

Survey Highlights

Choice in Education

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Alberta 

Survey Highlights – Choice in Education

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Executive Summary

The history of education in Alberta is one of choice.

Today's parents can choose to educate their child in a public, separate, charter, or independent (private) school, or to educate at home. Those with rights under section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms can access Francophone education. Additional choices are also provided within these school types where there are opportunities to study online, to take alternative programs, and to learn vocational skills.

Government committed to developing a Choice in Education Act to support and enhance choice within Alberta's existing system. As part of this work, a public survey was conducted, open to all Albertans. This survey produced 57,000 usable responses for analysis.

The survey captured respondents' thoughts on choice, including opinions on what needed improvement, and where changes could be made. This document summarizes the key findings and themes from the survey responses.

Most of those responding to the survey were satisfied with the amount of educational choice in Alberta (61.6%) and with the information available about school choice (59.1%).

Although similar, satisfaction with the amount of choice was *lower* among respondents from Northern Alberta and *higher* among respondents from the Edmonton and Calgary regions.

Respondents attending separate (Catholic) schools reported the highest satisfaction with the amount of choice, while those attending federal/band-operated schools reported the lowest.

The survey included open-ended questions where respondents could write in their thoughts. Given the large number of responses to the survey, a random sample of responses was selected for analysis on two specific open-ended questions. The themes identified in this analysis add more depth and context to the responses in the previous quantitative questions and demonstrate the diverse opinions among respondents.

Responses in French and English contained similar themes in terms of satisfaction with available choice. Among the English responses, the largest theme that emerged was satisfaction with the level of choice available. Other responses stated by similar numbers of people included opinions that there was 'not enough choice' or 'too much choice.'

Background

Context

Alberta's education system has a long and successful record of providing choice in education. Alberta offers a number of education options that allow parents to select the path they feel will best help their children reach their full potential.

Students can choose between public, separate, charter, independent (private) schools, home education, and those with section 23 Charter rights can access Francophone education.

Government committed in its 2019 platform 'Getting Alberta Back to Work' to bring forward a Choice in Education Act, which would:

- Affirm parents have primary responsibility for the education of their children;
- Add to the preamble of the *Education Act* recognition of Section 26.3 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children"; and
- Protect the status and funding of independent (private) schools.

In order to better inform the Choice in Education Act, Alberta Education gathered feedback from Albertans on opportunities to protect, improve and enhance education choice in Alberta.

Methodology and caveats

Nearly 74,000 people¹ accessed the survey in a variety of formats. Not including those identical surveys that arrived by email² or after the survey period closed³, just over 57,000 respondents provided input on one or more of the non-demographic questions. For further details, see Table 1 (below).

Table 1: Number of respondents by format and input provided.

Survey Format	Demographics only	Input provided for one or more non-demographic question	Other	Row Total
English-online	13,728	55,637		69,365
French-online	431	1,320		1,751
English-printed	5	115		120
Interest Group's PDF Submission by email ⁴			2,357	2,357
Total	14,164	57,072	2,357	73,593

This report contains analysis of the data, however, statistical significance – whether the results are from chance or from some specific factor such as age or gender - has not been calculated. Detailed information on the methodology for both quantitative and qualitative analysis can be found in

Appendix 1: Methodology.

¹ A small number of respondents indicated that they do not currently reside in Alberta. Regardless, those respondents were still included in this analysis if they provided input on one or more of the non-demographic questions.

² 2,357 surveys arrived via email from a public education advocacy interest group. The completed surveys were identical: they selected "prefer not to say" for all of the demographic questions; did not complete the scale questions; and provided open responses supportive of public education throughout. These surveys were analyzed separately so as not to affect the demographic components of the overall analysis (see Appendix 2).

³ A number of surveys arrived after the closing date and were not included in the analysis.

⁴ See footnote 2 above.

Limitations of data analysis

- These results are not generalizable to the Alberta population because respondents self-selected for participation.
- Percentages are rounded to the first decimal place.

Respondent profile

Respondents were mostly:

- Aged 35-44 (38.9%)
- Female (69.8%)
- Living in urban areas (74.2%) (See Figure 2) predominantly Calgary or Edmonton (63.9%) (See Figure 1)
- Residents of Alberta for more than 20 years (72%) (See Figure 3)
- Speakers of English as their first language (90.7%)
- Parents of children attending public (40.7%) or separate school (20.5%)
- Parents or guardians (61%)
- English speakers as a first language (91%)⁵ (See Figure 4)

In addition:

- 20.6% of respondents indicated that they are employees in a school
- Only 3% of respondents self-identified as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or Indigenous (See Figure 5)
- 4.8% of respondents self-identified as a Francophone person under Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (See Figure 6)

Further information on the respondent profile can be found in Figures 1 through 8 which outline respondents based on location, time in Alberta, language and identity.

⁵ Due to an error in the online survey formatting, respondents only had the option to check mark English, French, or an Indigenous language. However as well as an open box to write in the name of the Indigenous language, there was also a separate open box for other languages. As a result, in the data set, Indigenous was not limited to Canadian Indigenous languages (Métis, Cree, Blackfoot, etc.); responses included Arabic, Dutch, German, and Spanish as well as several other languages.

Location

Most respondents are located in the Edmonton or Calgary region (63.9%) with more than 74.2% identifying as living in an urban area; see Figures 1, 2.

Figure 1: Which best describes the area of Alberta where you live? Percentage and count of responses.

