



SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS ALBERTA

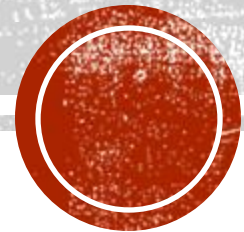


**PUBLIC EDUCATION IS A
PUBLIC GOOD:
ADVOCATING FOR EQUITABLE
EDUCATION POLICY IN
ALBERTA**

Wing Li, PhD (she/her)

Communications Director

Support Our Students Alberta



WHO ARE WE?



- Support Our Students (SOS) Alberta
- Non-partisan, grassroots community-driven public education advocacy organization
- Chapters based in Edmonton & Calgary

SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS ALBERTA

- Founded in 2015 in Calgary by two teachers (also parents with kids in CBE public schools)
- We are educators, parents, grandparents, students, academics, general community members
- We collaborate with students, organized labour, grassroots activists in other sectors, public interest and equity seeking groups
- We regularly contribute to the press (radio/TV/print/podcasts); publish original research or articles



Fighting for the right of every child
to access quality, equitable, and
barrier-free
PUBLIC EDUCATION



WING LI, PHD (SHE / HER)

- Parent of three kids (Grade 5, Grade 2, 1 year old)
- PhD in Neuroscience from University of Lethbridge
- Personally attended Alberta public schools in Stony Plain AB K – 12
- Became involved with SOS in 2019 after Kenney government took over

WHAT DO WE BELIEVE?


Pursuing the Promise of Public Education is important and worthwhile:

Education is a basic human right; every child has an enshrined right to access barrier-free K-12 education (free and high quality schooling)

Public education is a cornerstone of healthy democracy

Equitable – each student receives & accesses what they need for their circumstance from the public system. Access is guaranteed regardless of socioeconomic status, geography, ability

Public education is a public good & a collective societal responsibility



EDUCATING OUR CHILDREN ALONGSIDE ONE ANOTHER IS ESSENTIAL FOR STRONG SOCIETIES

- The public community school ideal
- Fosters understanding & acceptance of others
- Cultivates community cohesion at local and broader levels of society
- Microcosms of heterogeneity of thought, exposure to societal diversity at large
- Otherwise: cultural breakdown and social fragmentation stem from educational segregation as in other jurisdictions

WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?



Defunding / Austerity – starving the public system of resources



Growing privatization – exclusive barriers or two-tier systems of education



Antagonism towards teachers & education workers to de-incentive these professions



Socio-cultural wars (SOGI, curriculum, ideologies dictated by political ideals)

WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?

- **Chronic underfunding - austerity**
 - Crowded classrooms – 2019 elimination of class size reporting & alleviation grants – LACK of space/ infrastructure/ no new schools for growing population
 - Overworked/ understaffed schools
 - Deferred building maintenance
 - complex needs cannot be accommodated adequately
 - Provincial budgetary cuts 2019-2023: frozen \$8b/year → rose to \$9.3B in 2024 but still a cut after inflation and pop. growth

WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?

- In the classroom:
 - Individual instructional attention
 - Example: Grade 1 class of 27, teacher is running 18 individual literacy & numeracy programs
 - Lack of access to diagnoses
 - Lack of adequate EAs for supporting children with complexities
 - Increasing reliance on volunteers

WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?



- Fundraising - normalizing private fund generation
 - Benevolence or perpetuation of inequities depending on affluence of neighbourhood?
- Alternative programming in public system to compete with marketization
- Fees – creeping into school provisions; contracting of private companies to deliver curricular content/ line blurred between essential versus “add-on”

