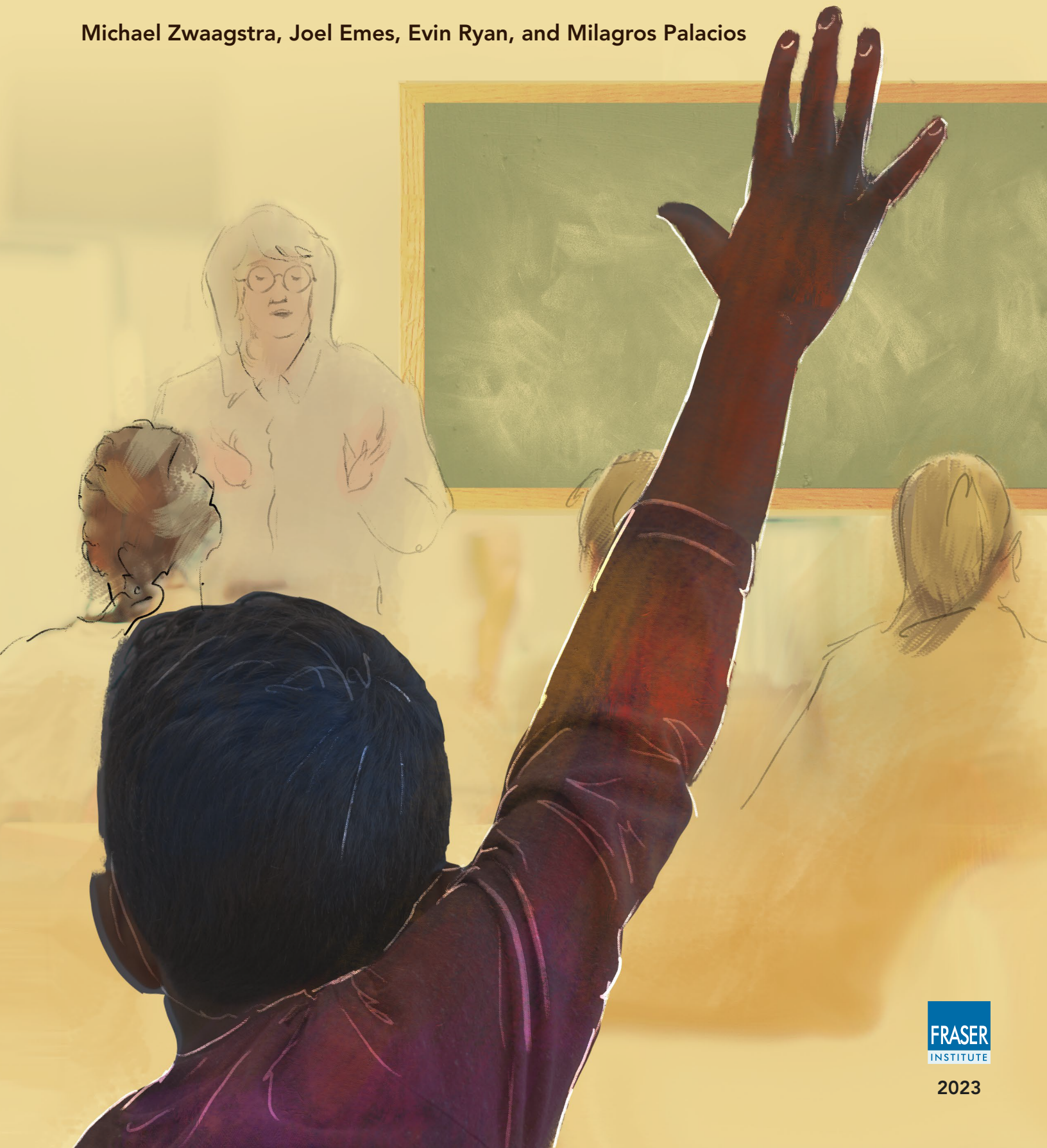


Where Our Students Are Educated: Measuring Student Enrolment in Canada, 2022

Michael Zwaagstra, Joel Emes, Evin Ryan, and Milagros Palacios



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*Measuring Student Enrolment
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Executive Summary

This study measures the degree to which Canadians in each province choose between the three principal ways of educating their children: public schools, independent schools, and homeschooling. The study covers the period from 2000–01 to 2019–20.

It is important to understand the enrolment numbers within the context of a declining school-aged population, which obviously has an impact on school enrolment. The number of Canadians aged 5 to 17 declined 0.2 percent between 2000 and 2020. Every province except Alberta (growth of 24.1 percent) recorded a decline in their school-aged population over this period.

This study is an update to and based on several previous editions, specifically MacLeod and Hasan (2017); Van Pelt, Clemens, Brown, and Palacios (2015); and the original, Clemens, Palacios, Loyer, and Fathers (2014).

Public Schooling

As detailed in the **Executive Summary Table**, education in public schools is the dominant form of education in all ten provinces. Education in public schools can take a variety of forms depending on the province, including Anglophone public, Francophone public, Anglophone separate (largely Roman Catholic education), Francophone separate (again largely Roman Catholic), and charter schools. In 2019–20, Newfoundland & Labrador had the highest level of enrolment in public schools at 98.2 percent of total enrolment; British Columbia had the lowest level at 86.4 percent.

Every province except Alberta (increase of 24.7 percent) recorded a decline in the absolute number of students enrolled in public schools.

Newfoundland & Labrador recorded the largest decline in public school enrolment over the period (29.4 percent). It also, however, experienced the largest decline (28.3 percent) in the school-aged population of any province. Every province, including Alberta, also experienced a decline in the share of total students receiving their education from public schools.

Every province provides both majority language instruction (French in Quebec, English in all other provinces) as well as official minority language instruction (English in Quebec, French in all other provinces) within its public-school systems.

The highest rate of Anglophone public school enrolment in 2019–20 was in Newfoundland & Labrador (97.6 percent). Not surprisingly, Quebec maintained the lowest level of enrolment in Anglophone public schools at 7.8 percent. The lowest enrolment level outside of Quebec was Ontario at 61.7 percent.

Every province except Alberta (increase of 18 percent) experienced a decline in absolute enrolment in Anglophone public schools between 2000–01 and 2019–20. Every province except New Brunswick also experienced a decline in the share of enrolment in Anglophone public schools over this period.

Quebec maintains the highest level of enrolment in public Francophone schools, at 80.1 percent. New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province, follows Quebec in terms of enrolment in public Francophone schools at 29.1 percent. Outside of these two provinces, Prince Edward Island has the highest level of enrolment in Francophone public schools at 4.9 percent of total enrolment. Three provinces have less than 1 percent of their students in Francophone public schools, with Newfoundland & Labrador registering the overall lowest rate of enrolment, at 0.5 percent.

Interestingly given the prominence of Francophone public education in Quebec and New Brunswick, both provinces actually recorded declines in enrolment in Francophone public schools between 2000–01 and 2019–20 of 3.5 percent and 23.5 percent, respectively. The eight remaining provinces all experienced increases in the enrolment levels in Francophone public schools. Similarly, only Quebec and New Brunswick experienced a proportional decline in the share of enrolment for Francophone public schools while the other eight provinces all recorded proportional increases.

Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Alberta also offer separate schools (primarily Roman Catholic) within their respective public-school systems. Over one in five students in 2019–20 in each of these provinces was educated in a separate school: 23.7 percent in Alberta, 23.3 percent in Saskatchewan, and 29.5 percent in Ontario.

Enrolment in separate schools in Ontario, both in absolute numbers and as a share of total enrolment, is declining, although the share of enrolment in Francophone separate schools increased. Enrolment in separate schools in both Alberta and Saskatchewan is increasing in terms of both absolute numbers and share of total enrolment.

The final category of public schooling is charter schools. They are autonomous schools that enjoy a fair degree of flexibility with respect to pedagogy, curriculum, and management (including exceptions from union contracts), but exist within the public school system. Alberta is the only Canadian province that allows charter schools. Although enrolling a modest number of students as a share of total enrolment (1.4 percent), absolute enrolment has increased an impressive 287.7 percent, from 2,558 in 2000–01 to 9,918 in 2019–20.

Independent Schools

All ten provinces allow independent schools. Five provinces provide government funding for independent schools—British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec. Ontario and the four Atlantic provinces do not allow money to follow children to the school of their choice.

British Columbia has the highest level of enrolment in independent schools (13.2 percent of total enrolment), with Quebec following closely at 11.7 percent of students. New Brunswick maintains the lowest level of enrolment at independent schools (1 percent). Indeed, all of the Atlantic Provinces record comparatively low levels of independent school enrolment.

