discussion and analysis of charter schools in Alberta, see Ritchie, 2010 and Thomson, 2008. Unlike the United States, where many teachers' unions have accepted charter schools, there is still much opposition by teachers' unions in Canada to charter schools (see Kuehn, 1995, for an example). See Kenny, 2012 for a discussion of charter schools in the United States.

Independent schools in British Columbia provide diverse alternatives to the public education system.⁹ Based on self-reporting to the Federation of Independent School Associations (FISA-BC), independent schools in British Columbia reported diverse religious backgrounds (Catholic, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Mennonite, and Seventh-Day Adventist), educational philosophies (Waldorf and Montessori), and educational offerings (International Baccalaureate and university preparation). Some also operated special needs schools, and a few offered specific programs such as ecological and environmental programs.

Like neighbouring Alberta, British Columbia's independent schools are supported by a tiered system of grants, the value of which depends on the school's adherence to several funding guidelines. The grant payments are made directly to the schools to support the education of the students attending them. The grants support the schools' operating costs. They do not fund any capital costs, including those associated with starting or expanding a school facility.

British Columbia has four groups of independent schools (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2011).

Group 1 schools receive 50 percent of the *operating* grant offered by their local board of education per full-time equivalent (FTE) student. These schools employ British Columbia-certified teachers,¹⁰ have educational programs consistent with ministerial orders, provide a program that meets the learning outcomes of BC's curriculum, meet various administrative requirements, participate in provincial assessments, maintain

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- 9 There is increasing research about the effects of school choice on education outcomes. For example, a recent NBER working paper by Hastings, Neilson, and Zimmerman (2012) examined how school choice influenced student outcomes by increasing their motivation and effort. School choice also led to improvements in the school and peer groups. The study relied on student outcome data from school choice lotteries in low-income urban districts in the United States. Among other findings, the paper concluded that students who are selected by lottery to attend independent schools have "significantly lower truancies after they learn about lottery outcomes but before they enroll in their new schools. The effects are largest for male students entering high school, whose truancy rates decline by 21 percent in the months after winning the lottery." Because the study also found "substantial test score gains," its results contribute to current evidence that school choice programs can effectively raise participants' test scores (Hastings, Neilson, and Zimmerman, 2012). In addition, the Brookings Institution recently released a paper examining the effect of school vouchers (i.e., more school choice) on college enrolment in New York City. One of the key findings was that African-American students were 24 percent more likely to attend college if they won a scholarship to attend an independent (i.e., private) school in the city (see Chingos and Peterson, 2012a and 2012b).
- 10 BC Ministry of Education guidelines regarding teachers specifically state that "Independent schools may employ teachers who reflect their schools' various perspectives, but all teachers in Group 1, 2, and 4 independent schools must be BC certified (ISA Schedule, sections 3(1)(d) & 4; and ISA, section 11(2)), and employment practices must be in compliance with the Employment Standards Act. In hiring staff or admitting students, independent schools may grant preferences to teachers and students whose religious affiliation matches those of the school (Human Rights Code, section 41)" (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2011).

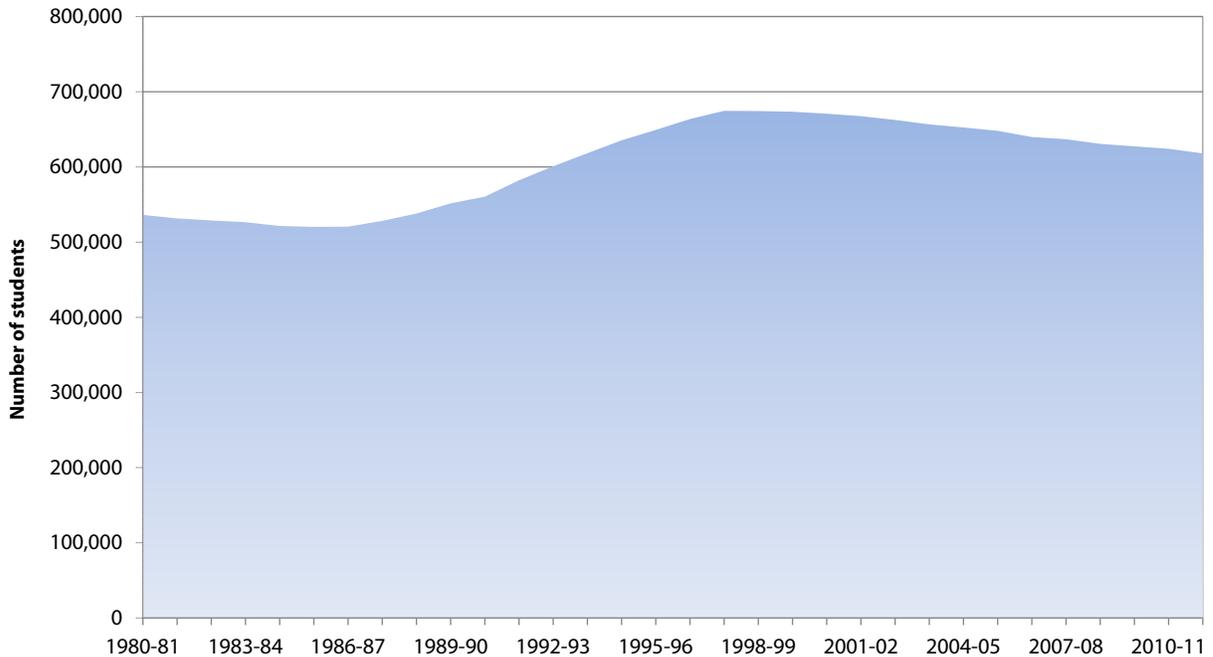
adequate educational facilities, and comply with municipal and regional district codes.¹¹ Group 1 schools constitute by far the largest group of independent schools in the province. According to BC's Ministry of Education, there were 56,062 students enrolled in 249 Group 1 schools in 2010-11 (reported as of June 2011).¹²

Group 2 schools meet the same requirements as Group 1 schools, but receive per-student operating grants of 35 percent of those offered by their local board of education because the school's per-student costs exceed the average operating costs of the local school district. Group 2 schools represent the second-largest group of independent schools in the province. In 2010-11, there were 14,352 students enrolled in 67 Group 2 schools.

Group 3 schools receive no funding and are not required to employ British Columbia-certified teachers or have educational programs consistent with ministerial orders. They must maintain facilities that meet all municipal and regional district codes. There were 539 students enrolled in 20 Group 3 schools in 2010-11.

Group 4 schools receive no funding and cater mainly to non-provincial students. These schools meet the same educational program requirements as Group 1 schools, their graduates are eligible to receive the BC Certificate of Graduation if all teachers are British Columbia certified, and they must be bonded. For-profit (as opposed to non-profit) schools are automatically categorized as Group 4 schools. There were 1,061 students enrolled in 11 Group 4 schools in 2010-11.

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- 11 The guidelines from the Ministry of Education specify that "Independent schools have freedom to approach the curriculum from their own perspectives but the programs of Group 1, 2, and 4 certified schools must meet the specified learning outcomes of the British Columbia curriculum for English Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies, and French (or another choice of mandatory second language) from Kindergarten–Grade 9. In Grades 10–12, subjects that contribute to the BC Certificate of Graduation (Dogwood) must meet the learning outcomes of the BC curriculum (see Ministerial Order 302/04 Graduation Program Order and the Educational Standards Order)" (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, 2011).
- 12 These statistics include 6,815 students (FTEs) enrolled in 12 distributed learning schools (DL). DLs represent a specific group of schools that can be included in either Group 1 or 2, and are required to meet the criteria listed in both groups.

Figure 1: Total student enrolment in British Columbia

Source: FISA-BC, 2012.

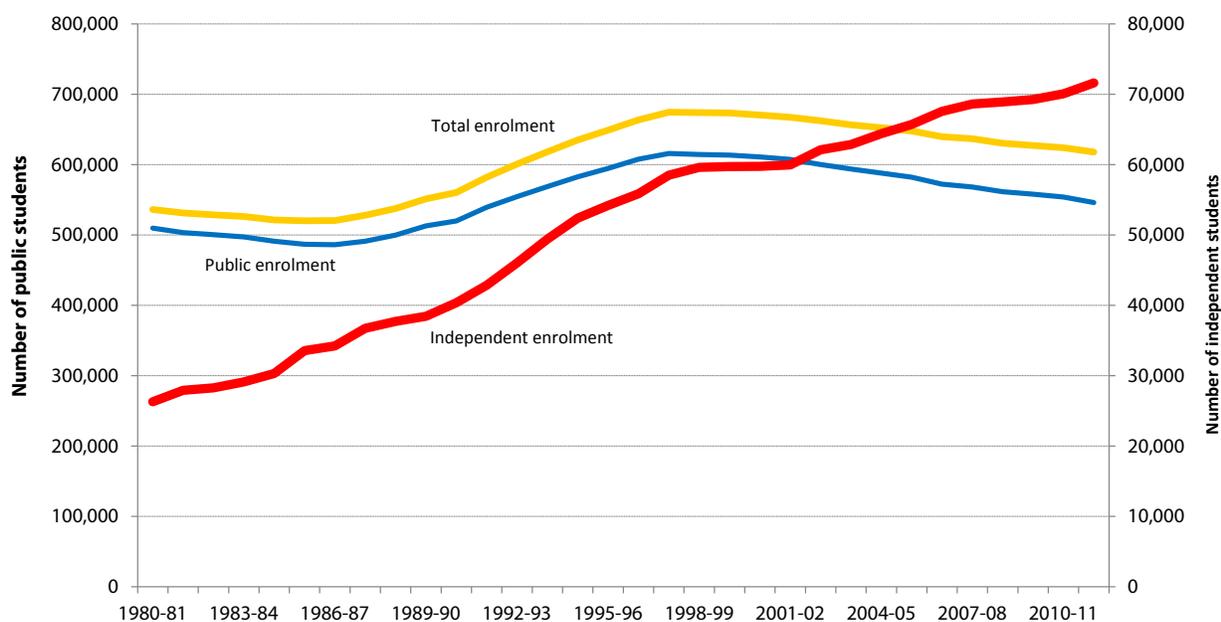
Key statistics on independent schools in British Columbia

In 2011-12, the most recent year for which data are available, there were a total of 365 independent schools in British Columbia,¹³ an increase of roughly 5.5 percent since 2000-01.

