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EDUCATION IN CANADA

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UNLIKE MOST INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES around the world, there is no federal body of education in Canada; rather, education is under provincial or territorial authority, granted under Canada's *Constitution Act* of 1867. As highlighted in Figure 1–1, Canada is composed of ten provinces (Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Ontario, Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Saskatchewan) and three territories (Nanavut, Northwest Territories, and Yukon). Thus, while there are many similarities across provincial and territorial education systems, there are significant policy variations in the areas of curriculum, assessment and accountability. These differences reflect the geography, history, language, culture, and corresponding specialized needs of the diverse populations served in each jurisdiction. All the education systems in Canada, however, are highly developed and widely accessible, reflecting a shared societal belief in the importance of education (CMEC, 2015). In this volume we begin by outlining the core commonalities that exist across the country while paying special attention to the localized nature of the systems—a hallmark of Canadian education. We then take a closer look at two of Canada's top performing jurisdictions, Alberta and Ontario, as exemplars of school systems that have developed strong supports around teacher development within their own unique policy contexts.

Overview of Canada

Canada is a multicultural society, with a foreign-born population of almost 20% (OECD, 2015). The Canadian constitution recognizes both English and French as its two official languages. According to 2011

Figure 1–1 Provinces and Territories of Canada

Source: Natural Resources Canada.

Statistics Canada census data, 5.8 million (17.5%) of Canadians speak both official languages. Nearly 7 million (21%) Canadians reported speaking French most often at home in 2011, although this is largely concentrated in the province of Quebec. In the rest of Canada, 74.1% of Canadians speak only English at home (CMEC, 2015). The minority language rights of French-speaking students living outside the province of Quebec and English-speaking students living in the province of Quebec are protected in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The Canadian Charter or Rights and Freedoms outlines the conditions under which Canadians have the right to access publicly funded education in either minority language. Each province and territory has established French-language school boards to manage the French-first-language schools. In the province of Quebec, the same structure applies to education in English-first-language schools.

All Canadians meeting age and residence requirements have access to free public education. In 2010–2011, there were 5,053,985 total students enrolled in public elementary and secondary schools in Canada (CMEC, 2015). Education is under provincial jurisdiction and there is no federal department of education. That being said, the federal government plays an important role in Canadian education, directly making provisions for First Nations schools on reserves and indirectly providing funding through intergovernmental transfers which aim to redistribute wealth across the country and "ensure a significant degree of equality across provinces in their ability to deliver social services such as education" (Parkin, 2015, p. 25). Although localized variations exist, the education systems within the ten provinces and three territories are based around a common belief in the importance of education, as evidenced by the significant proportion of budgets allocated to schooling (approximately 20% of total expenditures, depending on the jurisdiction).

In 2013, Canada's elementary and secondary school systems employed 397,122 educators (Statistics Canada, 2014), most of whom had four or five years of postsecondary study. The teaching profession is unionized in all jurisdictions; however, the scope of the work of teacher associations varies. National frameworks around teacher competencies, professionalism, and the work of teachers do not exist. Rather, teacher appraisal varies across jurisdictions and the establishment of professional standards and certification of the teaching profession are provincial/territorial responsibilities (OECD, 2015). To teach in Canada educators are required to obtain at least a bachelor of education from one of approximately 50 accredited teacher education programs at universities across the country. Some also offer postgraduate preparation for teaching. With large surpluses in teacher supply contrasted with available teaching jobs, Canadian teacher education programs and schools are selective in choosing candidates and teachers, which some analysts suggest is a contributor to high achievement (OECD, 2011). Positive learning environments and strong instructional leadership have also been identified as keys in Canada's continued school improvement efforts. Indicators from PISA 2012 showed that Canadian 15-year-olds viewed teacher-student relations at levels that are higher than the OECD average and school leaders reporter higher than average levels of instructional leadership (OCED, 2015).

