

NEWS RELEASE

Religious and specialty schools—not elite prep schools—dominate B.C. independent school landscape

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For Immediate Release

TORONTO—The majority of independent schools—schools which operate outside the public system—in British Columbia 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 British Columbians 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 B.C., where many independent schools are partially funded by the government.

It finds that 75,402 (or 12.3 per cent) of all K-12 students in B.C. schools attended an independent school in 2013/14.

Fully 188 of B.C.'s 340 independent schools have a religious affiliation—half (50.0 per cent) are Christian (non-Catholic), 42.0 per cent are Catholic, 3.2 per cent are Jewish, 2.7 per cent are Islamic and 2.1 per cent have other religious perspectives.

Additionally, 68 independent schools in B.C. 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 (e.g. students with special needs).

And notably, 43 per cent of the 340 independent schools in B.C. 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 B.C. impede honest debate about the benefits of these schools in the province,” Van Pelt said.

“It's time British Columbians 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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