

Education Spending in Public Schools in Canada 2020 Edition

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Executive summary

This study reviews the change in education spending on public schools in Canada from 2012/13 to 2016/17.¹ It has two main parts. First, we review the changes in education spending over the past five years, accounting for the effects of enrolment and inflation. Second, this study reviews the components of education spending in Canada, both provincially and nationally.²

To accurately assess education spending in Canada, the effects of enrolment and price changes (inflation) must be considered. Student enrolment in public schools increased by 1.4 percent nationally from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Alberta and Saskatchewan saw the most significant increases in enrolment at 10.3 and 6.5 percent, respectively. Six out of ten provinces, however, experienced a decline in enrolment. Nova Scotia and New Brunswick saw the largest declines in enrolment at 3.3 and 3.2 percent, respectively.

After accounting for enrolment and adjusting for inflation, per-student spending saw an increase of 2.9 percent nationally, from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Per-student spending (inflation-adjusted) increased in seven out of ten provinces. Prince Edward Island saw the largest increase (8.3 percent), followed by Nova Scotia (7.1 percent) and Manitoba (6.6 percent). Quebec and Ontario—the provinces with the highest total nominal spending—saw increases of approximately 3 percent. Only three provinces experienced a decline in real per-student spending—Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia.

In 2016/17, annual public school education spending in Canada increased by \$2.3 billion more than was necessary to account for enrolment and inflation changes alone. If real per-student spending had remained constant from 2012/13 to 2016/17, total spending would have been 3.4

1. This is an update to *Education Spending in Public Schools in Canada: 2019 Edition*. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/education-spending-in-canada-2019_0.pdf>. Due to changes in methodology within a primary data source (Statistics Canada Table 37-10-0066-01) in 2012/13, the period of analysis has been reduced from ten to five years. See *Appendix A: Changes in methodology and period of analysis* for more information.

2. National data includes the provinces and territories.

percent lower. In all provinces except for Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan, total spending exceeded the amount necessary to account for enrolment and inflation changes.

In 2016/17, Prince Edward Island saw the largest percentage difference between actual spending and the level of spending that would be needed to offset enrolment and price changes alone, at 7.5 percent. Nova Scotia and Manitoba also saw spending increase significantly more than would be necessary to account for these factors, at 6.6 and 5.6 percent respectively.

Compensation (salaries, wages, fringe benefits, and pensions) contributed the most to the total growth in spending from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Specifically, compensation spending increased from \$45.6 billion (2012/13) to \$50.4 billion (2016/17). This is the equivalent of a 10.5 percent increase in compensation spending. Salaries and wages increased by 9.3 percent, from \$36.7 billion in 2012/13 to \$40.1 billion in 2016/17, and accounted for 71.1 percent of the overall compensation increase. However, as a share of total education spending in public schools, salaries and wages declined slightly from 59.7 percent in 2012/13 to 58.9 in 2016/17.

Pension costs saw the highest growth out of all compensation categories, increasing from \$3.4 billion (2012/13) to \$4.0 billion (2016/17)—an increase of 18.3 percent. As a share of total education spending in public schools, pension costs increased slightly from 5.5 percent in 2012/13 to 5.9 percent in 2016/17.

Fringe benefits also saw substantial growth, increasing from \$5.5 billion (2012/13) to \$6.2 billion (2016/17). Similar to pension costs, the portion of total education spending on fringe benefits increased slightly from 8.9 percent in 2012/13 to 9.1 percent 2016/17.

Capital spending saw the highest growth rate of any spending category from 2012/13 to 2016/17—an increase of 22.3 percent. In dollar terms, capital spending increased from \$4.9 billion to over \$6.0 billion during this time period. As a share of total spending, capital spending increased from 8.0 percent in 2012/13 to 8.9 percent in 2016/17.

The data clearly shows that there has been an increase in education spending in Canada. Education spending has increased by more than necessary to offset the effects of enrolment and inflation growth, equating to billions of dollars in additional spending. This is contrary to the general perception that education spending in public schools has been cut.

Introduction

This study aims to provide Canadians with an update on the state of public education in Canada by focusing on a key component—education spending. We review per-student education spending (inflation-adjusted) for both primary and secondary education (referred to as K–12) over five years, from 2012/13 to 2016/17. This study is an update to previous work, including MacLeod and Emes (2019, 2017a, 2017b), and Clemens, Emes, and Van Pelt (2016).

There are two main parts to this paper. First, we review changes in education spending through time, accounting for student enrolment and inflation. Second, we review the specific components of education spending in Canada to better understand the composition of spending increases. We conclude with an overview of our findings.

Education spending and public student enrolment

This part is divided into five main sections. First, we review the increase in total education spending on public schools by province and nationally, from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Second, we review enrolment in public schools by province and nationally, over the same period. Third, to adjust for enrolment changes, this study calculates per-student spending using data from parts one and two. Section four adjusts the data for inflation (i.e., price changes). Finally, section five reviews what the increase in education spending *would* be, if spending increased proportionally to enrolment and inflation only, to provide a clear comparison to the actual increase in spending.

Total education spending on public schools

This section examines total education spending in public schools over the last five years (2012/13 to 2016/17). It is important to note that this measure is limited to spending on public schools, as opposed to spending on public education. As a result, spending on independent schools in Quebec and the four western provinces are excluded.

Second, Statistics Canada's currently available data includes some small categories of revenue and spending that could be considered non-governmental and are difficult to remove. Specifically, "Fees & Other Private Sources" is included in this bulletin's data series. The category includes rentals and leases, investment revenues, capital fund-sourced revenues, other fees, trust account revenues, interschool transfers, and adjustments. These items represent a comparatively small amount of revenues and spending relative to the entire envelope of spending on public schools. However, it is important to recognize that the measure relied on for this bulletin may include a small amount of private revenues and spending.

In addition, the dataset used in this study includes several categories of spending on public schools that are often ignored or purposefully excluded, such as spending on capital (mainly new school construction and/

or renovations) and contributions to teacher pension plans. It is important to include these spending categories particularly considering their significant relative growth in recent years, as is explored in part two of this paper.

The specific definition used for this dataset is the following: “public elementary and secondary education expenditures” less “direct government expenditures on public education by the Department of National Defence,” “federal school expenditures,” and “special education expenditures on public education” (Statistics Canada, 2019a).

