

Parent Involvement ~ Basic Principles

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A Brief History of Parent Involvement in BC Public Education

We cannot afford to sequester parents on the periphery of the educational enterprise. Parent involvement is neither a quick fix nor a luxury; it is absolutely fundamental to a healthy system of public education.

Anne Henderson, 1988

Parent groups have been active in BC's public schools for over eighty years. On September 8, 1915, the first official parent organization was launched at the oldest school in the province, Craigflower on the outskirts of Victoria. In the same autumn, two groups were meeting in Vancouver to discuss organizing parent teacher associations at Bayview Elementary and King Edward High School. Other schools in the Vancouver area soon followed, leading to the creation of the Vancouver and District Parent Teacher Federation.

By 1922, the idea of parent involvement in education had spread so far across the province that it was evident that a provincial organization was needed. More than 60 associations sent 283 delegates to a conference in Vancouver to create a plan for a provincial federation. On April 22, 1922, the BC Parent Teacher Federation was formed, and plans were made to promote the ideals and objectives of the organization in all schools in the province.

Over the years, the provincial federation was successful in providing input to government on many educational, health, and safety issues affecting children and youth in BC. The name was changed to include the words "Home and School", and the federation became a member of the Canadian Home and School Federation.

The BC chapter undertook provincial surveys, the last of which was to gather input for the Royal Commission on Education in 1987. Following the two-year Commission, the BC government amended the School Act to give parents the right to belong to a parent advisory council in their school, and through it to advise the board, principal, and staff on any matter relating to the school. Many parent organizations already in place in schools became the official parent advisory council for the school. Many more schools acquired a council for the first time.

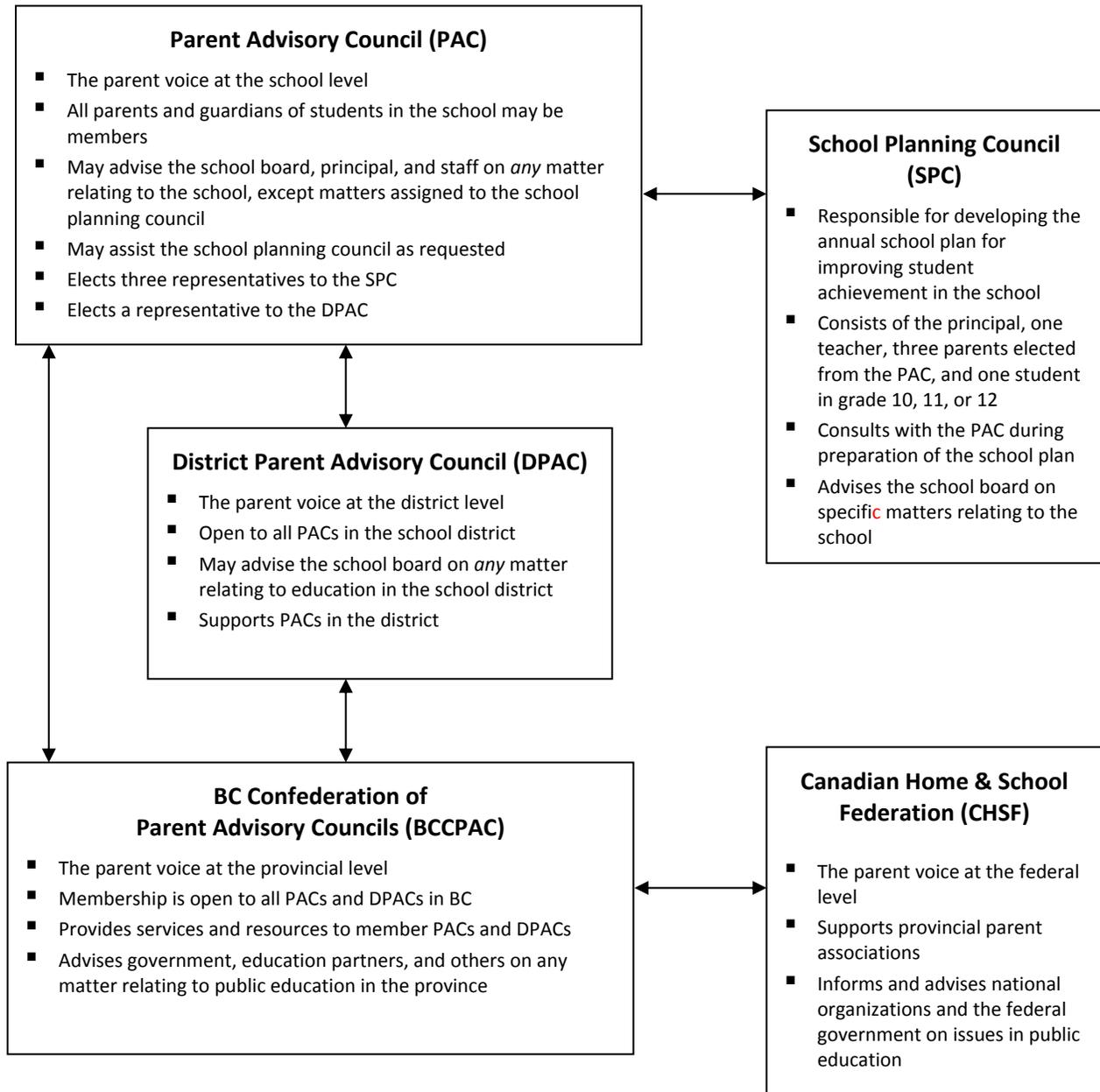
More legislative changes came in 2002. Parents were given the right to form a district parent advisory council in their school district, and through it to advise the board on any matter relating to education in the district. School planning councils in every school were legislated for the first time, with the responsibility of creating an annual school plan for improving student achievement. Parents were given majority representation (3) on the school planning council, joining the principal, one teacher, and a senior student in secondary schools.

