



2007 Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning:

Results for elementary and secondary school learning

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Table of Contents

About the survey.....	4
Summary of findings.....	5
Canadian attitudes toward homework.....	10
Canadian attitudes toward tutoring.....	18
Canadian attitudes toward language-immersion programs.....	24
Canadian attitudes toward bullying.....	32
Conclusion.....	39
Appendix: Questions asked.....	40
Endnotes.....	42

The Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning

About the survey

Most Canadians are concerned about maintaining high standards of quality and achievement in elementary and secondary schools across the country.¹ This interest in the state of education and the performance of schools reflects a long-standing belief in the importance of quality education with respect to ensuring economic productivity, civic participation and the welfare of the country's citizens.

In order to probe Canadians' views and perceptions of learning and education, the Canadian Council on Learning conducts an annual Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning (SCAL). The 2007 edition of the survey addresses three domains of learning: early childhood learning, structured learning and adult learning. This report focusses on the results pertaining to structured learning in the elementary and secondary school years; in particular, on Canadians' attitudes about homework, tutoring, language-immersion programs and bullying.

The annual Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning (SCAL) provides a unique opportunity to gauge the opinions, perceptions, and beliefs of Canadians about various aspects of learning in Canada. Now in its second year, the survey was designed by the Canadian Council on Learning (CCL) in consultation with Statistics Canada, which administered the survey on behalf of CCL. SCAL data were collected in May and June 2007. Results are based on telephone interviews with 5,361 Canadians. All respondents had previously participated in Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey or the Canadian Community Health Survey.

Note: The analyses and opinions expressed in CCL publications related to SCAL are solely those of the Canadian Council on Learning.

Summary of Findings for Structured Learning

In brief

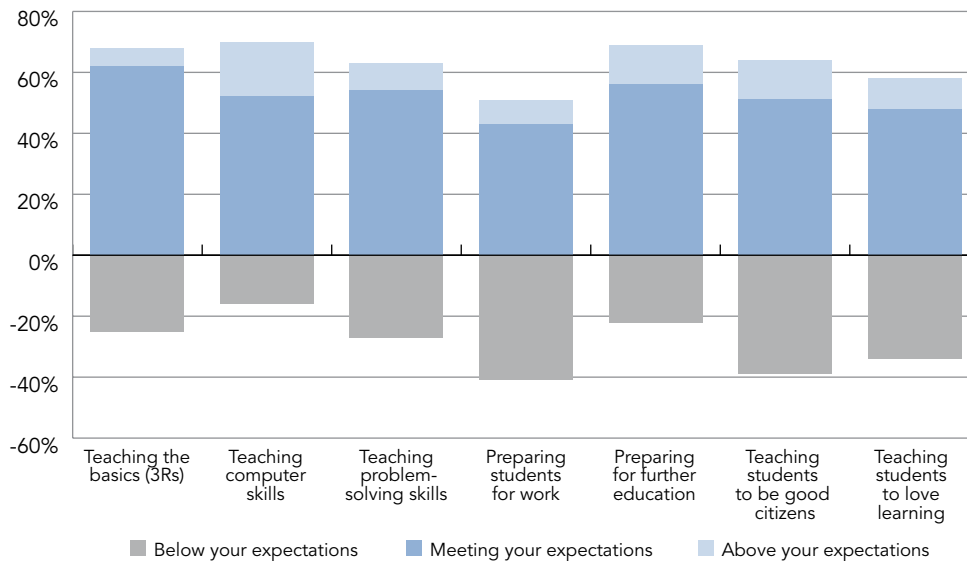
The majority of Canadians are satisfied with the performance of elementary schools and high-schools, although many Canadians indicate that there is room for improvement—particularly with respect to preparing students for work. Most Canadians see homework as a valuable learning tool, but most also indicate that homework is often a source of household stress. One-quarter of parents have enrolled their children in language-immersion programs and one-third have hired private tutors for their children. Bullying remains a topic of concern for most Canadians.

