

# Public and private spending on elementary and secondary schools, 2020/2021

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In 2020/2021, total expenditures for elementary and secondary public and private schools increased by 6.1% from 2019/2020 to \$85.6 billion. Compared with the previous five years, this increase was well above average, as spending increased to support schools at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of this spending (95.3%, or \$81.5 billion) was directed to public education.

In 2020/2021, direct expenditures, grants and contributions by provincial and territorial governments accounted for over two-thirds (72.7%), or \$60.5 billion, of the total funding for public and private elementary and secondary education. Local taxation and other taxes levied by school boards and local governments accounted for 17.4% of funding, while the remaining funding included amounts from federal departments (3.7%), student fees and tuition (2.8%), and all other private sources, such as revenues from ancillary operations (3.5%).

## Federal government introduces the Safe Return to Class Fund

The pandemic has had a profound impact on education across the country, leading to numerous disruptions and school closures throughout 2020/2021. During this time, each province and territory developed new models for educational delivery during phases of remote, blended, and fully in-person schooling. In order to support this transition, the federal government announced up to \$2 billion in support through the [Safe Return to Class Fund](#). This funding was used by provinces and territories to help create these new learning spaces fitted to suit the new health and safety requirements, implement new digital course content and technological supports, as well as assist in additional staffing in classrooms and student transportation.

As special funding was directed to schools through the provincial/territorial governments, public school revenues from provincial/territorial governments increased by 7.5% in 2020/2021 from the previous year to \$51.4 billion. During this period, public school spending across all major categories of expenditures increased to levels well above the previous five-year average. The largest of these increases were seen in spending on instructional supplies (+8.9%) and school facilities services (+6.4%), which together included the purchase of personal protective equipment, the development of online learning and the purchase of new electronic remote learning devices for students, as well as the implementation of other health and safety measures such as additional systems for improved air ventilation.

## Total spending on public school teachers' salaries continued to grow through the pandemic

At the national level, expenditures for teachers' salaries grew \$1.7 billion (+4.0%) to \$43.3 billion in 2020/2021, which is an increase almost four times greater than the average of the previous five years. In some cases, provincial and territorial governments earmarked federal funds from the Safe Return to Class Fund to hire more teachers during the pandemic, including special tutors and substitutes to support absences and temporary changes to class sizes. According to results from the [Elementary and Secondary Education Survey](#), the total number of educators in Canada increased by 1.7%, with the largest increases occurring in the Northwest Territories (+7.3%) and New Brunswick (+6.4%).

Aside from the additional educators hired in 2020/2021, several newly ratified collective bargaining agreements between teachers' unions and the provincial/territorial governments also played a role in the increase of teachers' salary expenses during the year. Specifically, in Quebec, [the Fédération autonome de l'enseignement signed a new contract with the provincial government](#) (link in French only) which increased both the entry and maximum annual salary level for its members, as well as implementing retroactive payments for past years. [The Saskatchewan Teachers Federation ratified a collective bargaining agreement](#) securing a wage increase for each year from 2020 to 2022, retroactive to September 2019. Also, a [new collective agreement between the territorial government and the Northwest Territories Teachers' Association](#) included a wage increase for teachers, as well as an increase to the Northern Living Allowance.

## Quebec makes significant investments in school construction and renovations

In 2020/2021, Quebec invested \$2.7 billion in capital expenditures, an increase of 42.5% compared with the previous year. This follows the release of the [2021-2031 Quebec Infrastructure Plan](#) (link in French only) which announced nearly \$20.9 billion for the school network. The infrastructure plan noted that due to a period of low investment in the 1990s and early 2000s, a significant proportion of the schools in the province, built between 1950 and 1970, have reached or will soon reach the end of their useful life.

Outside of Quebec, British Columbia has also continued to make investments in school maintenance and infrastructure. Due in part to school expansions, upgrades and the [Seismic Mitigation Program](#), capital expenditures rose to \$967.1 million in 2020/2021, marking the fifth consecutive yearly increase for the province. At the national level, capital expenditures also increased in 2020/2021 (+18.0%), as several provinces and territories used federal funding to upgrade facilities to meet new health guidelines and recommendations.

## Public school revenues from local taxation sources continue to decline

Local taxation represents the second largest source of funding for public schools, representing just over one-fifth (21.0%) of total revenues in 2020/2021. However, this amount has been in decline since 2015/2016, including a decrease of 8.0% to \$14.4 billion in 2020/2021.

In Quebec, public school revenues from local taxation in 2020/2021 were less than half of what they were in 2017/2018, representing 7.5% of total revenues compared with 17.8% three years prior. One of the major drivers for this decline is tied to a decision aimed at reforming Quebec's 25-year-old school taxation system. [The new legislation was designed to standardize the tax rate](#), where homeowners pay the lowest existing rate, regardless of what region they live in. In 2020/2021, revenues from local taxation declined 30.7% to \$1.1 billion. During this same period, funding from the Quebec provincial government increased by 6.9% to \$12.5 billion, offsetting the decline in local funding.

In 2020/2021, [British Columbia also introduced changes to its school taxation system](#). Specifically, the provincial government took significant steps to support British Columbia businesses, non-profits, and other organizations during the pandemic by reducing the school property tax rates for commercial properties to achieve an average 25% reduction in the total property tax bill. This also follows a preliminary reduction of 50% announced in the initial British Columbia COVID-19 Action Plan. Similar to Quebec, funding from the provincial government of British Columbia (+11.8% to \$5.6 billion) increased during the same period, partially offsetting the decline in local funding.

## Revenues from ancillary services were negatively affected by school closures

[Ancillary revenues decreased in all jurisdictions](#), leading to a 24.9% decrease at the national level in 2020/2021. Post-secondary institutions faced a similar situation during the same period due to the pandemic. Ancillary revenues, which come from cafeteria sales, parking fees, school plays and concerts, excursion fees, fundraising campaigns, etc., make up 3.3% of total revenues for public schools.

### Note to readers

Public school board finance data are derived from [Financial Information of Elementary and Secondary Schools \(FINESS\)](#). The objective of this annual survey is to collect financial information on school boards and districts across Canada.

These financial statistics are collected from every province and territory—with the exception of Nunavut, where data are estimated—and are converted into a standard classification.

Data for this survey are not available at the school board and district level.

Student enrolment figures and educator counts are from the [Elementary–Secondary Education Survey](#).

Due to the elimination of the Survey of Financial Statistics of Private Elementary and Secondary Schools, data on funding for private elementary and secondary education have been estimated for the reference period 2006/2007 and onward, based on changes to private institutions' enrolment.

All of the financial figures are in constant 2020/2021 dollars adjusted for inflation, unless otherwise noted.

Caution should be taken when comparing provinces and territories directly, since provinces and territories have different funding formulas and structures.

Available tables: [37-10-0063-01](#) to [37-10-0067-01](#) .

Definitions, data sources and methods: survey numbers [3119](#) and [3140](#).

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; [infostats@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:infostats@statcan.gc.ca)) or Media Relations ([statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca](mailto:statcan.mediahotline-ligneinfomedias.statcan@statcan.gc.ca)).