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# The Canadian Education Freedom Index

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## **Erratum**

Incorrect information on New Brunswick home schooling regulations has appeared in the *Canadian Education Freedom Index*. The correct information follows.

Parents in New Brunswick who wish to home school their children must “obtain an official exemption from attending public school.” Parents must also complete a form annually to determine whether their children are receiving “effective instruction.”

Therefore, on the Home School Indicator of the *Canadian Education Freedom Index*, New Brunswick should receive a score of 0 on the variables of Permission and Reporting, and an overall score of 0 on that indicator. New Brunswick should receive an overall score of 8 per cent and a rank of 7 on the *Canadian Education Freedom Index*.

For more information on home schooling in New Brunswick, please see the New Brunswick Home Schooling Information Brochure at <http://www.gnb.ca/0000/publications/curric/hsib.pdf>.

The authors apologize for the error and for any inconvenience it may have caused.



# Executive Summary

The *Canadian Education Freedom Index* draws attention to the powerful role our provincial governments play in creating or obstructing educational freedom. It shows that “public education” does not mean the same thing in one province as it does in any other. Some provinces, through funding and regulation, support many different educational choices for parents, while others make it nearly impossible for parents to educate their children anywhere but their local public school. Because of these dramatic differences in public policy, some Canadian parents have much greater power than others to “determine the kind of education that shall be given to their children,” something the United Nations declares to be a fundamental human right (United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26).

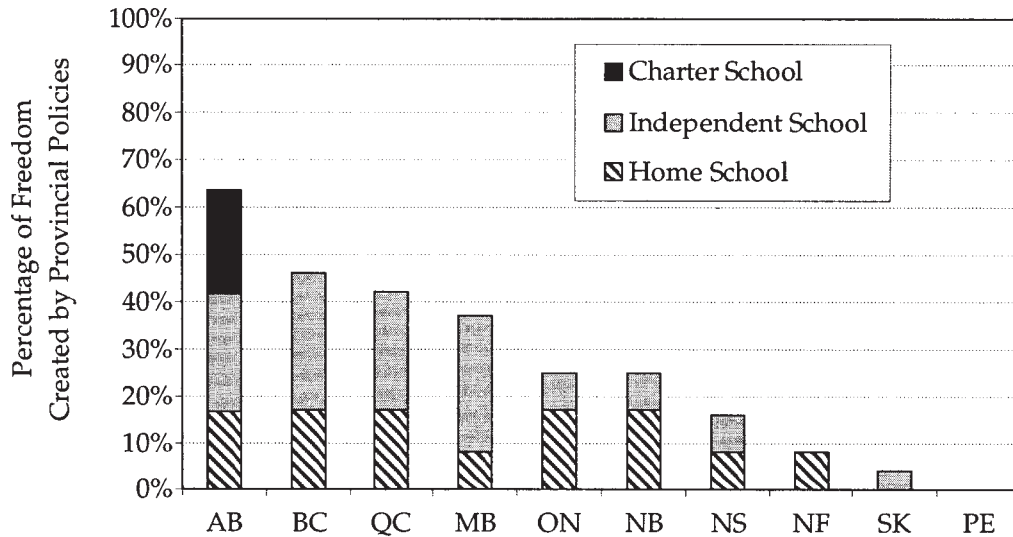
The *Canadian Education Freedom Index* measures the freedom that parents in different provinces have to educate their children. It does this by comparing policies governing the three types of school they might choose if the public system is unsatisfactory to them: home schools, independent (or private) schools, or charter schools. It does not measure the very real differences in school choice available in different parts of the same province, because, though such measurement would certainly be valuable and revealing, the work lies outside the scope and resources of this project. Rather, it measures the ease with which parents can establish the education they want for their children if what they want is not provided in the public system.

The *Canadian Education Freedom Index* does this by collecting a variety of objective indicators of educational freedom into one document so that anyone—parent, politician, journalist or student—can compare the policies of different provinces across the country. The index identifies those differences in an attempt to promote discussion on the merits of various education policies used by different provinces. It reflects how those policies expand or limit the educational opportunities available to Canadian children.

**Table 1:**  
**Canadian Education Freedom Index, 2003**

Category	Home School	Independent School	Charter School	Average Score	Rank
AB	50%	75%	66%	64%	1
BC	50%	88%	0	46%	2
QC	50%	75%	0	42%	3
MB	25%	88%	0	38%	4
ON	50%	25%	0	25%	5
NB	50%	25%	0	25%	5
NS	25%	25%	0	17%	7
NF	25%	0%	0	8%	8
SK	0%	13%	0	4%	9
PE	0%	0%	0	0%	10

The index shows that based on these indicators, Alberta, British Columbia, Quebec and Manitoba rank, educationally, as the freest provinces in Canada. Prince Edward Island, Saskatchewan and Newfoundland are the least free.

**Figure 1: Total Canadian Education Freedom by Province, 2003**

In terms of home schooling alone, New Brunswick, Quebec, Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario tie for first place. Prince Edward Island and Saskatchewan are the least free provinces for parents who wish to educate their children at home.

Manitoba and British Columbia offer parents the most freedom to educate their children in an independent school, while Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island offer the least freedom in this category.

The only province that offers the choice of charter schools is Alberta.

Educational freedom is difficult to measure and this index is the first attempt of its kind in Canada. Its goal is to draw attention to differences among provincial education policies, to recognize those governments that are working to improve

freedom for education, and to highlight the importance of educational freedom in the continuing debate about improving education.

Does educational freedom also result in academic achievement? By comparing the two national tests of student achievement (SAIP and PISA) with the Canadian Education Freedom Index, we see that the provinces with the country's highest achievers are also those with the greatest educational freedom. Conversely, provinces whose students repeatedly score below average on academic tests tend to be among Canada's least free. It does not appear that high academic achievement is the result of small class sizes or high spending. Alberta, the most educationally free province, and also the one that consistently scores the highest academically, has the highest student/educator ratio in the country and spends less per pupil than three other major provinces.



