



Canadian Education Association
linking . listening . learning . leading since 1891

**PUBLIC
EDUCATION
IN CANADA:
FACTS,
TRENDS
AND
ATTITUDES
2007**

Public Education in Canada: Facts, Trends and Attitudes

Published by the Canadian Education Association (CEA)
Association canadienne d'éducation (ACE)

317 Adelaide Street West, Suite 300
Toronto, ON M5V 1P9

© Canadian Education Association 2007

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced mechanically without the permission of the publisher.

ISBN number: 1-896660-29-0

AUTHOR

Jodene Dunleavy

RESEARCH ANALYSIS TEAM

Doug Hart, Margaret Oldfield, Christa Freiler, and Luke Rodgers

DESIGN

J. Lynn Campbell, Sonya V. Thursby

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CEA would like to thank all of the individuals who provided valuable expertise in the preparation of commentaries related to the survey research results.

CEA would also like to acknowledge the vital contributions of Thérèse LaFerrière, Claire Lapointe, Kevin Lukian, and Jean-Pierre Proulx for their insights in helping to form a contextual understanding of the Quebec survey results.

The Public Attitudes Toward Education Survey was conducted by York University's Institute of Social Research.

Publié en français sous le titre : *L'éducation publique au Canada – Faits, tendances et attitudes*

CONTENTS

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CANADA... 1

PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEMS... 1

Enrolment... 2

The Education Workforce... 2

Funding Public Education... 3

TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL REFORM — CANADIAN PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES... 3

MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF CANADA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM... 4

Student Achievement... 4

High School Completion... 5

Participation in Post-Secondary Education... 5

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION IN CANADA—THE 2007 CEA SURVEY... 6

■ VIEWS ABOUT EDUCATION ARE REMARKABLY SIMILAR ACROSS THE COUNTRY... 7

Teaching... 7

Student Assessment... 8

Educational Change... 9

■ SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOLS IS GENERALLY HIGH ACROSS CANADA, BUT THERE IS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT... 9

■ CONFIDENCE IN PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP FOR EDUCATION IS GENERALLY LOW... 11

■ CANADIANS SHARE A STRONG COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC EDUCATION... 12

■ CANADIANS HAVE MIXED VIEWS ON EDUCATIONAL CHANGE... 14

The Direction of Change... 14

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION IN CANADA... 16

APPENDIX A... 18

ENDNOTES... 20



Tables and Figures

TABLE 1: Student:Educator ratios 2004/05 and change since 1998/99...3

TABLE 2: Provincial funding for public education, 2004/05...3

TABLE 3: Extent of need to find new ways of doing things in elementary and secondary schools...9

TABLE 4: World values survey: Canadians' confidence in different institutions and organizations...11

FIGURE 1: Full-time equivalent enrolments in Canadian public elementary and secondary schools (2004/05)...2

FIGURE 2: % Canadians very or somewhat satisfied with the jobs teachers are doing...7

FIGURE 3: High school students should be assessed using province-wide tests (% Agree)...8

FIGURE 4: High school grades should mainly reflect teachers' assessments (% Agree)...8

FIGURE 5: Public grading of community schools: 1979-2007 comparisons...10

FIGURE 6: % Canadians with a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in provincial public schools...10

FIGURE 7: % Canadians with a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in educational policy...12

FIGURE 8: % Canadians willing to serve on local school councils...12

FIGURE 9: Support for increased government spending on public schools...13

FIGURE 10: Willingness to pay more taxes (% Yes): 1984-2007 comparison...13

FIGURE 11: Perceived change in the way schools operate over the past 10 years...14

FIGURE 12: Degree of change necessary to fix educational problems by region...16

FOREWORD

The Canadian Education Association (CEA) is pleased to present its fourth report on public attitudes toward public education in Canada. Based on a survey of over 2,400 Canadians conducted between January and May 2007 in partnership with researchers at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto (OISE/UT), this report follows previous surveys commissioned by CEA in 1979, 1984 and 1990.

CEA believes that Canadians share a strong commitment to building vibrant public education systems that contribute to the growth and development of children and youth and cultivate their capacity to shape their lives, their communities, their workplaces and their country. In capturing a national picture of Canadians' satisfaction and confidence in our education systems and their views on educational change, we believe this report contributes to the conversations we need to have to realize our goals for Canadian public education in the 21st century.

Over the years, CEA has explored different questions with Canadians through our national surveys, but their purpose has remained the same. With each survey since 1979, CEA has set out to examine and describe Canadians' views about the quality of elementary and secondary education as a starting point for informed dialogue about public policy trends and issues in education across the country.

This year's report offers a number of new sections that did not appear in previous reports. An expanded section on education systems in Canada, a summary of public school indicators, and a brief outline of trends in educational reform provide readers with a context for reviewing the results of the 2007 CEA Survey that follow. This year, we also invited a diverse group of educational leaders from across the country to comment on different aspects of the survey results. These commentaries bring the data to life by demonstrating the types of discussions that can emerge from the survey results. We hope that these commentaries, along with the data itself, will inspire similar conversations among Canadians about the future of education in Canada and the qualities of a learning society that we desire for our children and for ourselves.



CAROLYN DUHAMEL
PRESIDENT
CANADIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION



PENNY MILTON
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
CANADIAN EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CANADA

PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEMS

The public education system in Canada consists of ten provincial and three territorial systems, including approximately 15,000 public French- and English-language schools administered by 375 school boards. Canada remains the only federated nation within the membership of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) that has no means for direct federal involvement in the direction of elementary and secondary education. Education is exclusively within the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial governments and has been since 1867 when Canada's Constitution Act provided that "[I]n and for each province, the legislature may exclusively make laws in relation to Education."ⁱ

Even though Canada lacks an integrated national strategy for education, provincial and territorial school systems across the country are remarkably similar: education is compulsory beginning generally at age 6 up to age 16, although in some cases compulsory schooling begins at age 5 and extends to age 18; all jurisdictions have some form of pre-elementary education (kindergarten) and most, with the exception of Quebec,¹ support a twelve-year elementary/secondary (K-12) program; and the school year is generally 190 days in length. Beyond these structural dimensions, it is also important to acknowledge that there are some significant provincial and territorial differences in curriculum, assessment and accountability policies, as well as many regional variations in approaching educational reform.

Elementary and secondary education for First Nations and Inuit children and youth is also provided through a combination of federal, provincial and local self-governed school authorities and band councils (see Gordon Martell's commentary on Aboriginal Education in Canada). Canada's federal government funds the majority of First Nations education through First Nations-operated schools on reserves, provincially administered schools off reserves, and federal schools operated by the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada on reserves. However, the respective territorial governments provide educational services for First Nations and/or Inuit students in the Yukon, Nunavut, and Northwest Territories. First Nations and Inuit students in northern Quebec receive educational services from the province of Quebec under the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreementⁱⁱ and in 2006, the British Columbia First Nations Education Steering Committee (FNESC) and the Government of British Columbia signed an Education Agreementⁱⁱⁱ recognizing First Nations' jurisdiction over First Nations' education, enacting commitments set out in the 2005 tripartite *Transformative Change Accord*^{iv}.

Canada is a bilingual country and recognizes French and English as its two official languages in the Canadian Constitution. More than 80% of French-speaking Canadians live in the province of Quebec, but the minority language rights of

French-speaking students living outside the province of Quebec and English-speaking students living in the province of Quebec are protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. A number of sections within the Charter guarantee Canadians' right to access all services in both official languages, including the right to a publicly funded education in the minority language of each province. For the 375 school boards in Canada, each province and territory has established French-language school boards to manage the network of French-language schools. In the province of Quebec the same structure applies to education in English-first-language schools.

In the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Ontario, as well as the Northwest Territories, publicly funded Catholic school boards run parallel to the public secular school systems. These parallel systems have their origins in the late 1800s when separate Catholic and Protestant schools were guaranteed in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Throughout Canada, former Protestant systems are now secular and in the late 1990s the province of Quebec replaced separate Catholic and Protestant systems with linguistically-based English and French secular systems, while Newfoundland and Labrador integrated its formerly denominational systems into five geographically based districts (4 English- and 1 French-language).

1 In the province of Quebec, students attend one less year of secondary school. Following the completion of high school in grade 11, students have the option of attending publicly funded CEGEP or Collège d'enseignement général et professionnel/College of General and Vocational Education to complete a two-year pre-University or three-year technical program.



ABORIGINAL EDUCATION IN CANADA

Despite the very real problems facing many Aboriginal students and communities that result in less than equitable educational outcomes, there is much to be optimistic about. My optimism stems from the continued development of new and innovative responses to the needs of Aboriginal students and communities. Antiquated structures and one-size-fits-all educational delivery models are yielding to a variety of local and regional responses that benefit from Aboriginal community vision and capacity as well as federal, provincial and territorial participation within co-governance relationships.

The challenge outlined in the 1996 *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* was to undertake reforms of education systems to foster more equitable student success. The challenge is being realized with each creative response that emerges out of genuine dialogue. Various levels of government are recognizing the benefits of shared responsibility in maximizing resources and sharing expertise. Co-governance relationships can respect jurisdiction and autonomy while dismantling roadblocks and creating pathways.

Building capacity and fostering independence results in a variety of models across the continuum of parental and community engagement. From the work of the First Nations Education Steering Committee to redefining parental and community participation in British Columbia to active co-governance arrangements between provincial school divisions and First Nations educational authorities in Saskatchewan, the independent Akwasasne Mohawk Schools in Ontario and Quebec, and the Mi'kmaw-Kina'matnewey education system in Nova Scotia, there is compelling evidence that the realization of genuine community participation fosters renewal and success.

