



# NEWS RELEASE

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

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For Immediate Release

**TORONTO**—The majority of independent schools—schools which operate outside the public system—in Ontario 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 Ontarians 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 Ontario, where independent schools are not funded by the government.

It finds that approximately 177,000 (or 5.5 per cent) of all K-12 students in Ontario schools attended an independent school in 2013/14.

Fully 457 of the province’s 954 independent schools have a religious affiliation—almost three quarters (71.1 per cent) are Christian (non-Catholic), 15.1 per cent are Islamic and 9.6 per cent are Jewish. Surprisingly, 15 of the religiously-oriented independent schools are Catholic schools despite Ontario’s fully-funded, government-run Catholic school system.

Moreover, 315 independent schools in Ontario 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, 35 per cent of the 954 independent schools in Ontario 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 Ontario impede honest debate about why thousands of families make the additional financial sacrifice to send their children to these schools,” Van Pelt said.

“It’s time Ontarians 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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