

Funding religious schools: the majority of Canadians say at least some public dollars should be provided

Fewer would provide funding on par with what public schools receive, however.

December 14, 2017 – Should religiously affiliated schools receive taxpayer dollars? And if so, what amount, and under what circumstances?

This ongoing debate in Canadian education – one complicated by the historical position of Catholic schools as a key provider of publicly funded education in many provinces – has been revived most recently in Saskatchewan, where [legal challenges are underway](#) to a court ruling that the provincial government cannot fund non-Catholic students' attendance at the province's Catholic schools.

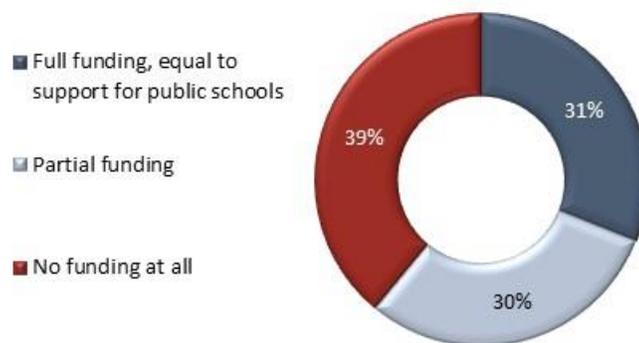
Recent polling from the Angus Reid Institute – part of a [year-long partnership](#) with [Faith in Canada 150](#) – finds Canadians more amenable than not to this particular intersection of church and state.

Asked a broad question about public funding of private, faith-based schools, six-in-ten Canadians (61%) say such institutions should either receive support equal to that enjoyed by public schools (31%), or at least some amount of government funding (30%).

More Key Findings:

- Those favouring partial funding were asked a follow-up question about roughly how much money religious schools should receive. More than half (51%) in this group say funds should be less than 50 per cent of what public schools get
- Younger respondents – those ages 18-34 – are more likely than their elders to say public funds should be appropriated to religious schools (38% favour full funding, and 35% prefer partial)

As far as you're concerned, should religious and faith-based schools receive ...



METHODOLOGY:

The Angus Reid Institute conducted an online survey from October 16 – 23, 2017, among a representative randomized sample of 1,972 Canadian adults who are members of the [Angus Reid Forum](#). For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of this size would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.2 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. Discrepancies in or between totals are due to rounding. The survey was conducted in partnership with [Faith in Canada 150](#) and paid for jointly by ARI and Faith in Canada 150. Detailed tables are found at the end of this release.

CONTACT:

Shachi Kurl, Executive Director: 604.908.1693 shachi.kurl@angusreid.org @shachikurl
Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

- Residents of the three provinces where separate, publicly funded Catholic school boards still operate – Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario – are more likely to support full funding than people in other parts of the country

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How much funding should religious and faith-based schools receive?

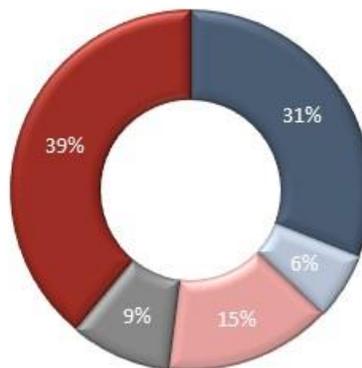
As mentioned, six-in-ten Canadians (61%) say faith-based education should receive government funding, though they disagree about how much money religious schools should receive in comparison to the public system. Three-in-ten (31%) say faith-based education should receive government funding on par with public schools. Another three-in-ten (30%) say religious schools should get only partial funding, while the plurality (39%) say they should receive no public money at all.

Respondents who said religious schools should receive partial funding were asked how much money they would allocate to such institutions, relative to public school funding. Slightly more than half (51%) said they would provide less than 50 per cent of the amount public schools receive to religious schools, while one-in-five (20%) said they would provide more than 50 per cent of what public schools receive. The rest (29%) were unsure.

Taken together with those who would provide full funding or no funding at all, the group that would provide partial funding can be broken down as seen in the following graph.

As far as you're concerned, should religious and faith-based schools receive ...

- Full funding, equal to support for public schools
- Partial funding - above 50%
- Partial funding - Below 50%
- Partial funding - Not sure how much
- No funding at all



Notable differences by region, age, and gender

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Ian Holliday, Research Associate: 604.442.3312 ian.holliday@angusreid.org

Three provinces – Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario – currently [provide separate streams of public funding](#) for Catholic schools. These separate schools have their own publicly funded school boards, and have historically educated Catholics and non-Catholics alike.