The achievement of equitable educational outcomes for Aboriginal children will require all levels of government to recognize the successes that have been achieved through enhanced participation of Aboriginal communities. Dismantling comfortable structures and taking risks with new relationships and power sharing arrangements is daunting. It is important to consider the tenacity of our Elders, the hope of our children and the desire of all Canadians to achieve outcomes representative of our democratic goals. There is no greater motivation than the success of our children.

GORDON MARTELL
GREATER SASKATOON CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Enrolment

More than five million school-aged children in Canada, including approximately 120,000 Inuit and First Nations children and youth, were enrolled in the public education system during the 2004/05 school year. **FIGURE 1** illustrates the large differences in the size of school systems across Canada from under 10,000 students enrolled in the Yukon, Northwest territories and Nunavut, to more than two million enrolled in the province of Ontario.^v

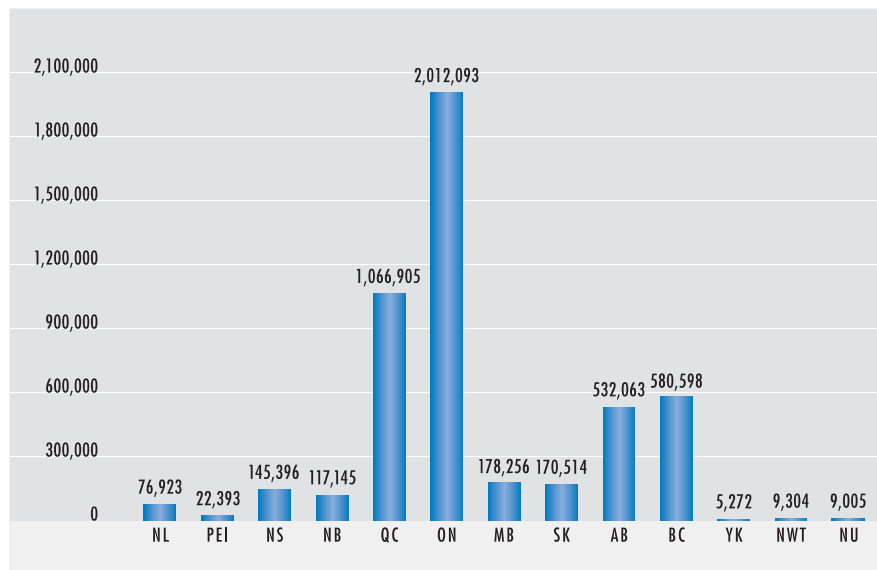
The Education Workforce

Data on the full complement of staff (e.g. teachers, school administrators, teaching assistants, custodians and administrative assistants) working in elementary and secondary schools across Canada is unavailable; however, detailed information available from Statistics Canada indicates that the educator workforce, which includes all employees in the public school system

who are required to have teacher certification as a condition of their employment, was just under 310,000 full-time equivalent (FTE) employees in 2004/05. The educator workforce is growing at a national level, but there are also some significant regional differences; the number of full-time equivalent educators increased in eight jurisdictions and declined in five.^{vi, vii}

Another way to view the educator workforce is through student-to-educator ratios, which as a result of declining enrolments in some jurisdictions and a national trend toward the implementation of reduced class size policies,² has declined on a national scale since the 1970s. **TABLE 1** shows recent changes since 1999, which generally reflect longer term trends of the number of full-time equivalent educators increasing more than student enrolments in all provinces and territories with the exception of British Columbia.

FIGURE 1: Full-time equivalent enrolments in Canadian public elementary and secondary schools (2004/05)



2 Note: student-to-educator ratios are not equivalent to class size because they include all staff with teacher certification who work outside of the classroom (e.g. principals, guidance counsellors etc.). Class size policies are mentioned here as one source of increases in the educator workforce.

TABLE 1: Student-to-educator ratios 2004/05 and change since 1998/99

	Canada	NL	PEI	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	YK	NWT	NU
2004/05	15.9	13.6	15.1	15.7	15.9	14.2	16.6	14.5	15.5	*16.9	17.5	11.5	15.4	16.2
% Change	-1.7	1.5	0.6	-1.7	-2.0	0.1	-1.8	-1.9	-0.4	*-5.7	-0.9	-4.4	-0.7	-15.4

TABLE 2: Provincial funding for public education, 2004/05

	Canada	NL	PEI	NS	NB	QC	ON	MB	SK	AB	BC	YK	NWT	NU
	\$9,040	8,075	7,583	7,728	8,653	8,663	9,267	9,394	9,031	9,346	8,960	15,837	13,344	13,040

Funding Public Education

All public education through secondary (or “high”) school is publicly funded, including general and vocational colleges (CEGEPs, or Collèges d’enseignement général et professionnel) in the province of Quebec. Based on the most recent data available, provincial/territorial spending on the K-12 education sector in the 2004/05 school year was just over \$44 billion. In addition, public expenditures through the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada totalled \$1.6 billion in the 2005/06 school year for Inuit and First Nations students attending federally and provincially funded schools.^{viii}

These overall figures can also be looked at in terms of per student funding. Total per student funding in Canada amounted to \$9,040 in 2004/05, an increase of 28% from \$7,077 in 1998/99. **TABLE 2** provides information on per student funding by province and territory for the 2004/05 school year and while this information provides interesting comparisons, readers are cautioned that these figures represent real dollars and therefore, do not take into account differences in the cost of providing services and different arrangements for delivering education (e.g. length of the school day or year, pre-kindergarten programs) in different regions of the country.

TRENDS IN EDUCATIONAL REFORM – CANADIAN PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES

The 2007 CEA Survey included a new set of questions to measure Canadians’ attitudes toward educational change over the past ten years. This section provides an overview of trends in provincial and territorial education reform since the mid-1990s to provide readers with some context for understanding the results of these questions.

Over the past ten years, reform agendas at the provincial, territorial and often school district level have centred on government commitments to greater accountability and improved student achievement. Based on these three foundations, many provinces and territories have:

- established some form of standardized, province-wide student achievement tests;
- implemented province-wide school and/or district improvement initiatives, commonly focused on student achievement in mathematics and literacy;
- developed or revised curriculum policies to standardize learning outcomes;
- invested in the implementation of reduced class size schemes;
- contributed to the creation of new multi-sector (i.e. education, health, social service) early learning and development programs;

- implemented reforms aimed at improving high school options and completion rates;
- established a variety of multi-sector programs for children and youth vulnerable to less than optimal social, health, and educational outcomes; and,
- introduced new programs to support increased parent and community engagement in learning and school level decision-making.

As an overview of trends, the above summary of education reform is only a partial picture of educational change in Canada – provincial and territorial reforms share some common areas of focus, but they are implemented and received in very different ways across the country. It is also important to note that mandated reforms are only one piece of the larger landscape of educational change where reforms are often contested through dynamic public debates about the best way to create high quality education and learning systems for all children and youth in Canada. These debates, which are often very similar across the country, are important to understanding education in Canada and we explore them further in the final section of this report – *Reflections on the Future of Education in Canada*.

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL ASSESSMENT RESULTS?



The Canadian government and the provincial and territorial governments have invested considerable resources in large-scale national and international studies to monitor educational performance. For example, Canada has participated in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), an assessment of the knowledge and life skills of 15-year-old youth conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

These assessments furnish data that describe long-term trends in student performance in reading, mathematics, and science. Large-scale monitoring efforts can help us understand the distribution of educational outcomes within and between schools, and how this is related to structural features of the schooling system, including the formal and informal mechanisms governing selection into particular schools and school programs.

An important aim of large-scale studies is to discern the extent of inequalities in schooling outcomes among ethnic and social class groups and between the sexes. Some international studies provide information on students' opportunity to learn, including the amount of time devoted to instruction, teachers' expectations for achievement, the quality of teaching, and the human and material resources devoted to schooling. They also provide comparative data on the extent to which student performance is related to the intended or official curriculum of the state vis-à-vis the curriculum that is actually taught in the classroom.

DR. J. DOUGLAS WILLMS
CANADIAN RESEARCH INSTITUTE
FOR SOCIAL POLICY

MEASURING THE SUCCESS OF CANADA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

There are many ways to measure the success of Canada's education system. And while we always have to remember that we are talking about 13 school systems with significant differences, Canada's achievements as a nation, compared to other industrialized western countries, are quite impressive. Like all countries, however, Canadian education systems also have some considerable challenges to resolve. This section offers an overview of how Canada "measures up" on some important education indicators and provides readers with a variety of resources that they can use to locate further information.

Student Achievement

Students in Canada regularly achieve higher outcomes than students from many other OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. Results of the most recent OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), for example, show that 15-year-old students in Canada:

- Outperformed students in all but two (Hong Kong-China and Finland) of the 41 participating countries in mathematics.^{ix}
- Continue to perform very well in reading; the overall achievement of Canadian students was significantly above the OECD average and only students in Finland outperformed Canadian students.
- Performed well above the OECD average in science and problem solving. However, "relative to Canada's position in mathematics and reading, Canadian students did not perform as strongly in these two domains. Four countries performed significantly better than Canada in both science and problem solving. Eight countries performed as well as Canada in science and seven countries performed as well as Canada in problem solving."^x

While all provinces performed at or above the OECD average in mathematics overall, there were some notable provincial differences. Students in Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec performed as well as those from the top performing countries, while students from Newfoundland and Labrador, Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Saskatchewan performed below the Canadian average.^{xi}

In many cases, youth in Canada also perform well on national School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP) assessments (designed to measure the overall effectiveness of school science, literacy and mathematics programs), although the performance of 16-year-olds – especially in mathematics and problem solving measures – suggest that students begin to encounter challenges when they start to work with high school curricula.