# The Canadian Education Freedom Index

## Introduction

Just as the education of one's children is one of the most important responsibilities of parenting, the management of education policy is one of the provincial government's most important responsibilities. Today's most compelling education research and the growing international movement toward educational choice suggest that governments can best fulfill their education responsibilities by improving the freedom of parents to choose their children's schools (Hepburn, 2001). In Canada, until now, no one has attempted to measure how much educational freedom parents have or how much the educational choices available to parents vary simply depending upon the province in which they live.

The *Canadian Education Freedom Index* measures freedom by comparing provincial policies governing the educational alternatives parents might select if the public school system is unsatisfactory to them. These alternatives are home schools, independent (or private) schools, or charter schools.

The index is strictly an inter-provincial comparison and does not measure the very real differences in school choice available in different parts of the same province. Though such measurement would certainly be valuable and revealing, the work lies outside the scope and resources of this project. Rather, it measures the ease with which parents can establish the education they want for their children if what they want is not provided in the public system.

Other publicly funded educational choices do exist in Canada that are not measured in this index. Several favoured ethnic groups—linguistic, religious, and racial—have their own public schools, for instance. For more information on these groups see the Appendix: Education Freedom by Minority Group. Also, school boards that offer, to a greater or lesser degree, educational choice for parents by encouraging or denying open enrolment and access to alternative or magnet schools create educational choice locally.

A quick glance at the graphs and tables of this index shows clearly that the term “public education” does not mean the same thing across the country. Some provinces, through funding and regulation, support many different educational choices for parents, while others make it nearly impossible for parents to educate their children anywhere but their local public school. This index reflects these differences by measuring variables of education policy related to the categories, home schooling, independent schooling and charter schooling. In the rankings, these variables are assigned weights so that public funding and provincial regulation are balanced in importance.

In the Home School Choice and Independent School Choice categories, provincial funding is weighed as equal to the sum of the other, regulatory variables. The Charter School Choice score is the sum of its variables weighed equally. The final Canadian Education Freedom score is the average of the three scores.



# Home Schooling

Although parents in Canada have a legal right to home school their children according to their conscientious beliefs,<sup>1</sup> parents' choice to educate their children at home is affected by several factors. Our measure is composed of three: whether public funding is available to students enrolled in home schools, whether parents must seek government permission to home school, and whether home schoolers must report student progress to their province (see table 2).

## Funding

The choice of parents to home school may be affected by the availability of funding. Funding helps covers the costs incurred by parents educating their children at home, including educational tools such as curricula, Internet access, and textbooks, transportation, and other expenses.

Only Alberta provides direct financial assistance to parents who home school their children. The money may be used for any costs associated with the home school. Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia also allocate money to school boards or independent schools that register home school students. "Funding Available to Home Schoolers," the first column in table 2, measures the maximum amount of funding that follows the child to the provider of the education: the parent.

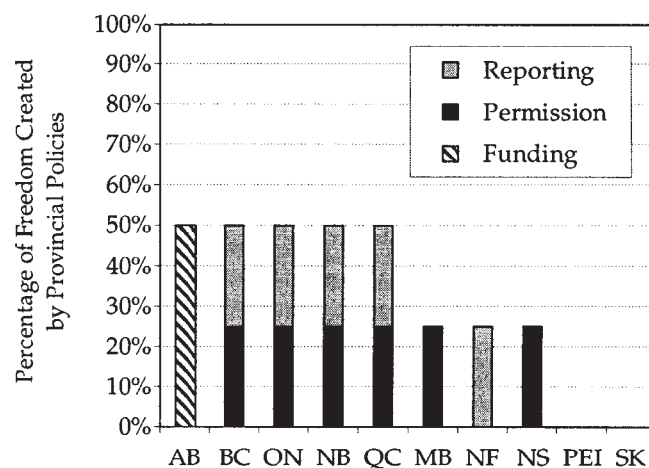
Funding is measured as a percentage of the average cost to educate a student in the pub-

lic school system. For example, if the government grants \$1,000 to a home-school parent and the average cost of education for a child in the public school system (including capital costs) is \$5,000, then the funding level is 20 percent. Alberta provides 16 percent of the cost of educating the child in the public system.

**Table 2: Home School Indicator**

Province	Funding (%)	Score (%)	Permission	Score (%)	Reporting	Score (%)
AB	16%	50	Yes	0	Yes	0
BC	0%	0	No	25	No	25
ON	0%	0	No	25	No	25
NB	0%	0	No	25	No	25
QC	0%	0	No	25	No	25
MB	0%	0	No	25	Yes	0
NF	0%	0	Yes	0	No	25
NS	0%	0	No	25	Yes	0
PEI	0%	0	Yes	0	Yes	0
SK	0%	0	Yes	0	Yes	0

**Figure 2: Freedom for Home Schooling by Province**





## Permission

This variable, the second column on table 2, measures whether or not parents have to apply to a government body for permission to home school. Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, and British Columbia place the decision to home school directly in the hands of parents. These six provinces do not require parents to seek government permission before starting a home school program. Instead, the government intervenes only if the parents prove themselves to be irresponsible or incapable. The remaining four provinces require that parents submit to an application process intended to prove that they are capable of home schooling their children before they start. This process by the local board or ministry is an obstacle to parents who prefer this choice for their children.

## Reporting

Some provinces demand that parents who home school report their children's progress on a regular basis. This indicator, the last column in table 2, measures whether or not home educators are required to report progress to the ministry, to a school board, or to an independent school. It does not measure the degree of reporting required.

Provinces that do not require reporting acknowledge that parents, not governments, hold the primary responsibility for educating their children. In these provinces, if the educational value of the home school program is suspect or if the parent is

accused of being incapable, government carries the burden to prove negligence or incompetence. Newfoundland, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, and British Columbia do not require parents to submit any reports. The other provinces do require it.

