

# Background

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## School Choice in Canada: Lessons for America

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**Abstract:** *In Canada, the province of Alberta has long encouraged school choice. Historically, Alberta has had two school systems between which parents may choose: the “public” system and a “separate” system. Other Alberta choices include charter, private, and French-language schools. Homeschooling is encouraged and supported by the provincial government, and “blended” programs are available where children can take some courses at home and others at school. This large variety of educational choice has led to positive results. International test results have placed Alberta students among the world’s top performers, including immigrant children who fare equal to or better than non-immigrant children. In Alberta, parents expect—and have—a wide variety of educational options for how to educate their children, a policy outcome that American states should emulate.*

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Canada might be perceived as having “socialized” education, akin to its “top down” health care system. In reality, several Canadian provinces have a flourishing “bottom up” choice-based primary and secondary education system. The province of Alberta has been especially supportive of school choice. Under the Canadian constitution, education is a provincial responsibility,<sup>1</sup> with which the federal government has not interfered. While the federal government does provide funding to universities and students at the primary and secondary levels, there is no Canadian equivalent of the U.S. Department of Education. The result is that Canada has 10 distinct provincial models of education.

### Talking Points

- The western Canadian province of Alberta provides families with a wide range of educational options, perhaps the most school choice of any jurisdiction in North America.
- International test results have placed Alberta students among the world’s top performers.
- Immigrant children have scored equal to or better than non-immigrant children—a result that was contrary to national and international trends.
- Alberta does not merely talk about school choice; the province directly encourages schools and school boards to respect school choice, for instance through mandates that school authorities who work with homeschooling parents must send only teachers for home visits who believe in and understand homeschooling.
- Parents in Alberta have, and expect, a wide variety of educational options for how to educate their children. The key aspect of Alberta’s school system that can be copied anywhere is the *climate* of choice the province has long encouraged.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:  
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A unique constitutional “wrinkle” exists in the Canadian context as a result of pre-Confederation (pre-1867) negotiations to preserve approaches to education that were themselves the result of the unique attempt to preserve the rights of parents to educate children in their own religion, culture, and language. Expressed in constitutional terms, the right of the Protestant or Roman Catholic minority in each province to its own, separate education system was preserved.<sup>2</sup> The end result of Canada’s unique constitutional framework is that experiments in school choice have not only been preserved but expanded, as choice between at least two systems has always been a feature of many Canadian provinces.

The relevant lesson for American policymakers is that widespread educational choice has kept public schools more accountable, encouraged competition in the delivery of quality education, and entrenched a culture and expectation of school choice in Alberta.

### Alberta as a Model for America

The purpose of this study, and of most relevance to Americans, is to discuss education in the province of Alberta where a plethora of school choice exists and is encouraged by the provincial government. Historically, the province of Alberta has had two taxpayer-funded school systems. The first is the secular “public” system, while the second is the “separate” system, which on occasion can be aligned with a denomination.<sup>3</sup> (For example, in Alberta’s largest city, Calgary, the fully funded separate school system is officially known as the Calgary Catholic School District). The latter is partly the result of historical settlement in the province; it is also the result of Canada’s linguistic and cultural duality in which English and French language rights have constitutional protection, and education rights flow from the same.

The presence of this second, separate, school system, fully funded by the province of Alberta, had led to competition and choice. In Alberta, those who pay property taxes can and do choose which system to fund when asked by civic census takers. That duality does not exist and cannot exist in the United States because of America’s own unique constitutional design. However, in Alberta, there is also a burgeoning “third stream” of school choices. This third stream has expanded school choice even more and includes:

- **Private schools—registered or accredited.** Registered schools must meet basic registration requirements, but are not required to teach the provincial curriculum or have Alberta Teaching Certificates; the trade-off is that registered private schools are not eligible for funding from the department of education. Accredited private schools must teach the provincial curriculum, and, as a result, receive 60 percent to 70 percent of applicable per student instruction grants available to the public school system. In the case of accredited private schools, the difference between the two funding figures is essentially determined by the degree of oversight that the accredited private school is willing to accept (the more oversight, the more funding).
- **Charter schools**, a result of an experiment in the mid-1990s which introduced the charter school concept to Alberta.
- **Francophone (French-language) schools** in the public or private system which receive funding from the tax base, full or partial, depending on whether they are in the public or private system, respectively.
- **Home education and blended programs**, whereby a parent can register with any school board in the province, whether public or private, Catholic or not, which then provides support

1. Department of Justice Canada, “Constitution Acts, 1867 to 1982,” Section 93, at <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/const/index.html> (October 18, 2010).
2. The exception is Quebec, where only existing residents, not newcomers, can exercise that right, an exception that need not concern us here.
3. The Alberta ministry responsible for education refers to the two tax-funded systems as “public” and “separate.” Some separate school districts though identify themselves as “Catholic” or “Protestant.” See Government of Alberta, Education, “School Choice: Public and Separate Schools,” at <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/choice/public.aspx> (October 26, 2010).