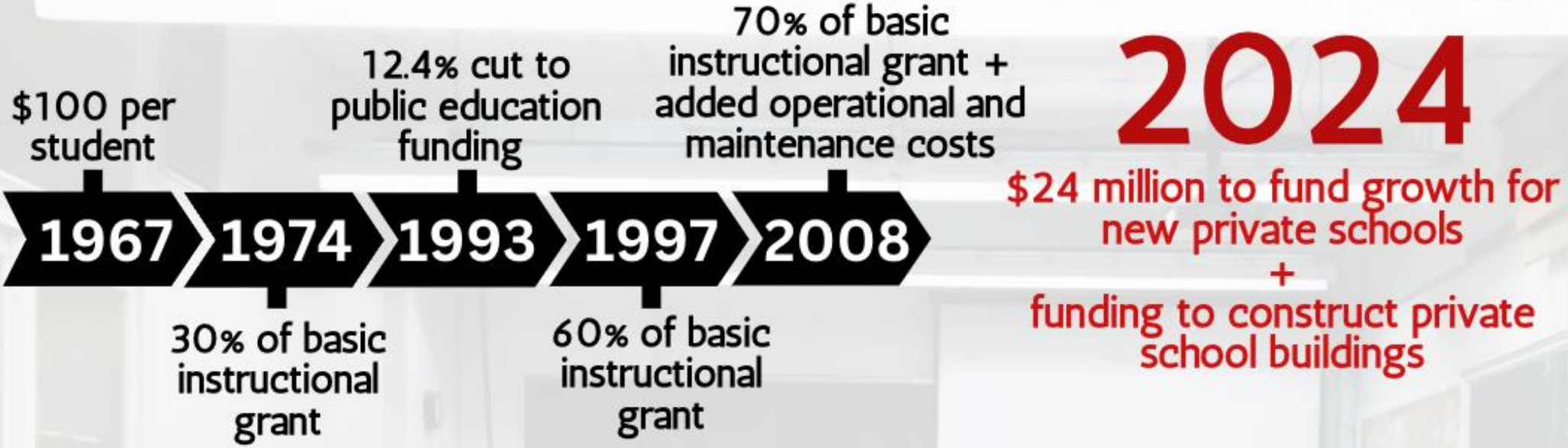
WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?

- “Privatization Creep” – political rhetoric of “School Choice” to paint public schools as failing or the worst option
- Public funds increasingly diverted to private education
 - Alberta subsidizes private education at one of the highest rates in Canada
 - 70% of instructional grants to private schools (Webber Academy, etc.) funded by the public
 - Tiered education leading to segregation by wealth & privilege
 - Bill 15: Choice in Education Act (2019)



PRIVATIZATION CREEP

.... A brief history of public funds given to private schools



WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?

- Double standard for use of public dollars
 - private education receive funds without upholding public governance, accessibility, or providing public benefit
- while public schools must adhere to strict regulatory standards; utilization rates, open accounting and critical examination while accepting all students of all complexities, needs, languages, backgrounds

WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?

- In 2021, Alberta spent ~\$314 million on accredited private schools and ECS operators
 - Of this, the 18 most affluent private schools received \$43 million in public support
- In 2024, total diverted has risen to over \$408 million
- Private schools are not restricted in how much extra tuition they can charge on top of their subsidy
- The provincial average private school tuition is \$8,080 per student/ per year
- 19 private schools charge more than \$12K/year

Source: Riep, C. *Private Schools Funding in Alberta: Scaling up Privatization* (2022).
Commissioned by Public Schools Boards' Association of Alberta.

WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?



Alberta invests the least money into public education and simultaneously the most money into private schools, in the country



MEDEANA MOUSSA
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- Over \$1 Billion of public money leaves the public system to subsidize private education every 4 years!!
- How many new public schools can this build?
How many new teachers, EAs can be hired?



For Richer For Poorer: A Tale Of Two Schools

CHARTER SCHOOLS: EXCLUSIVE TO ALBERTA

- Alberta is the only Canadian province to legislate the operation of charter schools
- Introduced in 1994 by Ralph Klein administration
- Original purpose: temporary testing sites of new pedagogies or teaching styles
- Charter schools receive the full per-student instructional funding from public taxes
- An approved charter authority can operate multiple campuses (schools)

Source: Riep, C. *Privatizing Public Choice: The Past, Present, and Future of Charter Schools in Alberta* (2020).
Commissioned by Public Schools Boards' Association of Alberta.

