

# EMPOWERED EDUCATORS

HOW HIGH-PERFORMING SYSTEMS SHAPE  
TEACHING QUALITY AROUND THE WORLD

## CANADA: DIVERSITY AND DECENTRALIZATION

COUNTRY BRIEF



This paper is part of a series of policy and country briefs produced as part of *Empowered Educators* – a landmark, international comparative study of teacher and teaching quality in the world’s top-performing education systems, commissioned by the Center on International Education Benchmarking® of the National Center on Education and the Economy®. For a complete listing of the materials produced by the *Empowered Educators* project, including a searchable database of recorded interviews and authentic tools, please visit [www.ncee.org/empowered-educators](http://www.ncee.org/empowered-educators).

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Research for the *Empowered Educators* study was coordinated by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) at Stanford University. SCOPE was founded in 2008 to foster research, policy, and practice to advance high-quality, equitable education systems in the United States and internationally.

## Canada: Diversity and Decentralization

Canada is one of the most diverse countries in the world and one of the most successful educationally. Some 20 percent of the population is foreign-born, and about a fourth of the population speaks a language other than English at home. At the same time, Canada's students had among the highest performance on the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and it was one of the few countries without significant gaps in performance between immigrant and non-immigrant students, or between those who speak English at home and those who do not. In addition, Canada has one of the best-educated adult populations in the world: 53 percent of Canadians aged 25-64 hold tertiary degrees, the highest proportion among industrialized countries.

Unlike most other high-performing countries, Canada is highly decentralized. There is no national ministry of education, and under the constitution the authority for governing schools rests with the provinces and territories. Within the provinces, though, a ministry of education or equivalent is responsible for the organization, management, and assessment of education at the elementary and secondary levels, while local school districts also have some authority.

Two of the highest-performing provinces in Canada are Alberta and Ontario. They represent a contrast in backgrounds and approaches. Alberta has been, at least until recently, relatively wealthy, with a strong oil industry. It had a stable government with consistent education policies for decades; however, after 44 years of Progressive Conservative rule, the New Democratic Party (NDP) gained a majority in the 2015 provincial elections. Ontario has the country's largest city, Toronto, and is the most diverse province in the country. It went through a significant change in government and education policy in 2003, and has since seen a substantial increase in performance.

Both Alberta and Ontario have focused their efforts in education on building systems to support teachers and developing and building their capacity to provide strong instruction. These efforts have paid off in high student performance, according to educators and researchers.

This brief will describe some of the features of the Alberta and Ontario systems for developing and strengthening teacher quality.

### Teachers and Teaching

The two provinces have been aided in their efforts in building strong teaching forces by the respect and esteem that teaching holds in Canada. As

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Lindy Amato of the Ontario Teachers' Federation said, "Nobody is ashamed to say, 'I am a teacher.' People are proud to say, 'I am a teacher.' People feel that pride." A 2013 survey conducted by the Alberta Teachers Association (ATA) underscored this view. The survey found that 9 in 10 teachers agreed that they are very committed to teaching as a profession and that in public they are proud to say that they are teachers. The overall respect for the teaching profession is reflected in teacher salaries, which begin above those of other occupations that require a similar level of education, although they flatten out sooner. There is a substantial surplus of teachers in Ontario and a healthy supply in Alberta, except for remote schools, for which the provinces have created recruitment incentives.

In part, the over-supply of teachers in Ontario reflects the attractiveness of teaching as a profession and the respect with which teaching is held in the province. Since the election of the Liberal government in 2003, there has been considerable attention to developing cooperative relationships between the government and teachers' unions with very recent protracted bargaining processes putting some of the gains at risk. However, salaries are generally high. Beginning teachers with five years of university education earn CA\$45,000, and those with ten years of experience and additional qualification courses (AQs), which individual teachers self-select and self-fund to enhance their practice and career, can earn as much as CA\$95,000. The salary of a fifth-year teacher, CA\$66,893 in 2013 is at the 75th percentile for individuals with university degrees working one full-time job.

