



NEWS RELEASE

Most families who choose independent schools in Alberta have similar incomes to families that choose public schools

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For immediate release

CALGARY—Despite common misperceptions, Alberta families with children in most independent schools actually have slightly lower incomes than families with children in public schools, finds a new study by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

“Amid the ongoing debate in Alberta about funding of independent schools, it’s important to understand there’s little difference in the income of parents that choose public schools versus those that choose the overwhelming majority of independent schools,” said Angela MacLeod, senior policy analyst with the Fraser Institute’s Barbara Mitchell Centre for Improvement in Education and co-author of *Comparing the Family Income of Students in Alberta’s Independent and Public Schools*.

The study finds that families with children in non-elite independent schools, which often provide religious or alternative education, had an average (after tax) income (\$95,549) that was 1.8 per cent lower than the average income of parents with children in public schools (\$97,301) in 2011, according to the most recent available data from Alberta’s Ministry of Education and Statistics Canada.

Crucially, more than eight-in-10 independent schools in Alberta are not elite institutions—in fact, only 17 schools meet that criteria, defined as having tuitions that exceed 10 per cent (or \$11,190) of the average after-tax family income.

In Alberta, nearly 50 per cent of independent schools offer religious education. And more than a quarter (26.2 per cent) of Alberta’s independent schools offer alternative teaching methods or have a specialty focus—art or athletics, for example—not available in the public system.

In Alberta, accredited independent schools receive partial government funding of 60 or 70 per cent on a per student basis for operating costs.

“The myth that independent schools in Alberta cater only to wealthy families prevents more fulsome discussions about providing more choice to parents and improving education in the province,” MacLeod said.

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