The BC Parent Teacher Home and School Federation changed its name to BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils in 1990.

Since 1989, BCCPAC has held two conferences each year. These conferences offer professional development opportunities for parents to learn more about supporting student learning. Parents discuss educational issues, share information, and express their views to the Ministry of Education and partner group representatives.

BCCPAC is the parent voice on provincial committees dealing with a wide range of issues, including student assessment, Aboriginal education, curriculum, and school safety. Just as a principal consults with the PAC on school issues and a school board consults with the DPAC on district issues, the Minister of Education consults with BCCPAC on public education issues in the province.

The PAC Network in BC Public Education



Purposes of PACs and DPACs

Advisory Role Under the School Act

Under the School Act, PACs and DPACs have an advisory role in schools and districts:

- A PAC, through its elected officers, may advise the school board, principal, and staff on *any* matter relating to the school, other than matters assigned to the school planning council. [*School Act, section 8(4)*]
- A PAC, through its three elected representatives on the school planning council, participates in preparing an annual school plan to improve student achievement in the school. [*School Act, sections 8.1 and 8.3*]
- A DPAC may advise the school board on *any* matter relating to education in the school district. [*School Act, section 8.5(1)*]

Activities of PACs and DPACs to Support Their Advisory Role

PACs and DPACs are involved in many kinds of activities to support their advisory role under the School Act, including, but not limited to

- promoting parent involvement in schools
- communicating with parents about the school and district
- providing parent education and professional development
- providing a forum for discussion of educational issues
- assisting parents and students in obtaining information and communicating with the school and district
- advocating for students and parents, and supporting local advocacy projects
- organizing activities and events for students and parents
- providing financial support for the goals of the council, as identified by the members.

Comprehensive List of PAC and DPAC Purposes

Following is a list of purposes of PACs and DPACs, reflecting the full range of activities PACs and DPACs are typically involved in.

This list is not necessarily in order of priority. Through discussion, councils will decide for themselves which purposes are most important to them. This list is often used as a starting point for developing a PAC or DPAC constitution or mission statement.

Purposes of PACs

- To promote the education and welfare of students
- To encourage parent involvement in the school
- To advise the school board, principal, and staff on any matter relating to the school, other than matters assigned to the school planning council
- To participate in the work of the school planning council through the PAC's elected representatives
- To contribute to a sense of community within the school and between the school, home, and neighbourhood

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- To provide parent education and professional development, and a forum for discussion of educational issues
- To assist parents in obtaining information and communicating with the principal and staff about their child's progress or other concerns
- To assist the principal and staff in ensuring the highest safety standards are maintained in the school and neighbourhood
- To organize and support activities for students and parents
- To provide financial support for the goals of the council, as determined by the membership
- To advise and participate in the activities of the DPAC and the BCCPAC

Purposes of DPACs

- To be the collective voice of parents in the school district
- To advise the school board on any matter relating to education in the district, including the district's Achievement Contract
- To communicate with parents and PACs on educational matters
- To provide parent education and professional development, and a forum for discussion of educational issues
- To assist parents in forming a PAC in every school
- To assist members in obtaining information and communicating with district personnel
- To communicate with other organizations in the community and province on educational matters of common interest
- To advise and participate in the activities of the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC)

Rights and Responsibilities of Parents and Students

Parents and students have rights and responsibilities from a variety of sources, including

- BC School Act and other provincial legislation
- regulations passed pursuant to the School Act and other legislation
- Orders in Council¹
- Ministerial Orders²
- federal legislation
- United Nations Conventions.

Knowing the basic rights and responsibilities of everyone in the school community will make it easier to work together for the benefit of students.

PACs and DPACs are encouraged to consult the Ministry of Education's *Manual of School Law*, a compendium of law on education in BC available at

✓ www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/

¹ *Orders in Council* are official documents implementing government decisions concerned with the day-to-day operation of the province. See www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/oic/aboutoic.htm

² *Ministerial Orders* are orders made from time to time by a Minister that do not require the approval of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. See www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/oic/aboutoic.htm.

On the following pages, you will find a list of the most important rights and responsibilities of parents and students, categorized as shown below. The legislative reference appears after each item. All references to the School Act can be found here: [School Act](#)

Parents' rights and responsibilities:

- Individual parental rights and responsibilities under the School Act
- Individual parental rights and responsibilities under Orders in Council
- Collective parental rights under the School Act

Students' rights and responsibilities:

- Individual student rights and responsibilities under the School Act
- Individual student rights and responsibilities under Orders in Council
- Collective student rights under the School Act
- Rights of students with special needs under the *Special Needs Students Order* of the Minister of Education
- Student rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- Principles of *Fair Schools*, Report of the BC Ombudsman, May 1995

Parents' rights and responsibilities

Individual parental rights and responsibilities under the School Act:



All sections of the School Act referred to here can be found at

[School Act BC](#)

Under section 11 of the School Act, every school board must establish an appeal procedure. You can obtain a copy of the appeal or complaints policy for your school or district from your principal, district office, PAC, or DPAC.

- The right to be informed of their child's attendance, behaviour, and progress in school [*School Act, section 7(1)(a)*]
- On request, to receive a copy of the school plan for the school and the achievement contract for the district [*School Act, section 7(1)(b)*]
- To belong to the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) in their school [*School Act, section 7(1)(c)*]
- To consult with the teacher, principal, vice-principal, or director of instruction with respect to their child's educational program. Conversely, parents are required, if requested, to consult with the teacher, principal, vice-principal, or director of instruction on their child's educational program [*School Act, section 7(2)*]
- To provide volunteer services at or for a school [*School Act, section 7.1*]
- To examine all student records kept by a board pertaining to their child [*School Act, section 9(1)(a)*]
- On payment of a fee, if any, to receive a copy of any student record they are entitled to examine under the above section [*School Act, section 9(1)(b)*]
- Can be held liable, with or separately from their children, for property of a school board that is destroyed, damaged, lost, or converted by an intentional or negligent act [*School Act, section 10*]

- To appeal to the school board a decision, or failure to make a decision, by a school board employee that significantly affects the education, health, or safety of their child [*School Act, section 11*]
- To educate their child at home or elsewhere [*School Act, section 12*]

Individual parental rights and responsibilities under Orders in Council:

“Parents have the right and responsibility to participate in the process of determining the educational goals, policies, and services provided for their children”.

