



Strong Parental Support for Standardized Testing across Canada

by Paige MacPherson

MAIN CONCLUSIONS

- 95% of Canadian parents of K-12 children believe it is important to know their child's academic performance in the core subjects by a fair and objective measure.
- 72% of Canadian parents express *strong support* for fair and objective student assessment.
- Support for fair and objective measurement of students' academic proficiency was highest in British Columbia and Ontario.
- Only 1% of Canadian parents believe it is not at all important to know their child's academic performance in the core subjects by a fair and objective measure.
- 84% of Canadian parents surveyed support standardized testing so they will understand how their children are doing in the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics.
- Support for standardized testing was highest in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Quebec, and Atlantic Canada.
- In every province or region of Canada, the largest share of parents of K-12 children strongly support standardized testing.
- Immigrant parents expressed the strongest levels of support for both standardized testing, and the fair and objective measurement of students' academic success.

Introduction

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use in Canada of standardized tests to evaluate student performance at the provincial level was mixed. School closures eliminated or substantially curtailed the limited standardized testing that was being done in some provinces, notably Quebec, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. Moreover, some provinces, particularly British Columbia, had weakened their regime of

standardized testing prior to COVID-19. It is not clear whether the provinces who used testing prior to COVID-19 will return to the earlier level or follow the lead of British Columbia and weaken their use of testing. This publication examines parental support for standardized tests across the country, and is part of a series looking at the state of standardized testing in Canada.

Standardized Testing in Jeopardy in Canada

Standardized testing is a tool employed by many provinces and across the developed world to objectively measure students' academic proficiency. Having students at the same level take the same test, with the test grade assessing students and teachers in a meaningful way, provides a level playing field on which parents, teachers, and all education stakeholders can determine performance, best practices, areas of strength and weakness, and strategies for academic improvement.

In Canada, abolishing standardized testing is the target of several teachers' unions and, though this cause has been long adopted by this stakeholder group, the efforts to undermine and eliminate standardized testing in several provinces have intensified during the COVID pandemic. For example, the Ontario

Secondary School Teachers Federation has called for a halt, and ultimately an end, to Ontario's grade-10 literacy test (Dubinski, 2021). The British Columbia Teachers Federation, too, has an ongoing advocacy effort to push parents to have their children opt out of standardized tests in the province (Yuzda, 2021).

In some instances, standardized tests are being replaced by lower-stakes student assessments. In British Columbia's secondary schools, for example, the standardized testing of secondary students using higher-stakes course exams, which contributed to a portion of students' course grade was replaced with lower-stakes student assessments, which are mandatory for graduation yet have poor participation rates and do not affect students' grades (Emes and MacPherson, 2022).

Details on Polling Methodology

The Fraser Institute commissioned a poll from Leger (2022) that surveyed parents of school-aged children (ages 5–17) enrolled in public and independent schools. A total of $n = 1,204$ interviews were conducted via Leger's on-line panel. One thousand interviews were conducted with a representative sampling of parents across Canada. An additional 100 interviews were conducted in Alberta and

British Columbia while ensuring a representative sampling was maintained across the nation. The interviews were conducted from November 12 to November 21, 2021.

As a non-probability survey, a margin of error is technically not to be reported. If the data were collected through a random sample, the margin of error would

be $\pm 2.8\%$, 19 times out of 20. Using data from the 2016 Census, results were weighted according to age, gender, and region in order to give a representative sample of the parent population in Canada. The

numbers presented in this poll have been rounded to the whole number. However, raw values were used to calculate the sums presented and therefore may not correspond to the manual addition of these numbers.