Schools meeting most Canadians' expectations

Canadians were asked about various aspects of schooling and whether the schools with which they are personally familiar are meeting their expectations in those areas. In most respects, a majority of Canadians believe that schools are meeting or exceeding their expectations, but Canadians do express some dissatisfaction. In particular, more than 40% of Canadians indicate that schools are below their expectations with respect to preparing students for work (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Canadians' attitudes about the performance of elementary and secondary schools

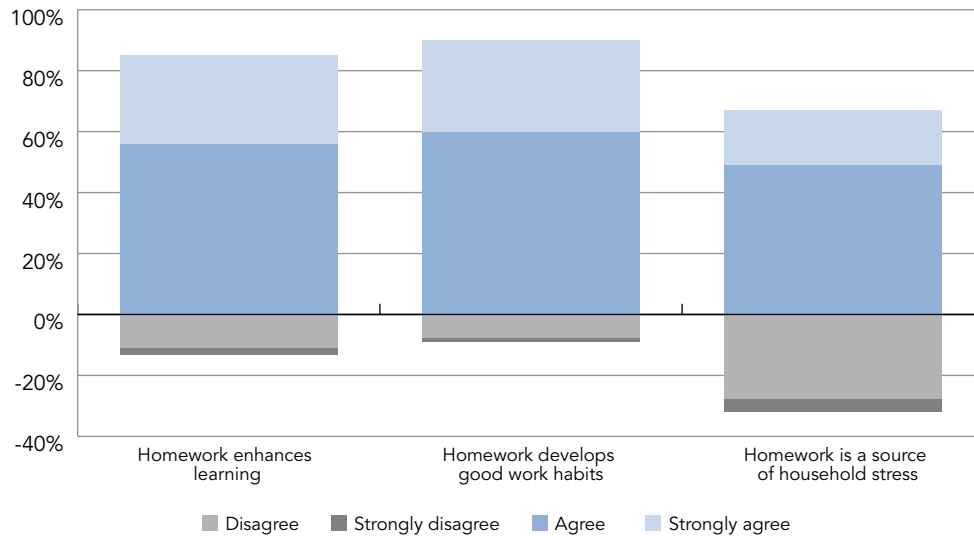


Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Homework valued, but often a source of stress

When asked about homework, most Canadians agree or strongly agree that homework enhances learning and helps students develop good work habits. However, more than 60% of Canadians also agree or strongly agree that, in their experience, homework has often been a source of household stress (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Canadians' attitudes toward homework

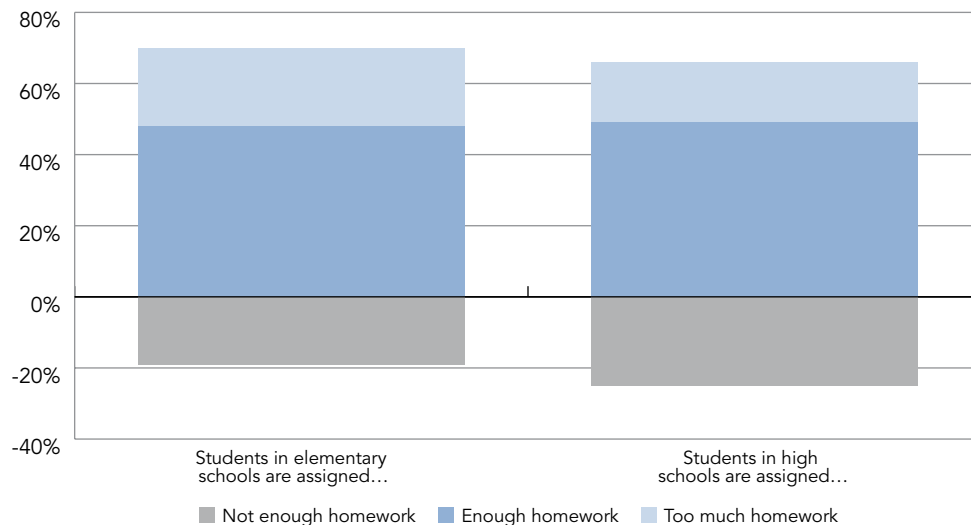


Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Amount of homework appropriate, say nearly half of Canadians

Nearly half of Canadians believe that both elementary and high-school students are assigned just enough homework. One-quarter of Canadians believe elementary students are assigned too much homework and 19% believe the same is true for high-school students (see *Figure 3*).