All provinces maintain the right to terminate a home school program if they determine that a child's right to education is being denied.

## Conclusion

The Home School indicator suggests that public funding goes hand in hand with increased regulation. For example, Alberta allows funding to follow home schooled children, but it places more regulatory demands on parents than most other provinces. British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick and Quebec, on the other hand, offer home schoolers no public funding but have no application or reporting requirements. This raises some interesting questions: Are home schoolers better off with more funding and more regulation, or with no public funding and less public intervention? If, as research indicates,<sup>2</sup> most home schooled children are receiving a satisfactory or superior education to that offered in public and private schools, are regulations necessary? Are regulations reasonable if public funding is increased? Alberta's high score on funding is offset by its poor performance in the permission and reporting categories, while scores for British Columbia, Ontario, New Brunswick and Quebec are the reverse.





# Independent Schooling

The Independent School Indicator measures the freedom that parents in different provinces have to choose independent schools for their children. This indicator is composed of five variables. Three of these measure the availability of public funding for independent schooling, and two measure government regulations of independent schools.

## Funding

The first variable, listed in the first column of table 3, asks whether or not significant public funding (30 percent or more of per pupil spending in public schools) is available to students educated in independent schools. Four provinces—Quebec, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia—

offer up to 35 to 38 percent of the funding spent on government-run schools to students who attend independent schools.<sup>3</sup>

Starting in 2002, Ontario made this funding available directly to parents who pay independent school tuition, through a refundable tax credit, which was initially worth 10 percent of tuition, up to a maximum of \$700 per child, per year. It is currently worth 20 percent of tuition up to a maximum of \$1,400 per child, per year. The tax credit is scheduled to grow each year for five years so that by 2006 it will be worth 50 percent of the independent-school tuition, up to a maximum of \$3,500 per child. Because the tax credit at its current level is worth only 20 percent, Ontario is not given credit for any independent school funding in this Index.

**Table 3: Independent School Indicator**

Province	Funding	Score (%)	Funding for Students at For-Profit Schools	Score (%)	Years Until Eligible For Funds	Score (%)	Curricular Approval	Score (%)	Mandatory Teacher Certification	Score (%)
BC	Yes	50	No	0	1	12.5	No	12.5	No	12.5
MB	Yes	50	Yes	12.5	3	0	No	12.5	No	12.5
AB	Yes	50	No	0	1	12.5	Yes	0	No	12.5
QC	Yes	50	Yes	12.5	0	12.5	Yes	0	Yes	0
ON	No	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	No	12.5	No	12.5
NB	No	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	No	12.5	No	12.5
NS	No	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	No	12.5	No	12.5
SK	No <sup>a</sup>	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	No	12.5	Yes	0
NF	No	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	Yes	0	Yes	0
PEI	No	0	N/A	0	N/A	0	Yes	0	Yes	0

<sup>a</sup>In Saskatchewan, eight independent “historical high schools” receive some public funding. Public funding is not available to the other independent schools in the province and would not be available to any new independent school. The province, therefore, receives a score of zero in this category.

## Funding for students attending for-profit schools

Some of the provinces that fund independent schools discriminate between non-profit and for-profit schools, while other provinces do not.

Allowing for-profit schools to accept public funding gives parents more school choice. The profit motive is an incentive for educators to open schools and offer educations that families want. History has shown repeatedly that competition among schools forces educators to focus on the needs of families, to keep prices down, and to improve the quality and variety of their teaching methods (see for instance Tooley, 1999, and Coulson, 2001). This variable, the second column in table 3, asks whether or not funding is available to students in for-profit schools.

## Number of years a school must operate before it is eligible to receive funds

The third column in table 3 considers the number of years a school must operate before it qualifies

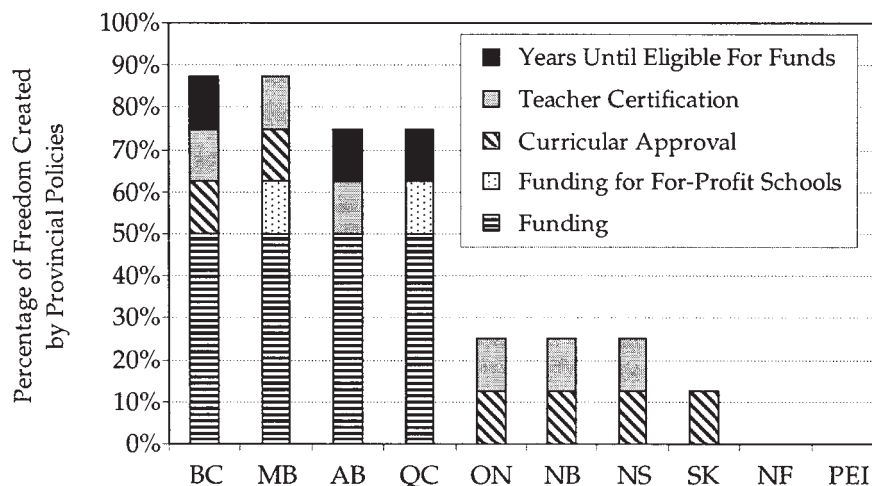
for provincial funding. Some provinces make public funds available to students at independent schools regardless of the length of time they have been in operation; other provinces demand that independent schools operate on parental tuition and other private funds for some years before they are eligible to receive public funding. Provinces that delay grants to independent schools place the financial viability of start-up schools in jeopardy. By making it more difficult for new schools to be established, these provinces effectively reduce the educational options available to parents. Regulations that delay funding make it more difficult for parents to choose a newly established school for their child, even if they believe that school would offer them the best education. Only parents who can afford to pay the full tuition have the option to have their children attend these schools. If a school may receive student funding after one year of operation or less, a province is given full credit in this category.