Every province recorded growth in the number of students enrolled in independent schools between 2000–01 and 2019–20. In addition, all provinces saw growth in the

share of total enrolment for independent schools. Although still accounting for a modest portion of its total enrolment, independent schools in Saskatchewan saw the greatest amount of growth in the number of students educated in independent schools (132.9 percent), and Prince Edward Island saw the greatest growth in the share of total enrolment (increase of 144.7 percent) as they increased from 0.9 percent of total enrolment in 2000–01 to 2.2 percent of total enrolment in 2019–20.

Home Schooling

Finally, the paper measures home schooling, wherein parents are the primary providers of education to their children. In 2019–20, Alberta recorded the highest rate of students enrolled in home schooling at 1.9 percent. Five provinces record home schooling enrolment rates of less than 1 percent but every province except British Columbia has experienced an increase in both absolute enrolment and the share of total enrolment. Home schooling remains a relatively small but growing part of the overall education system.

Executive Summary Table: School Choice by Province, 2019-20, as Percentage of Total Enrolment

	Public System						Independent	Home School
	Public, Anglophone	Public, Francophone	Separate, Anglophone	Separate, Francophone	Charter	Total Public System		
BC	85.5%	0.9%				86.4%	13.2%	0.4%
AB	67.5%	1.2%	23.7%		1.4%	93.8%	4.3%	1.9%
SK	71.6%	0.9%	23.3%			95.8%	2.8%	1.5%
MB	87.4%	2.9%				90.2%	8.0%	1.8%
ON	61.7%	1.6%	25.9%	3.6%		92.8%	6.9%	0.3%
QC	7.8%	80.1%				87.9%	11.7%	0.4%
NB	69.0%	29.1%				98.1%	1.0%	0.9%
NS	91.0%	4.7%				95.7%	3.1%	1.2%
PE	91.8%	4.9%				96.7%	2.2%	1.1%
NL	97.6%	0.5%				98.2%	1.6%	0.2%

Notes and sources: See Appendix.

Introduction

This paper updates and extends the analysis contained in the original *Measuring Choice and Competition in Canadian Education* (Clemens, Palacios, Loyers, and Fathers, 2014) and the previous edition of this study (Macleod and Hasan, 2017). The original study provided a general review of the existing research on school choice and competition, and data on current school enrolment by type of school by province. This was the first step in understanding the degree of school choice that is available to parents across Canada, as well as the level of competition between schools. The previous edition of this report contained enrolment data from the 2000–01 school year up until 2014–15. This version updates enrolment to 2019–20, the most recent year data is available from all provinces.

The paper is divided into three sections along with supporting data and appendices, with each section profiling a different type of schooling in Canada. The first section provides data and analysis on public school enrolment, the second looks at independent school enrolment, and the third examines home schooling. As a precursor, a general background is provided to contextualize the analyses. Finally, a series of data appendices are included that summarize the data both by province and by type of schooling.

There are two primary mechanisms for families to choose which school their child attends. The first is by selecting the location of their residence, and their ability to move residences in order to choose different schools. This is a result of the catchment system in many Canadian provinces: families need to reside within certain physical boundaries to attend a particular school.

This is distinct from parents' ability to make educational choices for their children without having to move their residence. This is the version of choice—what we simply refer to as “school choice”—that is analyzed in this paper.

This paper measures several elements of school choice in Canada. In the public school system, this includes enrolments in both Anglophone and Francophone schools, religious-based separate schools, and specialized charter schools. It also includes enrolment outside of the public system in independent schools and home schooling.

There are additional dimensions of school choice and competition in Canada that are not specifically measured in this study. These include specialized programs within the public school system (such as French immersion or arts-centered education), distance or online education, and policies of open enrolment at the district or board level.

It is also worth recognizing the governance and accountability structure of K–12 education in Canada within which school choice occurs. Canada does not have a federal education system, but is instead composed of thirteen distinct provincial/territorial education systems. The federal government is only directly involved in K–12 education in

relation to Indigenous peoples, and families in the military and foreign service. [1] The absence of federal involvement provides the provinces with the authority and autonomy to implement their own unique systems. The decentralized nature of K–12 education has, not surprisingly, resulted in wide variations between the provinces regarding the funding and organization of K–12 education.

Each province has its own ministry of education with certain responsibilities distributed to local school boards. Generally speaking, the provincial ministries determine the curriculum standards, funding levels, and regulatory issues while the school boards are responsible for implementing the provincial standards, administering local regulations, and managing day-to-day school operations. While recognizing the considerable scope for school choice policies at the district level, the analysis in this paper focuses on policies administered at the provincial level.

As noted above, the three broad types of schools in the Canadian K–12 system that we focus on are public schools, independent schools, and home schooling. The following section assesses the extent of enrolment in each of these three types of schooling by province. The data presented has been compiled using documents and data found on either the respective Ministry or Department of Education websites, or through direct contact with representatives of the provincial governments. [2]

This report presents statistics for the most recent school year for which data was available across all ten provinces, 2019–20. Enrolment statistics for this year are presented alongside data from 2000–01, the earliest year for which comparable data were consistently available. [3] This comparison allows us to present general trends in K–12 student enrolment across the ten provinces.

Finally, it is important to understand the changes in school-age population (specifically, individuals aged 5 to 17, between 2000 and 2020). For the ten provinces as a whole (the three territories excluded) there was a 0.2 percent decline in the number of school-aged children. Every province except Alberta experienced a decline in their school-aged population (**figure 1**). The most severe reduction in the school-aged population was

[1] In this report, we examine student enrolment only within the ten provinces. Federally administered programs, as well as education in the Territories, are excluded. Information on federal Aboriginal education can be found at <<https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1476967841178/1531399315241>>. Information on Canadian Forces Dependent Education can be found at <<https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/corporate/policies-standards/compensation-benefits-instructions/chapter-12-education-of-children.html>> (as of November 23, 2022).

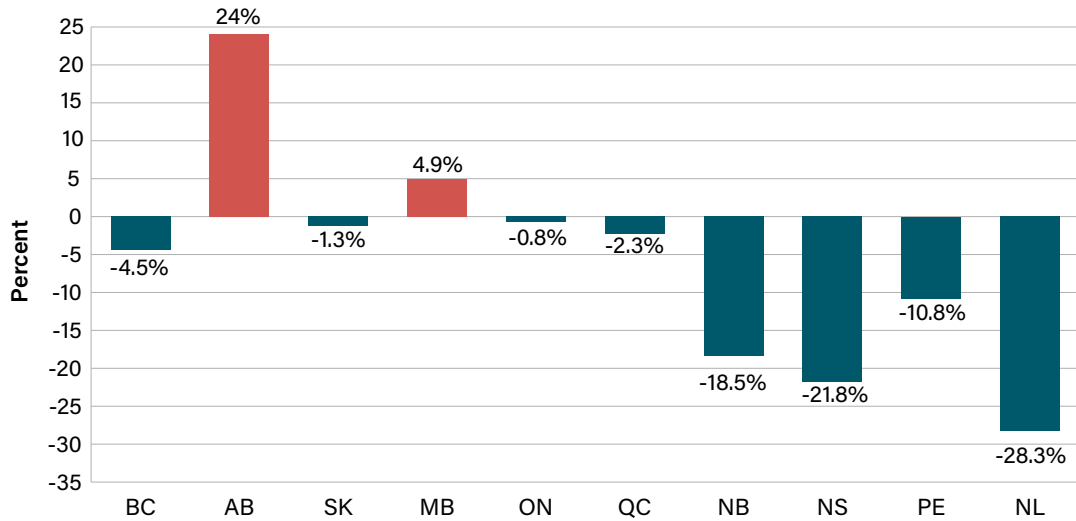
[2] The figures presented in this paper show the number of students enrolled in various types of schools relative to total enrolment. The calculation of total enrolment includes students enrolled in fully-funded public or separate schools, independent schools, and home-schooled students attending K–12 education. Therefore, the total enrolment figures might be different in some cases from the ones reported by provincial departments of education. For more details please see Appendix.

[3] Home-schooling data was not collected or reported by all provinces in 2000–01. The earliest year for which we have data for all ten provinces is 2007–08. The analysis for home schooling therefore uses 2007–08 as the base year of comparison.

recorded in Newfoundland & Labrador (28.3 percent). This is consistent with the trend reported in the previous edition of this paper.

