

Vast majority of students attended public schools prior to the pandemic

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Over 5.6 million students in Canada were enrolled in elementary and secondary school programs in 2018/2019, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. These students were attending public schools, private/independent schools, or were home-schooled.

In the same school year, over 380,000 students graduated from Canadian high schools.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, students experienced significant changes to their educational instruction, with most students learning remotely at the end of the 2019/2020 school year. Parents and students weighed options for the 2020/2021 school year, including a return to in-classroom instruction, remote learning, and moving from public schools to private schools or home-schooling. The 2018/2019 results from the Elementary-Secondary Education Survey can be used as a benchmark to evaluate the impact of COVID-19 on enrolments and graduates.

Student enrolment in elementary and secondary school programs in 2018/2019

Children in Canada are required by law to attend school from the age of 5 or 6 until the age of 16 or 18, depending on the province or territory. There were 5,675,691 students in Canada's elementary–secondary programs in 2018/2019. Because school attendance is a legal requirement, variations in enrolments reflect fluctuations in the school-aged population. To explore enrolment data in a visual format, visit the "[Elementary-secondary school enrolments: Interactive tool](#)."

Vast majority of students attend public schools

The vast majority of students (91.8%) attended public schools in 2018/2019. This represents an increase of 1.0% from the previous school year and aligns with an estimated 1.1% increase in the population of 5- to 18-year-olds during the same period.

In the same school year, 7.5% of students attended private/independent schools in Canada. British Columbia (13.1%) and Quebec (9.6%) had the highest proportion of their students attending these schools.

In the Elementary-Secondary Education Survey (ESES), private/independent schools are defined on the basis of governance by private individuals and/or groups rather than source of funding. The schools included in the private/independent school sector vary across jurisdictions. For example, in Manitoba, Catholic schools are included in this sector, while in other provinces and territories they are not.

While enrolments in public schools increased at roughly the same rate as the school-aged population, enrolments in private/independent schools have increased at more than twice that rate, rising 2.5% from 2017/2018 to 2018/2019.

As a result of a higher rate of growth in the private/independent sector compared with the public sector, the proportion of private/independent school students increased from 7.1% in 2014/2015 to 7.5% in 2018/2019. By comparison, the proportion of public school students decreased from 92.3% to 91.8% during the same period.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been increased focus on home-schooling and distance learning. Home-schooling is an alternative method of learning, outside of the school environment, where parents deliver courses and instructional programs to their children. It does not include distance learning or online learning, which are provided by the school. Very few Canadian students (0.7%) were home-schooled in 2018/2019.

As more students may be learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, recent studies have shown that some students may experience challenges connecting to school remotely and that parents are concerned about their academic success. For more information, please refer to "[COVID-19 Pandemic: School Closures and the Online Preparedness of Children](#)" and "[Parents supporting learning at home during the COVID-19 pandemic](#)."



Table 1
Number and proportion of students in elementary and secondary schools, by school type, Canada, provinces and territories, 2018/2019

	Public schools		Private/independent schools		Home-schooling	
	number	%	number	%	number	%
Canada¹	5,212,908	91.8	425,043	7.5	37,737	0.7
Newfoundland and Labrador	64,188	98.2	1,005	1.5	147	0.2
Prince Edward Island	20,361	97.1	441	2.1	171	0.8
Nova Scotia	120,606	95.7	4,179	3.3	1,263	1.0
New Brunswick	97,893	97.9	1,257	1.3	834	0.8
Quebec ²	1,231,077	90.0	131,910	9.6	4,149	0.3
Ontario	2,040,483	92.8	150,666	6.8	8,565	0.4
Manitoba ³	186,522	91.3	14,022	6.9	3,708	1.8
Saskatchewan ⁴	184,413	95.9	5,217	2.7	2,625	1.4
Alberta	673,788	93.9	30,270	4.2	13,689	1.9
British Columbia ⁴	568,983	86.6	86,079	13.1	2,307	0.4
Yukon	5,448	97.0	...	...	171	3.0
Northwest Territories	8,493	98.7	...	...	111	1.3
Nunavut ⁵	10,653	100.0	...	...	.	.

. not available for any reference period

... not applicable

1. The Canada totals reflect data from the reporting provinces and territories.

2. Quebec includes general programs for adults and vocational programs in addition to regular programs for youth.

3. Manitoba counts its students in Catholic schools under "private/independent schools."

4. Saskatchewan and British Columbia include general programs for adults in addition to regular programs for youth.

5. Nunavut includes its counts for students in home-schooling (typically less than 10) under "public schools."

Note(s): Counts represent the number of students enrolled in programs at the beginning of the school year (in September or as close as possible thereafter). All numbers, including the totals, have been randomly rounded; therefore, totals may not add up to the sum of all categories due to rounding. Calculations were done using unrounded data. Data are subject to revision.

