



We champion independent education.

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Mission Statement

To serve and support independent schools as they make a difference in the lives of Alberta's children.

We do this by:

- Supporting and encouraging high standards in our schools
- Educating the public on how our schools serve the public good
- Fostering cooperation amongst educational stakeholders, and
- Defending the parental right to a choice in their children's education



Photo courtesy Renfrew Educational Services

Backgrounder

Founded in 1958, the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA, pronounced ACE-ka) is a voluntary, not-for-profit organization that supports independent schools in Alberta, assists them in maintaining their independence, and advocates for them in legislative and financial matters. AISCA's work includes:

- Working with Alberta Education on legislative and regulatory matters
- Speaking to government on behalf of independent schools in Alberta
- Public relations for Alberta's independent schools
- Individual and collective support for independent schools

Independent schools are inspired and given purpose by many different foundations: governance models, educational philosophies, pedagogical approaches, worldviews, cultures and faiths. Some parents and supporting communities want these foundations to be given more emphasis than in the dominant public or separate school systems. So, they establish independent school communities within the Alberta provincial framework. AISCA serves these school communities.



Photo courtesy Glenmore Christian Academy

Video

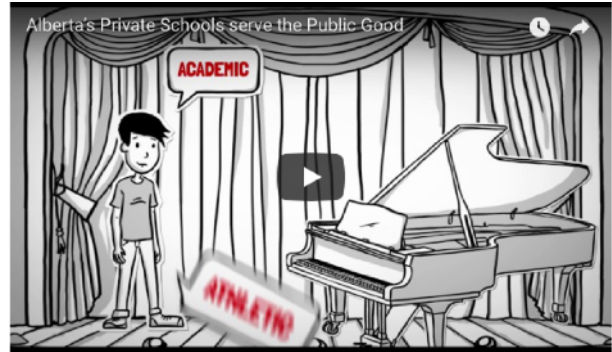
Visit our website or go to YouTube to see videos about AISCA and independent schools.

Alberta's private schools save taxpayers money



https://youtu.be/RolJRnftc_E

Alberta's private schools serve the public good



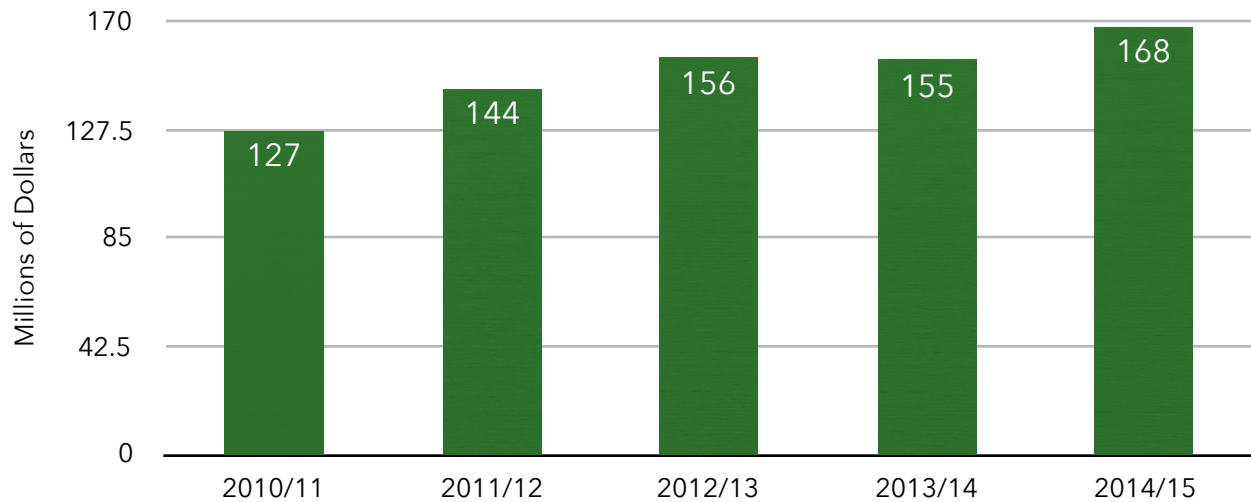
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Photo courtesy Londonderry Child Development Society