The overall decline in the school-aged population, as well as the variation between provinces, is important to consider as the enrolment analyses are presented in the following sections.

Figure 1: Change in School-Aged Population (Ages 5–17), 2000–2020



Sources: Statistics Canada (2022a); calculations by authors.

Public Schools

This section measures enrolment in public schools in each of the provinces. Contrary to the popular perception of a monolithic public school system, and depending on the province of residence, there can be a number of schooling options within the public system. These may include:

- Anglophone public schools;
- Francophone public schools;
- Separate schools (primarily Roman Catholic, with a few minor exceptions);
- Charter schools.

For clarity and comparability, each type of public school is assessed separately before the public system is treated in aggregate.

Anglophone Public Schools

Every province, with the notable exception of Quebec, has multiple Anglophone public school boards acting as its primary source of education. While almost all public schools in Canada, outside of the separate systems that will be discussed later, are secular—that is, non-religious—it is important to recognize that there are some religious-based schools present in Alberta’s Anglophone public system. The majority of these public schools are Christian, but there are also schools geared toward families of Jewish and Muslim faiths.

Table 1 contains data for Anglophone public school enrolment. Figure 2 illustrates the Anglophone public school enrolment levels as a share of total enrolment for 2000–01 and 2019–20.

As was also true in the previous edition of this study, Newfoundland & Labrador maintains the highest rate of public Anglophone enrolment at 97.6 percent. In general, the Atlantic Provinces have the highest rates of public Anglophone enrolment with bilingual New Brunswick being an exception.

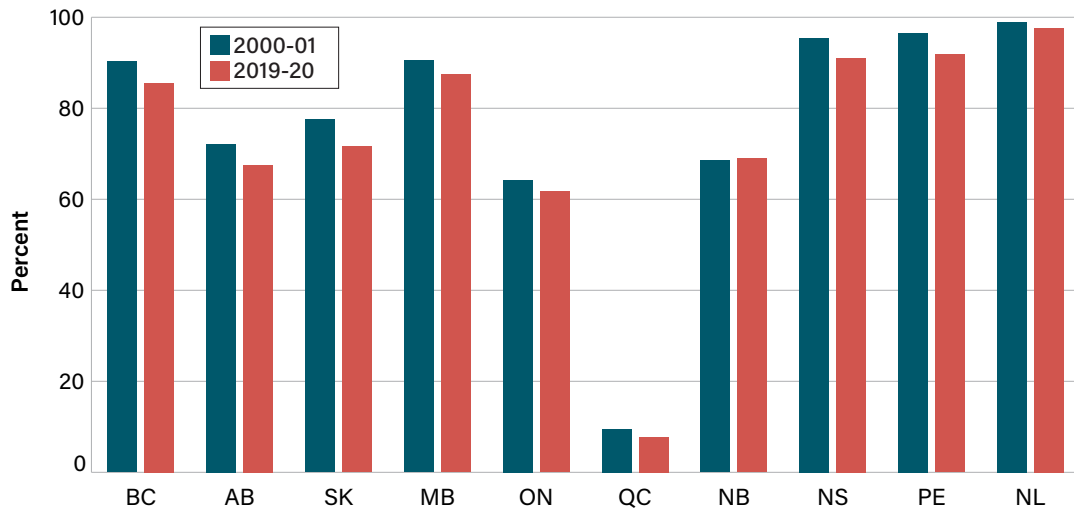
Quebec’s 7.8 percent enrolment in Anglophone schools is by far the lowest of any of the provinces, as is to be expected with French being Quebec’s official language and the language of instruction in most schools. In addition, the Government of Quebec places restrictions on students attending Anglophone schools in the province. [4] Other than Quebec, Ontario has the lowest rate of public Anglophone enrolment at 61.7 percent.

[4] Specifically, in Quebec, only students who are Anglophone Canadian citizens and whose parents or siblings were educated in Canada in English are entitled to English-language education, under the Charter provisions outlined in the following footnote. All other students must attend Francophone schools, or enrol in a private English-language school for at least one year (Allison and Van Pelt, 2012: 85).

Table 1: Anglophone Enrolment, Fully-funded Public Schools, Selected Years

	2000-01	2019-20	2001-2020	2000-01	2019-20
	Number		Percent Change	Percent of total enrolment	
BC	616,509	563,054	-8.7%	90.3%	85.5%
AB	418,343	492,525	17.7%	72.1%	67.5%
SK	145,062	135,211	-6.8%	77.5%	71.6%
MB	184,066	178,594	-3.0%	90.5%	87.4%
ON	1,446,255	1,367,585	-5.4%	64.2%	61.7%
QC	105,575	85,026	-19.5%	9.5%	7.8%
NB	86,555	69,607	-19.6%	68.5%	69.0%
NS	151,445	113,141	-25.3%	95.4%	91.0%
PE	23,089	19,690	-14.7%	96.6%	91.8%
NL	90,031	63,367	-29.6%	98.9%	97.6%

Notes and sources: See Appendix.

Figure 2: Anglophone Public School Enrolment as a Share of Total Enrolment, 2000-01 and 2019-20

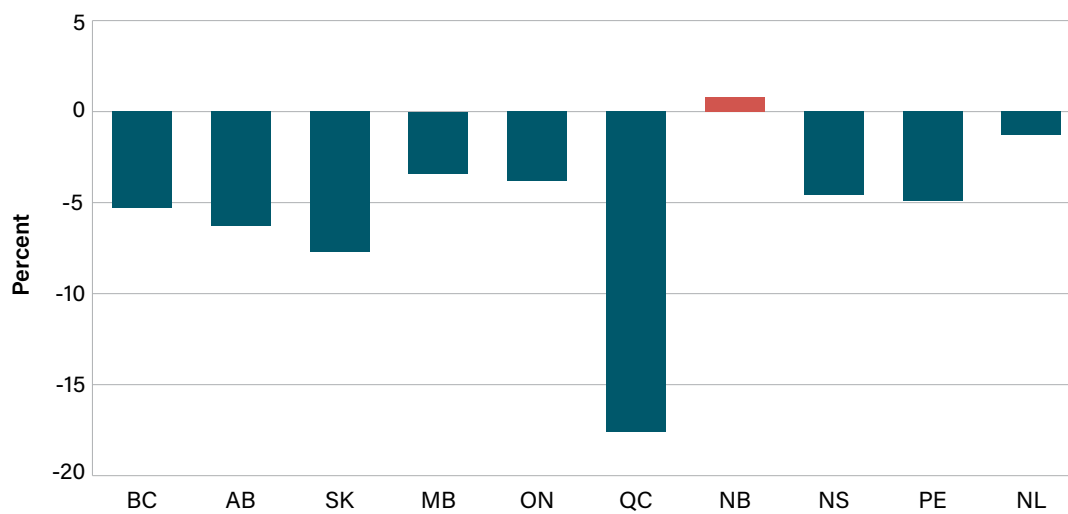
Notes and sources: See Appendix.

In terms of the absolute numbers of students enrolled in Anglophone public schools, as presented in table 1, there has been an overall decline in enrolment since 2000–01. This trend was first reported in a previous edition of this paper. Every province except Alberta experienced a decline in the absolute number of students enrolled in public Anglophone schools. Newfoundland & Labrador experienced the largest decline of 29.6 percent, while Manitoba experienced the smallest decline of 3.0 percent.

Nine of the ten provinces experienced a decline in public Anglophone enrolment as a share of total enrolment between 2000–01 and 2019–20 (**figure 3**). Quebec recorded the largest decline of 17.6 percent, from 9.5 percent of total enrolment in 2000–01 to 7.8 percent in 2019–20. Alberta has the third largest decline of 6.3 percent in the share of total enrolment, from 72.1 percent in 2000–01 to 67.5 percent in 2019–20 despite being the only province to have increased its absolute enrolment numbers. Newfoundland & Labrador had the smallest decline, 1.3 percent of total enrolment, from 98.9 percent in 2000–01 to 97.6 percent in 2019–20.

Of the ten provinces, only New Brunswick recorded a modest increase in the share of students attending an Anglophone public school, increasing from 68.5 percent to 69.0 percent. It should be noted that this measurement peaked at 70.5 percent in 2010–11 and has been declining in the years since.

Figure 3: Percent Change in Anglophone Public School Enrolment as a Share of Total Enrolment, 2000-01 to 2019-20



Notes and sources: See Appendix.