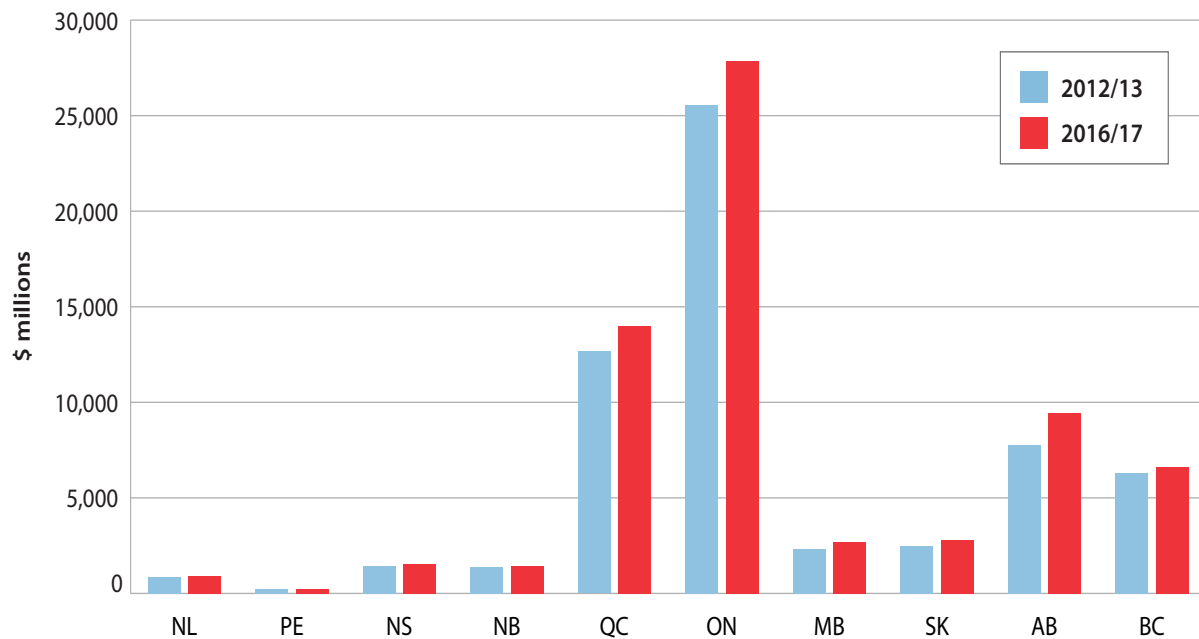
Table 1 reviews education spending in public schools from 2012/13 to 2016/17. **Figure 1** illustrates the increase in education spending over the same period by province. In total, education spending in Canada increased from \$61.5 billion in 2012/13 to \$68.1 billion in 2016/17. This represents a 10.7 percent increase in nominal spending, or \$6.6 billion.

While Quebec and Ontario have the highest spending in dollar terms, Alberta saw the largest percentage increase in nominal spending at 21.3 percent. Manitoba followed with the second highest increase in spending at 15.5 percent. Five provinces—Prince Edward Island, Quebec, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta—experienced a notable increase in education spending (more than ten percent), from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

Table 1: Spending on public schools

	2012/13	2016/17	2012/13–2016/17	
	\$ millions		Nominal change (\$ millions)	% change
Canada	61,529	68,138	6,609	10.7%
NL	876	895	19	2.2%
PE	229	253	24	10.4%
NS	1,438	1,557	119	8.3%
NB	1,383	1,445	62	4.5%
QC	12,660	13,975	1,315	10.4%
ON	25,535	27,881	2,346	9.2%
MB	2,335	2,696	361	15.5%
SK	2,477	2,787	309	12.5%
AB	7,775	9,429	1,655	21.3%
BC	6,320	6,624	304	4.8%

Source: Statistics Canada, 2019a.

Figure 1: Spending on public schools

Source: Statistics Canada, 2019a.

Enrolment in public schools

As noted by Van Pelt and Emes (2015), an analysis of spending on public schools is incomplete without consideration for enrolment. Any analysis of education spending that ignores enrolment risks materially misrepresenting the reality of education spending. An increase in aggregate education spending that is less than the increase in enrolment results in a per-student decrease in spending on education. Alternatively, a reduction in education spending that is less than a reduction in enrolment results in an increase in per-student spending. It is therefore critical to consider changes in enrolment when reviewing education spending.

Table 2 includes enrolment in public schools across provinces and nationally, between 2012/13 to 2016/17. **Figures 2a to 2d** illustrate the change in enrolment by province.

Nationally, enrolment increased by 1.4 percent from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Enrolment in several provinces has experienced more prominent changes over time. In Alberta, for example, public school enrolment increased by 10.3 percent from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Saskatchewan saw the second highest increase in enrolment during this time, at 6.5 percent. Quebec and Manitoba also experienced an increase in enrolment from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

In contrast, enrolment decreased in the other six provinces over this period. All four Atlantic Provinces saw a drop in enrolment. In Nova Scotia

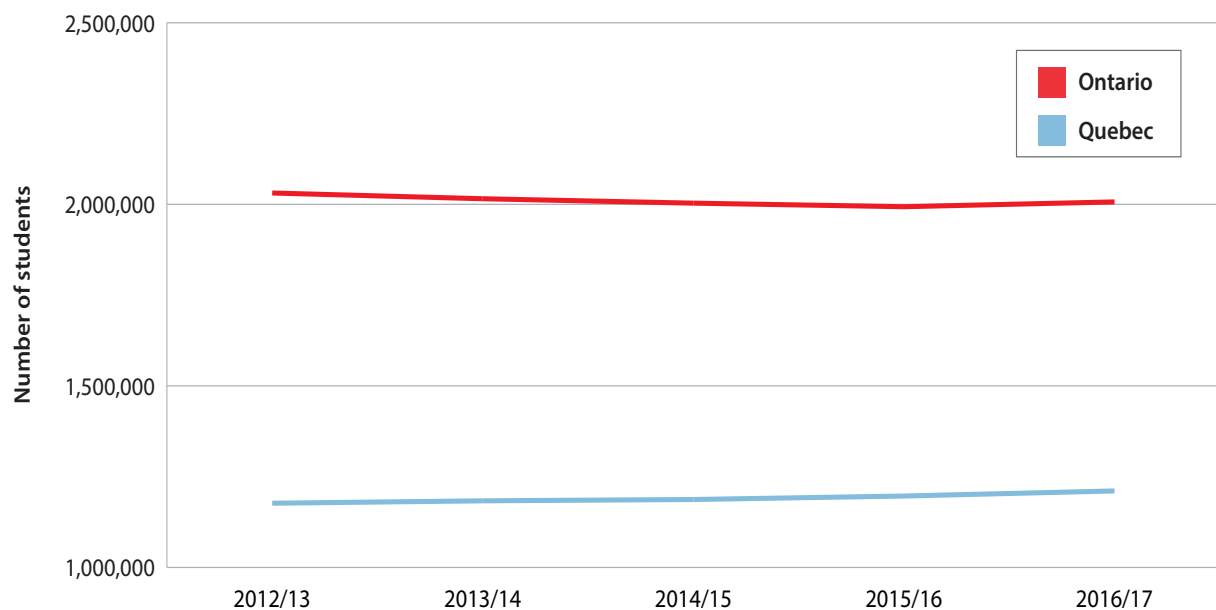
and New Brunswick, enrolment fell by 3.3 and 3.2 per cent, respectively. Enrolment declined slightly in the two other Atlantic Provinces (Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador). Outside of Atlantic Canada, British Columbia and Ontario also saw small decreases in enrolment from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

Table 2: Enrolment in public schools, 2012/13 to 2016/17 (number of students)