Important Data, Graphs & Charts

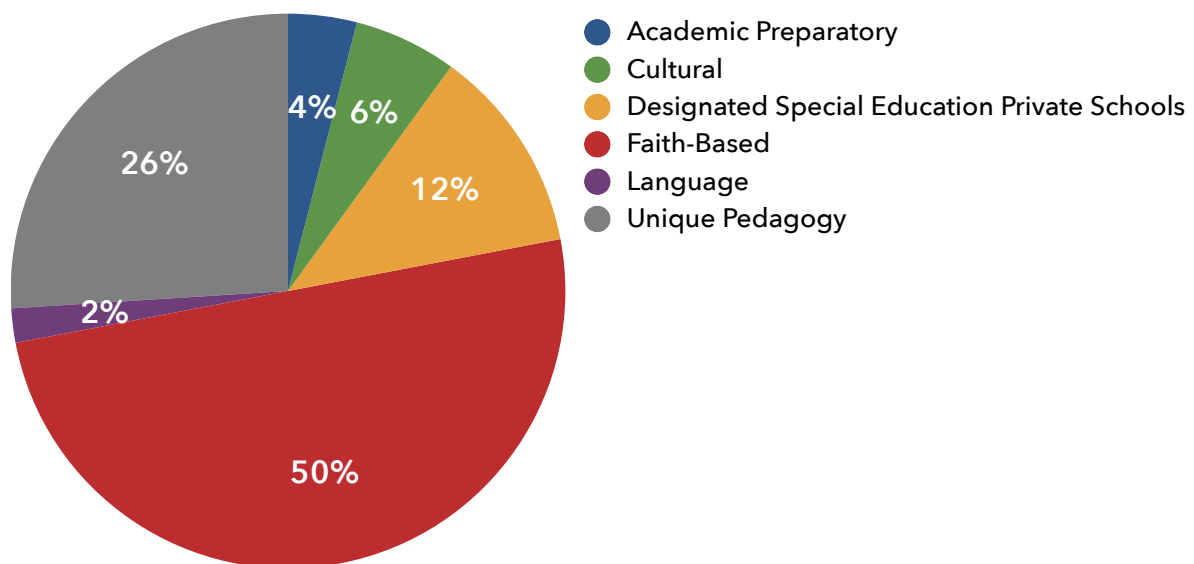
Taxpayer Savings Due to Existence of Independent Schools



Calculations in chart based on data from:

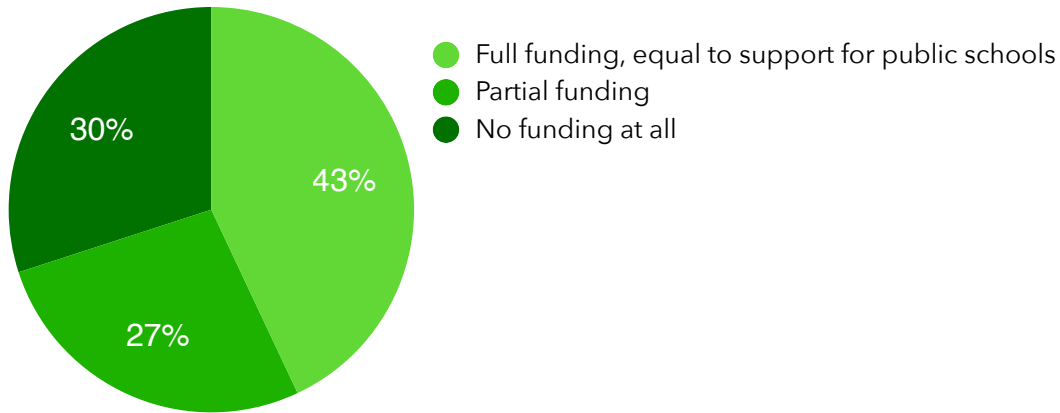
<https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/parentchoice/pages/69/attachments/original/1497903179/>

Types of Independent Schools



Based on data collected by Alberta Education

Angus Reid poll: As far as you're concerned, should religious and faith-based schools receive...