Figure 3
Canadians' beliefs about the quantity of homework assigned to elementary and high-school students



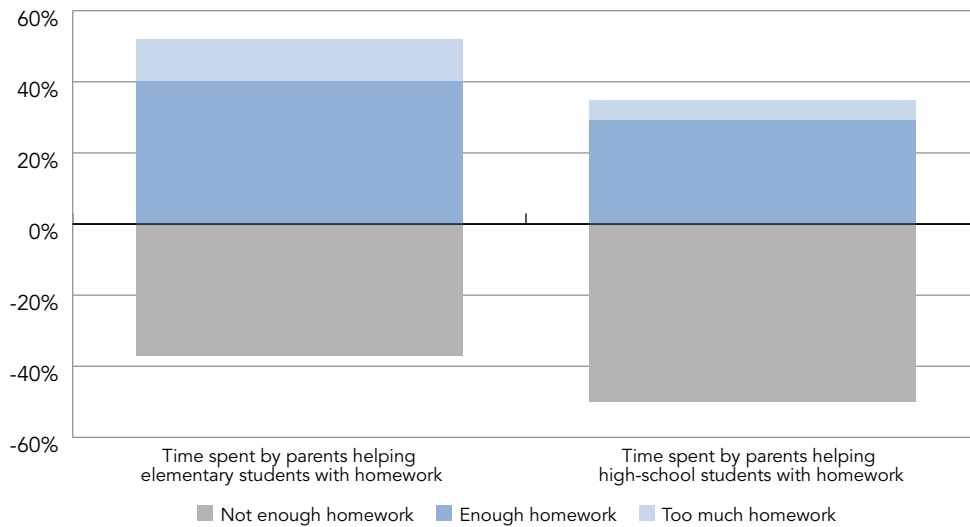
Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Half of parents do not spend enough time helping with high-school homework

Very few Canadians believe that parents spend too much time helping their children with homework. However, 37% believe that parents do not spend enough time helping their elementary school children with homework and 50% believe the same with respect to high-school students (see Figure 4).

Figure 4

Canadians' beliefs about parents' time spent helping their children with homework



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

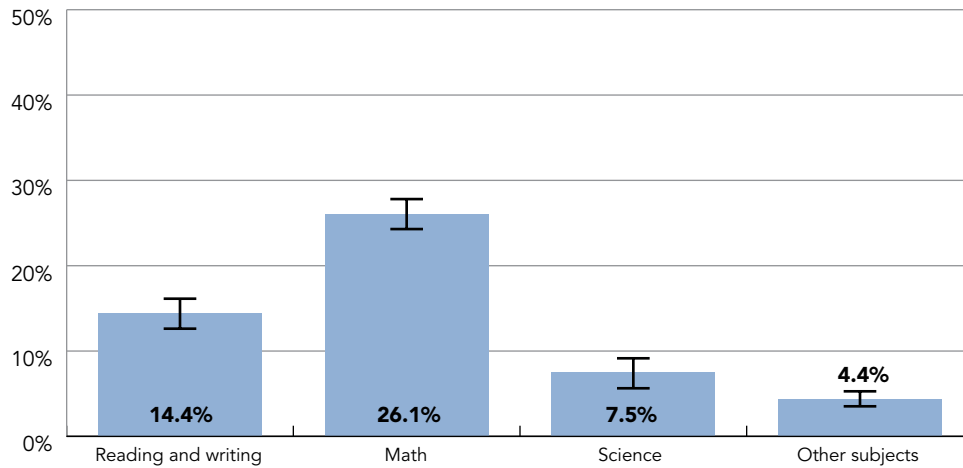
» More SCAL results, context and analysis on homework are available on page 10

One in three parents have hired a tutor

Overall, 33% of parents report hiring a private tutor to assist with their children's education. Most tutors are hired to assist with mathematics, but tutors are also hired to help with reading and writing, science and other subjects (see Figure 5).

Figure 5

Proportion of Canadian parents who have hired private tutors



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

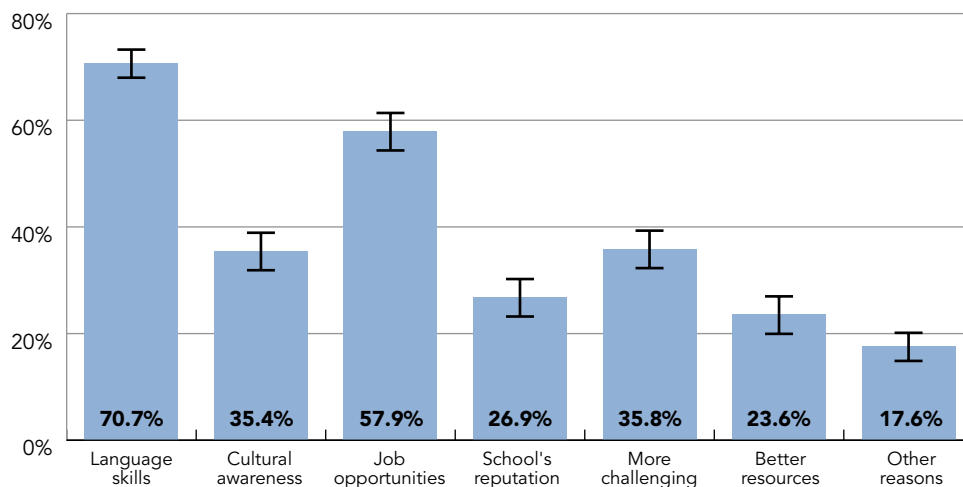
» More SCAL results, context and analysis on tutors are available on page 18