Support for Fair and Objective Measurement of Student Performance

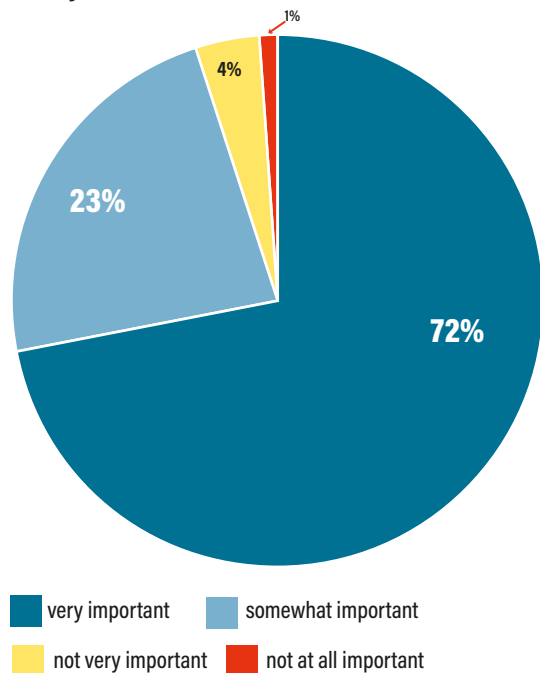
Almost all Canadian parents of children in K-12 schools believe that it is important to know their child’s academic performance in core subjects by a fair and objective measure.

The Leger poll asked Canadian parents of children in K-12 schools the following: *Thinking of your children in school, how important is knowing how your child is doing in the core subjects of reading, writing and math, relative to other students by a fair and objective measure?* Respondents could select one level of support from the following categories: *very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important, or don’t know.*

Of the Canadian parents surveyed, 95% with children in K-12 schools believe that it is important to know their children’s academic performance in core subjects by a fair and objective measure. This figure includes respondents who selected either *very important* or *somewhat important* (**figure 1**).

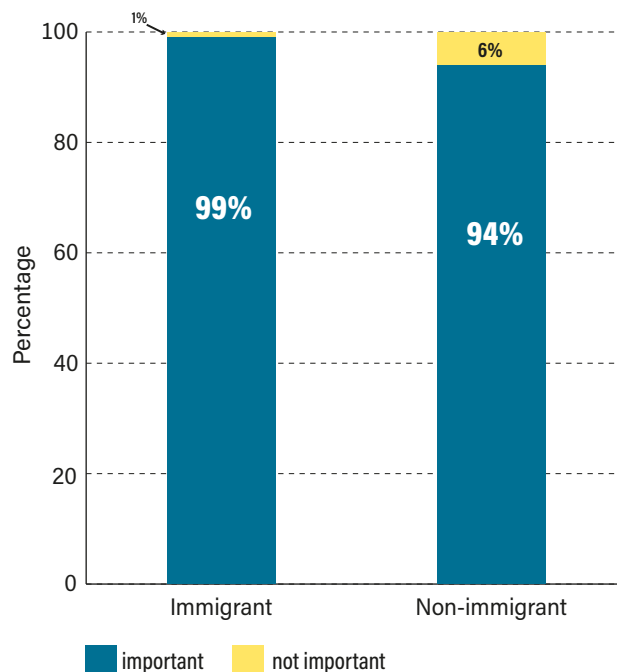
There was a slight difference in responses based on immigration status (determined by the answer to the question: *Were you born in Canada or did you immigrate to Canada?*). Immigrant parents expressed the strongest level of support: 99% consider objective measurement of student performance important compared to 94% for non-immigrant parents (**figure 2**).

Figure 1: Overall parental support (%) for fair and objective student assessment



Source: Leger, 2022.

Figure 2: Parental support for fair and objective student assessment, by immigration status



Source: Leger, 2022.

Regionally, support amongst parents was highest in British Columbia (96%) and in Ontario (98%). Ninety-four percent of Quebec’s parents expressed support, as did 91% of parents in Alberta and the Prairie provinces (Saskatchewan and Manitoba), and 92% of parents in Atlantic Canada (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland & Labrador). These percentages of Canadian parents of children in K-12 schools who expressed support for standardized testing includes respondents who selected *very important* or *somewhat important*.

