

# Voting With Their Feet

*Many parents are eager to take advantage of BC's trend towards school choice.*

By Clare Ogilvie and Ian Austin

Shannon Rothwell is looking forward to sleeping in her own bed. "But it's been worth sleeping here," the British Columbia mom said inside the family's RV Friday, moving forms and toys aside to sink into a well-worn captain's chair.

Over the singing of a Shirley Temple video, playing to amuse four-year-old daughter Brittany, Rothwell explained why she felt it necessary for the family to take up residence in a school parking lot to get their child into the new Auguston Traditional elementary school set to open in September.

"I really like the values this school will teach, like respect," said Rothwell. "And I like the idea of uniforms. That way, there is no competition between the kids about clothes."

Another knock at the door of their camper and another inquisitive parent. The Rothwells were first to camp out; so by default they became control central. "I won't miss the knocks," said husband Chris as he stirred spaghetti sauce simmering over the gas stove.

It was their last supper there. Yesterday, they packed up and went home after successfully registering Brittany, and also placing five-month-old daughter Kieran on a future waiting list.

The family, with pet dog Simba, had planned to camp out all along to get their kids into the school. An information meeting held two weeks ago was so well attended they decided they had better get a spot early. They ended up camping for 12 days.

Just a few hours after they arrived at the parking lot of Abbots-

ford's Career Technical Centre, RVs began to roll in, cars were parked, and a few souls initially decided to brave freezing weather in tents.

Soon service roads were high-ways for tricycles, the pavement was a



*Dozens of parents and kids lived for days in motorhomes, vans, and tents to sign up for the new traditional school in Abbotsford, BC.*

chalk artist's easel, and a playing field the venue of a make-believe World Cup soccer game.

There were community Barbie-doll tea parties and movie nights for the parents. Last Monday, Rothwell even organized a parking lot barbecue. "I've really enjoyed getting to know everyone," said Rothwell. "I'll miss this."

What Shannon won't miss is waiting for Chris to get back to the trailer after work so she can go home and have a shower, do laundry and pick up more supplies.

Nor will she miss trying to amuse and care for two sick children in a space half the size of most garages. Brittany ended up in hospital with croup a few days into their stay and Kieran has a cold.

And they were the lucky ones. Some of the parents were sharing accommodation with three families squeezed into one camper.

The attraction is back-to-basics education, school uniforms, strict discipline, and a nostalgia for school-as-it-once-was.

"This is the best you can get; it's private school on sale," said Anyssa Carruthers, whose daughter Hannah will be starting grade 1 in the fall.

"People line up at A & B Sound, why not for a traditional school? This is not for a VCR — this is for our children and for the rest of their lives."

Campers were given a number, like at a take-out restaurant, and an adult had to stay on site to ensure a place in line until registration for the 250 spaces finished.

By noon of the first day of registration, Auguston School was almost

full. But some parents won't know for sure if their kids got in or not until the school board determines class size in a couple of months.

Marg McDonough, who is principal of both the new Auguston school and the already-established King traditional school, wasn't surprised at the turnout.

"Nowadays, the educational consumer is very astute," she said.

"They are far more involved than they used to be, and the fact is that they now have choices — so that means taking action."

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