- Science 2004: 71% of 13-year-olds and 64% of 16-year-olds reached expected levels on the 2004 science assessment.
- Writing 2002: 84% of 13-year-olds and 61% of 16-year-olds reached expected levels.
- Mathematics 2001: 64% of 13-year-olds and 50% of 16-year-olds reached expectations in mathematics content areas while 68% of 13-year-olds and 47% of 16-year-olds met expectations in mathematical problem solving.^{xii}

Similar to trends appearing in international assessments, there are significant regional differences in student achievement across Canada. In the 2004 SAIP science assessment for example, 13-year-olds in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, Yukon, and the Northwest Territories, as well as French-speaking students in Manitoba and Ontario performed under the Canadian average.^{xiii}

High School Completion

High school completion rates in Canada improved significantly during the 1990s. As the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) recently reported, the percentage of Canadians aged 20 to 24 who did not complete high school, and who are no longer attending school, dropped from 17% in 1990/91 to 9% in 2005/06. In an age where the successful transition from school to work is highly dependent on youth obtaining at least a high school diploma, an increase in Canada's high school completion rate is a strong indicator of improvement. And while students in Canada are more likely to complete high school than students from the United States, Germany and France, they are less likely to do so than students in nine other industrialized countries, including several in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe, the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Austria.^{xiv}

In addition to gauging high school completion through overall graduation rates, our understanding of the characteristics of students who do not complete high school in Canada has grown considerably since the 1990s. The following points provide a picture of youth in Canada who disengage from high school before graduation:

- The number of young women who graduate from high school is significantly higher than the number of young men.

- There are significant provincial and territorial differences in drop out rates; in 1999, drop out rates ranged from a low of just over 7% in Saskatchewan to just over 16% in Quebec and Prince Edward Island.
- Drop out rates are consistently higher across the country outside of large urban centres; in 2004/05, "the dropout rates were seven percentage points lower in cities than in Canada's small towns and rural villages."^{xv}
- A disproportionate number of Canadian students living in poverty, youth with disabilities, and youth from visible minority and Aboriginal communities experience disengagement from secondary school.^{xvi}

Finally, the national picture of high school non-completion rates takes on a new meaning when the participation of Canadian young adults (aged 20 to 24) in "second chance" programs is accounted for. In 2002, Statistics Canada reported the first results from its longitudinal 1999 Youth in Transition survey, which showed that the majority (85% or 341,000) of Canadian youth had graduated from high school by age 20 and a further 8.9% of the 48,441 twenty-year-olds who had dropped out of high school in earlier years were enrolled in or had completed some type of post-secondary education, including CEGEP, college, trade, vocational programs, or other courses above the high school level by 1999.^{xvii}

Participation in Post-Secondary Education

Canada continues to have one of the highest international rates of participation in post-secondary education (PSE). In 2004 the number of 20 to 24-year-olds in Canada enrolled in university, community college and other post-secondary programs exceeded rates in the United States and the United Kingdom. In the same year, however, Canada's PSE rate for this age group fell "slightly below the OECD average country mean of 41%."^{xviii}

Data from 2004 also show that approximately 22% of working-age Canadians had completed a university degree and a further 22% had completed a college or vocational program. The benefits of PSE in Canada are unquestionable; in 2001 over 80% of adults who had completed post-secondary education were active in the labour force, compared to just under 50% who had only completed high school.

Apprenticeship programs also grew in number across Canada during the 1990s. In 2002, there were 234,500 registered apprentices in Canada (30% more than in 1992). As with the university sector where 6 in every 10 graduates are women, however, gender gaps continue to characterize enrolments in apprenticeship programs where in 2002, only 9% of registered apprentices were women.^{xix}

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION IN CANADA—THE 2007 CEA SURVEY

Over the past thirty years, the Canadian Education Association has conducted periodic surveys of public attitudes toward education in Canada. The 2007 Survey of Public Attitudes Toward Public Education in Canada is the fourth in a series of surveys conducted in 1979, 1984 and 1990.

The questions we have asked through our national surveys have changed over time, but their purpose has remained the same. With each survey we have set out to explore Canadian opinions about the quality of elementary and secondary (K-12) education, to monitor how these opinions change over time, and to publish the results to stimulate ongoing public dialogue about public policy in education and Canadians' commitment to building vibrant and successful public education systems across the country.

The 2007 CEA Survey grew out of a partnership with a research team at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT) who have conducted regular surveys of public attitudes toward education in Ontario since 1978. The results of the 2007 OISE/UT survey may be found at: www.oise.utoronto.ca/OISE-Survey

The 2007 CEA Survey involved a representative³ random sample of 2441 adults (18 years of age or over) with or without children currently enrolled in an elementary and/or secondary school. Both the national (CEA) and Ontario (OISE/UT) surveys were administered by the Institute for Social Research at York University who interviewed all participants by telephone between January and May 2007. A response rate of 52% was obtained.

In all cases, participants were asked a series of questions related to basic dimensions of public attitudes toward education (see Appendix A for the complete list of questions), such as satisfaction with schools and the job teachers are doing, perceptions of changes in the quality of elementary and secondary education, views on the adequacy of funding for schools, opinions about different aspects of education governance, and their orientations to educational change.

The remainder of this section presents a summary of findings from the 2007 CEA Survey through the discussion of five themes that emerged from our analysis of the data. Following a brief description, each theme is described in detail from a national perspective and accompanied by information on the similarities and/or differences we observed in regional opinions. Wherever possible, we have also included additional information for each theme by referring to previous CEA surveys and other national surveys that have polled Canadians on their attitudes toward education. To demonstrate the types of discussion that can emerge from this data, we also invited educators from different regions of the country to comment on the findings. These commentaries appear throughout this section and are drawn together in the conclusion as we offer some final reflections on the future of public education in Canada.

3 Canadians in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and Yukon were not polled because of our lack of resources to poll in languages other than English and French, and the low population density of the Territories.

■ VIEWS ABOUT EDUCATION ARE REMARKABLY SIMILAR ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Given that Canada has 13 provincial and territorial education systems, and a variety of federal, provincial and local approaches to education for Canada's First Nations and Inuit children and youth, one might expect significant regional differences among survey respondents. It is heartening that the 2007 CEA Survey revealed some remarkably similar views across the country, especially in the areas of teaching, learning, and overall satisfaction with teachers and the school system.

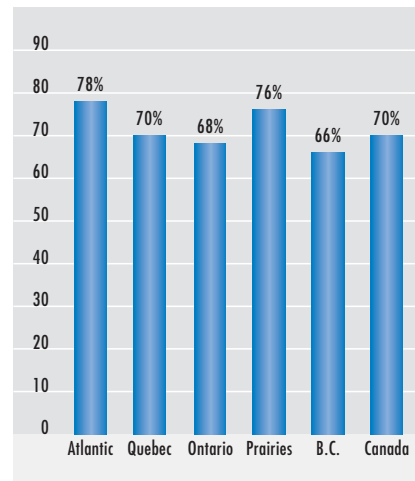
As a general comment, we were surprised by the similarity of views held by adults with children currently enrolled in elementary and secondary schools and those who did not. We often hear that adults without children in school tend to hold different views and have lower levels of commitment to public education; and while this perception held true in a couple of areas,⁴ results of the 2007 CEA Survey revealed that the gap between these two groups is not nearly as wide as we commonly think it is.

⁴ These two areas were: 1) willingness to serve on a local school council and 2) levels of interest and participation in educational issues.

Teaching

Canadians in all regions share a high level of satisfaction with the jobs teachers are doing in elementary and secondary schools and are consistently more satisfied with teachers than with school systems in general. Although satisfaction levels with teachers' work is somewhat higher in the Atlantic (78%) and Prairie (76%) provinces, 70% of Canadians agree that teachers are doing a good job.

FIGURE 2: % Canadians very or somewhat satisfied with the jobs teachers are doing



THE TEACHING PROFESSION IN CANADA



The Canadian Teachers' Federation is pleased with the results of the CEA survey showing the high degree of satisfaction Canadians have with teachers. This survey supports the findings of the Léger Marketing public opinion poll in May 2007, which showed that 89% of Canadians and 93% of students trust teachers. Teaching was reported as the fourth most trusted profession of 23 professions about which Canadians were surveyed. Léger has conducted the same survey in each of the last five years.

The consistent support shown for teacher assigned marks as the source for school grades is also gratifying. Constant criticism of education in Canada from groups with their own biases (such as the Fraser Institute and the Atlantic Institute of Market Studies) has left Canadians questioning what to believe. These surveys show that the hard work of teachers has earned public confidence. Research done by CTF and its Member organizations corroborates these results.

Teachers work to maintain trust and respect. They value relationships with communities, especially with parents. Studies have clearly indicated that positive relationships teachers maintain create better learning conditions for students. We believe that it is also one of the contributing factors that place Canada's education systems among the top three in the world.

DR. CALVIN FRASER
SECRETARY GENERAL
CANADIAN TEACHERS' FEDERATION

STUDENT ASSESSMENT IN CANADA



Large-scale assessments provide common measures that allow systems and schools to see where they are and make focused plans for improvement. Classroom assessments, especially when they are used to determine what students need to do and learn next, can be a powerful lever for changing teaching practices and enhancing student learning.

In the absence of high quality information from schools that the public has confidence in, they will continue to support large-scale standard measures of student achievement. Parents value classroom assessments and understand that teachers are uniquely positioned to see the complexity of learning for each student. However, they do not always have confidence in the objectivity or fairness of the results. This places an enormous responsibility on teachers to provide high quality information that the public can trust, and makes it essential that school districts develop effective systems of classroom assessment that are defensible and fair for all students.

Large-scale assessments and classroom assessments done by teachers both make important contributions to continuous improvement in education. It is important that we continue to support both approaches and ensure that both forms of assessment provide high quality information that the public can have confidence in and value as fair representations of students' learning.

DR. LORNA EARL
DIRECTOR, APORIA CONSULTING LTD.