In 2011-12, there was a total of 617,837 K-12 students in British Columbia, of which 546,219 (88.4 percent) attended public schools. The remaining 71,615 students (11.6 percent of the total) attended independent schools (FISA-BC, 2012).

Understanding the trends in public and independent school enrolment is important, particularly with respect to the aim of this study. Figure 1 illustrates the total K-12 student enrolment in British Columbia beginning in 1980-81. From 1980-81 to 1986-87, total student enrolment declined. However, that trend reversed in 1987-88.

13 The Federation of Independent School Associations—British Columbia (FISA-BC) annually compiles statistics about independent schools by combining data from the BC Ministry of Education with information from their member schools and associations. The most recent fact sheet includes information up to 2011-12 (FISA-BC, 2011). In addition, the BC Ministry of Education provides downloadable data for both public and independent school enrolment at http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/reports/pdfs/student_stats/prov.xlsx.

Figure 2: Number of enrolled students, 1980-81 to 2010-11

Source: FISA-BC, 2012.

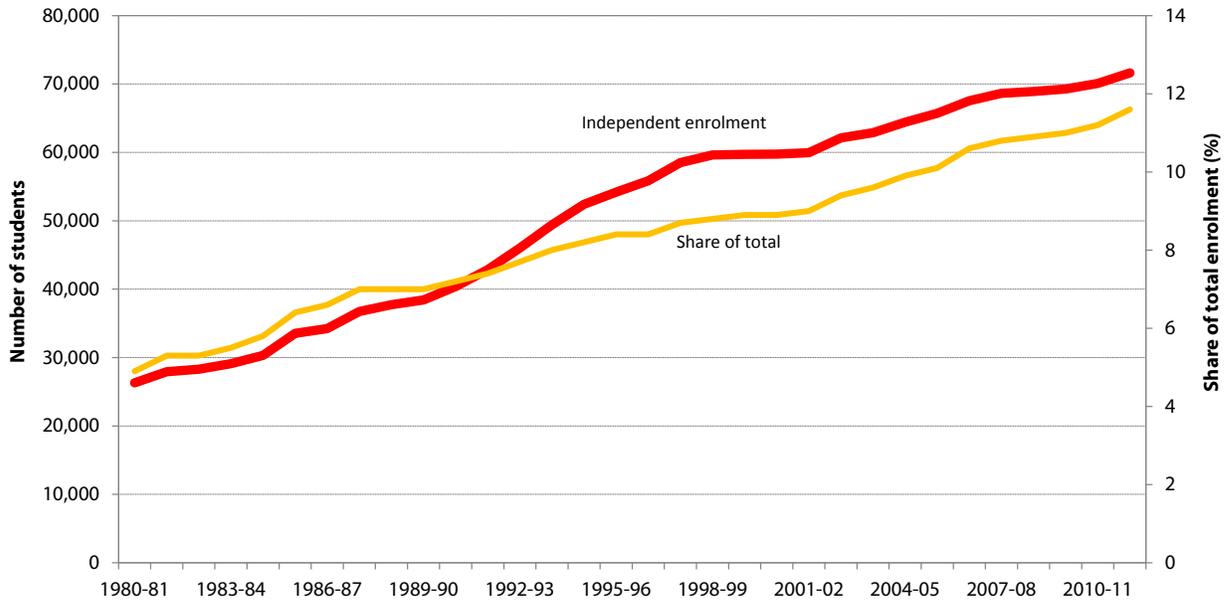
Total school enrolment began to increase and continued to do so until 1997-98 when total enrolment peaked at 674,477 students. It has since declined by 56,640 full-time-equivalent students, or 8.4 percent (FISA-BC, 2012).

Figure 2 differentiates between public and independent school enrolment. Public school enrolment generally mirrors total school enrolment (see the top two lines in figure 2). Public school enrolment declined from 1980-81 until 1987-88 when it began to increase, which it did until 1997-98 when it peaked at 615,980 students. Enrolment has since declined by 69,761 FTEs or 11.3 percent (FISA-BC, 2012).

Enrolment in independent schools, on the other hand, increased from 26,314 in 1980-81 to 71,615 in 2011-12, an increase of 172.2 percent. Unlike the varying enrolment gains and declines in public schools, enrolment in independent schools has consistently increased each year since 1980-81 (figure 2) at an average annual rate of 3.3 percent (FISA-BC, 2012).

Figure 3 focuses specifically on student enrolment in independent schools beginning in 1980-81. As illustrated, there has been an uninterrupted increase in the number of students attending independent schools (left axis in figure 3). The share of total K-12 students at independent schools also steadily increased over this period, from 4.9 percent in 1980-81 to 11.6 percent in 2011-12 (right axis in figure 3) (FISA-BC, 2012).

Figure 3: Independent school enrolment—number and share of total



Source: FISA-BC, 2012.

Student enrolment data clearly show that students attending independent schools in British Columbia continue to increase in both absolute terms and as a share of total enrolment; independent schools continue to educate an increasing share of students in the province.

Methodology

This study is composed of several distinct stages of research, including a formal survey of independent school administrators and interviews with leaders in the independent school community. The study also reviews existing research,¹⁴ though there was a surprising lack of scholarly analysis on wait lists¹⁵ for independent schools in Canada and the United States. Much of the existing research focuses on charter schools, which are

14 For a good overview of research on independent schools please see <http://www.fisabc.ca/stats-resources/further-readings>.

15 There was some limited research on wait times and lotteries in the United States, but it was exclusively focused on public charter schools. For example, see Hastings, Kane, and Staiger, 2006.

distinct from independent schools since they remain part of the public education system.¹⁶

Survey of independent schools in the Lower Mainland

The key component of the research project involved directly surveying independent school principals and administrators. A number of scholars and education leaders were consulted as the survey was crafted and revised between September 2011 and January 2012. They included Lance Izumi, J.D. (Pacific Research Institute), Vicki Murray, Ph.D. (Independent Women's Forum), Professor Stephen Easton (Simon Fraser University), Professor Deani Van Pelt (University Redeemer College), Professor Mark Holmes (University of Toronto, retired), and Malkin Dare (Society for Quality Education). In addition, Peter Froese, Ed.D., of the Federation of Independent School Associations in British Columbia (FISA-BC) generously reviewed the survey several times, providing valuable suggestions.

From November 2011 to January 2012, extensive outreach to independent school associations in advance of the survey including phone conversations, email correspondence, and official communications to leaders of the various independent school associations in British Columbia¹⁷ was completed.

Advance letters explaining the research project, providing a sample survey, and background information were sent to all 160 independent schools in British Columbia's Lower Mainland in mid-February prior to the survey period (March-April).

After discussions with the principals and other school administrators, seven schools were removed from the survey. One of the institutions, for example, provides education for psychiatric patients and does not receive applications for attendance. Another is part of a daycare facility and only offers kindergarten. Yet another is a semi-nary facility. Once these 7 schools were removed from the list, 153 Lower Mainland independent schools remained as potential respondents.

An additional 10 schools were removed to avoid what were deemed duplications. Two types of schools were included in this category. One type was schools with two entries: one for their regular operations and a second for their distributed learning (DL) program. These were combined into a single school. The second type included schools that were separately designated by the level of grades covered (elementary,

16 Some of the key studies focusing on charter schools include Vanourek, 2005; Bulkeley and Fisler, 2002; Anderson et al., 2002; and Schwartz, 1997.

17 Information for these various school associations can be found at the Society of Christian Schools of BC (www.scsbc.ca); the Federation of Independent School Associations of BC (www.fisabc.ca); the Catholic Independent Schools Vancouver Archdiocese (www.cisva.bc.ca); the Independent Schools Association of BC (www.isabc.ca); and the Association of Christian Schools International—Western Canada (www.acsiwc.org/).

middle, and secondary). Several of these schools share the same building and, in some cases, the same principal or administrator. In fact, in three of these cases, the principal responded to the survey for all of the locations as a single entity. All of the schools in this situation were reduced to a single entity. This resulted in a net reduction of 10 schools, bringing the overall total to 143 independent schools.

