

2023/24

Crowded and Complex Classrooms

A look at the state of class size, composition and supports for inclusion in Alberta's public education system



Crowded and Complex Classrooms

Alberta has a world-renowned public education system. Our teachers and other school staff work hard to provide outstanding educational opportunities.

Unfortunately, students and teachers are not provided with the best supports and, as a result, too many children are falling through the cracks.

OPTIMAL LEARNING happens when students and teachers have reasonable class sizes and supports are available to assist students with special learning needs.

Alberta ranks last in education spending

Figure 1. Per student operating expenditures 2020/21 (Statistics Canada 2024a)



Province	Per student*
CANADA	\$13,332
Alberta	\$11,601
New Brunswick	\$12,176
Saskatchewan	\$12,459
British Columbia	\$12,667
Ontario	\$13,242
Newfoundland & Labrador	\$13,607
Nova Scotia	\$13,623
Prince Edward Island	\$14,084
Manitoba	\$14,281
Québec	\$15,116

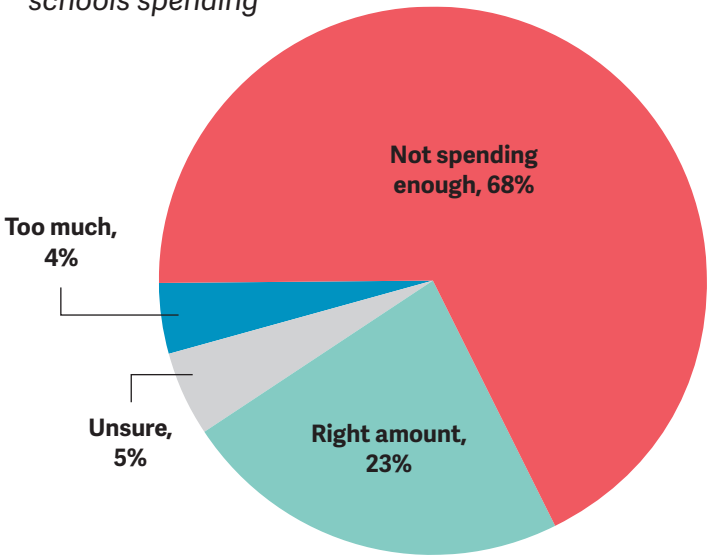
*The per student amount for Canada excludes Yukon, NWT and Nunavut.

Government Spending

When asked about the amount the Alberta government spends on public schools, more than two-thirds of Albertans (68 per cent) say the government is not spending enough. Just under one in four (23 per cent) believe government is spending the right amount. Very few believe the government is spending too much (four per cent) or are unsure (five per cent).¹

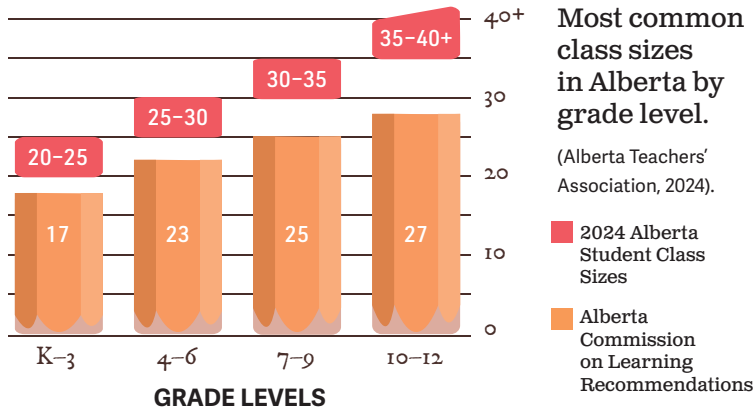


Figure 2. Alberta’s public schools spending



Class Size and Composition

40 IS THE NEW 30



Did you know?

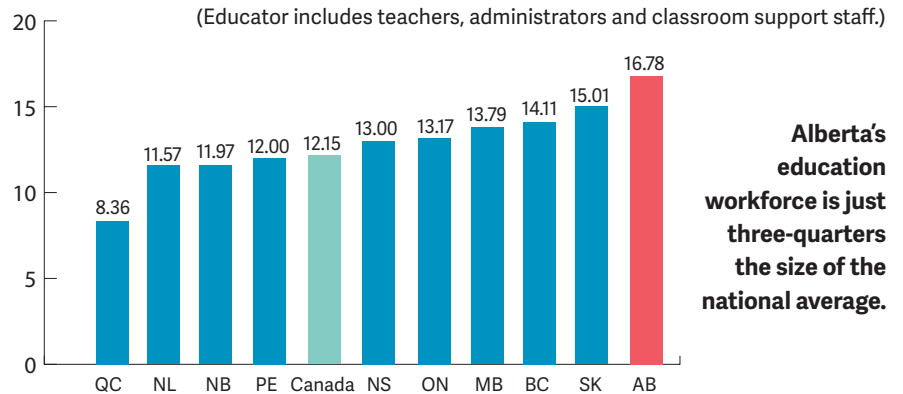
Alberta stopped publicly reporting data on the size of classes in 2019. At that time, 55 of 61 school divisions exceeded guidelines for K-3 average class sizes.

85 per cent of teachers reported seeing a dramatic increase in the complexity and diversity of student needs in 2023 (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2024).

RESEARCH CLEARLY SHOWS that smaller class sizes allow for higher levels of student engagement, increased time with the curriculum and more opportunities for teachers to focus on the individual needs and interests of students in the classroom.

Figure 3. Total number of students per educator by province (2021/22)

(Statistics Canada 2023b; 2023c).



In 2023, one in two teachers have experienced aggression as part of their professional practice (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2024).

In 2021/22, 50 school boards incurred costs related to supporting special needs that exceeded the amount of funding they were provided. **The shortfall in funding for inclusion and ESL supports totalled \$200 million across the province.** ²



In rural areas, class sizes may be smaller, but classes often include students from multiple grades or courses learning **different programs of study in the same room at the same time.**

The payoff from class size reduction

is greatest for children from low-income, marginalized and vulnerable populations.



72% of Albertans believe that class sizes are **too big.** ³

Inclusion without funding & supports is abandonment!

Teachers want what students need, and we believe that students, individually and collectively, achieve better outcomes when public education is well supported.

Addressing issues of class size, composition and undersupported special needs will help ensure that students succeed and that Alberta's public education system continues to be a global top performer.

Notes

1 Based on the results of the *Perceptions of Education in Alberta Survey* conducted between August 11 and 28, 2023. The data is included with permission from Janet Brown Opinion Research.

2 Based on calculations using data from school board funding profiles, school board budget reports and school board audited financial statements. These reports and statements are available on the Government of Alberta's website at www.alberta.ca/k-12-education-financial-statements.

3 Please see note 1.

References

Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). 2024. *2023 Pulse Research Study Report on Class Size, Complexity, and Aggression*. Edmonton, Alta: ATA.

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Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA). 2024. *40 is the New 30*.



The Alberta Teachers' Association