Canada has a highly educated population, with 53% of 25–64-year-olds holding tertiary qualifications in 2012—ranking first among countries participating in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) analyses, which collectively averaged 33% (OECD, 2014). In recent decades, Canada has consistently been ranked

as a top performer on the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD, 2015). Across the ten provinces, Canadian 15-year-olds scored well above the OECD average in both mathematics and reading in the 2012 rankings and, of the 65 countries and economies participating in the assessment, only three OECD and six non-OECD countries outperformed Canada. As Parkin (2015) points outs, based on a variety of international assessments, "no country outside of East Asia performs better than Canada on a regular basis" (p. 6).

Complementing its focus on high quality education, Canada also has a strong focus on health and well-being, providing all residents with free health care and access to a host of social services dedicated to child, youth, and adult development. Since 2000, Canada has particularly focused on the provision of social programs and services in early childhood (birth to age 6) (Government of Canada, 2011). A national Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) issues a taxable monthly payment of $100 per child to families with children under the age of six (OECD, 2015). This funding is used at the discretion of parents to offset the costs of raising children. In late 2014, the federal government proposed increases to UCCB to $160 per child under the age of six and $60 per month for children aged 6–17. The increases took effect on January 1, 2015, and the first retroactive payment was made to families in July of 2015. Additional provincial baby bonuses and supplements for low-income families are also available to those who meet certain qualifications, with benefits and criteria varying between jurisdictions. While improvements in children's health have been made in a number of areas (such as infant mortality, teenage births, and bullying), when it comes to overall child well-being, UNICEF (2013) describes Canada as a country "stuck in the middle", achieving a middle ranking on their report card of 29 of the richest countries for the past decade. As such, key public education issues include a focus on diversity and equity with particular attention to social justice issues such as poverty, gender issues, mental health, racism, and violence prevention.

That being said, the impact of socioeconomic status on achievement in Canada is less than the OECD average, particularly in mathematics (9.4% compared with the OECD average of 14%). In fact, "in every OCED country except Finland, the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood a student is born in and of the local school they attend has more of an impact on their academic performance than in Canada" (Parkin, 2015, p. 24). Achievement among immigrant children is a particularly remarkable aspect of the nation's success as Canada is among only a few countries internationally where there is no significant achievement gap

between its immigrant and nonimmigrant students on the PISA (OECD, 2015). It is also one of the few countries where there is no significant performance gap between students who speak the language of instruction at home and those who do not (OECD, 2011). These successes were recently highlighted by the Center on International Education Benchmarking (CIEB, 2015), who identified Canada as one of only three nations (with Finland and Estonia) whose education systems "are able to offer their students a quality education regardless of socioeconomic background at a low cost and still come out at the top of the international league tables for overall student performance."

Nevertheless, while Canada performs highly in international comparisons, there are some variations across provincial and territorial systems. For example, 2011 data for the upper secondary graduation indicates: "The proportion of students who completed their education in the expected time varied considerably across the country: from 12% in Nunavut to 84% in Nova Scotia" (Statistics Canada, 2015, p. 41). A Pan Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) is administered to a sample of students across the ten provinces every three years. The average performance Canada is high; however, several provinces demonstrate performance at or above the Canadian average—Alberta in science and math; British Columbia in science; Newfoundland and Labrador in science; Ontario in math, reading, and science; and Quebec in math (CMEC, 2014). Within an overall high-performing system, it is important to remember that school education in Canada varies by province and territory.

Governance of School Systems

Provincial and territorial systems are centralized and schools have less autonomy regarding resource allocation, curriculum, and assessment than many of their OECD counterparts (OECD, 2015). In all 13 jurisdictions, departments or ministries of education are responsible for the organization, delivery, and assessment of education at elementary and secondary levels. A minister of education, who is almost always an elected member of the legislature, is appointed by the government leader to lead the department. Responsibility for the overall operation of the departments, however, is with the deputy ministers, who belong to the civil service. The provincial/territorial ministry or department provides education, administrative and financial management and school support functions. It also establishes the terms of the educational services to be provided, including the policy and legislative frameworks

(CMEC, 2015). The ministry or department of education typically lays out basic requirements around the assessment of students, with school boards and schools having the authority to establish their own assessment policies within the provincial/territorial framework. While format and structure vary across the country, students in most jurisdictions are required to participate in provincial or territorial summative examinations at key stages (typically grades 3, 6, and upper secondary) (OECD, 2015). The ministers of education collaborate through the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), with key pan-Canadian educational policies focused around evaluation and assessment (OECD, 2015).