### *Teacher Education*

Building a strong teaching force in both provinces starts with rigorous teacher education. Entry into teacher education in Alberta is competitive. Candidates seeking to enter preparation programs must meet certain grade-point average requirements specified by teacher education institutions. In addition, some institutions require portfolios, interviews, and volunteer work. In the fall of 2013, 5,363 students applied to enter preparation programs, and 2,123, or 40 percent, eventually enrolled.

Although the province does not formally approve teacher education programs, it regularly conducts "efficacy reports," or audits, to ensure that the programs meet quality standards. In addition, the province sets certification requirements for teachers, which influences the content of teacher education programs. To become certified, individuals must provide evidence of at least four years of university education, the completion of at least 48 semester hour credits in professional teacher education course work, and a minimum of ten weeks of supervised student teaching (practicum). Many practicums are longer, and some institutions are moving to extend them to 20 weeks.

The coursework requirements differ for secondary and elementary teachers. Secondary teachers are required to present a minimum of 24 semester hour credits in a teachable subject area, and 6 semester hour credits in English/French Literature and Composition. Elementary teachers are required to present 24 semester hours of credits in academic coursework, including 6 semester hour credits in English/French Literature and Composition and 3 semester hour credits each in Canadian Studies, Mathematics, and Science. The additional 9 credits of academic courses for elementary teachers are determined at the institutional level. The programs also have a number of checkpoints along the way, which teacher-candidates must pass in order to continue in a preparation program. Those who do not pass are counseled out of teacher education.

For the most part, there is no “alternative certification” in Alberta. However, career and technical education teachers and teachers who were certified outside of the province can present evidence of work experience, in addition to a year’s worth of coursework, in order to earn a certificate. Teach for Canada is a new initiative and is aiming to prepare teachers who will teach in FNMI (First Nations, Metis, and Inuit) schools in the north of the province. However, unlike Teach for America, candidates in Teach for Canada must complete provincial certification requirements.

In 2015, Ontario’s provincial government made significant changes to teacher education aimed at strengthening preparation for all teachers. The changes cut in half the number of enrollments in teacher-education programs, thus making admissions even more competitive than it was, and doubled the length of the programs from one year to two years. The revision also lengthened the required practicum to 80 days. As one teacher put it, these changes will improve teacher preparation:

“ To be honest, [the practicum] wasn’t enough time to really understand the profession. We saw the superficial aspect of it—teaching a lesson, maybe some classroom management techniques, but the everyday life of a teacher is not something that I left understanding. How to navigate colleagues that don’t have the same mindset that you have, there wasn’t enough time spent on that. I didn’t learn how to have those courageous conversations with my teacher colleagues or with my administrators or with parents and my students in terms of how to move the learning forward. So the two years could be great in terms of getting that extra time in the classroom. ”

Traditionally, teacher-education programs could be taken concurrently with bachelor’s degree programs or subsequently. In the wake of the 2015 reforms, some institutions, such as the Ontario Institute for Students in Education at the University of Toronto, are moving to graduate-level-only programs.

Teacher education programs in Ontario must be certified by the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), a body established to regulate the teaching profession. Certified programs are expected to: reflect current research in teacher education; integrate

theory and practice; reference the Ontario curriculum; and include theory, methods, and foundation courses.

At the primary and junior levels, pre-service teachers may complete a subject specialization prior to beginning their teacher education, but it is not required. Rather than subject-specialists, teachers in these levels are considered generalists who typically teach all subject areas. Intermediate/Senior programs generally require future teachers to complete two subject-specific methodology courses that align with their areas of specialization. Content areas can include a range of subjects such as business, computer science, English, family studies, math, science, French, geography, history, music, religion, technology, health, and art.

### *Hiring and Induction*

The process for hiring and inducting new teachers varies between the two provinces. In Ontario, school boards are responsible for hiring and appointing teachers. Typically, teachers apply to schools of their choice within a specific school board and are assigned by principals to positions based on their qualifications and the specific program needs of the school, such as teaching English language learners or French immersion programs. Generally, evaluations of candidates are based on qualifications and seniority, with the assessment framework outlined by the OCT's Standards of Practice competencies.