Francophone Public Schools

Figure 4 illustrates Francophone public school enrolment for each province for 2019–20 as a share of total student enrolment, [5] and **table 2** extends the data from table 1 to include both Anglophone and Francophone public school enrolment. It should be noted that New Brunswick describes its public school system as a “dual system” of both Francophone and Anglophone schools.

[5] Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms constitutionally guarantees the right to minority language education across the country. This theoretically guarantees public Francophone education for French-speaking families outside of Quebec, and public Anglophone education for families in Quebec who meet the requirements imposed by the provincial government. In practice, this mandates that every province in Canada simply maintains at least one public Francophone school board. This does not, however, guarantee access to Francophone education as school boards, like all organizations, face restraints.

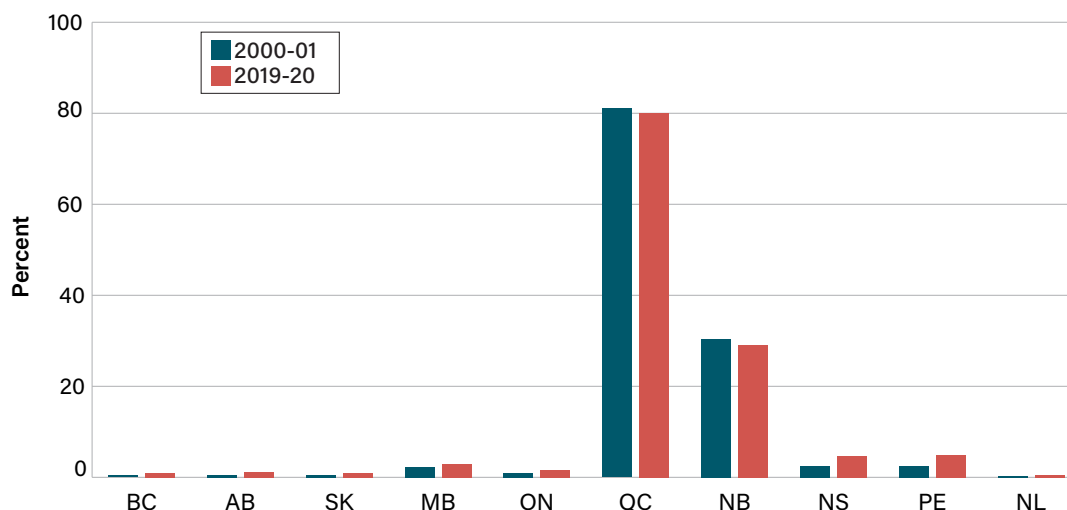
Table 2: Anglophone and Francophone Enrolment, Public Schools

		2000-01	2019-20	2001-2020	2000-01	2019-20
		Number		Percent Change	Percent of total enrolment	
BC	Anglophone	616,509	563,054	-8.7%	90.3%	85.5%
	Francophone	2,769	6,198	123.8%	0.4%	0.9%
	Anglophone and Francophone	619,278	569,252	-8.1%	90.7%	86.4%
AB	Anglophone	418,343	463,487	10.8%	72.1%	67.5%
	Francophone (*)	3,134	8,052	156.9%	0.5%	1.2%
	Anglophone and Francophone	421,477	471,539	11.9%	72.6%	68.7%
SK	Anglophone	145,062	135,211	-6.8%	77.5%	71.6%
	Francophone (*)	1,007	1,723	71.1%	0.5%	0.9%
	Anglophone and Francophone	146,069	136,934	-6.3%	78.1%	72.5%
MB	Anglophone	184,066	178,594	-3.0%	90.5%	87.4%
	Francophone	4,470	5,840	30.6%	2.2%	2.9%
	Anglophone and Francophone	188,536	184,434	-2.2%	92.7%	90.2%
ON	Anglophone	1,446,255	1,367,585	-5.4%	64.2%	61.7%
	Francophone	20,000	34,610	73.1%	0.9%	1.6%
	Anglophone and Francophone	1,466,255	1,402,195	-4.4%	65.1%	63.3%
QC	Anglophone	105,575	85,026	-19.5%	9.5%	7.8%
	Francophone	903,246	872,019	-3.5%	81.1%	80.1%
	Anglophone and Francophone	1,008,821	957,045	-5.1%	90.6%	87.9%
NB	Anglophone	86,555	69,607	-19.6%	68.5%	69.0%
	Francophone	38,387	29,358	-23.5%	30.4%	29.1%
	Anglophone and Francophone	124,942	98,965	-20.8%	98.8%	98.1%
NS	Anglophone	151,445	113,141	-25.3%	95.4%	91.0%
	Francophone	3,976	5,873	47.7%	2.5%	4.7%
	Anglophone and Francophone	155,421	119,014	-23.4%	97.9%	95.7%
PE	Anglophone	23,089	19,690	-14.7%	96.6%	91.8%
	Francophone	603	1,044	73.1%	2.5%	4.9%
	Anglophone and Francophone	23,692	20,734	-12.5%	99.1%	96.7%
NL	Anglophone	90,031	63,367	-29.6%	98.9%	97.6%
	Francophone	256	354	38.3%	0.3%	0.5%
	Anglophone and Francophone	90,287	63,721	-29.4%	99.2%	98.2%

Notes and sources: See Appendix.

* Francophone school districts in Alberta and Saskatchewan operate both secular and Catholic schools. As neither Alberta nor Saskatchewan currently only track total Francophone enrolment, all Francophone enrolment in these two provinces have thus been included in the figures above.

Figure 4: Francophone Public School Enrolment as a Share of Total Enrolment, 2000-01 and 2019-20



Notes and sources: See Appendix.

Quebec is the only province that has a public Francophone system as its main school system. A total of 80.1 percent of Quebec students attended a Francophone public school in 2019–20 (figure 4). For the nine provinces other than Quebec, French is considered the minority language. Enrolment in Francophone public schools ranges from a low of 0.5 percent in Newfoundland & Labrador to a high of 29.1 percent in New Brunswick—Canada’s only officially bilingual province.

The Francophone school boards in Alberta [6] and Saskatchewan [7] operate not only secular schools but also Catholic schools, as is consistent with English-language Catholic education available in these provinces. However, only total Francophone enrolment is tracked by the respective education ministries and this is the value that has been included in this section. In contrast, Ontario—the only other province to provide publicly funded Catholic education—has distinct Francophone public and Francophone separate school boards and provides differentiated enrolment figures.

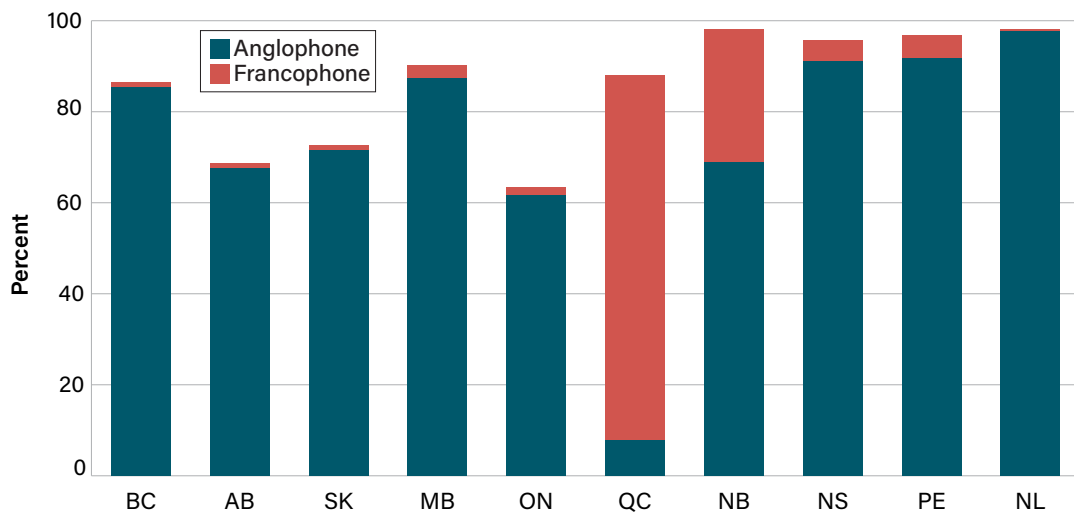
In terms of absolute numbers, as summarized in table 2, eight of the ten provinces had increases in the number of students attending Francophone public schools between 2000–01 and 2019–20. Two provinces experienced an overall decline in Francophone public enrolment: Quebec (3.5 percent) and New Brunswick (23.5 percent), which incidentally are the two provinces with the highest rate of Francophone enrolment.