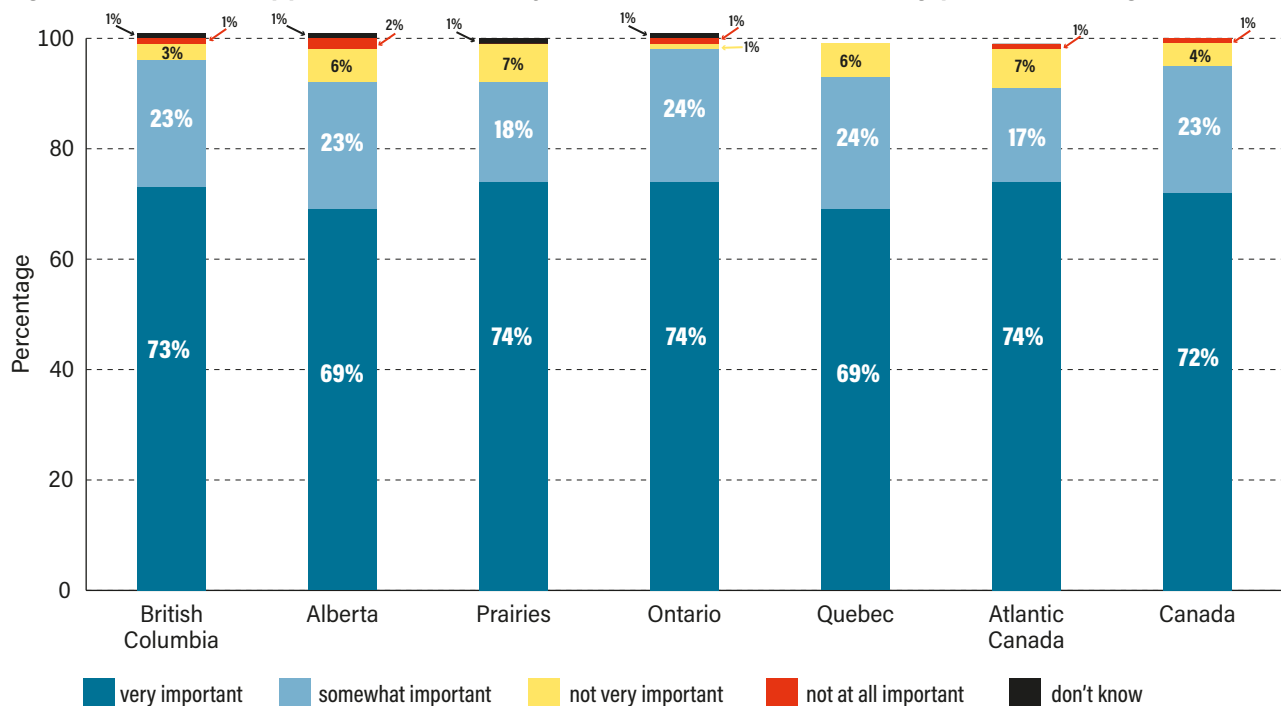
When broken down further, the proportion of parents who believe fair and objective measurement of student performance is *very important* is by far the largest proportion of the total parents surveyed. This high level of support ranged from 74% in the Prairies

(Manitoba and Saskatchewan), Ontario, and Atlantic Canada to 73% in British Columbia, to a low of 69% in Alberta and Quebec. Nationally, 72% of parents believe that fair and objective student assessment is very important.

The second-largest proportion of parent respondents believed that fair and objective measurement of students is *somewhat important*, ranging from a high of 24% in Ontario and Quebec, to 23% in British Columbia and Alberta, to lows of 18% in the Prairies and 17% in Atlantic Canada.

In every province and region, 7% or less of parents believe fair and objective student assessment is *not very important* (4% nationally) and 2% or less of parents believe fair and objective student assessment is *not at all important* (1% nationally) (**figure 3**).

Figure 3: Parental support for fair and objective student assessment, by province or region



Source: Leger, 2022.

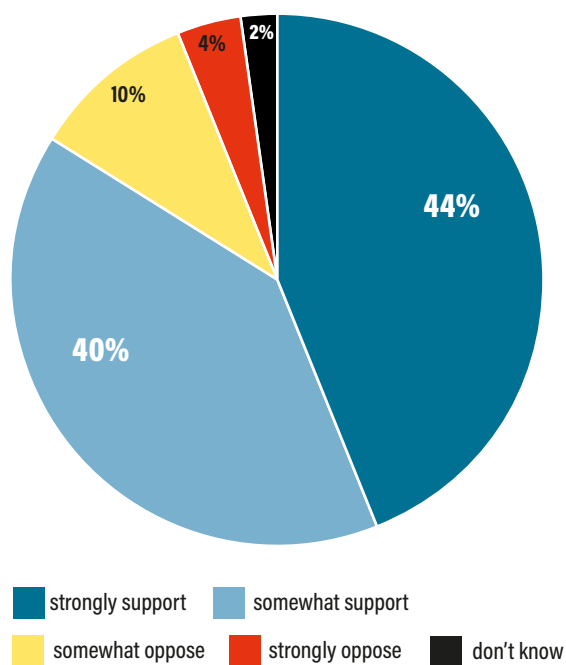
Specific Support for Standardized Testing

A large majority (84%) of Canadian parents of children in K-12 schools support standardized testing to understand how their children are performing in the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics.