A decline in the number of retirements and an increase in the number of graduates have meant that applying for teaching jobs has become more competitive, and school boards have become more selective in hiring teachers. Although the cut in teacher-education slots will eventually reduce the supply, there are an estimated 40,000 people in Ontario with teaching credentials who are underemployed or not employed as full-time teachers.

All first-year new teachers hired to a permanent contract in Ontario are expected to participate in the New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP). Established in 2006 and funded by the Ministry, NTIP is intended to provide comprehensive support in terms of early professional development to new teachers placed in regular teaching positions or long-term occasional positions in Ontario school boards. NTIP includes three components: 1) an orientation to the school and school board; 2) ongoing mentoring by more experienced teachers throughout the first year; and 3) professional development and training appropriate to the needs of new teachers. Principals conduct two performance appraisals throughout the first twelve months, and if not satisfactory, teachers are given up to twenty-four months to improve. Once the program is completed, the OCT is notified within sixty days and a notation is made on the teacher's record of certification. Boards of education may decide to extend NTIP supports to the second year for either permanent hires or long-term occasional (substitute) teachers.

Mentors for the program are selected by the school administration and receive training to support their new role as mentors. Mentees have the option of choosing their mentor. Increasingly, rather than having only one mentor, new teachers are working with several to support different aspects of their teaching practice and career, as one policymaker noted:

“ We think of building a mentoring web. It can be one-to-one, but it could also be online, it could be a group, it could be a community of practice, it could be informal. Mentorship can be customized based on a person’s individual needs. To me it’s the ultimate personalization of learning. When the mentor and the new teacher meet, the agenda for the learning are the needs of the new teacher. And that’s really powerful. ”

Shared release time for mentors and new teachers to collaborate is provided by the NTIP, and can be used for co-planning, classroom observation, and collaborative assessment of student work, among other areas.

The specific allocation of teachers’ time is part of collective bargaining, but the structure of teachers’ daily schedules is similar, regardless of where they are employed. In secondary schools, for example, most teachers teach in three out of four daily time slots, with the fourth allotted for preparation. In primary and elementary schools, most teachers have 240 minutes of preparation each week. But teachers have been concerned about their workload, and in 2013, the government conducted a study of the workload and its effect on professionalism. The study found that the average elementary teacher dedicates almost 25 hours to non-instructional tasks per week in addition to their 25 hours of classroom teaching. The study also found, however, that other aspects of the job, such as collaborative working environments, lessened the impact of these factors on their job satisfaction.

In Alberta, by contrast, support for new teachers is less structured than in Ontario. Most teachers receive some form of induction, although the Ministry does not fund induction programs or require them. (Some districts, like Edmonton’s, require induction programs for new teachers.) According to the TALIS survey, informal induction programs are available for more than 80 percent of lower secondary teachers for teachers new to a school, while formal programs are available to 50 percent of lower secondary teachers new to a school and 80 percent of teachers new to teaching. Much of the induction support comes via the ATA, the professional association of teachers, rather than through the province or school districts.

Newly certified teachers in Alberta receive an interim credential, which is good for three years. To earn a permanent certification, teachers must

**An Ontario study found that collaborative working environments lessened the impact of heavier workloads on teachers’ job satisfaction.**

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complete two years of successful teaching and demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required by the province's teaching standards, based on two evaluations. The evaluations assess whether teachers can demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and attributes for permanent certification outlined in the provincial Teaching Quality Standard.

### *Professional Learning*

Teachers in both Alberta and Ontario have many opportunities for professional learning. In Alberta, much of the professional development is provided by the ATA. In fact, the association spends about 50 percent of its budget on professional development, far more than teachers' organizations in the United States. In addition, districts, regional centers, and some schools also provide professional development.

The time for professional development varies by district. Seventy-five percent of respondents to a 2012 ATA survey said they had eight or more days for professional development, while 25 percent had seven or fewer. About a fourth said job-embedded professional development was "nonexistent," compared with 0 just two years earlier.