Student Assessment

Beginning in the 1990s, province-wide assessment systems became common in many provinces across Canada. Assessment strategies vary, but most provinces now have systems in place for measuring and reporting on student achievement in literacy and mathematics at the school, school district and provincial levels.

As part of the 2007 CEA Survey, we asked Canadians to share their views on provincial secondary student assessment systems and observed a high level of agreement across regions. There is strong public support (77%) across the country for province-wide high school graduation exams (FIGURE 3). A 2006 survey conducted by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) also indicates that support for large-scale provincial, national and international achievement tests is strong among respondents with recent direct

experience with Canadian schools. As CCL reports, three-quarters (75%) of Canadians "agree that tests measure vital aspects of learning and help schools to provide better instruction" while two-thirds (66%) agree that they "are a good tool to hold schools accountable for their performance."^{xx}

Data reported by the CCL indicated that 60% of Canadians view large-scale assessments as "better measures of student achievement than teacher-assigned grades,"^{xxi} but the 2007 CEA Survey, which polled adults with and without children currently enrolled in Canadian schools, revealed that a clear majority (60%) believe that teacher assessments should continue to be the source of high school grades (FIGURE 4). This is a finding that we take to suggest Canadians' general agreement that parallel provincial and classroom-based student assessment systems should be maintained.

FIGURE 3: High school students should be assessed using province-wide tests (% Agree)

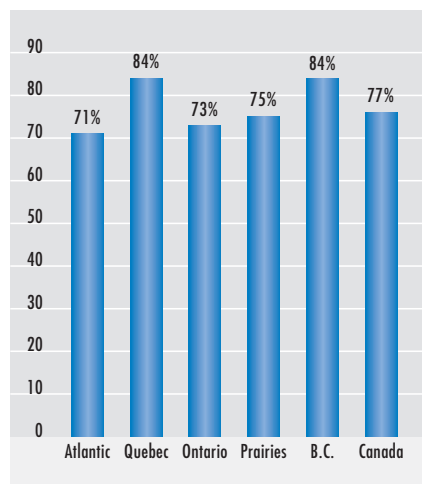
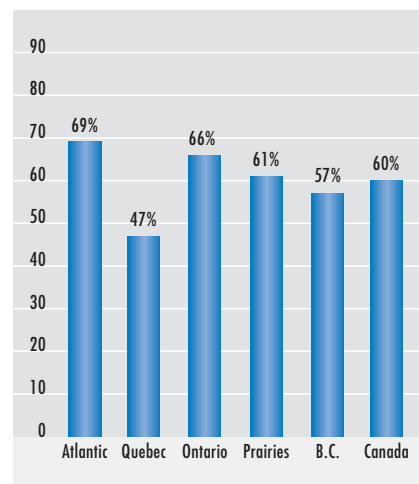


FIGURE 4: High school grades should mainly reflect teachers' assessments (% Agree)





WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

Given that most Canadian adults have been through the education system, are greatly influenced by their own experiences as students or as parents, and seem to support the general notion of change, a question that emerges for me is: what are the changes that they believe are necessary?

Based upon conversations that I have had with fellow parents, as well as survey results in my own school division, my feeling is that many adults, regardless of the successes they may have had in their own schooling, have a growing sense that the skills and sensibilities required for success in the adult world are changing. As a result, many believe changes are necessary, but are unsure of what they need to be – New thinking? A return to basics? And how will we know if we are successful?

Firstly, we need renewed conversations at the local, provincial, and national level about the larger context for schooling; what are the characteristics of the better world we wish to create? I believe that it is only through these conversations that a new consensus for significant change can occur. Secondly, as a body of professionals, we educators need to gain our voice and lead. During the past 20 years, a significant body of experiential knowledge has been developed that identifies what works in educational and organizational change. In the absence of sound moral and research-based leadership, systems will continue to lurch from one reform initiative to another gaining the cynicism that they richly deserve. In the absence of sound moral and research-based leadership, simplistic notions of external accountability will be imposed upon us and take us to where we do not want to go.

DUANE BROTHERS
SUPERINTENDENT-CEO
SUNRISE SCHOOL DIVISION, MANITOBA

TABLE 3: Extent of need to find new ways of doing things in elementary and secondary schools

Area of schooling	Significant change required (%)	Some change required (%)
Learning in elementary schools	55	30
Learning in high schools	58	32
Connections between learning in and outside of school	58	29
Learning outcomes	62	30
Addressing differences in student abilities	55	32
Addressing inequities in educational outcomes for different social groups	60	27

Educational Change

Canadians in all regions are divided in their views on the success of educational change over the past ten years (SEE PAGE 14). Amid these differences, however, we also noted a number of areas where Canadians are in strong agreement. An overwhelming number of Canadians are more likely to react positively to new ideas for schools if there is evidence of their success in experiments (83%) or on a large scale in other schools (89%). These views stand in sharp contrast to the 44% of Canadians who indicate that they would be much more or somewhat more likely to react positively to new ideas for schools based exclusively on provincial government support for the idea.

When it comes to factors most likely to shape Canadians' views about how schools should be run, named their own experiences as a parent (70%) or student (51%) as very important, while the influence of the media (TV, radio and newspapers, magazines or books) was most commonly identified as somewhat important.

In addition to favouring evidence and experience-based ideas for schools, Canadians also favour a balanced approach to educational change. TABLE 3 illustrates a national trend toward attitudes that favour maintaining an equal focus on improvement in all areas of schooling; views which may draw some momentum from Cana-

dian beliefs that the success of educational change over the past ten years has been mixed (38%) or unsuccessful (24%).

■ SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOLS IS GENERALLY HIGH ACROSS CANADA, BUT THERE IS ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

If you were to evaluate the quality of schools in your local community, would they receive top grades or a failing mark? We asked Canadians to give their community schools a grade from A to F and found that assessments of the quality of elementary and secondary schools across the country were generally high. One third of Canadians feel their local schools are average (a C grade), and while 42% gave their schools a B grade, only 6% chose A, which suggests that there is significant room for improvement.

Since CEA first asked Canadians to grade their local schools in 1979, schools have received passing grades. The proportion of A grades fell sharply between 1979 and 1990 from 19% to 6%, where it remains in 2007 (FIGURE 5) and yet, the majority of Canadians (between 65% and 75%) have consistently judged the quality of schools in their community as average (C) or above average (B) for the past 28 years.

Canadian Gallup Polls reported a similar trend during the 1980s when the number

EXPLORING PUBLIC ATTITUDES IN QUEBEC

The results of the 2007 CEA survey indicate that Canadians hold remarkably similar views about education. At the same time, however, we noticed that the views of Quebec residents were different from those in other parts of Canada in response to quite a few of the questions. We asked educational leaders in Quebec to share their thoughts on factors that might have contributed to these differences.

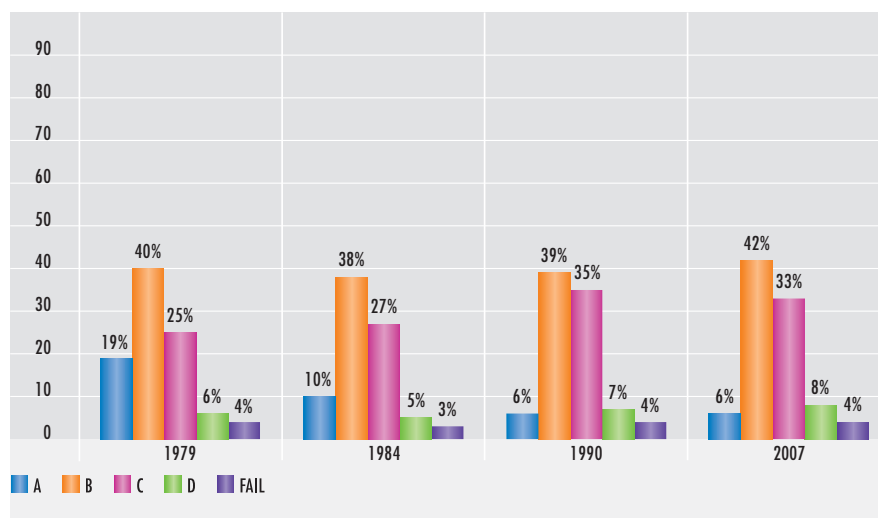
As a general comment, we were reminded that Quebec was in the midst of an election campaign from January to March 2007, a period that overlaps with the survey timeline. While the CEA Survey continued to May, education reform was frequently in the media spotlight during the election campaign, including a proposal by one party to abolish school boards in favour of shifting education governance to municipal governments.

In addition to this current context, it is important to consider the following:

- The impact of ten years of extensive and highly controversial education reform in Quebec, which reached the third grade of secondary school in 2007/08. Reforms have been debated extensively in the media and contested by teachers in a public way. We cannot assume that the high level of public debate surrounding these reforms is directly responsible for Quebecers' views about education, but we can theorize that they may be influential in Quebec residents' above average view that there have been too many changes in education and their generally negative perception of the success of these changes.
- The view of Quebec respondents that their provincial government has "too little" control over local education. While this might seem to contradict the point above, it was suggested that this view reflects Quebecers' strong cultural attachment to their public institutions and their role in building the province's capacity, and to confirm it as a distinct culture in Canada. This notion is also reflected in Quebecers' higher than average confidence in their school systems, which reflects an overall belief in the longer-term sustainability and effectiveness of improvement in education.

Relative to the views expressed in other regions, Quebec respondents were the least likely to support increased government spending on education or increased taxes for education, a finding which may be explained by the reality that Quebec residents pay the highest taxes in Canada and direct higher than average funding to education.