Four surveys were only partially completed. Follow-up calls yielded limited or no response.

In addition, in conversations or email exchanges with three schools, respondents indicated that they do not maintain waiting lists because they have little possibility of accommodating those on wait lists and feel it is unfair to parents to create a false expectation that their children will be accepted to the school. These three schools are in an unusual situation: there is clearly parental demand for them that cannot currently be met. However, they did not complete the survey and we had insufficient information from other sources to fully include them in the results.

Finally, two schools with a religious affiliation that indicated they are not permitted to maintain wait lists by their founding charter for any child whose parents are active in the religious organization linked with the school. Through discussions with the principals at both schools, it was clear that wait lists exist in a technical sense, but that the principals were required to accommodate the students on the list.

In order to retain the portions of the survey completed and the information gathered from phone conversations and email exchanges, we adjusted the number of respondents in the wait times section to reflect the total number of schools participating. In other words, we included the information available and verified in applicable sections, but adjusted the response count to reflect the increase in respondents.

It is worth noting that the survey results are generally interpreted as being conservative. For example, a substantial number of schools counted only those students on official wait lists. Many of these schools had other students who were also on wait lists but who were accommodated expeditiously. These students were not included on their wait list. In addition, other schools reported very short wait lists, but discussions with them revealed that such lists only included students who had a chance of being accommodated. The schools themselves limited the lists so as not to create unrealistic expectations for parents. Indeed, as already discussed, three schools in the survey reported that they did not maintain wait lists because there was simply no realistic way for them to accommodate the large numbers of students expressing interest in attending the school.

All that said, there are potential weaknesses with the wait list data, which may indicate some overestimation of wait lists.¹⁸ First, it is likely that some parents apply to

18 These concerns were largely raised in discussion with one school association leader as part of this project's interview process.

multiple schools and thus have their children on more than one wait list. This raises the possibility of double-counting students on wait lists, particularly in areas with independent schools in close proximity. In addition, the seriousness or lengthiness of the wait lists may be questionable given that at least some parents likely respond to the wait lists by immediately finding suitable alternatives.

One-on-one interviews

The third component of the research project entailed direct interviews and discussions with independent school community leaders.¹⁹ The following four questions, as well as an opportunity for general comments, were asked of school association leaders:

- 1) What is your general response to the initial draft of the study?
- 2) What is your specific reaction to, and suggestions for, solutions to the barriers identified by independent school administrators in their efforts to expand their school's operations?
- 3) Following on question 2, what are the barriers that new schools face? Are there barriers or obstacles to new schools being built and established that are unique to new schools versus existing schools?
- 4) What suggestions and comments do you have on provincial or local policies that could improve and help independent schools?

School community leaders were given time to reflect on and discuss any related issues that were not specifically covered in the questions. These interviews were conducted between June 28 and July 16, 2012.

19 The original design of the project included interviews with independent school principals. The aim was to complete between 15 and 20 interviews, but due to time constraints only seven interviews were completed with principals from independent schools that participated in the survey. While the interviews were informative and enlightening, the number of completed interviews was insufficient to warrant their inclusion in the study.

2 Independent school survey results

This section of the report summarizes the survey results.

Responses

As discussed previously, 160 independent schools in the Lower Mainland were initially identified for this survey. This was reduced to 153 schools after discussions with principals and other school administrators who informed researchers of the non-applicability of the survey to their particular circumstance. An additional ten schools were consolidated with related schools to reflect a more accurate depiction of the school. This resulted in a total count of 143 schools in the Lower Mainland. We received 96 completed surveys from schools throughout the Lower Mainland, a response rate of 67.1 percent.

In addition to the 96 completed surveys, researchers also received 4 partial responses, and discussed or corresponded via e-mail with another 5 schools that indicated they did not maintain or record wait lists because they had little or no ability to accommodate them and did not want to create false or unrealistic expectations among parents. These results were included in the count for the presence of wait lists, meaning that the response rate for whether schools had wait lists actually reached 73.4 percent.

Characteristics of responding schools

A number of school characteristics are worth noting. The following section discusses five from the responding schools: (1) grades covered, (2) religious affiliation (if applicable), (3) nature of non-religious schools, (4) school size by number of students, and (5) geographic location. In each case, three comparisons are provided: (1) all independent schools²⁰ in the Lower Mainland, (2) independent schools responding to the survey, and (3) independent schools who responded positively to having a wait list. The tables in this section have a consistent format. The column marked “All Schools” includes all independent schools in the Lower Mainland (143 after adjustments). The column “Responding Schools” refers to the 96 independent schools that responded to

20 Adjusted to reflect schools excluded and consolidated, as discussed in the Methodology section.

the survey. Finally, the “School Reporting Wait Lists” is a subset of the Responding Schools and refers to those participating schools that responded positively to having a wait list for admission (55).

Grades covered

Table 1 presents the grade levels covered by independent schools in the Lower Mainland. As table 1 indicates, elementary-only independent schools, which means schools that include grades starting at pre-kindergarten (pre-K), kindergarten (K), or first grade through to grade 6, 7, or 8 represented 55.2 percent of all independent schools in the Lower Mainland and 59.4 percent of responding schools.

The next largest category of independent schools in the Lower Mainland is schools that include elementary through secondary grade levels. This group represented 22.4 percent of all independent schools in the Lower Mainland, but only 13.5 percent of respondents. This was the only category of schools (by grades covered) in which the responding group was less, as a share of the total, than the total population of independent schools.

The next largest category of independent schools by grades covered was secondary schools, which represented 11.9 percent of all independent schools in the Lower Mainland and 14.6 percent of respondents. Schools that combined elementary and middle school as well as schools combining middle and secondary schools together represented a little more than 10 percent of all independent schools in the Lower Mainland and slightly more as a share of responding schools.

Table 1: Grades covered

Grade Levels Covered	All schools	Percent of total	Responding schools	Percent of total	Response rate	School reporting wait lists	Percent of total
Elementary-only	79	55.2%	57	59.4%	72.2%	33	60.0%
Secondary-only	17	11.9%	14	14.6%	82.4%	6	10.9%
Elementary and Middle*	10	7.0%	8	8.3%	80.0%	3	5.5%
Middle and Secondary	5	3.5%	4	4.2%	80.0%	4	7.3%
Elementary, Middle, and Secondary	32	22.4%	13	13.5%	40.6%	9	16.4%
Total	143		96			55	

*Note: There was one middle-school only, and it was included in the “elementary and middle school category” to protect its anonymity.

All categories except for schools covering elementary, middle, and secondary (comprehensive) had response rates in excess of 70 percent, with three categories reaching or exceeding response rates of 80 percent. The responding group of schools was generally reflective of the overall total independent schools in the Lower Mainland in terms of the grade covered.

Religious affiliation

Table 2 categorizes independent schools according to their religious affiliation. Three religious categories are included, as is a non-religious classification. The “Catholic” category is straightforward. “Christian” covers a broad range of Christian-oriented schools. The final religious category, “Other Religions,” covers a number of religions including Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh. These schools are grouped together solely to guarantee their anonymity; the grouping does not in any way reflect a lower value or importance attributed to these religious schools. Finally, there is a category for schools that do not focus on, or are not organized along religious lines.

Catholic schools were the largest group of independent schools included in the analysis in the Lower Mainland (33.6 percent) and were the largest group of respondents (39.6 percent). Christian schools were the next largest category of schools in the Lower Mainland at 30.1 percent. The percentage responding to the survey as a share of the total (31.3 percent) was almost the same. Non-religious schools were the third largest category of independent schools in the Lower Mainland, representing 29.4 percent of all independent schools and 22.9 percent of survey respondents. Schools with

Table 2: Religious orientation of schools

Religious Classification	All schools	Percent of total	Responding schools	Percent of total	Response rate	School reporting wait lists	Percent of total
Catholic	48	33.6%	38	39.6%	79.2%	28	50.9%
Christian	43	30.1%	30	31.3%	69.8%	12	21.8%
Other Religions*	10	7.0%	6	6.3%	60.0%	1	1.8%
Non-Religious	42	29.4%	22	22.9%	52.4%	14	25.5%
Total	143		96			55	

*Note: In order to ensure anonymity for the small number of schools within each category, a new category was created for several religions including Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh. Had we not done this, readers could have discerned the identity of some respondents, which we had guaranteed would be carefully protected.

other religious affiliations represented 7 percent of independent schools in the Lower Mainland and slightly less than that in terms of responses.

The highest response rate was garnered from Catholic schools (79.2 percent) while the lowest response rate was from non-religious schools (52.4 percent), partly owing to the poor responses from schools providing comprehensive education (elementary through secondary), which tend to be non-religious. The religious affiliation of the responding schools is generally representative of the religious nature of independent schools in the Lower Mainland.