Typically, school boards (also known as districts, divisions or district education councils in different provinces) are entrusted with local governance of education. Members are elected by public ballot, and the authority for operational and administrational (including financial) duties is delegated to local leaders at the discretion of the provincial and territorial governments. Local authorities oversee the group of schools within their board or division, and are responsible for curriculum implementation, personnel, student enrollment, and initiation of proposals for new construction or other major capital expenditures.

Organization of the System

Primary and Elementary Education (Grades K–8)

Operated by the local education authorities, one year of pregrade one (kindergarten) for five-year-olds is available in all provinces/territories. Preschool classes may also be available from age four or earlier, although there is substantial variation between jurisdictions in terms of provision and operation (OECD, 2015). Across Canada, 95 percent of five-year-olds attend pre-elementary or elementary school, and over 40 percent of four-year-olds are enrolled in junior kindergarten. Emphasized in the primary and elementary school curriculum are the basic subjects of language, mathematics, social studies, science, health and physical education, and introductory arts, with some jurisdictions including second-language learning. In general, schooling is compulsory from ages 5–18 but, in some provinces, can begin at age four and continue until graduation from secondary school or age 21. In 2012, the average hours per year of total compulsory instruction time for primary and elementary students in Canada was 919—higher than the OECD average of 794 hours (OECD, 2014).

Secondary Education (Grades 9–12)

Almost 98% of elementary students progress to the secondary level. Here, students are required to take primarily compulsory courses in the first years with access to specialized courses in later years to prepare for the job market or meet the entrance requirements of postsecondary institutions in specific areas of interest. Typically, vocational and academic programs are offered within the same secondary schools, but sometimes technical and vocational programs are offered in separate, dedicated vocational training centers. A number of jurisdictions also offer apprenticeship program at the secondary level that offer hands-on learning with a career focus (OECD, 2015). Students who complete the requisite number of compulsory and optional courses are awarded secondary school diplomas. In 2012, the average totally compulsory instruction time for lower secondary students in Canada was 924 hours—just above the OECD average of 905 hours (OECD, 2014). The upper secondary graduation rate for students below the age of 25 in 2011 was 81%, which was on par with the OECD average of 80% (OECD, 2014). In terms of the number of 25–34 year olds who have attained upper secondary qualifications, however, Canada ranks 10 percentage points higher than the OCED average at 92%. (OECD, 2015).

Separate and Private Schools

Legislation and practices concerning the establishment of separate educational systems and private educational institutions varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. In many jurisdictions separate school systems are publically funded and include both elementary and secondary education. These separate systems are public schools that reflect the constitutional right to religious education for Roman Catholics or Protestants, when either group is the religious minority in a community. Some jurisdictions also provide partial funding for private schools if certain criteria, which vary among jurisdictions, are met. In other jurisdictions, there is no public funding allocated to private schools, although they are still be regulated by the government. Government-funded school systems, both public and separate, however, serve about 93% of all students in Canada (CMEC, 2015), and the private system is relatively small in size.