## Breakdown of Student Population in Alberta, by Authority Type

| Authority Type        | Authorities | Schools      | Students       | Percentage of Total Student Population |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|--|
| Public                | 41          | 1,428        | 416,763        | 69%                                    |
| Separate/Catholic     | 17          | 366          | 135,672        | 23%                                    |
| Francophone           | 5           | 35           | 5,563          | 1%                                     |
| Charter               | 13          | 19           | 7,550          | 1%                                     |
| ECS Private Operator* | 100         | 112          | 11,984         | 2%                                     |
| Private School        | 132         | 155          | 24,097         | 4%                                     |
| <b>Total**</b>        | <b>308</b>  | <b>2,115</b> | <b>601,629</b> | <b>100%</b>                            |

\* ECS (Early Childhood Services) includes pre-school and other services such as programs for developmentally challenged children in school and pre-school.

\*\* Homeschooling enrollment figures are included above and are not placed in a separate category because every homeschooled child is overseen by an associate school board or associate school. Figures for homeschooled children are in Table 2.

Sources: Government of Alberta, Education, "Number of Schools and Authorities," at <http://education.alberta.ca/apps/statistics/numberschools.asp> (October 27, 2010); Government of Alberta, Education, "Alberta Student Population by Authority System for 2009/2010 Preliminary," at <http://education.alberta.ca/apps/statistics/quickfacts/page2.asp> (October 27, 2010).

Table 1 • B 2485  heritage.org

to the homeschooling parent. "Blended" programs allow a child to take some courses at home, others at school. Homeschooled students receive two visits a year from teachers from the chosen board or school.

The plethora of choices in Alberta for parents has led to competition between school systems, between school districts, between schools themselves, and even between types of schooling options, i.e., home-schooling versus traditional "brick and mortar" schools. Importantly, such choices have led to superior results according to international surveys. Alberta's students—including immigrant children—are among the best-scoring in the world.

### Alberta's Six School Choices

**Choices 1 and 2: "Public" and "Separate" Schools.** When Alberta became a province of Can-

ada, Section 17 of the Alberta Act of 1905 affirmed the right of minority-faith communities, either Protestant or Roman Catholic, to form separate school districts. This provision is continued by Section 29 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which preserves existing constitutional rights and is also enshrined in provincial law in accordance with section 93 of the 1867 Constitution Act. Application for a separate school district includes:<sup>4</sup>

- A petition for the establishment of a separate school district with signatures from three people who identify themselves as "separate school electors";<sup>5</sup>
- A public meeting as a result of a successful petition where, if a majority of the quorum present (and who have identified themselves as of a "separate" faith) votes in favor of the separate dis-

trict, the separate school district is established under the same regulations as the existing public school district;

- If a quorum is not present at the meeting (25 percent of the registered voters who identified themselves as "separate school electors"), a plebiscite can be called, and, if a majority votes in favor, a separate district is established; and
- In either event, the provincial Minister of Education (equivalent to a state secretary of education in the U.S.) must then establish that separate district.

"Separate schools"—designated as such under this constitutional and legal provision—receive 100 percent of the funding available to the public school system. Citizens who pay property taxes choose to support the "public" or "separate" option by

4. Alberta Education, "Establishing a Separate School District: Information Package," 2008, at [http://education.alberta.ca/media/888970/2008\\_est\\_a\\_sep\\_sd\\_final\\_september\\_2008v3.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/888970/2008_est_a_sep_sd_final_september_2008v3.pdf) (October 19, 2010).

