

Education Matters: Insights on Education, Learning and Training in Canada

**A Profile of Minority-language Students
in Canada: Results from the Programme
for International Student Assessment,
2009**



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| 0 ^s | value rounded to 0 (zero) where there is a meaningful distinction between true zero and the value that was rounded |
| ^p | preliminary |
| ^r | revised |
| x | suppressed to meet the confidentiality requirements of the <i>Statistics Act</i> |
| ^E | use with caution |
| F | too unreliable to be published |
| * | significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$) |

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In 2009, the **Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)** went into the field in Canada for the fourth time. **PISA** began in 2000 and focuses on the capabilities of 15-year-olds as they near the end of compulsory education. **PISA** permits exploration of the ways that achievement in reading, mathematics and science vary across different populations and the factors that influence achievement within and across different sub-groups. The following profile summarizes the results of **PISA** 2009 for students in minority-language school systems in the seven provinces that reported data for both their English and French-language school systems (Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia).¹

Box 1: Minority-language students

The minority-language 15-year-old population described here includes students from schools that respond to and receive funding under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms which "... recognizes the right of Canadian citizens belonging to the English- or French-language minority in a province or territory to have their children educated in that language at the elementary-secondary level, where numbers warrant, in minority-language educational facilities provided out of public funds."²

The minority-language student population covered in this article consists of Anglophone students in Quebec and Francophone students outside of Quebec.

Students, family and home Life

The distribution of males and females in the minority student populations did not differ to any significant degree from that of the majority student population (Table 1). In both cases, the distribution of males and females was fairly equal. It is clear that parents of children entitled to a minority-language education do not make the decision to pursue this type of education based on gender.

Minority-language students were far more likely, often to a significant extent, to have been born in Canada or to have at least one parent who was born in Canada when compared to majority-language students (85.0% and 74.8%, respectively) (Table 1). A significant difference between minority- and majority-language student populations on this characteristic was evident for Canada overall and for New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba, where the share of Canadian-born students or students with at least one parent who was born in Canada, was significantly higher in the minority-language school system.

Table 1
Characteristics of students in minority-and majority-language school systems, Canada and selected provinces, 2009

Language of school system	Gender	Students immigration status	
	Female	Canadian-born ²	Second generation ^{3,4}
		percent	
Canada¹			
Minority	50.2	85.0*	10.0*
Majority	49.6	74.8*	14.1*
Nova Scotia			
Minority	55.6	96.7	F
Majority	49.0	95.3	1.9*
New Brunswick			
Minority	50.2	98.4*	F
Majority	49.7	95.4*	1.2*
Quebec			
Minority	49.9	82.7	12.4
Majority	50.5	85.4	8.2

Ontario			
Minority	50.3	83.4*	10.3*
Majority	49.5	66.7*	19.4*
Manitoba			
Minority	56.2	95.2*	F ¹
Majority	50.3	79.7*	9.0 ^E
Alberta			
Minority	47.8	72.2	9.0 ^E
Majority	50.3	78.7	10.8
British Columbia			
Minority	46.6	63.6	20.6 ^E
Majority	48.5	65.3	18.6
* Indicates a significant difference between students in minority- and majority-language school systems. ^E use with caution ^F too unreliable to be published ¹ Includes all provinces except Newfoundland and Labrador. ² Student born in Canada or with at least one parent born in Canada, student born abroad but at least one parent born in Canada. ³ Second generation: Student born in Canada but both parents born in another country. ⁴ First generation (not shown in table) : Student born in another country and both parents also born in another country. Source: Statistics Canada. Programme for International Student Assessment , 2009.			

The family structure of minority-language students was typical of Canadian families today—the vast majority of minority-language students (over 83%) were living in traditional nuclear families in 2009, while about 16% were in single-parent families. While these figures are comparable to those of majority-language students, there was a slightly higher tendency for minority-language students to come from traditional nuclear families rather than single-parent families relative to the rest of the students in their specific provinces.

