



SEVENTH-DAY
ADVENTIST[®]
CHURCH

British Columbia Conference
Serving BC, Yukon and Western NWT

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October 5, 2021

Dear Fellow British Columbia Conference Church Family:

Greetings! I pray that this message finds all of you and your beloved ones well and in good health, by God's grace.

I would like to bring a matter of utmost importance to your attention. For over 15 years our Conference has been blessed by the ministry that our West Coast Adventist School (WCAS) has provided for our children and youth. WCAS is a Distance Learning School (online school) and it serves those students who do not have access to an Adventist brick-and-mortar school in their area or those who prefer to have their education in a private setting.

WCAS has filled that gap as a valuable education option for those students and for their parents/guardians who want their children to be exposed to a solid Adventist education, when considering their specific situations as mentioned above. The current Online Schools structural system in British Columbia allows students to enrol at WCAS from different locations in BC, Canada, and even overseas. The British Columbia Government provides some funding for that format of education, and it is tuition-free for those students who are BC residents. West Coast has, since its founding in 2006, established a long history of exemplary relationship with the BC Ministry of Education (MOE). Multiple commendations regarding the excellence of our program on their yearly evaluations demonstrate this. I take this opportunity to sincerely thank our dedicated WCAS teachers for their commitment, passion, and hard work as they *minister* to our online students.

However, this is about to be completely changed through Bill-8, already approved by the British Columbia Legislature in March last year. This Bill mandates that Online Learning Schools in BC will come under the umbrella of a new centralized operational system which will be controlled by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (MOE). That will negatively impact the Independent online schools' ability to continue their operations. The MOE already supervises the BC Online Schools but the current format makes provision for faith-based online schools to function in a way that there is some flexibility regarding the curriculum that is taught and the spiritual approach that each faith-based denomination online school has for teachings religious subject, etc. Nonetheless, when Bill-8 comes into effect next school year, it will pose a big challenge and cause a major logistical, financial, and philosophical impact for the survival of all online faith-based schools in BC.

The most significant implication of Bill 8 would be that an Independent Online School would be in a position to only enrol students who live in the school district where the Independent Online School is located. i.e. - if this proposed new system was already in effect this year, WCAS could only enrol 2 of its 2021-2022 students – those who live in Abbotsford (where WCAS is located), instead of the 100+ of its current students who reside all over the province. Of course, those numbers would not make WCAS feasible to operate. Many of the WCAS students are attending our school online specifically because they live outside of geographical reach of an Adventist school. As a faith community we are most concerned about these students' access to our faith-based system. Besides that, all our other Adventist students who wanted to chose WCAS to provide their education will be deprived of this privilege in many aspects:

1 – Socially: they will miss out on the ability to connect among themselves, and it will create a barrier for their bonding. Social interaction is a huge element for children and youth in their connective development and growth. At WCAS they spend several hours a week connected with their “peers” online as they receive their education.

2 – Emotionally: The interactions with friends who have the same moral principles, purposes, and vision in life, through the guidance of their Christian parents/guardians in most cases, promotes the well-being of our children and youth. Again, the importance of home, church, school, and friends is one that cannot be downplayed for their success in life.

3 – Spiritually: This is an extremely important attribute for us, Seventh-day Adventists. We emphasize the utmost relevance of a close connection between home and school, two unique settings where faith can be developed in the hearts of our children and youth. We believe that those two institutions work hand in hand in the development of their character, as one supports the other with principles and values that help them to have a daily experiential relationship with God. Such spiritual practice is vital to inspire faith in God in the hearts of our children and youth to love God while they receive an education in such an environment which assist to prepare them academically and spiritually to make positive contributions to society.

4 – Community: The combination of the three aspects mentioned above create a sense of community for our children and youth. The exposure to an Adventist school (brick-and-mortar or online, through WCAS) and churches is a key element for the expression of their faith. That experience provides them an opportunity to participate and worship God “together” with their peers, even from their different locations online or in person, enjoy their spiritual devotional time as part of a community, listen to different speakers, and missionaries' experiences by of those across the globe in person or through DVD's & links, etc., become a relational positive experience for our children and youth. This helps them to be a part of a healthy community for their maturing – physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

5 – Academically: Provincial exams and other tests' scores reveal that both WCAS and/or brick-and mortar Adventist school students have a better performance and participation rates than those attending schools on the public system: If WCAS were unable to continue its service, it will be detrimental to many of our children and youth that solely depend on the excellent education that WCAS can provide for them.

6 – Funding: The financial drainage that the implementation that this Bill-8 can cause a situation that could potentially create an environment for the reduction of granting by the Governmental Agency to independent schools for the provision of education for our children in those settings – online or brick-and-mortar. This grant is already only 50% of what is allocated to the public-schools sector (online). The financial portion from the MOE to support independent online schools was significantly reduced last year, even while we were facing the uncertainties of an unknown pandemic. A small change in one line, could end up making many Independent online schools to cease to operate!

Finally, WCAS is doing a fantastic job to provide quality education to its students throughout this pandemic, especially during the months that all schools in BC were closed. That cannot be ignored!

Yes, brothers and sisters, if Bill-8 is not properly challenged by Christians and believers of all religious denominations, this situation can cause an undesirable outcome to all independent faith-based schools and presents a very real threat to continued educational choice and religious liberty in our province.

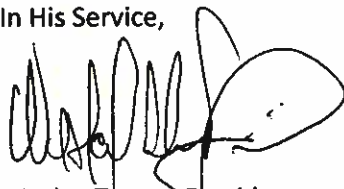
This is where you can help: Please address this matter on a high-level. Be polite, concise, with a Christian approach but in a straight-forward way through a letter to your local MLA expressing your support for our WCAS. Please let him/her know how important WCAS is for your children and your faith community – whether you have children studying at WCAS or any other Adventist school. I kindly invite you to take this matter seriously and write this letter of support with the spirit of a family: *your children are my children as mine are yours - they are all our children.*

Melanie Kartik, WCAS Principal would be happy to share with you further details relating to Bill 8, the right approach and some nuggets how you can best express your support to WCAS during this critical time. She can be reached at principal@wcasd1.ca

Above all, I humbly request all of us to make this a special matter of our prayers! (I John 5:15)

Thank you for your being a part of our church family in the BC Conference and your faith and dedicated service to God's Church.

In His Service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Wesley Torres', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Wesley Torres, President