They have the primary responsibility to ensure that children are provided with the healthy and supportive environment necessary for learning.



The Statement of Education Policy Order is an order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. It can be found at:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/d/oic_1280-89.pdf

They have a responsibility to help shape and support the goals of the school system and to share the task of educating their young.”
[*Statement of Education Policy Order, OIC 1280/89*]

Collective parental rights under the School Act:

- The right to form a Parent Advisory Council in their school [*School Act, sections 8(1) and 8(2)*]
- Through the PAC’s elected officers,
 - to advise the school board, principal, and staff on any matter relating to the school, other than matters assigned to the school planning council, and
 - at the request of the school planning council, to assist the school planning council in carrying out its functions under the School Act [*School Act, section 8(4)*]. The purpose of the school planning council is to prepare an annual school plan to improve student achievement in the school [*School Act, section 8.3*]
- Through the PAC, to elect three parent representatives to the school planning council [*School Act, section 8.1(3)*]
- Through the PAC, to form a district parent advisory council in their district [*School Act, sections 8.4(1) and 8.4(2)*]
- Through the PAC, to elect one parent representative to the district parent advisory council [*School Act, section 8.4(3)*]
- Through the district parent advisory council, to advise the school board on any matter relating to education in the district [*School Act, section 8.5(1)*]

Students' rights and responsibilities

Students are the focus of the whole education system and the primary recipient of the service. Every position in the system exists to serve students, to provide them with an education. They are the reason for the existence of the system.

[Fair Schools Report
May 1995](#)

Individual student rights and responsibilities under the School Act:

- The right to participate in an educational program between the ages of 5 and 19 [*School Act, section 2(1)*]
- The right to attend any school in British Columbia, if the school board determines that space and facilities are available in the school [*School Act, section 2(2)*]
- The responsibility to participate in an educational program until the age of 16 [*School Act, section 3(1)(b)*]
- The right to consult with a teacher, principal, vice-principal, or director of instruction about their educational program [*School Act, section 4*]
- The responsibility to comply with school rules, codes of conduct, and other rules and policies of the school board [*School Act, section 6(1)*]
- If attending a school, the responsibility to participate in an educational program as directed by the school board [*School Act, section 6(2)*]
- Can be held liable, with or separately from their parents, for property of a school board that is destroyed, damaged, lost, or converted by an intentional or negligent act [*School Act, section 10*]
- The right to appeal to the school board a decision, or failure to make a decision, by a school board employee that significantly affects their education, health, or safety [*School Act, section 11*]

Individual student rights and responsibilities under Orders in Council:



The *Statement of Education Policy Order* is an order of the Lieutenant Governor in Council. It can be found on the web at:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/d/oic_1280-89.pdf

- “Students have the opportunity to avail themselves of a quality education consistent with their abilities, the opportunity to share in the shaping of their educational programs, and the opportunity to determine their career and occupational goals.
- They have the responsibility to make the most of their opportunities, to respect the rights of others, and to cooperate with fellow students in the achievement of their goals.” [*Statement of Education Policy Order, OIC 1280/89*]

Collective student rights under the School Act:

For grade 10, 11, and 12 students, the right to be consulted by the principal on the appointment of a student representative to the school planning council [*School Act, section 8.1(3)*]

Rights of students with special needs under the *Special Needs Students Order* of the Minister of Education:



The *Special Needs Students Order* can be found on the web at:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/legislation/schoollaw/e/m150-89.pdf

- A “student with special needs” is a student who has a disability of an intellectual, physical, sensory, emotional or behavioural nature, has a learning disability or has exceptional gifts or talents.
- An administrative officer (principal, vice-principal, or director of instruction) must offer to consult with a parent of a special needs student regarding the placement of that student in an educational program.
- A school board must provide a special needs student with an educational program in a classroom where that student is integrated with other students who do not have special needs, unless the educational needs of the special needs student or other students indicate that the educational program for the special needs student should be provided otherwise. [*Ministerial Order 150/89*]