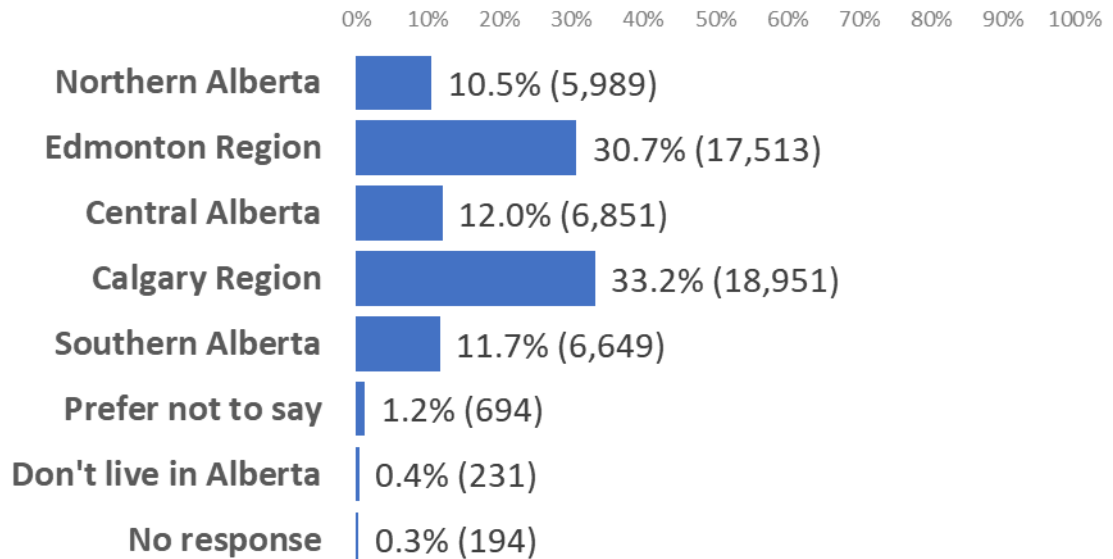
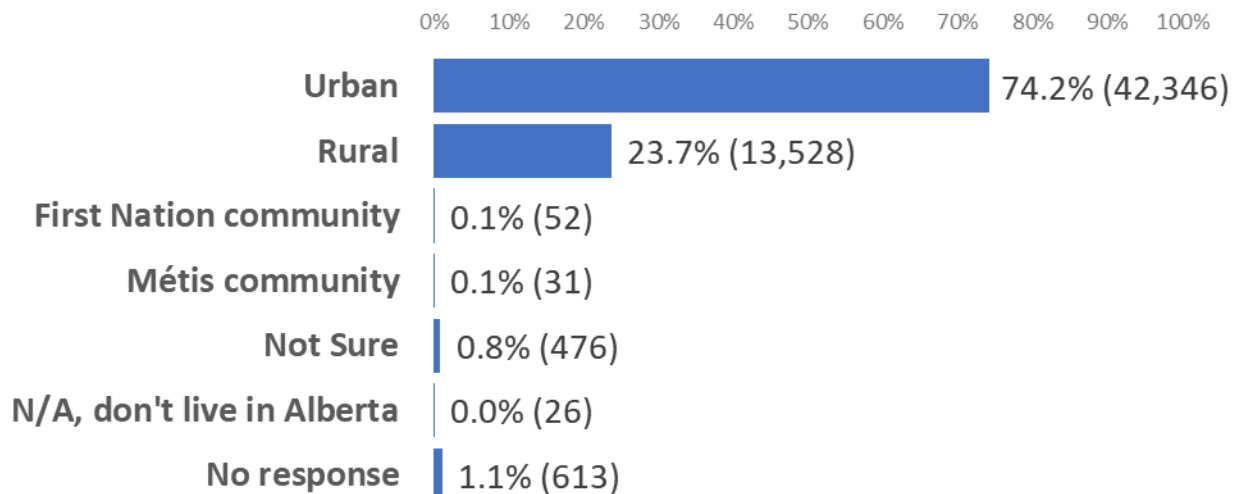


Figure 2: Do you live in an urban or rural location? Percentage and count of responses.

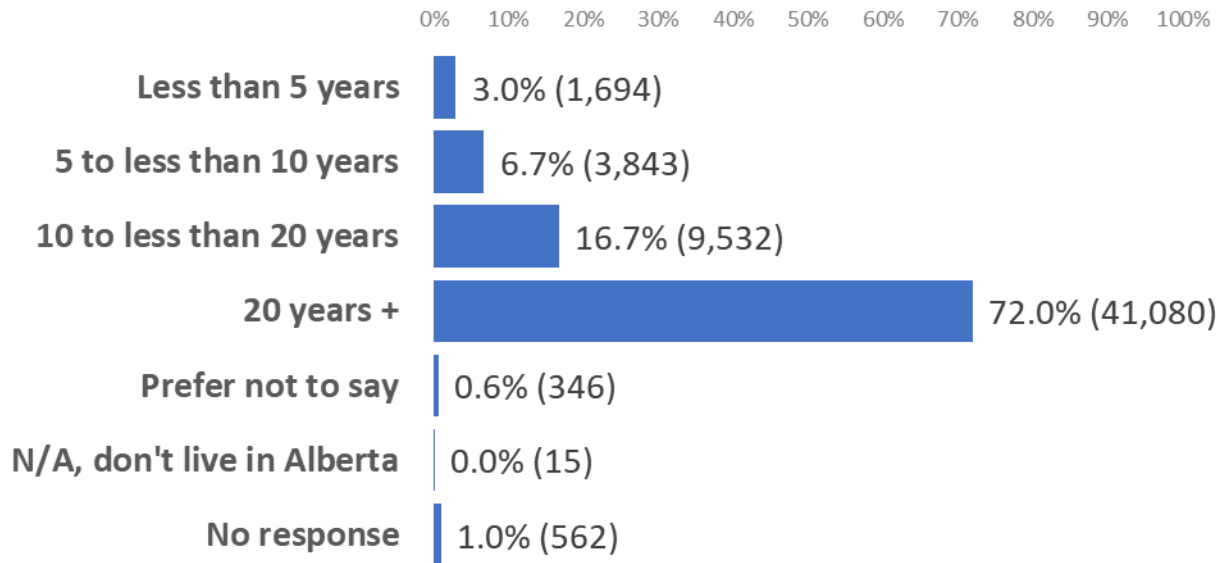


Time in Alberta

Most respondents are residents of Alberta for more than 20 years (72%); see

Figure 3.

Figure 3: How long have you lived in Alberta? Percentage and count of responses.



Language and identity

The majority of respondents identified English as the first language they learned; see Figure 4; 3% identified as First Nations, Métis, Inuit or Indigenous⁶; see Figure 5; and 4.8% identified as francophone; see Figure 6.

Figure 4: What is the first language that you learned as a child, which you still read and understand? Percentage and count of responses.