Further details of non-religious schools

We further explored the nature of non-religious schools in the Lower Mainland—and those responding to the survey. Table 3 summarizes the results. The first category, “alternative pedagogical schools,” includes Montessori and Waldorf schools, as well as two others that provide alternative education. Schools in this category employ alternative methods and techniques in their educational programs compared with the more traditional education. For example, Montessori schools tend to focus on student independence, freedom of action within broad limits, regard for a child’s individual psychological development, and the use of technological advances in education instruction. This group represents the largest group of non-religious schools in the Lower Mainland (38.1 percent) as well as the largest group of responding schools in the non-religious category (45.5 percent).

“Preparatory schools” represent the second largest category of non-religious schools in the Lower Mainland at 35.7 percent. They represented a slightly lower percentage of the responding schools (31.8 percent) within the non-religious category.

There are a number of “Specialty Education Schools” in the Lower Mainland, including those offering services to children with autism or learning disabilities such as dyslexia, schools specializing in international students, a French-language school, and a school focusing on integrated arts. These schools represented 16.7 percent of non-religious independent schools in the Lower Mainland and slightly less (13.6 percent) of the responding schools.

Finally, a small group (4) of non-religious schools did not indicate any particular characteristics to enable researchers to categorize them in any of the above classifications. These schools were included as “General Non-Religious” and represented 9.5 percent of the non-religious schools in the Lower Mainland and slightly less (9.1 percent) of schools responding to the survey.

School size by student count

Table 4 breaks down the number of students at independent schools. Independent schools tend to be relatively small. For instance, 42.7 percent of all independent

Table 3: Categorization of non-religious schools

Categories	All schools	Percent of total	Responding schools	Percent of total	Response rate	School reporting wait lists	Percent of total
Alternative Pedagogical Schools	16	38.1%	10	45.5%	62.5%	6	42.9%
Preparatory Schools	15	35.7%	7	31.8%	46.7%	6	42.9%
Specialty Education Schools	7	16.7%	3	13.6%	42.9%	2	14.3%
General Non-Religious	4	9.5%	2	9.1%	50.0%	0	0.0%
Total	42		22			14	

schools in the Lower Mainland have 200 or fewer students (table 4). The composition of reporting schools is similar to that of all of the independent schools in the Lower Mainland.

Two categories had poor survey response rates: mid-sized schools with between 300 and 400 students (50 percent) and large schools with over 1,000 students (40 percent).

Table 4: School size by number of students

Number of students	All schools	Percent of total	Responding schools	Percent of total	Response rate	School reporting wait lists	Percent of total
Fewer than 50	18	12.6%	13	13.5%	72.2%	6	10.9%
50 - 100	17	11.9%	13	13.5%	76.5%	2	3.6%
100 - 200	26	18.2%	21	21.9%	80.8%	7	12.7%
200 - 300	32	22.4%	19	19.8%	59.4%	16	29.1%
300 - 400	18	12.6%	9	9.4%	50.0%	6	10.9%
400 - 500	10	7.0%	7	7.3%	70.0%	7	12.7%
500 - 750	13	9.1%	9	9.4%	69.2%	8	14.5%
750 - 1000	4	2.8%	3	3.1%	75.0%	2	3.6%
1,000 and over	5	3.5%	2	2.1%	40.0%	1	1.8%
Total	143		96			55	

Geographic location

To ascertain whether or not wait lists were concentrated by geographical area, we divided the Lower Mainland into seven regions: Vancouver, North Shore, Richmond, Surrey-Delta, Burnaby-New Westminster, the Tri-Cities, and the Fraser Valley. Table 5 summarizes the results for both the Lower Mainland overall and responding schools.

Vancouver and the Fraser Valley have the highest share of independent schools and also responded to the survey at the highest rate (table 5).

The proportion of the total number of independent schools in the Lower Mainland varies among the remaining five districts: from 6.3 percent in Richmond to 15.4 percent in Surrey-Delta. Similarly, the proportion of independent schools participating in the survey varies among the five districts: from 7.3 percent for Burnaby-New Westminster to 10.4 percent for Surrey-Delta.

The response rate was strong for five of the seven districts, ranging from 63.6 percent in Burnaby-New Westminster to 88.9 percent in Richmond. The response rates were weaker for the North Shore (50.0 percent) and Surrey-Delta (45.5 percent). But overall, the responding schools did reflect the geographic dispersion of the independent schools in the Lower Mainland.

Table 5: Schools by geographic location

Location in Lower Mainland	All schools	Percent of total	Responding schools	Percent of total	Response rate	School reporting wait lists	Percent of total
Vancouver	41	28.7%	28	29.2%	68.3%	19	34.5%
North Shore*	16	11.2%	8	8.3%	50.0%	6	10.9%
Richmond	9	6.3%	8	8.3%	88.9%	4	7.3%
Surrey-Delta	22	15.4%	10	10.4%	45.5%	6	10.9%
Burnaby-New Westminster	11	7.7%	7	7.3%	63.6%	5	9.1%
Tri-Cities	9	6.3%	8	8.3%	88.9%	6	10.9%
Fraser Valley	35	24.5%	27	28.1%	77.1%	9	16.4%
Total	143		96			55	

*The North Shore includes Squamish and Whistler.

Wait list results

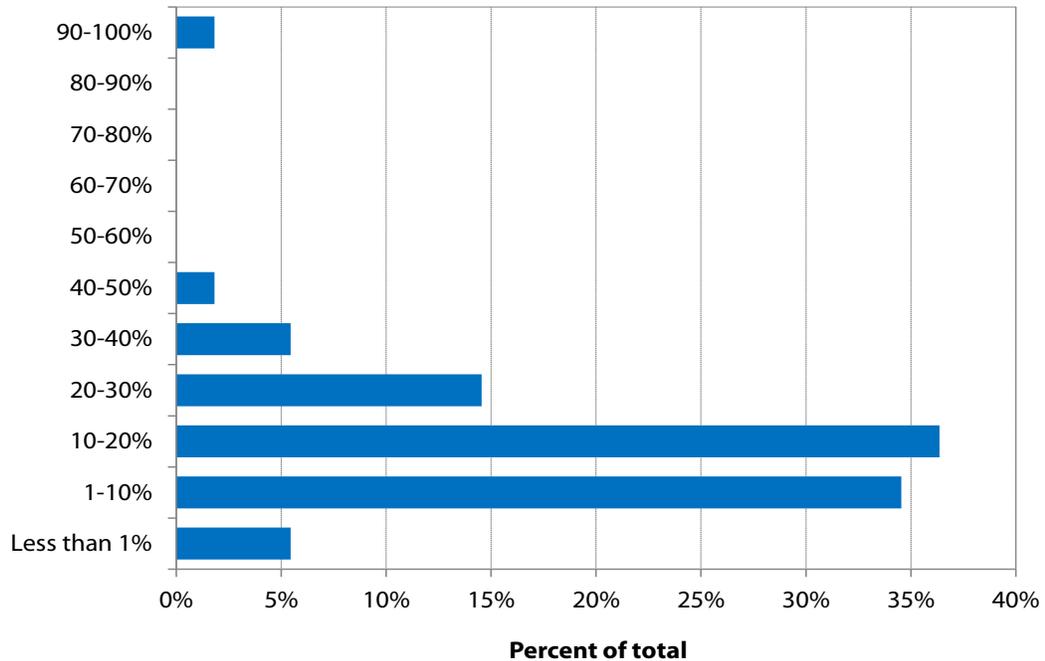
A total of 55 schools (57.3 percent of respondents) indicated they had a wait list.²¹ This number does not include 9 schools that either provided only partial information on wait lists, or declined to respond to the survey altogether, because they don't keep wait lists to avoid giving parents unrealistic expectations about the chance that their children can attend the school. In other words, parental demand for these schools is so great that the administrators don't maintain a wait list for them. Including the nine schools in the "does have a wait list" category results in 61.0 percent of responding schools adjusted for these special cases maintaining wait lists.²²

Data were collected on the number of students on a school's wait list compared to its total student population. The total number of students identified on wait lists was 2,172. On average, the wait list represented 14.3 percent of the total number of students attending a school that reported it had a wait list, but there was great variation from school to school. The ratio of students-on-a-waiting-list-to-existing- (i.e., already attending) students ranged from less than 1 percent (3 schools) to 93.8 percent. The upper end of the range was for a small, highly specialized school serving educationally-challenged students. Excluding this school, the next highest ratio of students-on-a-wait-list-to-existing-students was 40.9 percent.

Figure 4 illustrates the distribution of the ratios of students on a wait list to existing students for schools reporting a wait list. In the figure, the ratio of students to the total is measured on the vertical axis while the fraction of the number of schools with each ratio is measured on the horizontal axis. The largest category is the 10 to 20 percent category; 36.4 percent of schools in this range report a wait list. The next largest category was the 1 to 10 percent category, followed by the 20 to 30 percent category (figure 4). The overwhelming majority of schools (85.5 percent) reported a ratio of students-on-a-wait-list-to-existing-students ranging from 1 to 30 percent. No school reported wait list ratios from 50 to 90 percent, though one school reported a wait list ratio of between 90 and 100 percent.