Source: <http://angusreid.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/2017.12.14-religious-school-funding.pdf>

Quick Facts

- Independent schools have been in existence before Alberta’s founding as a province (1905)
- Year AISCA was established: **1958**
- Amount of money the Government of Alberta allocates to each student in public schools: **\$13,000**
- Amount of money it allocates to each student in independent schools: **\$5,000**
- Total savings in tax dollars for Alberta because of the lowered cost per student at independent schools, 2011-2016: **\$750 million**
- Tax dollars given to independent schools to cover capital costs, transportation, and teacher pensions: **\$0**
- Number of students in independent schools and Early Childhood Services programs as of 2017: **35,607**
- Percentage of Alberta students enrolled in independent schools and ECS programs: **5%**
- Alberta families choosing most independent schools (82%) have the same income as families at public schools

Frequently Asked Questions

What is an independent school?

The word “independent” means the school operates under a different mandate than a public school. An independent school is created when a group of citizens with similar educational goals apply to the Alberta Ministry of Education for approval to operate a school. The school is then incorporated under the provincial Societies Act, and receives its authority to operate from the Minister of Education.

What is the difference between independent schools and private schools?

In Alberta, the two terms are essentially the same. Provincial legislation uses the term “private” to describe AISCA member schools, but they are not “private” as the term is commonly used by the general public. We prefer the term

“independent”, which we define as schools which receive both private and public funds. We also serve the public good by providing education which is only partially publicly funded.

How is an independent school operated?

An independent school is established as a Not For Profit Society or a Not For Profit Corporation and follows the rules of those specific Acts of Legislation. The schools are governed by a board. In most cases, the board is elected by the membership. This board is accountable to the Minister of Education and to the membership for operating the school.

Why do parents send their children to independent schools?

Many reasons. Some believe that they have a duty to be deeply involved in their children’s education. Others believe that a large educational system can take a long time to respond to



Photo courtesy Foothills Academy

parental concerns. Some find their children have difficulty thriving and succeeding in the public or separate school system.

Independent schools allow children to be educated within a parentally engaged environment. The school may also have a particular academic emphasis, special needs focus, pedagogical philosophy like Waldorf or Montessori, or faith orientation that is compatible with their value system. These are characteristics that the parents see as valuable and want their children to experience. This grassroots governance is essential to an independent school.

Do independent schools undermine the public system?

No. They sustain and enrich the cultural and educational diversity that exists in Alberta. They also strengthen democracy by providing alternatives to mainstream education. Independent schools are also freer to be responsive to parental choice and voice.

Do independent schools do harm to our society?

Diversity is part of our Canadian and Albertan multicultural heritage. Independent schools reflect this diversity, nurture it, and preserve particular traditions and values. Integration, cohesion, and strengthening of the common good takes place within this diverse educational landscape.

Is a choice of school systems good for education?

The public and separate school systems acknowledge a need for choice. For example, in the Alberta public school system, many schools attract students with a particular interest, like fine arts, language, athletics, or faith affiliation. We also have 28,000 students in French immersion programs, over 8,000 students in Francophone schools, and approximately 166,000 students in the predominantly Catholic separate school



Photo courtesy Morinville Christian School

system.¹

Like these other school options, independent schools offer choice as well, further extending the liberty that is so important to our province's democracy and diversity.

With so many different schools, isn't the quality of education compromised?

No. All schools must abide by Alberta learning standards. Teachers must meet the required credentials and have professional certificates. Studies done on Alberta's independent schools suggest that their existence improves the quality of schooling in general by creating an element of competition. In fact, Alberta's system of school choice has been recognized internationally for providing high-quality education.²

Shouldn't schools avoid teaching faith and religion?

Various faith groups operate about half of Alberta's independent schools, but they are not alone. Alberta's separate school system includes

approximately 166,000 students in faith-based schools, where faith permeates the entire school culture.³

Faith is an important part of Alberta's culture and heritage, and as such needs to be taught. How to teach it is a question that can be answered differently by different school systems, a choice which promotes democracy and diversity.



