



# Politics and Policy-Making in Canadian Education

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# Preface

In Canada, education is governed by a decentralized system, with each province and territory holding primary responsibility over its own education policies, curriculum, and funding structures. However, these policies are not created in isolation—they are deeply shaped by broader political ideologies, social movements, and public discourse at both the provincial and national levels.

Understanding how education policy is made is essential for educators, students, policymakers, and the public alike. It allows us to critically assess how decisions—from curriculum reforms to funding allocations—come to affect classroom practice and student outcomes. This infographic outlines the four key stages of the Canadian education policy-making cycle: **agenda-setting, policy formulation, political decision-making, and implementation**. It also highlights the diverse stakeholders who influence these decisions and the unique provincial governance structures that define the Canadian context.

By visualizing the policy process, this infographic aims to demystify how educational change happens and encourages deeper engagement with the political and social forces that shape the future of learning in Canada.



# Political Dynamics in Education

## Federal and Provincial Jurisdiction in Education

Education in Canada is governed primarily by provincial and territorial governments, resulting in significant regional variation in education policy and delivery. The federal government plays a more limited role but remains involved in specific areas such as the funding of Indigenous education, support for official-language minority schools (e.g., French-language education outside Quebec and English-language education within Quebec), and investment in post-secondary research. Provincial and territorial authorities maintain jurisdiction over curriculum design, school governance, teacher certification, and funding allocation, contributing to a decentralized and diverse educational landscape across the country.

## Key Political Issues in Canadian Education

### ➤ Funding and Equity

Disparities in educational funding are evident both between and within provinces, particularly in urban versus rural settings. These inequities manifest in uneven access to educational resources, facilities, and student services. Public debates continue over the funding of private and separate school systems, most notably in Ontario, where the Catholic school system receives full

**Educational  
authorities at both  
the provincial and  
federal levels**

public funding. Additionally, there is growing advocacy for increased federal transfers to support Indigenous education, particularly to address chronic underfunding and inadequate infrastructure in First Nations communities.

### ➤ **Indigenous Education and Reconciliation**

Indigenous education remains central to national conversations about reconciliation. Following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Calls to Action, several provinces have made efforts to incorporate Indigenous history, languages, and perspectives into school curricula. Despite these initiatives, federal funding for on-reserve schools remains a contentious issue, with many institutions continuing to face significant resource and staffing shortages. Political discourse around Indigenous education thus reflects broader challenges in addressing historical injustices and ensuring educational equity for Indigenous learners.

### ➤ **Language Politics**

Language politics continue to shape education policy in Canada, particularly in relation to the country's official bilingualism. Outside Quebec, French-language minority communities have pursued legal action to secure equitable funding and access to French-language schools. Within Quebec, legislative efforts such as Bill 96 (2022) seek to reinforce the primacy of the French language in education by limiting access to English-language post-secondary institutions. These policy shifts highlight the continued politicization of linguistic identity and cultural preservation within Canadian education.

### ➤ **Curriculum Debates**

Curriculum content remains a politically charged issue across provinces. Revisions to sex education, particularly in Ontario, have sparked backlash from socially conservative groups. Similarly, the inclusion of critical race theory, anti-racism education, and gender identity topics has drawn both

support and criticism from parents and advocacy organizations. Climate change and sustainability education have also become key areas of debate, with varying degrees of integration into provincial curricula. These debates reflect broader ideological divisions about the role of education in shaping societal values.

### ➤ **School Choice and Privatization**

School choice and the privatization of education are increasingly contested topics. Alberta remains the only province to allow charter schools, while debates over homeschooling and private school vouchers have intensified in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Proponents argue that these alternatives promote innovation and parental autonomy, while critics warn that they may undermine the public education system and exacerbate inequality.


### ➤ **Teachers' Unions and Labour Relations**

Labour relations between governments and teachers' unions frequently influence educational policy. Disputes over wages, class sizes, and working conditions have led to strikes and work-to-rule campaigns, notably in British Columbia and Ontario. While governments often frame these disputes within broader fiscal considerations, unions emphasize the importance of investment in education and the preservation of professional standards. Labour relations thus represent a key intersection between education policy and political ideology.

### ➤ **COVID-19 and Remote Learning**

The COVID-19 pandemic introduced new political challenges in education, including disagreements over school closures, mask mandates, and vaccination policies. These issues were heavily politicized, revealing deep divides in public opinion and governance approaches. In the post-pandemic context, schools face lasting impacts such as learning loss, increased demand for mental health services, and renewed attention to the digital divide.