## Curricular approval

Provinces that allow independent schools curricular freedom maximize parental freedom to choose their children's education. The freedom to

choose a school because of its unique curriculum is an important educational freedom that is not recognized in all provinces. As the fourth column of table 3 indicates, Alberta, Quebec, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island insist that they have some authority over the curricula taught in otherwise independent schools. This flies in the face of the United Nations' Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26), which states parents should have

**Figure 3: Freedom for Independent Schooling by Province**



the right to choose the kind of education that their children receive. Of course, legislation against hate crimes, racism, sexual harassment, teaching violent overthrow of the government, etc. all apply to all independent schools as they do to other organizations. Any attempt by the government to limit parental choice of curriculum beyond this is not only in clear opposition of this human right, but also in opposition to Canada's democratic character.

### **Mandatory teacher certification**

Certification, the fourth column of table 3, increases the cost of teachers and limits the pool of applicants, but does not provide any guarantee of teaching quality. In fact, a recent review of 50 years of literature on the subject found that teacher certification was "neither an efficient nor an effective means by which to ensure a competent teaching force. Worse, it is often counterproductive."<sup>4</sup> Schools that have reason to believe a certificate signifies competence would select on that basis without being required by law to do so. Thus, removing the certification requirement would not only improve the choice of schools but also encourage faculties of education to provide evidence that their teaching certificates signify quality. This variable asks whether or not independent schools are required to hire only certified teachers. For Quebec, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, and PEI, the answer is yes.

### **Conclusion**

Independent schools offer pedagogical, religious, cultural, and social alternatives to government-run schools. How valuable these alternatives are, in terms of both their qualitative difference from the public option and their affordability for parents, is determined by the provincial legislation that governs them. While basic legislation against hate crimes, racism, harassment, and violent overthrow of the government governs all independent schools in Canada, they are otherwise treated very differently from province to province. Some restrict their qualitative differences from public schools by regulating the curriculum they must teach (Alberta, Quebec, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island) and the teachers they may hire (Quebec, Saskatchewan, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island). Others (Ontario, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, and Prince Edward Island) make them less affordable by disallowing significant public subsidies.

Conversely, British Columbia, Quebec, Alberta, and Manitoba provide qualifying independent schools one third or more of the per-student funding public schools receive. This acts, in a sense, as an educational guarantee: parents who are not satisfied with the education provided by public schools have a significant fraction of the cost of their children's independent schooling paid for, provided that schools meet stipulated governmental criteria. Compared to other countries, which generally have more nationally legislated education policy, such stark inter-provincial differences are unusual.



# Charter Schooling

Charter schools are a breed of independent public school, which can now be found in most American states and one Canadian province. In order for charter schools to be formed and funded, provincial legislation must establish one or more public authorities—such as the Ministry of Education, local school boards, or universities—with the power to grant a “charter” to qualifying groups. These groups are often like-minded parents and educators who want an educational alternative to the public schools in their area.

Certain rules govern charter schools, and while these rules vary among jurisdictions, the following are basic. Charter schools may not select students by ability or charge tuition; they must adhere to all provincial health, safety, and building standards, and are subject to all the laws and regulations as other societies and/or entities registered under the Societies Act and Companies Act. A province has the right to revoke the charter if the school fails to meet all laws and regulations or does not provide a satisfactory education to its students. In return, the province provides charter

schools with a per-pupil operating grant and the freedom to manage the school.<sup>5</sup> Research on charter schools in the United States shows that the details and restrictions of charter school legislation vary considerably among the American states, with dramatic effects on the number of charter schools established (Greene, 2000, pp. 5-6; and Center for Education Reform, 2003).

This index’s provincial Charter School Indicator (table 4) is composed of four variables, all of which measure the obstacles to establishing a charter school. Those variables are the existence of charter school legislation, the provincial limit on the number of charter schools permitted, the number of chartering authorities, and whether or not 100 percent of the funding available to other public schools is available to students at charter schools.

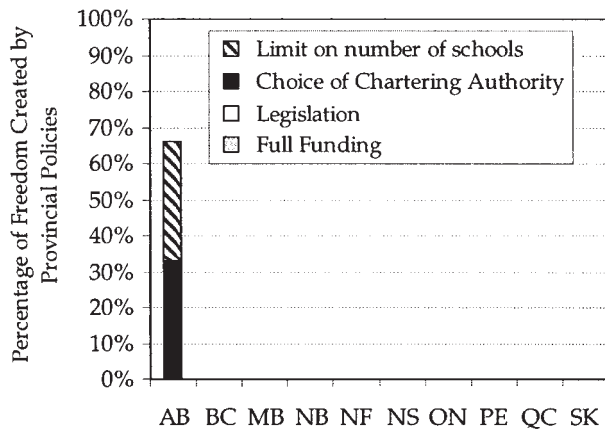
## Legislation

The first measure, recorded in the first column of table 4, is whether or not provinces have charter

**Table 4: Charter School Indicator**

Province	Charter School Legislation	Limit on Number of Schools	Number of Chartering Authorities	100% Funding Available
AB	Yes	15	2	No
BC	No	0	0	No
MB	No	0	0	No
NB	No	0	0	No
NF	No	0	0	No
NS	No	0	0	No
ON	No	0	0	No
PEI	No	0	0	No
QC	No	0	0	No
SK	No	0	0	No

**Figure 4: Freedom for Charter Schooling**



school legislation. Alberta is the only province that does, and its legislation is far from perfect. Parents and educators in that province still face a number of barriers to creating charter schools. For instance, a group requesting charter status must make a proposal to the local school board, which then decides whether to grant or deny the request. If the request is denied, the application may be sent to the department of education for review and a new ruling. To date, only one charter school application has been approved by its local school board. Alberta's department of education has granted the rest of the charter school applications after a request for review (Bosetti, 2001).