Photo courtesy River Valley School

¹Alberta Student Population by Authority System, Separate Schools, 2016/2017. <https://education.alberta.ca/alberta-education/student-population/everyone/student-population-overview/>

² <https://education.alberta.ca/education-studies/pisa/everyone/results/>

³ Alberta Student Population by Authority System, Separate Schools, 2016/2017. <https://education.alberta.ca/alberta-education/student-population/everyone/student-population-overview/>

What safeguards are there against ethnic and religious prejudice?

All schools in Alberta must encourage respect for all people as well as allow for individual and group identity. Alberta legislation requires schools to foster a safe and caring school environment. AISCA's bylaws specifically stipulate that no member school "may advocate or promote racial or ethnic superiority, or religious intolerance, or social change through violence". The Minister of Education has the power to investigate questionable teaching practices in any school in the province, including independent schools.

How much money do independent schools receive from the provincial government?

It depends on the type of independent school. Children in Early Childhood Services (Kindergarten) receive the same level of funding as children in the public systems. Children in Designated Special Education Private Schools receive the same amount for their instruction as similarly coded children in public schools. While there is some fluctuation in funding due to variation in grant allotments, students in independent schools receive on average around \$5200 per year, while the money allotted for students in a public or separate school is around \$13,000.⁴



Photo courtesy Edmonton Islamic Academy

How is this money spent?

The money received from the government by independent schools covers approximately 40% of the expenditure per student in the province, and is used for instructional costs.

What types of expenses do independent schools incur?

Expenses incurred include **instructional, support and capital costs:**

⁴Sources:

http://parentchoice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Independent_Schools_Paper.pdf

<https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/education-spending-and-public-student-enrolment-in-canada-2016.pdf>

<https://education.alberta.ca/budget/funding-supports/everyone/budget-2017-funding-charts/>

- **Instructional costs** include salaries for principal, teachers and instructional support staff, learning resources and supplies, and equipment and furnishings used in the instructional program.
- **Support costs** include plant operations and maintenance, board governance, office administration, and student transportation.
- **Capital costs** include building projects, building quality restoration program expenditures and debt carrying costs on school buildings.

How much does it cost to send a student to an independent school?

Tuition rates vary widely, and are set by the individual school boards. While some schools do not charge tuition, most schools need to do so to make up part of the shortfall resulting from the reduced government funding they receive.

Shouldn't parents who send their children to an independent school pay the full cost?



Photo courtesy Glenmore Christian Academy

For over 50 years, the Government of Alberta has recognized that independent schools serve the public interest. The Government also believes in ensuring equal opportunity for all children to receive an adequate education. But independent schools are not supported equally; parents typically pay two-thirds of their children's educational costs in addition to paying their regular school taxes. So, since it is the Ministry of Education's responsibility to ensure effective education for all children, and it is the children and not the schools that benefit, the government recognizes that allocating a portion of public money to independent schools makes sense.

Even though independent schools receive some public funding, this is still beneficial to the public purse. Every dollar that

independent schools contribute to education is one that the government and the taxpayers do not pay. It has been estimated that over \$175,000,000 is saved each year, through the reduced funding received by independent schools.⁵

Do most children who attend private schools come from wealthy families?

No. Just as in public, separate, Francophone, and charter schools, students attending independent schools come from families across the economic spectrum. Current research shows that the families in over 80% of independent schools have a household income that is slightly below the average household income in Alberta.⁶

What credentials do teachers at independent schools have?

The same as public school teachers. Alberta Education administers the issuing of teaching certificates in independent schools as well as public schools.

Who inspects independent schools?

The Alberta Ministry of Education has a monitoring program that requires audits, annual reports and three-year plans, verification of all teaching credentials, and on-site visits. Independent schools are required to meet the same program goals as those in the public system, and student performance is tested just like it is in the public schools.



Photo courtesy Londonderry Child Development Society

⁵ Source: http://parentchoice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Independent_Schools_Paper.pdf

⁶ <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/comparing-the-family-income-of-students-in-albertas-independent-and-public-schools.pdf>

Who determines the curriculum at an independent school, and how is its effectiveness measured?