CHARTER SCHOOLS: EXCLUSIVE TO ALBERTA



The former SMART Technologies building near the University of Calgary will become a Charter Hub, housing a number of charter schools. Gavin Young/Postmedia

- Absence of clear metrics of whether they have fulfilled their original purpose
- Until 2019, capped at 15 charter authorities
- UCP govt removed this cap (Bill 8: Education Amendment Act)
- Also removed other application restrictions so now operators apply directly to the minister and bypass the local public school board adjudication
- January 2024: 21 Charter Authorities operating 36 schools

CHARTER SCHOOLS ERODE PUBLIC EDUCATION

- Charter schools siphon public funds to serve exclusive niches of cherry-picked students
 - Alberta data shows many charter schools cater to the wealthiest socioeconomic households
- exempt from accepting students with complex needs by claiming “niche program”
- exempt from accepting students within their catchment areas
- Private management closed to public scrutiny and accountability
- Redundancy of offerings compete with public school boards
- Significant bumps in provincial funding occur without public explanation
- Not truly “public” although they are dubbed “public charter schools” to manufacture consent for their continued existence

CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE PRIVATE SCHOOLS IN DISGUISE



For Edward Matsubara, smaller class sizes and an emphasis on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) at the STEM Collegiate charter school in south Edmonton convinced him to pull his twin 14-year-old sons out of the public system.

"It's sort of like getting private school without paying for private school, that's the way we saw it,"

Matsubara told CTV News

Edmonton, adding he and his wife

had their children on a waitlist for a little more than a year before they were accepted.

CHARTER SCHOOLS ERODE PUBLIC EDUCATION (PRIVATIZATION CREEP) & REINFORCE EQUITY GAPS

▶ LISTEN LIVE Stephen@voiced.ca [f](#) [X](#) [RSS](#)

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1.8 “If we let these charter schools continue to expand, it’s going to be the loss of what public education really means” with Dr. Wing Li
By Shannon Moore

PRIVATIZING PUBLIC CHOICE

THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE OF
CHARTER SCHOOLS IN ALBERTA

Curtis Riep, Ph.D. candidate, University of Alberta

Addendum added by Public School Boards’ Association of Alberta

September 2020

“In the USA the bulk of the research has found that charter schools actually reinforce segregation on the basis of race, wealth, ethnicity, disabling conditions, and language (Bifulco & Ladd, 2007; Cobb & Glass, 1999; Frankenberg, Siegel-Hawley, & Wang, 2008; Garcia, 2008; Horn & Miron, 2000; Miron et al., 2010).”



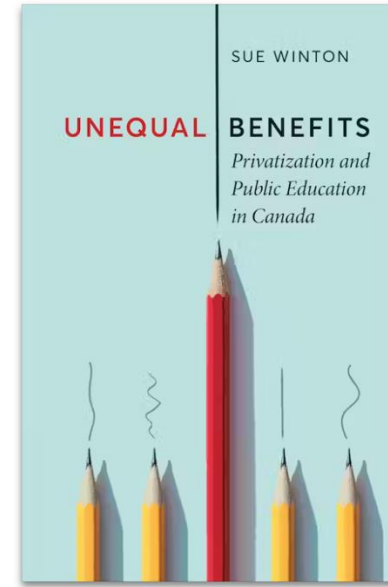
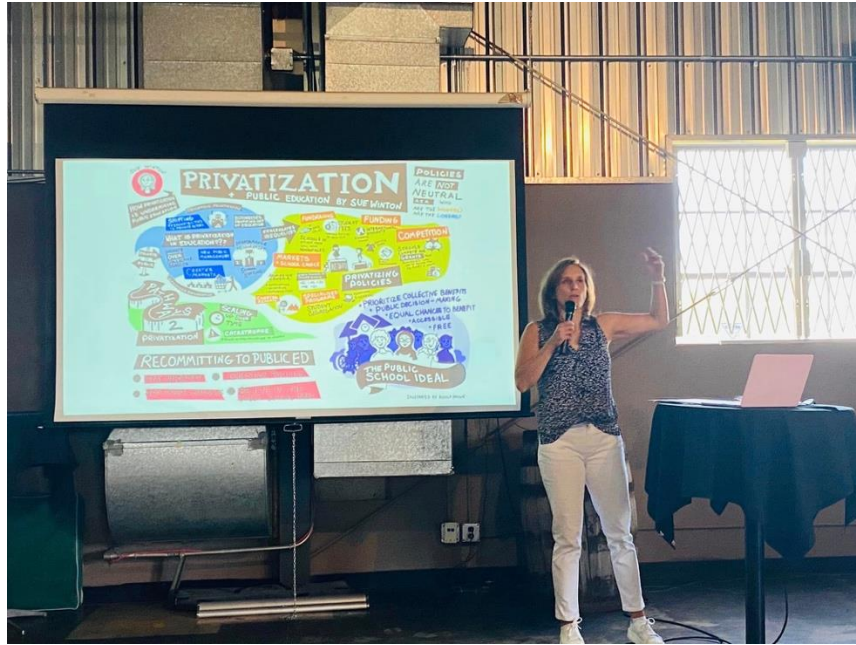
NEWS