Source(s): Table 37-10-0109-01.

Rising enrolments in second official language programs in public schools

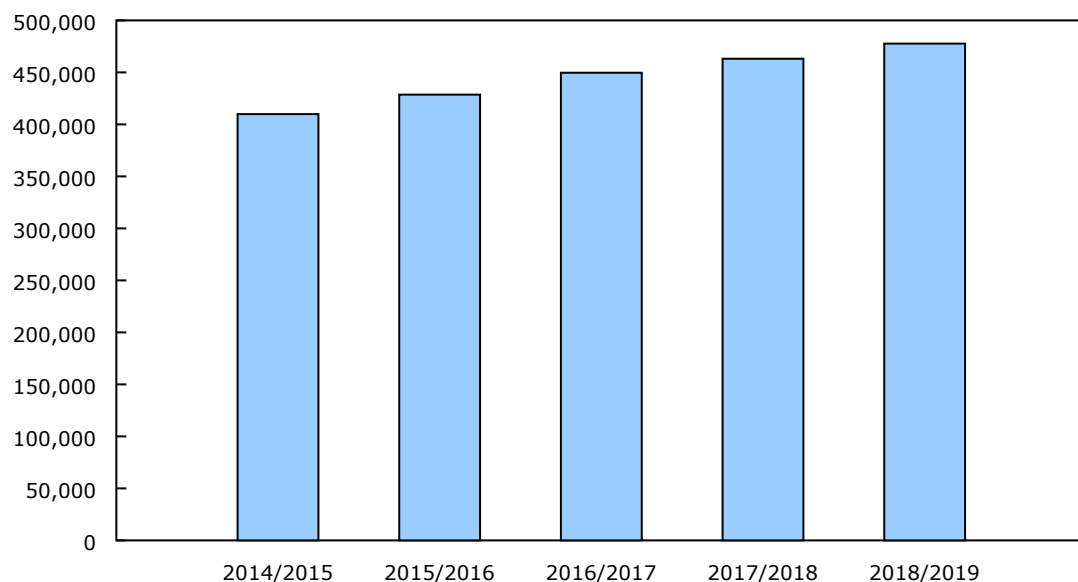
As an officially bilingual country, Canadians benefit when they are able to speak both English and French. In 2018/2019, just under half of the students in public schools across Canada (2,492,223) were learning their second official language, a proportion that has remained relatively constant in recent years. This group includes students learning French or English through regular second language programs, where the language is taught as a subject in the regular course offerings. It also includes students enrolled in French immersion programs where French is the language of instruction for a significant part of the school day.

Approximately four in five students learning their second official language (2,014,542) were enrolled in regular second language programs in 2018/2019, up 1.5% from the previous school year.

French immersion programs offer students an opportunity to develop their language skills beyond the regular second language programs by offering a variety of courses taught in French, rather than just focusing on the basics. There were 477,681 students enrolled in French immersion programs in 2018/2019, up 3.1% compared with the 2017/2018 school year. Enrolments increased or remained relatively stable in all the jurisdictions that provide data on French immersion programs.

Chart 1 Enrolments in French immersion programs, public elementary and secondary schools, Canada

number of students



Note(s): Quebec and Nunavut do not report enrolments in French immersion programs.

Source(s): Table 37-10-0009-01.

Over a five-year period, the proportion of public school students enrolled in French immersion rose from 10.6% in 2014/2015 to 12.0% in 2018/2019. Similar to previous years, New Brunswick (25.9%) and Prince Edward Island (25.3%) had the highest proportions of students in French immersion.

The types of official languages programs offered in public schools, as well as the points at which students may enroll in these programs, differ by province/territory. For example, New Brunswick changed the entry point for French Immersion from grade 3 to grade 1 for the 2017/2018 school year, contributing to the 26.5% increase from 2016/2017 to 2018/2019 for these programs.

Little change in the number of high school graduates

In 2018/2019, 383,568 students graduated from high schools in Canada, up 0.9% from a year earlier. As with enrolment counts, variations in the graduate counts reflect fluctuations in the size of the school-aged population.

High school graduation is the foundation for further education and is widely considered the minimum requirement for successful entry into the labour market. Even so, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, high school graduates may be vulnerable. A recent study that explored the potential economic impact of the pandemic on recent graduates revealed that high school graduates may be affected. Over the next five years it is estimated that their potential earnings loss will be more pronounced than that for postsecondary graduates. For more information, please refer to "[Potential Earnings Losses among High School and Postsecondary Graduates Due to the COVID-19 Economic Downturn.](#)"

While the ESES cannot be used to calculate high school graduation rates, a Statistics Canada study exploring high school graduation rates showed that 89% of Canadian students graduated from high school within five years after starting grade 10 ("Secondary 3" in Quebec). For more information, please refer to "[The output of educational institutions and the impact of learning.](#)"

Table 2
Number of high school graduates,¹ by school type, Canada,² 2017/2018 and 2018/2019

	2017/2018	2018/2019	2017/2018 to 2018/2019
	number		% change
Total, school type	380,322	383,568	0.9
Public schools	341,538	343,410	0.5
Private/independent schools ³	38,784	40,158	3.5

1. In addition to regular programs for youth, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia include graduates from general programs for adults. Quebec includes graduates from general programs for adults and vocational programs.

