

EXPLORING ALBERTA'S INDEPENDENT SCHOOL LANDSCAPE

Diversity, Growth, and Trends

David Hunt and Joanna DeJong VanHof | April 2024

Key Points

- Alberta has a plural education model, offering what is perhaps the most diverse approach to K–12 schooling in Canada. Despite the pluralism that exists across Alberta's fully taxpayer-funded schools, some families still choose to send their children to independent schools.
- This paper applies a typology of independent schools, developed in previous Cardus research, to identify the types of independent schools that exist in Alberta, and the number of schools and enrolment in each type.
- While the enrolment growth in the independent school sector is outpacing the enrolment growth in the province as a whole, only one net new independent school has been created in Alberta since 2013–14. Data suggests that growth in enrolment is due to existing schools becoming larger and more students enrolling as supervised home education or shared-responsibility students. That said, growth has not translated to an increase in pluralism understood as additional school choices and options.
- “Elite” schools are uncommon in the sector. Alberta independent schools tend to be small community-oriented schools: Seventy-five percent of all independent schools in the province enrol fewer than 300 students, and most of these are Religious and Special Emphasis schools.
- Three-quarters of independent schools belong to a school association. Membership within school associations provides an additional layer of accountability beyond that of government regulation, and contributes to robust expressions of educational pluralism.
- The Alberta government should continue to encourage the presence of meaningful pluralism by supporting new and existing independent schools that meet requirements, so that families have access to options that best fit their education needs.

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CONTACT

Joanna DeJong VanHof
Researcher
tel: 905-528-8866 x 141
jvanhof@cardus.ca

CARDUS.CA

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