Student rights under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child



The *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* can be found on the web at:

<http://www.unicef.org/rc/>

- The right to free and compulsory primary education [*Article 28*]
- To equal access to secondary and higher education [*Article 28*]
- To school discipline consistent with the child’s human dignity [*Article 28*]
- To express their views freely in matters that affect them, and to have their views considered in accordance with their age and maturity [*Article 12*]

Parents continue to be the primary advocates for children in the public school system. They are no longer prepared to restrict their activities to fundraising...The Ombudsman supports parental involvement in schools at the local, district and provincial levels.

[Fair Schools Report
May 1995](#)

Principles of *Fair Schools*, Report of the BC Ombudsman, May 1995

Note: Parent and student advocacy as practiced by the BCCPAC Advocacy Project is based on the principles of *Fair Schools*.

1. All children and youth have the right to be valued and to be treated with respect and dignity.
2. All children and youth have the right to a fair and equitable education.
3. All children and youth have the right to receive appropriate advocacy supports.
4. All children and youth have the right to participate in decisions that affect them, to express their views, and to have them carefully considered.
5. All children and youth have the right to the benefit of the fundamental human rights provided in the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.
6. All children and youth have the right to a safe physical and emotional environment.

7. All children and youth have the right to receive appropriate programs from appropriately trained and properly motivated staff.
8. All children and youth should have the opportunity to access publicly funded services in their home communities or as close to their home as possible.

The *Fair Schools Report* is available free of charge from the BC Ombudsman. Call **1-800-567-3247**.

It is also available on the BC Ombudsman's website at

- ✓ http://www.ombudsman.bc.ca/resources/reports/Public_Reports/Public%20Report%20No%20-%202035.pdf

Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA)

The *Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA)* came into effect in BC on January 1, 2004, to regulate the way private sector organizations collect, use, keep secure, and disclose personal information.

The Act ensures that all private sector organizations that hold information about individuals handle that personal information responsibly. It also gives individuals control over the way information about them is handled, and a right to request access to, and correction of, their personal information.

Who is covered by PIPA?

The Act applies to businesses, trade unions, unincorporated associations, and the non-profit sector, including clubs. PACs, DPACs, and BCCPAC fall within these categories.

PIPA does not apply to *public* bodies such as provincial government ministries, municipalities, or school boards. Public bodies are covered by the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*,³ and are specifically excluded from PIPA.

What is "personal information"?

Personal information is defined as "information about an identifiable individual". It means

- information that *can identify* an individual, for example, name, home address, home phone number, and ID numbers
- information *about an identifiable* individual, for example, physical description, education, religion, employment, marital status, and blood type.

Personal information includes *employee personal information*, but does *not* include "business contact information" or "work product information":

- *Business contact information* is the kind of information you would find on a business card or letterhead—name, position or title, business phone number, address, e-mail, and fax number. You do not need consent to collect, use, or disclose this information.
- *Work product information* is anything prepared or collected as part of a person's business or employment—for example, letters, reports, or research. Employees do not have a right of access to everything they prepare as part of their employment.

³ See page 12

With limited exceptions, all other information collected on an identifiable individual is protected under the Act.

What does this mean for PACs and DPACs?

The Act creates “common sense” rules for collecting, using, and sharing personal information. These rules will apply if your PAC or DPAC decides to collect personal information for

- contact lists that use *home* phone numbers, addresses, or personal e-mail rather than business addresses
- volunteer or committee lists
- donour lists
- awards or prizes.

The personal information might include photographs and video tapes as well as electronic or paper records.