### Limited numbers

The second variable in table 4 considers the provincial limit on the number of charter schools. If the limit is low, few schools will be established, and most children will never have the option of a charter school education. A limit on the number of charter schools may also limit the amount of educational diversity that each province can achieve. In Alberta the number of charter schools is limited to 15.

### Number of chartering authorities

The third variable in table 4 addresses the number of chartering authorities that may grant charter status. Provinces that allow only one chartering authority may seriously limit the number of charter schools approved, particularly if that authority stands to lose funding and students for every charter school it approves. This has been the case wherever local school boards have been given sole the authority for granting charters. In Alberta, resistance from local school boards, the primary chartering authorities, "has created a tremendous challenge for charter schools. It delays the establishment of such schools, forces charter proponents to shop around for school boards, and creates tensions between local boards and charter schools. In recent years, local boards have rejected at least eight new charter proposals... Clearly the necessity for charter schools to be sponsored by a school board presents a conflict of interest for the board" (Bosetti, 2001, p. 115).

### Full funding

The last variable in table 4 measures the funding of charter schools compared to other public schools. Provinces that do not provide full funding for students and schools, specifically, tuition grants and capital funding for buildings, hamper efforts to offer alternatives. Alberta is the only province to provide funding to charter schools, and it does not provide 100 percent of the funding that it offers to other public schools. They do not receive full capital funding, and as a result, Alberta's charter schools have reported that 10 to 15 percent of their operating budgets are devoted to their facilities, a cost that other public schools do not bear. This has had a detrimental affect not only on long-term planning for the schools but also on teachers' salaries and class sizes in charter schools (Bosetti, 2001, pp. 115-116).



## Conclusion

Charter schools are a way to create educational freedom within the confines of the public system. They enable families who share similar educational priorities to create schools that are satisfying to both their public and private constituents. Effective charter school legislation eliminates the need for central planning by the province, and

allows locally managed public schools to meet the needs of many in the population who are dissatisfied with their current choice of educational options. They also create an incentive for school boards to offer more educational choice in order to remove the need for parents to create charter schools. In doing just that, the Edmonton school board has become renowned for the amount of choice it offers students.



## The Rankings

Any ranking depends on the assignment of weights to the various indicators. Common sense and scholarly research suggest that a parent's freedom to choose home schooling, an independent school, or a charter school is profoundly affected both by provincial funding and by provincial regulation. Independent schools can provide true parental choice if they are reasonably priced and not overly regulated. Evidence from other countries, as well as from the Canadian provinces, suggests that enrolment in independent schools is sensitive to the level of financial support offered by the government (Holmes 1998, pp. 38, 40, 48, 249-250).<sup>6</sup> Though any single government regulation may have little impact on educational freedom, many regulations can result in the limitation of parental choice. For instance, in the Netherlands, parents are nominally offered a choice of state-subsidized schools, but the variety of their choices in both public and private institutions is severely limited by the long list of regulations to which all schools must adhere (Coulson,

1999, p. 298). Clearly, both total funding and total regulation are critical to educational freedom.

This index, table 5 below, attempts to balance the importance of public funding with that of regulation through its weighting of the variables. To determine the score for Home School Choice and Independent School Choice, the index weighs provincial funding as equal to the sum of its other variables (Permission and Reporting Requirements in the case of Home School Choice, and Funding for For-Profit Schools, Curricular Approval, Teacher Certification and Years until Eligible for Funds in the case of the Independent School Choice indicator). The Charter School Score is the sum of its three variables, equally weighted.

The provincial scores in the three categories are then ranked. These rankings are relative, in that they compare the educational freedom of the provinces to one another, rather than to an ideal



**Table 5: Education Freedom Scores and Rankings in Three Categories**

Home School Choice Indicator						
Province	Funding	Permission	Reporting	Score	Score as %	Ranking
AB	2	0	0	2	50.0%	1
BC	0	1	1	2	50.0%	1
ON	0	1	1	2	50.0%	1
NB	0	1	1	2	50.0%	1
QC	0	1	1	2	50.0%	1
MB	0	1	0	1	25.0%	6
NF	0	0	1	1	25.0%	6
NS	0	1	0	1	25.0%	6
PEI	0	0	0	0	0.0%	9
SK	0	0	0	0	0.0%	9

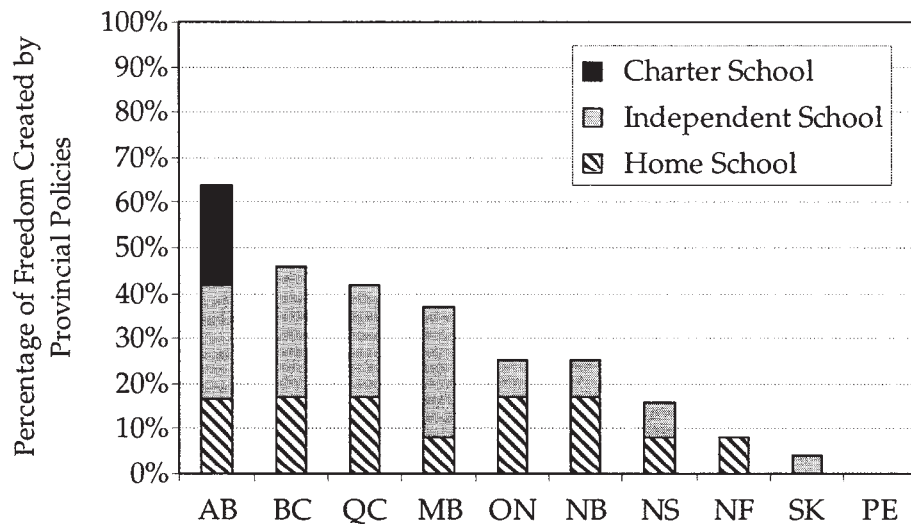
Independent School Indicator								
Province	Funding	Funding for Students at For-Profit Schools?	Curricular Approval	Teacher Certification	Years Until Eligible For Funds	Score	Score as %	Ranking
BC	4	0	1	1	1	7	88.0%	1
MB	4	1	1	1	0	7	88.0%	1
AB	4	0	0	1	1	6	75.0%	3
QC	4	1	0	0	1	6	75.0%	3
ON	0	0	1	1	0	2	25.0%	5
NB	0	0	1	1	0	2	25.0%	5
NS	0	0	1	1	0	2	25.0%	5
SK	0	0	1	0	0	1	12.5%	8
NF	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	9
PEI	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.0%	9