Danielle Smith Backs Plan to Spend More Public Dollars on Elite Private Schools and Homeschooling

Smith endorses Arizona 'voucher-style' approach to funding private education

 by Stephen Magusiak, Reporter
September 15, 2022

VOUCHERS & 'AMERICANIZATION' OF EDUCATION SYSTEM




PRIVATIZATION CREEP IN EDUCATION (NATIONAL SCALE)

- Normalization of private actors entering and operating within the public education system
- Private fundraising
- Contractors delivering curricular content
- Individual and corporate philanthropy

WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?



- Ideological/ political interference (culture wars)
- Curriculum
 - K- 6 UCP draft released March 29, 2021
 - Exclusion of educators & working groups from development
 - Content-heavy, age-inappropriate, non-linear scaffolding in Math and Literacy



SEPTEMBER 17, 2024: ALBERTA ANNOUNCED “SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION ACCELERATOR PROGRAM”

- The “proposed plan:”
- \$8.6 billion, 90 new schools built over three years
- adds \$6.5 billion to the previously announced amount of \$2.1 billion (February budget)
- 200,000 spaces in the next 7 years
 - 50,000 spaces for students over the next three years
 - create an additional 150,000 student spaces in the four years after the initial three-year push, for a total of 200,000 over seven years
- Within one month of program being announced, Ministry received 400 applications (45 from charter schools)



Edmonton Public Schools board said the district is growing by about 5,000 students a year, enough to fill two new high schools



The division will be out of high school capacity by 2027, the memo adds, yet the province granted construction funding for one K-9 school in the 2022-23 school year.



Edmonton Public Schools is the second-largest division in Alberta.

**SEPTEMBER 17,
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SEPTEMBER 17, 2024: ALBERTA ANNOUNCED “SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION ACCELERATOR PROGRAM”

- **BIG CONS:**
 - adding 12,500 spaces in charter schools over the next four years (currently 12,000 Alberta students in charter schools and the plan would create space for double that number)
 - School capital pilot program for ‘non-profit’ private schools.
 - UCP govt prioritize private & charters over public system needs

**ALBERTA IS NOW THE ONLY PROVINCE TO BUILD PRIVATE SCHOOLS
WITH PUBLIC FUNDS**



Long-term building plan is needed but space is crunched now!



Students are going without supports TODAY



Construction Workforce capacity? Housing crisis at the same time? Is this even feasible?



Is this well thought out?



What about hiring new teachers – we need a plan to support, recruit and retain educational professionals – ATA says we are lacking 3,000 – 5,000 additional teachers



The plan is a trojan horse to sneak in more education privatization

**EDMONTON
NEEDS SPACE
AND SUPPORT
NOW – TIME IS
OF THE ESSENCE**

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE OUR GOALS?