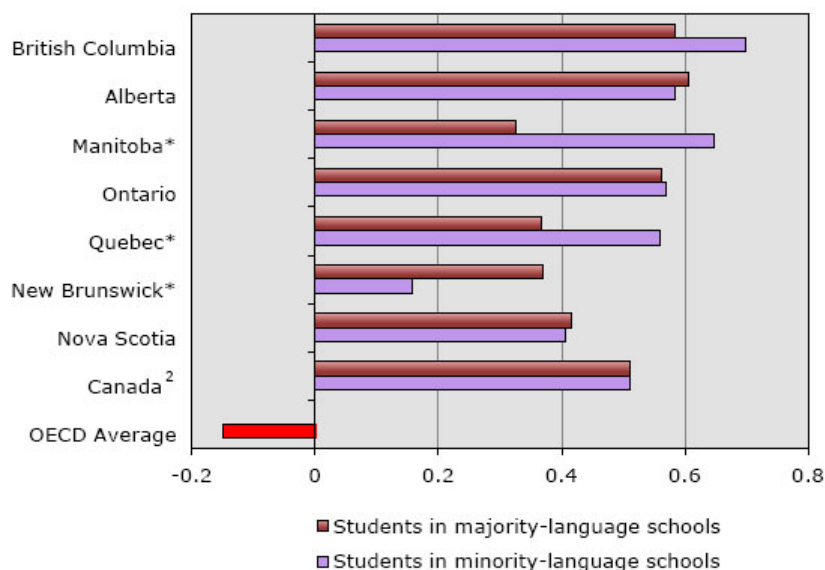
Overall, more than 70% of 15-year-old students in Canada had at least one parent with a post-secondary education in 2009. The proportion of students with at least one parent with a post-secondary education tended to be somewhat higher for the minority-language student populations in general, but the only province to show a significant difference on this characteristic was British Columbia. In that province, over 86% of the *PISA* students attending minority-language schools reported at least one parent with post-secondary relative to 70.9% of those in the majority-language schools.

A smaller share of the 15-year-old minority-language students indicated that they had a parent at home full-time relative to their majority-language peers. In Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia there was a significant difference on this characteristic, with a higher percentage of majority-language students having a parent at home full-time in 2009 relative to students in minority-language schools.

Family social, cultural and economic status (SCES), as measured in *PISA*, is a combination of indicators of parents' highest occupational and educational status and of possessions in the home which reflect relative wealth, cultural possessions (i.e. books and art in the home) and access to educational resources in the home (i.e. reference books, access to the internet). Higher scores on this index indicate a higher level of wealth, a higher number of cultural possessions in the home and greater access to educational resources in the home for the student.

Canada was well above the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) average on this index and showed no overall difference between minority- and majority-language students at that level of geography. Provincial differences were evident, however, with some showing a significant gap between the two populations (Chart 1). In New Brunswick, the minority-language student population was significantly lower on this index than the majority-language students, while the opposite was true in Quebec and Manitoba. In Nova Scotia, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia, measures of family wealth showed no significant differences between minority- and majority- student populations.

Chart 1
Scores¹ on the Index of Social, Cultural and Economic Status for students in minority- and majority-language school systems, OECD, Canada and selected provinces, 2009



* Indicates a significant difference between students in minority- and majority-language school systems.

1 Higher scores indicate greater social, economic and cultural wealth.

2 Includes all provinces except Newfoundland and Labrador.

Source: Statistics Canada. **Programme for International Student Assessment**, 2009.

Of particular note is the information on language spoken most often at home by 15-year-old students in minority-language schools. A comparison of language spoken in the home and the language used for instruction at school (which was the PISA test language) was possible with the 2009 data. For Canada, only one in ten students in the majority-language school system was using a language most often at home that was different from the language of instruction at school (Table 2). This rose to one-third for students in minority-language school systems, overall.

At all geographies covered in this report, the relative difference in school and home language for majority- and minority- language students was significant. In some instances, the differences were extreme – for example, in Nova Scotia, Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta and British Columbia, the proportion of minority-language students using a different language at home than at school was above 50%, or one out of every two minority-language students. By comparison, this figure was typically below 15% for students attending majority-language schools. Depending on the degree of mismatch, this could indicate difficulty in getting help with homework at home or in having access to school-language support materials in the home. It also raises questions as to the ability to practice and reinforce the linguistic skills being developed at school.

Table 2
Language use at home and at school for students in minority- and majority-language school systems, Canada and selected provinces, 2009

Language of school system	Language used most often at home compared to language of instruction at school	
	Same	Different ² percent
Canada¹		
Minority	67.0*	33.0*
Majority	86.6*	13.4*
Nova Scotia		
Minority	42.8*	57.2*
Majority	97.2*	2.8* ^E
New Brunswick		
Minority	87.1*	12.9*
Majority	94.3*	5.7* ^E
Quebec		
Minority	76.5*	23.5*
Majority	88.3*	11.7*
Ontario		
Minority	47.0*	53.0*
Majority	85.3*	14.7*
Manitoba		
Minority	49.2*	50.8*
Majority	86.7*	13.3*
Alberta		
Minority	49.0*	51.0*
Majority	87.9*	12.1*
British Columbia		
Minority	25.2*	74.8*
Majority	80.5*	19.5*

* Indicates a significant difference between students in minority- and majority-language school systems.