Professional development is based on teachers' individual growth plans, which are developed annually based on teachers' self-assessments against teacher quality standards. But there is little formal evaluation. There seems to be the belief that investing in teacher learning carries with it a form of internal and informal teacher evaluation and accountability and that the kind of formal teacher evaluation practices that are growing in popularity in the United States and some other countries are unnecessary in Alberta.

The Alberta government sponsored a major initiative in 2000 to support teachers' professional growth. The Alberta Initiative for School Improvement (AISI), designed to engage teachers in developing and implementing projects to improve student learning, was scheduled to last for four three-year cycles, and ended up remaining in place for 14 years. It was funded at CA\$75 million a year, or CA\$75 per pupil.

Under the program, teachers were encouraged to develop school-based action research projects that would address local needs and lead to improved student learning. Teachers were responsible for all aspects of their projects including design, collection and analysis of data, sharing of findings, and fiscal accountability. In all, some 1,800 projects were created, and an evaluation found that they produced "positive change" in student achievement as well as in teacher practice. Although a series of budget cuts led to the demise of the initiative, educators in Alberta believe it has produced long-lasting effects. The ATA, for example, used insights from the initiative in developing its framework for professional development.



Ontario has focused on professional learning and growth as a key element in its theory of action for educational improvement. There is a vast array of professional learning opportunities and supports, including formal Additional Qualifications (AQs), provincial professional learning initiatives and resources, professional learning led by educators' organizations including teacher federations, school board and school level professional learning, and individual opportunities for teachers to advance their knowledge skills and practices. A 2014 study found that 90 percent of respondents reported participating in professional learning activities during the school day, with almost 50 percent of teacher respondents reporting participation in two or more activities over the past 12 months.

Professional learning in Ontario takes several forms. More than 40,000 teachers voluntarily take AQ programs every year to upgrade their qualifications and enhance their practice. AQ programs are offered by Ontario faculties of education and other organizations—about 400 are available—and are accredited by OCT. These programs are voluntary, taken on a teacher's own personal time (e.g., during the summer), and the cost of participation is covered by the teacher (up to CA\$1,000 per program).

The province also provides professional learning support to advance provincial initiatives. For example, the newly elected Ontario government in 2003 launched a Literacy and Numeracy Strategy to increase student achievement in those key areas, and a Student Success Strategy to increase high school graduation rates. As part of those strategies, the province provided resources to support professional development in literacy, numeracy, differentiated instruction, assessment, and instructional leadership. Over time, the support evolved to include access to a range of online and in-print learning resources, as well as support for job-embedded collaborative professional learning.

Ontario also provides targeted supports for schools, student groups, and areas of practice that are identified as needing additional assistance. Consistent with the theory of action for “positive support and pressure,” the strategy for lower performing schools involves targeted resources and supports for leadership and teacher development through collaborative capacity building. For example, the Student Success strategy includes a School Support Initiative for schools identified based on low achievement results.

The approach to school improvement is not one of standardization of top-down directives. Rather the goal is to identify, value and develop professional capacity linked to professional accountability, as one Ministry leader described:

“ When we're working with boards or schools or teachers, it's a treasure hunt, not a witch hunt, and all of our processes are founded on a deep respect and regard for the work of teaching and learning and a deep respect and regard for our educators. We would never go in and deliver to them “look, here is ‘the’ strategy for how you teach math, or ‘the’ strategy for how you

teach literacy and if you would just do it this way results will improve,” because that is not how kids learn. Kids learn when you have a dedicated teacher who understands deeply where kids are and has a whole backpack full of teaching strategies. The professional capacity, the professional judgement comes in deciding how you are going to do that. ”

The teachers’ federations also play a significant role in the provision of professional learning in Ontario, with thousands of teachers participating annually in activities developed “by teachers, for teachers.” Opportunities throughout the school year include short-term experiences, such as one- to three-day workshops on a variety of topics including leadership skills, curriculum delivery, and equity mindedness, as well as longer-term experiences like the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario’s (ETFO) yearlong teacher action research program, Reflections on Practice (ROP). Teacher organizations also support development of curriculum resources and materials, and the Ministry and the Ontario Teachers’ Federation and the four affiliate unions have formed a partnership to develop and support a Teacher Learning and Leadership Program.