Thousands of Albertans attended a rally outside the legislature to voice concerns about the state of public education in the province (CTV News Edmonton/Brandon Lynch).

- Build people power – outreach & spreading public awareness
- Organize political power – school board elections/ trustees
- Provincial advocacy – pressure on local & rural MLAs
- Recommit to the Public Education Promise
 - Guard and protect our collective social contract that every child should access high quality, equitable public education without barriers of finance, wealth, status, ability

HOW DO WE ACHIEVE OUR GOALS?

- The vast majority of families in Alberta (>90%) choose public education
(709,855 students in public & Catholic system 2023-24, 12,000 charter, 53,000 private)*
- We must demand that policy makers support, fund and improve the public education system that serves all children, instead of undermining, eroding and privatizing it at the expense of not just children, but also society at large



Our Students Alberta executive director Medeana Moussa spoke to protestors at the McDougall Centre in Calgary on February 18, 2021. ARYN TOOMBS / FOR LIVEWIRE CALGARY

<https://edmonton.ctvnews.ca/debate-over-how-alberta-will-spend-8-6b-in-new-school-construction-funding-1.7078147>

Public education remains our best vehicle for achieving social equity.



THANK YOU

Email: yegsosalberta@gmail.com

Web: www.supportourstudents.ca

Social: @SOSAlberta

TONIGHT'S DISCUSSION



SUPPORT OUR STUDENTS ALBERTA



Who are we?



What do we believe?

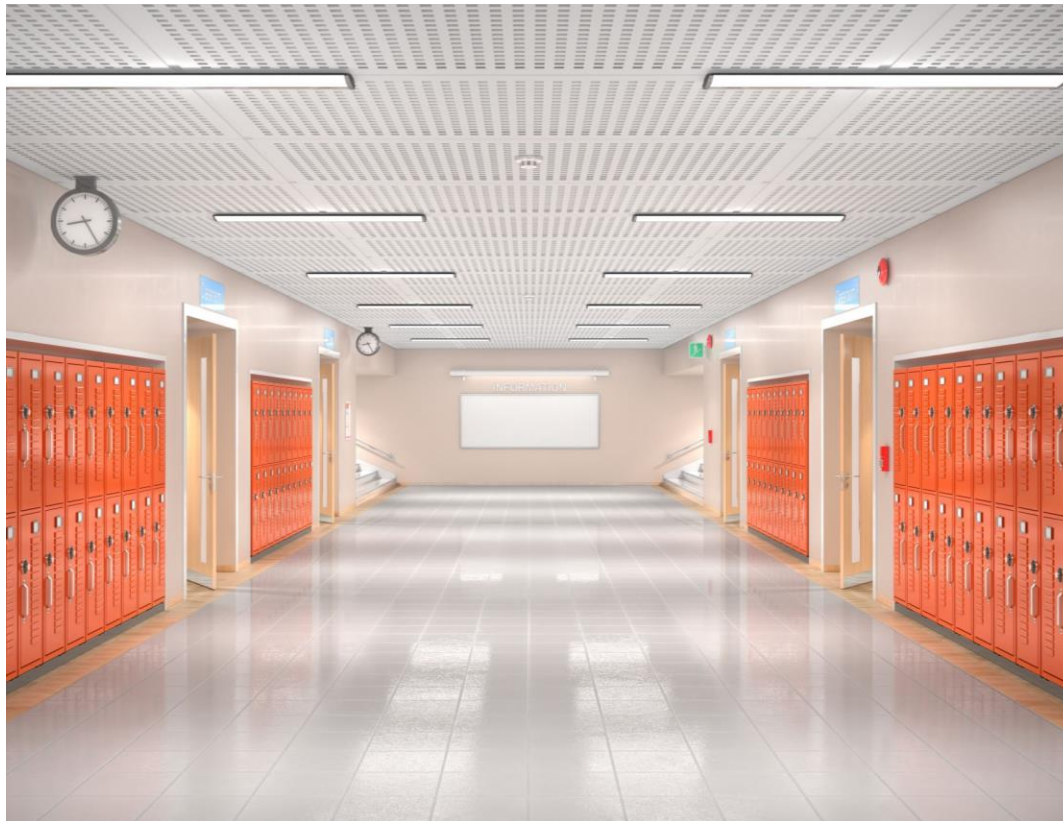


What issues and challenges do we face?