5. In Alberta, voters identify themselves as supporters of the "public" or "separate" school system in a municipal census which occurs every three years and/or on their annual property tax form. The process is akin to U.S. voters declaring themselves registered as Republican, Democrat, or Independent.

answering the census question of whether they support the public system or the separate system. In some cases, the separate school system is known by a denominational affiliation, such as “Catholic.” The property-tax payers will then have the education portion of their property taxes flow to their designated school system.<sup>6</sup>

While not directly relevant to the American experience or constitutional environment—American constitutional jurisprudence has made a distinction between aid to parents who select a religious school and payments directly to religious institutions, in compliance with the Establishment Clause—the existence of this right in Canada further entrenches a choice-based school system. The right to a choice among schools also encourages the *expectation* of choices when parents consider education and the needs of their child.

**Choice 3: Francophone Schools.** Under the Canadian constitution, parents whose first language is French have a right to French-language education for their children (where numbers warrant it).<sup>7</sup> The existence of this right further entrenches a choice-based school system; it further encourages parents to expect educational choices.

**Choice 4: Private Schools.** In Alberta, Section 28 of the School Act lists the requirements for private schools for grades one to 12. All private schools:

- **Must** meet the basic requirements of the School Act, including those that apply to student records, exam procedures, suspension provi-

### Number of Alberta Students in Homeschooling and Blended Schooling

| School Year | Home Education Program | Home Education Blended Program | Online Program |
|-------------|------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------|
| 2007        | 7,291                  | 2,678                          | 4,872          |
| 2008        | 7,658                  | 2,075                          | 5,338          |
| 2009        | 8,097                  | 2,015                          | 10,121         |
| 2010        | 7,968                  | 1,913                          | 6,920          |

Source: Data provided by the Government of Alberta's education department.

Table 2 • B 2485  heritage.org

sions, standardized tests as required by the provincial government,<sup>8</sup> approved curricula,<sup>8</sup> and other requirements;<sup>9</sup>

- **May** charge tuition as they see fit;
- **May** select their students and are not required to enroll students with special education needs (with the exception of Designated Special Education Private Schools);
- **Must** have boards that are elected from among members of its community or a community non-profit company; and
- **May** employ teachers who have valid Alberta Teaching Certificates but who are not eligible for active memberships in the Alberta Teachers' Association (the Alberta teachers' union).<sup>10</sup>

6. In Alberta, property taxes flow to the school system as a whole, i.e., the public system or the separate system, not to the individual district. The funding formula is based on student population and other needs of the individual district; the purpose is to avoid funding imbalances based on more lucrative property values.

7. Alberta Education, “Affirming Francophone Education,” 2001, at <http://education.alberta.ca/media/433070/cadreeng.pdf> (October 19, 2010).

8. There is flexibility on what constitutes approved curricula in the province of Alberta. Public schools must follow the Alberta Programs of Study, which directs, first in broad terms, the type of education a student is to receive and which subjects flow from that requirement. A private school that applies for and receives funding must also follow the Alberta Programs of Study. However, a private school that does not accept government funding must instead submit a proposed program of study with a list of subjects the school proposes to offer, as well as the major skills and knowledge areas to be mastered by the students. Similarly, non-funded private schools do not have to administer standardized provincial tests but must provide a description of proposed alternative testing. In both curricula and testing, the “Minister” (in essence the provincial government) must approve alternate curricula and testing. See Government of Alberta, “School Act: Private Schools Regulation,” 2000, sections 2 (1)(g)(h) and 10(1), at [http://www.qp.alberta.ca/574.cfm?page=2000\\_190.cfm&leg\\_type=Regs&isbncln=0779750373](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/574.cfm?page=2000_190.cfm&leg_type=Regs&isbncln=0779750373) (October 19, 2010).

9. *Ibid.*

There are two types of private schools in Alberta:

- **Registered private schools** (not taxpayer-funded). These schools must meet the basic registration requirements established by the provincial government but are not required to teach the official curriculum (known as Alberta Programs of Study). They are required to meet basic goals and standards. Their teachers are *not* required to have Alberta Teaching Certificates nor are they required to be members of the teachers' union.
- **Accredited private schools.** These accredited private schools fall into three further categories:
  1. Accredited by the Alberta education department and not taxpayer-funded (usually language and culture schools but also some adult education schools);
  2. Accredited with Level 1 or Level 2 funding from the tax base. These schools must teach students the official curriculum (Alberta Programs of Study), administer provincial exams, and teachers must have Alberta Teaching Certificates. They are not required, however, to belong to the teachers' union.
 

