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British Columbia News

# Access zones now in place to protect kids at school

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/31006>

B.C.'s K-12 students and staff will be protected from harassing protesters as the Province enacts access zones around schools.

"Every kid and teacher in our province has the right to go to school without being disrupted by aggressive or hateful protests," said Premier David Eby. "Our government is taking action to protect kids and ensure schools remain safe spaces by establishing no-go zones for protestors. I want people who think it's OK to intimidate or harass kids while they're trying to learn or play at school to know that what you're doing is now illegal."

The Safe Access to Schools Act gives the Province the legal authority to prohibit people from interfering with safe access to school grounds. This includes behaviour such as yelling that causes disruptions to school programs and activities or holding signs with slogans that cause concern for the safety of students and staff.

Since the start of the school year, 20 schools have been targeted as sites by disruptive protestors. While everyone has a right to freedom of expression, using access zones as a tool to legally prevent harassment of kids and staff within specified hours and spaces around learning environments will better protect everyone in schools and help keep the focus on learning.

"Ensuring every child can access the education they need to succeed without fear or intimidation is our top priority," said Rachna Singh, Minister of Education and Child Care. "A child's learning environment should be a safe and inclusive one, and we're doing what is needed to keep kids safe at school."

Access zones are in place at K-12 schools and police can arrest or issue tickets to anyone found impeding access, disrupting or interfering with educational activities, or attempting to intimidate an individual within 20 metres (66 feet) of school property. The zones will be in effect on school days from 7 a.m. until 6 p.m. and during extracurricular school activities at all of B.C.'s K-12 public and independent schools, with limited exceptions.

"While everyone has a right to freedom of expression, including peaceful protest, disrupting children's learning environment is not appropriate," said Niki Sharma, Attorney General. "We are taking action to protect kids and make sure that schools are places where both students and staff feel safe, respected and welcome."

The health, safety and well-being of kids and those teaching and coaching extracurricular school activities at school is a top priority for the B.C. government. This law is supported by many of B.C.'s education partners, such as the BC School Trustees Association, the BC Teachers Federation, the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils and CUPE BC, among others.

This law is part of the Province's commitment to keeping people safe, which includes further actions taken by the provincial government to protect youth from online threats and restrict cellphone use in schools.

## Quick Facts:

- An access zone is an area where specified forms of harmful behaviour are not allowed. Within the access zone, it is now an offence to engage in behaviours that can harm students and staff or disrupt school programs.
- Schools and school districts can call the police to intervene if they are concerned that behaviour within an access zone may be harmful to others.
- The distance was chosen to provide a reasonable amount of space between protests or harmful behaviour

and students in schools trying to learn.

- This legislation was passed on May 16, 2024.

### **Learn More:**

To learn more about what government is doing to keep kids safe, visit:

<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024PREM0004-000088> (<https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2024PREM0004-000088>)

For more information about B.C. legislation, visit: <https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/Legislation> (<https://strongerbc.gov.bc.ca/Legislation>)

A backgrounder follows.

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## **Ministry of Education and Child Care**

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### **Backgrounders**

What people are saying about the access zones

#### **Carolyn Broady, president of the BC School Trustees Association (BCSTA) –**

“BCSTA supports the new access zones around schools, something we advocated for to keep students and staff safe from disruptions. Democratic debate is important but it can’t compromise school safety. We appreciate the government’s efforts to protect our students from unnecessary learning disruptions.”

#### **Clint Johnston, president of the BC Teachers’ Federation –**

“Every student deserves to be safe, cared for and free from bullying at school, especially as they are learning to express themselves and find their identities. We have seen a concerning rise in targeted harassment at schools where teachers and staff do amazing work everyday. As both a teacher and parent, it’s excellent to see the provincial government stepping up with exclusion zones that will protect teachers’ workplaces and students’ learning environments from this harmful behaviour, so that schools can remain the safe and supportive spaces they need to be.”

#### **Laura Ward, president of the BC Confederation of Parent Advisory Councils (BCCPAC) –**

“Preventing disruptive and intimidating behaviours on school grounds assures the safety and well-being of our children, school staff and other community partners. This legislation will also support many of our parent advisory council meetings and other events on school grounds to proceed without disruption. BCCPAC applauds the government’s commitment to a safe and caring school environment for all.”

#### **Rohan Arul-pragasam, president of the BC School Superintendents Association –**

“Schools need to be safe, nurturing learning environments where we can belong to ourselves and feel a sense of belonging to the school community. This new legislation gives the police the authority to take action to keep students and staff safe. It ensures schools are free from disruptions and protests, which is essential to continue supporting students and staff to thrive in an environment that nurtures and celebrates the human spirit.”

#### **Karen Ranalletta, president of CUPE BC –**

“Schools should be safe, inclusive places for children to learn, grow and thrive. We strongly support the government’s action to protect students and workers from those who seek to threaten and intimidate them with divisive and hateful disruptions at schools. This legislation is essential to ensure that our schools can remain focused on fostering growth and learning without fear.”

## **Acknowledgment**

The B.C. Public Service acknowledges the territories of First Nations around B.C. and is grateful to carry out our work on these lands. We acknowledge the rights, interests, priorities, and concerns of all Indigenous Peoples - First Nations, Métis, and Inuit - respecting and acknowledging their distinct cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments.