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Research article

Elementary and secondary school enrolment amid changing immigration levels

by Aneta Bonikowska, Garnett Picot, Feng Hou and Évamé Koumaglo

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Abstract

Background: Canada's population growth, driven by changing levels of permanent residents (PRs) and non-permanent residents (NPRs), has contributed to notable demographic shifts. These changes may be placing new pressures on the education system, prompting a need to better understand how immigration trends could influence enrolment across all levels of schooling. In response, this paper examines projected changes in elementary and secondary school enrolment in Canada from 2026 to 2030, with a focus on the marginal impact of changes in immigration levels at the national and regional levels.

Data and methods: The study combines data from the 2021 Census of Population and the Longitudinal Immigration Database, as well as Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan and projections of the number of NPRs, to model the number of school-aged children—both PRs and NPRs—in Canada, in the provinces and territories, and in municipalities of different sizes.

Results: Based on past immigration levels and future planned levels (drawn from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada's 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan), the elementary school system is expected to accommodate approximately 47,100 additional PR children, while the number of NPR children is projected to decline by 49,200 from 2026 to 2030, compared with 2025. The net result is a modest decrease of about 2,100 elementary school-aged children related to immigration; their projected total number in 2025 was about 501,200. At the secondary level, a projected increase of 25,500 PR children is nearly offset by a decline of 24,300 NPR children, resulting in a small net gain; in 2025, their projected total number was about 241,100. Provincial and territorial impacts vary. However, immigrant children consistently represent a smaller share of school enrolment than of the general population. As a result, projected changes in immigrant enrolment translate into less than a 1% change in total enrolment in all provinces and the territories by 2030. Likewise, although immigrants are concentrated in larger municipalities, projected changes in immigrant enrolment translate into less than a 0.1% change in total enrolment across municipality types.

Interpretation: The projected changes in the number of PR and NPR children are relatively minor in scale, given that Canada's school-aged population included approximately 3.5 million elementary school-aged children and 1.8 million children at the secondary level in 2025.

Keywords: School-aged population, education demand, immigration levels, permanent and non-permanent residents, demographic projections

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What is already known on this subject?

- Statistics Canada regularly produces demographic projections for various subgroups of the population.

What does this study add?

- This study shows the projected marginal effect of immigration, including past and planned future cohorts, on the number of school-aged children in Canada.

Introduction

Canada's population growth in recent years has been driven by rising numbers of permanent residents (PRs) and non-permanent residents (NPRs). This growth has brought significant demographic changes, with potential implications for many public services, including the education system. As schools work to accommodate more children from increasingly diverse backgrounds, questions are emerging about how immigration trends may be shaping demand for elementary, secondary and postsecondary education.

In its 2025 to 2027 Strategic Plan, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) recognized the pressures on public services and emphasized the importance of aligning immigration levels—both permanent and temporary—with Canada's capacity to support newcomers. Since then, IRCC has begun implementing measures to reduce the intake of PRs and NPRs. While immigration remains vital to the country's economic and social priorities, understanding its impact on education is essential for school planning purposes.

Despite the importance of this issue, there is limited empirical research that quantifies how immigration affects education systems across Canada. It is plausible that if the overall school-aged population is declining, the education system may have greater capacity to integrate newcomer children. Conversely, if the school-aged population is growing rapidly, additional immigration could place more strain on existing resources. Yet detailed analyses of how immigration shapes demand for elementary and secondary education across Canada remain scarce.

This study aims to help fill that gap. Its primary objective is to estimate the effect of changes in immigration levels on the demand for education at the elementary and secondary levels. The analysis draws on census data, immigration data, administrative tax data, planned PR admission levels drawn from IRCC's 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan and projections of the total number of NPRs from IRCC.

This report is organized into four main sections. It begins with an overview of the demographic context, presenting past and projected changes in the total number of school-aged children in Canada over the next decade. This includes both immigrant and Canadian-born populations, examined under various immigration projection assumptions. The second section estimates the marginal effects of different levels of PR admissions and NPR stocks on the size of the elementary and secondary school-aged population. This is followed by a regional analysis, which breaks down national results by province or territory and municipality size to highlight regional variations. The final section summarizes the findings and their implications for education planning and policy development.

The demographic context: Historical and projected school-aged immigrant and Canadian-born populations under various immigration level projection assumptions

Historical demographic estimates by Statistics Canada indicate a steady decline in the proportion of elementary and secondary school-aged children relative to the total population, representing a reduced demand for school seats at these levels. Specifically, the population aged 6 to 13 years declined continuously from 10.6% of the total population in 2001 to 8.5% in 2025 (Statistics Canada 2025a). The 14 to 17 age group, representing secondary school-aged children, decreased from 5.4.% in 2001 to 4.4% in 2025.

Despite the declining share of school-aged children, the absolute number has increased significantly during the last three years, driven largely by higher levels of PR admissions and NPR inflows.

The number of elementary school-aged children (ages 6 to 13) declined from 3.297 million in 2001 to 2.955 million in 2011, followed by a gradual increase to 3.362 million in 2021. By 2025, this number had risen to 3.536 million—an increase of approximately 174,000 children in just four years. However, over the two-decade period from 2001 to 2021, the net increase was 65,000, indicating relatively modest long-term growth in demand for elementary education.

For the 14 to 17 age group, which represents secondary school-aged children, the population peaked at 1.782 million in 2006. It then declined steadily to 1.586 million by 2018, a net decrease of 196,000. However, this trend reversed in 2019. From 2021 to 2025, the population increased from 1.641 million to 1.830 million—an increase of roughly 189,000 in four years.

The surge in school-aged children reflects broader population dynamics, driven by a sharp rise in immigration during the last three years. According to Statistics Canada's demographic estimates, the number of PR admissions grew from 226,000 in 2021 to approximately 465,000 annually from 2022 to 2025 (Statistics Canada 2025b). Similarly, the NPR population in Canada rose from 1.442 million (3.8% of the total population) in 2021 to 2.572 million (6.4%) in 2023, and further to an estimated 3.149 million (7.6%) in 2024, then declined slightly to 2.848 million (6.8%) in 2025 (Statistics Canada 2026b).

Over the next 10 years, the number of elementary school-aged children—including immigrant and Canadian-born children—is unlikely to surge and may decline, even under the highest PR and NPR assumptions.

From 2026 to 2035, even the high-immigration assumption[1] suggests no increase in the number of children aged 6 to 13 (Table 1). The medium-immigration assumption suggests a decline of about 197,000 in this age group by 2035, and the low-immigration assumption projects a decrease of 373,000.

1. The high-immigration assumption projects an annual admission of 436,000 to 494,000 PRs, with the number of NPRs at 6.0% to 6.8% of the population over the decade (Table A1).

Table 1
Projected population of immigrant and Canadian-born children at the national level

	Ages 6 to 13	Ages 14 to 17
	number (x 1,000)	
Estimated		
2020	3,346.4	1,622.9
2021	3,361.9	1,641.2
2022	3,398.5	1,689.0
2023	3,458.3	1,747.5
2024	3,524.2	1,808.7
2025	3,535.9	1,830.3
Projected		
Low		
2026	3,495.1	1,823.7
2030	3,342.5	1,838.1
2035	3,122.5	1,769.5
Medium		
2026	3,507.9	1,830.1
2030	3,388.7	1,860.6
2035	3,311.3	1,817.9
High		
2026	3,523.2	1,837.9
2030	3,442.9	1,887.0
2035	3,521.0	1,874.4

Sources: Statistics Canada, 2026a, Table 17-10-0057-01 Projected population, by projection scenario, age and gender, as of July 1 (x 1,000), and 2025a, Table 17-10-0005-01 Population estimates on July 1, by age and gender.

Projections indicate that the population of secondary school-aged children (ages 14 to 17) is expected to remain relatively stable over the coming decade.

Under the high-growth assumption, projections indicate an increase of approximately 37,000 immigrants and Canadian-born individuals aged 14 to 17 over the next decade. This contrasts with the gradual decline in this age group observed from 2006 to 2018, followed by a sharp rise of about 230,000 from 2019 to 2025. Consequently, even the high-growth assumption does not anticipate a particularly substantial increase over the next decade. By comparison, both the medium- and low-growth assumptions project a small decline in the population of 14- to 17-year-olds throughout the coming decade.

Overall, after the education system has adjusted to the rapidly increasing demand from 2021 to 2025, national demand at the elementary and secondary levels is not expected to rise over the coming decade and may even decline. These population projections are national-level results. They can mask significant population changes at the provincial, territorial or municipal level, as detailed later, with the population increasing in some areas and declining in others, even if aggregate national demand for school seats is stable.

Data and methods

This study uses a combination of administrative and census data and the IRCC 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan to analyze historical trends and project the marginal impact of immigration (including both PRs and NPRs) on Canada's elementary and secondary school-aged populations from 2026 to 2030. The analysis integrates the following:

- the 2021 Census of Population
- the Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMDB)[2]
- IRCC's 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan (IRCC 2025)
- projections of the annual numbers of NPRs obtained from IRCC.

For the purposes of the projection in this study, elementary school-aged children are defined as those aged 6 to 13, while secondary school-aged children are defined as those aged 14 to 17. For the elementary and secondary systems, it is assumed that the participation rate for populations aged 6 to 13 and 14 to 17 is 100%.[3]

The study estimates the marginal effect of immigration on school-aged populations separately for PRs and NPRs. For PRs, the model distinguishes between PRs selected directly from abroad (referred to as one-step PRs for ease of exposition) and PRs who were previously NPRs in Canada (referred to as two-step PRs). The following represents the key components of the methodology; more details are available in Bonikowska et al. (2025):

- **Estimating the effect of permanent residents**

The impact of PRs is modelled using the following steps:

1. Estimate the age structure of a 100,000-person synthetic PR cohort using historical data.
2. Age the cohort forward annually over a 10-year projection period.
3. Adjust for exits by removing individuals projected to be absent from Canada each year, based on the IMDB.
4. Isolate one-step PRs by subtracting children who were NPRs before becoming PRs.
5. Repeat the process for several consecutive cohorts to calculate their cumulative effect on enrolment.
6. Scale the results to reflect actual past and planned future PR admissions beyond the 100,000 baseline to obtain the projected numbers of one-step PRs in the elementary and secondary school systems. The PR cohort size for past admission cohorts going back to 2015 was calculated using IRCC data. The 2026 to 2028 PR cohort size was based on the IRCC 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan (IRCC 2025). Note that the latter plan includes two one-time programs that will add to the total PR admissions in 2026 and 2027. Although the actual distribution between the two years is subject to change, IRCC is projecting higher admissions in 2027. To operationalize this model, this study assumed that 40% of the two-year total will be admitted in 2026 and 60% in 2027. For the purposes

2. The IMDB is the result of a collaboration between Statistics Canada, IRCC, and the provinces and territories. It consists of administrative data from IRCC and tax files from the Canada Revenue Agency.
3. This assumption was made to simplify the model. Some children may attend private schools that do not rely on public funding. Others may be homeschooled.

of the projection exercise presented in this study, PR admissions were assumed to remain constant at the 2028 level in 2029 and 2030 (see Appendix Table A2).

7. Repeat the previous steps, except for step 4, and subtract the projected numbers for one-step PRs to yield projected numbers for two-step PRs.

- **Estimating the effect of non-permanent residents**

The approach used to estimate the effect of NPRs on future school enrolment differs from that used for PRs. It is based solely on projected changes in the total number—or stock—of NPRs in future years.

The main steps include the following:

1. Use projected NPR levels for each year from 2026 to 2030. The projected numbers of NPRs up to 2028 were obtained from IRCC. As with the projected counts of PRs, the number of NPRs was assumed to remain constant at the 2028 level in 2029 and 2030 for the purposes of this study (see Table A2 in the appendix).
2. Apply historical age distributions to estimate how many NPRs fall within school-aged groups (ages 6 to 13 and 14 to 17).
3. Calculate year-over-year changes in these age groups to estimate the marginal effect on enrolment.

- **Estimating the total effect of immigration at the national level**

The total marginal effect of immigration is the sum of the projected impacts of one-step PRs, two-step PRs and NPRs.

- **Estimating the total effect of immigration at the regional level**

Provincial and territorial distributions of immigrant children are based on the 2021 Census and assumed constant over the projection period. The level and provincial and territorial distribution of all immigrants are not good indicators of the composition for school-aged children. Immigrants are much less concentrated at the elementary and secondary levels than what overall immigration figures might suggest. This distinction is important because the capacity of elementary and secondary school systems to effectively support immigrant children depends not only on the total number of immigrants but also specifically on the number and proportions of school-aged PR and NPR children across provinces and territories.

Distributions of immigrant children across municipalities are also based on the 2021 Census and assumed constant over the projection period. Municipalities are grouped into four categories by population size: 500,000 residents or more, 100,000 to fewer than 500,000 residents, 10,000 to fewer than 100,000 residents, and fewer than 10,000 residents.

Results

The marginal effect of immigration levels on future elementary and secondary school enrolment at the national level

The effect of one-step permanent residents on school enrolment

Table 2 displays the projected number of one-step PR children aged 6 to 17, divided into two age groups, for each year from 2026 to 2030. The results represent the number of children in the elementary and secondary school systems in a given year as a result of past and projected one-step PR immigration, based on admissions from 2015 to 2030. For context, the number of PRs admitted to Canada increased steadily from 271,000 in 2015 to 482,000 in 2024, with a temporary dip in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. While PR admissions are expected to stay above 400,000 in 2026 and 2027, they are projected to decline to 380,000 in 2028. In this study, total PR admissions are assumed to remain at 380,000 through 2030 (Table A2).

Table 2
Projected and cumulative marginal effects of past and future immigration levels on population aged 6 to 13 and 14 to 17, one-step permanent residents, 2026 to 2030

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
			number		
Panel A: Ages 6 to 13					
Admission year					
2016	9,100	..	..	..	..
2017	11,900	8,800	..	..	..
2018	16,700	13,300	9,900	..	..
2019	21,400	17,800	14,100	10,500	..
2020	13,400	11,600	9,600	7,600	5,700
2021	31,400	29,600	25,500	21,200	16,800
2022	33,800	33,900	31,900	27,500	22,800
2023	36,100	36,500	36,500	34,400	29,600
2024	36,000	37,100	37,500	37,500	35,300
2025	28,300	29,400	30,400	30,700	30,700
2026	28,300	29,600	30,800	31,700	32,100
2027	...	29,400	30,800	32,100	33,000
2028	...	...	26,000	27,200	28,300
2029	...	...	...	26,000	27,200
2030	...	...	...	...	26,000
Total	266,400	276,900	282,900	286,400	287,600
Change	10,100	10,500	6,000	3,400	1,300
Panel B: Ages 14 to 17					
Admission year					
2016	10,900	..	..	..	..
2017	10,500	10,500	..	..	..
2018	11,600	11,800	11,700	..	..
2019	12,000	12,300	12,500	12,500	..
2020	6,300	6,500	6,700	6,800	6,700
2021	13,100	13,800	14,300	14,700	14,900
2022	13,400	14,100	14,800	15,400	15,800
2023	13,800	14,500	15,200	16,000	16,600
2024	13,500	14,100	14,900	15,700	16,400
2025	10,600	11,000	11,600	12,200	12,800
2026	10,800	11,100	11,500	12,100	12,700
2027	...	11,200	11,600	12,000	12,600
2028	...	...	9,900	10,200	10,600
2029	...	...	...	9,900	10,200
2030	...	...	...	...	9,900
Total	126,400	131,000	134,700	137,400	139,400
Change	4,800	4,600	3,800	2,600	2,000

.. not available for a specific reference period

... not applicable

Note: Totals may not add up because of rounding.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2024, and Census of Population, 2021; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025 data and 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan.

Elementary school-aged population (ages 6 to 13)

Focusing on 2026, the first year of the projection period, the 2016 PR admission cohort is expected to contribute approximately 9,100 children to the group aged 6 to 13, the 2017 cohort approximately 11,900 children, and so on until the 2026 cohort (Table 2). Summing across PR cohorts from 2016 to 2026, approximately 266,400 one-step immigrant children are projected to be in the elementary school-aged group in 2026. Similar calculations are carried out for each calendar year up to 2030.

The year-over-year change in the number of immigrant children provides a more direct measure of the additional school capacity required than the total number of children present in a given year. While cumulative figures—such as the 266,400 immigrant children aged 6 to 13 projected to be in the system in 2026—reflect the overall presence of past and recent PR cohorts, they do not indicate the annual increase in enrolment. This marginal increase is projected at 10,100 children in 2026 and 10,500 in 2027, tapering off to nearly 1,300 by 2030.

Cumulatively, from 2026 to 2030, the additional demand for elementary school seats from one-step PR cohorts is estimated at 31,300.

Secondary school-aged population (ages 14 to 17)

For secondary school-aged children, the 2026 one-step PR cohort and the 10 preceding cohorts are projected to contribute 126,400 children aged 14 to 17 in 2026. This number is expected to rise to 139,400 by 2030. However, the annual increase in enrolment demand is projected to remain modest, declining from 4,800 in 2026 to 2,000 by 2030. In total, approximately 17,700 additional secondary school seats would be required by 2030 to accommodate the marginal effect of new one-step PR admissions to Canada from 2026 to 2030.

These findings suggest that, under current immigration assumptions, the additional demand for school capacity from one-step PR immigration will be relatively limited at the national level, particularly in the context of Canada’s overall school-aged population.

The effect of two-step permanent residents on school enrolment

The number of two-step PR children aged 6 to 13 is expected to rise from 75,700 in 2025 to 91,500 by 2030. More importantly, the yearly growth is projected to peak at 6,700 in 2026, then decline to 1,200 by 2029 and to 500 by 2030 (Table 3). From 2026 to 2030, the cumulative increase in elementary school seats needed to accommodate these children is estimated at 15,800 across Canada. For children aged 14 to 17, projected annual demand for secondary school spaces is expected to rise by approximately 2,300 in 2026 and 2,700 in 2027, before declining to about 700 by 2030. Overall, this represents a cumulative need for an estimated 7,800 additional spaces nationwide over the same period.

Table 3
Annual change in projected population aged 6 to 13 and 14 to 17, 2026 to 2030

	One-step permanent residents	Two-step permanent residents	Non-permanent residents	Total
		number		
Ages 6 to 13				
Total number in 2025	256,400	75,700	169,200	501,200
Annual change in year:				
2026	10,100	5,300	-12,800	2,600
2027	10,500	6,700	-22,500	-5,400
2028	6,000	2,000	-13,800	-5,800
2029	3,400	1,200	0	4,700
2030	1,300	500	0	1,800
Total change	31,300	15,800	-49,200	-2,100
Ages 14 to 17				
Total number in 2025	121,600	35,900	83,500	241,100
Annual change in year:				
2026	4,800	2,300	-6,300	700
2027	4,600	2,700	-11,100	-3,900
2028	3,800	1,200	-6,800	-1,900
2029	2,600	900	0	3,500
2030	2,000	700	0	2,700
Total change	17,700	7,800	-24,300	1,200

Note: Totals may not add up because of rounding.
Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2024, and Census of Population, 2021; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025 data, 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan and yearly projections of the total stock of non-permanent residents.

The effect of non-permanent residents on school enrolment

The number of school-aged children among NPRs in Canada is projected to decline significantly over the coming years, reflecting broader demographic trends. The total NPR population is expected to decrease from approximately 3 million in 2024 (Statistics Canada 2026b) to under 2 million by 2028 and to remain stable thereafter (Table A2). Consequently, the number of elementary school-aged children (ages 6 to 13) within this group is also projected to fall, from 169,200 in 2025 to about 120,000 in 2028, with little change afterward.

The year-over-year change in the number of NPR children indicates reduced demand for school capacity. At the elementary level, in 2026, the number of children is projected to decline by approximately 12,800, compared with 2025, followed by a further decrease of about 22,500 in 2027. A decline of about 13,800 is expected in 2028, after which the numbers are projected to stabilize. By 2030, the elementary system may require roughly 49,200 fewer seats to accommodate NPR children, compared with 2025. A similar trend is observed in the secondary system (ages 14 to 17), where the projected reduction in enrolment could result in 24,300 fewer seats needed by 2030. These patterns suggest a temporary easing of pressure on school infrastructure, particularly in the elementary grades.

The combined marginal effect of permanent residents and non-permanent residents on future elementary and secondary enrolment

From 2026 to 2030, the population of elementary school children aged 6 to 13 is expected to increase by approximately 47,100 because of PR immigration (one- and two-step PRs combined), while the number of NPR children in this age group is projected to decline by about 49,200 (Table 3). As a result, the net effect is a projected decline of 2,100 children in this age group by 2030; their projected total number in 2025 was about 501,200. This represents a relatively minor shift over five years, especially compared with the estimated 3.5 million children aged 6 to 13 in Canada in 2025 (Table 1).

A similar pattern is observed among secondary school children aged 14 to 17. From 2026 to 2030, the combined marginal effects of PR and NPR levels are projected to result in a net increase of 1,200 individuals in this age group. This reflects a modest gain of about 25,500 children from PR immigration, offset by a decline of 24,300 associated with NPR trends. The projected total number of PR and NPR children aged 14 to 17 was about 241,100 in 2025. For context, there were approximately 1.8 million individuals aged 14 to 17 in Canada in 2025.

Overall, these projections suggest that changes in PR and NPR levels will have a limited impact on elementary and secondary school enrolment pressures over the coming years at the national level. Nevertheless, the effects are likely to vary across regions, and pressures may be more acute in rapidly growing communities, particularly if schools are already operating at capacity.

The marginal effect of immigration levels on future elementary and secondary school enrolment at the provincial or territorial level

There is considerable variation across provinces and territories in the share of elementary and secondary school-aged children who are either PRs or NPRs (Table 4). For example, in 2021, 3.1% of elementary school-aged children in Newfoundland and Labrador were PRs or NPRs, suggesting that the province's school system faces relatively low pressure in accommodating immigrant children. By contrast, Manitoba had the highest share, with 13.0% of elementary school-aged children being PRs or NPRs. Other provinces, including Ontario, Quebec and those in western Canada, had immigrant shares ranging from nearly 9% to over 10% at the elementary level.

Table 4
Percentage of population who are permanent or non-permanent residents, by province or territory and age group, 2021

	Permanent and non-permanent residents		
	Total population	Ages 6 to 13	Ages 14 to 17
	percent		
Canada	25.6	10.2	14.0
Newfoundland and Labrador	3.9	3.1	2.8
Prince Edward Island	11.4	9.0	11.1
Nova Scotia	9.8	7.2	6.5
New Brunswick	7.2	6.8	7.0
Quebec	17.0	8.9	11.5
Ontario	32.7	11.2	14.7
Manitoba	22.3	13.0	17.9
Saskatchewan	13.9	10.4	14.7
Alberta	24.8	10.7	17.1
British Columbia	32.5	10.2	15.8
Territories	10.4	2.4	5.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

In addition to these overall differences, the provincial and territorial distribution of one-step PR, two-step PR and NPR immigrant children also varies (Table 5). For example, in 2021, about 25% of NPR children were in Quebec, compared with 13% of two-step PR children. Conversely, a smaller share of NPR children than PR children were in the three Prairie provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta). This distinction is important because the number of NPR children is projected to decline significantly in the near future, unlike the number of PR children, which is expected to slowly increase over the projection period. As a result, provinces or territories with a greater proportion of PR children than NPR children are more likely to experience increases in elementary and secondary enrolment because of immigration than others.

Table 5
Provincial or territorial distribution of children younger than 18 who are permanent or non-permanent residents, 2021

	One-step permanent residents	Two-step permanent residents	Non-permanent residents
		percent	
Newfoundland and Labrador	0.3	0.2	0.4
Prince Edward Island	0.3	0.3	0.5
Nova Scotia	1.5	1.0	1.9
New Brunswick	1.2	0.1	1.3
Quebec	18.7	13.0	25.5
Ontario	40.5	52.1	41.7
Manitoba	5.8	2.5	2.8
Saskatchewan	4.1	2.8	1.6
Alberta	15.7	14.6	7.4
British Columbia	11.8	12.3	16.9
Territories	0.1	0.1	0.1

Note: Totals may not add up to 100% because of rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Population, 2021.

This dynamic is reflected in the projections: the Prairie provinces are expected to see gradual increases in the enrolment of immigrant children over the next five years, while most other provinces are projected to experience notable declines—driven by falling NPR numbers—in 2027 and 2028, followed by modest growth through 2030 (tables 6 and 7).[4]

4. In this section, the term “immigrant children” refers to the total of PR and NPR children.

Table 6
Projected change in the number of permanent resident and non-permanent resident children aged 6 to 13, 2026 to 2030

	Total number	Annual change				
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Canada						
PR	332,100	15,400	17,100	8,000	4,700	1,800
NPR	169,200	-12,800	-22,500	-13,800	0	0
Total	501,200	2,600	-5,400	-5,800	4,700	1,800
Newfoundland and Labrador						
PR	1,000	40	50	20	10	10
NPR	680	-50	-90	-60	0	0
Total	1,680	-10	-40	-30	10	10
Prince Edward Island						
PR	1,050	50	50	30	10	10
NPR	800	-60	-110	-70	0	0
Total	1,850	-10	-50	-40	10	10
Nova Scotia						
PR	4,490	200	220	110	60	20
NPR	3,170	-240	-420	-260	0	0
Total	7,660	-40	-200	-150	60	20
New Brunswick						
PR	3,780	170	190	90	50	20
NPR	2,150	-160	-290	-180	0	0
Total	5,930	10	-100	-80	50	20
Quebec						
PR	57,920	2,580	2,830	1,390	810	310
NPR	43,060	-3,270	-5,730	-3,520	0	0
Total	100,980	-690	-2,900	-2,140	810	310
Ontario						
PR	143,150	6,840	7,710	3,480	2,040	790
NPR	70,530	-5,350	-9,380	-5,770	0	0
Total	213,680	1,490	-1,670	-2,290	2,040	790

Notes: PR: permanent resident; NPR: non-permanent resident. Totals may not add up because of rounding.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2024, and Census of Population, 2021; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025 data, 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan and yearly projections of the total stock of non-permanent residents.

Table 6
Projected change in the number of permanent resident and non-permanent resident children aged 6 to 13, 2026 to 2030 (continued)

	Total number	Annual change				
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Manitoba						
PR	16,790	720	770	400	230	90
NPR	4,730	-360	-630	-390	0	0
Total	21,530	360	140	10	230	90
Saskatchewan						
PR	12,660	560	620	300	180	70
NPR	2,710	-210	-360	-220	0	0
Total	15,360	360	260	80	180	70
Alberta						
PR	51,230	2,360	2,610	1,240	720	280
NPR	12,460	-950	-1,660	-1,020	0	0
Total	63,680	1,410	960	220	720	280
British Columbia						
PR	39,610	1,850	2,060	960	560	220
NPR	28,660	-2,180	-3,810	-2,350	0	0
Total	68,270	-330	-1,750	-1,390	560	220
Territories						
PR	380	20	20	10	10	0
NPR	190	-10	-30	-20	0	0
Total	580	0	-10	-10	10	0

Notes: PR: permanent resident; NPR: non-permanent resident. Totals may not add up because of rounding.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2024, and Census of Population, 2021; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025 data, 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan and yearly projections of the total stock of non-permanent residents.

Table 7
Projected change in the number of permanent resident and non-permanent resident children aged 14 to 17, 2026 to 2030

	Total number	Annual change				
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Canada						
PR	157,500	7,000	7,200	5,000	3,500	2,700
NPR	83,500	-6,300	-11,100	-6,800	0	0
Total	241,100	700	-3,900	-1,900	3,500	2,700
Newfoundland and Labrador						
PR	470	20	20	10	10	10
NPR	330	-30	-40	-30	0	0
Total	810	0	-20	-10	10	10
Prince Edward Island						
PR	500	20	20	20	10	10
NPR	400	-30	-50	-30	0	0
Total	890	-10	-30	-20	10	10
Nova Scotia						
PR	2,130	90	90	70	50	40
NPR	1,570	-120	-210	-130	0	0
Total	3,700	-30	-110	-60	50	40
New Brunswick						
PR	1,800	80	80	60	40	30
NPR	1,060	-80	-140	-90	0	0
Total	2,860	0	-60	-30	40	30
Quebec						
PR	27,480	1,190	1,200	860	610	470
NPR	21,260	-1,610	-2,830	-1,740	0	0
Total	48,740	-420	-1,620	-880	610	470
Ontario						
PR	67,920	3,120	3,240	2,150	1,530	1,180
NPR	34,820	-2,640	-4,630	-2,850	0	0
Total	102,730	470	-1,390	-700	1,530	1,180

Notes: PR: permanent resident; NPR: non-permanent resident. Totals may not add up because of rounding.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2024, and Census of Population, 2021; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025 data, 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan and yearly projections of the total stock of non-permanent residents.