The common sense rules are:

- *Identify the purpose* for which the personal information is needed. Is the purpose reasonable?
- *Limit the collection* of personal information. Is the information necessary for the purpose?
- *Disclose the purpose* to the individuals from whom the information is collected.
- *Obtain consent* from the individuals before or at the time the information is collected, *and* when a new use for the information is proposed.
- *Limit the use, disclosure, and retention* of information to the purpose for which it was collected, unless the individuals consent to a new purpose. Get rid of the information (or render it anonymous) as soon as it no longer serves the purpose.
- *Be accurate and complete* in the information you collect.
- *Safeguard personal information* from unauthorized access, collection, use, disclosure, modification, or disposal by people within and outside the PAC or DPAC.
- *Be open* about your practices with respect to personal information. Identify who is accountable for the information collected, who can answer questions, and how a person can gain access to his or her personal information.
- *Give people access* to their personal information. Explain how it has been or is being used. Tell them who it has been given to. Correct it if it is inaccurate or incomplete.
- *Provide recourse* if someone complains. Investigate complaints, deal with them openly, and resolve them.

Giving consent

A person can consent to the collection, use, and disclosure of personal information *explicitly* in writing or verbally, or *implicitly*, called “deemed consent”. Consent is *deemed* to be given when

- the purpose of the information would be considered obvious to a reasonable person, *and*
- the person voluntarily gives the information for that purpose.

Information collected before PIPA

Personal information that your PAC or DPAC may have collected *before* January 1, 2004, does not need to be *re*-collected. The Act applies, however, to how you use, secure, and share the information. You may only use the information for a reasonable purpose consistent with the purpose for which it was originally collected.

Responsibility for volunteers

Responsibility for personal information lies with your PAC or DPAC, not with the individual volunteers who collected, used, or shared the information. The PAC or DPAC is responsible for the methods volunteers use to collect information and the manner in which it is handled.

For more information on the *Personal Information Protection Act*, go to these websites:

For the legislation:

- ✓ http://www.leg.bc.ca/37th4th/3rd_read/gov38-3.htm

For a guide prepared by the Office of the Information & Privacy Commissioner:

- ✓ http://www.oipc.bc.org/pdfs/private/guide_to_oipc_processes.pdf

Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPOP)

Unlike the *Personal Information Privacy Act*, which applies to the private sector, the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIPOP)* applies to *public* bodies such as provincial government ministries, municipalities, and school boards.

FOIPOP is based on two principles:

- information in the custody or control of public bodies is available to the public
- any personal information held by public bodies should be protected from unauthorized collection, use, and disclosure.

The objective of FOIPOP is to make public institutions more open and accountable, and to protect individual privacy. The Act does several things:

- With limited exceptions, it gives the public the right of access to “records”, meaning all recorded information.
- It gives individuals the right to request correction of information about themselves.
- It prevents unauthorized collection, use, and disclosure of personal information by public bodies.

Access to information under FOIPOP

FOIPOP is not intended to replace the normal process people go through to obtain information. Public bodies, including schools and school districts, are expected to respond to most requests for information on an informal and voluntary basis.

When people want information that would not normally be available, they have the right to make a formal request. The public body must respond within 30 calendar days by either providing the information or explaining why it cannot be released.



Check your school district website, school board office, or school for a district policy on Freedom of Information. Or go to the website of the BC School Trustees Association at

www.bcsta.org/policy/poindex.htm

Requesting information from a school district

Most school districts have a policy setting out the steps to access information under FOIPOP. Many have an Information and Privacy Coordinator who looks after requests.

A request for information must be in writing, either as a letter or a form required by your local policy. The information requested must be in the form of a “record”. Records are defined as books, documents, maps, drawings, photographs, letters, vouchers, papers, or any other thing on which information is recorded or stored by graphic, electronic, or mechanical means. A fee may be charged for photocopying.

Withholding of records

Some records can be withheld. These are designated exceptions under FOIPOP. Many of the exceptions are discretionary, meaning the school district can decide whether to withhold the information or not.

Any request for *someone else’s* personal information must be refused. FOIPOP establishes strict standards for the collection and use of personal information.

For the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*, go to

- ✓ www.qp.gov.bc.ca/statreg/stat/F/96165_01.htm
- ✓ bclaws.bc.ca - FOIPOP