Language-immersion programs chosen by 24% of parents

Nearly one-quarter of Canadian parents report having enrolled their children in language-immersion programs (primarily French immersion). Most parents report that their reasons for enrolling their children in immersion programs are to learn and maintain additional language skills and to improve future job opportunities (see Figure 6).

Figure 6

Parents' reasons for enrolling their children in language-immersion programs



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

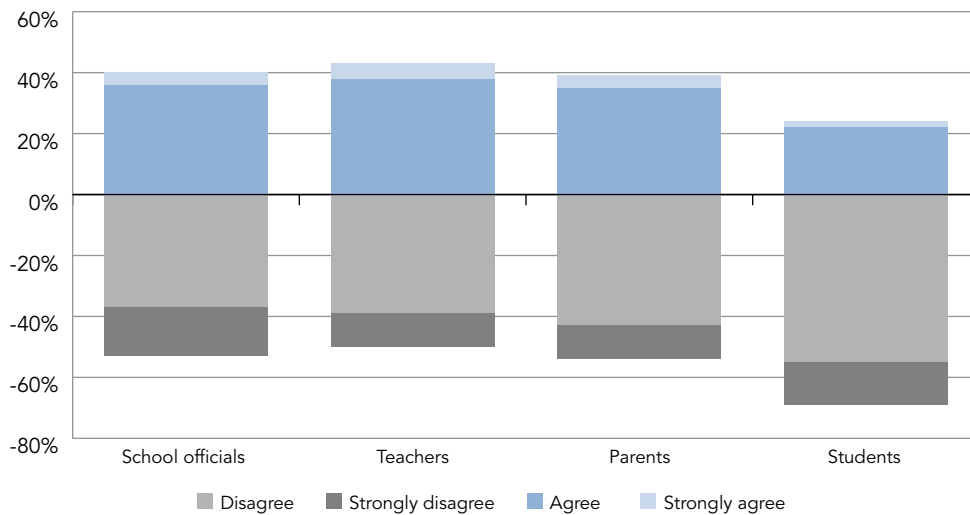
» More SCAL results, context and analysis on language-immersion programs are available on page 24

Bullying seen as a serious issue for children at school

More than 80% of Canadians agree or strongly agree that bullying is one of the most serious issues affecting students today. Nearly half (47%) of Canadian parents indicate that their children have been bullied and 16% indicate that this bullying has occurred frequently. Canadians generally disagree that enough is being done to prevent and address bullying in schools, and they hold all relevant parties responsible for doing more (see *Figure 7*).

Figure 7

Canadians' beliefs that relevant parties are doing enough to prevent and address bullying in schools



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

» More SCAL results, context and analysis on bullying are available on page 32

Canadian attitudes toward homework

The role of homework in structured learning

Homework is a daily feature of most students' school experience and consists of a series of tasks or activities assigned by teachers to students, generally completed outside normal school hours.^{2,3}

Historically, homework has been a controversial issue, with public opinion alternately swaying between strong support for homework and deep concern about its value and effectiveness. Proponents of homework argue that it can help reinforce what students learn in the classroom, prepare them for further learning, support the development of good working habits, help build their sense of independence and personal responsibility,⁴ and enhance communication between parents, students and schools.^{5,6,7} Opponents question its contribution to student achievement⁸ and suggest that, rather than contributing to learning, homework can make students feel overburdened, reduce their access to leisure, promote cheating, and compound the effects of socio-economic inequalities among students.^{9,10,11}

Notwithstanding these controversies, parents and educators currently appear to believe that homework plays an important role in the learning experience of students, and they are prepared to invest time and effort in the proper supervision and support of homework.¹² It is therefore no surprise that, according to results from SCAL 2007, an overwhelming majority of Canadians currently believe that homework is an important element of education. Yet it also appears to be a significant cause of stress in many Canadian households.