Table 7
Projected change in the number of permanent resident and non-permanent resident children aged 14 to 17, 2026 to 2030 (continued)

	Total number	Annual change				
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
Manitoba						
PR	7,970	330	330	250	180	130
NPR	2,340	-180	-310	-190	0	0
Total	10,310	160	20	60	180	130
Saskatchewan						
PR	6,010	260	260	190	130	100
NPR	1,340	-100	-180	-110	0	0
Total	7,340	160	90	80	130	100
Alberta						
PR	24,310	1,080	1,110	770	540	420
NPR	6,150	-470	-820	-500	0	0
Total	30,450	610	290	260	540	420
British Columbia						
PR	18,790	840	870	590	420	320
NPR	14,150	-1,070	-1,880	-1,160	0	0
Total	32,940	-230	-1,010	-560	420	320
Territories						
PR	180	10	10	10	0	0
NPR	100	-10	-10	-10	0	0
Total	280	0	0	0	0	0

Notes: PR: permanent resident; NPR: non-permanent resident. Totals may not add up because of rounding.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2024, and Census of Population, 2021; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025 data, 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan and yearly projections of the total stock of non-permanent residents.

Newfoundland and Labrador: Immigrant children in this province made up 3% of the school-aged population (ages 6 to 17) in 2021. Projections show minimal change through 2030, with small declines from 2026 to 2028 (ranging from 10 to 60 children per year in the elementary and secondary systems combined), followed by slight increases. The impact on school capacity is expected to be negligible, amounting to a 0.1% decline in total enrolment related to immigration.[5]

Prince Edward Island: This province is projected to require fewer spots in the elementary and secondary systems for immigrant children over the coming years, particularly in 2027 and 2028, when a drop mainly in NPR children is expected. The number of immigrant children in the elementary and secondary systems combined is projected to decline by roughly 4.4% by 2030, with a decrease expected from 2026 and

5. The number of immigrant children in the elementary and secondary systems combined is projected to fall by about 2.8% from 2026 to 2030, compared with 2025. Multiplying 2.8% by the percentage of children who were immigrants (3.0%) yields 0.1% as the expected decline in enrolment related to immigration.

2028, followed by small increases until 2030. Because nearly 10% of school-aged children in this province were immigrants in 2021, this indicates a decline of 0.4% in total enrolment related to immigration.

Nova Scotia: The combined number of NPR elementary and secondary school-aged children is projected to fall by about 1,380 over the three years from 2026 to 2028. The number of PR children is projected to increase. The net result is a small decline of about 70 immigrant elementary and secondary school-aged children in 2026, followed by decreases of 310 in 2027 and 210 in 2028 and smaller increases until 2030. Because 7% of school-aged children were immigrants in 2021, this indicates a decline of about 0.3% in total enrolment related to immigration.

New Brunswick: The pattern for New Brunswick resembles that for Nova Scotia. There is a projected decline in NPR children from 2026 to 2028, offset to some extent by increases in PR children, resulting in a decrease of about 260 immigrant elementary and secondary school-aged children in those three years combined. This would be followed by small increases until 2030. Because about 7% of elementary and secondary school-aged children in this province were immigrants in 2021, the drop in immigrant children projected from 2026 to 2030 amounts to a 0.1% decline in overall enrolment related to immigration.

Quebec: Significant declines in the number of immigrant elementary and secondary school-aged children are projected from 2026 to 2028, followed by increases until 2030. Consequently, this province may require 6,450 fewer elementary and secondary seats for immigrant children over the five-year projection. This represents about 4.3% of immigrant enrolment in 2025. Because about 10% of all elementary and secondary school-aged children were immigrants in 2021, this 4.3% drop in seat requirements translates into about a 0.4% decrease in overall enrolment requirements related to immigration.

Ontario: After a projected rise in the number of elementary and secondary school-aged children in 2026, their enrolment is expected to decline in 2027 and 2028, then to rise again in 2029 and 2030. By 2030, elementary enrolment is projected to include 360 more children than in 2025, or a 0.2% increase, while secondary enrolment is expected to involve 1,090 more children than in 2025, or a 1.1% gain. Given that immigrants made up about 11% of elementary school-aged children and about 15% of secondary school-aged children in 2021, these changes correspond to negligible growth in elementary-level enrolment and a 0.2% increase in total enrolment at the secondary level related to immigration**.**

Manitoba: Unlike the eastern provinces, Manitoba is projected to experience increases in immigrant enrolment from 2026 to 2030 at both the elementary and secondary levels. Cumulatively, elementary and secondary enrolment is projected to increase by about 1,380 children (about 4.3%) over the five years. Immigrant children constituted 13% of elementary school-aged children and about 18% of secondary school-aged children in 2021, or 14.6% of elementary and secondary school-aged children combined. A 4.3% increase in immigrant children overall translates into roughly 0.6% growth in total enrolment at the elementary and secondary levels combined related to immigration.

Saskatchewan: This province is projected to experience increases in immigrant elementary and secondary enrolment from 2026 to 2030, with a cumulative gain of roughly 1,510 children (6.7%) over the five years. Because immigrant children accounted for nearly 12% of all children in 2021, the 6.7% increase translates into 0.8% growth in overall enrolment.

Alberta: Like Manitoba and Saskatchewan, Alberta is projected to see increases in immigrant elementary and secondary enrolment from 2026 to 2030, resulting in a cumulative gain of about 5,710 immigrant children (6.1%) in 2030, compared with 2025. This growth translates into a 0.8% increase in overall enrolment.

British Columbia: Projections for this province resemble those for Quebec and Ontario. Following a decline of approximately 5,270 elementary and secondary school-aged immigrant children (5.2%) from 2026 to 2028, immigrant enrolment is projected to slowly increase until 2030. Overall, the projections suggest 3,750 fewer elementary and secondary school-aged immigrant children in 2030, compared with 2025, representing roughly 0.4% fewer children overall.

