

EDUCATION IN CANADA

Canada is a federation composed of 10 provinces and three territories, each of which, within the federative system of shared powers, is exclusively responsible for education. While Canada does not have a central ministry or office of education, its Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) provides a forum for education ministers from the 13 jurisdictions to consult on matters of common concern, share information and represent Canadian education internationally. Established in 1967, CMEC is considered to be the national voice for education in Canada by providing a mechanism through which ministers can consult one another, and co-operate with national education organizations and the Government of Canada (www.cmec.ca).

The provinces and territories have developed their own educational structures and institutions, reflecting the regional circumstances and the diversity of the country's social and cultural fabric. The 13 educational systems are more alike than they are different with all systems maintaining a three-tiered structure of elementary, secondary and post-secondary schooling. As well, all jurisdictions provide universal, free and compulsory elementary and secondary schooling. Post-secondary education is provided by universities and colleges, community colleges or institutes of technology.

The three northern territories — the Northwest Territories, Yukon and Nunavut — have been assigned responsibility for the delivery of educational services through a federal statute. The Government of Canada provides funding for education in these territories, each of which has established its own department of education that manages the delivery of educational services.

While the provinces retain responsibility for training, the Government of Canada provides for the education of Aboriginal Canadians living on First Nations reserves — with the exception of the Cree, Inuit and Naskapi of Quebec, whose education is the responsibility of that province — as well as the education and training of individuals in the Canadian Armed Forces, Coast Guard and Correctional Services. The federal government also provides financial support for post-secondary education, adult occupational training and the teaching of the two official languages, especially second language training.

In all of the provinces and territories, members of school boards (or, in the case of New Brunswick, district parent advisory committees) are elected by public ballot. The powers and duties of these boards are defined in provincial/territorial statutes and are, in general, consistent throughout Canada. School boards generally have authority over implementing curriculums, operating and administering school systems, acquiring required financial resources, initiating proposals for new construction or other major capital expenditures, and staffing.

Implement targeted and inter-sectoral educational policies, as necessary, and develop programs that focus specifically on groups at a disadvantage in the areas of education, functional illiteracy and socioeconomic conditions, with attention to women, minorities and vulnerable populations. Inter-sectoral programs in education, health and nutrition, as well as early childhood educational strategies, will be priorities, inasmuch as they contribute more directly to plans to combat poverty.