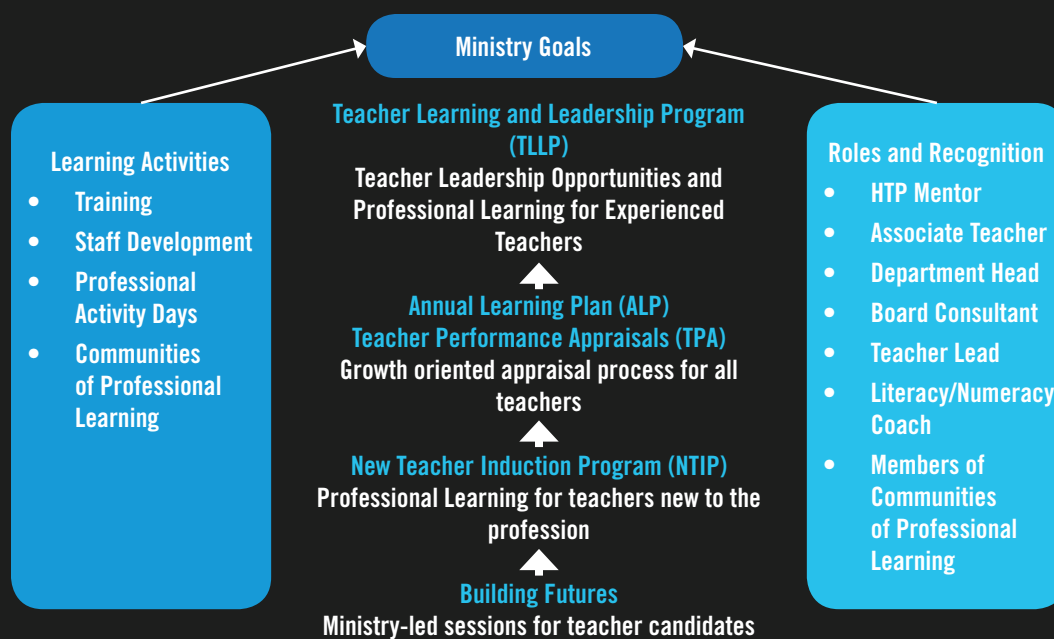
In 2006, the Ontario Teachers’ Federation and the Ministry of Education collaborated to develop the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP), an effort to support teacher-directed professional learning, develop teachers’ leadership skills, and facilitate knowledge exchange for the spread and sustainability of effective practices. An average of 78 projects per year has been funded.

Successful applicants receive training, support, and funding for their TLLP projects. Prior to embarking on their TLLP projects, teacher leaders attend a Leadership Skills for Classroom Teachers training to support their preparation to take on the professional learning, project management and leadership expectations of a TLLP. Throughout their TLLP project – and beyond – participants become part of Mentoring Moments, an online community to share resources, learning and discussion and, at the end of their TLLP project, TLLP teams attend the Sharing the Learning Summit to showcase completed projects and to strengthen the spread and sustainability of practices. Over 95 percent of participants report being satisfied or very satisfied with the training received.

A study of the program found significant benefits. Some 94 percent of TLLP teacher leaders reported improvements in their knowledge and skills; 76 percent reported improvements in their instructional and assessment strategies; and 55 percent reported improved leadership skills. As one teacher put it:

“ The opportunity that this project gave me to utilize strategies dealing with collaboration, empowering others in the group, and motivating colleagues that were less confident than others at the outset of this project, was incredibly valuable. Leading this project was the most useful leadership

**Figure 1: Teacher Development in Ontario**



based professional learning that I have been involved with in my teaching career. ”

Professional learning in Ontario is linked also to teacher evaluation. The Teacher Performance Appraisal (TPA) was first introduced as a legislated requirement in Ontario in 2002 and revised in 2007. The system is intended to provide teachers with meaningful appraisals that encourage professional learning and growth by identifying opportunities for additional support where required. The key components of the TPA include a pre-observation meeting, classroom observation, a post-observation meeting, and a summative report. The principal is responsible for the appraisals, and vice principals or supervisory officers may act as designates for the principal. Experienced teachers are normally appraised once every five years, although a teacher can be evaluated at any time if there is a performance concern.

