



NEWS RELEASE

Sweden provides lessons on how to increase accessibility for low- and middle-income parents to more school choice

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For immediate release

TORONTO— Amid continued calls in some provinces to reduce or even eliminate government funding of independent schools, policymakers could look to Sweden and its full government funding model that increases school choice for parents, particularly modest-income families, finds a new study by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian public policy think-tank.

“Parents across Canada increasingly want greater choice when it comes to the education of their children, but religious and alternative independent schools can be financially out of reach for low- and middle-income families,” said Deani Van Pelt, director of the Barbara Mitchell Centre for Improvement in Education at the Fraser Institute.

The new study, *Regulation and Funding of Independent Schools: Lessons from Sweden*, examines the Scandinavian country’s education reforms since the 1990s.

It finds as full government funding was extended to independent schools in Sweden, enrolment in independent schools increased from less than two per cent of total enrolment in 1992 to more than 14 per cent in 2014 in elementary grades, and more than 25 per cent in upper-secondary grades.

“Reducing the financial barriers for families with limited incomes clearly resulted in those families choosing alternative education provided by independent schools,” Van Pelt said.

Crucially—and quite distinctly from Canada—for-profit and non-profit schools in Sweden are equally eligible for full government funding.

In fact, for-profit independent schools have come to dominate independent school enrolment in Sweden: 64 per cent of elementary and lower-secondary independent school students attend a for-profit independent school while 85 per cent of upper-secondary independent school students attend for-profit schools.

In Canada, for-profit schools are not eligible for government funding. Partial funding is provided to non-profit independent schools who meet eligibility requirements in five provinces: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec.

Like Sweden, there is evidence that the partial government funding in those five provinces have made independent schools more accessible for modest-income families. For example, between 2000-01 and 2012-13, public school enrolments declined by 8.1 per cent in the five provinces that provide partial funding to independent schools, while enrolment at independent schools increased by 20.5 per cent.

“Government funding for a wider variety of education options—including both non-profit and for-profit independent schools—expands choice for families,” Van Pelt said.

“But access to that expanded school choice should not be limited to families of means. Sweden has overcome this financial barrier for modest-income families by providing more comparable levels of funding for both independent and public schools.”

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