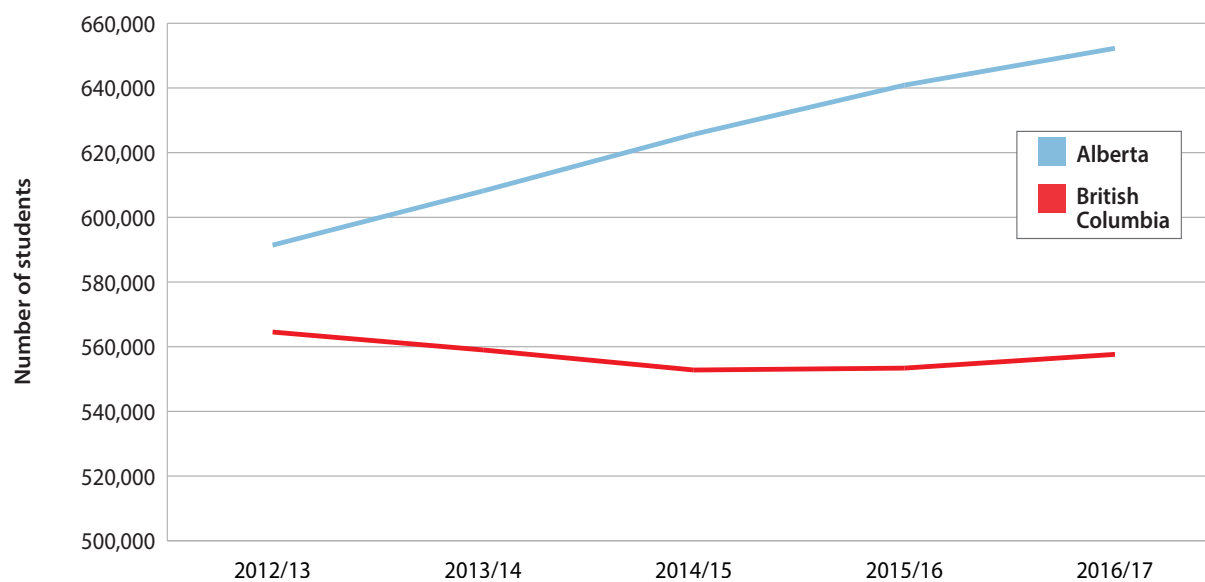
	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	% change, 2012/13 to 2016/17
Canada	5,047,062	5,048,538	5,052,054	5,068,566	5,117,328	1.4%
NL	67,479	67,290	67,167	66,654	66,183	-1.9%
PE	20,406	20,133	19,938	19,710	20,007	-2.0%
NS	122,643	121,026	119,382	118,152	118,566	-3.3%
NB	101,079	99,921	98,907	97,914	97,842	-3.2%
QC	1,176,849	1,183,497	1,187,103	1,196,664	1,210,698	2.9%
ON	2,031,195	2,015,385	2,003,238	1,993,431	2,006,700	-1.2%
MB	179,289	179,109	179,733	181,020	183,018	2.1%
SK	169,725	171,987	174,747	177,246	180,696	6.5%
AB	591,399	608,166	625,668	640,869	652,272	10.3%
BC	564,528	558,984	552,786	553,374	557,625	-1.2%

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019b, 2019e.

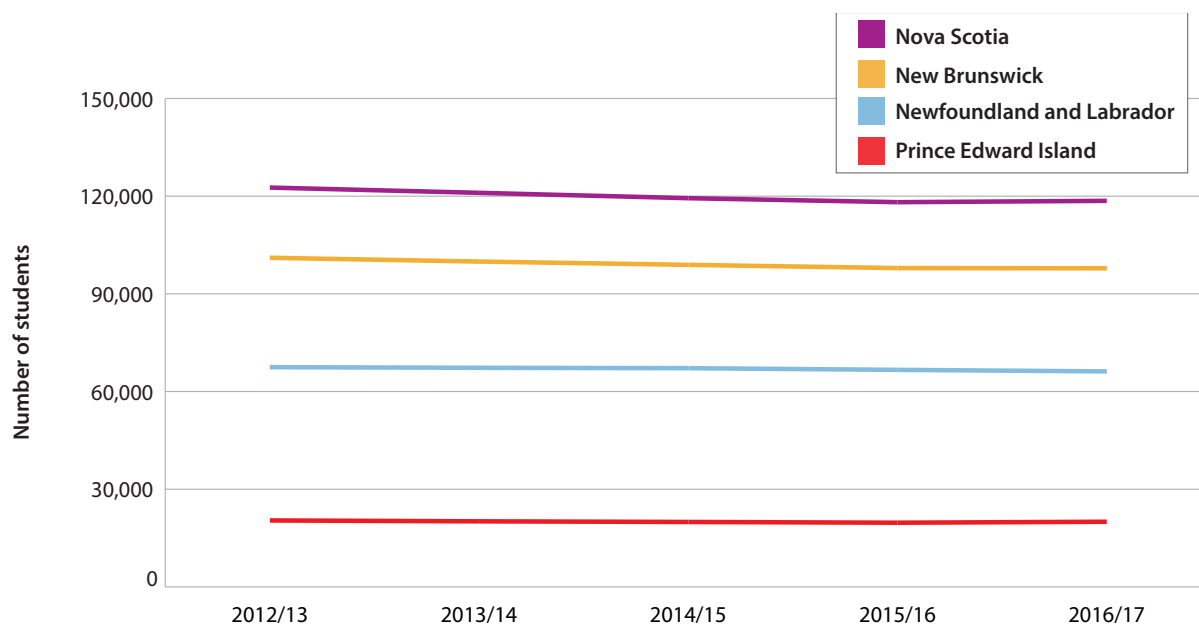
Figure 2a: Enrolment in public schools, Ontario and Quebec



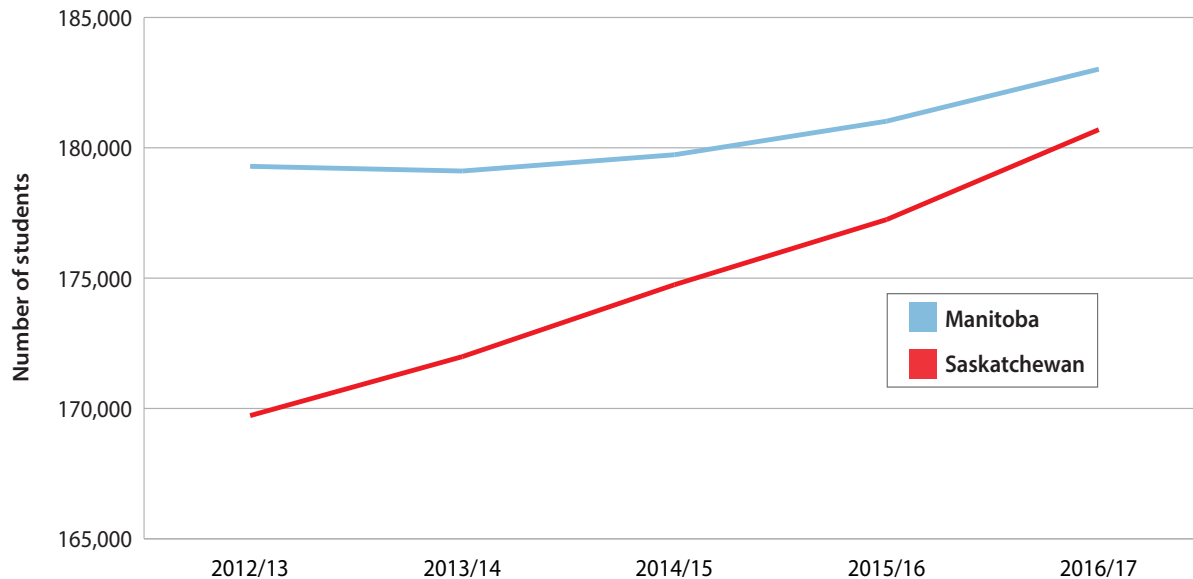
Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019b, 2019e.

Figure 2b: Enrolment in public schools, Alberta and British Columbia

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019b, 2019e.

Figure 2c: Enrolment in public schools, Atlantic Canada

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019b, 2019e

Figure 2d: Enrolment in public schools, Manitoba and Saskatchewan

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019b, 2019e.