Charter School Indicator							
Province	Legislation	Limit on number of schools	Choice of chartering authority	100% Funding Available	Score	Score as %	Ranking
AB	1	0	1	No	2	66.0%	1
BC	0	0	0	No	0	0.0%	2
MB	0	0	0	No	0	0.0%	2
NB	0	0	0	No	0	0.0%	2
NF	0	0	0	No	0	0.0%	2
NS	0	0	0	No	0	0.0%	2
ON	0	0	0	No	0	0.0%	2
PE	0	0	0	No	0	0.0%	2
QC	0	0	0	No	0	0.0%	2
SK	0	0	0	No	0	0.0%	2

**Table 6: Total Canadian Educational Freedom Index**

Province	Home School	Independent School	Charter School	Average Score	Rank
AB	50%	75%	66%	64%	1
BC	50%	88%	0	46%	2
QC	50%	75%	0	42%	3
MB	25%	88%	0	38%	4
ON	50%	25%	0	25%	5
NB	50%	25%	0	25%	5
NS	25%	25%	0	17%	7
NF	25%	0%	0	8%	8
SK	0%	13%	0	4%	9
PE	0%	0%	0	0%	10

**Figure 5: Total Canadian Education Freedom by Province**



of freedom. In each case, the freest province is ranked 1, and the least free is ranked 10. When two or more provinces receive the same score, they are given a ranking that is an average of their positions. For instance, in the case of the Home School Choice indicator, five provinces received the top score of 50 percent. They were assigned a rank of 3, an average of ranks 1 to 5.

The final Education Freedom score (table 6) is the average of the three scores, expressed in percentage terms. The combined scores produce an ultimate ranking, which is the Education Freedom Index.



# Education Freedom and Academic Achievement

Educational freedom is an end in itself, but does freedom also result in academic achievement? With only ten provinces to look at, it is impossible to establish causation, or make any statistically significant claims. However, by looking at the tests of student achievement taken in all provinces, we find repeatedly that the provinces whose students are the country's top scorers are those with the greatest educational freedom, while those whose students repeatedly score below average tend to be among the least free.

The Student Achievement Indicators Test (SAIP) and the OECD's Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) are both tests that are conducted to a sample of students and schools across Canada under the auspices of the Council of Education Ministers, Canada (CMEC). The tests include sections in mathematics (PISA and SAIP), science (PISA and SAIP), reading (PISA),

reading and writing (PISA) or writing (SAIP). Both PISA (table 7) and SAIP (table 8) show that Alberta, Quebec, and British Columbia generally have the highest academic achievement in Canada. Ontario and Manitoba tend to be in the middle of the pack, while the Atlantic provinces and Saskatchewan tend to perform below the national average. This order corresponds with their ranking on the *Canadian Education Freedom Index* (CEFI).

While one might suggest that other forces are at work, such as spending on education, socio-economic status, or class size, for instance, there is evidence that that is not the case. Table 9 lists the provinces' *Canadian Education Freedom Index* ranking as well as the average personal income in each province, the student/educator ratio, and per pu-

**Table 7: PISA Scores**

Province	Reading 2000	Math 2000	Science 2000	CEFI Ranking
AB	550	547	546	1
BC	538	534	533	2
QC	536	550	541	3
MB	529	533	527	4
ON	533	524	522	5
NB	501	506	497	5
NS	521	513	516	7
NF	517	509	516	8
SK	529	525	522	9
PE	517	512	508	10

Source: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. Available online at [www.cmec.ca/index.en.html](http://www.cmec.ca/index.en.html).

**Table 8: SAIP Scores**

Province	Math (content) 13 '01	Writing 13 '02	Science (written assessment) 13 '99	CEFI Ranking
AB	70.6	82.6	82.5	1
BC	60.7	80.8	76.1	2
QC	74.0	87.5	72.5	3
MB	57.2	82.8	72.5	4
ON	63.1	85.0	71.4	5
NB	53.7	77.9	66.6	5
NS	47.7	75.5	69.3	7
NF	57.1	74.8	68.0	8
SK	52.1	75.4	75.5	9
PE	52.7	77.9	74.3	10

Source: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. Available online at [www.cmec.ca/index.en.html](http://www.cmec.ca/index.en.html).