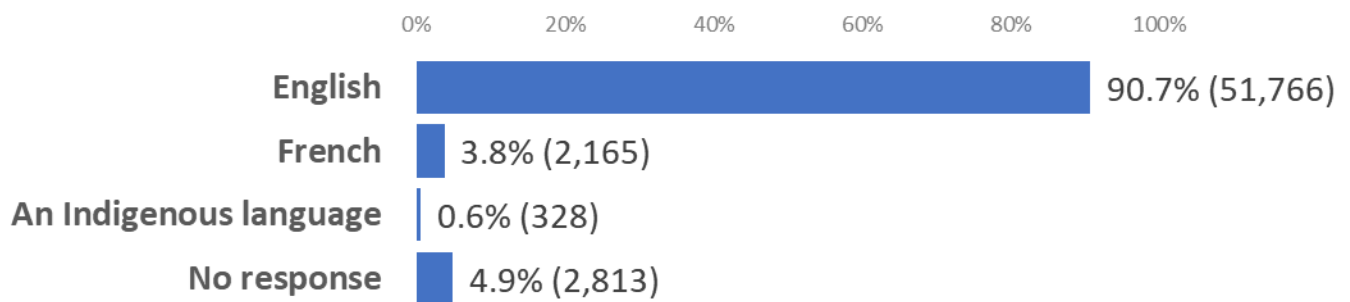
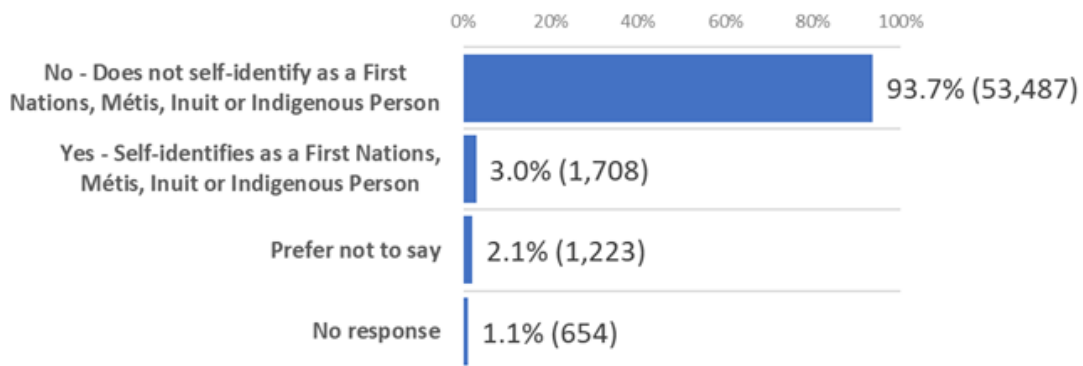
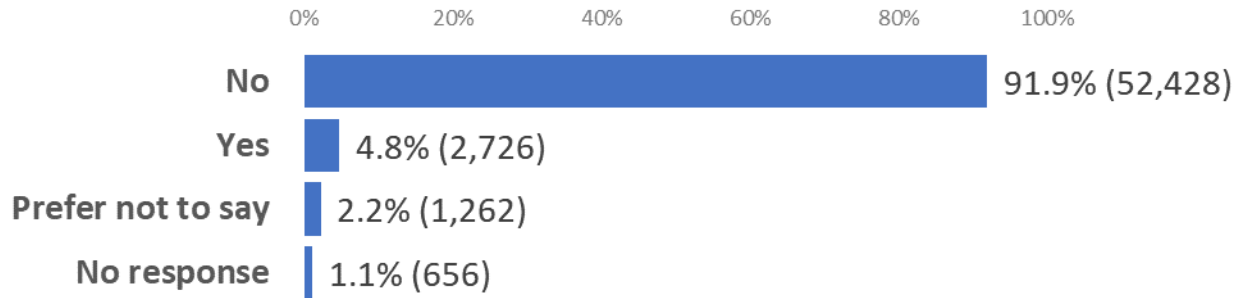


Figure 5: Do you identify as a First Nations, Métis, Inuit or Indigenous Person? Percentage and count of responses.



⁶This is not representative of all Alberta given that other Alberta Education data from 2014/15 to 2018/19 suggests that 7.3% of students self-identify as First Nation, Métis or Inuit (not including school enrolments associated with First Nations schools or school authorities).

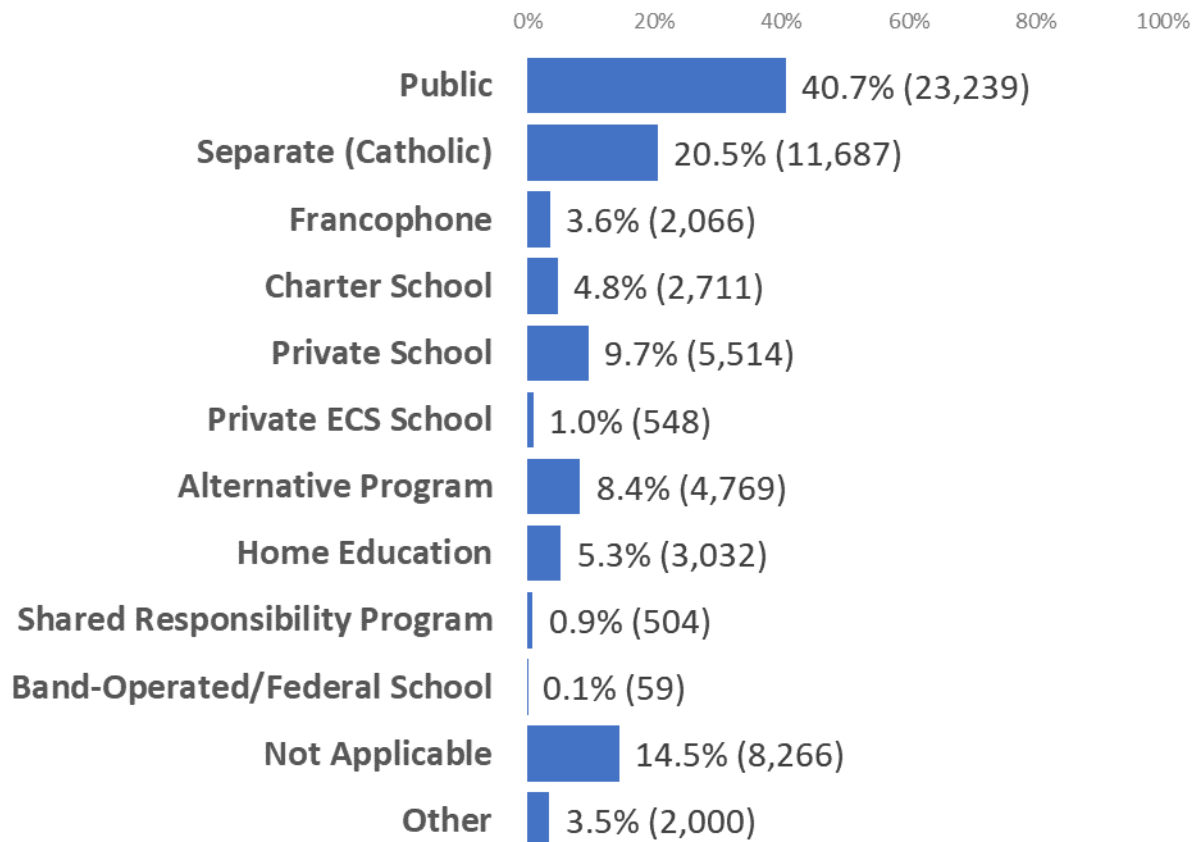
Figure 6: Do you identify as a Francophone person as described in Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) that gives Francophones, who live in a minority setting, the right to a primary and secondary education in their official language? Percentage and count of responses.



Type of school or program

The majority of respondents reported that they or their children attend a public or separate (Catholic) school (61.2%). Figure 7 provides a detailed breakdown of school types⁷. Respondents could select more than one type of school or program in cases where they had children attending different types of school. As a result, percentages and counts will not add up to 100% or the total count of respondents used in these analyses (57,072). Figure 8 breaks down household income by school type.