Per-student spending in public schools

An increase in total enrolment in public schools means that the increase in per-student spending is lower than the simple aggregated spending presented previously. To account for changes in enrolment, it is useful to assess per-student spending. **Table 3** presents per-student spending across provinces and nationally, from 2012/13 to 2016/17. **Figure 3** illustrates per-student spending by province in 2012/13 and 2016/17.

In total, Canada experienced an increase in per-student spending of 9.2 percent. This is lower than the initially reported increase of 10.7 percent in aggregate spending because total enrolment increased slightly, by 1.4 percent.

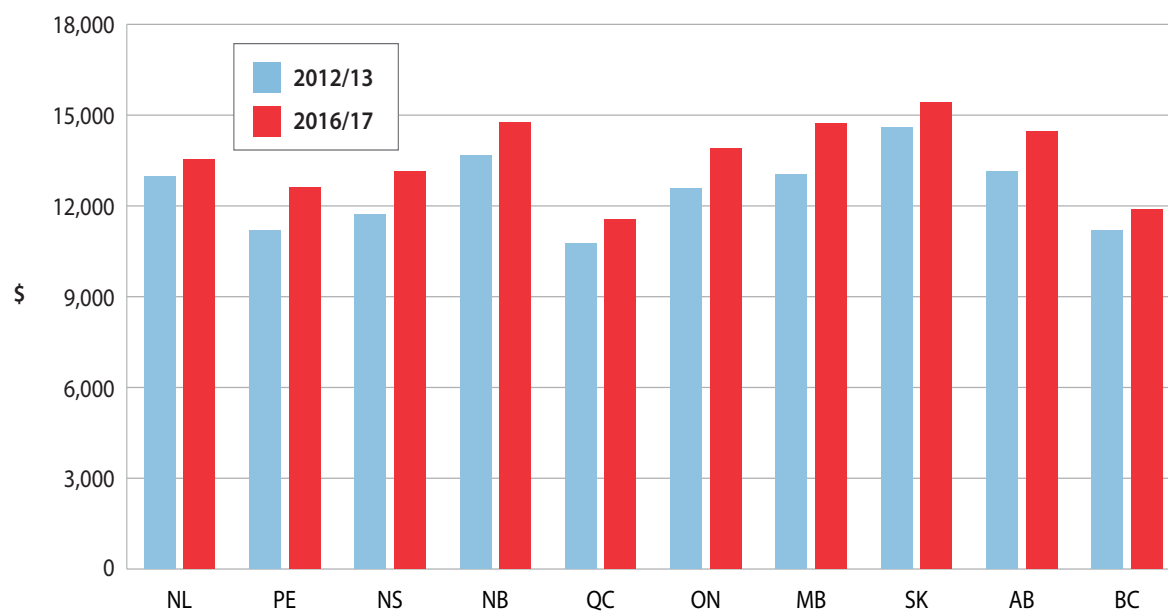
All of the provinces recorded increases in per-student spending in public schools from 2012/13 to 2016/17 (figure 3). Manitoba saw the highest increase in per-student spending over this period, from \$13,024 to \$14,733, an increase of 13.1 percent. Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia also experienced marked increases in per-student spending, at 12.7 percent (from \$11,203 to \$12,621) and 12.0 percent (from \$11,727 to \$13,135) respectively.

All of the provinces experienced increases in per-student spending in public schools over this period. Newfoundland and Labrador recorded the lowest increase in per-student spending at 4.2 percent. Five provinces—Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, and Alberta—had increases at or more than 10 percent.

Table 3: Per-student spending in public schools, 2012/13 to 2016/17 (\$)

	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	% change, 2012/13 to 2016/17
Canada	12,191	12,481	12,763	13,140	13,315	9.2%
NL	12,981	12,910	13,185	13,560	13,521	4.2%
PE	11,203	12,231	12,492	12,431	12,621	12.7%
NS	11,727	12,167	12,834	13,133	13,135	12.0%
NB	13,680	13,294	13,829	14,418	14,768	8.0%
QC	10,758	11,132	11,375	11,180	11,543	7.3%
ON	12,572	13,050	13,357	13,655	13,894	10.5%
MB	13,024	13,872	14,210	14,528	14,733	13.1%
SK	14,597	14,895	14,837	16,115	15,423	5.7%
AB	13,146	13,172	13,318	14,551	14,456	10.0%
BC	11,195	10,874	11,162	11,809	11,879	6.1%

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019a, 2019b, 2019e.

Figure 3: Per-student spending in public schools, by province (\$)

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019a, 2019b, 2019e.

Accounting for inflation

To avoid overstating spending changes (or potentially understating them), it is important to factor in inflation. Inflation is the change in general price level through time that affects the real or effective value of money. Simply put, governments could well be spending more in nominal dollars on education over time, but if these increases are less than inflation, the real or effective level of spending could be decreasing. The reason for this seemingly counterintuitive result is that inflation erodes the value of money by making goods and services more expensive. Up to this point, inflation has not been included in our calculations.

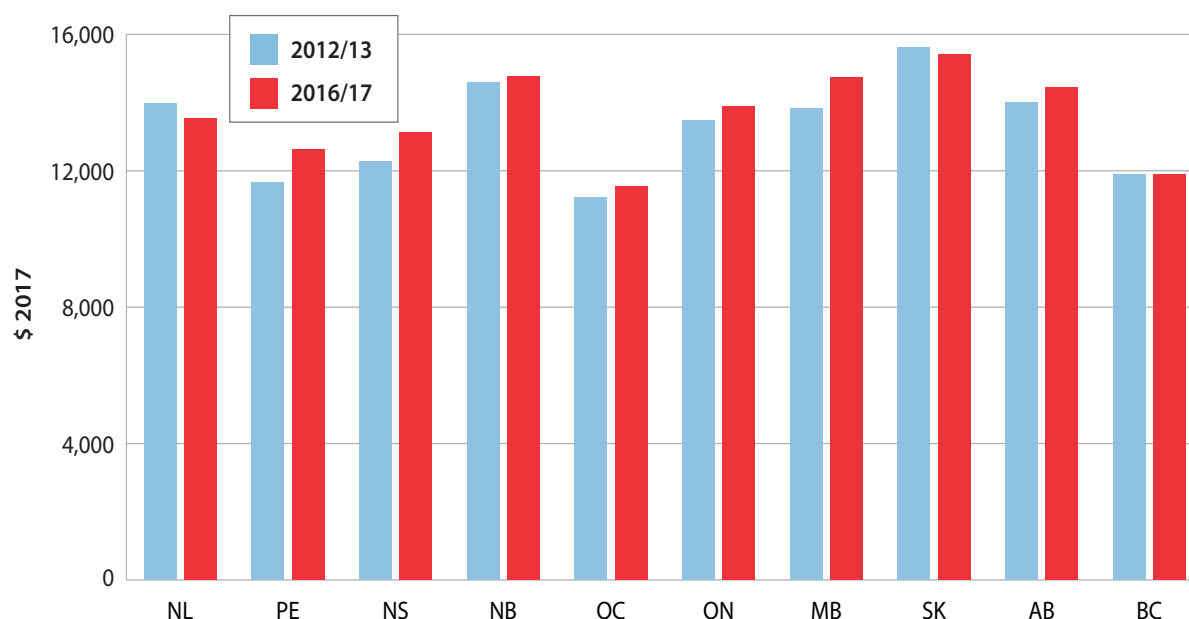
This section re-calculates per-student spending adjusting for inflation. **Table 4** and **figure 4** present the re-calculated numbers. Per-student spending adjusted for inflation increased by 2.9 percent nationally from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Put another way, after accounting for the effects of enrolment and price changes, Canada saw an increase in spending of \$370 per student.