Independent schools teach the Alberta Program of Studies. The Ministry of Education ensures that the programs are compatible. Students at independent schools take the grade 6 and grade 9 provincial achievement tests and the grade 12 provincial exams, to ensure that the graduates meet the standards.

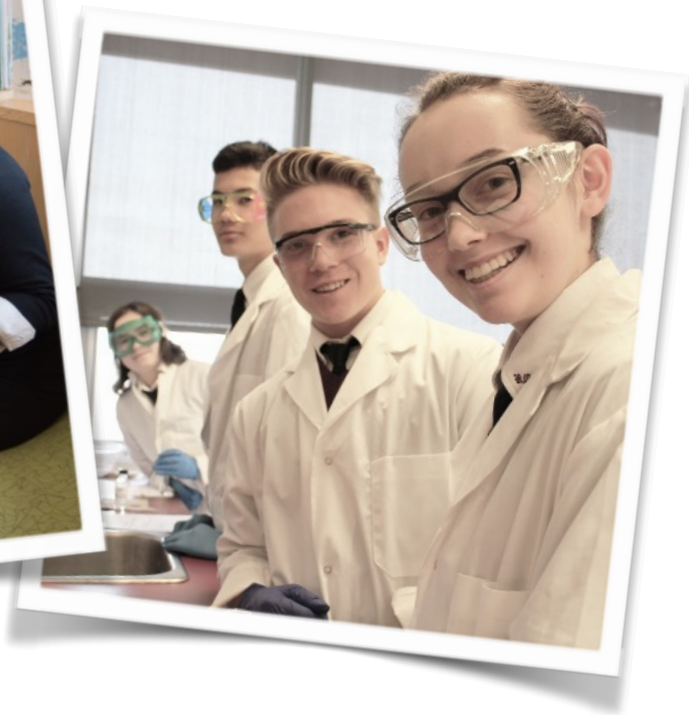
Do special needs students attend independent schools?

Most independent schools accommodate special needs students to the degree that they have resources and programs available, but because they receive less funding, they are not always able to fully meet the needs of every special needs child.

There are also a number of independent schools devoted to educating special needs students, called Designated Special Education Private Schools (DSEPS). The parents of these children believe that their child's needs are better met in these specialized environments. Parents of special needs children are at times referred to these schools by public boards.



Photos courtesy Rundle College



Executive Director Biography

John Jagersma has more than fifteen years' experience in the field of education. He has served as Executive Director for the Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta since 2015. In this role he advocates for, and supports, independent schools, early childhood service programs, and alternative programs. John started his career in education as a Jr. High Social Studies and Physical Education teacher. Prior to joining AISCA he worked as a principal of Parkland Immanuel Christian School for 7 years. His academic credentials include a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of the Fraser Valley, a Bachelor of Education degree from the University of British Columbia, and a Master of Education degree focusing on school leadership from the University of Alberta.



Photo courtesy Edmonton Islamic Academy

More Resources

Photographs

Most of the photos in this media kit are available upon request. Please reference the page number in the kit. Requests for photographs can be made through the Executive Director.

Page 1 photo credits (all photos used with permission):

- Left: Morinville Christian School
- Top: Edmonton Islamic Academy
- Right: Renfrew Educational Services
- Bottom: Londonderry Childhood Development Society

Research

Milke, Mark, Ph.D. Alberta's Independent Schools: Taxpayers Saved \$750 Million. Calgary: Parents for Choice in Education. https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/parentchoice/pages/106/attachments/original/1497984864/Independent_Schools_Paper.pdf?1497984864

MacIntyre, Hugh and Emes, Joel. Fiscal Consequences of Higher Spending on K-12 Public Schools in Canada. Fraser Institute Research Bulletin, February 2017. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/fiscal-consequences-of-higher-spending-on-K-12-public-schools-in-canada.pdf>

Editorial: All Alberta schools serve the public good

by John Jagersma, Executive Director, Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta. Available on the AISCA website: <http://www.aisca.ab.ca/2016/07/john-jagersma-all-alberta-schools-serve-the-public-good/>

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