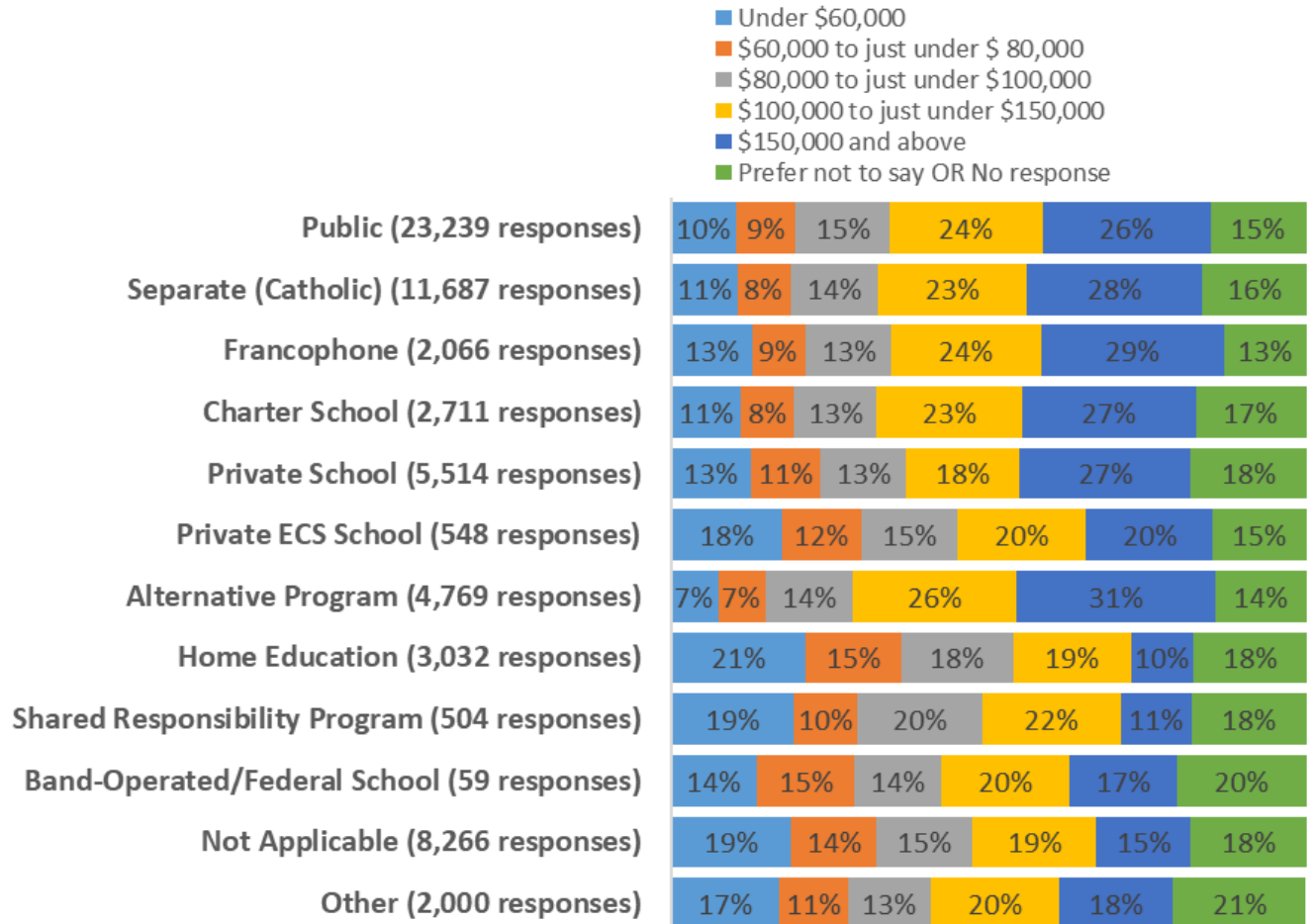
Figure 7: What type of school (K-12) do you or your children attend? (Select all that apply)



⁷ "Public" includes responses for both "Designated Public" and "Public School Outside of Our Designated Area". "Separate (Catholic)" includes responses for both "Designated Separate (Catholic)" and "Separate School Outside of Our Designated Area". "Francophone" includes responses for both "Designated Francophone" and "Francophone School Outside of Our Designated Area"

Income by type of school⁸

Figure 8: Percent of respondents for each school type that indicated each gross household income. Graph is based on the responses to "What type of school (K-12) do you or your children attend? (Select all that apply)" and "Which of the following best describes your household income before taxes or other deductions ("gross" household income)? (Select one)"



⁸ Reminder: This section reflects only data from the survey. It is not representative of Alberta more generally.

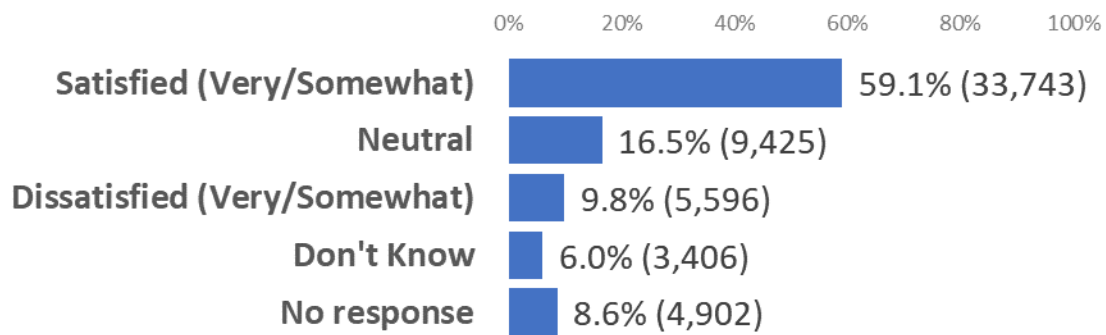
Quantitative Results

Satisfaction Overview

Overall satisfaction with information available

A majority of respondents (59.1%) stated that they were somewhat or very satisfied with the information available regarding choice; see Figure 9.

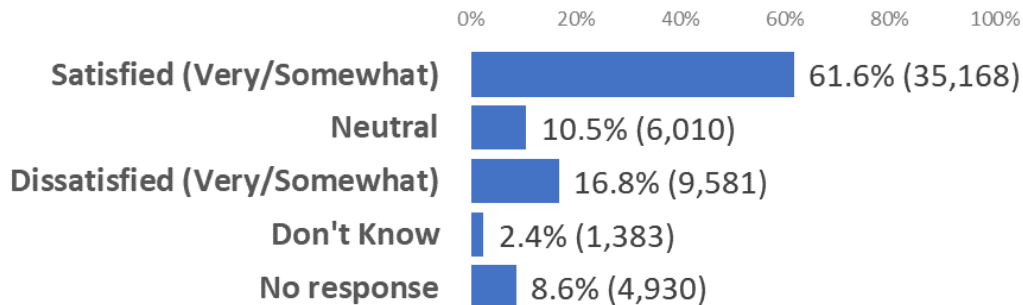
Figure 9: How satisfied are you with the information available to you on the different school/program opportunities available to you/your child? Percentage and count of responses.