FIGURE 5: Public grading of community schools: 1979-2007 comparisons



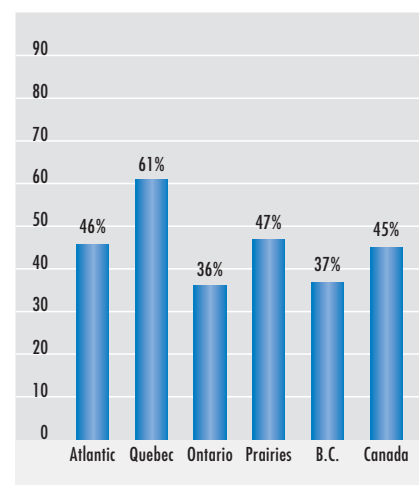
of Canadians who gave their schools an A or B dropped dramatically between 1979 and 1986,^{xxii} and the proportion of Canadians satisfied with education in general reached a low of 35% in 1992.^{xxiii}

We also asked Canadians about their overall satisfaction with their local schools and school systems. When compared with the results of earlier CEA surveys, we found that satisfaction levels have generally improved in the past fifteen years with 60% of Canadians reporting in 2007 that they are very or somewhat satisfied with school systems in general. At the same time, we are observing an opposite trend in Canadians' level of confidence in public schools since 1984 – when 76% of Canadians reported a great deal or fair amount of confidence – public confidence fell a full 31% to 45% in 2007 (FIGURE 6). This upward trend in satisfaction and downward trend in confidence suggests that Canadians generally believe school systems are improving, but are largely unsure about the sustainability of improvements over time.

Within this national picture of public satisfaction and confidence, it is important to note some significant regional differences. Since 1984, Canadians living in British Columbia and Quebec have consistently

reported lower levels of satisfaction with schools and the school system than those living in the Prairie provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba. And while British Columbians' satisfaction levels persist through modest levels of confidence (37%) in public schools, those in Quebec show a strong contrast – Quebecers have the lowest level of satisfaction and the highest level of confidence in schools in the country, an interesting combination of opinion that we explore further in the adjacent commentary.

FIGURE 6: % Canadians with a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in provincial public schools



CONFIDENCE IN PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP FOR EDUCATION IS GENERALLY LOW

We also asked participants to tell us how confident they are in provincial government leadership for education. Few (19%) Canadians have a lot of confidence and respect in their provincial governments when it comes to educational policy, while close to half (45%) have some and a third (33%) have little or no confidence or respect. As illustrated in **FIGURE 7**, confidence levels in this area do vary by region from a high of 29% in Quebec and a low of 13% in Ontario who said they were confident, however the consistency of views is generally similar across the country.

Canadians' attitudes toward provincial governments in terms of educational policy reflect a national^{xxiv} and international trend toward a general decline of confidence in many institutions and organizations (**TABLE 4**). And while we cannot make direct comparisons between the 2007 CEA Survey and data from the World Values Survey, the two sets of data do point to some interesting questions about the nature of

public confidence in institutions in general and the complexity of understanding specific issues related to public confidence in government leadership through education policy. For example, to what extent are Canadians' views about government leadership influenced by: 1) competing interests in other public policy areas, 2) overall confidence and respect for incumbent provincial and territorial government leadership, or 3) overall confidence in Canada's ability to sustain its future performance in the global economy?

It is also interesting to note that Canadians' lack of confidence in provincial governments in terms of educational policy does not translate directly to a high level of dissatisfaction with provincial control of local education. Overall, 13% of Canadians indicated that they "couldn't say" whether provincial governments had too little or too much control over local education. Of the remaining 87%, however, 31% feel their provincial governments have about the right amount of control, 34% believe they have too much control, and 22% are of the opinion that they have too little control.

TABLE 4: World values survey: Canadians' confidence in different institutions and organizations^{xxv}

Confidence in different institutions and organizations (% with a great deal or a lot of confidence)					
	1990	2000		1990	2000
Churches	64	58	Labour Unions	35	35
Civil Services	49	49	Major Companies	51	53
Government	–	22	Media	46	35
Justice System	54	–	Political Parties	–	41

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN EDUCATION GOVERNANCE



Effective communications are essential for developing and maintaining a high degree of public confidence in the education system. The public expresses the highest satisfaction with public education when they have direct experience through their local schools. Confidence in the education system as a whole is, however, a much deeper concept. Often the public cannot distinguish the roles and responsibilities among schools, school boards, and provincial Departments or Ministries of Education. The public seems to perceive them as if they are loosely connected systems within a system, and cannot distinguish among them, especially when it comes to communication. We need to do a much better job of reaching out to each other and to our communities to engage them in a meaningful dialogue about our schools and our public education system.

We cannot underestimate the importance of community engagement as a source of public confidence. When we connect with school communities, ask genuine questions on issues that matter to them, and provide the tools and knowledge they need to be part of an informed dialogue, we build confidence in the system. Genuine public engagement will not guarantee consensus and this is okay if we believe that a wide diversity of opinions is the sign of a healthy democratic system. We stand to compromise public trust only when we fail to foster diverse views.

School systems and provincial governments also build public confidence when they help people learn how to effectively navigate and advocate for themselves within the system. In many ways we have become vested in "fixing the problem" or "putting out fires" as a way of building public confidence. This approach often has the opposite effect because it brings the stability and fairness of our systems into question and fosters adversarial relationships. It is a difficult balance to achieve, but we need to build public trust in our ability to meet the needs of individual students while also making sound strategic decisions that benefit all students.

As Canadians, we need to realize that now, more than ever, the performance of our education systems is important to us as a nation. It is important to know where we want our education systems to be for the success of individuals and the nation in the global economy. To build confidence in the collective picture of education in Canada, we need to know what matters to the public and then we have to use this knowledge to design indicators that allow us to regularly take the temperature of our public education systems both within and across jurisdictions.

HOWARD WINDSOR (SCHOOL BOARD)
AND CAROLE OLSEN (SUPERINTENDENT)
HALIFAX REGIONAL SCHOOL BOARD

BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS



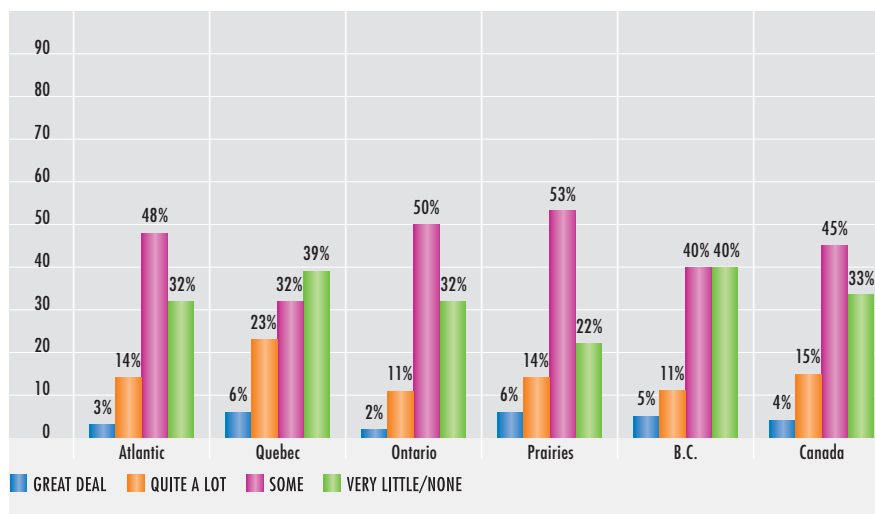
Public education rests on public confidence. Schools can only flourish where the population – not only parents, but also the entire community – believes that the system is performing well and helping students attain good educational outcomes. After all, we are asking people to trust us with their children, and to give us significant sums of money.

Many sources inform public judgments about the education system, but the most important are personal experience or the experience of others whom we value. This means that every interaction between schools, students, staff and the broader community affects public attitudes towards education – for better or worse. Like it or not, schools are in the public communications business.

Support for public education remains high among Canadians, especially in comparison to other institutions. In general, public confidence in institutions is declining – perhaps a result of the greater propensity to question things that results from increased levels of education. In that sense, more education probably makes it harder to build and sustain public confidence. While educators should be pleased with the degree of support we have, this support can never be taken for granted and must be built and rebuilt continually – hard, but vitally important work.

DR. BEN LEVIN
ONTARIO INSTITUTE FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION,
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

FIGURE 7: % Canadians with a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in educational policy



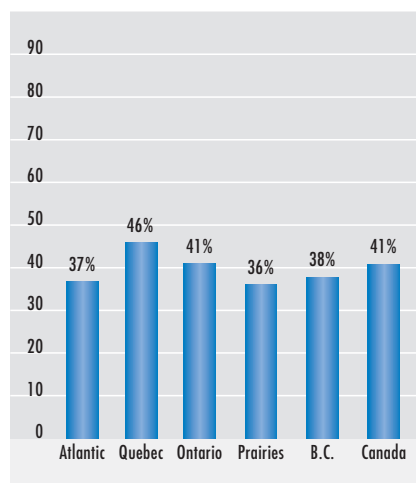
CANADIANS SHARE A STRONG COMMITMENT TO PUBLIC EDUCATION

Next to generally low levels of public confidence in provincial leadership for education, Canadians express a strong desire to have a greater say in how schools are run in all regions of the country. When compared to results from 1979 and 1984, there is a clear sense that Canadians feel their ability to influence education in their local communities has declined significantly over the past twenty years to a point where in

2007, more than 60% of residents in every province feel that they have “too little” say in local education decisions.

Four out of every ten (41%) Canadians also indicate that they are willing to serve on a local school council (FIGURE 8). This – along with a high degree of desire to have a greater say in how schools are run – suggests that many Canadians share a strong interest in contributing to decisions about local education. It also suggests that Canadians favour a variety of mechanisms – including school councils – for engaging in conversations or “having a say” in how their local schools are run.

FIGURE 8: % Canadians willing to serve on local school councils



Canadians’ strong commitment to public education is also revealed in the tremendous level of support for increased government spending on elementary and secondary schools. Almost three-quarters (72%) of Canadians believe provincial governments should be directing more financial resources to public schools (FIGURE 9).