Effectiveness of homework

A number of studies on the effectiveness of homework suggest that homework has positive effects on grades, test scores and attitudes toward formal learning.^{13,14,15,16} A number of studies on the effectiveness of homework suggest that students who are assigned homework outperform those who are not and that greater amounts of homework can lead to better academic outcomes.^{17,18} However, studies also show that homework is a particularly useful instructional tool for high-school students and that it has smaller, and sometimes negative, effects on learning and academic performance among elementary students.^{19,20}

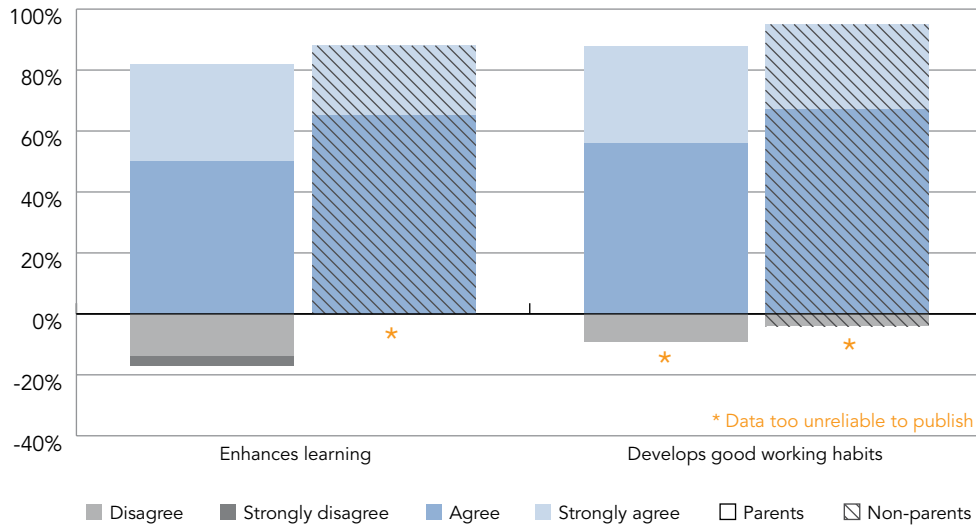
CCL is currently conducting a systematic review on the effectiveness of homework, to be published in 2008.

SCAL results reveal that Canadians have mixed feelings about homework. There is a strong consensus among Canadians that homework is a valuable learning tool, but they are split in their opinions on the amount of time spent on homework—by students and their parents. Furthermore, a majority of Canadians indicate that homework, in their experience, has often been a source of household stress.

Perceptions about homework’s value

Canadians express strong support for the value of homework. This is equally true, both for parents of school-age children (aged five to 24) and for non-parents,ⁱ although non-parents are slightly more likely to agree or strongly agree that homework enhances learning and develops good work habits (see Figure 8).

Figure 8
Parents' and non-parents' attitudes toward homework



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

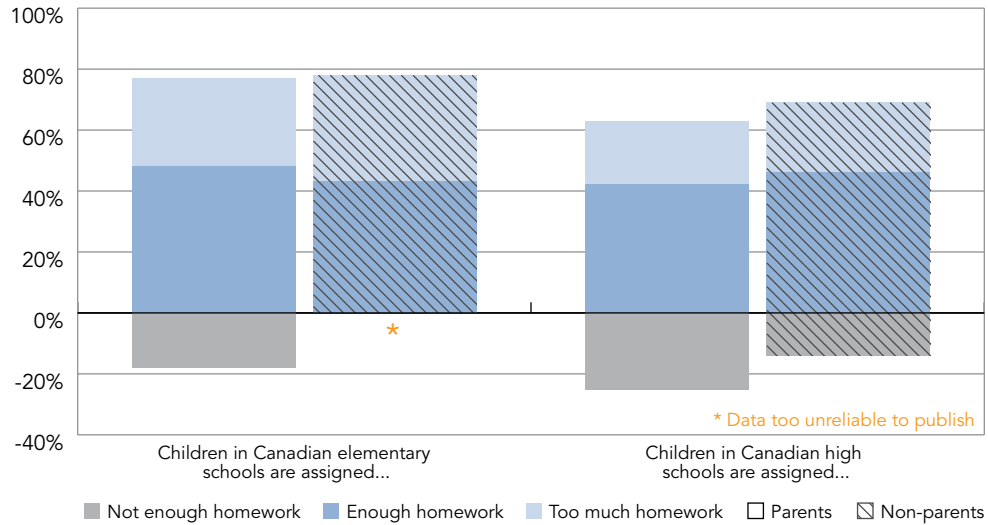
Perceptions about the amount of homework assigned

Parents and non-parents express similar opinions about the appropriateness of the amount of homework assigned to students, although parents are somewhat more likely than non-parents to indicate that high-school students are not assigned enough homework (see Figure 9).