Overall satisfaction with amount of choice available

Similar to above, a majority of respondents (61.6%) stated that they were somewhat or very satisfied with the amount of choice currently available to them; see Figure 10.

Figure 10: Are you satisfied with the current amount of choice in education in Alberta? Percentage and count of responses.



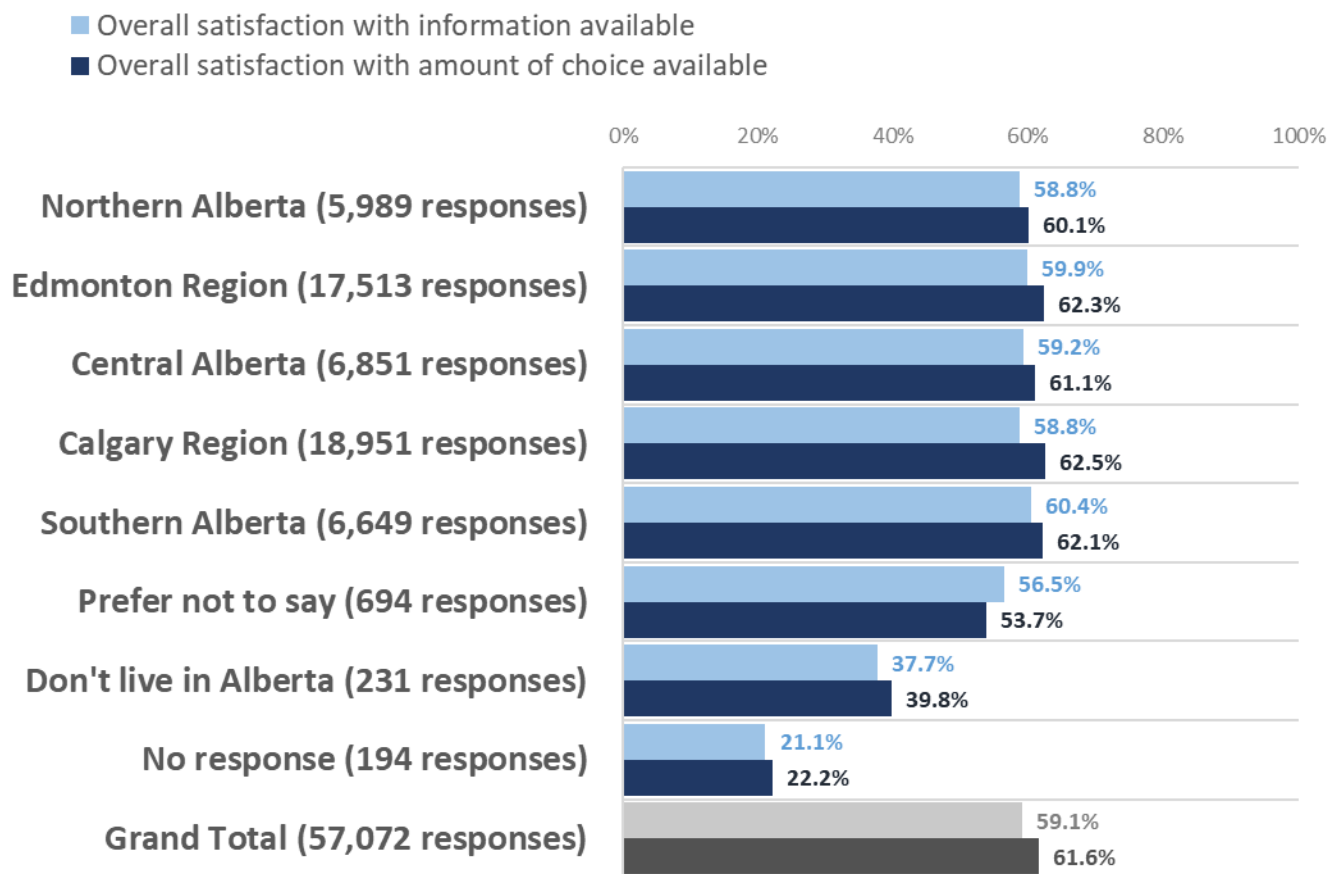
Analysis

Beyond the overall statistics, analysis was conducted on selected demographic groups to see how levels of satisfaction with choice varied.

Satisfaction by location

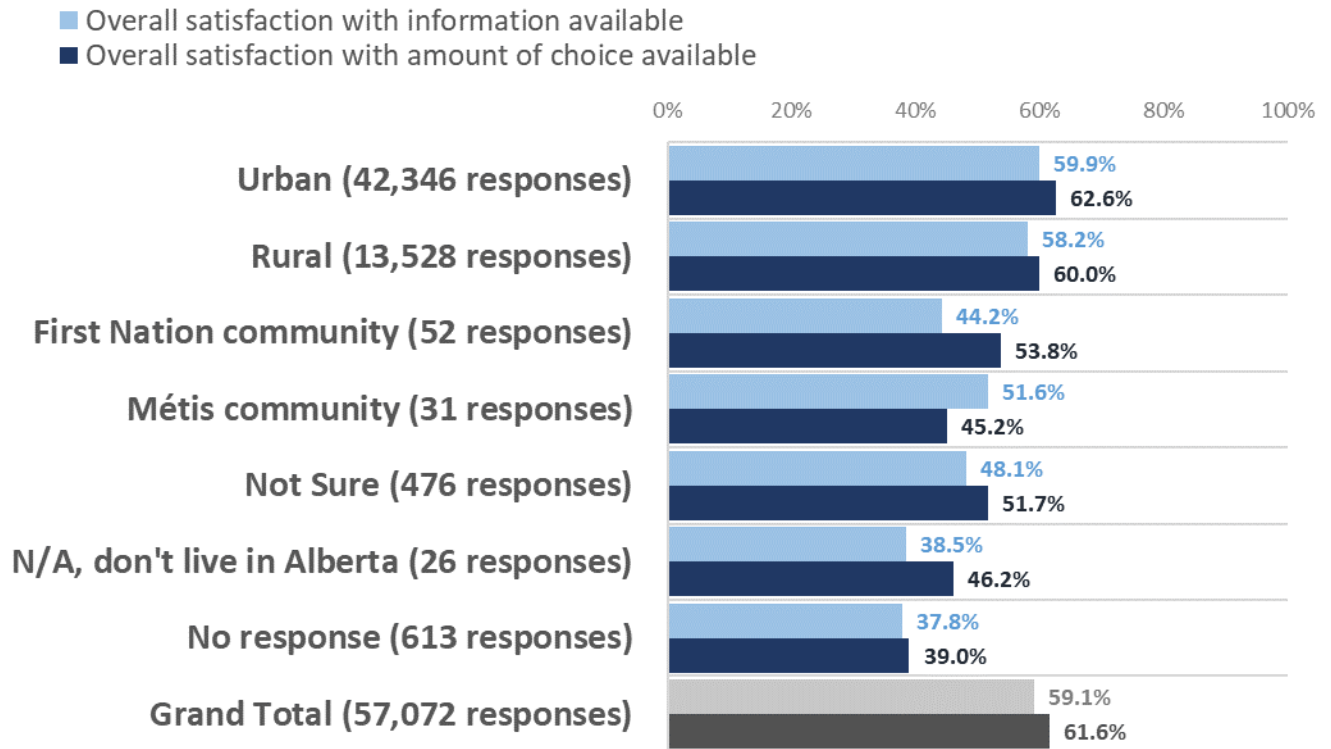
As Figure 11 illustrates, although similar, satisfaction with the amount of choice was *lower* among respondents from Northern Alberta and *higher* among respondents from the Edmonton and Calgary regions.