^E use with caution

1 Includes all provinces except Newfoundland and Labrador.

2 In most instances, when the language of instruction at school was different from the language used most often at home, the language used at home was the other official language for minority-language students and was an allophone language (neither English nor French) for majority-language students.

Source: Statistics Canada. **Programme for International Student Assessment**, 2009.

Over 95% of 15-year-olds reported having a home life that was conducive to learning and that supported typical teenage life in Canada. There were no significant differences between the minority- and majority-language student populations in any of the provinces on these lifestyle indicators. Students at this age in Canada typically report having a quiet place to do their schoolwork and the computer and educational software needed to complete their homework. They are living in environments that support literacy and reading (typically having more than 100 books in the home) and have at least one of the modern-day electronic devices such as DVD's, cell phones and the like at their disposal in their home.

15-year-old student life

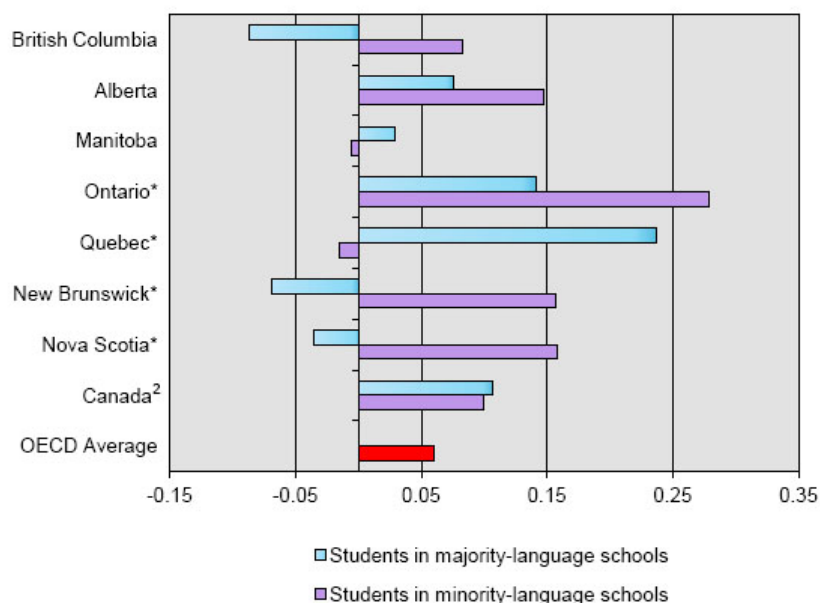
Teenage life in Canada usually includes a variety of activities, many of which are seen as preparatory to future careers and adulthood. Overall, about 60% of minority-language students worked for pay during the 2008/2009 academic year, a figure that was comparable to the figure for majority-language students. Similarly, the share of students active in volunteering was comparable for students in the two school systems, both at 59%. As well, life in Canada provides teens with the opportunity to engage in a number of other types of activities (both at school and outside of school) including sports, music lessons, the arts and the like. About eight in ten minority-language students engaged in these types of activities in 2009, similar to the rate for majority-language students.

Schooling and academic performance

Schooling takes up the greatest share of 15-year-old life in Canada. On the index of attitudes towards schooling, there were no overriding differences between students in minority- and majority-language school systems at the Canada level, with both populations scoring above the OECD average on this index in 2009.

At the provincial level, however, substantial differences existed. In Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Ontario, students in minority-language schools were much more positive about their schooling than their majority-language counterparts (Chart 2). In Quebec, the reverse was the case, with students in majority-language schools scoring much higher on this index than did students in minority-language schools.

Chart 2
Scores¹ on the index of attitudes towards school for students in minority- and majority-language school systems, OECD, Canada and selected provinces, 2009



* Indicates a significant difference between students in minority- and majority-language school systems.

¹ Higher scores indicate more positive attitudes towards school.

² Includes all provinces except Newfoundland and Labrador.

Source: Statistics Canada. Programme for International Student Assessment, 2009.

At the Canada level, a higher proportion of minority-language students reported having overall grades of over 70% than majority-language students. Furthermore, in the language arts, math and science, the share of minority-language students who reported having grades of over 70% was significantly higher than was the case for students attending majority-language schools. New Brunswick was the exception, where a significantly larger proportion of students in majority-language schools reported having overall grades of 70% compared to their counterparts in minority-language schools (Table 3).