**Beneath the surface of Canada's well-regarded education system lie deep political fault lines that continue to shape debates over equity, funding, curriculum, and cultural identity.**





## Regional Variations

### Regional Variations in Educational Politics

Canadian provinces and territories exhibit distinct educational priorities and political dynamics. In **Quebec**, policies focus on secularism (e.g., Bill 21) and the protection of French-language education. **Ontario** has seen significant controversy under the Ford government over sex education reforms, funding cuts, and union disputes. **Alberta** has initiated a contentious curriculum redesign under the United Conservative Party, emphasizing patriotism and traditional knowledge. **British Columbia** prioritizes progressive education policies and Indigenous reconciliation. In the **Atlantic provinces**, challenges related to rural school closures and demographic decline dominate educational discourse.

### Emerging Trends in Canadian Education

Several emerging trends are reshaping Canadian education, including the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and digital literacy, which has sparked debates about regulation, pedagogy, and academic integrity, while the rise of tools like ChatGPT intensifies discussions on classroom technology use; simultaneously, the post-pandemic surge in mental health needs and the growing focus on immigrant and refugee education are prompting calls for targeted support and inclusive policies.

# Conclusion

The political dynamics of education in Canada reflect broader societal debates about Indigenous rights, linguistic and cultural identity, educational equity, and the balance of federal and provincial authority. While public education remains a widely supported institution, controversies surrounding curriculum reform, school funding, privatization, and teacher labour actions ensure that education remains a prominent and evolving area of political discourse. As Canada continues to navigate these issues, the future of education policy will be shaped by ongoing efforts to reconcile diversity, inclusion, and democratic values within a decentralized governance framework.



# Implications for Educators

## Current Challenges Facing Educators

Canadian educators are navigating a period marked by significant challenges that directly impact their professional responsibilities and the educational outcomes of students:

- Over 90% of Canadian students are affected by an education crisis, with severe consequences such as unmet academic needs and diminished access to specialized services and supports<sup>1</sup>.
- The majority of educators (63%) feel unsupported by provincial or territorial ministries of education, indicating systemic neglect at the policy level<sup>1</sup>.
- Nearly 80% of educators struggle with unpredictable and increasing workloads, while 95% observe that staff shortages are harming students, particularly those with special needs<sup>1</sup>.
- Classrooms are increasingly complex, with 77% of educators reporting a significant rise in student needs and diversity, and many students requiring special education support being left behind<sup>1</sup>.
- More than half of educators (55%) have experienced violence or aggression in the past year, and responses to such incidents are often inadequate<sup>1</sup>.
- Excessive workloads and insufficient preparation time are widespread, with 73% working over 45 hours per week and 65% identifying more preparation time as a top priority<sup>1</sup>.

# Key Implications for Educators

## 1. Need for Systemic Support and Reform

Educators are calling for urgent reforms to address the crisis in public education, including:

- **Reducing class sizes** to better manage classroom complexity and provide more individualized attention<sup>1</sup>.
- **Increasing the number of education support staff** to address diverse student needs, especially for high-needs and special education students<sup>1</sup>.
- **Implementing class complexity provisions** to ensure equitable support for all students<sup>1</sup>.
- **Allocating more dedicated preparation time** to allow educators to plan and deliver high-quality instruction<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Legal and Policy Considerations

Supreme Court decisions, such as the Jeffrey Moore case, have reinforced that budget cuts should not disproportionately impact special needs programs. School boards must ensure that accommodations for students with learning disabilities are not sacrificed for efficiency, and that alternative supports are provided if programs are cut<sup>5</sup>. This sets a legal precedent requiring educators and administrators to advocate for equitable resource allocation and inclusive practices.

## 3. Professional Development and Leadership

- Ongoing professional development is mandated across provinces, with a focus on collaborative learning communities and inquiry-based approaches<sup>3</sup>.
- Principals and school leaders face intensified workloads due to changing demographics, increased accountability, and evolving societal expectations, including supporting mental health and responding to greater diversity in schools<sup>4</sup>.
- Recruitment and retention of teachers, especially in remote areas, remain a concern, prompting provinces to offer incentives and mentorship programs for new educators<sup>3</sup>.

## 4. Federal-Provincial Dynamics

- Education is constitutionally a provincial responsibility, limiting the federal government's direct involvement. However, educators and stakeholders often advocate for national guidelines, increased federal funding, and greater interprovincial standardization to ensure consistency and quality across the country<sup>2</sup>.



