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Independent Schools serve the Public Good

Independent schools serve a cross section of students.

There are those that claim that independent schools serve only the children of the rich.

This notion is nonsense.

Yes, a small number of Alberta schools charge tuitions that appear geared to upper socio-economic parents.

Often not remembered is that these schools make available scholarships and subsidies so that students from lesser socio-economic backgrounds may also gain admission.

The vast majority of Independent schools enroll students from average families with moderate incomes. These

families send their children to these schools because they share the belief systems or educational philosophies that animate individual independent schools. The reality is that across the breadth of independent schools in the province, the makeup includes families and students from a broad range of social, economic, ethnic, religious, and cultural backgrounds. Tuitions independent school families pay at great sacrifice serve primarily to make up the shortfall in taxpayer dollars that students in independent schools receive in comparison to their peers in public schools.

Independent schools serve students in keeping with the learning and teaching strategies, education philosophy and belief system that animates each of them. In this context, they serve a broad range of students just as do public schools.



The notion that independent schools enroll only the brightest student is also misguided. In fact, Alberta is fortunate to have some eleven Designated Special Education independent schools as well as many community-based Early Childhood Services (ECS) operators dedicated specifically to serving students and children with special needs. Most independent schools, just as most neighborhood public schools, enroll students with special needs whenever they have the resources to deliver suitable programs.

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Independent Schools prepare students for an integrated and active participation in a pluralistic society.

Some Albertans argue that the public system alone promotes the development of “common values” necessary to the preparation of citizens and that independent education “creates separation within education that could lead to more societal divisions and lack of tolerance” (Zinga, 2008). This view is highly suspect both in principle and on the basis of research.

Bernard Shapiro in his report to the Government of Ontario (1985) argued that in a society that considers itself as diverse and multicultural, parents should be able to select the right type of education for their children. Alberta’s own Private Schools Funding Task Force (1998) determined that independent schools serve the public good, “they meet the needs of certain students, they reflect the diversity of Alberta society, and they provide choices for parents.” In the context of Canada’s diverse, democratic and multi-cultural society, independent schools should be seen, not as divisive, but as exemplifying the diversity that Albertans honour.

Research points to the reality that independent schools’ students and graduates understand and practice their obligations as citizens as well or better than do their public school counterparts.

AISCA was pleased to hear our new Education Minister, the Honourable David Eggen, state that, “I’ve inherited an education system that has other models that deliver education. For the sake of security, for the sake of stability in our education at this point I have no plans to change that landscape here in the province of Alberta” (Howell, 2015).

This position is principled, and appropriate to the educational context of Alberta.

Research points to the reality that independent schools’ students and graduates understand and practice their obligations as citizens as well or better than do their public school counterparts. David E. Campbell’s empirical analysis (2008) found that students enrolled in private schools when compared to those in public schools, are

“more likely to engage in community service, develop civic skills in school, express confidence in being able to use those skills, exhibit greater political knowledge, and express a greater degree of political tolerance.” As Campbell notes, the “statistical record suggests that private schooling and school choice often enhance the realization of the civic virtues that are central to a well-functioning democracy.” (2008). The 2012 Cardus Education Survey found that independent schools are graduating students committed to shared social purposes and the “common good”. The government’s own data reveals the reality that independent schools are safe and caring institutions that are responsive to their parents, and do a good job of preparing students for life after high school (see side column).

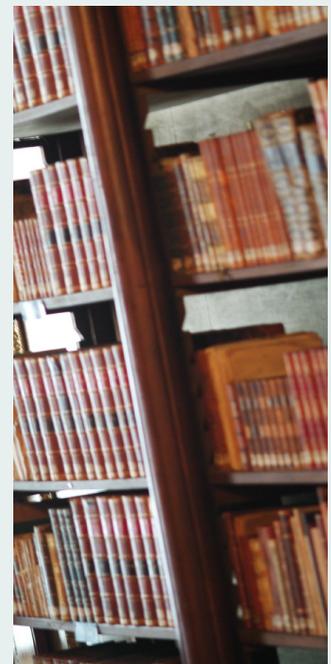
The data collected from Alberta’s Accountability Pillar show that students, parents, and teachers of independent schools believe that their schools:

Are safe and caring:
93.9% agree
(Alberta average: 89.2%);

Successfully prepare students for the world of work:
92.8% agree
(Alberta average: 82.0%);

Prepare students for their roles as citizens:
91.1% agree
(Alberta average: 83.5%);

Support parental involvement:
89.8% agree
(Alberta average: 80.7%)





Independent schools have saved government some \$750 million over the past five years. (Milke, 2015)

Independent Schools save the government millions of dollars

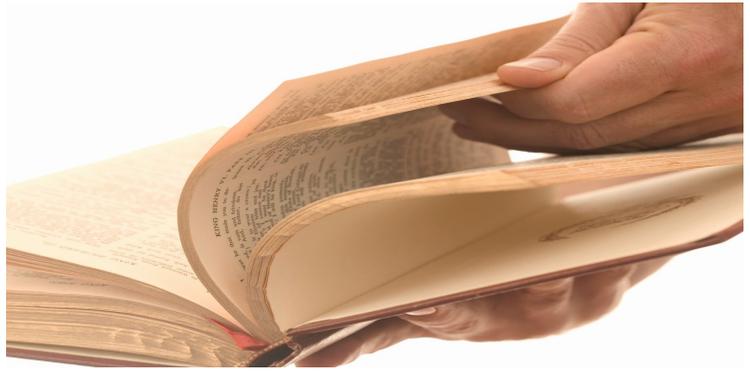
In keeping with the 1998 Private Schools Funding Task Force, Alberta independent schools receive part of the funding public authorities receive per student. Currently, private school funding is limited to a maximum of 70% of the Instructional and Plant Operations and Maintenance (POM) funding envelopes provided to public authorities. Independent schools do not receive funding for a number of funding envelopes available to public authorities, including: class size reduction dollars, technology enhancement funding, transportation grants and capital (school building) funds. In addition, independent school teachers do not benefit from the \$2 billion dollars government provided to the Teachers' Retirement Fund to cover pension plan shortfalls.

In fact, as Milke (2015) recently pointed out, using even the most conservative figures, independent schools have saved government some \$750 million over the past five years. Milke uses a comparison of the public system cost to taxpayers for a student in the public system of 10,874, in comparison to a student in the private school system costing the taxpayer \$5150. Statistics Canada places the per-student spending in public schools in Alberta in 2013 at \$13,234 (Tables 477-0025 and 478-0014); this would bring the savings to the public purse up over a billion dollars in the past 5 years. It could be argued that tuitions paid by independent school parents in fact make more dollars available to public schools.

The evidence clearly indicates that independent schools serve the public good in our diverse, democratic society.

Quick Facts on Independent Schools

- ◇ They have been part of the educational landscape of Alberta for over 100 years.
- ◇ Independent schools serve the public good, benefiting the children they serve and society as a whole.
- ◇ Educational choice is a parental right recognized by the United Nations.
- ◇ Independent schools strengthen school choice.
- ◇ Graduates from independent schools are active participants in civic society.
- ◇ Private schools save taxpayers money.
- ◇ The needs of a diverse group of students are met through independent schools.
- ◇ The Association of Independent Schools and Colleges in Alberta (AISCA) has been the umbrella organization for independent schools since 1958.
- ◇ Visit www.aisca.ab.ca for more details.



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