Figure 11: Overall satisfaction with information available and with amount of choice available, by region.



Likewise, satisfaction with the amount of choice was slightly higher for respondents from urban areas than from rural areas; see Figure 12.

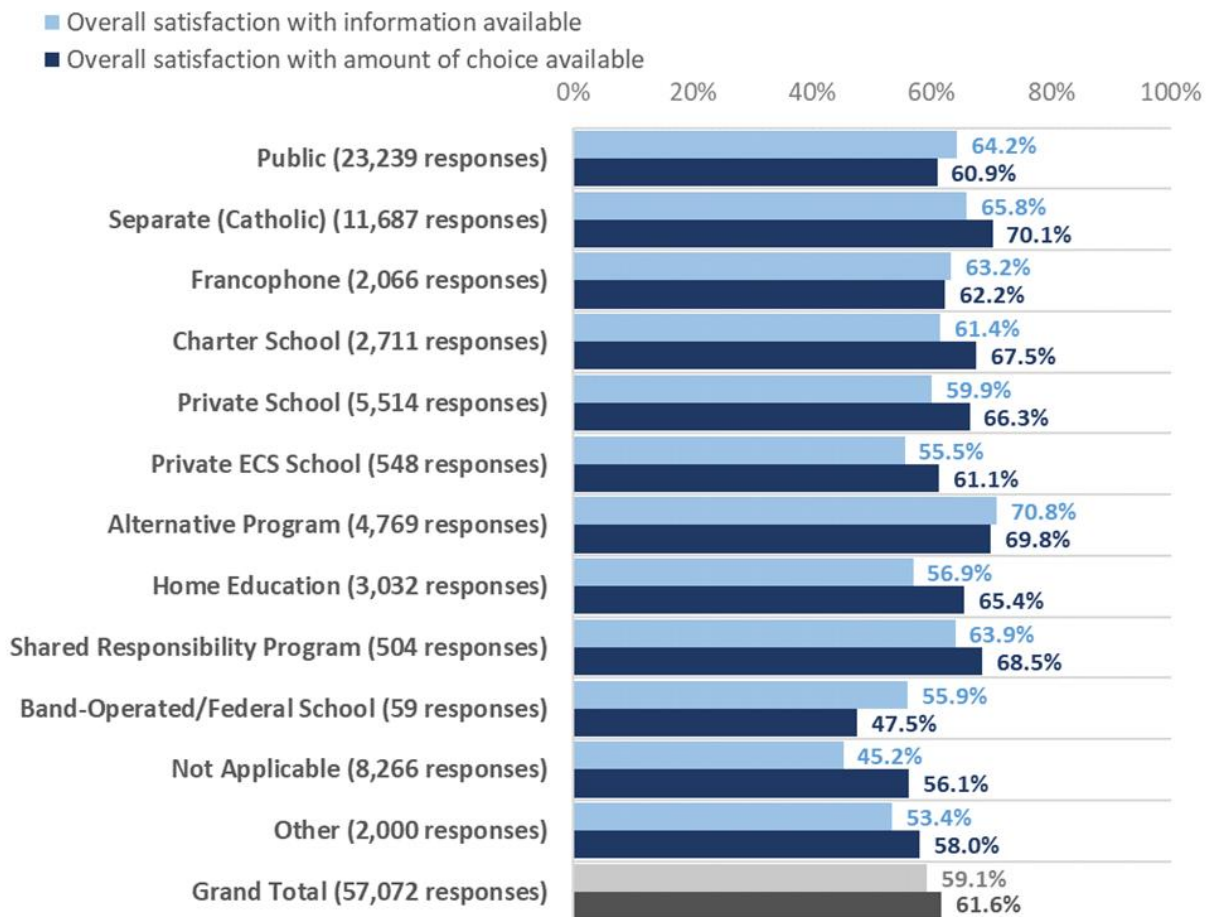
Figure 12: Overall satisfaction with information available and with amount of choice available, by urban/rural.



Satisfaction by type of school or program⁹

As Figure 13 shows, respondents attending separate (Catholic) schools reported the highest satisfaction with the amount of choice, while those attending Federal or band-operated schools reported the lowest.

Figure 13: Overall satisfaction with information available and with amount of choice available, by type of school or program.



⁹ "Public" includes responses for both "Designated Public" and "Public School Outside of Our Designated Area".

"Separate (Catholic)" includes responses for both "Designated Separate (Catholic)" and "Separate School Outside of Our Designated Area".