ⁱ Non-parents include Canadians who do not have any children and those who do not have any school-age children but do have children in other age groups.

Figure 9

Parents' and non-parents' opinions about the amount of homework assigned to students



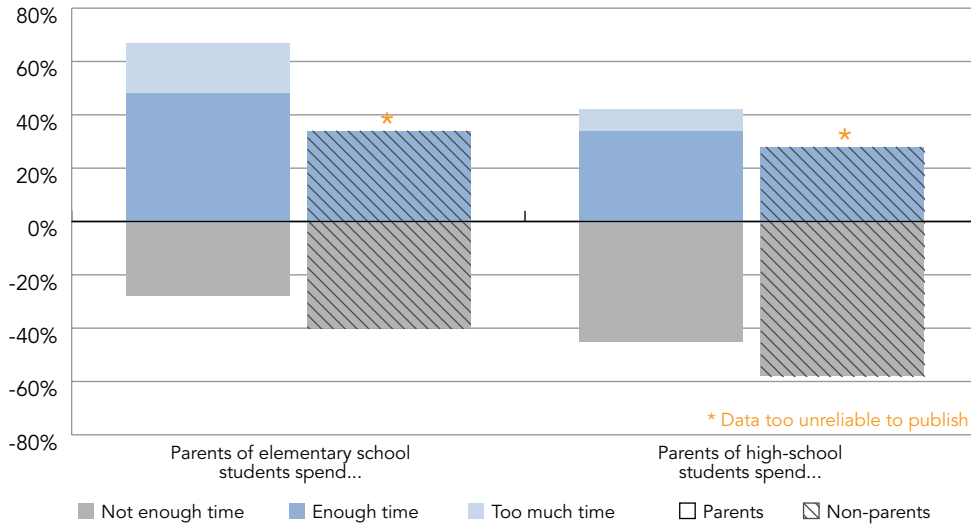
Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Perceptions about the amount time spent doing homework

Parents and non-parents have quite different opinions about the appropriateness of amount of time parents spend helping their children with homework. Approximately 40% of non-parents indicate that parents do not spend enough time helping their elementary school children with homework and nearly 60% believe this about high-school students. Many parents also indicate that parents do not spend enough time helping their children with homework, but they are less likely than non-parents to express this opinion and more likely to indicate that parents spend too much time helping with homework (see Figure 10).

Figure 10

Parents' and non-parents' opinions about the amount of time parents spend helping their children with homework



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Perceptions about homework as a source of household stress

More than two-thirds of Canadians agree or strongly agree that homework has often been a source of household stress. This is true for parents of school-age children and non-parents, although parents are more likely to express this opinion than non-parents (72% of parents vs. 65% of non-parents). Research on homework-related stress suggests that homework stress is experienced by the vast majority of families who have school-age children, and that it is particularly prevalent among families with children transitioning between major school levels and among families facing work-life balance challenges.²¹ A growing perception of the importance of school achievement appears to be fuelling parental expectations about school activities that, like homework, are meant to support children's learning. Given the trend toward so-called "intensive parenting"²² and recent data indicating that, at an average of 9.2 hours per week, homework is the second-most time-consuming activity of adolescent students in Canada,²³ it is not surprising that most Canadian parents feel that homework contributes to household stress.

While many parents report that homework is a source of household stress, this is not universally true. In order to determine which factors are associated with a greater likelihood of experiencing homework-related stress, a logistic regression analysis (see text box on page 14) was conducted using gender, country of birth, educational attainment and household income as predictors, and reported levels of homework-related stress as the outcome.

Logistic Regression

Logistic regression is used to predict the likelihood of particular outcomes, such as the likelihood that a parent will report homework-related stress. It also helps determine how certain characteristics of the respondents might change the likelihood of a given outcome. Because many demographic factors tend to interact, logistic regression is useful in separating out the influences of factors that tend to interact or co-vary. For example, since people with higher levels of education tend to earn higher incomes, it is useful to know whether homework-related stress is affected primarily by income or education, or both.

