



Facts on Canada

Education in Canada

Education has two main goals: to give individuals the opportunity to develop themselves, and to provide society with the skills it needs to evolve in its best interests. Canada's educational system is based on finding a coordinated approach to the pursuit of these sometimes conflicting goals. Comprehensive, diversified, and available to everyone, the system reflects the Canadian belief in the importance of education.

Education in Canada consists of ten provincial and three territorial systems, including public schools, "separate" (i.e., denominational) schools, and private schools. Children are required by law to attend school from the age of 6 or 7 until they are 15 or 16. To make it possible to fulfill this obligation, all non-private education through secondary (or "high") school is publicly funded. In Quebec, general and vocational colleges (CEGEPs, or *Colleges d'enseignement général et professionnel*) are also publicly funded and require only a minimal registration fee. Most other post-secondary schools, however, charge tuition fees.

A Provincial Responsibility

Unlike many other industrialized countries, Canada has no federal educational system; the Constitution vested the responsibility for education in the provinces. Each provincial system, while similar to the others, reflects its particular region, history and culture. The provincial departments of education – headed by an elected minister – set standards, draw up curricula, and give grants to educational institutions.

Responsibility for the administration of elementary and secondary schools is delegated to local elected school boards or commissions. The boards set budgets, hire and negotiate with teachers, and shape school curricula within provincial guidelines.

A Broad Federal Role

The Government of Canada plays an indirect but vital role in education. It provides financial support for post-secondary education, labour market training, and the teaching of the two official languages – especially second-language training. In addition, it is responsible for the education of Aboriginal peoples, armed forces personnel and their dependents, and inmates of federal correctional facilities.

The Canada Student Loans Program, which assists over 350 000 post-secondary students each year, represents the cornerstone of the Government of Canada's commitment to making post-secondary education accessible. The program provides

loans and pays the interests on the loan while the student is in school. The Canada Student Loans Program also has a number of repayment options for borrowers who have difficulty making payments after leaving school.

In addition, in 1998, the Government of Canada introduced the \$2.5 billion Canada Millennium Scholarships initiative to help Canadians gain access to post-secondary education and reduce student debt. Created in January 2000, the Canada Millennium Scholarship Foundation, the independent body created to manage the fund and administer the scholarships, will assist some 100 000 students annually through its two scholarship programs. Bursaries averaging \$3 000 are granted to students on the basis of financial need and merit; Excellence Awards are granted to Canadians entering their first year of post-secondary studies who are committed to the pursuit of academic excellence and innovation, and demonstrate the capacity for leadership. Individuals can receive up to \$19 200 from the Foundation over a maximum of 32 months of study.

The Canada Education Savings Grant program was launched in 1998 to help offset the increasing costs of post-secondary education by supplementing Canadians' educational savings. Its purpose is to make post-secondary education more accessible to young Canadians. The Government of Canada provides a grant of an additional 20 percent on top of Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP) contributions, up to a maximum of \$400 annually, until the child turns 17. This could add up to as much as \$7 200 by the time a child is ready for post-secondary education. More than a million Canadians have received the CES Grant on their RESP contributions since 1998.

Elementary and Secondary Schools

About five million children now attend public schools in Canada. In some provinces, children can enter kindergarten at the age of four before starting the elementary grades at age six. The elementary curriculum emphasizes the basic subjects of language, math, social studies, introductory arts and science.

In general, high school programs consist of two streams. The first prepares students for university, the second for post-secondary education at a community college or institute of technology, or for the workplace. There are also special programs for students unable to complete the conventional courses of study.

In most provinces, individual schools now set, conduct and mark their own examinations. In some provinces, however, students must pass a graduation examination in certain key subjects in order to proceed to the post-secondary level. University entrance thus depends on course selection and marks in high school; requirements vary from province to province.

Other Schools

For parents seeking alternatives to the public system, there are separate as well as private schools. Some provinces have legislation that permits the establishment of separate schools by religious groups. Mostly Roman Catholic, separate schools, which in 1995 accounted for about one-fourth of Canada's public school enrolment, offer a complete parochial curriculum from kindergarten through the secondary level in some provinces.

Private or independent schools have a current enrolment of over a quarter of a million students, and offer a great variety of curriculum options based on religion, language or academic status.

Teacher Training

Canada's elementary and secondary education systems employ close to 300 000 full-time teachers. Their professional training generally includes at least four or five years of study (a Bachelor of Education degree normally requires university graduation plus one year of educational studies). Teachers are licensed by the provincial departments of education.

Post-Secondary Education

For most of Canada's history, post-secondary education was provided almost exclusively by its universities. These were mainly private institutions, many with a religious affiliation. During the 1960s, however, as the demand for greater variety in post-secondary education rose sharply and enrolment grew, systems of publicly-operated post-secondary non-university institutions began to develop. Today in Canada, some 200 technical institutes and community colleges complement about 100 universities, attracting a total post-secondary enrolment of approximately one million students. Student fees, owing to substantial government subsidies, account for only about 11 percent of the cost of Canadian post-secondary education.

Canada's universities are internationally known for the quality of their teaching and research. Examples include the neurological breakthroughs of Wilder Penfield at McGill University and the discovery of insulin at the University of Toronto by Frederick Banting, C.H. Best, J.J.R. Macleod, and J.B. Collip. Full-time enrolment in Canadian universities stands at over half a million, with enrolments at individual institutions ranging from less than a 1 000 to over 35 000. Women are well represented in the universities; they receive more than half of all degrees conferred.

Canada's School System: A National Asset

The Canadian belief in education is general and deep. And this belief is reflected in a considerable financial commitment: Canada ranks among the world's leaders in per capita spending on public education. Canada maintains this level of investment because it continues to generate healthy returns. Almost everywhere, the quality of education is directly related to the quality of life. In Canada, the high educational level (almost half the population over the age of 15 now has some post-secondary schooling) has proven to be a powerful contributor to the country's favourable standard of living, its growth of opportunity, and its reputation as a place where intellectual accomplishment is fostered and profitably pursued.

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