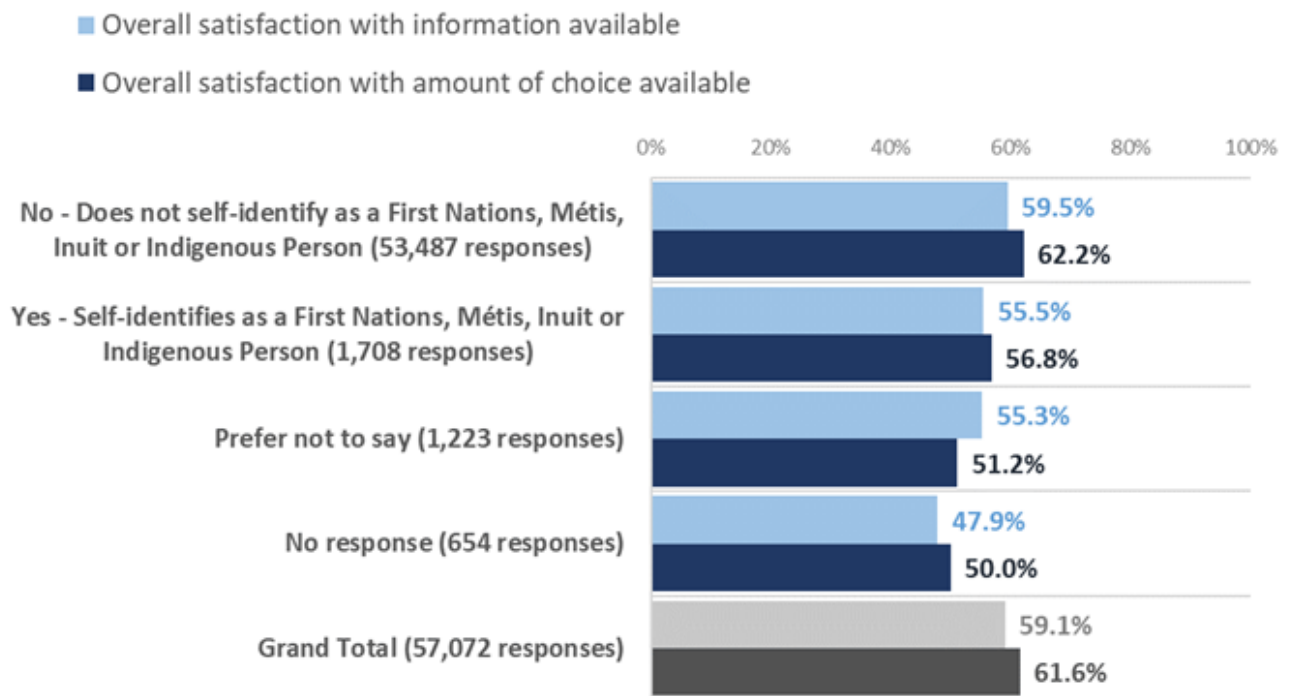
"Francophone" includes responses for both "Designated Francophone" and "Francophone School Outside of Our Designated Area".

Satisfaction of First Nation, Métis, Inuit or Indigenous self-identification

Due to the limited number of responses received from individuals identified as First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or Indigenous, limited inferences can be made about these groups. However, based on the limited information available, these groups appear to be *less* satisfied with the amount of choice available than other groups.

Figure 14 shows the overall satisfaction with information available and the amount of choice available for respondents who identified as First Nation, Métis, Inuit or Indigenous (respondents labelled Yes in the chart below, representing 3% of the respondents). Note that this does not indicate the number of respondent who are First Nation, Métis, Inuit or Indigenous, but rather the number that self-identified.

Figure 14: Overall satisfaction with information available and with amount of choice available, by First Nation, Métis, Inuit or Indigenous self-identification on survey.



Qualitative results

The survey included a number of open-ended questions, where respondents could write in their answers to the questions. This section contains a summary of the themes that emerged from an analysis of a limited random sample of responses to two key questions:

- Are you satisfied with the current amount of choice in education in Alberta?
- What, if anything, do you see as needing improvement in terms of choice in Alberta's education system? (i.e. type, access, level, quality, etc.)

Details on how many responses were analyzed and how they were coded into themes can be found in Appendix 1: Methodology.

Satisfaction with choice

In the survey, the question "Are you satisfied with the current amount of choice in education in Alberta?" was posed. Below is a summary of sample responses reviewed.

Note: for English responses, a total of 918 references were used and percentages shown are a reflection of that number. For the French responses, a total of 577 references were used.

English responses

English respondent profile

- Age 35-44 (39%) and female (67.8%)
- Identified as parents/guardians (61.5%)
- Living in urban areas (74.4%) compared to rural (23.4%)
- Residents of Alberta for more than 20 years (71.8%)
- Parents of children attending public (40.7%) or separate (20.5%) schools

General themes on choice

Responses indicated a range of perspectives on how well Alberta's current system of choice is working.

Some respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the level of choice available, and supported maintaining the existing system and options available. Other respondents stated that there was not enough choice, and identified a variety of perceived limitations on choice, including not enough choice within the public system and not enough access to specific programs (e.g. French immersion, Francophone schooling). A third group of respondents stated that there was too much choice, indicating belief that too much choice was fragmenting funding and educational

quality, and objecting to the use of public funding to support independent (private) and charter schools.

Responses also identified challenges with equity and access to choice across Alberta, including limited choices in rural areas and difficulty accessing available choice due to socioeconomic status or other factors.

A number of respondents identified specific concerns about the availability of resources for students with special needs, in terms of both specialized schools and programs and aides or other supports within regular classrooms.

Other themes

A number of the responses specifically mentioned resourcing of the different education options in Alberta. These responses varied in their support for different school types, and expressed a wide range of views including, on the one hand decreasing or eliminating funding for independent (private) and charter schools, and, on the other, increasing funding for independent (private) and charter schools.

Some respondents suggested removing duplication of services, due to a desire for cost savings, greater efficiencies, and the ability to redirect savings into supporting quality education

French responses

French respondent profile

- Age 35-44 (52%) and female (69.3%)
- Identified as parents/guardians (20.6%)
- Living in urban areas (79.6%) compared to rural (17.2%)
- Residents of Alberta for 10 to less than 20 years (36.7%)
- Parents of children attending their residentially designated Francophone (77.5%) or separate school (12.9%)

Surveys received in French contained similar themes to the English surveys in terms of appreciation for available choice, equitable access to education regardless of socioeconomic status, and removing duplication within the education system.

French survey responses also contained some unique themes specific to French-language education, including needs for increased resources and improved education quality for Francophone students. Respondents mentioned issues including lack of modern infrastructure compared with public schools and lack of supports for students with special needs in Francophone schools. Some responses also stated an interest in separating religion from

education, so that students do not have to choose between accessing public education and Francophone education.

Improving choice

In the survey, the question “What, if anything, do you see as needing improvement in terms of choice in Alberta’s education system?” was posed. Below is a summary of sample responses reviewed.

English responses

Resources to Support Choice

Many responses mentioned resourcing as a way to improve choice. A range of responses were given from increasing funding to public schools to increasing funding to charter schools, independent (private) schools and for home educated students. Some responses also identified specific concerns related to resourcing and costs, such as transportation costs as a limiting factor for students being able to access choice and the unique funding supports needed for rural schools to offer choice.

Government and parent roles

A number of survey responses mentioned the roles of government and/or parents in education. These responses included comments about the importance of parents as decision-makers for their children’s education, factors that limit parents’ ability to access choice (such as regulations, school board policies, or finances), and the belief that parents should be free to choose, but should have to pay for non-public options.

Responses that mentioned government contained disparate perspectives on government involvement in education, including calls for government to make education a priority and increase support as well as for government to reduce its involvement in education.

Other themes

Some respondents flagged removing duplication of services as a concern, due to a desire for cost savings, greater efficiencies, and the ability to redirect savings into supporting quality education.

