



NEWS RELEASE

Low income parents find inexpensive private schools better than public schools

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For Immediate Release

TORONTO, ON- Low income families with children attending inexpensive private schools say their children do better academically and experience fewer social problems than children at public schools, according to the results of a new survey published today by independent research organization the Fraser Institute.

“The parents surveyed reported lower incidences of bullying, fighting, drug use, and racism in inexpensive private schools compared to public schools. They also found their children did better academically and had improved social skills,” said Claudia Hepburn, the study’s co-author and Fraser Institute director of education studies.

The survey and accompanying study, *Low Incomes, High Standards, Can private schools make a difference for low income families? Findings from the Children First: School Choice Trust Parent Survey*, examines the experiences and satisfaction levels of low income parents whose children attend inexpensive private schools compared to those who attend public schools. The study is available as a free PDF at www.fraserinstitute.org

Survey participants were drawn from Ontario families who applied for a grant through Children First: School Choice Trust to send their children to a private school.

Children First: School Choice Trust was launched by the Fraser Institute in 2003 to help low income families send their children to a school of their choice. The program provides tuition assistance grants worth up to \$4,000 per child per year to Ontario families whose average household income is less than \$29,000 per year. More than 1,800 children have received grants with more than 34,000 children applying since the program’s inception.

The average cost of tuition at the private schools attended by Children First recipients was \$4,398, while the cost of providing public schooling that year was more than \$8,000 per child in Ontario.

Survey participants were broken into three groups: families who received a Children First grant; families that did not receive a grant but were still able to send their children to a private school; and families who did not receive a grant and whose children attended a public school.

For each question, Children First families reported that their children’s academic performance improved and behavioural problems decreased but there was no statistical difference between the scores of families who attended private schools with or without a Children First grant. Significant differences were noted in the scores of families at private schools compared to those at public schools. In every case, a larger proportion of families with children at public schools reported that the child’s academic performance, social skills and behaviour had worsened than did families with children at a private school.

“We were astounded to see that small independent schools make such a difference for disadvantaged children, particularly considering that these schools cost, on average, 45 per cent less than public schools,” Hepburn said.

(more)

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“The survey results strongly show that parents of limited income who make the sacrifice to send their children to independent schools, whether or not they do so through a Children First grant, are much more satisfied with the academic and social environment of their children’s school than the parents whose children attend public schools.”

Academic Quality

Parents who received a Children First grant and parents who sent their children to private schools without a grant reported similar high levels of satisfaction with the academic quality of their children’s schools.

Sixty-nine percent of the Children First group and 73 per cent of the private school group gave their schools an “A” grade, compared with just 19 per cent of the public school group. The majority (74 per cent) of parents in the public school group gave their schools either a “B” (44 per cent) or “C” (30 per cent) grade for academic quality.

Academic Performance

Parents who received a Children First grant saw more improvement in their children’s academic performance over the previous school year than the comparison group did. Thirty-seven per cent of the Children First group said their children’s academic performance was much better while 27 per cent of parents whose children attended private school without the Children First grant saw improvement. Less than half as many parents in the public school group (15 per cent) said their children’s academic performance was much better than the previous school year. Additionally, 13 per cent of the public school group reported a decline in their children’s academic performance, while only six per cent of the Children First group and one per cent of the private school group reported a decline.

Bullying, Fighting, Drugs and Other Social Problems

Both the Children First group and the comparison groups experienced more problems with bullying than any other social issue. Approximately three times as many parents who sent their children to a public school (55.3 per cent) than parents from the Children First (18.2 per cent) and the private school group (17.3 per cent) said their children had problems with bullying.

Fighting was the second most reported problem in this category. Forty per cent of parents in the public school group, 5.7 per cent of the Children First group, and 9.4 per cent of the private school group reported that their children experienced fighting at their schools. Far more parents in the public school group than those in the Children First and private school groups also reported problems with drugs, cheating, racism, and stealing at their schools.

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