Taxpayer funding constitutes 60 percent of the base instruction rate for all "level 1" private schools, and 70 percent of applicable student grants for "level 2" private schools, plus other specific grants. These funding levels are correlated with the degree of oversight agreed to by the school in question. Such schools have been funded in Alberta since 1967; and
  3. Designated Special Education Private Schools. These schools are for special needs students and receive 100 percent of the funding available to standard public and "separate" schools.

**Choice 5: Charter Schools.** In Alberta, charter schools are autonomous non-profit public schools under sections 31 to 38 of the School Act and are

designed to allow specialization in selected subject areas. (That specialization is in addition to Alberta Education's Program of Studies.<sup>11</sup>) Charter schools were established in 1994 with the expressed goal of allowing autonomous public schools to provide innovative means of delivering education. Alberta is the only province in Canada to experiment with this type of choice in education.

A charter is an agreement between the Minister of Education and an individual or group (teachers or parents) regarding the establishment and administration of a school. The charter describes the unique educational service the school will provide, how the school will operate, and which student outcomes it intends to achieve. Charter schools in Alberta have five-year contracts and are renewable.

The features of a charter school as described by the Alberta government are:<sup>12</sup>

- **Access**—Charter schools cannot deny access to any students who meet the academic requirements of the relevant portion of the School Act.
- **Choice**—A charter school should provide enhanced or innovative delivery of public education to students (for instance, a concentration on music instruction or art that would be unavailable in a regular public school). This means that parents and students have more opportunities to choose an education that best serves student needs.
- **Curriculum**—The curriculum is similar to and structured around a basic education<sup>13</sup> as defined by Alberta Education and the required exams.
- **Funding**—Charter schools are *eligible* for the same provincial funding per student as any other public school; in practice they receive less per student on the reasoning that as stand-alone schools without the administrative overhead of a district, costs are presumed to be less.
- **Secularism**—Charter schools may not be affiliated with a religious faith or denomination,

10. Government of Alberta, Education, "School Choice: Private Schools," 2010, at <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/choice/private.aspx> (October 19, 2010).

11. Government of Alberta, Education, "School Choice: Charter Schools," 2010, at <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/choice/charter.aspx> (October 19, 2010).

12. Government of Alberta, "Charter Schools Handbook," May 2009, at [http://education.alberta.ca/media/434258/charter\\_hndbk.pdf](http://education.alberta.ca/media/434258/charter_hndbk.pdf) (October 19, 2010).

though a charter school may provide religion classes.

- **Non-profit**—Charter schools are non-profit schools.
- **Staffing**—Teachers employed at charter schools must be certified. They are not required to be members of the teachers' union.
- **Purpose**—Charter schools are expected to improve student learning by providing a different educational environment beyond the services provided by the existing school board. For example, a charter school may take a traditional approach to instruction in the classroom, or require school uniforms (regardless of standard practice in the public schools).
- **Specialization**—Charter schools specialize in a particular educational service or approach.
- **Tuition Fees**—Charter schools may not charge tuition.
- **Accountability**—Each charter board is responsible for its charter school(s). This responsibility includes:
  - *Autonomy*—A charter board has the authority and autonomy to operate a charter school,
  - *Financial Reporting*—A charter board must appoint an independent auditor and annually submit an Alberta Education Budget Report Form and an Audited Financial Statement to the ministry of education, and
  - *Governance*—A charter school is operated by a corporate body in accordance with the relevant section of the School Act. The governing body is called the charter board, and its mem-

bership should represent parents and teachers of students in the school as well as community members.

Charter schools in Alberta have been mostly successful. A 2010 Canada West Foundation report noted that charter schools succeeded in providing enhanced educational choice in Alberta and improved educational outcomes for their students. However, the report noted that challenges included, “an onerous periodic charter renewal process, limited access to facilities and an uncertain position in the educational community. These challenges inhibit the ability of charter schools to achieve their full potential.”<sup>14</sup> The report also noted opposition from some in the educational establishment—from some school boards and from the provincial teachers' union—as other factors that have inhibited more significant growth.

