

COMMERCIALISM IN CANADIAN SCHOOLS: Who's Calling the Shots?



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Publicly funded education, universally accessible and inclusive, is a societal responsibility instituted to provide equal opportunities for all children. Funding for this public good is an obligation of the provincial and territorial governments. Private funding sources (corporate or individual) can divert or compromise the ability of public schools to fulfil the expectations established for them.

The Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and the Fédération des syndicats de l'enseignement undertook a national survey to collect data on a range of school commercialism activities in Canadian elementary and secondary public schools.

SURVEY RESULTS: THE NATIONAL PICTURE

An advertising presence

Nationally, 32% of schools reported the **presence of advertising** in or on the school, with higher reported rates in secondary schools than in elementary schools. The lowest incidence of advertising was found in Quebec.

Most advertising in **elementary schools** was found on school supplies and in hallways, cafeterias and other school areas. In **secondary schools**, most advertising was found in school areas such as hallways and cafeterias, and to a lesser extent on school supplies and team uniforms.

Private money in public schools

15% of elementary schools and 21% of secondary schools reported **selling services to generate revenue**.

Nationally, schools reported raising—**through fundraising and other activities including user fees, advertising revenue and partnerships/sponsorships**—sums ranging from a few hundred dollars to, in some cases, several hundred thousand dollars (average amount: \$15,705, median amount: \$10,000). Secondary schools raised larger sums than elementary schools, and English schools raised larger sums than French schools.

Exclusive Marketing Deals

Coke and Pepsi are the two most prominent corporations in schools: nationally, 27% of all schools had an exclusive marketing arrangement with Coke or Pepsi (16% with Coke, 11% with Pepsi).

10% of all schools reported an exclusive contract for food services, while 6% reported another type of exclusive contract.

Corporate sponsorships and incentive programs

15% of elementary schools and 30% of secondary schools reported a partnership or sponsorship arrangement.

30% of all schools reported having incentive programs (school communities collect products or product labels that can be redeemed for merchandise for their schools) although they were much more prevalent in elementary than secondary schools.

Quebec had the lowest involvement of any region in incentive programs as a result of the 1997-98 government ban on such activities.

User fees and fundraising

36% of schools reported that their school or board had a **charitable tax number**.

School trips (67%), supplies (34%), programs (29%) and sports teams (24%) top the list of the most common items for which schools charge **user fees**. Secondary schools are more likely to charge user fees for sports teams, school programs and clubs than elementary schools.

Fundraising is common in public schools, with money raised for school trips (73%), library books (49%) athletic programs (44%), technology (35%), school clubs (26%), academic programs (24%), school supplies, textbooks and other activities.

60% OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS FUNDRAISE FOR LIBRARY BOOKS

What's wrong with private money in public schools?

Inequity: Schools and school communities have varying degrees of capacity to fundraise and otherwise attract outside funding.

Competition for funding: Relying on private donors may create competition among programs and schools, as different institutions go after the same sources of funds.

Targeted funding: Relying on private sources, through fundraising or corporate donations, allows those private sources, rather than schools and school boards, to make decisions on programs deemed more “worthy” of support.

Conditional funding: Some private donors may attach strings—an advertising requirement, or the inclusion of certain students and the exclusion of others, or the use of specific curriculum—to their funding for public education.

Selective funding: An increasing number of items such as playground equipment, field trips, and even some classroom and learning resources are being defined as “frills,” outside of government funding.

Unstable funding: Many private sources of funding do not make commitments to provide the resources over any extended period, particularly in times of economic instability.

Lack of educational quality control: Who ensures that the curriculum/classroom materials being provided to schools by corporate sources are unbiased, complete, and accurate?

Who's calling the shots in your school? Keep funding for public schools public!



Commercialism in Canadian schools: Who's calling the shots? is available, along with more detailed provincial and territorial data, on the following websites:

www.ctf-fce.ca, www.policyalternatives.ca, and www.fse.qc.net



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