[6] As the Alberta government only collects and reports total Francophone enrolment we are only including this value, but readers should be aware that this also includes Francophone Catholic schools.

[7] Saskatchewan’s provincial government only collects and reports total Francophone enrolment, but as with Alberta noted above, the reader should be aware that this represents a mix of both secular and Catholic schools

The combination of Anglophone and Francophone public schools constitutes the majority of total public schools in every province, although several provinces (Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario) also provide separate schools (primarily Roman Catholic) as a part of their overall public system, which will be discussed shortly. **Figure 5** illustrates the share of total enrolment represented by both Anglophone and Francophone public enrolment by province for 2019–20. Newfoundland & Labrador maintains the highest level of public-school enrolment at 98.2 percent, while Ontario has the lowest level at 63.3 percent (when considering separate schools as distinct from public schools).

Figure 5: Anglophone and Francophone Public School Enrolment as a Share of Total Enrolment, 2019-20



Notes and sources: See Appendix.

Separate (Roman Catholic) Public Schools

Three provinces—Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario—also operate separate school boards. [8] Most separate schools in these three provinces are Roman Catholic, although

[8] In addition to constitutionally guaranteed language-based choice, these three provinces extend constitutional guarantees for publicly funded denominational schools under section 93 of the British North America Act (1867). This section guaranteed the continuation of a pre-existing right in Ontario for members of the minority religion (here, Roman Catholic) to choose between majority common schools or Roman Catholic separate schools. The provision was extended to Alberta and Saskatchewan when they joined confederation (Allison and Van Pelt, 2012: 88, 91). However, recent analysis has found that amending separate school funding in Ontario would only require a resolution passed by the Ontario legislature and federal Parliament (Parry, 2016). In fact, Quebec and Newfoundland & Labrador historically also had denominationally defined public school boards, but these were replaced by linguistically based public systems in each province in 1997 and 1998, respectively. In Quebec, this change was announced in 1987, but only took effect in 1997.

there is also one Protestant separate board in each of Ontario and Saskatchewan. [9] All three provinces offer Roman Catholic instruction in both official languages. [10] In Alberta and Saskatchewan, the Francophone school districts operate both secular and Roman Catholic schools, and their total enrolment is captured in the Francophone section above. However, Ontario has Francophone separate school boards operating distinctly from its Francophone public school boards, and as such Francophone separate enrolment has been included in table 3.

Table 3 contains information regarding separate school enrolment in both official languages for Ontario, and Anglophone schools in Alberta and Saskatchewan. In 2019–20, separate school enrolment accounted for a meaningful portion of the total student enrolment in each of the three provinces: 23.7 percent in Alberta, 23.3 percent in Saskatchewan, and 29.5 percent in Ontario.

Table 3: Anglophone and Francophone Separate School Enrolment

		2000-01	2019-20	2001-2020	2000-01	2019-20
		Number		Percent Change	Percent of total enrolment	
AB	<i>Anglophone (*)</i>	124,780	173,051	38.7%	21.5%	23.7%
SK	<i>Anglophone (*)</i>	37,225	43,940	18.0%	19.9%	23.3%
ON	<i>Anglophone</i>	603,902	574,795	-4.8%	26.8%	25.9%
	<i>Francophone</i>	73,442	78,910	7.4%	3.3%	3.6%
	<i>Anglophone and Francophone</i>	677,344	653,705	-3.5%	30.1%	29.5%

Notes and sources: See Appendix.

* The Francophone school districts in both Alberta and Saskatchewan operate both secular and Catholic schools; however, the provinces only track total Francophone enrolment. As such only Anglophone Separate School enrolment has been included above.

[9] Alberta also historically had one Protestant separate board, the St. Albert Protestant Separate School District in Edmonton. In 2012, this school switched from a separate board to a public board (Tumilty, 2012).

[10] The enrolment requirements for separate schools differ somewhat between the three provinces. Alberta, for instance, admits non-Catholic students to all of its separate boards. Ontario and Saskatchewan both formally restrict enrolment in elementary schools to Catholic families, but have accepted non-Catholic students to secondary schools since 1985 and 1995, respectively. Thus, although access for Roman Catholic families and their children is prioritized, separate school boards can and do admit non-Catholic students if there is adequate room. On April 20, 2017, Court of Queen Bench Justice Donald Layh ruled that Saskatchewan’s funding of non-Catholic students to attend Catholic schools violates the “state’s duty of religious freedoms” under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. This ruling could have far-reaching ramifications for non-Catholics attending separate schools not only in Saskatchewan, but in Alberta and Ontario as well. The provincial government will be appealing the decision, and Premier Brad Wall has announced his intention to use the Notwithstanding Clause if necessary to protect the rights of non-Catholics to attend Catholic schools. See <<http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/education/saskatchewan-ruling-on-catholic-schools-could-have-far-reaching-consequences/article34789962/>>.

In Alberta, separate school enrolment grew both in nominal terms and as a share of total enrolment between 2000–01 and 2019–20. The number of students attending a separate school increased by 38.7 percent over the period, and the portion of total enrolment increased from 21.5 percent in 2000–01 to 23.7 percent in 2019–20.

Saskatchewan saw a significant increase in nominal enrolment of 18.0 percent. We should note that separate school enrolment in absolute terms was on the decline until 2008–09 but has been increasing in recent years. The portion of total enrolment has increased from 19.9 percent in 2000–01 to 23.3 percent in 2019–20.

In contrast, Ontario has experienced declining enrolment in separate schools in both absolute terms (3.5 percent decline) and as a share of total enrolment, from 30.1 percent in 2000–01 to 29.5 percent in 2019–20. It is interesting to note that there has been a decline in Anglophone separate school enrolment (from 26.8 percent of total enrolment in 2000–01 to 25.9 percent in 2019–20) while Francophone separate school enrolment increased marginally from 3.3 percent to 3.6 percent of total enrolment over the same period.

Charter Schools

Charter schools offer an additional avenue for school choice within the public system. Despite popular perception, charter schools are not part of the independent education system. [11] Rather, they are autonomous, not-for-profit schools within the public system that provide alternative education programs. They generally have greater discretion in selecting curriculum (though in Canada, they offer the provincial curriculum with supplementary educational offerings), offer diverse teaching approaches, and focus on more specific types of students than public schools.

While the United States has broadly experimented with charter schools, which can also be found in Europe (for example, they are very common in Sweden), Canada's experience is more limited. Currently Alberta is the only province to offer charter schools (as of 2019–20 there were 13 charter school authorities operating a larger number of charter schools). Charter schools represent a fairly small proportion of total student enrolment at 1.4 percent or 9,918 students (**table 4**). However, this is a substantial increase from 2000–01 when charter schools enrolled only 2,558 students with 0.4 percent of total enrolment.

[11] For a complete discussion of Alberta's charter schools, please see Bosetti, Brown, Hasan, and Van Pelt (2015).

Table 4: Public Anglophone, Public Francophone, Separate Anglophone and Francophone, and Charter Enrolment, Selected Years

		2000-01	2019-20	2001-2020	2000-01	2019-20
		Number		Percent Change	Percent of total enrolment	
BC	Anglophone	616,509	563,054	-8.7%	90.3%	85.5%
	Francophone	2,769	6,198	123.8%	0.4%	0.9%
	Total Public	619,278	569,252	-8.1%	90.7%	86.4%
AB	Anglophone	418,343	492,525	17.7%	72.1%	67.5%
	Francophone (*)	3,134	8,882	183.4%	0.5%	1.2%
	Separate (Anglophone) (*)	124,780	173,051	38.7%	21.5%	23.7%
	Total Public	548,815	684,376	24.7%	94.6%	93.8%
SK	Anglophone	145,062	135,211	-6.8%	77.5%	71.6%
	Francophone (*)	1,007	1,723	71.1%	0.5%	0.9%
	Separate (Anglophone)	37,225	43,940	18.0%	19.9%	23.3%
	Total Public	183,294	180,874	-1.3%	97.9%	95.8%
MB	Anglophone	184,066	178,594	-3.0%	90.5%	87.4%
	Francophone	4,470	5,840	30.6%	2.2%	2.9%
	Total Public	188,536	184,434	-2.2%	92.7%	90.2%
ON	Anglophone	1,446,255	1,367,585	-5.4%	64.2%	61.7%
	Francophone	20,000	34,610	73.1%	0.9%	1.6%
	Separate (Anglophone)	603,902	574,795	-4.8%	26.8%	25.9%
	Separate (Francophone)	73,442	78,910	7.4%	3.3%	3.6%
	Total Public	2,143,599	2,055,900	-4.1%	95.1%	92.8%
QC	Anglophone	105,575	85,026	-19.5%	9.5%	7.8%
	Francophone	903,246	872,019	-3.5%	81.1%	80.1%
	Total Public	1,008,821	957,045	-5.1%	90.6%	87.9%
NB	Anglophone	86,555	69,607	-19.6%	68.5%	69.0%
	Francophone	38,387	29,358	-23.5%	30.4%	29.1%
	Total Public	124,942	98,965	-20.8%	98.8%	98.1%
NS	Anglophone	151,445	113,141	-25.3%	95.4%	91.0%
	Francophone	3,976	5,873	47.7%	2.5%	4.7%
	Total Public	155,421	119,014	-23.4%	97.9%	95.7%
PE	Anglophone	23,089	19,690	-14.7%	96.6%	91.8%
	Francophone	603	1,044	73.1%	2.5%	4.9%
	Total Public	23,692	20,734	-12.5%	99.1%	96.7%
NL	Anglophone	90,031	63,367	-29.6%	98.9%	97.6%
	Francophone	256	354	38.3%	0.3%	0.5%
	Total Public	90,287	63,721	-29.4%	99.2%	98.2%

Notes and sources: See Appendix.