Prince Edward Island saw the highest percentage increase at 8.3 percent, or an additional \$962 per student. Nova Scotia and Manitoba also experienced marked increases in per-student spending (inflation-adjusted) at 7.1 per cent and 6.6 percent respectively. Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan and British Columbia saw small decreases in inflation-adjusted per-student spending from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

Table 4: Per-student spending in public schools, adjusted for price changes, 2012/13 to 2016/17 (\$ 2017)

	2012/2013	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016	2016/2017	% change, 2012/13 to 2016/17
Canada	12,946	12,999	13,146	13,344	13,315	2.9%
NL	13,980	13,644	13,870	13,888	13,521	-3.3%
PE	11,659	12,522	12,869	12,659	12,621	8.3%
NS	12,264	12,507	13,142	13,283	13,135	7.1%
NB	14,592	13,976	14,469	14,756	14,768	1.2%
QC	11,217	11,447	11,576	11,296	11,543	2.9%
ON	13,481	13,671	13,829	13,887	13,894	3.1%
MB	13,818	14,448	14,625	14,766	14,733	6.6%
SK	15,607	15,555	15,245	16,383	15,423	-1.2%
AB	14,003	13,680	13,676	14,777	14,456	3.2%
BC	11,890	11,432	11,608	12,060	11,879	-0.1%

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019a, 2019b, 2019e.

Figure 4: Per-student spending in public schools, adjusted for price changes (\$ 2017)

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019e.

For all provinces (and nationally), the percentage increases in per-student spending in table 4 are less than those in table 3, which did not account for the effects of inflation. It is notable, however, that after adjusting for changes in enrolment and price levels, per-student spending still increased in seven of the ten provinces.

The spending increases in context

The change in inflation-adjusted education spending across provinces is quite mixed, ranging from a decrease of 3.3 percent in Newfoundland and Labrador to an increase of 8.3 percent in Prince Edward Island. It is important to provide context to determine how large or small the changes actually are. To do so, this section compares actual education spending to expected education spending based on inflation and enrolment changes.

Specifically, this analysis is based on a counterfactual assumption wherein education spending is calculated for 2016/17 based on the per-student level observed in 2012/13, adjusted for changes in enrolment and inflation. In other words, this section compares actual aggregate spending on public schools in 2016/17 with what the total spending would have been, if the inflation-adjusted per-student spending levels on public schools remained constant from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

Table 5 presents the actual and counterfactual-based (adjusted) spending in public schools for 2016/17, as well as the difference between these two values. **Figure 5** illustrates this comparison across provinces. The first column shows the actual level of spending on public schools. The second column, “Adjusted spending,” illustrates the counterfactual, or what total education spending on public schools in 2016/17 would have been had the inflation-adjusted per-student spending levels been maintained from the 2012/13 base year.

Nationally, between 2012/13 and 2016/17, total education spending exceeded the amount required to account for changes in enrolment and inflation by \$2.3 billion. In percentage terms, if inflation-adjusted per-student spending had remained constant over this period, actual spending in public schools in 2016/17 would have been 3.4 percent lower.

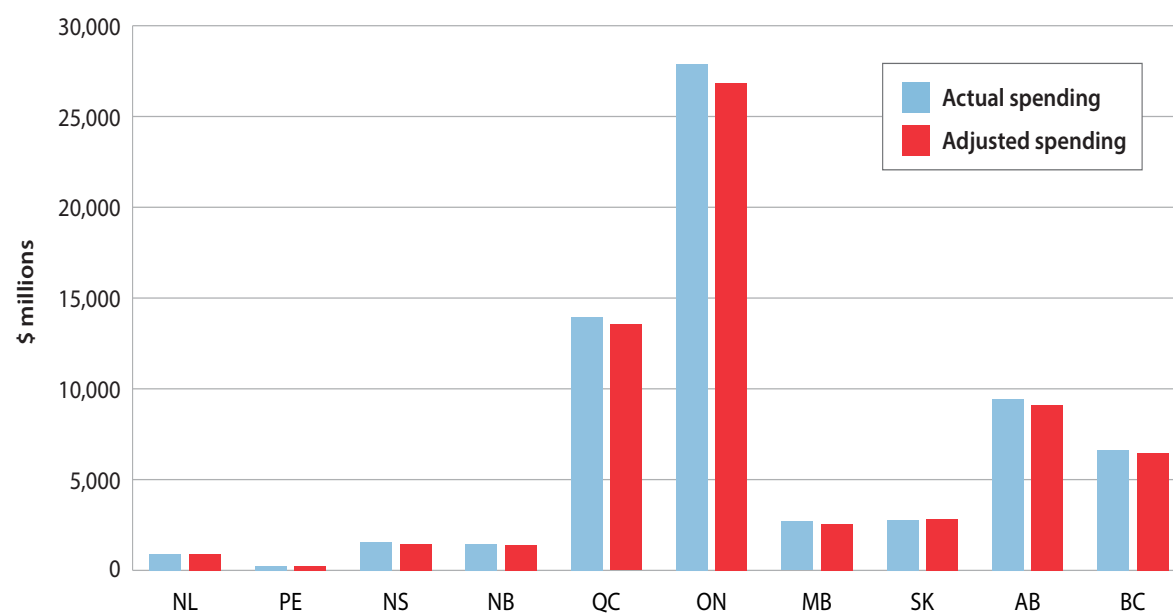
Provincially, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia had the largest percentage difference between actual spending and the level of spending that would have been required to adjust for changes in enrolment and inflation; the two provinces spent 7.5 percent (\$19 million) and 6.6 percent (\$102 million) more respectively in 2016/17 than would be required to adjust for inflation and enrolment changes.

This counterfactual analysis reinforces the fact that the increase in education spending has exceeded what is required to offset the effects of inflation and enrolment changes in almost all provinces (except for Newfoundland and Labrador, and Saskatchewan) over the last five years (2012/13 to 2016/17).

Table 5: Comparing actual and adjusted spending in public schools, 2016/17 (\$ millions)

	Actual spending	Adjusted spending	Difference	Percent difference
Canada	68,138	65,820	-2,318	-3.4%
NL	895	919	24	2.7%
PE	253	234	-19	-7.5%
NS	1,557	1,455	-102	-6.6%
NB	1,445	1,407	-38	-2.7%
QC	13,975	13,542	-434	-3.1%
ON	27,881	26,864	-1,018	-3.7%
MB	2,696	2,544	-152	-5.6%
SK	2,787	2,814	27	1.0%
AB	9,429	9,121	-308	-3.3%
BC	6,624	6,487	-137	-2.1%

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019e.

Figure 5: Comparing actual and adjusted spending in public schools, 2016/17 (\$ millions)

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019e.

Understanding the increases in education spending

This part extends the analysis of education spending in Canada to provide a more comprehensive review of the specific components of spending, provincially and nationally, from 2012/13 to 2016/17. Our analysis of education spending is based on data provided to Statistics Canada by provincial governments. While Statistics Canada's data tables are an excellent resource for understanding education spending, there are weaknesses in the underlying provincially provided data.¹ One key challenge relates to the data definitions, which are established by the provinces themselves and not Statistics Canada. Definitional differences among provinces and changes to spending categories over time can affect the quality of the data.

