

# Public funds should not subsidize private schools, advocates argue

Claire Theobald

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*Speaking is Michael Janz, Chair of Edmonton Public School Board who along with Public Interest Alberta and 12 other organizations urged the provincial government to phase out the public funding of private schools to strengthen public school systems across the province, in Edmonton, Thursday, February 23, 2017. Ed Kaiser/Postmedia article*

Representatives from 14 interested organizations are calling on the provincial government to phase out funding for private schools.

“Continuing to support Alberta’s private schools means taking funds away from the children at public schools, thus limiting their opportunities and their success. We are calling for the return of those dollars to our children,” said Arlene Hrynyk, president of the [Public School Boards Association of Alberta](#) at an announcement on Thursday. The proposal, put forth by [Public Interest Alberta](#), calls on the provincial government to phase out public funding of private schools — excluding schools for students with special needs — by reducing funding by one-third each year over a period of three years.

As it stands, private schools in Alberta receive 70 per cent of the operational funding of public schools, about \$5,200 per student.

Advocates say the move could free up \$100 million per year in educational funding that could then be used to support programs in public, separate and francophone schools that currently serve 93 per cent of students in Alberta.

“We support the existence of private schools, we support their ability to deliver education and to provide that choice for parents. What we take umbrage with though is the idea that we as a taxpayer should have to subsidize that choice,” said Michael Janz, chairperson of the [Edmonton Public School Board](#).

Jonathan Teghtmeyer, associate co-ordinator of communications for the [Alberta Teachers' Association](#), said providing public funds to private schools that then charge thousands of dollars in tuition to their students, enabling those schools to offer smaller class sizes and programs that public schools themselves cannot afford, promotes inequity.

"I am continually amazed by private schools that advertise small class sizes, often crowing about class sizes as small as 12 to 15 students to promote their schools. In these schools, parents are often paying \$10,000 to \$15,000 a year or even more in tuition. At the same time, only five of Alberta's 61 public boards have (kindergarten to Grade 3) class sizes that meet the targets established 15 years ago by the Alberta Commission on Learning," said Teghtmeyer.

Teghtmeyer said those funds could instead be used to reduce mandatory school fees, make class sizes smaller, increase classroom supports for students with special needs and provide lunch programs to combat hunger in the public schools that serve the majority of students in Alberta, [promises made by the provincial government during their last election campaign](#).

"It's time for Alberta to join the ranks of other Canadian provinces and use all funds earmarked for education to fully fund and support the public system," said Carolyn Blasetti, executive director of [Support Our Students Alberta](#), adding the move would bring Alberta in line with five other provinces in Canada that currently offer no public subsidization to private schools.

Dave Rodney, MLA for Calgary-Lougheed and education critic for the Alberta Progressive Conservative caucus, called the proposal "threatening" and defended funding private schools as part of supporting a diverse and robust educational system. "Our province has a long, proud tradition of offering parents and students a wide variety of educational choices, and I believe we've got to do all we can to ensure that we protect those choices for Alberta families," Rodney said.

There were 28,627 students enrolled in 315 private schools in Alberta last year, representing approximately four per cent of the total student population. Of those private schools, 129 offer special education programming and are not included in Public Interest Alberta's proposal.

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**Participating organizations:**

Public Interest Alberta

Progress Alberta

Alberta Teachers' Association

Public School Boards Association of Alberta

Edmonton Public school board  
Support Our Students (SOS)  
CUPE Alberta  
CBE Staff Association  
CUPE Local 40  
CUPE Local 474  
CUPE Local 3550  
Unifor Local 52A  
Calgary and District Labour Council  
Edmonton and District Labour Council