The marginal effect of immigration levels on future elementary and secondary school enrolment at the municipal level

Immigrants and NPRs disproportionately settle in large urban areas. Overall, 41.6% of residents in municipalities with a population of half a million or more were either PRs or NPRs in 2021, compared with 14.7% in municipalities with 10,000 to fewer than 100,000 residents. There was a similar pattern for school-aged children, although again, the proportions were lower than in the overall population. For example, 17.1% of elementary school-aged children in municipalities with 500,000 residents or more were PRs or NPRs, compared with 5.7% of children in municipalities with 10,000 to fewer than 100,000 residents.

The distribution of one-step PR, two-step PR and NPR children across the four types of municipalities was almost identical. In 2021, the shares residing in the largest urban centres varied from 52.4% to 53.6%, while they varied from 15.8% to 15.9% in municipalities of 10,000 to fewer than 100,000 residents. As a result, the projected percentage changes in the enrolment rates related to immigration across the four types of municipalities were also very similar.

Thus, until 2030, cumulatively, all municipality size groups are projected to see a decrease in the number of elementary school-aged children (except for municipalities with a population of less than 10,000) and an increase in the number of secondary school-aged children.

In the biggest municipalities (500,000 residents or more), the elementary system is projected to see an increase of about 1,270 children in 2026, compared with 2025, with declines of about 6,150 children (about 2.3%) in 2027 and 2028 combined (Table 8). This is projected to be followed by two years of increases in the number of elementary school-aged children. Overall, the number of elementary school-aged children is expected to decline by 1,440 (0.5%) in 2030, compared with 2025. In the secondary system, declines are expected in 2027 and 2028, but by 2030, there is a projected increase of about 500 children (0.4%). Combined, the elementary and secondary systems are expected to have about 940 fewer immigrant children (either PRs or NPRs) in 2030 than in 2025, a decline of 0.2%. Because about 19% of elementary and secondary school-aged children were immigrants in 2021, this decline amounts to about 0.05% fewer children overall.

Table 8
Projected change in the number of permanent resident and non-permanent resident children aged 6 to 13 and 14 to 17, 2026 to 2030

	Total number	Annual change				
	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
	number					
Ages 6 to 13						
Municipalities with population size of:						
500,000 or more						
PR	176,000	8,150	9,060	4,250	2,490	950
NPR	90,590	-6,880	-12,050	-7,410	0	0
Total	266,590	1,270	-2,990	-3,160	2,490	950
100,000 to fewer than 500,000						
PR	90,590	4,210	4,690	2,190	1,280	490
NPR	45,950	-3,490	-6,110	-3,760	0	0
Total	136,540	720	-1,420	-1,570	1,280	490
10,000 to fewer than 100,000						
PR	52,710	2,440	2,720	1,270	740	290
NPR	26,870	-2,040	-3,570	-2,200	0	0
Total	79,580	400	-850	-930	740	290
Fewer than 10,000						
PR	12,760	600	670	310	180	70
NPR	5,740	-440	-760	-470	0	0
Total	18,500	160	-100	-160	180	70
Ages 14 to 17						
Municipalities with population size of:						
500,000 or more						
PR	83,510	3,730	3,830	2,630	1,870	1,440
NPR	44,720	-3,400	-5,950	-3,660	0	0
Total	128,230	340	-2,120	-1,030	1,870	1,440
100,000 to fewer than 500,000						
PR	42,980	1,930	1,980	1,360	960	740
NPR	22,680	-1,720	-3,020	-1,860	0	0
Total	65,660	200	-1,040	-500	960	740
10,000 to fewer than 100,000						
PR	25,010	1,120	1,150	790	560	430
NPR	13,260	-1,010	-1,760	-1,090	0	0
Total	38,270	110	-620	-300	560	430
Fewer than 10,000						
PR	6,050	270	280	190	140	100
NPR	2,840	-220	-380	-230	0	0
Total	8,890	60	-100	-40	140	100

Notes: PR: permanent resident; NPR: non-permanent resident. Totals may not add up because of rounding.

Sources: Statistics Canada, Longitudinal Immigration Database, 2024, and Census of Population, 2021; and Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025 data, 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan and yearly projections of the total stock of non-permanent residents.

In smaller municipalities, the projected patterns are very similar; however, projected declines account for proportionally smaller changes in overall enrolment, given that lower shares of children (compared with the largest municipalities) are immigrants (PRs or NPRs). Thus, across municipalities with 100,000 to fewer than 500,000 residents, the elementary and secondary systems are projected to see about 140 fewer immigrant children in 2030 than in 2025. Because 13.8% of children were immigrants in 2021, this implies a 0.01% decline in total enrolment. In municipalities with 10,000 to fewer than 100,000 residents, a decline of about 170 children is projected for 2030, compared with 2025, representing a 0.01% decrease in enrolment. Finally, municipalities with fewer than 10,000 residents could see a net increase of about 310 children, which would represent a 0.03% rise in total enrolment.

Conclusion

Based on the assumptions regarding future levels of PRs and NPRs outlined in this study, the projections provide no indication of a significant increase in elementary and secondary enrolment (including immigrants and the Canadian-born population) at the national level from 2026 to 2030. Under some immigration projection assumptions, a decline in enrolment is foreseen. Focusing on the effect of immigration alone, the projections suggest a small decline in elementary and secondary enrolment associated with changing NPR and PR levels. This potential outcome follows a significant increase in elementary and secondary enrolment from 2021 to 2024 because of high immigration levels. Enrolment levels constitute an important aspect of absorptive capacity. From 2026 to 2030, changing enrolment levels at the national level are not projected to have a negative effect on the system's ability to absorb immigrant children.

The effect of changing immigration levels on elementary and secondary enrolment varies by province or territory. Small declines in the number of immigrant children are expected in the Atlantic provinces, Quebec and British Columbia (ranging from 1.4% to 4.4%). The Prairie provinces are expected to see small increases ranging from about 4.3% to 6.7%, while Ontario is expected to see a 0.5% rise. However, these are small changes over a five-year period, and immigrant enrolment constitutes about 3% to 15% of elementary and secondary enrolment across all provinces and the territories. Hence, changing immigration levels are projected to alter elementary and secondary enrolment levels by less than 1%—either an increase or a decrease—by 2030 in all provinces and the territories.