After consultation with Statistics Canada, the authors developed three aggregated categories of education spending which offer the most reasonable balance between the potential variation in definitions among provinces, among other issues, and our aim to analyze changes within education spending categories. The three aggregated categories of education spending are compensation, capital, and other.

“Compensation” includes the salaries, wages, and benefits of all school staff and direct contributions to the teachers’ pension funds. Employer pension contributions for non-teaching staff are included in “fringe benefits.”

“Capital” includes expenditures to buy a new asset or extend the life of an existing asset—constructing new buildings, expanding existing facilities, or implementing renovations—and debt charges on such spending.

“Other” covers all other expenditures including direct spending by the provincial government, supply and services, fees and contractual services and other miscellaneous expenditures.

1. See <<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/edu/power-pouvoir/ch2/types/5214777-eng.htm>> for more information on the types of data collected by Statistics Canada and their relative strengths and weaknesses.

Table 6 shows the dollar value of aggregate education spending in Canada by spending category, the growth in spending for each category, and the contribution of each to total growth in spending in 2012/13 and 2016/17.

Table 6: Education spending allocations, Canada

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	45,588	74.1	50,367	73.9	4,779	72.3	10.5
Salaries & wages	36,736	59.7	40,135	58.9	3,399	51.4	9.3
Fringe benefits	5,460	8.9	6,219	9.1	759	11.5	13.9
Pensions	3,393	5.5	4,013	5.9	621	9.4	18.3
Capital	4,940	8.0	6,042	8.9	1,102	16.7	22.3
Other	11,001	17.9	11,730	17.2	729	11.0	6.6
Total	61,529		68,138		6,609		10.7

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019a, 2019d.

An overwhelming proportion of the increase was spent on compensation, the costs for which grew from \$45.6 billion in 2012/13 to \$50.4 billion in 2016/17, an increase of \$4.8 billion or 10.5 percent. The increase in compensation costs represents 72.3 percent of the total \$6.6 billion increase in education spending in public schools between 2012/13 and 2016/17.

It is important to understand how each of the three sub-categories contributed to the overall increase in compensation spending. Salaries and wages accounted for the largest share of growth in compensation spending at 71.1 percent. This spending category increased from \$36.7 billion in 2012/13 to \$40.1 billion in 2016/17, a rise of 9.3 percent. As a share of total education spending in public schools, salaries and wages decreased slightly from 59.7 percent in 2012/13 to 58.9 percent in 2016/17.

“Fringe benefits” rose from \$5.5 billion in 2012/13 to \$6.2 billion in 2016/17, a 13.9 percent increase. The increase in fringe benefits explains 15.9 percent of the overall increase in compensation spending. The cost of fringe benefits as a share of total education spending in public schools increased slightly from 8.9 percent in 2012/13 to 9.1 percent in 2016/17.

“Pension” costs increased over the period, rising from \$3.4 billion in 2012/13 to \$4.0 billion in 2016/17, a 18.3 percent increase. This increase explains 13.0 percent of the overall increase in compensation costs. Pension costs as a share of total education spending on public schools also increased, from 5.5 percent in 2012/13 to 5.9 percent in 2016/17.

“Capital” spending also saw a substantial rise over the time period, growing from \$4.9 billion in 2012/13 to \$6.0 billion in 2016/17, a 22.3 percent increase. Capital spending represents 16.7 percent (\$1.1 billion) of the overall increase in education spending (\$6.6 billion) in public schools. As a share of total education spending in public schools, capital spending rose from 8.0 percent in 2012/13 to 8.9 percent in 2016/17.

“Other” spending recorded the smallest increase of any category of spending in public schools over this time period at 6.6 percent. As a share of total education spending, it declined slightly from 17.9 percent in 2012/13 to 17.2 percent in 2016/17.

Tables 7 through 12 provide more details about pension spending, fringe benefits, and capital spending in aggregate, both provincially and nationally.

Pension spending

Table 7 contains the dollar value for teacher pension contributions made by each of the ten provincial governments in Canada, as well as the total contribution by all provincial governments, from 2012/13 to 2016/17.²

Nationally, government contributions to teacher pensions is the second fastest growing component of overall education spending in public schools (the first being capital spending) with a growth rate of 18.3 percent.³ Among provinces, Nova Scotia saw the fastest growth in teacher pension contributions from 2012/13 to 2016/17, at a rate of more than 36 percent. Quebec and Saskatchewan also saw marked growth in teacher pension contributions during this time, reaching close to 30 percent. New Brunswick was the only province to experience a decline in teacher pension contributions from 2012/13 to 2016/17.⁴

2. Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, and British Columbia do not have data available for the period analyzed. In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador and British Columbia, this data appeared to be zero. In previous editions of this publication, pension spending was provided for both provinces, but due to the methodological changes undertaken by Statistics Canada, this data seems to be reallocated under fringe benefit spending. However, Statistics Canada was unable to confirm these changes prior to this publication. According to the previous edition of this publication, pension spending was \$52 million for Newfoundland and Labrador, and \$421 million for British Columbia. Meanwhile, fringe benefits were \$43 million for Newfoundland and Labrador and \$521 million for British Columbia. Under the new methodology, fringe benefits are recorded as \$93 million and \$964 million for Newfoundland and Labrador and British Columbia for 2015/16, respectively.

3. The spending in this analysis includes only the employer portion of the pension contributions, not contributions to pensions made by the employees themselves.

4. New Brunswick introduced a new teacher’s pension plan in 2014 that ended special payments which had averaged \$83 million over the previous decade. It is therefore useful to consider pension spending growth following this policy change; from 2013/14 to 2016/17, teacher pension spending in New Brunswick increased by 43.4 percent.

Table 7: Teacher pension spending (\$ millions)

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Change	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Canada	3,393	3,594	3,772	3,913	4,013	621		18.3
NL	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
PE	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NS	60	61	64	72	82	22	3.5	36.2
NB	153	55	68	78	80	-74	-11.9	-48.1
QC	602	769	792	769	776	174	28.1	29.0
ON	1,396	1,466	1,531	1,601	1,643	248	39.9	17.8
MB	152	160	167	183	189	37	6.0	24.4
SK	279	274	302	337	361	82	13.2	29.4
AB	750	808	848	873	882	131	21.2	17.5
BC	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Statistics Canada, 2019a.

Note: "n/a" means that data is not available for a specific reference period.

Table 8: Growth in teacher pension spending (%)

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Average annual growth
Canada	n/a	5.9	5.0	3.7	2.6	4.3
NL	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
PE	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NS	n/a	1.4	4.9	12.9	13.5	8.2
NB	n/a	-63.8	22.1	15.4	1.8	-6.1
QC	n/a	27.9	3.0	-2.9	0.9	7.2
ON	n/a	5.1	4.4	4.6	2.7	4.2
MB	n/a	5.1	4.3	9.4	3.7	5.6
SK	n/a	-1.8	10.3	11.3	7.3	6.8
AB	n/a	7.7	5.0	2.9	0.9	4.1
BC	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: Statistics Canada, 2019a.

Table 8 shows the annual growth in government contributions to teacher pensions for Canada and the provinces. Canada-wide pension spending grew by 4.3 percent annually, on average, between 2012/13 and 2016/17. In line with total growth over the period, Nova Scotia experienced the highest annual growth in teacher pension contributions, averaging 8.2 percent. Quebec saw the second highest average annual growth at 7.2 percent, followed by Saskatchewan at 6.8 percent. Excluding New Brunswick, all provinces experienced positive average annual growth in teacher pension spending from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

Looking at pension spending on a year by year basis, Canada saw a relatively modest growth of teacher pension contributions in 2016/17, at 2.6 percent. All provinces saw an increase in pension spending in 2016/17, with two provinces (Nova Scotia and Saskatchewan) experiencing substantial increases, at 13.5 and 7.3 percent respectively.