Canadians’ support for increased funding to public education systems stands in sharp contrast to national attitudes toward government funding for private schools. Excluding the Prairie provinces, where 54% of residents support government funding

FIGURE 9: Support for increased government spending on public schools

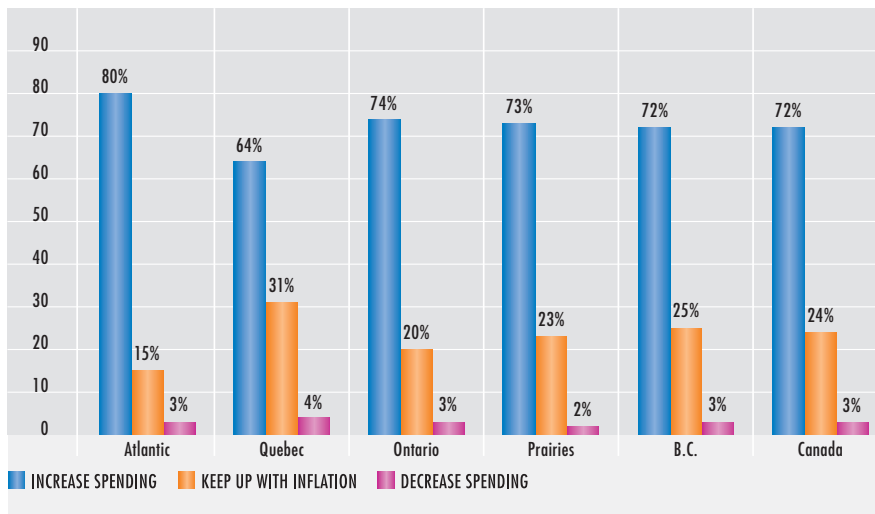
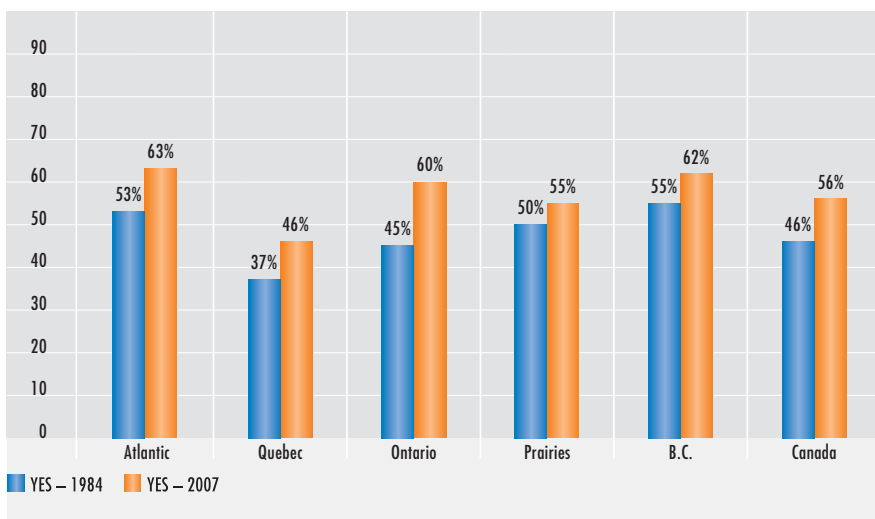


FIGURE 10: Willingness to pay more taxes (% Yes): 1984-2007 comparison



of all public and private schools, a minority (38%) of Canadians feel public funding should be extended to all private schools.

And while Canadians are generally divided in their willingness to pay increased taxes to finance education spending (FIGURE 10), a majority (between 55% and 63%) of residents – including an equal number of adults with and without school aged children – living outside of Quebec are willing to pay more taxes to support increased funding to schools. When this data is com-

pared to results of the 1984 CEA study, a national shift in attitudes toward taxes for education is revealed: accounting for variations in different regions, Canadians are at least 10% more likely to say they are willing to pay more taxes for education today than they were 22 years ago. And while this finding must be treated with caution, it can be taken to challenge political claims that a majority of Canadians are in favour of tax cuts, at least as far as education is concerned.

PARENT ENGAGEMENT



In November 2002 I was elected to the Vancouver School Board. Several months before, an equally important but much quieter event took place – my daughter started kindergarten. The juxtaposition of these experiences created a unique opportunity to reflect on how public education serves communities and individual learners.

At the time, B.C. had suffered from one billion dollars of educational services cut over a decade. The numbers were staggering. As a parent, I was angry that my daughter would have less opportunity than I, a child of the 1970s. As a trustee, I felt that I had failed the system. Along with the right of well-funded public education comes a responsibility for its defence.

So defend we did. Parents, teachers, principals, support staff, community groups, editorial pages sustained months of advocacy... and we won! Over our three-year tenure, hundreds of millions of dollars were restored.

This was lesson number one: the community is painfully aware that more funding is needed but successful advocacy requires leadership with a broad community mandate. Conversely, when elected officials fail to speak out, it is a significant abrogation of the community's expectation and trust.

The second lesson was harder to learn. The challenges multiplied with the money. This seemed an inevitable denouement; a shared struggle for funds had splintered into individual struggles. But the problem was actually much deeper; our fight to restore funding belied an assumption that the programs cut were still relevant while in reality some no longer were.

Which brings me to the final lesson: while the system can absorb failure, each parent only has one chance to support their children in meeting their unique potential. This most basic of parental instincts must be valued and responded to even as we study, peer-review, pilot and implement new programs.

There is a great deal of work to do to reach the potential of both the system and each individual learner. Supporting leadership and critically examining our practice – even as we fight for adequate funding and focusing on each learner as a test of our success – are critical ingredients for crafting a 21st century education system.

ANDREA REIMER
PARENT AND FORMER TRUSTEE
VANCOUVER SCHOOL BOARD

A DECADE OF REFORM IN CANADIAN PUBLIC EDUCATION



The results compiled on the opinions of Canadians regarding educational reforms implemented over the past ten years show that the public has heard about the vast changes that have taken place in the various public school systems across the country. It's noteworthy that few Canadians have sufficient information to realize the extent of these changes, since only 20% believe that the reforms were major.

In addition, the results indicate that the Canadian public is, so to speak, equally divided in its assessment of the impact of these reforms on students. This is particularly the case of high schools, since approximately 30% of respondents believe that the impacts were positive, 30% think they were neutral and 30% feel they were negative. As often happens in public opinion surveys, some results are indeed intriguing, as is the case in Quebec, where there is the largest proportion of respondents in Canada who thought that the changes introduced were going in the right direction (40%), while believing that the new approaches were not very successful (28%).

Moreover, opinion polls being what they are, which are a picture of what the “man or woman on the street” think, I'm surprised that opinions across Canada are so similar. In fact, I would have expected greater differences in opinion between the various provinces and regions, as well as within each region. I believe that this relative consistency can be explained by the fact that many of the respondents probably have little regular close contact with school communities and therefore do not know exactly what major reforms have taken place in the Canadian educational landscape in the past decade. What little they do know undoubtedly comes mostly from mainstream media, which is notably reflected in the responses given by survey participants in Quebec.

DR. CLAIRE LAPOINTE
DIRECTRICE, CENTRE DE RECHERCHE ET
D'INTERVENTION SUR LA RÉUSSITE SCOLAIRE

■ CANADIANS HAVE MIXED VIEWS ON EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

The 2007 CEA Survey introduced a new set of questions to gauge Canadians' beliefs about educational change from retrospective and forward-thinking perspectives. In both cases, Canadians are generally divided in their attitudes toward educational change.

The Direction of Change

A majority (89%) of Canadians are aware that changes have taken place in public schools over the past ten years, but tend to hold different views about the extent of change. Three in ten Canadians say they have seen minor (31%) or moderate (29%) changes while a further two in ten (20%) feel changes in schools have been major (FIGURE 11).

Canadians in all regions are also largely divided on the scale and direction of provincial governments' attempts to change schools:

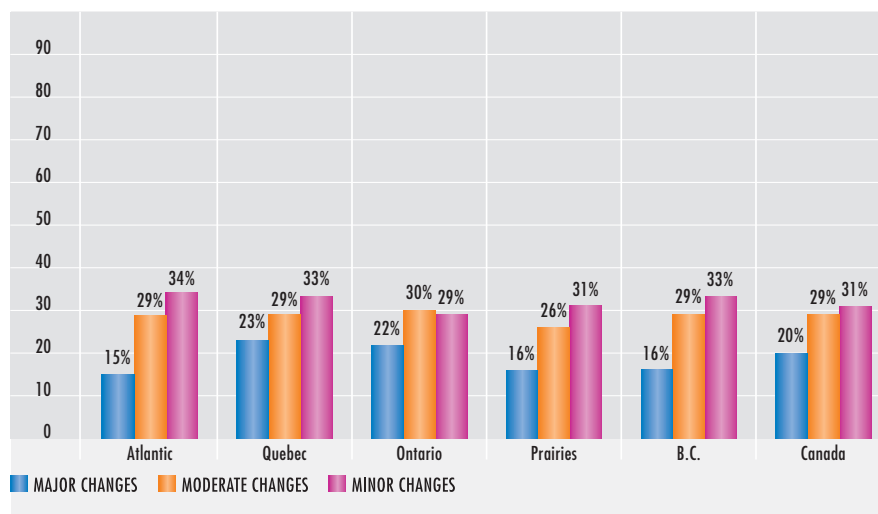
- Few Canadians (20%) rate provincial approaches to change as “about right,” and on either side of this view are beliefs that governments have introduced either too many (33%) or too few (40%)

changes over the past ten years.