* Francophone school districts in Alberta and Saskatchewan operate both secular and Catholic schools. As both Alberta and Saskatchewan only track total Francophone enrolment, we have used those figures above.

Public School Enrolment Summary

Table 4 contains comprehensive public school enrolment data for each of the provinces. **Figure 6** illustrates the share of total student enrolment represented by all the different types of public-school enrolment by province for 2019–20. The vast majority of students in Canada attend public schools. The range of enrolment in public schools spans from a low of 86.4 percent in British Columbia to a high of 98.2 percent in Newfoundland & Labrador.

The share of Canadian students enrolled in a public school—Anglophone, Francophone, separate, or charter—has declined between 2000–01 and 2019–20 in each of the ten provinces. British Columbia has seen the largest decline over the period, from 90.7 percent in 2000–01 to 86.4 percent in 2019–20 (a 4.3 percentage points reduction) and New Brunswick and Alberta tied for the smallest decline, from 98.8 percent in 2000–01 to 98.1 percent in 2019–20 and 94.6 percent in 2000–01 to 93.8 percent in 2019–20, respectively. This amounted to a 0.7 percentage point reduction in both provinces.

Figure 7 shows that, despite the majority of students attending public schools, an increasing number of families across Canada are choosing educational options outside of the public system for their children. The number of students enrolled in public schools, measured as a share of total enrolment, has declined in all ten provinces over the period.

Figure 6: Public School Enrolment as a Share of Total Enrolment by Type of School, 2019-20

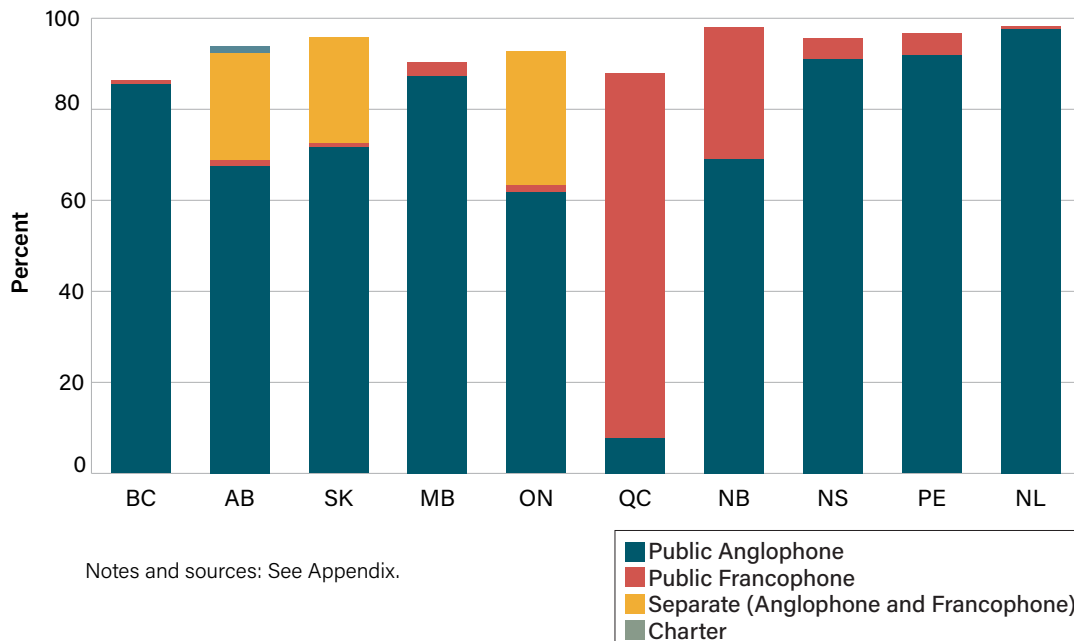
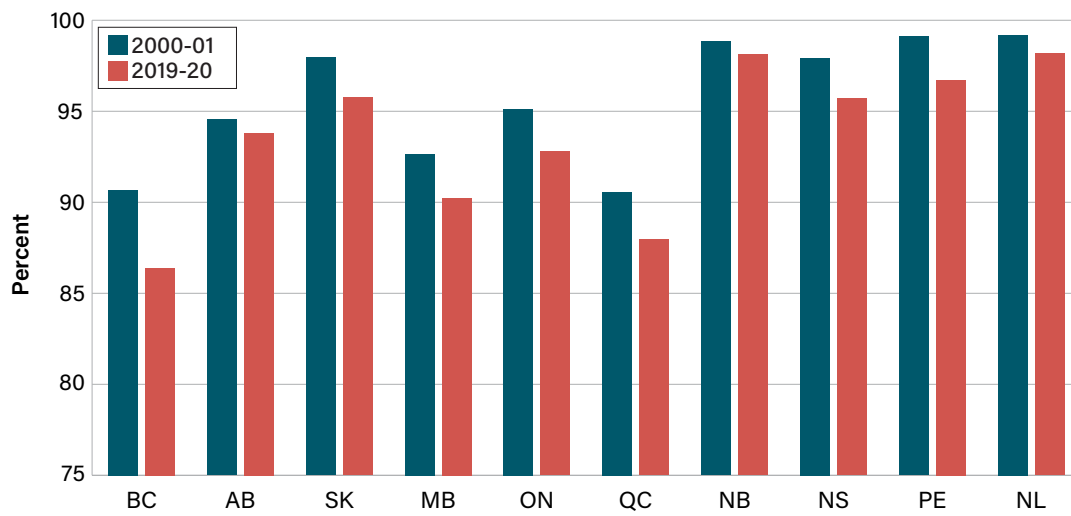


Figure 7: Aggregate Public School Enrolment as a Share of Total Enrolment, 2000-01 and 2019-20



Notes and sources: See Appendix.

Independent Schools

All provinces in Canada have independent schools. [12] Independent schools are characterized by alternative approaches to teaching, usually with a distinct academic focus or religious orientation. [13] Alternative academic schools include those using Waldorf or Montessori teaching methods. Most religiously defined schools in Canada are either Roman Catholic (in provinces without a fully funded separate school board) or Protestant Christian, although Islamic, Sikh, Jewish, Amish, and other denominational schools are also offered. [14]

Currently, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec offer partial government funding for independent schools, while Ontario and the Atlantic Provinces do not. [15] Government formulas for determining independent school funding differ by province but are generally linked to the average per-student operating funding for the public school district in which the independent school is located.

Table 5 contains enrolment data for independent schools across all Canadian provinces. **Figure 8** presents independent enrolment for 2019–20. British Columbia has the highest proportion of students enrolled in an independent school at 13.2 percent. Quebec has the second highest at 11.7 percent.

Interestingly, Ontario has a higher percentage (6.9 percent) of students enrolled in independent schools than two of the five provinces (Alberta and Saskatchewan) that provide financial support for independent schools. However, it is important to note that Ontario is also the province with the fewest regulations for establishing an independent school (Allison, 2015) and Saskatchewan’s policy change for funding all Qualified Independent Schools was only recently introduced in 2012.