Given the prominent ongoing role of publicly funded religious schools in these three provinces, it's perhaps not surprising that the three are the only regions above the national average in terms of the number of residents supporting full funding for religious education.

It's worth noting, of course, that in no region of the country does a majority of the population reject all public funding for faith-based schools. Quebec – where the religious neutrality of the state is [a recurring and salient political issue](#) – comes closest, as seen in the following table:

As far as you're concerned, should religious and faith-based schools receive ...								
	Total	Region						
		BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	ATL
Full funding, equal to support for public schools	31%	25%	43%	40%	29%	33%	25%	29%
Partial funding	30%	36%	27%	31%	39%	28%	29%	33%
No funding at all	39%	39%	30%	29%	32%	39%	46%	38%

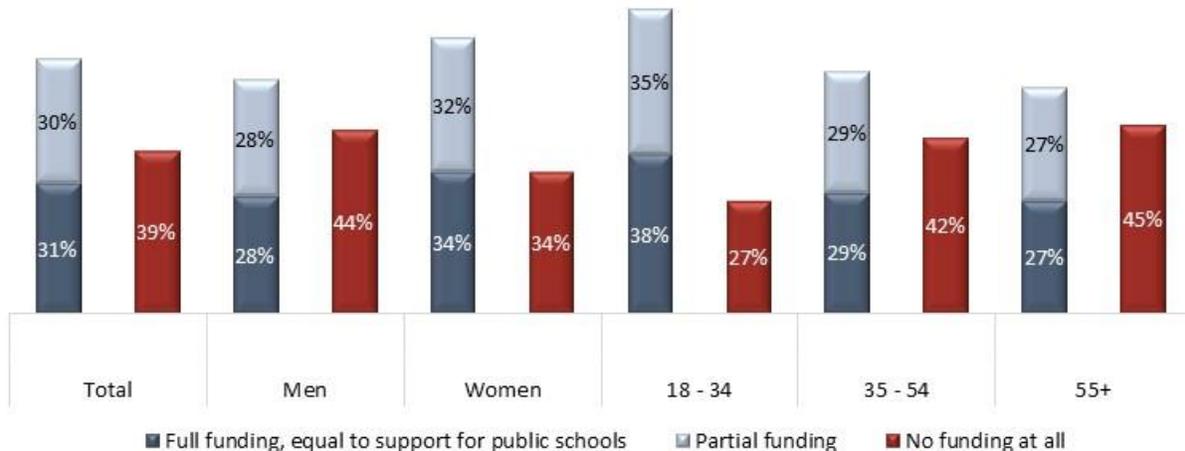
Age and gender are also key drivers of opinion on this question, with men more likely to say religious schools should receive “no funding at all” and women more divided, as seen in the graph that follows.

Looking at responses by age, it becomes clear that those closest to their own school days view public spending on religious education most favourably. A plurality (38%) of those ages 18 – 34 say religious schools should receive full funding, while among older age groups “no funding at all” is the plurality choice:

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As far as you're concerned, should religious and faith-based schools receive ...



One demographic characteristic that – perhaps surprisingly – doesn't have much impact on responses to this question is whether a person has children living in their household or not.

Parents and guardians are only marginally more likely to favour full funding (33% do, compared to 30% of those without kids in their households – a difference that is not statistically significant). Likewise, people with children are no more or less likely to favour partial funding, nor are they more or less inclined to say this partial funding should be above 50 per cent. See summary tables at the end of this report for greater detail.

The spectrum of religion and faith

One of the key drivers of division on the question of government money paying for faith-based education is the continuum of religious belief described in [previous Angus Reid Institute-Faith in Canada 150 research](#). The four broad segments of this continuum were re-created for this analysis. They are:

- The **Religiously Committed** – As the name implies, this group consists of deeply faithful individuals who attend religious services regularly and get involved in their faith in other ways as well. They tend to be certain that God or some other higher power exists, and they pray to this entity and feel its presence frequently. This segment includes more women than men, and more people ages 55 and older than people in any other age group.
- The **Privately Faithful** – Members of this group are also strong believers in God or a higher power, and most of them also pray regularly. Unlike the Religiously Committed, however, the Privately Faithful are just that: Private. The vast majority of them attend religious services less than once a month, and hardly any of them read sacred texts regularly. Like the Religiously Committed, this group skews older and more female than the general population.
- The **Spiritually Uncertain** – This group is distinguished by its lack of conviction on matters of faith. While the vast majority do not rule out the possibility that God or a higher power exists, only one-in-six (15%) say they definitely believe in such a being. Two-thirds of them pray, but only

