

CHARTING NEW HORIZONS FOR INDEPENDENT EDUCATION IN CANADA

Deani Van Pelt | December 2023

Key Points

- This paper offers key perspectives on current trends in independent education in North America. It argues that the goal of education is two-fold: the formation of personhood—body, mind, and spirit; and the formation of citizens, who participate in a shared society. These goals are best achieved through a plurality of educational options, including independent schools.
- Subsequently, this paper highlights current trends in education innovation:
 - increases in student enrolment in independent schools and homeschooling,
 - increases in the types of independent school, and start-ups of new ways of educating, such as hybrid schools, microschools, and other pedagogical approaches,
 - increases in research on independent schooling and strengthening of policy supporting school choice across North America,
 - and a renewed interest in philanthropic and corporate support of new and innovative forms of education.
- Concurrent with these trends are a consequence of challenges within district (public) education, and this paper describes research outcomes on pandemic learning loss and declines in academic achievement, rising concerns of chronic absenteeism, increased violence in schools, difficulties retaining teachers, and significant reports of declining mental health and wellbeing among both students and educators. These concerns are compounded by public perception that district systems increasingly provide education that is ideological in content.
- This paper concludes that we are leaving an era of educational uniformity and entering an era of education plurality, evident through a diversity of providers, approaches, learners, and funders. Pluralism, by definition, does not prioritize or prize one version of education over another. Rather, all are expected to be excellent spaces. What is key is that a variety of secular, philosophical, and religious schools can all contribute to the common good, to flourishing students, and to healthy civic formation.
- Finally, a call to action is issued for the expansion of educational pluralism: for generous funding and philanthropy in support of independent education, for meaningful participation in local education initiatives, and for advocacy toward a renewed commitment to plural education.

CARDUS

CONTACT

David Hunt
Program Director, Cardus Education
tel: 905-528-8866 x 708
dhunt@cardus.ca

[CARDUS.CA](https://www.cardus.ca)

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