Canada West recommended remedying such deficiencies with ending the onerous renewal process and instead giving charter schools permanent status. Canada West argued that such permanent status would then allow them to access the funding and facilities needed to fulfill their mandates.<sup>15</sup>

Despite these problems, the list of charter schools (13 in Alberta with 22 campuses) and their specializations is wide and deep. Specializations include: English as a second language, traditional education, programs for at-risk youth, arts immersion, the option of all-female schools, technology-rich curriculum, classes for academically capable “underachievers,” academic excellence and character development classes, Canadian indigenous teachings, “gifted” education classes, rural leadership classes, and music instruction.<sup>16</sup> Attendance

13. Basic education mainly deals with what most people will think of as the “3 Rs,” but the list of regulations is extensive. See Government of Alberta, Education, “Goals and Standards Applicable to the Provision of Basic Education in Alberta,” February 10, 1998, at <http://education.alberta.ca/department/policy/standards/goals.aspx> (October 19, 2010). But section 3(1) of Alberta's School Act does mandate that education programs and instructional materials “must not promote or foster doctrines of racial or ethnic superiority or persecution, religious intolerance or persecution, social change through violent action of disobedience of laws.” See Government of Alberta, Education, “Education Legislation: School Act and Regulations,” at [http://www.qp.alberta.ca/574.cfm?page=s03.cfm&leg\\_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779733941](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/574.cfm?page=s03.cfm&leg_type=Acts&isbncln=9780779733941) (October 19, 2010).
14. Shawna Ritchie, “Innovation in Action: An Examination of Charter Schools in Alberta,” Canada West Foundation, January 2010, at [http://cwf.ca/blog/Canada\\_West\\_Foundation\\_Blog/tag/Charter\\_Schools/](http://cwf.ca/blog/Canada_West_Foundation_Blog/tag/Charter_Schools/) (October 19, 2010).
15. *Ibid.*
16. The Association of Alberta Public Charter Schools, “Our Members,” 2010, at <http://www.taapcs.ca/schools/> (October 19, 2010).

has grown from zero in 1994 (before they were introduced) to approximately 7,000 students in 2010. The goal of charter schools is to provide innovation and choice in education, a goal that despite several handicaps, such schools have succeeded in attaining.

### Choice 6: Home Education/Blended Programs.

Alberta has been the most innovative, flexible, and supportive province in Canada as it concerns home-schooling. Provincial law mandates that every child between the ages of six and 16 attend school, but the province explicitly recognizes homeschooling as a “school” for the purposes of the School Act. In addition to that legal right recognized by the province, school boards and parents must, by law, work together, but there is great choice within that relationship for the parents:<sup>17</sup>

- Parents can choose *any* school board or private school anywhere within the province to help with the education curricula and tests for their child. If the institution accepts the request, it is the explicit responsibility of the school board or private school to provide such support.
- A school board or school chosen by the parents for this relationship is known as an “associate school board” or an “associate school.” Parents can thus “shop around” for a school or school board that is favorable to their views and supportive of and proficient in helping homeschooling become successful.
- The province provides a guide that clearly outlines the responsibility and rights of the parents in educating their child and also the responsibility and rights of the associate school board or school.<sup>18</sup>
- Associate school boards or associate private schools (depending on which option the parent has chosen) are required to visit home-educated students at least twice a year. Teachers who perform these home visits measure progress by

reviewing samples of student work, and information gathered at such visits is required to be shared with parents.

- The board or school receive compensation, which provides an incentive to provide excellent support to parents. It has the benefit of fostering competition between school boards and schools to better serve parents.
- Parents have flexibility in designing home education programs—including methods of academic evaluation.
- If the parents follow the Alberta Programs of Study in their curriculum for their child, the student is eligible to receive the equivalent high school credits, assuming the student has met the normal minimum outcomes prescribed by the province.
- A further choice exists in terms of whether to give one’s child a complete at-home education or a “blended” program. The distinction is as follows:<sup>19</sup>

#### *Home education*

- The parent takes sole responsibility for the education of the child.
- Curriculum design is a packaged education program delivered, but not designed by parents; or, delivered and designed by parents or a person named by the parents.

#### *Blended*

- The parent shares responsibility for the education of the child with a school authority (school board or private school).
- In practice the curriculum design is shared; the parent has responsibility for some courses and the school authority has responsibility for other courses. It is meant to be a flexible arrangement that the parent and school authority mutually agree upon, depending on the skills and aptitudes of the parents and children and the courses and curriculum

17. Government of Alberta, Education, “School Choice: Home Education/Blended Programs,” at <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/choice/homeeducation.aspx> (October 19, 2010).