Leger’s poll asked Canadian parents of children in K-12 schools the following: *Thinking of your children in school, do you support or oppose your children taking standardized tests to understand how they and their school are doing in the core subjects of reading, writing and math?* Respondents could select one of the following categories: *strongly support*, *somewhat support*, *somewhat oppose*, *strongly oppose*, or *don’t know*.

The 84% of Canadian parents of children in K-12 schools who expressed support for standardized testing includes respondents who selected *strongly support* or *somewhat support* (figure 4).

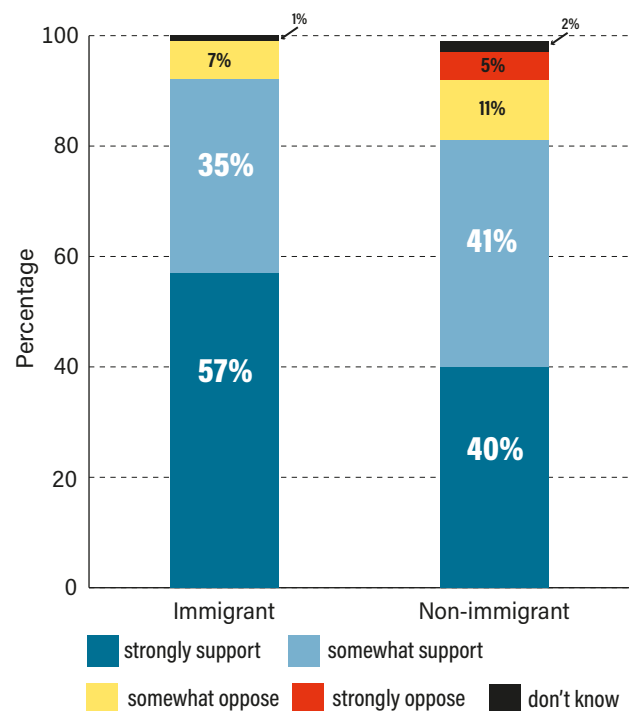
Figure 4: Overall parental support (%) for standardized testing



Source: Leger, 2022.

Again there was a small difference in the responses based on immigration status. Specifically, 92% of immigrant parents support standardized tests for core subjects, compared to 81% of non-immigrant parents (figure 5).

Figure 5: Parental support for standardized testing, by immigration status



Source: Leger, 2022.

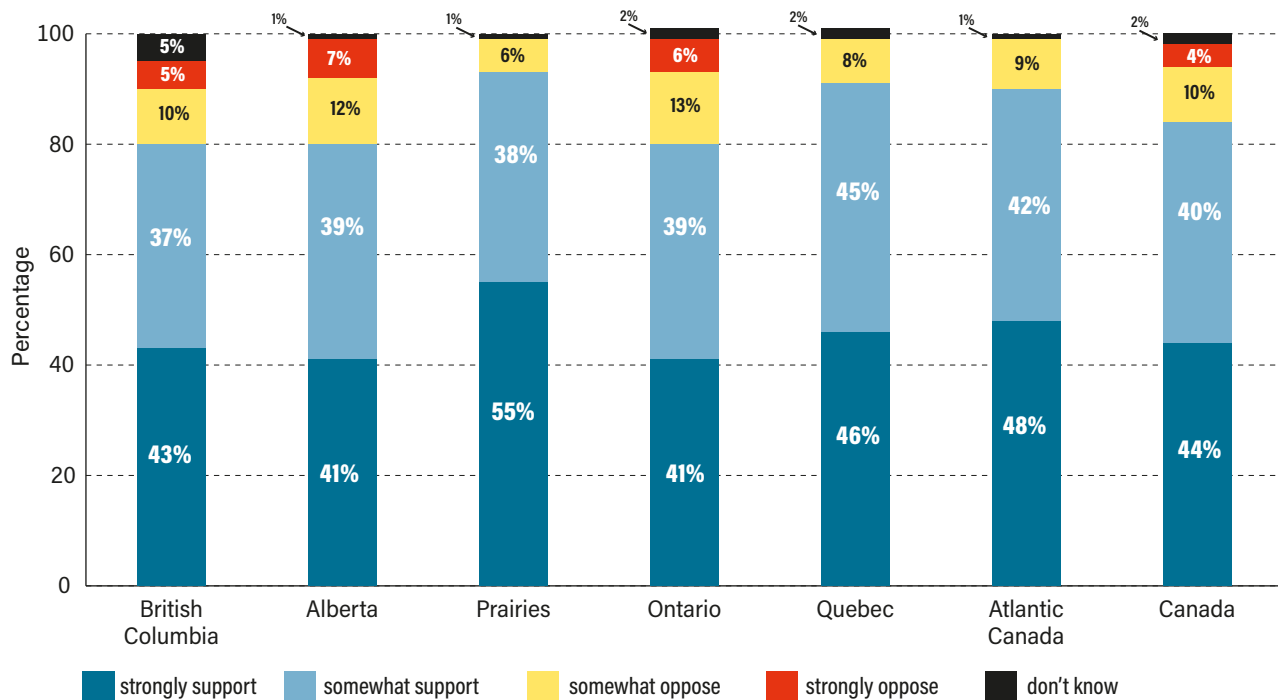
Overall support amongst parents was 90% or higher in the Prairie provinces (Saskatchewan and Manitoba), Quebec, and Atlantic Canada (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland & Labrador), and was 80% in British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario. This level of support includes respondents who selected either *strongly support* or *somewhat support*.

