5. Private Reports

#26 Canadian Education Association, Information Note: The Public Funding of Private Schools in Canada, February 1992

The 1992 information note was written by the Canadian Education Association in February 1992. The CEA is a non-governmental organization with the following Mission Statement:

“The Canadian Education Association pursues the improvement of education and serves the education community by providing opportunities to study issues of common interest; to share ideas, experiences and information; to establish and maintain linkages with government bodies, non-government agencies and individuals; to analyze trends and directions through research; and to participate in learning activities.”

This information note details the legal status of private schools in each province or territory of Canada and the different public funding arrangements of private schools (if any) in each jurisdiction.

CEA INFORMATION NOTE

A Tradition of Excellence

The Public Funding of Private Schools in Canada

February 1992

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INTRODUCTION

The funding of private (or independent) schools in Canada has generated much debate in educational circles. Supporters of private education believe that private schools offer greater diversity in educational programs and give parents the flexibility to choose the curriculum appropriate for their child. On the one hand, British Columbia’s Federation of Independent School Associations believes that independent schools are an alternative that “provides enrichment that enhances the education enterprise.” Because independent schools provide a service that “serves the public purpose,” they ought to receive “an equitable share of taxes collected for the provision of such services.”

On the other hand, advocates of a stronger public education system argue that increased public funding of private schools would lead to the creation of schools segregated along lines of religion, ethnicity or class, which would deny students the advantages of a shared acculturation experience. They also fear that support of private schools would erode the public’s financial and ideological support for public schooling. Opponents of private school funding argue that parents who send their children to private schools should not expect the tuition fees to be subsidized by the government. An editorial by David Clandfield in Our Schools/Our Selves argues that “Public funding is not supposed to turn private schools into free public schools, but only to take some of the financial pressure off [the private schools]. Any service that has to be paid for is more accessible to the wealthy members of our society than to the less wealthy.”

Although traditional “English-style” private schools have usually been the domain of the children of the well-to-do, private schools now offer a wide range of elementary and secondary programs. There are several reasons why parents choose to send their children to a private rather than to a public school. In many cases, they want their children to have a strong religious component in their education (e.g., many private schools offer religious education to Roman Catholic, Jewish, Mennonite people or a Seventh Day Adventist program). Some parents, prefer their children to be taught according to a particular methodology such as that offered in the Montessori and Waldorf schools, while others send them to schools with French or other second-language immersion programs. In large urban centres, many parents opt for private education because they do not believe that the public school system is providing the quality of education or the individual attention their children require. Finally, many private schools offer special education or programs for gifted students, and the so-called “visa” schools prepare foreign students for admission to North American universities.

Enrolment in private schools in Canada has increased steadily during the past two decades. In 1970-71, 142,601 students were enrolled in private schools (2.4% of the

1 Federation of Independent School Associations, Brief Submitted to the British Columbia Royal Commission on Education, March 1, 1988.