Other themes not directly related to choice included concerns about overall education funding, supports for diverse populations, the effectiveness of the current inclusion model in supporting students with special needs, and the need for updates to the curriculum.

French responses

Many of the themes seen in the French-language survey responses aligned with those seen in the English responses, including calls for more resources for public schools and reducing funding for independent (private), charter and home education.

Resources to support choice

The most common theme in French-language survey responses was a call to increase the quality of education for Francophone students. In particular, respondents flagged the need for more schools and improved infrastructure, and better teacher training for Francophone and French immersion schools. Responses also called for making access and funding comparable between Francophone and other public schools.

Other themes

Additional themes that emerged from the French responses were a desire for increased options for Francophone students, including more public (non-Catholic) Francophone options. Respondents also identified a need for better communication between schools and parents, and more information about available choices.

Other observations

Analysis of the qualitative data revealed some differences across demographic groups in terms of the themes that appeared in their responses. A selection of these are noted below.

Urban/rural:

- Compared with urban respondents, rural respondents:
 - More frequently mentioned the limitations and difference of choice in rural areas
 - Less frequently mentioned the impacts of socioeconomic status on choice in education
 - More frequently mentioned increased funding for home education and independent (private) schools

Home education:

- Compared with non-home educated respondents, home educated respondents or those home educating their children:
 - More frequently mentioned the limitations of choice in rural areas and more likely to call for increased funding to rural schools
 - Less frequently mentioned that public funds should support public schools
 - More frequently mentioned the curriculum needs updating
 - More frequently mentioned increased government transparency
 - More frequently mentioned parental choice

Appendix 1: Methodology

These analyses reflect responses received from the “Public Engagement for Proposed Choice in Education Act” Survey. Responses were collected through:

- an online English-Language survey
- an online French-Language survey
- a printed English-Language survey
- a printed French-Language survey

Of the 71,236 responses received online or on paper, approximately 20% did not include a response to any of the topic-specific questions (Question 14 or later). Respondents that did not answer Question 14 or later did not provide input on the topic and were excluded from analyses in this document, except where otherwise indicated.

2,358 identical responses, containing no demographic information, were received via email. Those responses are not reflected in the analyses described in this report.

- The response to Question 22 (*Are you satisfied with the current amount of choice in education in Alberta?*) on these surveys was “I choose Public Education over privatization” and fell into the theme “Government involvement in education.”
- The response to Question 24 (*What, if anything, do you see as needing improvement in terms of choice in Alberta’s education system? (i.e. type, access, level, quality, etc.)*) was “Stop using public dollars to subsidize private schools” and fell into the theme “Reduction of funding to charter or private or homeschool.”

Responses to printed surveys were manually entered into the online survey tool.

- Audit processes were not in place for this data entry; some data entry errors may have occurred.
- Some printed surveys were entered into the online tool prior to the closure of the survey; the exact number of such surveys is not known. These surveys were not identified any differently than online responses so cannot be disaggregated.
- Some responses to printed surveys were excluded when responses to earlier mandatory questions were missing.

Analysis of qualitative results

Prior to the analysis, data cleaning to remove non-text symbols occurred. Responses to open-ended questions were individually coded into themes by two different raters with advanced expertise in qualitative analysis methods. Discrepancies between raters were resolved through discussion.

The analytical tool used to organize the coding structure was NVivo 12 (QSR International Pty Ltd., 2018) qualitative data analysis software.

Data saturation (the point when “no new information or themes are observed in the data”; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006, p. 59) was reached. Furthermore, results of quantitative analyses for the sample did not differ from those of the entire set of responses. These two findings provided evidence that the sample accurately represented the entire set of responses.

An iterative random sampling procedure was used, with the goal of selecting approximately 1,000 non-blank responses. 1,299 English language survey responses to Question #24 (*What, if anything, do you see as needing improvement in terms of choice in Alberta’s education system? (i.e. type, access, level, quality, etc.)*) were randomly selected. 295 responses were blank, leaving a sample of 1,004 non-blank responses to this question. These 1,004 responses were individually coded into 1,318 references (in a single response, a respondent could express more than one separate idea (reference); these could be coded into different themes).

The same sample of responses was used for thematic coding of Question #22 (*Are you satisfied with the current amount of choice in education in Alberta?*). Thirteen of the responses out of the sample of 1,299 were not useable (identical respondent IDs were associated with different responses). Of the remaining 1,286 sampled responses, 494 were blank (38%). The remaining 792 responses were coded into 918 references.

All 1,174 French language survey responses were analyzed. Responses were translated into English and then the translations were added to the combined French and English data set in a new column. Once in the data set, they were coded in the same way as the English open questions: two coders independently working on theming the data and then meeting together to confirm or further discuss the choices of codes.

- Out of the 1,174 responses, 683 (58.1%) did not provide a response to Question 22. The remaining 491 responses were coded into 577 references.
- Out of the 1,174 responses, 482 respondents (41.1%) did not provide a response to Question 24. The remaining 692 responses were coded into 871 references.

Appendix 2: Analysis of submission from interest group

2,357 surveys¹⁰ arrived via email from people via a public education advocacy interest group. The completed surveys were very similar¹¹ in that they contained no demographic information and responses supportive of public education throughout. These surveys were analyzed separately so as not to affect the demographic components of the overall analysis. The demographic information is important to show how people experience education and choice differently in Alberta.

Like the other surveys, qualitative analysis to open responses was undertaken for:

- Q22 - Are you satisfied with the current amount of choice in education in Alberta?
- Q24 - What, if anything, do you see as needing improvement in terms of choice in Alberta's education system? (i.e. type, access, level, quality, etc.)

Identical responses were recorded for this question in the 2357 submissions that came in.

SURVEY QUESTION	RESPONSE (n=2,357)	THEME
Question #22 <i>Are you satisfied with the current amount of choice in education in Alberta?</i>	I choose public education over privatization.	Government involvement in education.
Question #24 <i>What, if anything, do you see as needing improvement in terms of choice in Alberta's education system? (i.e. type, access, level, quality, etc.)</i>	Stop using public dollars to subsidize private schools	Reduction of funding to charter or independent (private) or homeschool

¹⁰ In addition, there were 155 undelivered acknowledgement emails that were returned as they had email addresses that were not operational or had been incorrectly inputted. 60 surveys were sent after the closing date and were not included.
¹¹ A number of respondents (176) sent in a survey more than once from the same email address with the same named person, postal code and email address. This may reflect people making submissions on behalf other people in their household who do not have email accounts or people making multiple submissions for themselves.

References

Guest, G., Bruce, A., & Johnson, L. (2006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 18(1), 59-82.

QSR International Pty Ltd. (2018). NVivo qualitative data analysis software, Version 12.
<https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo/home>