5. Responding to Diversity and Inclusion

- Educators must address the needs of increasingly diverse student populations, including Indigenous students, newcomers, and those with varying linguistic, cultural, and learning backgrounds<sup>4</sup>.
- The implications of truth and reconciliation efforts require educators to engage in culturally responsive teaching and support for Indigenous students and communities<sup>4</sup>.

Summary Table: Key Implications

| Challenge/Issue             | Implication for Educators                                 |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Lack of ministerial support | Advocacy for systemic reforms and better funding          |
| Overloaded classrooms       | Push for smaller class sizes and more support staff       |
| Special needs neglect       | Ensure equitable access and compliance with legal rulings |
| Rising violence/aggression  | Demand for safer work environments and better protocols   |
| Overwork and prep time      | Need for workload management and increased prep time      |
| Diversity and inclusion     | Culturally responsive pedagogy and ongoing training       |
| Federal-provincial tensions | Collaboration for national standards and funding          |



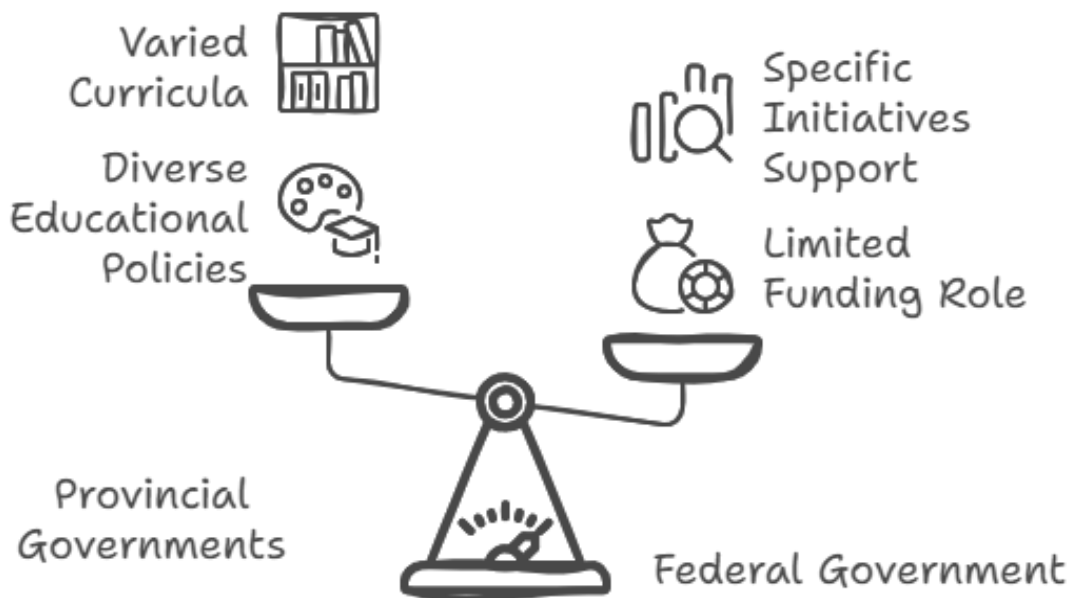
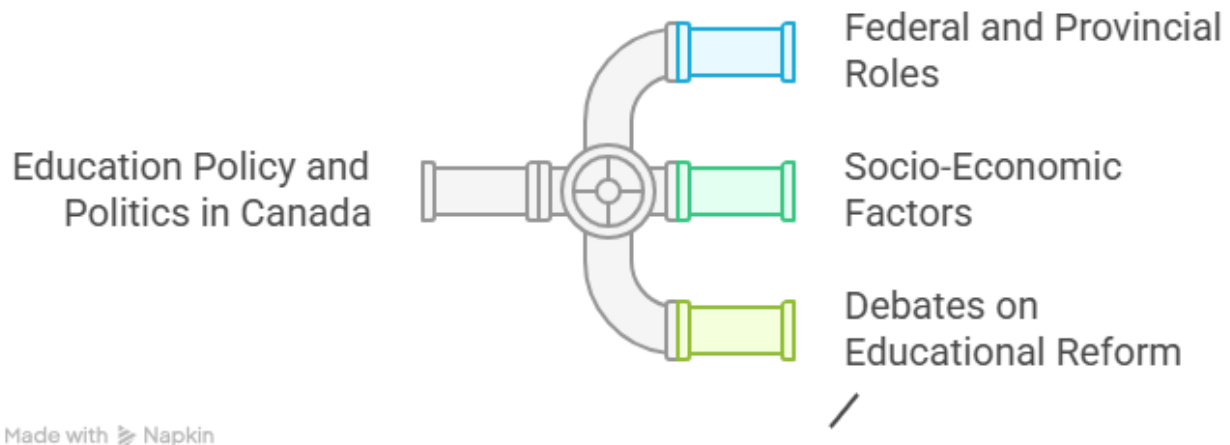
## Conclusion