Fringe benefit spending

The growth in fringe benefits exceeded aggregate growth for total spending, at 13.9 percent. As shown in **table 9**, this represents an increase from \$5.5 billion (2012/13) to \$6.2 billion (2016/17), or \$759 million in additional spending.

In nominal dollars, Ontario saw the largest increase in spending (\$387 million), followed by Alberta (\$172 million), from 2012/13 to 2016/17. These two provinces accounted for 73.6 percent of the total increase in fringe benefit spending in public schools in Canada. All ten provinces saw an increase in nominal spending on fringe benefits from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

In terms of percentage increase, from 2012/13 to 2016/17, New Brunswick experienced the highest growth in fringe benefits (23.9 percent), followed by Alberta (18.2 percent) and Ontario (17.4 percent). Nova Scotia had the lowest growth rate at 3.8 percent.

As shown in **table 10**, fringe benefit spending nationally has grown consistently year over year, with the highest growth in 2013/14 at 6.0 percent. On a year-by-year basis, 2016/17 saw an increase of only 0.9 percent in overall fringe benefit spending in Canada. This was mostly driven by reduced fringe benefit spending in Nova Scotia (a 17.1 percent decline between 2015/16 and 2016/17). Prince Edward Island and British Columbia also saw a year over year decline in fringe benefit spending in 2016/17. The remaining seven provinces had an increase in year over year spending in 2016/17, with New Brunswick experiencing the highest growth in fringe benefits at 16.1 percent.

Table 9: Fringe benefit spending (\$ millions)

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Change	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Canada	5,460	5,786	5,955	6,163	6,219	759		13.9
NL	85	85	83	93	95	10	1.3	11.5
PE	30	34	33	34	34	4	0.5	12.1
NS	89	91	100	112	93	3	0.4	3.8
NB	59	62	63	63	74	14	1.9	23.9
QC	859	889	920	917	959	100	13.2	11.7
ON	2,224	2,417	2,462	2,551	2,610	387	50.9	17.4
MB	126	130	135	144	144	18	2.4	14.1
SK	122	128	132	130	131	9	1.2	7.2
AB	943	1,016	1,056	1,106	1,114	172	22.6	18.2
BC	874	882	923	964	914	40	5.3	4.6

Source: Statistics Canada, 2019d.

Table 10: Growth in fringe benefit spending (%)

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Average annual growth
Canada	n/a	6.0	2.9	3.5	0.9	3.3
NL	n/a	0.7	-2.6	12.3	1.2	2.9
PE	n/a	11.7	-2.0	2.6	-0.1	3.0
NS	n/a	2.2	9.4	11.9	-17.1	1.6
NB	n/a	4.0	1.8	0.7	16.1	5.7
QC	n/a	3.6	3.4	-0.3	4.6	2.8
ON	n/a	8.7	1.9	3.6	2.3	4.1
MB	n/a	3.2	3.7	6.6	0.1	3.4
SK	n/a	4.9	3.0	-1.4	0.7	1.8
AB	n/a	7.8	3.9	4.7	0.8	4.3
BC	n/a	0.8	4.7	4.5	-5.2	1.2

Source: Statistics Canada, 2019d.

Capital spending

Capital spending has been increasing at a faster rate than any other category of education spending in public schools. Specifically, this category of spending increased from \$4.9 billion (2012/13) to \$6.0 billion (2016/17), an increase of 22.3 percent ([table 11](#)).

Alberta saw the largest increase in nominal dollars over the time period at \$774 million. This province alone accounted for 70.3 percent of the total increase in capital spending in public schools in Canada. Ontario saw the second largest increase in nominal dollars at \$231 million and accounts for the second largest share of total change in capital spending at 21.0 percent. The smallest nominal dollar increase over the period was in Newfoundland and Labrador, with an increase of \$9 million. British Columbia was the only province to experience negative growth in capital spending from 2012/13 to 2016/17, falling from \$545 million in 2012/13 to \$441 million in 2016/17.

In terms of percentage change, on average, capital spending for Canada has grown by 5.3 percent annually since 2012/13 ([table 12](#)). Alberta has the highest average annual growth rate over the period at 53.9 percent, followed by Saskatchewan at 15.9 percent. British Columbia had the lowest average annual growth rate at -4.7 percent.

There is a high degree of variability in the annual growth rates both between and within the provinces over time. Each province has experienced a decline in capital spending in at least one year and yet many have experienced significant growth in other years. Alberta has seen the greatest variability across years, with an annual growth of 171.6 percent in 2015/16, followed by a decrease of 3.2 percent in 2016/17.

Table 11: Capital spending (\$ millions)

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Change	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Canada	4,940	5,164	5,165	5,891	6,042	1,102		22.3
NL	67	83	80	77	76	9	0.8	13.3
QC	1,324	1,356	1,492	1,409	1,408	84	7.6	6.4
ON	2,278	2,394	2,243	2,206	2,509	231	21.0	10.1
MB	178	252	246	231	214	36	3.3	20.5
SK	255	276	221	450	322	67	6.1	26.2
AB	265	279	395	1,073	1,039	774	70.3	292.6
BC	545	498	441	397	441	-104	-9.4	-19.1

Source: Statistics Canada, 2019d.

Note: Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick are not reported because the underlying values are too small and/or they drop to zero over the period of analysis.

Table 12: Growth in capital spending (%)

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	Annual average growth
Canada	n/a	4.5	0.0	14.0	2.6	5.3
NL	n/a	24.1	-3.9	-4.1	-0.9	3.8
QC	n/a	2.4	10.0	-5.6	0.0	1.7
ON	n/a	5.1	-6.3	-1.7	13.8	2.7
MB	n/a	41.7	-2.2	-6.1	-7.4	6.5
SK	n/a	8.2	-20.1	103.6	-28.3	15.9
AB	n/a	5.3	41.8	171.6	-3.2	53.9
BC	n/a	-8.6	-11.5	-10.0	11.1	-4.7

Source: Statistics Canada, 2019d.

Note: Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick are not reported because the underlying values are too small and/or they drop to zero over the period of analysis.

Conclusion

It is clear from the data presented that from 2012/13 to 2016/17 Canada has increased education spending in public schools beyond what was required to account for enrolment and price changes. This means there was a real increase in per-student spending in public schools in Canada, which is contrary to the general perception that education spending in public schools has been cut.

Our results indicate that compensation remains the largest and costliest aspect of education spending, and has contributed the largest portion to the growth in total education spending in Canada. Fringe benefits and pension costs, which are sub-categories of compensation, increased as a share of both compensation and total education spending. Put another way, governments are spending more dollars on compensation with an increasing share towards fringe benefits and pensions. Capital spending has also seen substantial increase over the years, and has grown as a share of overall spending.

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Appendix A: Changes in methodology and period of analysis

This study is an update to *Education Spending in Public Schools in Canada—2019 Edition*. The 2019 paper reviewed changes in education spending over the period of a decade, from 2006/07 to 2015/16. Due to changes in methodology within a primary data source in 2012/13, this edition reviews a shortened period of analysis of five years, from 2012/13 to 2016/17.