**Table 9: Canadian Education Freedom Index Ranking Versus Other Provincial Variables**

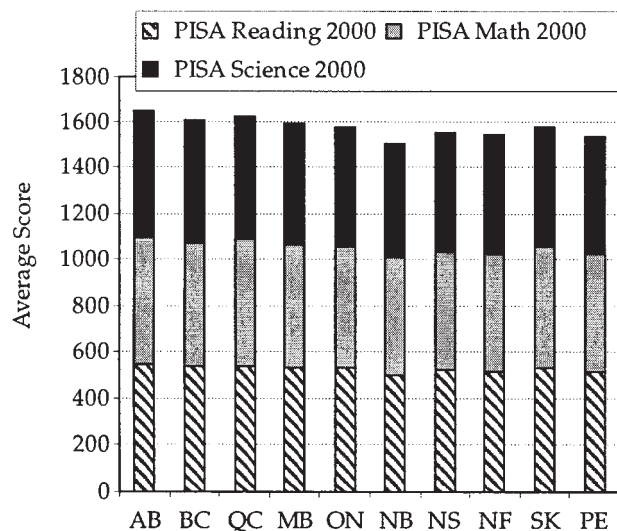
Province	CEFI Ranking	Average Personal Per Capita Income 2002	Student/Educator Ratios 1999/2000	Spending Per Full-Time Equivalent Student, 1999
AB	1	\$32,996	18.43	\$6,871
BC	2	\$27,793	16.59	\$6,985
QC	3	\$27,955	14.98	\$7,097
MB	4	\$27,110	15.78	\$7,432
ON	5	\$32,052	15.93	\$7,554
NB	5	\$25,467	16.78	\$6,433
NS	7	\$25,986	16.46	\$5,642
NF	8	\$23,608	14.29	\$5,841
SK	9	\$24,290	16.20	\$6,277
PE	10	\$24,650	16.62	\$5,677

Note: The numbers in columns 3 through 5 may not be directly comparable. Sources: Column 3, "Average Personal Per Capita Income, 2002" is from Statistics Canada (2003), *Provincial Economic Accounts*; column 4 (Student/Educator Ratios 1999/2000) is from the *Interprovincial Education Statistics Project*, p. 15; and column 5 is from Statistics Canada (2002), "School Board Revenues and Expenditures," *The Daily* (Tuesday, July 23).

Spending on education. This comparison shows a statistically significant relationship between personal income and education freedom. It also reveals that Alberta—the most educationally free province in the country and also the one that consistently scores highest academically—does not come tops in two of the other categories often associated in people’s minds with high achievement: small classes, and more spending on education. Though Albertans have the highest personal income in Canada, Alberta spends considerably less per pupil than do Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, or British Columbia. Alberta also has one of the highest student/ educator ratios in the country, yet still outscores all the other provinces.<sup>7</sup>

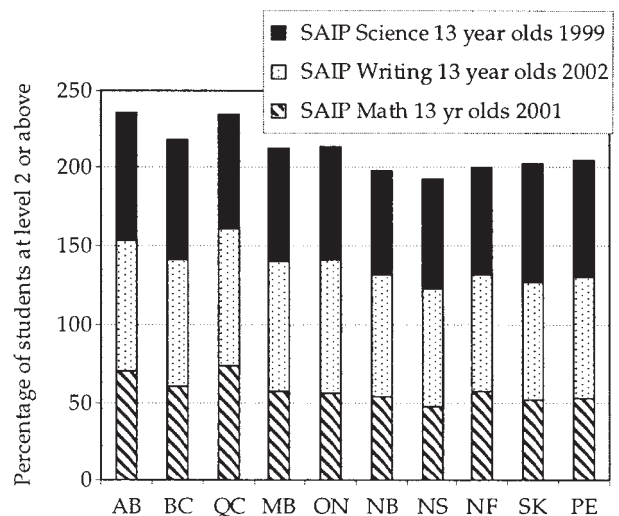
Clearly, its high achievement is not the result of lower class sizes or spending. Perhaps its achievement is linked in some way to the flexibility school administrators and parents have to solve the educational problems of their children.

**Figure 6: PISA Scores by Province**



Source: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. Available online at [www.cmec.ca/index.en.html](http://www.cmec.ca/index.en.html).

**Figure 7: SAIP Scores by Province**



Source: Council of Ministers of Education, Canada. Available online at [www.cmec.ca/index.en.html](http://www.cmec.ca/index.en.html).



## Conclusion

Across the country Canadians have very different educational choices. This *Canadian Education Freedom Index* reveals not only that provinces create choices for families in different ways from each other, but that the range of total educational freedom by province is very large.

The province with the highest rank on this index, Alberta (64 percent), scores nearly 50 percent higher than second-placed British Columbia (46 percent), and infinitely higher than last-placed Prince Edward Island (0 percent). Apart from top-ranked Alberta, the provinces can be broadly categorized into three groups: British Columbia, Quebec and Manitoba are more or less 40 percent free, while Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia are about 20 percent free, and Newfoundland, Saskatchewan and Prince Edward Island, are less than 10 percent free.

The index also indicates the great scope for improvement in Canada. The scores are not clustered into what could be considered an honour roll of educational freedom. Even Alberta, head and shoulders above the rest of the provinces, is the only one with even a passing grade.

### *Alberta*

Alberta ranks first in the index. It is the only province to provide financial support for those who teach their children at home. It also subsidizes children who attend independent schools. With this funding, however, comes a high level of government control, and Alberta could increase its

score and secure its first-place rank in future editions of this index by reducing the level of regulations imposed on home schools and independent schools. Families in Alberta are the only Canadians who can send their children to charter schools, but the limits on funding, chartering authorities, and number of charter schools has meant that this option is currently available only to a tiny percentage of Albertans.

### *British Columbia*

British Columbia ranks second as a result of its policies toward independent and home schools. British Columbia's four tiers of independent schools (two of which are funded) gives schools the option to receive more funding while being more heavily regulated, or to receive less funding but have more freedom. This flexibility enables British Columbia to place first, along with Manitoba, on the independent school ranking, while the freedom it allows families who teach their children at home makes it rank highly in the Home School category.

### *Quebec*

Quebec's relatively generous funding policies for independent schools, and the freedom it allows those who teach their children at home give it third place in the ranking. However, Quebec could have placed higher if it allowed independent schools more flexibility over their curricula, teachers, and organization. It should also consider allowing charter schools.

### *Manitoba*

Manitoba scores highly on the independent-school variable, but could improve its ranking by improving its policies for home schooling families and for those who seek to establish a charter school.

### *Ontario and New Brunswick*

With no charter schools, nor funding for independent or home schools, Ontario and New Brunswick place midway in the rankings. If Ontario continues to phase in the implementation of the new education tax credit as scheduled, it should place higher on future editions of this index, provided its government does not succumb to the temptation to tie funding to increases in regulation of independent schools.