The current landscape in Canadian education presents significant implications for educators, including the urgent need for systemic reforms, legal compliance with inclusive education mandates, enhanced professional development, and proactive responses to diversity. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated action from educators, administrators, and policymakers to ensure equitable, high-quality education for all students in Canada [12345](#).

*As Canadian classrooms become increasingly diverse and politically complex, educators stand at the forefront of transformative change in the nation's education system.*

# Educational Policy-Making Process

## Unveiling the Dimensions of Canadian Education Policy



## Balancing Provincial Autonomy and Federal Support in Canadian Education

## Educational Policy-Making Process

The educational policy-making process is a structured, multi-stage journey that transforms an identified need into actionable policy, implementation, and ongoing evaluation. Visual integration—such as flowcharts or diagrams—can help clarify the relationships and feedback loops between these stages. Below is a concise breakdown of the process, suitable for visual representation.

### Key Stages in the Educational Policy-Making Process

| Stage                    | Description  |
|--------------------------|--|
| Problem Identification   | Recognize a gap or need in the education system, often through research, data, or community input. |
| Research & Analysis      | Gather evidence, review best practices, and analyze data to understand the issue in depth.         |
| Policy Formulation       | Develop possible solutions and draft policy proposals, often involving stakeholder collaboration.  |
| Stakeholder Consultation | Engage educators, parents, students, and community members for feedback and buy-in.                |
| Policy Adoption/Approval | Submit the policy for approval by relevant authorities (e.g., school boards, government bodies).   |
| Implementation           | Put the policy into action, allocate resources, train staff, and monitor initial rollout.          |
| Evaluation & Feedback    | Assess the policy's impact, gather feedback, and make necessary adjustments for improvement.       |

*"Shaping minds starts with shaping policy — because the future of education begins at the decision-making table."*



## Suggested Visual Integration

A flowchart is an effective way to visualize the cyclical and collaborative nature of educational policy-making. Here's a suggested structure:



- **Feedback Loops:** The evaluation stage often leads back to problem identification, creating a continuous improvement cycle.
- **Stakeholder Involvement:** Stakeholder consultation and collaboration are present throughout, not just in a single stage.
- **Iterative Process:** Policy drafting and consultation may repeat several times before adoption.

## Summary Table of the Process

| Step                     | Key Activities   | Example Stakeholders         |
|--------------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Problem Identification   | Data analysis, identifying gaps, community forums            | Teachers, parents, students  |
| Research & Analysis      | Reviewing literature, case studies, evidence-based practices | Researchers, administrators  |
| Policy Formulation       | Drafting proposals, setting objectives, defining metrics     | Policy makers, committees    |
| Stakeholder Consultation | Public hearings, surveys, workshops                          | All affected parties         |
| Policy Adoption/Approval | Legislative review, board approval, advocacy                 | School boards, legislators   |
| Implementation           | Resource allocation, training, rollout planning              | School staff, administrators |
| Evaluation & Feedback    | Assessments, feedback collection, policy revision            | Evaluators, stakeholders     |

This structured, visual approach helps demystify the educational policy-making process, making it accessible for educators, stakeholders, and policymakers alike [12345](#).

# Classroom Activities on Politics and Education Policy

## 1. Activity: “Mapping Policy Influence”

### Objective:

To help students identify and understand the roles of key stakeholders in shaping education policy in Canada, and to visualize the complex relationships and power dynamics involved.

### Materials:

- Stakeholder profile cards (e.g., teacher unions, ministries of education, school boards, parent advocacy groups, political parties, media, Indigenous organizations)
- Provincial election data (e.g., party platforms, campaign promises)
- Policy charts showing recent decisions (e.g., curriculum changes in Alberta or Ontario)

### Instructions:

- Begin with a brief overview of the education policy process in Canada, emphasizing the decentralized structure and provincial autonomy.
- Divide students into small groups and assign each group a set of stakeholder profile cards.
- Provide a recent policy example (e.g., Alberta’s K–6 curriculum redesign) for context.
- Students collaboratively build a **visual “influence map”** or flowchart showing how different stakeholders are connected and the extent of their influence over specific policy decisions.
- Groups present their maps and explain the reasoning behind their connections.
- Facilitate a class discussion about power, advocacy, and political leverage in education policymaking.