2. Counts for "private/independent schools" exclude Nova Scotia (data not available) and the territories (no private/independent schools).

3. Manitoba counts its graduates from Catholic schools under "private/independent schools."

Note(s): Counts represent the number of first-time high school graduates, as provided by the provinces and territories. All numbers, including the totals, have been randomly rounded; therefore, totals may not add up to the sum of all categories due to rounding. Calculations were done using unrounded data. Data are subject to revision.

Source(s): Table [37-10-0111-01](#).

Note to readers

The data in this release are from the Elementary–Secondary Education Survey (ESES). The ESES is an annual survey that collects aggregate data from each provincial/territorial ministry or department of education. The 2018/2019 ESES, conducted in 2020, collected data for five school years: 2014/2015 to 2018/2019.

The enrolment counts represent data for programs in Canada's public and private/independent elementary and secondary schools, as well as for home-schooled students, as provided by the provinces and territories. The number of students represents those enrolled in elementary–secondary programs at the beginning of the school year (in September or as close as possible thereafter).

The increase in the student-aged population is based on population estimates in table [17-10-0005-01](#).

The graduate counts represent first-time graduates from secondary schools (both public and private/independent). Graduates from home-schooled programs are included in either the public or in the private/independent graduate counts. In 2018/2019, nine provinces reported high school graduates from private/independent schools.

The territories do not have any private/independent schools.

Public schools are publicly funded elementary and secondary schools that are operated by school boards or the province or territory.

Private/independent schools encompass elementary and secondary schools that are operated, managed and administered by private individuals and/or groups (for example, a church, a trade union or a business enterprise, or a foreign or international agency) or that have a governing board that exercises powers similar to those of a board of education and consists mostly of members not selected by a public agency.

The extent to which an institution receives funding from public or private sources does not determine its classification as a public or private/independent school for the ESES. Privately managed schools may be subject to some regulation or control by public authorities, but these institutions are nevertheless classified as private/independent, provided that they are ultimately subject to private control. Public regulation may extend to areas such as curriculum, staffing appointments, admissions policies, and other matters. The ESES does not distinguish between government-dependent private and independent private institutions.

Home-schooling is an alternative method of learning that takes place outside the public or private/independent school environment. Parents choosing home-schooling have the primary responsibility of managing, delivering and supervising their children's courses and programs of learning. Although home-schooling students may be associated with a public or private/independent school, the enrolment counts for home-schooling are reported separately.

Any detailed comparisons between the provinces and territories must be undertaken with caution. Reporting by type of school varies across jurisdictions. For example, Manitoba includes its students in Catholic schools under "private/independent schools," and Nunavut includes its counts for students in home-schooling (typically less than 10) under "public schools." Reporting by program type also varies across jurisdictions. While all provinces and territories report students in regular programs for youth, a few also report students in general programs for adults and/or vocational programs.

Enrolments in official languages programs, as reported by the provinces and territories, are presented for students in the following three programs. "French immersion programs" are programs where French is the language of instruction for students attending English schools. "Regular second language programs (or core language programs)" are programs where French is taught to students attending English schools outside Quebec, or programs where English is taught to students attending French schools in Quebec, as a subject in the regular course offerings. "Education programs in the minority official language" are programs for students from the official language minority of each province or territory (French outside Quebec, English in Quebec). These programs allow children in the official language minority to pursue their education in their language. Data on these official languages programs in public schools are available in table [37-10-0009-01](#), while enrolments in official languages programs in private/independent schools are presented in table [37-10-0175-01](#).

All numbers, including the totals, have been randomly rounded; therefore, sums of the values for the provinces and territories may not add up to the total counts for Canada. Calculations were done using unrounded values. All data are subject to revision.

Available tables: [37-10-0007-01](#) to [37-10-0009-01](#) , [37-10-0019-01](#), [37-10-0078-01](#), [37-10-0109-01](#), [37-10-0111-01](#), [37-10-0153-01](#) and [37-10-0173-01](#) to [37-10-0179-01](#) .

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey number [5102](#).

For more information, or to enquire about the concepts, methods or data quality of this release, contact us (toll-free 1-800-263-1136; 514-283-8300; STATCAN.infostats-infostats.STATCAN@canada.ca) or Media Relations (613-951-4636; STATCAN.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.STATCAN@canada.ca).