

Most (86%) Canadians are Concerned About Public Elementary School Children's Performance in Reading, Writing, and Math
Three-quarters (75%) Agree that Standardized Testing is a Good Way to Measure and Compare Performance of Students Against Other Provinces and Jurisdictions

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Toronto, ON – Most (86%) Canadians are ‘concerned’ (48% strongly/38% somewhat) about ‘the performance of school children on basic things like reading, writing and math’, while few (14%) are ‘not concerned’ (3% strongly/12% somewhat) about public elementary school children’s performance in these key areas, according to a new Ipsos Reid poll conducted exclusively for Global Television, the fourth instalment of a six-part series on education. Quebecers (89%) are most ‘concerned’ (47% very/41% somewhat) about performance in these areas, followed by Albertans (86%), Ontarians (85%), British Columbians (84%), and residents of Atlantic Canada (83%) and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (83%).

Standardized testing is used across Canada to measure the performance of Canadian students, but there is often debate about whether or not this is a good means by which to measure the knowledge that students have learned.

The results of the poll are decidedly in favour of standardized testing: three-quarters (75%) ‘agree’ (24% strongly/51% somewhat) that ‘standardized testing is a good way to measure and compare the performance of our school children against other provinces and jurisdictions’. One quarter (25%) ‘disagree’ (7% strongly/18% somewhat) with this assessment. Interestingly, those with kids in the household are less likely (71%) than those without kids (78%) to agree.

While they are most concerned with performance, Quebecers (81%) are also most likely to 'agree' (23% strongly/58% somewhat) that standardized testing is a good way to measure and compare performance of school children, higher than Albertans (76%), Atlantic Canadians (75%), residents of Ontario (73%) and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (73%), and British Columbians (72%). British Columbians (28%) and residents of Ontario (27%) and Saskatchewan and Manitoba (27%) more so 'disagree' that this form of testing is a good tool to measure and compare student performance than the remaining provinces when compared against Atlantic Canadians (25%), Albertans (24%), and Quebecers (19%).

Recently, there has also been debate about whether or not children who perform poorly should be assessed a failing grade, or whether it is too damaging to their emotional state, and therefore unproductive. On this matter, eight in ten (81%) 'agree' (42% strongly/39% somewhat) that 'schools should give out failing grades to children who don't perform well', Residents of the Prairie Provinces (89% - Saskatchewan/Manitoba, 88% - Alberta) are most likely to 'agree' that schools should give out failing grades if deserved, although Quebecers are significantly less likely (74%) to think so, with Atlantic Canadians (83%), British Columbians (83%), and Ontarians (82%) falling in between Prairie and Quebec residents. Conversely, two in ten (19%) 'disagree' (3% strongly/15% somewhat) with this approach.

With many saying that kids lose a lot of what they have learned over the long summer break, there is growing chorus of education experts who are calling for a move towards year-round schooling, which would see the two-month long summer reduced, with a greater number of shorter breaks scattered throughout the school year. A majority (59%) of Canadians, however, 'disagree' (28% strongly/31% somewhat) with this approach, while only a minority (41%) 'agree' (13% strongly/28% somewhat). Among those with children in the household, those with kids are decidedly against (64%) rather than for it (36%). A majority of Albertans (59%) and Ontarians (51%) agree that schools should move to year-round schooling,

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compared to a majority of Quebecers (75%), Saskatchewan and Manitoban residents (74%), Atlantic Canadians (68%), and British Columbians (58%) who disagree that the two-month long summer should be reduced in favour of year-long schooling.

Another area that is often linked with the quality of education is the number of students in the classroom. Two in three (66%) Canadians are 'concerned' (24% very/42% somewhat) about 'class sizes', while one in three (34%) are not (6% not at all/28% not very). Residents of Saskatchewan and Manitoba (73%) and British Columbia (71%) are most concerned about the number of students in classrooms, although a majority of Atlantic Canadians (68%), Ontarians (65%), Albertans (63%), and Quebecers (63%) are also concerned about class sizes.

These are some of the findings of an Ipsos Reid poll conducted between August 20-27, 2012, on behalf of Global Television, the fourth instalment of a six-part series on education. For the survey, a sample of 1,569 Canadians from Ipsos' Canadian online panel was interviewed online. Weighting was then employed to balance demographics to ensure that the sample's composition reflects that of the adult population according to Census data and to provide results intended to approximate the sample universe. A survey with an unweighted probability sample of this size and a 100% response rate would have an estimated margin of error of +/- 2.5 percentage points, 19 times out of 20, respectively, of what the results would have been had the entire population of adults in Canada been polled. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error, and measurement error.

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