### Learning Outcome:

Students will develop a systems-level understanding of how multiple actors interact to shape education policy and the importance of political awareness in education leadership.

## 2. Activity: “Debate on Education Funding”

### Objective:

To engage students in critical thinking and informed debate about the political and economic dimensions of education funding in Canada.

### Materials:

- Excerpts from provincial budget documents (e.g., Ministry of Education allocations)
- News articles and op-eds on recent funding controversies (e.g., class size changes, funding cuts, mental health investments)
- Political party platforms (provincial level)

### Instructions:

- Introduce students to the basic structure of education funding in Canada, including federal transfers, provincial budgets, and local factors.
- Divide the class into groups representing different political parties or interest groups (e.g., Liberal Party, Conservative Party, NDP, Green Party, teachers’ unions, parent associations).
- Each group researches its assigned perspective and prepares arguments on how education funding should be allocated (e.g., prioritizing mental health, investing in rural schools, increasing private options).
- Host a **structured classroom debate**, with opening statements, rebuttals, and closing arguments.
- After the debate, hold a reflection discussion about how political ideology influences funding decisions and the implications for students and educators.

### Learning Outcome:

Students will analyze budgetary priorities, connect financial decisions to political values, and practice respectful argumentation and policy critique.



### 3. Activity: “Quiz on Policy and Governance”

#### Objective:

To assess students’ knowledge of the Canadian education governance system, key stages in policymaking, and the influence of political actors.

#### Materials:

- Online quiz tools such as **Kahoot**, **Google Forms**, or **Quizizz**
- A mix of multiple-choice, true/false, and short-answer questions
- Projector or shared devices for real-time participation

#### Instructions:

- Develop a quiz that includes questions on:
  - The division of responsibilities between federal and provincial governments
  - Key education stakeholders (e.g., school boards, unions, ministries)
  - Examples of recent political actions impacting education (e.g., Bill 21 in Quebec)
  - Stages of the policy process (agenda-setting, formulation, implementation, evaluation)
- Conduct the quiz live using interactive software or assign it as individual homework.
- Follow the quiz with a **whole-class discussion** to clarify misunderstandings and expand on the real-world implications of governance structures.

#### Learning Outcome:

Students will consolidate their understanding of how education policy is created, implemented, and contested within Canada’s political framework.

# Education Policy and Politics: Principles of Transformational

## Servant Leadership in Practice

This portfolio presents a comprehensive collection of exemplars and evidence demonstrating the practical application of transformational servant leadership principles in addressing complex educational policy and political issues. Through collaborative engagement, ethical decision-making, and a commitment to equity and inclusion, the artifacts within highlight how servant leadership can empower stakeholders, influence systemic change, and foster sustainable improvements in educational contexts.

## Conclusion

Politics and policy-making in Canadian education are deeply intertwined with the country's federal structure, cultural diversity, and evolving social values. While provinces and territories hold primary jurisdiction over education, a wide array of stakeholders—including governments, teacher unions, parent groups, and Indigenous communities—continuously shape educational priorities and outcomes. From debates over curriculum content and language rights to the allocation of funding and the integration of technology, education remains a dynamic and contested political arena. Understanding these processes is essential not only for policymakers and educators but also for all citizens committed to equitable and inclusive schooling. As Canada confronts challenges such as reconciliation, immigration, mental health, and digital transformation, education policy will continue to reflect—and influence—the broader struggles over identity, democracy, and social justice. A nuanced awareness of these political dynamics is therefore critical to shaping a future education system that is responsive, inclusive, and resilient.

To bridge theory and practice, the accompanying activities are designed to engage students directly with the political complexities of education in Canada. Through mapping exercises, structured debates, and interactive assessments, students move beyond theoretical knowledge to critically examine

real-world policy processes and power structures. The “Mapping Policy Influence” activity fosters systems thinking and awareness of stakeholder roles, while the “Debate on Education Funding” encourages engagement with political ideologies and their implications for equity and resource allocation. Meanwhile, the “Quiz on Policy and Governance” serves both as a formative assessment and a catalyst for deeper dialogue about how educational decisions are made. Together, these activities cultivate civic awareness, critical thinking, and policy literacy—essential competencies for future educators, policymakers, and active citizens. By understanding how political forces influence education, students are empowered to contribute meaningfully to shaping the future of Canadian schooling.

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