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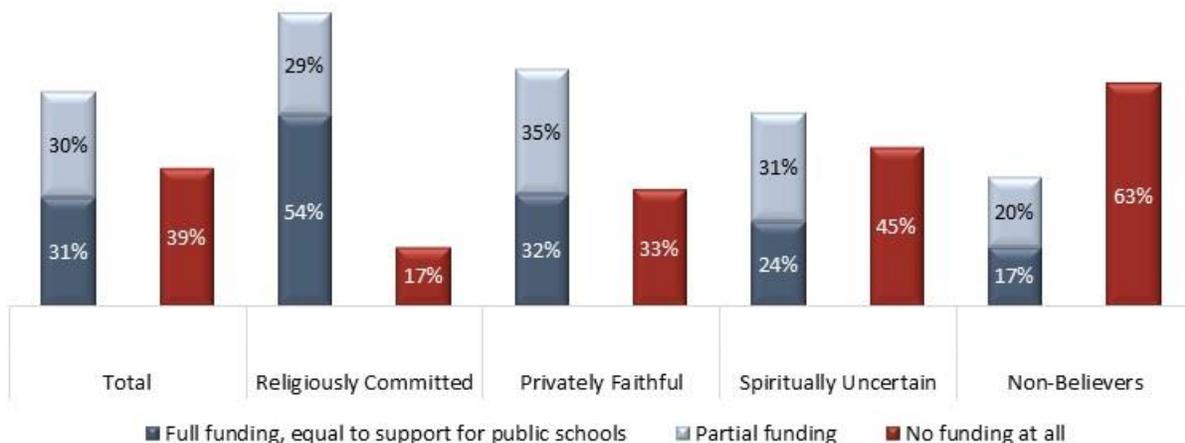
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one-in-ten do so once a month or more. They hardly ever attend religious services. This group includes more young people than the two more religious segments, and includes equal numbers of men and women.

- The **Non-Believers** are those Canadians who doubt or outright reject the existence of God or a higher power, and deny having any personal feelings of faith or spirituality. As might be expected, nearly all of these Canadians do not attend services, pray, or read sacred texts with any regularity. The Non-Believers are the only majority-male segment, and they are the group that contains the fewest respondents in the 55-plus age group.

As they are on so many other issues, the Non-Believers and the Religiously Committed are on opposite sides of the religious school funding question. The two middle cohorts, meanwhile, are divided on how many taxpayer dollars, if any, should go to religious schools:

As far as you're concerned, should religious and faith-based schools receive ...



Interestingly, those who prefer partial funding for religious schools are more likely to say such funding should be less than half of what public schools receive regardless of which segment of the religious spectrum they occupy.

Some 13 per cent of the Religiously Committed, overall, say funding should be below 50 per cent, compared to half that many (6%) who say funding should be above the halfway point. Similarly, 11 per cent of the Non-Believers choose “below 50 per cent” compared to 3 per cent who choose “above 50 per cent.”

Full responses for the two questions combined, by segment, are summarized in the following table:

As far as you're concerned, should religious and faith-based schools receive ...					
	Total	Spectrum of Religion/Faith			
		Religiously Committed	Privately Faithful	Spiritually Uncertain	Non-Believers
Full funding, equal to support for public schools	31%	54%	32%	24%	17%
Partial funding - Above 50%	6%	6%	7%	6%	3%
Partial funding - Below 50%	15%	13%	18%	16%	11%
Partial funding - Not sure/Can't say	9%	9%	11%	8%	7%
No funding at all	39%	17%	33%	45%	63%

The **Angus Reid Institute (ARI)** was founded in October 2014 by pollster and sociologist, Dr. Angus Reid. ARI is a national, not-for-profit, non-partisan public opinion research foundation established to advance education by commissioning, conducting and disseminating to the public accessible and impartial statistical data, research and policy analysis on economics, political science, philanthropy, public administration, domestic and international affairs and other socio-economic issues of importance to Canada and its world.

Summary tables follow. For detailed results by age, gender, region, education, and other demographics, [click here](#).

For detailed results by the spectrum of religion and faith, [click here](#).

As far as you're concerned, should religious and faith-based schools receive ...			
(weighted sample sizes)	Total (1972)	Children in household	
		Yes (562)	No (1410)
Full funding, equal to support for public schools	31%	33%	30%
Partial funding	30%	30%	30%
No funding at all	39%	37%	40%

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By partial funding, would you support a level that is above or below 50% of public school funding?

(Asked only of those who said "partial funding," N=590)

(weighted sample sizes)	Total (590)	Children in household	
		Yes (171)	No (420)
Above 50%	20%	20%	20%
Below 50%	51%	49%	51%
Not sure/Can't say	29%	31%	28%

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