The most significant change in methodology relates to the statistics Canada table 37-10-0066-01 “Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Education Expenditures”. Within “Public Elementary and Secondary Education Expenditures”, the subcategory “Public School Board Expenditures” shifted from calendar year to fiscal year in 2012/13. In previous editions, this data was adjusted by Statistics Canada to present it in a format similar to fiscal year. It is important to note that other data in this category were already reported by fiscal year.

There have also been methodological changes to data aggregating to “Direct Government Expenditures on Public Education”. First, there was a change in the data source for some capital expenditures and pension contributions from the Public Accounts to the Elementary and Secondary Education Survey (ESES). Second, while there was previously an adjustment made to reconcile the provincial/territorial revenue figures reported by the school boards with the public school grants and contributions reported by the provincial/territorial governments, this adjustment contributed to significant variability in the data and was eliminated in 2012/13. Finally, the data no longer includes estimated public school expenditures transferred to private schools.

The subcategory “Special Education Expenditures on Public Education” also underwent changes in 2012/13. Previously, data within this category that was unreported by the provinces/territories was estimated by Statistics Canada. This data was determined to be unreliable and as such was removed.

Notwithstanding the shortened period of analysis, due to the changes outlined above, this publication follows the same methodology as the previous study, *Education Spending in Public Schools in Canada—2019 Edition*, and is intended to serve as an update.

Appendix B: Education spending allocations in public schools, by province

Table B1: Education spending allocations, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	657	76.5	674	78.6	17	-1,318.4	2.6
Salaries & wages	572	66.6	579	67.5	7	-556.6	1.3
Fringe benefits	85	9.9	95	11.0	10	-761.9	11.5
Pensions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Capital	67	7.8	76	8.9	9	-693.2	13.3
Other	135	15.7	108	12.6	-27	2,111.7	-20.1
Total	859		858		-1		-0.1

Table B2: Education spending allocations, Prince Edward Island, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	172	76.2	201	87.6	29	669.2	17.1
Salaries & wages	142	62.9	168	72.9	26	586.4	18.2
Fringe benefits	30	13.3	34	14.7	4	82.8	12.1
Pensions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Capital	16	7.0	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Other	38	16.8	29	12.4	-9	-211.2	-24.6
Total	226		230		4		2.0

Table B3: Education spending allocations, Nova Scotia, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	1,021	72.6	1,144	75.1	123	104.8	12.1
Salaries & wages	871	61.9	969	63.6	98	83.3	11.3
Fringe benefits	89	6.4	93	6.1	3	2.9	3.8
Pensions	60	4.3	82	5.4	22	18.6	36.2
Capital	3	0.2	10	0.7	7	6.3	245.9
Other	383	27.2	370	24.3	-13	-11.1	-3.4
Total	1,407		1,524		118		8.4

Table B4: Education spending allocations, New Brunswick, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	968	70.0	1,012	70.0	44	70.4	4.5
Salaries & wages	755	54.6	859	59.4	103	166.2	13.7
Fringe benefits	59	4.3	74	5.1	14	22.8	23.9
Pensions	153	11.1	80	5.5	-74	-118.7	-48.1
Capital	5	0.4	7	0.5	2	3.4	42.4
Other	410	29.6	426	29.5	16	26.2	4.0
Total	1,383		1,445		62		4.5

Table B5: Education spending allocations, Quebec, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	8,846	69.9	9,991	71.5	1,144	87.0	12.9
Salaries & wages	7,386	58.3	8,256	59.1	870	66.1	11.8
Fringe benefits	859	6.8	959	6.9	100	7.6	11.7
Pensions	602	4.8	776	5.6	174	13.2	29.0
Capital	1,324	10.5	1,408	10.1	84	6.4	6.4
Other	2,490	19.7	2,577	18.4	87	6.6	3.5
Total	12,660		13,975		1,315		10.4

Table B6: Education spending allocations, Ontario, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	19,570	76.6	21,351	76.6	1,781	75.9	9.1
Salaries & wages	15,950	62.5	17,097	61.3	1,147	48.9	7.2
Fringe benefits	2,224	8.7	2,610	9.4	387	16.5	17.4
Pensions	1,396	5.5	1,643	5.9	248	10.6	17.8
Capital	2,278	8.9	2,509	9.0	231	9.8	10.1
Other	3,687	14.4	4,021	14.4	334	14.2	9.1
Total	25,535		27,881		2,346		9.2

Table B7: Education spending allocations, Manitoba, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	1,809	77.5	2,093	77.6	284	78.5	15.7
Salaries & wages	1,531	65.6	1,759	65.2	229	63.2	14.9
Fringe benefits	126	5.4	144	5.3	18	4.9	14.1
Pensions	152	6.5	189	7.0	37	10.3	24.4
Capital	178	7.6	214	7.9	36	10.1	20.5
Other	348	14.9	389	14.4	41	11.5	11.9
Total	2,335		2,696		361		15.5

Table B8: Education spending allocations, Saskatchewan, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	1,749	70.6	1,984	71.2	235	75.8	13.4
Salaries & wages	1,348	54.4	1,492	53.5	144	46.5	10.7
Fringe benefits	122	4.9	131	4.7	9	2.8	7.2
Pensions	279	11.3	361	13.0	82	26.5	29.4
Capital	255	10.3	322	11.6	67	21.6	26.2
Other	473	19.1	481	17.2	8	2.5	1.7
Total	2,477		2,787		309		12.5

Table B9: Education spending allocations, Alberta, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	5,955	76.6	6,778	71.9	823	49.7	13.8
Salaries & wages	4,262	54.8	4,782	50.7	520	31.4	12.2
Fringe benefits	943	12.1	1,114	11.8	172	10.4	18.2
Pensions	750	9.6	882	9.3	131	7.9	17.5
Capital	265	3.4	1,039	11.0	774	46.8	292.6
Other	1,555	20.0	1,612	17.1	57	3.5	3.7
Total	7,775		9,429		1,655		21.3

Table B10: Education spending allocations, British Columbia, 2012/13 to 2016/17

	2012/13		2016/17		2012/13 to 2016/17		
	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	\$ millions	Share of total (%)	Change, \$ millions	Share of change (%)	Growth (%)
Compensation	4,504	71.3	4,774	72.1	270	88.9	6.0
Salaries & wages	3,630	57.4	3,860	58.3	230	75.8	6.3
Fringe benefits	874	13.8	914	13.8	40	13.2	4.6
Pensions	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Capital	545	8.6	441	6.7	-104	-34.3	-19.1
Other	1,271	20.1	1,409	21.3	138	45.3	10.8
Total	6,320		6,624		304		4.8

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2019a, 2019d.

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Notre mission consiste à améliorer la qualité de vie des Canadiens et des générations à venir en étudiant, en mesurant et en diffusant les effets des politiques gouvernementales, de l'entrepreneuriat et des choix sur leur bien-être.

Peer review—validating the accuracy of our research

The Fraser Institute maintains a rigorous peer review process for its research. New research, major research projects, and substantively modified research conducted by the Fraser Institute are reviewed by experts with a recognized expertise in the topic area being addressed. Whenever possible, external review is a blind process. Updates to previously reviewed research or new editions of previously reviewed research are not reviewed unless the update includes substantive or material changes in the methodology.

The review process is overseen by the directors of the Institute's research departments who are responsible for ensuring all research published by the Institute passes through the appropriate peer review. If a dispute about the recommendations of the reviewers should arise during the Institute's peer review process, the Institute has an Editorial Advisory Board, a panel of scholars from Canada, the United States, and Europe to whom it can turn for help in resolving the dispute.

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