



Independent school enrolment on the rise: study ; EDUCATION: More students, more schools opening in private, independent school system

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Public schools may be bleeding pupils, but more parents than ever before are sending their kids to independent and private schools.

That's the gist of a report released this week by the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada, a conservative think tank based in Ottawa. Researchers with the institute say studies have shown despite the declining number of elementary and secondary school students in Ontario, only the public school system is actually experiencing a decline in enrolment.

Independent school enrolment is on the rise, they say, even while the Ontario government increases funding to public schools.

"Even in the face of demographic decline, independent school enrolment continues to increase," said Derek Miedema, an institute researcher who wrote the study. "Parents shoulder the burden of this cost across Ontario today."

The study found that between 1960 and 2005, the public education system had an increase in enrolment of 52.5%, compared to a 357% increase in the independent and private system.

Between 2000 and 2005, the study says, Ontario public schools saw an enrolment decrease of 1.1% while independent school enrolment grew by 8.8%.

"Our experiences do reflect the numbers in the study," said Barbara Bierman, executive director of the Ontario Federation of Independent Schools. "Our association is growing and not experiencing declines. Not only are more students enrolling in existing school within our association, but new schools are opening."

Bierman said the trend is reflective of the desire of parents to be more involved in their children's education.

"Parents often feel shut out by the public system, that they don't have a voice when it comes to their children's educational experiences," she said.

"Independent schools offer parents the opportunity to become stakeholders and be involved in day-to-day decisions. There's a real sense of community and communication, and that's very attractive to a lot of parents."