18. Home Education Handbook, “Alberta Home Education Programs—Rights and Responsibilities,” 2007, pp. 17 and 18, at <http://education.alberta.ca/media/1225757/home%20education%20handbook%20edit%20april%202010.pdf> (October 19, 2010).

19. *Ibid.*

available from the school authority. This will differ depending on the school authority chosen, and on the wishes of the parents.

Funding for homeschooling is dependent on the proportion of responsibility accepted by the parent. By law, an associate school board or associate school must offer the parents at least 50 percent of the per child funding available to the institution. There are restrictions on how the money can be used—it cannot be used for personal remuneration or for out-of-pocket educational expenses that would normally be incurred by parents whose child is in traditional brick-and-mortar schools. Parents can, if they wish, decline funding entirely, though this does not change the rights and responsibilities assigned under provincial legislation.

Alberta's approach to homeschooling and blended schooling is the most flexible and supportive of parental choice in all of Canada.

### Results of Alberta's Six Schooling Choices

Alberta's system has led to high-scoring students regardless of which of the six options their parents chose. Students from public, Catholic/separate, private, charter, or home schools and blended schools score high on international standardized achievement tests. In 2006, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) placed Alberta's students second in the world (up from fourth) in science (the focus subject for the 2006 tests). Alberta was also the only province whose overall science score, as well as each individual test score, was significantly higher than the Canadian average. In the two minor areas of study tested that year, reading and math, Alberta tied for third and fifth in the world, respectively.<sup>20</sup>

Immigrant children have scored equal to or better than native children—a result that within Canada occurred only in Alberta and was a unique result for PISA.<sup>21</sup> Such a result is thus contrary to

national and international trends and speaks for Alberta's choice-based education system.

### Lessons for the United States

Because of constitutional and other differences between the United States and Canada, several of Alberta's choice-based options would not translate into the context of American states. But the key aspect of Alberta's school system that *can* be copied anywhere is the *climate* of choice that the province has long encouraged. American policymakers should consider:

- **Legislation that allows schools and school boards to create alternative education programs** that emphasize a particular subject matter—for example, some public schools specialize in music, others in art.
- **Explicit legislative support for a wide variety of schooling options.** In the case of homeschooling in Alberta, the province explicitly instructs school boards and schools that work with homeschoolers to “assign teachers to home education who are supportive of home education parents and students and who are informed about the special characteristics of tutorial learning.”<sup>22</sup>
- **“Opt-out” provisions** that allow parents to choose what subject matter their children will be exposed to when a question of conscience arises. As of September 2010, parents have the ability, even in the public school system, to withdraw their children temporarily from instruction of a religious or sexual nature about which the parent has concerns.<sup>23</sup>

### Conclusion

The province of Alberta has long provided a wide range of educational choices, both historically and through evolving policies over the decades. Parents have the freedom and support to send their children

20. Press release, “Alberta's 15-Year Olds Place Among World's Best on International Tests,” Government of Alberta, December 4, 2007, at <http://education.alberta.ca/departments/newsroom/news/2007/december/20071204.aspx> (October 19, 2010).

21. *Ibid.*

22. Province of Alberta, “School Act: Home Education Regulation,” Section 5, 2006, at [http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Regs/2006\\_145.pdf](http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Regs/2006_145.pdf) (October 19, 2010).



to a public, private, or charter school of their choice, or to educate them at home.

The availability of educational choice in Alberta has led to positive results for students. International test results have placed Alberta students among the world's top performers, including immigrant children who fare equal to or better than non-immigrant children.

Meanwhile, parents in Alberta have and expect a wide variety of educational options in how to educate their children, a policy outcome that American states can, and should, emulate. While some states

and school districts in the United States are moving toward policies to provide greater options to parents, there is still much progress to be made before the door of educational choice is opened to all students. The key aspect of Alberta's school system that can be copied anywhere is the *climate* of choice the province has long encouraged.

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23. "The Government of Alberta believes parents have a right and a responsibility to make decisions respecting the education of their children. Parents should be aware that on September 1, 2010, Section 11.1 of the *Alberta Human Rights Act* comes into effect. This section deals with notifying parents when their child will be receiving instruction that includes subject matter that deals primarily and explicitly with religion, human sexuality or sexual orientation. When parents are notified of such, they have the right to request that their child be exempted from that instruction without academic penalty." Government of Alberta, Education, "Role of Parents: Respecting Parental Choice," at <http://education.alberta.ca/parents/role.aspx> (October 19, 2010).