When broken down further, both nationally and in every province or region, the largest proportion of

parents responding to this survey *strongly support* standardized testing in the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics. This ranges from a high of 55% in the Prairies (Manitoba and Saskatchewan) to a low of 41% in Alberta and Ontario. Nationally, 44% of parents strongly support standardized testing in the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics. The second-largest proportion of parents nationally and in every province or region *somewhat support* standardized testing, ranging from a high of 45% in Quebec to a low of 37% in British Columbia.

Opposition to standardized testing in this survey is highest in Ontario at 19% (combining those who *somewhat oppose* and *strongly oppose*) with British Columbia only slightly behind at 15%. This is an important finding since the organized opposition to standardized tests by teachers' unions is strongest in these two provinces. The lowest opposition to standardized tests is in the Prairies, where 6% of parents *somewhat oppose* and none *strongly oppose*. Similarly, 8% in Quebec and 9% in Atlantic Canada *somewhat oppose*, no parents *strongly oppose* standardized testing (*figure 6*).

Figure 6: Parental support for standardized testing, by province or region



Source: Leger, 2022.

Conclusion

As the use of standardized testing is diminishing in some Canadian jurisdictions, such as British Columbia, and is the target of advocacy campaigns by organized labour opposing its use, parental support for fair and objective measurement of students—and specifically, of standardized testing—among Canadian parents remains strong.

Almost all Canadian parents of children in K-12 schools believe it is important to know their children's academic performance in core subjects by a fair and objective measure. Immigrant parents most strongly support this (99%), as do parents in British Columbia (96%) and Ontario (98%). In every region of Canada, parental support was above 90%. Looking specifically at the strongest level of support, 72% of parents nationally believe that fair and objective measurement of students' academic success is *very important*, and only 1% of Canadian parents believe that it is *not at all important*.

When it comes to specific support for standardized testing, 84% of Canadian parents surveyed support standardized testing so they will understand how their children are doing in the core subjects of reading, writing, and mathematics. Support was highest among parents in Saskatchewan and Manitoba (93%), followed by 90% in Atlantic Canada and 91% in Quebec. Again, support amongst immigrant parents was strongest (92%). Both nationally and in every province or region, the largest proportion of parents responding to this survey strongly support standardized testing.

Parents are critical stakeholders in Canadian education. Policy makers across the country should be aware that standardized testing, and the fair and objective measurement of students' academic proficiency, is supported by a large majority of Canadian parents in every region of the country.

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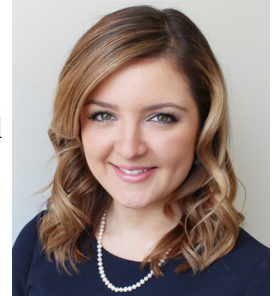
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