Although immigrants are concentrated in bigger municipalities, the projected proportional changes in the numbers of elementary and secondary school-aged immigrant children from 2026 to 2030 are small and similar across municipality sizes. The elementary school system is projected to see up to a 0.5% decrease in the number of immigrant children across the three larger types of municipalities, while the secondary school system is expected to see up to a 0.5% increase in immigrant children in all except the smallest municipalities (which are expected to see a 1.8% increase). However, these increases translate into less than a 0.1% change in children's enrolment overall—either an increase or a decrease—by 2030 in all municipality types. These projections may nevertheless mask variation across specific municipalities or school boards.

Two facts may help interpret these results.

First, although immigrants (PRs) accounted for 23% of the Canadian population in 2021, immigrant children accounted for 8.4% of elementary school-aged children and 12.3% of secondary school-aged children that year. There is significant variation by province or territory. For example, in 2021, immigrants accounted for about 2% of elementary enrolment in Newfoundland and Labrador and roughly 12% in Manitoba. Nonetheless, the age structure of immigrants is such that they are less concentrated in the elementary and secondary school systems than in the whole population. The extent to which school systems can absorb increases in the number of immigrant children depends on immigrants' initial share

of enrolment, since the same proportional increase will translate into a larger overall change where their share is higher.[6]

Second, a continuous inflow of immigrants does not necessarily mean an increase in immigrant enrolment in the elementary and secondary systems. While entry cohorts produce an inflow of immigrant children, there is also an outflow of children as they age out of the elementary and secondary systems. If immigrant entry levels remain constant over several years, whether at high or low levels, a form of equilibrium is established whereby inflows match outflows and the number of immigrant children remains more or less constant. For example, from 2016 to 2020, 1.4 million immigrants entered Canada. However, the number of elementary school-aged children who were immigrants (PRs) changed little and the share of children who were immigrants declined from 8.7% to 8.4%. It is the change in annual immigrant entry levels that results in rising or falling immigrant enrolment levels, not the size of the entry cohort in any given year.

However, the projected relative stability in enrolment at the elementary and secondary levels does not necessarily mean that issues regarding absorptive capacity will not change over the coming years. Many factors other than enrolment levels influence the ability of the school system to reasonably absorb immigrant children. Other possible factors can include teacher shortages, funding issues, increasing teacher retirements, changes in programs designed to assist immigrant children, aging infrastructure and others (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2024; McDonald & Miah, 2024; Mukamurera et al., 2023; Ontario College of Teachers, 2022; Volante et al., 2020).

6. For example, a 5% increase in the number of immigrant children in a region where immigrants make up 10% of all enrolled children leads to growth in overall enrolment of 0.5%. By contrast, if immigrants made up 1% of all children, a 5% increase in the number of immigrant children would translate into a 0.05% rise in overall enrolment, which, all else equal, would presumably be easier to accommodate than a 0.5% gain.

Appendix

Projections of the total population, including immigrants and the Canadian-born population, with low, medium and high trajectories are based on various assumptions regarding immigration (permanent resident [PR]) inflows and the annual number of non-permanent residents (NPRs).

Most growth (or decline) in population projections is driven by assumptions regarding PRs and NPRs.[7] The assumptions embedded in the model are expressed as a percentage of the total population, but they have been converted to actual values here.

Table A1

Projected annual admissions of permanent residents and number of non-permanent residents according to low, medium and high assumptions

	Annual permanent residents		Annual non-permanent residents	
	% of total population	number (x 1,000)	% of total population	number (x 1,000)
Low				
2026	0.94	389	5.96	2,469
2030	0.79	329	4.20	1,751
2035	0.75	318	3.86	1,635
Medium				
2026	0.99	412	6.36	2,649
2030	0.91	387	4.99	2,123
2035	0.91	402	4.90	2,162
High				
2026	1.04	436	6.83	2,864
2030	1.03	448	5.95	2,591
2035	1.07	494	6.17	2,849

Source: Statistics Canada, 2026c, Population Projections for Canada (2025 to 2075), Provinces and Territories (2025 to 2050): Technical Report on Methodology and Assumptions.

7. There are also assumptions regarding the fertility rate, life expectancy and net emigration. It will take five years for changes in the fertility rate to affect even the youngest elementary and secondary age groups, and net emigration tends to be quite small, with relatively little change over time. Changes in life expectancy have little effect on the school-aged population.

Table A2

Planned number of new permanent residents and number of non-permanent residents, 2026 to 2030

	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030
			number (x 1,000)		
PR admissions	439.2	468.8	380.0	380.0	380.0
Regular	380.0	380.0	380.0	380.0	380.0
One-time initiative 1[1,3]	46.0	69.0	...	...	...
One-time initiative 2[2,3]	13.2	19.8	...	...	...
Total number of NPRs	2,473.3	2,117.3	1,898.3	1,898.3	1,898.3
Change in number of NPRs	-203.2	-356.0	-219.0	0.0	0.0

... not applicable

1. This refers to the streamlined transition of approximately 115,000 protected persons in Canada.

2. This refers to the accelerated transition of up to 33,000 temporary workers.

3. The approximate total transitions to permanent residence for two one-time programs were reported as two-year totals. Although the actual distribution between the two years is subject to change, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada is projecting higher admissions in 2027. To operationalize this model, a 40% and 60% split was applied in this study.

Notes: PR: permanent resident; NPR: non-permanent resident. The total counts of PRs for the years 2026 to 2028 come from the Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan (IRCC 2025). The total number of NPRs up to 2028 are IRCC projections. The counts for 2029 and 2030 are assumed to remain at the 2028 level for the purposes of the projection exercise in this study. Unlike Statistics Canada's population projections, IRCC's planned numbers represent end-of-year counts.

Sources: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2025 data, 2026-2028 Immigration Levels Plan and yearly projections of the total stock of non-permanent residents.

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