New Brunswick maintains the lowest rate of independent school enrolment as a share of total enrolment, at 1.0 percent. In general, the Atlantic Provinces have quite low rates of independent school enrolment with Nova Scotia at 3.1 percent, Prince Edward Island at 2.2 percent, and Newfoundland & Labrador at 1.6 percent. Nevertheless, each of these provinces has seen small, yet steady, increases in independent school enrolment since the 2000–01 school year. Prince Edward Island’s increase in share of students

[12] Non-public schools in Canada are alternatively called private or independent, depending on the province. For the purposes of this paper, we refer to both private and independent schools as “independent.”

[13] For a complete discussion of the independent schools in Canada as well as an overview of the different funding categories across provinces, please see Allison, Hasan, and Van Pelt (2016).

[14] For example, Clemens (2012: 21) found that Catholic schools represent 33.6 percent of all independent schools in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia.

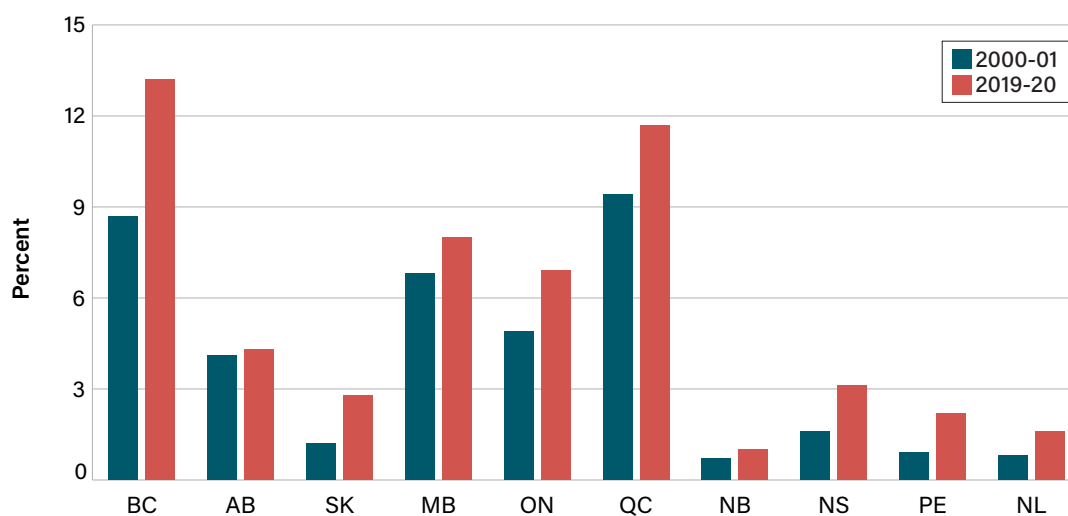
[15] Please see Van Pelt, Hasan, and Allison (2017) for a complete analysis of all regulations and requirements for the operation and funding of independent schools across Canada.

Table 5: Independent School Enrolment

	2000-01	2019-20	2001-2020	2000-01	2019-20
	Number		Percent Change	Percent of total enrolment	
BC	59,649	87,168	46.1%	8.7%	13.2%
AB	23,617	31,612	33.9%	4.1%	4.3%
SK	2,245	5,228	132.9%	1.2%	2.8%
MB	13,855	16,254	17.3%	6.8%	8.0%
ON	109,904	153,291	39.5%	4.9%	6.9%
QC	105,245	126,868	20.5%	9.4%	11.7%
NB	874	970	11.0%	0.7%	1.0%
NS	2,608	3,865	48.2%	1.6%	3.1%
PE	216	474	119.4%	0.9%	2.2%
NL	734	1,035	41.0%	0.8%	1.6%

Notes and sources: See Appendix.

Figure 8: Independent School Enrolment as a Share of Total Enrolment, 2000-01 and 2019-20



Notes and sources: See Appendix.

attending independent schools was the largest in the country from 2000–01 to 2019–20, an increase of 144.7 percent.

The share of independent school enrolment relative to total enrolment has increased between 2000–01 and 2019–20 in each of the ten provinces. Although Saskatchewan has a relatively modest share of students attending independent schools (2.8 percent of total enrolment), it has seen the second-largest increase over the period (130.7 percent) from 1.2 percent of total enrolment in 2000–01. New Brunswick independent school enrolment increased only moderately in absolute terms, but still saw a noticeable increase in the share of total enrolment from 0.7 percent in 2000–01 to 1.0 percent in 2019–20.

Home Schooling

The final type of education examined in this report is home schooling, the choice of parents to provide their children’s education themselves. Parents in every province are legally entitled to educate their children at home. Some provinces allow parents more discretion in their choice to home educate, solely requiring a notification to the local school board, while others require approval of education plans prior to beginning home school, and periodic reports on the student’s progress.

In general, home education is not funded by provincial governments. Three provinces—British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan—offer limited funding towards the direct cost of home schooling. While the other provinces do not provide any specific funding to home-schooled students, they may allow home-educated students to enroll in specific school courses, participate in school extracurricular activities such as sports teams and field trips, and offer curriculum material and resources without any fees.

Table 6 contains home school enrolment data, [16] which is illustrated in figure 9. In general, home education represents a very small share of total student enrolment. Alberta has the highest level of home schooling in the country, although it accounts for only 1.9 percent of total enrolment. The other two prairie provinces, Manitoba and Saskatchewan, have the next highest proportion of students being home schooled at 1.8 percent and 1.5 percent respectively. Newfoundland & Labrador has the lowest proportion of students being home schooled at only 0.2 percent.

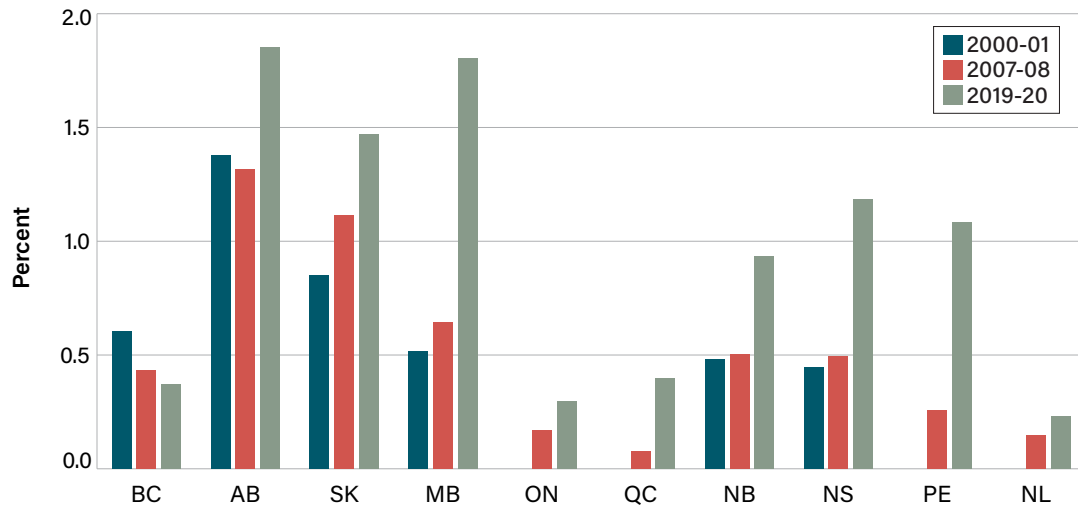
Table 6: Home Schooling Enrolment, Selected Years

	2000-01	2007-08	2019-20	2001-2020	2000-01	2007-08	2019-20
	Number			Percent Change	Percent of total enrolment		
BC	4,134	2,789	2,454	-40.6%	0.6%	0.4%	0.4%
AB	7,994	7,752	13,523	69.2%	1.4%	1.3%	1.9%
SK	1,595	1,838	2,779	74.2%	0.9%	1.1%	1.5%
MB	1,047	1,235	3,689	252.3%	0.5%	0.6%	1.8%
ON	n/a	3,711	6,564	n/a	n/a	0.2%	0.3%
QC	n/a	788	4,307	n/a	n/a	0.1%	0.4%
NB	608	561	941	54.8%	0.5%	0.5%	0.9%
NS	708	683	1,475	108.3%	0.4%	0.5%	1.2%
PE	n/a	54	232	n/a	n/a	0.3%	1.1%
NL	n/a	107	150	n/a	n/a	0.1%	0.2%

Notes and sources: See Appendix.

[16] Data was unavailable for Ontario, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland & Labrador until the mid-2000s, as these provinces did not report home school data in their provincial statistics.

Figure 9: Home Schooling Enrolment as a Share of Total Enrolment, Selected Years



Notes and sources: See Appendix.

Despite overall low shares of student enrolment, home schooling has experienced strong growth in terms of absolute enrolment over the past five years in nine out of ten provinces, with British Columbia being the only exception.