### *Remaining provinces*

Nova Scotia, Newfoundland, Saskatchewan, and Prince Edward Island are ranked at the bottom of the *Canadian Education Freedom Index*. They offer families little choice either in the public school system or outside it. They could improve their scores dramatically by offering support for independent schools or home schooling, or by creating legislation enabling charter schools.

Canada's ten provinces offer a diverse collection of education policies and a wide variety of educational choices. Too little recognition is given to those governments that offer parents educational freedom. This index attempts to highlight the importance of parental choice to Canadian education policy by congratulating the freest provinces and by inspiring those striving for reform. The authors hope that this index will help Canada realize its commitment to educational excellence for all students, no matter where they live.



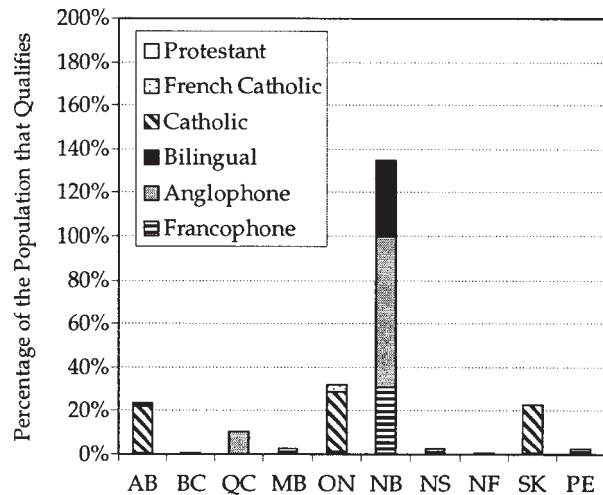


# Appendix: Education Freedom by Minority Group

Though one normally associates freedom as a right enjoyed by individuals, Canada has entrenched some education choices as group rights. Certain linguistic, religious, and racial groups, favoured by tradition or the constitution (listed in the Appendix table) enjoy a publicly funded choice of schooling that is not available to other Canadians. In every province, the Francophone or Anglophone minority has the right to public schooling in its own language. Three provinces, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario, offer separate religious education to children of Catholic parents, and two provinces have a third public system for French Catholic families. Across Canada, Native Canadians have freedoms of school governance and funding that are not allowed to other Canadians. Because these choices are available only to the identified minorities who attend a publicly administered school—if such a school exists within a reasonable commute—these choices are not part of this *Canadian Education Freedom Index*.

As stated earlier, the index measures the ease with which parents can establish the education they want for their children if what they want is

**Appendix Figure: Education Freedom by Linguistic and Religious Group**



**Appendix Table: Linguistic and Religious School Choice by Minority Group and Province**

Province	Francophone	Anglophone	Bilingual	Catholic	French Catholic	Protestant
AB	0.5%	N/A	N/A	21.8%	0.1%	1.2%
BC	0.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
QC	N/A	10.4%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
MB	2.3%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
ON	0.9%	N/A	N/A	27.6%	3.5%	N/A
NB	30.7%	69.3%	35.0%	N/A	N/A	N/A
NS	2.6%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
NF	0.3%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SK	0.6%	N/A	N/A	20.4%	N/A	0.1%
PE	2.5%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

not already provided by the public system. Parents who belong to these minority groups have no more rights to public funding for their preferred education than other Canadians if they do not send their children to a school run by a public or separate school board.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>According to Statistics Canada, home schooling takes place when “a child participates in his or her education ‘at home’ rather than attending a public, private or other type of school. Parents or guardians assume the responsibility of educating their child and may develop their own curriculum guidelines.” The right to home school is upheld in the education statutes of each of the ten provinces, either as an exemption to compulsory attendance in the public school system or as an educational alternative.

<sup>2</sup>For a summary of the research on home schooling see Basham, 2001.

<sup>3</sup>Some of these provinces offer independent schools a choice of funding levels, each with its own set of regulations. For example, British Columbia has four categories of independent schools, each with its own level of funding and regulation. Group 1 schools receive the most funding and are constrained by the most regulations. Group 3 schools have no funding and the most freedom. Group 1 schools receive 37 percent of the funding spent on students in public schools but must employ only certified teachers. Group 3 schools receive no funding but are not required to employ certified

teachers. Group 4 schools are for-profit schools; these are heavily regulated and not funded. In provinces where different categories of independent school funding and regulation exist, as they do in British Columbia, the variables in table 3 show the minimum regulation available among all the categories, whether or not funding is available at that level. British Columbia therefore receives a “Yes” for the “Funding” variable and a “No” for the “Must Employ Only Certified Teachers” variable, although no school can qualify for both.

Further, under common law in Canada, non-profit schools are considered charitable institutions and so receive substantial benefits not available to for-profit schools. These benefits include tax deductibility of donations to the school and exemptions both from property tax and from tax on investments.

<sup>4</sup>*Teacher Certification Reconsidered: Stumbling for Quality* reviewed 150 studies before reaching this conclusion. See the Abell Foundation, 2001.

<sup>5</sup>For more information on Canada’s charter schools, see Bosetti, 2001.

<sup>6</sup>Holmes suggests that access to independent schools offers “the strongest guarantee to the average parent of genuine choice, free from the control of the education establishment” (Holmes, 1998, p. 249).

<sup>7</sup>Alberta spends \$6,871 per full-time equivalent pupil and has a student/educator ratio of 18.43. The Canadian average student/educator ratio is 16.2 (see Government of British Columbia, 2002), and the Canadian average spending per full-time equivalent student is \$7,145 (Statistics Canada, 2002).



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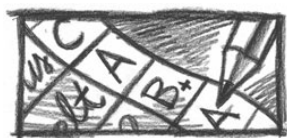


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