- 54% of Canadians believe educational change has been a mix of initiatives headed in the right and wrong directions. At a regional level, more residents in the Atlantic and Prairie provinces had mixed views about the direction of change and were least likely to assess changes to schools as heading in the wrong direction, while residents in Quebec were the most decided on the direction of change, with only 39% holding mixed views and significant number (40%) feeling that changes were heading in right direction; a full 13% above the national average of 27%.

Over one-third of Canadians (38%) are uncertain about the success of changes to public schools in the last decade, but a third (33%) also believe changes have been somewhat successful in contrast to a much lower number (18%) who rate the overall success of change as somewhat unsuccessful. In this case, however, Canadians' evaluations of educational change shift considerably if we account for regional differences. In the province of Quebec, where residents are most likely to agree

FIGURE 11: Perceived change in the way schools operate over the past 10 years



that educational change is heading in the right direction, it is interesting to note an opposite trend in residents' views on the implementation of these changes: Quebeckers are less than half as likely (16% compared to a national average of 40%) to evaluate the changes they have seen in schools as somewhat successful and almost twice as likely to evaluate them as unsuccessful (28% compared to a national average of 15%).

In reflecting on improvements to the quality of education in elementary and secondary schools over the past ten years, Canadians in all regions are also divided:

- Across Canada, 34% of Canadians believe that the quality of education

received by elementary students improved a little (26%) or a lot (8%) in the last 10 years. A further 27% feel the quality of education has remained the same or worsened (31%). A significantly higher proportion of Quebeckers feel that it worsened a little (32%) or a lot (12%) compared to all other regions in the country.

- A similar percentage (28%) of Canadians believe the quality of education received by high school students improved in the last 10 years and are equally divided on whether the quality of high school education remained the same (30%) or worsened (29%).

THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION IN CANADA



In 2002-2003, Alberta undertook a major review of education in the province. A nine-person commission, supported by staff and expert advisors, engaged the public and educational stakeholders in a dialogue to set the course of public education in Alberta for the next 20 years.

We heard from countless individuals and organizations and completed a comprehensive review of research on a wide range of topics, with a goal to look beyond the issues of today and to think of the skills, knowledge, programs and supports children need to succeed, now and in the future; a future that could be very different from what we see today.

There was strong public acknowledgement of the following:

- Public education is the most important investment we can make as a society. Our education system not only shapes individual students' lives, it shapes the very nature of our society. A strong and vibrant public education system is critical to develop social cohesion and the kind of civil society we need for the future.
- The education system must start and end with children and youth. Schools are not there for teachers or administrators, or for parents, or for businesses or government. The first and only criterion for judging the success of schools and the education system should be how well every child learns, and how every child succeeds.
- It is critical to look beyond the pressing issues of today and prepare for the future. The best approach is to ensure that our education system remains flexible, resilient and able to anticipate and adapt to a climate of perpetual change.
- Education will become more critical to individuals, their communities and the country as a whole, with the growing importance of skills, knowledge and ideas required in a global economy.

Our Canadian provinces have excellent education systems, as rated against OECD countries. We have a strong public education system open to all children; however, the public wants more of our educational systems. They want to build on our successes and ensure nothing short of excellence in the future. Financial and human resources will be required to bring this vision to reality.

PATRICIA MACKENZIE
CHAIR, ALBERTA COMMISSION ON LEARNING

REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE EDUCATION OF CANADA

Canadians in all regions are divided and often uncertain about the scale and impact of change in schools over the past ten years. In this context, it is not surprising that Canadians expressed a strong, but temperate appetite for further change. In views that are very consistent across the country, 46% of Canadians believe moderate changes are required to fix problems with education systems in their province and the remainder are split between support for minor (21%) and major (27%) change.

Canadians share a relatively high level of satisfaction with schools and school systems across the country and are largely in agreement that some change is required, but not a lot. Alongside this modest appetite for change is a strong sentiment that there is a great deal of room for improvement at the school, school district and provincial government levels of our education systems. This sentiment is

echoed in several of the commentaries that appear throughout this report and in the works of many Canadian and international authors who write about the dramatic difference that the modern context of schooling makes in how we view the outcomes of education for individuals and society as a whole.

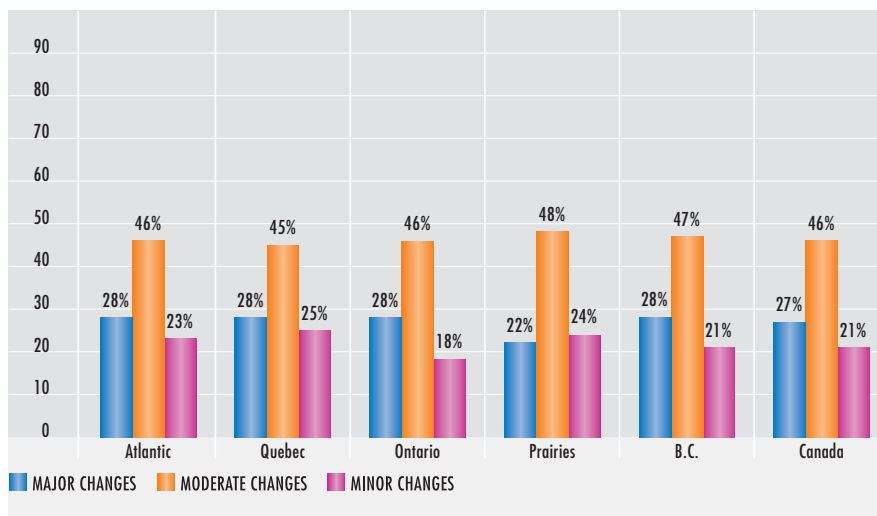
In addition to sharing his commentary in this report, Ben Levin reminded us that, “public opinion polls tell us what people think, but don’t necessarily tell us what to do.” The results of this report are an important snapshot of Canadians’ current attitudes toward public education and contribute to what Howard Windsor and Carole Olsen of the Halifax Regional School Board refer to as “the collective picture of education in Canada.” To also become valuable in helping us to define a way forward for education in Canada, however, the results need to be drawn into a larger


conversation that also includes the views of children and youth, and the insights of provocative educational research that allows us to imagine how we might think about learning and schooling in radically different ways.

In Canada, like many other industrialized nations, school systems provide all children and youth with equal opportunities, but produce unequal outcomes. Our educational challenge is to create schools and school systems that achieve equal opportunity and good outcomes for *all* students. Canadians’ strong commitment to public education and their desire to have a greater say in decision-making is an incredible asset in overcoming this challenge – we cannot have a thriving public education system without an interested public. At the same time, however, we have to overcome a tendency in education – and many other public policy areas – to think about change as a process of improving what we have, rather than a process of discovering new and novel ideas for transformation. As Gordon Martell observes in his commentary on new forms of governance for First Nations’ education in Canada: sometimes the only way forward is through “the continued development of new and innovative responses” that force “antiquated structures and one size fits all educational delivery models” to give way to a variety of local and regional ideas grounded in the vision and capacity of communities.

In sharing findings from the 2003 Final Report of the Alberta Commission on Learning, Patricia MacKenzie reports that the public strongly acknowledged that:

FIGURE 12: Degree of change necessary to fix educational problems by region





"public education is the most important investment we can make as a society. Our education system not only shapes individual student's lives, it shapes the very nature of our society. A strong and vibrant public education system is critical to develop social cohesion and the kind of civil society we need for the future." If these beliefs hold true across the country, and we think they do, we need to grasp Canada's education challenge as something that matters to all Canadians, identify strategies to revitalize citizens' roles in education, and create the conditions for thoughtful dialogue about the future of education in Canada that we desire for our children and for ourselves.

■ We end by offering a set of questions that arose while we were writing this report in place of a set of conclusions in the hopes that they stir readers to explore ways of using the different sections of this report to inspire new conversations about education.

- When it comes to education, what matters most to Canadians?
- Does Canada have a clear picture of what a good school system is?
- What are the goals of our education systems in the 21st century?
- Who should decide what children and youth in Canada learn?
- How can useful education research be shared effectively with the public?
- What ideas do people trust when it comes to education, and how do they come to trust new ideas?
- How can schools and school systems continually build and rebuild public confidence?
- What are the most effective strategies for engaging the public in genuine dialogue about education in Canada?

APPENDIX A – PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARD EDUCATION IN CANADA – THE 2007 CEA SURVEY

QUESTIONS

Satisfaction/Confidence Questions

- How satisfied are you with the school system IN GENERAL? (very, somewhat, neither, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, can't say)
- How satisfied are you with [PROVINCE] ELEMENTARY and HIGH SCHOOLS when it comes to the job teachers are doing? (very, somewhat, neither, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied, can't say)
- Over the past ten years, do you think the quality of education received by students in [PROVINCE] ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS, has improved a great deal, improved a little, remained the same, worsened a little, worsened a great deal, can't say?
- The quality of education received by students in [PROVINCE] HIGH SCHOOLS improved a great deal, improved a little, remained the same, worsened a little, worsened a great deal, can't say?
- Students are often given the grades A, B, C, D, or Fail to indicate the quality of their work. If the public schools in your community were graded in the same way, what grade would you give them?
- What degree of change do you feel is necessary to fix problems with the educational system in your province and make it work for people? (no changes, minor changes, moderate changes, major changes, can't say)
- How much respect and confidence do you have in the public schools in your province? (great deal, quite a lot, some, very little/none, can't say)
- And how much respect and confidence do you have for your provincial government when it comes to educational policy? (great deal, quite a lot, some, very little/none, can't say)

Educational Finance Questions

- What would you like to see happen to TOTAL government spending? (increase greatly, increase somewhat, keep up with inflation, decrease somewhat, decrease greatly, can't say)
- What about government spending for ELEMENTARY and HIGH SCHOOLS? (increase greatly, increase somewhat, keep up with inflation, decrease somewhat, decrease greatly, can't say)

- Would you be willing to pay more taxes to support education in [PROVINCE]? (yes, no, can't say)


- Provided the schools meet province-wide standards, what schools do you think should be given government funding? (only currently funded public, all public and private)

School Governance Questions

- Overall do you think that the Provincial government now has far too little, somewhat too little, about the right amount, somewhat too much, or far too much control over local education?
- Do you feel the public has too much say, enough say, or too little say about how schools are run?
- If asked today, would you definitely, probably, probably not or definitely not serve on a local school council?