Conclusion

As one might expect given the decentralized nature of K–12 education in Canada, the mix of public, independent, and home-based education varies by province, as does the funding and regulation of these sectors. Some provinces rely more heavily on choice and competition within the public systems while others rely more heavily on independent schools to provide choice and competition.

Across Canada, public-school systems remain by far the largest providers of education. In 2019–20, between 86.4 percent (British Columbia) and 98.2 percent (Newfoundland & Labrador) of K–12 students were enrolled in public schools. Of this, the majority-language public schools—Francophone in Quebec, Anglophone in all other provinces—dominate enrolment, educating between 61.7 percent (Ontario) and 97.6 percent (Newfoundland & Labrador) of students in Canada. However, depending on the province, there are several opportunities for school choice within the public system.

One form of choice and competition afforded to students across the country is public education in a second language—English in Quebec, French in all other provinces. Enrolment in these schools ranges from 0.5 percent in Newfoundland & Labrador to 29.1 percent in New Brunswick. Put simply, depending on the province and particular city (and school district), there is the possibility of selecting a public school based on linguistic preferences that provide yet another layer of choice and competition within the public education system.

Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario also provide full funding for separate schools (primarily Roman Catholic). Between 23.3 percent (Saskatchewan) and 29.5 percent (Ontario) of students in these provinces are enrolled in separate schools. The loosening of regulations regarding the degree of religious instruction and the admittance of non-religious students (or students of different faiths) heightens the degree of parental choice and competition since these schools are no longer exclusively available to Roman Catholic families.

Finally, charter schools are another method by which to inject parental choice and competition into the public education system. Currently, the only province to provide charter schools is Alberta. There are 13 charters granted in Alberta, housing a larger number of charter schools and enrolling 1.4 percent of the province’s students.

The large number of students enrolled in the public systems includes those in majority language schools, minority language schools, separate schools, and charter schools. However, we should note that these schools also offer further layers of choice through specialized programs such as French Immersion and International Baccalaureate, and, especially in Alberta, some additional pedagogical and religious options.

Nevertheless, the proportion of students enrolled in public schools has declined over time. Every province has seen a decline in the proportion of students enrolled in the public system from 2000–01 to 2019–20. British Columbia and Quebec have seen the largest declines in public enrolment as a proportion of total enrolment in this period,

from 90.7 to 86.4 percent in British Columbia (a 4.3 percentage points decline) and from 90.6 to 87.9 percent in Quebec (2.6 percentage points decline).

The general reduction in public school enrolment has been met both with increased enrolment in independent schools and with a larger share of families choosing to home-school their children. British Columbia has the highest level of independent school enrolment at 13.2 percent of total enrolment, and Quebec is not far behind at 11.7 percent.

As previously discussed, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario provide some degree of religious instruction (mainly Roman Catholic) within their public education systems. The remaining provinces, however, provide almost all other religious education outside the public education system through independent schools. This explains some of the variation in both public-school enrolment and independent school enrolment in provinces like British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec.

In addition to the differences in the treatment of religious schools, there is also a fairly wide disparity in the funding and regulation of independent schools. British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec all provide government funding for independent schools ranging between 35 percent and 80 percent of public school per-student operating allocations. Ontario and the Atlantic Provinces (aside from a small number of designated independent schools in Nova Scotia for severely learning-disabled children), [17] on the other hand, provide no funding for independent schools. However, in general, independent schools in these provinces enjoy much more autonomy with respect to provincial guidelines on curriculum and other regulations.

The final type of schooling analyzed in this paper is home schooling. Over the period between 2007–08 and 2019–20 there was an increase in the proportion of home-educated students in every province except British Columbia. While this sector of education is experiencing enormous growth, total enrolment in home schooling remains quite modest. Alberta is leading the country in terms of the proportion of students being educated at home at 1.9 percent of total enrolment, with Manitoba close behind at 1.8 percent.

Generally speaking, Alberta currently offers the greatest degree of school choice in Canada. Apart from having five fully funded public school choices, it also provides substantial funding for students wishing to attend independent schools and for parents wishing to educate their children at home. The presence of charter schools provides parents with additional options outside of traditional linguistic and religious options offered by public school boards.

At the other end of the spectrum, the Atlantic Provinces tend to offer comparatively less parental choice and competition between schools. None of the Atlantic Provinces provide separate school education, nor do they offer broad funding for parents who choose independent schools.

However, despite the different levels of funding and the wide variety of regulatory environments across the country, an increasing number of families—from every single province—are choosing educational options outside of the public education system for their children.

[17] This funding comes from the Nova Scotia Tuition Support Program.

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Appendix: Notes and Sources for Tables and Figures

General Notes

1. Enrolment statistics are based on total head count enrolment, not full-time equivalent.
2. Total enrolment includes students enrolled in fully-funded religious and non-religious public schools and independent schools as well as homeschooled students attending K–12 education, unless otherwise mentioned.
3. Aboriginal students in federal or band-operated schools and students in federal schools for the military and foreign services are not included.
4. Enrolment numbers include adults who are registered in public, independent, or home school programs. Adults registered in Adult Education Centres are not included. For Quebec, adult education is managed separately from the general education program, so all adults are excluded from the counts.
5. Data includes students enrolled in French Immersion programs.
6. Home school education can be included within the public school count or a separate count depending on the province.
7. Home school counts include students who have been reported to the ministry. Numbers for unreported home schoolers is unknown, and therefore cannot be included in our analysis.
8. Numbers either taken directly from Ministry of Education documents or calculated using multiple documents.

Specific Notes

British Columbia

Enrolment numbers include students enrolled in Standard, Alternate, Distance, and Long-Term Provincial Resource Program facility types. They exclude students enrolled in Youth Custody schools. Adults enrolled in these programs are included in the counts; adults enrolled in Continuing Education are not.

Alberta

Total public enrolment includes Charter Schools enrolment. Early child services (ECS) includes both kindergarten students and other early childhood education services, and cannot be disaggregated.

Although Alberta does not offer a pre- or junior-kindergarten, any other ECS programs offered through public schools may be included in these figures.

The province of Alberta only tracks Francophone enrolment as a whole, so we are not able to divide it into Catholic and secular enrolment.

Saskatchewan

The province of Saskatchewan only tracks Francophone enrolment as a whole, so we are not able to divide it into secular and Catholic enrolment.

Enrolment data for Registered Independent schools was missing for the 2000–01 school year. This number was estimated as an average of the 1999–2000 data point and the 2001–2002 data point.

Manitoba

Enrolment statistics reported by the Department of Education and Advanced Learning include students enrolled in Nursery programs in addition to K–12 enrolment; nursery students have been excluded.

Federally operated First Nations schools are excluded from analysis. Public enrolment counts exclude band-operated First Nations schools managed by the Park West and Frontier School Divisions under educational agreements.

Francophone enrolment includes only students enrolled with the Francophone school division (Division Scolaire Franco-Manitobaine). There are several schools offering a Francophone program that are listed within the Anglophone divisions; these schools are included in the Anglophone count.

Ontario

In the enrolment statistics set by the Ministry of Education, data for schools which enrolled less than ten students were compressed to a “<10” value. In our counts, we gave these schools a median enrolment value of “5”.

Independent school data includes independent schools, First Nations schools, overseas schools, and combined schools.

Quebec

Federally operated First Nations schools are excluded from analysis. Students enrolled in indigenous language school boards are also not included in this analysis.

Quebec’s education system includes two years of kindergarten (Maternelle 4 ans and Maternelle 5 ans). Both years are included. Quebec’s education system goes from kindergarten to grade 11. Following grade 11, most students enroll in a CÉGEP college for two years, equivalent to grade 12 and first-year university. Due to this system, enrolment statistics for Quebec are for K–11 enrolment rather than K–12.

Nova Scotia

Enrolment numbers have been adjusted to exclude pre-kindergarten students from the public and independent school counts.

Prince Edward Island

Kindergarten was not part of the provincial education system in Prince Edward Island until 2010–11. Prior to this year, all Kindergarten and Early Childhood Education facilities were private, and not comparable to the post-2010 Kindergarten program. Because of this change in provincial policy, prior to 2010–11, Kindergarten students are not included in the K-12 enrolment statistics. Calculations were done to ensure that this change did not have a significant effect on our results.

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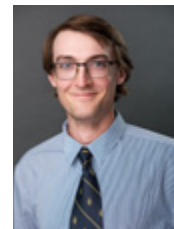
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