Educational Funding

Funding for public education is overseen by each provincial/territorial government and sourced through a mix of government transfers and local taxes collected by either the government (in jurisdictions which

have centralized funding) or by school boards themselves (in jurisdictions where school boards have retaining taxing rights). Revised annually, provincial/territorial regulations set out the grant structure that establishes the level of funding for each school board based on factors such as the number of students, special needs, and location. Provincial funding to districts is typically divided into three categories: block grants based on number of students; categorical grants—either for funding specific programmatic needs (for example, special education), or helping districts meet particular challenges in providing basic services (for example, funding transportation for more remote districts); as well as equalization funding for districts to equalize less wealthy districts (CMEC, 2015). The primary allocation of government transfers to school boards is based on a per-pupil funding level that is consistence across the jurisdiction. Some inequity in funding does exist in jurisdictions where school boards have retained the right to directly collect education tax. In these jurisdictions school boards in more affluent neighborhoods tend to generate higher revenues per capita than those based in less affluent communities. In most jurisdictions, however, governments often provide additional funding to smaller school boards and school boards with a large proportion of high needs students or students of minority languages in order to provide more equitable service.

Student Expenditure

The average per pupil expenditure in 2010 was $10,166US in secondary education—approximately 6% higher than per pupil expenditures in primary/elementary education ($9580US). This represented 6.7% of Canada's GDP and 13.2% of all public expenditures (up from 5.9% and 12.4% in 2000). This varies from province to province, however, partially influenced by the size of the school-age population and enrollment in education, as well as the provinces' relative wealth. The portion of expenditure per student allocated to core services represented 95% of the total expenditure per students. This is consistent with the proportion on core services in OECD countries (94%) in elementary through postsecondary nontertiary education (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2014). The highest per-pupil spending typically occurs in the northern territories where remote locations make the delivery of quality education more costly. Outside of the territories, in 2010, the highest expenditure (across primary/elementary and secondary education) was Alberta ($10,423US) and the lowest was Nova Scotia ($8,719US).

Working Conditions

Teacher Pay

Teacher salaries in most jurisdictions are not based on the grade level at which a teacher teachers, with the exception of Ontario where primary teachers currently earn slightly less than their secondary counterparts (approximately 2% less). Salary scales in all jurisdictions, however, are influenced by a teachers' level of education and their years of experience. In 2009, teacher salaries in Canada represented 62.5% of overall expenditures in education—on par with the OECD average (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2014). Canada and OECD averages also reveal similar relative differences between starting salaries and those at the top of the salary scales; however, Canada's teachers reached the top of their salary scales much faster than those of their OECD counterparts (11 years in Canada versus 24 years on average in the OECD countries). For example, in 2011, Canadian teachers at the beginning of their careers earned an average annual salary of $35,534US, compared to the OECD average of $28,854US. After 15 years of experience, however, teachers in Canada earned $56,349US—significantly higher than the OECD average of $38,136US (OECD, 2013a). Variations in starting and top-out salaries do exist across jurisdictions, however. Based on minimum training, in 2010/11, the North West Territories offered the highest salaries, regardless of career stage, at approximately $68,000CAN for beginning teachers and $97,000CAN for those at the top of the scale. This reflects the high cost of living in the far north and issues around teacher recruitment and retention in such remote locations. Among the provinces, Alberta teachers receive the highest compensation based on minimum training (approx. $55,000–$87,000CAN), with beginning teachers in Quebec ($42,000CAN) and top-of-the-scale teachers in British Columbia and Newfoundland ($65,000CAN) earning the lowest salaries based on minimum training (Canadian Education Statistics Council, 2014).

Teaching Time

The school year in most Canadian provinces consists of approximately 195 days of instruction. Teachers typically teach anywhere from four to five hours per day, depending on the allocation for preparation time, which varies both between and within the jurisdictions. In 2012, primary and elementary school teachers in Canada taught an average of 802 hours per year, compared with the OECD average of 782 hours. At

the lower secondary level (generally Grades 7–9), the net annual teaching time was 747 hours and almost the same (751 hours) at the upper secondary level (generally grades 10–12). Overall, these figures are higher than the OECD averages: 20 hours higher in primary/elementary, 53 hours higher in lower secondary, and 96 hours higher at upper secondary (OECD, 2014).