Innovation Questions

- Over the past 10 years, would you say that there has been no real change, minor changes, moderate changes, or major changes in the way that schools in [PROVINCE] operate?
- Over the past 10 years, would you say government and school authorities have tried to make far too many, somewhat too many, about the right number, somewhat too few, or far too few changes in the province's schools?
- On balance, would you say most of these attempts to make changes in schools have been in the definitely right direction, probably right, some right some wrong, probably wrong, or definitely wrong direction?
- Regardless of whether you think these changes were in the right or wrong direction, given their goals, would you say they were very successful, somewhat successful, some successful/some unsuccessful, somewhat unsuccessful, or very unsuccessful?
- How much need is there, if any, to find new ways of doing things when it comes to each of the following? (great deal, quite a lot, some, a little, no need, can't say)
 - Help students learn in elementary classrooms:
 - Learn in high school classes
 - Link school and outside learning
 - Decide what is important to learn
 - Handle differences in student abilities
 - Handle different outcomes for social groups



■ When you read or hear new ideas about how things might be done in our schools and school system, would you say your first reaction is very positive, somewhat positive, neutral, somewhat negative, very negative, can't say?

■ How much more likely would you be to react positively to a new idea if:

- your provincial government favoured the idea?
- teachers groups favoured the idea?
- parents groups favoured the idea?
- group you trusted favoured the idea?
- parents you know favoured the idea?
- the idea had been tried out successfully in an experiment?
- the idea had been tried out successfully on a large scale?

■ How important have each of the following been in shaping your views about how schools should be run?

- Own experiences as student
- Own experiences as parent
- Newspapers, magazines, books
- TV and radio
- Talk with friends, neighbours, coworkers

Testing Questions

■ Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with each of the following statements:

- Province-wide tests should be used to assess the performance of each high school student.
- High school students' final grades should mainly reflect their teachers' assessments not the results of province-wide tests.
- Students should have to pass a provincial examination in each compulsory subject in order to graduate from high school.

ENDNOTES

- i Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (no date). Education in Canada. Accessed on September 12, 2007 at (<http://www.cmec.ca/international/educationcanada.en.pdf>)
- ii The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, retrieved on September 12, 2007 at (http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/pr/pub/ywtk/index_e.html#fep)
- iii Government of British Columbia and the First Nations Education Steering Committee (2006). *News Release – B.C. and First Nations Sign Education Agreement*. Accessed on October 1, 2007 at (http://www2.news.gov.bc.ca/news_releases_2005-2009/2006OTP0117-000907.htm)
- iv British Columbia Assembly of First Nations (2005). *Transformative Change Accord*. Accessed on October 1, 2007 at (http://www.bcafn.ca/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=179&Itemid=29)
- v Statistics Canada (2007). *The Daily, August 30, 2007: Public School Indicators*. Accessed on September 12, 2007 at (<http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/070830/d070830d.htm>). For detailed information see Statistics Canada (2007). *Summary Public School Indicators for the Provinces and Territories, 1998/1999 to 2004/2005* at (<http://www.statcan.ca:80/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=81-595-MIE2007050>)
- vi Blouin, P. and Courchesne, M-J (2007) *Summary Public School Indicators for the Provinces and Territories, 1998/1999 to 2004/2005*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada – Culture, Tourism and the Centre for Education Statistics Division. Accessed on September 20, 2007 at: (<http://www.statcan.ca/english/research/81-595-MIE/81-595-MIE2007050.pdf>)
- vii Statistics Canada (2007). *The Daily, August 30, 2007: Public School Indicators*. Accessed on September 12, 2007 at (<http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/070830/d070830d.htm>). For detailed information see Statistics Canada (2007). *Summary Public School Indicators for the Provinces and Territories, 1998/1999 to 2004/2005* at (<http://www.statcan.ca:80/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=81-595-MIE2007050>)
- viii Statistics Canada (2007). *The Daily, August 30, 2007: Public School Indicators*. Accessed on September 12, 2007 at (<http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/070830/d070830d.htm>). For detailed information see Statistics Canada (2007). *Summary Public School Indicators for the Provinces and Territories, 1998/1999 to 2004/2005* at (<http://www.statcan.ca:80/bsolc/english/bsolc?catno=81-595-MIE2007050>)
- ix Statistics Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2003) *Measuring up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study – The Performance of Canada's Youth in Mathematics, Reading, Science and Problem Solving. First Findings for Canadians aged Fifteen*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. (<http://www.cmec.ca/pisa/2003/highlights.en.pdf>)
- x Statistics Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2003) *Measuring up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study – The Performance of Canada's Youth in Mathematics, Reading, Science and Problem Solving. First Findings for Canadians aged Fifteen*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. (<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-004-XIE/200412/pisa.htm#c>)
- xi Statistics Canada and the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2003) *Measuring up: Canadian Results of the OECD PISA Study – The Performance of Canada's Youth in Mathematics, Reading, Science and Problem Solving. First Findings for Canadians aged Fifteen*. Ottawa: Statistics Canada. (<http://www.cmec.ca/pisa/2003/highlights.en.pdf>)
- xii Information on the School Achievement Indicators Program and reports for all subject areas are available on the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada website – (<http://www.cmec.ca/pcap/indexe.stm>)
- xiii Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (2005). *Science in Canadian Schools 2004*. Accessed on September 15, 2007 at (<http://www.cmec.ca/pcap/science3/public/highlights.en.pdf>)
- xiv Canadian Council on Learning (2007). *State of Learning in Canada – No Time for Complacency*. Ottawa: CCL, p. 37 Accessed on September 15, 2007 at (http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/5ECAAE9-D5E4-43B9-94E4-84D6D31BC5BC/0/NewSOLR_Report.pdf)
- xv Canadian Council on Learning (2007). *State of Learning in Canada – No Time for Complacency*. Ottawa: CCL, p. 37 Accessed on September 15, 2007 at (http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/5ECAAE9-D5E4-43B9-94E4-84D6D31BC5BC/0/NewSOLR_Report.pdf)
- xvi Audas, R. and Willms, J.D. (2001). Engagement and Dropping Out of School: A Life-Course Perspective. Accessed on January 8, 2007 at (<http://www11.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/hrsdcrb/publications/research/2001-000175/SP-483-01-02E.pdf>); Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2006) *Improving Primary and Secondary Education on Reserves in Canada*. Accessed on January 8, 2007 at (www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/sp/hrsdprc/publications/research/2001-000175/SP-483-01-02E.pdf)



- Ontario Ministry of Education (2006). *Early School Leavers: Understanding the Lived Reality of Student Disengagement from Secondary School – Final Report*. Prepared by Community Health Systems Resource Group at the Hospital For Sick Children. Accessed on December 8, 2006 at (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/schoolleavers.pdf>) pg. 27.
- Richards, J. and Vining, A (2004) *CD Howe Institute Commentary – Aboriginal Off-Reserve Education: Time for Action*. Accessed on January 8, 2007 at (http://www.cdhowe.org/pdf/commentary_198.pdf)
- xvii Statistics Canada (2002). *At a Crossroads: First Results for the 18 to 20-Year-old Cohort of the Youth in Transition Survey*. Accessed on September 15, 2007 at (<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-591-XIE/81-591-XIE2000001.pdf>)
- xviii Canadian Council on Learning (2007). *Learning to Know, to Do, to Live Together, to Be – Participation in Post-Secondary Education*. Accessed on September 19, 2007 at: (<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/CAC7D2C5-DA8A-4E4B-B052-F06662BD8ED8/0/ParticipationInPostSecondaryEducationEN.pdf>)
- xix Statistics Canada (2006) *Chapter A – a Portrait of the School-Age Population in Education indicators in Canada: Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program 2005*. Accessed on September 15, 2007 at (<http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-582-XIE/81-582-XIE2006001.htm>)
- xx Canadian Council on Learning (2006). *Survey of Canadian Attitudes Toward Learning: Elementary, Secondary and Post-Secondary Structured Learning*. Ottawa: CCL. Accessed on September 19, 2007 at (<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/D6B130CA-E00F-4AA2-AB08-6AF5C2E58F30/0/FactSheetStructureENGmtg.pdf>)
- xxi Canadian Council on Learning (2006). *Survey of Canadian Attitudes Toward Learning: Elementary, Secondary and Post-Secondary Structured Learning*. Ottawa: CCL. Accessed on September 19, 2007 at (<http://www.ccl-cca.ca/NR/rdonlyres/D6B130CA-E00F-4AA2-AB08-6AF5C2E58F30/0/FactSheetStructureENGmtg.pdf>)
- xxii Canadian Gallup Poll Ltd. (1979, 1981, 1986). *The Gallup Report*.
- xxiii Gallup Canada, Inc. (1998, February 27). *The Gallup Poll*, 58(11), 2.
- xxiv Guppy and Davies (1999). "Understanding Canadians' declining confidence in public education." *Canadian Journal of Education*, 24:3, Summer 1999, p. 265-280.
- xxv World Values Survey Association (2006). *World Values Survey – Online Data*. Accessed on October 1, 2007 at (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>)



317 Adelaide St. West, Suite 300
Toronto, Ontario M5V 1P9
Tel: 416.591.6300
Fax: 416.591.5345

317, rue Adelaide Ouest, bureau 300
Toronto (Ontario) M5V 1P9
Tél.: 416.591.6300
Télé. : 416.591.5345