-
- 21 One school association leader interviewed for this project raised two concerns regarding the definition of wait lists. First, there is a real possibility of parents applying to multiple schools and thus having their children on more than one wait list. This raises the possibility of double-counting students on wait lists, particularly in areas with independent schools in close proximity. In addition, the individual questioned how serious or long-lasting the wait lists were, since at least some parents respond to the wait lists by immediately finding suitable alternatives for their children.
- 22 In addition, two surveys were received well after the deadline that could not be included in the analysis due to time constraints. Both indicated they had wait lists for students; one of them a fairly long waiting list representing nearly 50 percent of existing students.

Figure 4: Ratio of number of students on a wait list relative to the total number of students at the school



There are two facts to keep in mind about these ratios. First, they do not include the 9 schools discussed previously that either provided partial information or do not maintain wait lists because of extremely high parental demand. If data were available for these high-demand schools, the ratios in figure 4 would have been marginally higher, at the very least. That is, both the average and the distribution would have shown a higher ratio of students on wait lists compared to existing students. Second, as discussed previously, the schools generally consider wait list estimates to be conservative.

Another way to gauge the depth and scope of school wait lists is to measure the number of grades with a wait list among reporting schools. Schools that reported they had wait lists indicated that, on average, 57.9 percent of grades in their school had a wait list. A little over one-quarter of reporting schools (27.3 percent) indicated that there was a wait list for every grade in their school. This outcome was surprising; going into the survey, the expectation was that wait lists would be concentrated in the lower grades, reflecting an initial entry effect.

Finally, 78.2 percent of the responding schools that had wait lists indicated that the current wait list was “normal” for the previous three years. This indicates a consistent level of demand that exceeds what these schools can provide.

Wait list results by characteristics

The following discussion explores the relationship, if any, between the grade levels covered, religious affiliation, nature of non-religious schools, size of the school in terms of the number of students, and the geographic location, which might help to explain the presence or absence of wait lists for admissions. The chief method by which to determine whether or not these characteristics relate to wait lists is to compare the characteristics for responding schools with those that reported wait lists.

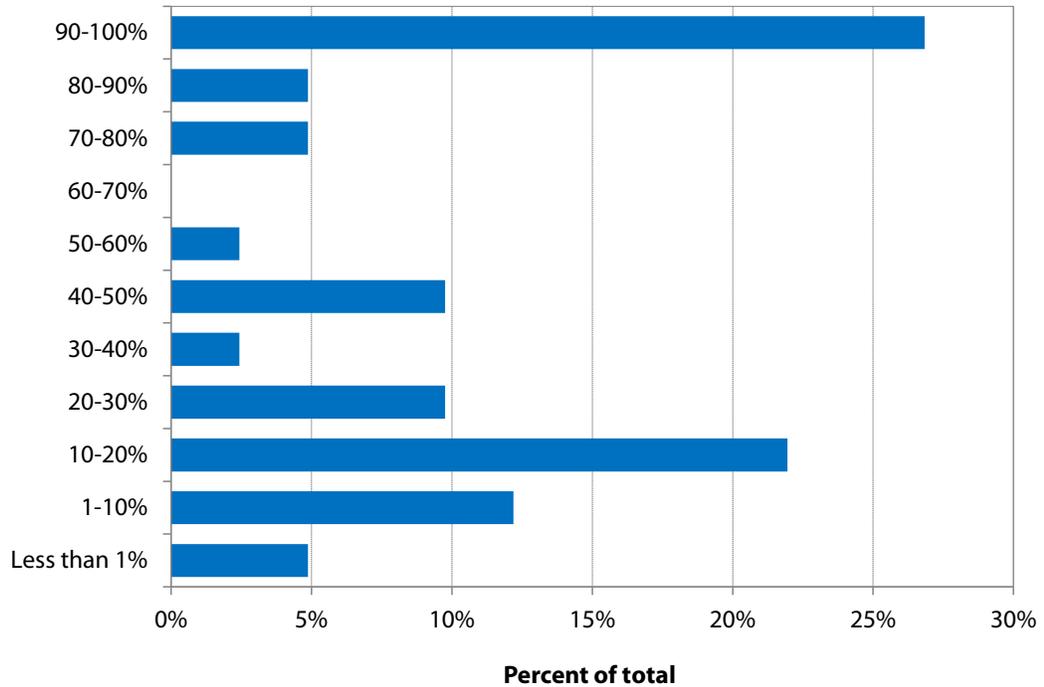
The data in tables 1 through 5 indicate that wait lists are explained neither by the grade levels covered by a school, the nature of the non-religious school, nor by the number of students in the school. There seems to be some relationship between Catholic schools and wait lists. Catholic schools represent 39.6 percent of respondents but 50.9 percent of responding schools that reported wait times. We completed a statistical test on the relationship between Catholic schools and the presence of wait lists. The results indicate that choosing a Catholic school increases the probability of being on a wait list in a statistically significant way.

In addition, there is a potential geographic explanation for the absence of wait lists. Independent schools in the Fraser Valley represented 28.1 percent of reporting schools but only 16.4 percent of schools indicating a wait list. A statistical test, similar to that undertaken for Catholic schools, confirmed that independent schools in the Fraser Valley are less likely to have a statistically meaningful wait list.²³

Accommodating students on wait lists

To gauge the ability of schools to respond to parental demand within their existing facilities and capacities, data were collected from responding schools on the percentage of students accommodated in the previous academic year. Of the 55 schools that indicated they had a wait list, 41 responded about their ability to accommodate the waiting students. Figure 5 illustrates the distribution of results by the percentage of students accommodated for the 41 reporting schools. As the figure clearly shows, the schools showed varying abilities to accommodate students on the wait list. The results ranged from less than 1 percent to 100 percent accommodation. Nearly 27 percent of the reporting schools indicated they were able to accommodate 90 to 100 percent of the stu-

23 To test the relationship between Catholic schools and the presence of wait lists, we used a Logit model. The results show that Catholic schools are more likely to have wait lists than any other type of school. In fact, the odds (defined as the ratio of the probability that the wait list will exist divided by the probability that it does not exist) of being on a wait list in a Catholic school is 3.69 ($= e^{1.305}$, where 1.305 is the log odds of the logit regression) times greater than the odds of being on a wait list at any other type of school. Similarly, we used a Logit model to test the relationship between the geographic locations of schools and wait lists. We found that the odds of being on a wait list decrease from 1 to 0.25 ($= e^{-1.386}$) for independent schools in the Fraser Valley. The specific econometric results are presented in Appendix A for those interested.

Figure 5: Percent of students on wait list accommodated in 2011-12

dents on the wait lists. Sixty-one percent of responding schools indicated they could only accommodate up to half of the students on wait lists. Indeed, 39 percent of the responding schools stated that they could only accommodate between 1 and 20 percent of the students on wait lists.

The survey had several questions that attempted to uncover the ways in which schools accommodate different prioritized groups on their wait lists. Many schools maintain a sorting mechanism by which to prioritize students on the wait list. Unfortunately, the response rates for two of the three questions in this category were too low, and in some cases far too ambiguous, to be included. However, for the question on prioritizing students on the wait list for religiously-oriented schools, there was sufficient response and clarity for the results to be included.

Religious schools have an interest in admitting students of parents who are active in the faith institutions linked with the schools (if such a link exists) and pursuing religious education as part of their overall faith. Religious schools are permitted to prioritize admittance based on parental involvement and support for faith organizations.

The guidelines for prioritizing students for Catholic schools²⁴ provided the basis for a question in the survey for all religiously-oriented schools. In order to ascertain the degree to which wait lists existed for different prioritized students, a question in the survey was asked using a revised set of tiers based on the Lower Mainland Catholic school guidelines. The tiers used in the survey are:

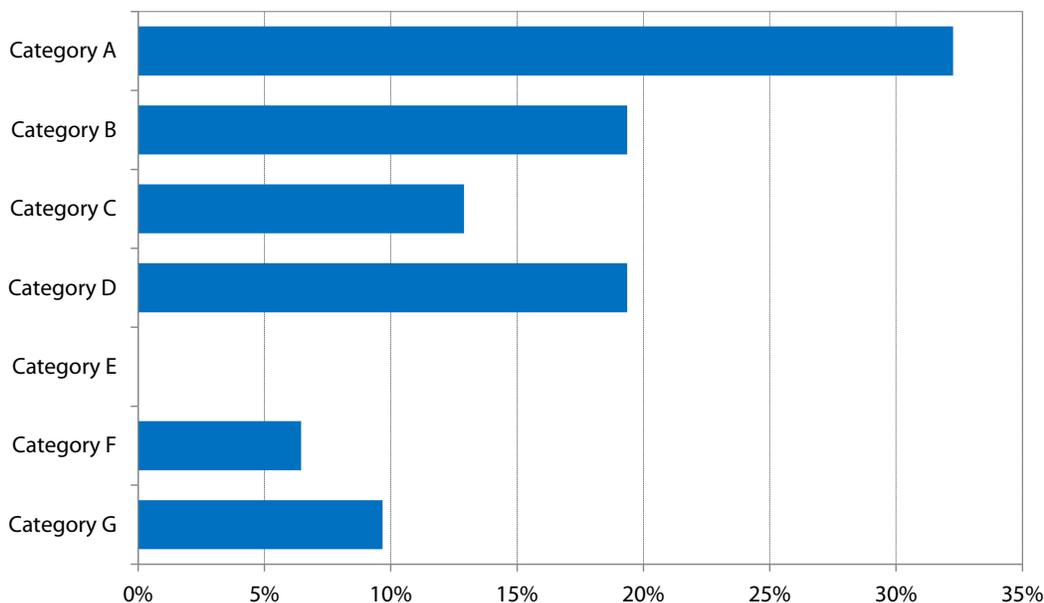
- A) Siblings of children in the school, whose families are practicing members of the faith, active in the parish/church/temple/synagogue affiliated with the school.
- B) Children whose families are practicing members of the faith, active in the parish/church/temple/synagogue affiliated with the school.
- C) Siblings of children in the school, whose families are practicing members of the faith, active in other places of worship not affiliated with the school.
- D) Children whose families are practicing members of the faith, coming into your school, who have been attending school elsewhere.
- E) Children whose families are members of the faith and active in similar places of worship but not affiliated with the school.
- F) Children whose families are practicing members of a faith different from the independent school.
- G) Children whose families are either not practicing any faith or active in a place of worship.