Aboriginal Education

According to the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC, 2015), in 2011–2012, there were approximately 110,597 First Nations students enrolled in Canada's K–12 education system. Approximately 60% of these students (66,388) attended on-reserve, band-operated schools (which are funded by the Federal government), while 37% (40,863) attended off-reserve schools operated by provinces/territories. The remaining three percent of students attended private schools or one of the seven federally operated reserve schools. While Canada has enjoyed much educational success, the education of First Nations students has historically been one of the countries more controversial and contentious issues. Bound to provide educational services to Canada's Indigenous peoples with the signing of treaties that gave the federal government control of the Aboriginal lands, for many years the governments answer to First Nations education was residential schools—educational institutions run by the churches that forced Native children to leave their homes to be educated at boarding schools. Students lived at the schools and were not permitted to speak their native tongue, engage in spiritual ceremonies, or dress in their traditional clothing in an attempt to assimilate them into the dominant culture. While the experiences of children at such schools varied, many students were subjected to years of abuse and mistreatment, which has contributed to intergenerational effects including family violence, substance abuse, and a deep mistrust of the education system as a whole. The last residential school in Canada closed in 1996, and in 2008 former Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized to Canada's Indigenous peoples, acknowledging that "the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language" (Government of Canada, 2008, ¶ 3). As part of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/irs settlement agreement- english.pdf), the government also launched the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=3) to investigate and document

the injustices of the legacy of residential schooling in order to promote awareness among the general public and begin the momentous task of healing and moving forward together. However, Aboriginal education in Canada continues to be a challenge, with First Nations students typically achieving at levels that are below the Canadian average (CMEC, 2015b; Parkin, 2015). Issues include teacher training and retention, the recruitment of Aboriginal teachers, parental engagement, language instruction, lower per-pupil funding formulas, and the development of culturally relevant curriculum (Standing Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples, 2011). To support the diverse needs of these students, the federal government provided $1.55 billion to First Nations elementary and secondary education in 2010–2011. For construction and maintenance of education facilities on reserve, additional funding of approximately $200 million was provided. On a per capita basis, the federal government stated that $14,056 was allocated per full-time equivalent student in 2011–2012 for elementary and secondary education expenditure (AANDC, 2015), but this number has been questioned by the Assembly of First Nations who argue that only about 40% of this funding is provided to students on-reserves, with the remainder going to provincial school boards to pay the tuition fees for students living on reserves but attending public schools (Assembly of First Nations, 2011). According to AFN, a closer examination of this number reveals that, in 2011, students in First Nation schools were actually being funded at $7101—a gap of over $3500 less than students in provincial schools. Further to this, the inequities of the historical residential schooling system for Aboriginal peoples and continuing issues concerning supports for Aboriginal students in First Nation schools require further focused attention and resources. In this vein, the TRC issued their final report in June of 2015, which contained 94 calls to action including recommendations to eliminate the funding gap in education between First Nations children being education on and off reserves and to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full collaboration of Aboriginal peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). According to the OECD (2015), improving the performance of Canada's Aboriginal students is a key issue in the continued betterment of equitable and quality education in the country.

Conclusion

Overall, Canada is a country that is proud of its education system and places a high value on—and participation in—publicly funded education. Teachers are highly qualified and, generally, a respected profession. The

Canadian population is, by international comparisons, well educated and inequities linked to socioeconomic status or immigrant status or lower than average compared to the OECD (OECD, 2015). Nevertheless, there remain national issues of concern, particularly recognition, reconciliation, and appropriate resources to support Aboriginal students and communities (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Furthermore, while the values and practices of education are influenced by the national political, social and economic context and, particularly, by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; school education is constitutionally the responsibility of provinces and territories. There is no one Canadian education system; instead there are local variations affecting teachers and teaching. In the following chapter, we provide in-depth case studies of two of Canada's highest performing provinces: Alberta and Ontario.

For more information on education in Canada and key policy initiatives, please see the OECD's recent Policy Outlook document on Canada (http://www.oecd.org/edu/EDUCATION POLICY OUTLOOK CANADA.pdf).