How do we achieve our goals?

ERODING THE PROMISE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD



- Political usage of “Choice” – rhetoric of “school choice or parent choice” to paint public schools as failing
- Privatization & marketization of education as just another consumer product
- Charter schools
- School fees
- Alternative programming
- Boutique schools

WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?

AB BUDGET 2023

UCP 2023 Pre-Election Budget Prioritizes Private and Charter Schools

@SOSAlberta

PRESS RELEASE

- • • • Alberta Students Continue to Learn in Overcrowded, Highly Complex Classrooms Despite Government Announcement

Read SOS full statement: www.supportourstudents.ca/press-room

CALGARY | News

Alberta announces \$30M to address high student enrolment, ATA calls it a 'drop in the bucket'

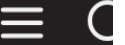


Mark Villani
CTV News Calgary Video Journalist
Follow Contact

Updated Nov. 28, 2023 3:09 p.m. MST
Published Nov. 28, 2023 2:06 p.m. MST

PUBLIC SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA: 2023 AWARD FOR SPECIAL CONTRIBUTION (MEDIA)



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How a public education advocacy group is tracking which Alberta schools have COVID-19 outbreaks

SEPTEMBER 26, 2021

The Alberta government will not release data on how many schools have COVID-19 outbreaks, so a non-profit group called Support Our Students is crowdsourcing its own list. Kim Smith spoke with Wing Li of SOS about what the group is recording so far this school year.

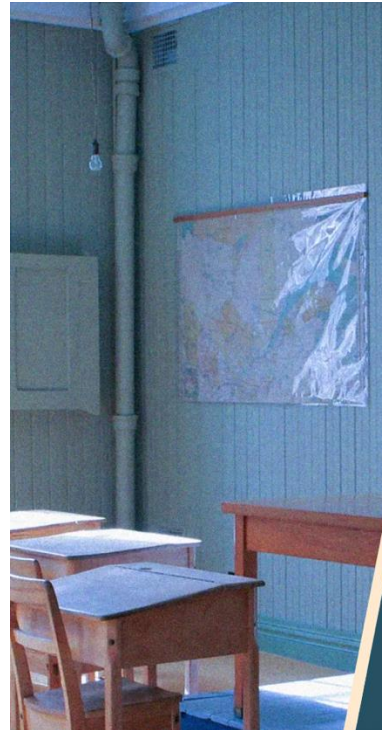
[Less info](#)

CURRICULUM: SOCIAL STUDIES

- Eurocentric bias/ Christian privilege
- Erasure of Indigenous history

“Religious diversity, including the non-religious, is an aspect of multiculturalism. To not include such diversity in a curriculum is to ignore an important, albeit challenging, feature of Canadian society and history.”

- Dr Margie Patrick (King's University) for the Monitor Magazine: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives



Alberta's social studies curriculum pushes religious exceptionalism

The authors of the curriculum made choices that favour Christianity over other religions, and minimize the historical impact of non-Christians in Alberta.



Margie Patrick

January 23, 2023

8-minute read

WHAT ISSUES & CHALLENGES PREVENT THE PURSUIT OF PUBLIC EDUCATION (ALBERTA)?

“Undermining teachers and public boards is another popular Republican tactic to manufacture consent for ideological curricula and privatization, and we've seen the current government deploy these tactics in Alberta.”

The Monitor Magazine (January 2023), Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives



Populism, Polarization and Privatization in Alberta Education

Alberta's government has been making moves towards privatizing education—are communities ready to stop it?



Heather Ganshorn

January 23, 2023