Religiously-oriented schools were asked for which category of students a wait list existed. It was assumed that wait lists existed for all students below that indicated on the survey. For example, if a school indicated that a wait list existed for category A, which includes siblings of children already in the school whose families are active in the faith institution affiliated with the school, the study assumed a wait list for all other

24 For example, Catholic schools in the Lower Mainland use a priority admittance system along the lines of the following:

- (1) Children presently enrolled in the school if they and their families meet the expectations of the school.
- (2) Siblings of children already in the school, whose families are practicing Catholics, active in the parish.
- (3) Children whose families are practicing Catholics active in the parish.
- (4) Siblings of children already in the school, whose families are practicing Catholics active in other parishes.
- (5) Children whose families are practicing Catholics coming into the parish, who have been attending school elsewhere.
- (6) Children whose families are practicing Catholics active in other parishes.
- (7) Children whose families are either not practicing Catholics or not active in their parishes.
- (8) Non-Catholics. Enrolment of more than 15 percent non-Catholics in any grade requires the approval of the Board of Directors. Once accepted into the school, non-Catholics need meet only the criteria expected of other students to be readmitted in subsequent years.
- (9) Siblings of non-Catholics cannot be given priority over Catholics.

Figure 6: Wait lists by prioritized admission category for religiously-oriented schools



categories, based on the fact that students in this category would be accommodated first before all other groups.

This is another method by which to gauge the severity of wait lists. Religious schools were specifically developed in order to provide religiously-oriented education. The presence of wait lists for these schools indicates a clear demand for such education. An indication of parental demand for religiously-oriented schools is illustrated by the fact that 32.3 percent of respondents indicated a wait list for category A, siblings of children already attending the school and whose parents are active in the affiliated faith institution (see figure 6).

Perhaps more telling of the great demand for religiously-oriented schools comes from the fact that over half of respondents (51.6 percent) indicated a wait list for either category A or B, which includes all children whose parents are active in the affiliated faith institution of the school (figure 6). When families active in the faith but worshipping at non-affiliated institutions are included, the response rate increases to 64.5 percent. In other words, almost two-thirds of the responding schools indicated that wait lists existed for students whose parents were active in their faith.

Non-religious students at religious schools

Another question that provides insights into the depth of parental demand for independent schools asked about the percentage of non-religious students attending reli-

gious schools. (This question only pertained to those schools that indicated a formal religious affiliation and/or orientation.) Of the 96 reporting schools in the survey, 74 indicated a religious affiliation or orientation. Fifty-two schools (70.3 percent) answered the survey question about the percentage of students attending their religious independent school who were non-religious.²⁵

There is a potential weakness in the responses. A number of the schools seemed to base their replies on the *allowable* number of students of a non-religious background rather than the *actual* number of non-religious students attending. We made several calls to clarify this response and in roughly half the cases the numbers were adjusted to reflect the actual number of non-religious students attending.

Of the religious schools responding, 38 (73.1 percent) indicated they had some students attending their school who were of a different religious background or who were non-religious. Fourteen schools (26.9 percent) indicated there were no non-religious students attending their school. Given that almost three-quarters of the responding religious schools indicated they had students who were non-religious, there appears to be fairly strong parental demand for the non-religious educational benefits provided by these independent schools.

Figure 7 illustrates the range of students attending responding religious independent schools that were identified as non-religious. Please recall that this categorization includes both non-religious students and religiously-oriented students who practice a religion other than that affiliated with the independent school. Almost 60 percent (59.6%) of responding schools indicated that non-religious students comprise between 1 and 30 percent of their student body. A small number (3) of responding schools said that less than 1 percent of their students were non-religious, and an equal number reported that more than 30 percent of their students were non-religious.

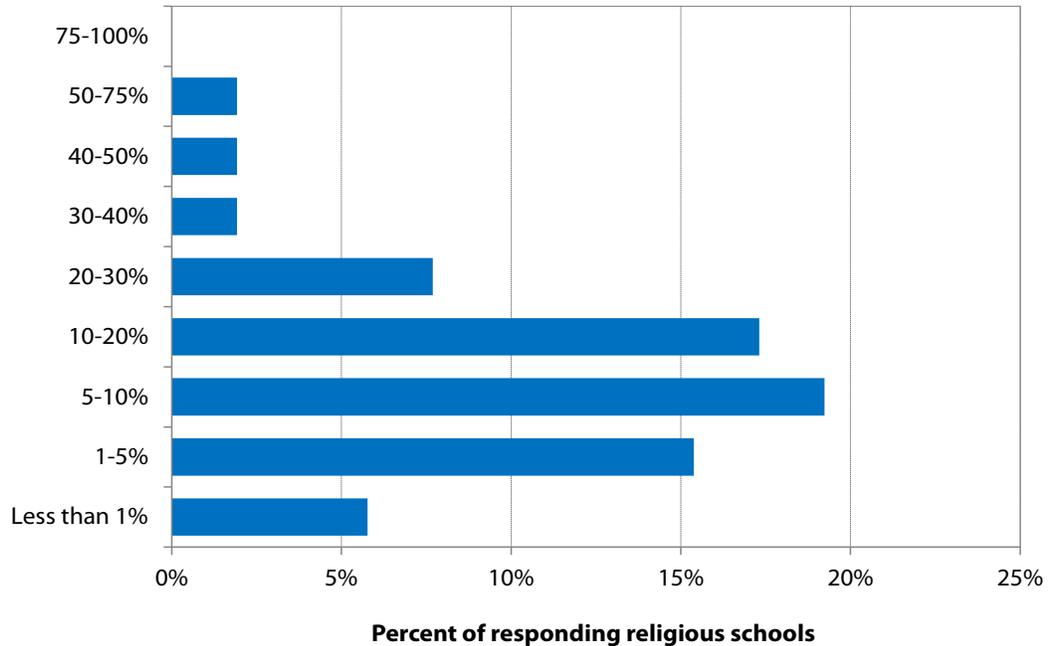
Expanding to respond to demand

Included in the survey were several questions about whether and how schools had attempted to respond to parental demand for them, as expressed by wait lists. The results for this section are limited to the 55 schools who indicated that they maintained wait lists, even though several schools without wait lists indicated current or future plans for expansion.

The first question asked whether schools had physically expanded in the past 5 years. Twenty-eight schools (50.9 percent of responding schools) indicated they had done so. While the question was originally intended to delve into the physical expansion

25 This categorization refers to the religion of the independent school. It does not necessarily indicate that the students are not religious. Rather, it indicates that the student is not a member or participating in the religion of the specific independent school.

Figure 7: Percent of non-religious students attending religious independent schools



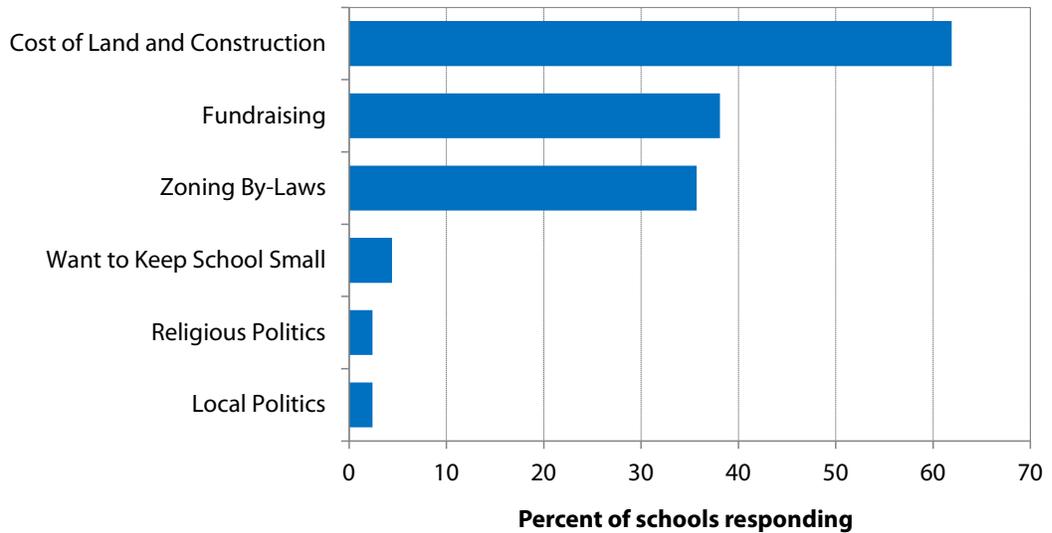
of schools, at least three included renovations that were undertaken to make better use of their existing buildings. The results should therefore be broadened accordingly.