In addition to the formal appraisals, teachers also complete an Annual Learning Plan, which outlines their plan for professional growth. In collaboration with their principals, teachers set growth goals, along with a rationale, a set of strategies, and an action plan for achieving them. In doing this they reflect on their previous performance appraisal, the prior year’s professional learning, and input from parents and students.

In part because of the amount and quality of support teachers in Ontario receive; the rate of attrition among teachers is very low. Only about 4 percent to 5 percent of teachers leave each year, and a 2011 survey conducted by the OCT found that 90 percent of teachers planned to stay in teaching for the next five years.

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### *Career Advancement*

In Ontario, teachers can advance through their career through a combination of experience, expertise, further training such as AQs, and changes in assignments. Teachers can aim to move into a range of positions at school, board and/or provincial levels, such as being an Associate Teacher to support teacher candidates in their practicum schools, becoming a NTIP mentor for newly qualified teachers, developing teacher leadership opportunities, participating in teacher federation or provincial organizations, and/or moving into school or board leadership positions. In addition, there are new teacher opportunities linked to the Ministry's student achievement strategies. For example, the Student Success strategy includes the appointment of a Student Success Teacher and a Student Success Team in each secondary school.

In addition to funding new positions for the Student Achievement strategy in schools and boards, the Ministry also seconds experienced educators to work – usually on a time limited basis – in the Ministry to inform strategies and to support implementation in the education sector.

Alberta, by contrast, has few opportunities for teachers to advance in their careers, unless they choose to become administrators. Teachers can guide their own professional growth through the development and implementation of annual individual growth plans, but they do not receive formal evaluation unless they choose to do so or are applying for an administrative position. Advances in salary are based on experience and education levels.

### **Building Capacity for Continued Success**

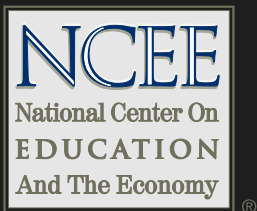
Ontario's education system since 2003 has developed a culture of professional learning to improve practices for students' learning. While students are the central priority, the professional capacity of teachers and administrators is considered to be the key to developing, delivering, and sustaining improved knowledge, processes, and practices for educational improvement.

But the Ontario approach to developing teachers and supporting teaching quality over the past decade did not start with a technical approach to mandating "teacher quality." Rather, leaders based their work on a theory of action linked to knowledge of educational change and professional capacity building. Partnership between and among teachers, school and district leaders, and government has informed both the content of the policies and, as importantly, the processes of how policy is developed and enacted. However, the nature and practice of partnership have evolved over time

and current discussions center on appropriately engaging, valuing and respecting professionalism going forward.

The proof is in the results. Ontario is now one of the highest-performing provinces in Canada and one of the top performers in the world. Ontario's educators and government are committed to continuous improvement and are currently advancing a renewed vision for achieving excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being, and enhancing public confidence.

Likewise, Alberta has placed a strong emphasis on developing and supporting teachers, and these efforts have contributed to that province's educational success as well. The AISI, although it no longer exists, represents a clear example of one factor that has made Alberta successful: the emphasis on teachers' professional growth. Alberta has developed a number of policies and enjoys some cultural advantages that have helped improve its education system, notably its political stability, its strong web of support for children and families, and the high degree of trust among all actors in the system. But by placing teachers at the center of the education system, preparing them well, and providing substantial support to them throughout their careers, Alberta has moved to the head of the educational pack.



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