

NEWS RELEASE

Religious and specialty schools—not elite prep schools—dominate independent school landscape in Alberta

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For Immediate Release

TORONTO—The majority of independent schools—schools which operate outside the public system—in Alberta have a religious or alternative teaching approach and don't conform to the elite stereotype, finds a new national study of independent schools released today by the Fraser Institute, an independent, non-partisan Canadian policy think-tank.

“Many Albertans believe independent schools are all elite university-prep schools—but that's simply not the case,” said Deani Van Pelt, director of the Barbara Mitchell Centre for Improvement in Education at the Fraser Institute and co-author of *A Diverse Landscape: Independent Schools in Canada*.

The study—the first of its kind—categorizes every independent school in Canada, including those in Alberta, where many independent schools are partially funded by the government.

It finds that 28,076 (or 4.4 per cent) of all K-12 students in Alberta schools attended an independent school in 2013/14.

Almost half (49 per cent) of the province's 145 independent schools have a religious affiliation— of these, 81.7 per cent were Christian (non-Catholic), 5.6 per cent were Catholic, 5.6 per cent Islamic and 4.2 per cent Jewish.

Additionally, about a quarter of independent schools in Alberta are “specialty schools,” with a special emphasis in the curriculum (arts, athletics, language, math/science, etc.), distinct approaches to teaching and learning (Montessori or Waldorf), or an emphasis on serving specific student populations (i.e. students with special needs).

And notably, 45 per cent of the 145 independent schools in Alberta were located outside the province's major population centres—again, disproving the stereotype of independent schools catering exclusively to the urban elite.

“The widespread misperceptions of independent schools in Alberta impede honest debate about the benefits of these schools in the province,” Van Pelt said.

“It's time Albertans understand and recognize the tremendous value and choice provided by independent schools to the education system and to families across the province.”


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