Over two-thirds (67.3 percent) of independent schools with wait lists in the Lower Mainland either expanded during the last five years or seriously considered expanding.

Twenty-four of the 55 schools with wait lists (43.6 percent) indicated they planned to expand their facilities in the future. As well, a little over 70 percent (70.8 percent) of the schools indicating that they planned to expand had already done so in the previous five years. The responses to this question must be interpreted cautiously as they may indicate confusion or even double-counting of the same expansion activities. A limited amount of follow up was undertaken on this question but it resulted in little additional clarity.

Barriers to expansion

The survey included an open-ended question to enable respondents to identify barriers to expansion. They were encouraged to provide multiple responses. Forty-two of the 55 schools reporting wait times (76.4 percent) responded to the barriers to expansion question. The responses were standardized and grouped. For example, replies

Figure 8: Identified barriers to independent school expansion

identifying financing, fundraising, capital or operating campaigns, and financial resources as barriers were all grouped into one “fundraising” category.

Figure 8, which highlights the results from the barriers to expansion question, indicates three principal barriers: the cost of acquiring land and building (61.9 percent), fundraising (38.1 percent), and zoning laws (35.7 percent).²⁶ Respondents mentioned both local and provincial zoning laws, although the former was much more prominent.

Respondents raised three other issues. Two of them were related to organizational politics while the third came from two schools that have decided to stay small for cultural and mission reasons (figure 8).²⁷

Interestingly, none of the respondents raised as a barrier the value of the provincial operating grant. Recall that independent schools in British Columbia can receive up to 50 percent of the per-pupil operating grant for their school district from the provincial government. The remaining funds come from tuition and other fees from parents and from school fundraising activities.

26 In a recent submission to the provincial government, FISA-BC, the representative organization for independent school associations in British Columbia, stated that the “acquisition of property is one of the most expensive and challenging hurdles for independent school authorities, particularly in large urban centres” (Froese, 2012).

27 These results mirror the responses from reporting schools that did not indicate they had student wait lists. In other words, schools that did not have wait lists but had considered expanding faced the same type of barriers as schools that did have wait lists and had been trying to expand or that had future expansion plans.

Two final questions in this section asked about the mix of facility ownership versus leasing in an attempt to explore solutions to the expansion barriers problem. The first question asked whether the schools owned their facilities, either directly or indirectly through the affiliated religious institution, or whether they leased or rented unused public schools. An overwhelming majority of respondents, 81.8 percent, indicated that they owned their facilities. The remaining 18.2 percent rented or leased theirs.

Respondents were also asked whether they had considered leasing or renting facilities, and if so, had they been successful in doing so. Only 12 schools with wait lists indicated they had contemplated renting or leasing facilities. Of those, only 2 did so successfully.

Another section of the questionnaire included a query germane to this discussion: did the school have an endowment? Just 15 schools with wait lists indicated that they had an endowment. Most of those indicated that the endowment was earmarked for capital expenditures and/or scholarships for students.²⁸

28 A question on the size of the endowment was included in the survey, but the responses were limited and therefore not included.

3 Interviews with independent school leaders

The final phase of the research project entailed direct, one-on-one interviews with leaders in the independent school community. The interviews focused on the following questions:

- 1) What is your general response to the initial draft of the study?
- 2) What is your specific reaction to, and suggestions for, solutions to the barriers identified by independent school administrators in their efforts to expand their school's operations?
- 3) Following on question 2, what barriers do new schools face? Are there barriers or obstacles to new schools being built and established that are unique to new schools versus existing schools?
- 4) What suggestions and comments do you have on provincial or local policies that could improve and help independent schools?

School community leaders were given ample time to reflect on and discuss any related issues that were not specifically covered in the questions. These interviews were conducted between June 28 and July 16, 2012.

Question 1: *What is your general response to the initial draft of the study, paying particular attention to two key findings: almost 57 percent of schools reported a wait list, and the average wait list count represented 14 percent of existing students?*

The interviewees consistently replied that they were not surprised by the results, but were surprised by the extent (57 percent of reporting schools indicated a wait list) and depth (students on wait lists represented, on average, 14 percent of existing students) of the wait lists. Two respondents explained that they expected that the poor economic conditions that have existed broadly and the related personal economic uncertainty of parents would have dampened demand for independent schools, as they impose some financial costs on parents. The economic effects of the 2008 and 2009 recession can be seen in the annual growth rates of independent school enrolment (figure 3). In the three years preceding the recession, the average enrolment for independent schools increased 2.1 percent annually, compared to annual increases of

0.4 percent in 2008-09 and 0.5 percent in 2009-10. Annual growth has since rebounded: 1.2 percent in 2010-11 and 2.2 percent in 2011-12.²⁹

Another respondent explained that he was surprised because of the overall drop in the total number of students enrolled in K-12 education in the province—a decline of almost 7 percent over the last decade.

Tempering the surprise, however, was the respondents' recognition that much parental demand for independent schools in the last year or so could have been influenced by the tension between the teachers' union (the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, or BCTF) and the government of British Columbia. Several respondents discussed the increasing discontentment with the public school system and the confrontation between the BCTF and the government during recent years. Indeed, one school association leader went as far as to say that the "tension and confrontations between the unions and the government, and the impression that education is being politicized, has encouraged parents to find alternatives in independent schools."

One school leader raised a phenomenon highlighted in figure 7 in which students who are not from religious families, or who practice a different religion, attend religious schools for the non-religious benefits they provide. He explained that this illustrated the real, material benefits of independent school education as well as the parental demand for such education.

Question 2: *What is your specific reaction to, and suggestions for, solutions to the barriers identified by independent school administrators in their efforts to expand their school's operation?*

There was unanimous consensus among the school leaders interviewed that the three barriers identified by school respondents, namely, the cost of land and construction, fundraising, and zoning by-laws (see figure 8) accurately represented the key barriers to schools expanding and responding to parental demand. However, some important nuances were raised during the interviews that are worth discussing further.

Three of the five school association leaders explained that through the boards of education, public schools have access to low-interest loans for capital expenditures, including both original construction and expansion. All four respondents said that construction costs were a significant barrier impeding the expansion of their schools. They offered suggestions for potential mechanisms by which independent schools

29 It is important to re-emphasize that the data presented in this study cover only the Lower Mainland. Anecdotal information received from leaders of various school associations indicates that independent schools outside the Lower Mainland have fared worse over the last few years than schools in the Lower Mainland due to the recession and slow recovery combined with declining numbers of school-aged children.

might gain similar access to low-interest rate loans, adjusting for any differences in risk.

There was also considerable discussion about the limited land availability and its cost in the metro areas of the Lower Mainland compared to the more rural areas. However, two respondents relayed how schools in their associations had purchased, or were considering purchasing, land adjacent to their schools for expansion, but that land-use zoning laws, specifically those associated with the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR),³⁰ limited their ability to use the land. Clearly, land-related barriers in both the urban (limited supply and high cost) and rural areas (agricultural zoning) impede independent schools from responding to parental demand.

Finally, one school association leader drew attention to an important barrier imposed by the schools themselves. According to this leader, many schools choose to remain small as a matter of policy so they can retain a small-school culture and philosophy. Unfortunately, the data do not allow us to further analyze the results beyond those presented in figure 8 where 4.4 percent of respondents indicated they wanted to remain small as a matter of policy.

Question 3: *Extending the discussion of question 2 to include barriers to new schools, are there barriers or obstacles to new schools being built and established that are unique to new schools versus existing schools?*

This important question was posed to the school association leaders since the school surveys were naturally completed from the perspective of those in existing schools, not those weighing the barriers and obstacles to starting a new school.

The general consensus among the association leaders was that new schools face the same barriers as existing schools with one key exception. Three of the five association leaders outlined the organizational requirements for starting a new school, which include time and costs to establish an organization, the application to the province (accreditation), fundraising for both capital and operating costs, and marketing to attract parents and students. These costs are a significant barrier to establishing a new independent school. However, as two of three respondents explained, their associations have mechanisms in place to assist potential new schools in this process.