Table 3
Proportion of students with grades of 70% or higher, students in minority- and majority-language school systems, Canada and selected provinces, 2009

Language of school system	Overall grades are 70% or higher	Language arts grades are 70% or higher
	percent	
Canada ¹		
Minority	82.8	73.2*
Majority	81.0	70.1*
Nova Scotia		
Minority	91.6*	77.5
Majority	84.6*	78.3
New Brunswick		
Minority	77.5*	63.0*
Majority	86.6*	76.1*
Quebec		
Minority	82.0	74.5*
Majority	77.9	61.2*
Ontario		
Minority	86.2	75.3
Majority	83.1	73.5
Manitoba		
Minority	86.4*	77.7*

Majority	77.5*	68.5*
Alberta		
Minority	80.5	69.3
Majority	78.8	67.5
British Columbia		
Minority	79.9	66.5
Majority	80.7	73.9
* Indicates a significant difference between students in minority- and majority-language school systems. 1 Includes all provinces except Newfoundland and Labrador. Source: Statistics Canada. Programme for International Student Assessment , 2009.		

At first glance, it appears that Canada's minority-language student population out-performed the *OECD* average of 493 in reading in 2009. However, this is in large part due to the performance of minority-language students in Quebec. In that province, students attending minority-language schools not only out-performed their counterparts in the other provinces in reading but also scored significantly above the *OECD* average (Table 4).

In all other provinces, students attending minority-language schools scored below the *OECD* average, whereas the scores for students in majority-language schools were equal to, or higher than, the *OECD* average. Similarly, in all provinces except Quebec and Manitoba, the scores for students in minority-language schools on the *PISA* reading assessment were significantly lower than the scores for students in majority-language schools. In Quebec and Manitoba, however, there were no significant differences in the scores for the two student populations.

Table 4
Estimated average scores in reading for students in minority- and majority-language school systems, Canada and selected provinces, 2009

	Students in minority-language school system	Students in majority-language school system	Difference in average scores, students in minority-language and majority-language school systems
	average score		difference
Canada¹	498	526	-28*
Nova Scotia	479	517	-38*
New Brunswick	469	511	-41*
Quebec	520	522	-2
Ontario	475	533	-58*
Manitoba	487	496	-8
Alberta	475	533	-58*
British Columbia	475	525	-49*
* Indicates a significant difference between students in minority- and majority-language school systems. 1 Includes all provinces except Newfoundland and Labrador. Note: The <i>OECD</i> average score in reading was 493. Source: Statistics Canada. Programme for International Student Assessment , 2009.			

Looking ahead – Career paths and planning for a post-secondary education

When looking ahead to a career, 15-year-old students from minority-language schools strongly believed that a good job would depend on their success in school (87.4% agreed with this statement) and that their schooling would have to include some form of post-secondary education (85.6% agreed).

Well over 90% of parents of students attending either minority- or majority-language schools believed that a post-secondary education was important to their children's future, and more than 90% of the students themselves, in both populations, expected to complete a post-secondary education (PSE).

Minority-language students were very positive about their future performance in *PSE*. Between eight and nine out of every ten students in the minority-language 15-year-old student group believed they would enjoy going to college or university. For questions related to future success in post-secondary education, the proportion of minority-language students who believed they could be successful was equal to or higher than that of the majority-language students. Where significant differences were evident (New Brunswick, Ontario and Manitoba), the minority-language student population was consistently more convinced of their future success in post-secondary education than their majority-language peers.

PISA identified the level of reliance students placed on available resources for career planning. About one-third of the students attending minority-language schools used a variety of resources (school, home and elsewhere) to gather information about current and future jobs. An additional one-quarter relied only on their schools for this information, while another 20% turned to people at home, only. In Ontario, minority-language students relied on 'school only' to a significantly lesser degree and on 'home only' to a significantly higher degree when compared to their majority-language counterparts.

Conclusion

The data from *PISA* 2009 profiles a minority-language student population that typifies Canadian teenage life. In 2009, the 15-year-old student lifestyle included school, work, volunteering and extracurricular activities. They appeared to be doing well in school and were relatively positive about their school experiences. Importantly, they planned to continue their education beyond high school and felt positive about their future academic experiences.

Notes

1. This article provides some highlights of a more detailed research report. See Shipley, Lisa. 2011. **A Profile of Minority - Language Students and Schools in Canada: Results from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2009**. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 81-595-M – No. 092.
2. **Protocol for agreements**, Department of Canadian Heritage. Accessed December 24, 2010.