A specific conversation on the possible role of for-profit schools was raised with two of the school association leaders. We asked whether, given the barriers identified for new and existing schools to expand, and the fact that many of the barriers are financially-related, there is any possible role for for-profit schools, which other coun-

30 For information on the Agricultural Land Reserve, see the British Columbia Agricultural Land Commission at www.alc.gov.bc.ca.

tries welcome³¹ and which have potentially greater access to start-up capital. The response was telling. The leaders agreed that such schools would likely have greater access to capital by which to overcome the financial barriers discussed. However, both indicated that the primary barrier to for-profit involvement in K-12 education is “ideological” and “perceptual” rather than substantive. Simply put, British Columbians have an aversion to public funds being used to support private companies pursuing a profit motive in education. That aversion is emotional rather than stemming from a substantive observation that for-profits perform poorly compared to non-profits in education delivery.

Question 4: *Please give us any suggestions or comments you have on provincial or local policies that could improve and help independent schools.*

The general responses to this question were included to varying degrees in previous replies. For example, the two most-discussed policy reforms were: 1) ensuring access to low-interest rate loans for capital spending; and 2) better using vacant public school facilities for independent schools wishing to expand their operations. The first policy recommendation was discussed earlier. The second flows naturally from the fact that the largest barrier to independent schools responding to increased demand is the cost of acquiring land and financing construction. Both policy recommendations are developed further in the following section.

Two of the school association leaders also recommended that the different ministries that oversee aspects of the schools improve their own inter-ministry coordination. Specifically, kindergarten to grade twelve is regulated by the Ministry of Education, while pre-kindergarten is regulated by the Ministry of Children and Family Development. Both respondents gave instances where the regulations imposed by the ministries differed based on the grade covered. If these two ministries were better coordinated and recognized that schools often provide pre-kindergarten classes, it would eliminate, or at least reduce, a number of problems reported by schools offering these classes.

31 For a discussion of for-profit schools in education, see the following studies, which are part of a series of papers published by the American Enterprise Institute on this subject: Riggan, 2012; Wildavsky, 2011; Kelly, 2011; Horn, 2011.

4 Conclusions and recommendations

There is little doubt about the current and growing demand for independent school education in British Columbia. While public school enrolment in the province has declined by over 11 percent since peaking in 1997-98, independent school enrolment has grown by 22.4 percent over the same period. Students enrolled in independent schools now represent 11.6 percent of all K-12 students in the province. Further, the results from the independent schools survey indicates that a majority of independent schools in the Lower Mainland (57.3 percent) have wait lists, with average wait lists representing 14.3 percent of the existing students.

This study primarily focuses on documenting and understanding the presence of wait lists for independent schools and on identifying barriers and obstacles that independent schools face as they try expand to respond to the demand for them. However, a number of practical recommendations emerged from the study.³²

1) Facilitate the use of idle public school facilities by independent schools

Three principal barriers identified by respondents to the independent schools survey were corroborated in the interviews with school association leaders. To varying degrees, all pertained to the costs associated with purchasing and developing land for school facilities. Any policy that could reduce these costs, even marginally, would help independent schools respond to parental demand. An obvious solution, which was recently explored and eventually advocated by the Federation of Independent School Associations (FISA-BC) (see Froese, 2012), is to encourage the use of idle and vacant public school facilities by independent schools wishing to expand.

British Columbia's current legislation allows for public school facilities to be purchased or leased by independent schools. Unfortunately, local boards of education too often view independent schools as hostile competitors rather than as a complementary part of K-12 education. The Federation of Independent School Associations'

32 Both school association leaders and several of the principals interviewed called for better coordination of regulations between provincial ministries. Specifically, they pointed to inconsistent operating regulations between the two ministries that have input into school operations when schools include pre-kindergarten classes, which is increasingly the case in independent schools. The Ministry of Education regulates K-12 classes, while the Ministry of Children and Family Development regulates pre-kindergarten. To avoid inconsistencies, the two ministries should ensure that operating regulations for pre-kindergarten classes are consistent with those for kindergarten and early elementary grades. This suggestion was not included as part of this study's formal recommendations since it exists outside of the confines of the core issues addressed.

briefing represents a practical, workable plan to improve the transition of idle public school facilities to independent schools. The proposal recommends a mechanism by which independent schools could appeal to the Minister of Education,³³ through the Assistant Deputy Minister, Executive Financial Officer of Resource Management, if the local board of education denies the independent school's initial request to purchase or lease an unused public school facility. This is an eminently practical improvement on the status quo. It makes little sense to have public school facilities sitting idle and consuming taxpayer money for upkeep while independent schools struggle to respond to parental demand to accommodate additional students. In addition, this change could be quickly implemented with results seen in short order.³⁴

2) Review policy on funding and access to low-interest loans for independent schools

As discussed earlier, independent schools do not receive any direct or indirect financial support for capital expenditures. In addition, independent schools do not have access to preferential interest loans through the provincial government as public schools do. The combination of these two policies means that capital costs are a particular barrier for independent schools. As discussed previously (see figure 8), independent schools have identified the cost of land acquisition and construction as the main factor limiting them from responding to parental demand. Indeed, several of the principals interviewed (though the results were not included in the study due to their small number) as well as two of the five school association leaders mentioned how valuable it would be to have some form of partial provincial capital funding and/or access to low-interest rate loans.

That said, increasing independent school grants and/or providing access to either capital funding or low-interest rate loans is not a panacea and must be considered very carefully. First, and perhaps most importantly, it is paramount that the schools retain and preserve their independent status. Additional reliance on government funding, including for capital expenditures, could jeopardize or erode their current levels of independence. Second, there is a material difference between the assets developed by public schools and those developed by independent schools, even though they serve the same purpose: those paid for and developed by the public school system remain publicly-owned assets; those developed for the independent schools are ultimately privately-held assets.

33 The current legislation governing school facilities provides the Minister of Education with the ultimate authority to grant disposition of land or improvements (see Froese, 2012).

34 The FISA-BC submission, for example, identified 10 independent schools in the Lower Mainland that are ready and willing to assume idle public school facilities (see Froese, 2012).

This paper recommends a thorough review of both policies—funding (operating and capital) and access to low-interest rate loans—by the provincial government, school associations, and other interested parties. In terms of the recommended review, the study suggests paying particular attention to other jurisdictions with independent school sectors such as Alberta, Australia, Sweden,³⁵ and parts of the United States.³⁶ The main goal of such a review is to determine whether additional operating or capital-related funding could help independent schools respond to documented parental demand while retaining their independence, ensuring efficient and responsible use of public funds, and maintaining proper separation of government and private activities.

3) Broad review of legislation and guidelines for independent schools

The data collected on wait lists for independent schools in the Lower Mainland indicates significant parental demand for alternatives to the public education system. With over half the independent schools in the Lower Mainland maintaining wait lists (representing, on average, 14 percent of existing students) and with many schools struggling to accommodate parents, it is imperative that the provincial government review and possibly revise provincial legislation and regulations governing independent schools to help schools respond flexibly to parental demand.

35 For further information on Sweden's education system, see Izumi, Chaney, and Stacey, 2009; Cowen, 2008; and Hepburn and Merrifield, 2006.

36 Alberta is an obvious choice for review and comparison. Two other suggestions offered by this paper's reviewers are Australia and Sweden. In Australia, for example, governments do provide independent schools with limited capital funding. Data provided by the Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) shows that government supplies roughly 17 percent of capital funding for independent schools. For further information on independent schools in Australia, please see the ISCA (<http://isca.edu.au>). In addition, the ISCA annually publishes a quick reference guide and statistics for independent schools. The *Snapshot* for 2012 is available at <http://isca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/ISCA-Snapshot-20121.pdf>. Specific information on capital funding in Australia is available from the ISCA at <http://isca.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/Independent-Update-3-Capital-funding-2008.pdf>.

A contrary example is Sweden, which finances education by providing all families with school vouchers. According to an expert on Swedish education who contributed to this paper, the country's voucher laws do not provide any capital assistance to independent schools (referred to as private schools in Sweden). One study found that the long-term financial sustainability that school vouchers provide was a more important financial consideration than one-time capital funding. In addition, Sweden's education system allows for-profit participants to operate, and these participants have greater access to financing than non-profits. For further information on Sweden's education system please see: Izumi, Chaney, and Stacey, 2009; Cowen, 2008; and Hepburn and Merrifield, 2006.

A final example worth considering is how private organizations have responded in Wisconsin after the introduction of the Milwaukee school voucher program. Private organizations have emerged to help raise resources directly for independent schools and to train independent school staff so that they can effectively fundraise for themselves (Sweet, 2003).

Appendix A: Econometric results of

1) Wait lists and Catholic schools and

2) Wait lists and school locations

1) Wait list and Catholic schools

Model: Predicted logit of (WAIT LIST) = -0.170 + (1.305)*CATHOLIC

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	CATHOLIC	1.305	.464	7.915	1	.005
	Constant	-.170	.261	.423	1	.516

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: CATHOLIC.

2) Wait list and location of schools

Model: Predicted logit of (WAIT LIST) = 0.693 + (-1.386)*CATHOLIC

Variables in the Equation

	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Sig.	Exp(B)
Step 1 ^a	VALLEY	-1.386	.482	8.288	1	.004
	Constant	.693	.255	7.367	1	.007

a. Variable(s) entered on step 1: VALLEY.

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