Country of birth is one of the strongest predictors of homework-related stress: parents born outside of Canada are less than half as likely (.36 times as likely) as parents born in Canada to report homework-related stress in their households. Given the challenges faced by many immigrant parents and their children in adapting to educational systems in Canada, not the least of which is very often the acquisition of a new language, it is noteworthy that these families are less likely to report homework-related stress than non-immigrant families. It is possible that previous experiences with the educational systems of their home countries, along with cultural expectations about achievement, discipline and commitment to school work reduce the homework-related stress experienced by immigrant parents.²⁴

Education is an important predictor of homework-related stress. Parents without a high-school diploma are twice as likely as those with a high-school diploma to see homework as a source of stress. It is likely that the higher levels of stress reported by parents who have not completed high-school is related to the more limited capacity of these parents to assist their children with their homeworkⁱⁱ as well as to additional challenges encountered by parents with limited education (e.g., lower paying and more precarious employment). However, these findings stand in contrast to recent research suggesting that parents possessing higher levels of education are likely to report higher levels of stress around homework as a result of their expectations of greater homework efforts and higher educational aspirations for their children.²⁵

Household income is also a significant predictor of homework-related stress, but shows a different pattern than education. Parents in the top household income bracket (\$100,000 or more) are more than twice as likely (2.3 times more likely) to report that homework is a source of stress as those in the lowest household income category (\$40,000 or less). The significantly higher level of stress associated with homework reported by parents from top-earning households may be associated with the work-life balance challenges faced by parents with demanding careers, or may simply be a reflection of the high educational expectations of parents in this group.

ⁱⁱ Data from SCAL 2006 revealed that parents with less education are less likely to feel that they have enough knowledge to help with their children's homework.

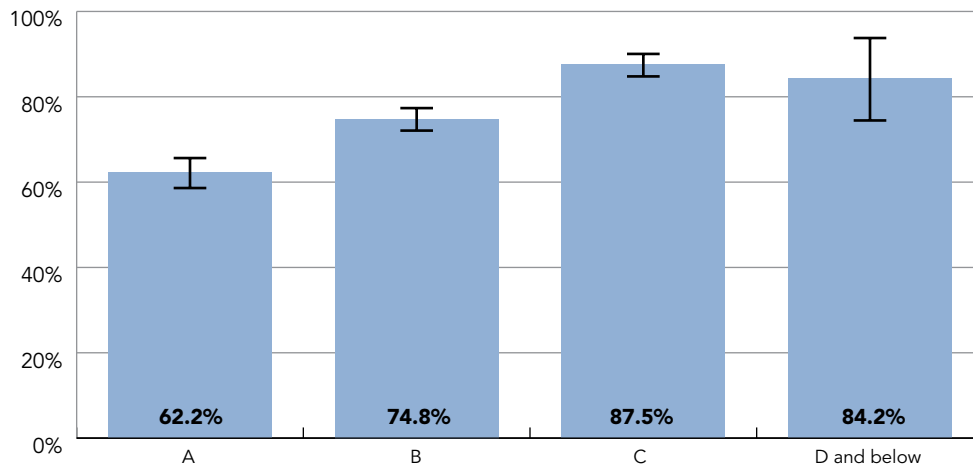
The results indicate that gender is not a strong predictor of homework-related stress. Mothers are slightly more likely (1.19 times more likely) than fathers to identify homework as a source of stress. Such a small difference might seem surprising given that mothers generally take on a larger share of parental duties with respect to helping children with homework.²⁶ However, even if mothers are more likely to directly experience homework stress, mothers and fathers are likely to be equally aware of it.

In addition to the demographic factors discussed above, parents' and children's experiences with homework and other aspects of schooling are also associated with the tendency to report homework-related stress.

Survey respondents were asked to estimate the overall level of achievement of their oldest school-aged child. Not surprisingly, parents of lower achieving students (those achieving grades of Cs and Ds) are more likely to report that homework is a source of stress (see *Figure 11*). Understandably, homework is a considerable source of stress for students who are struggling academically and this stress often spills over into the household.²⁷

Figure 11

Proportion of parents who agree or strongly agree that homework has often been a source of household stress, by level of achievement of oldest school-age child



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

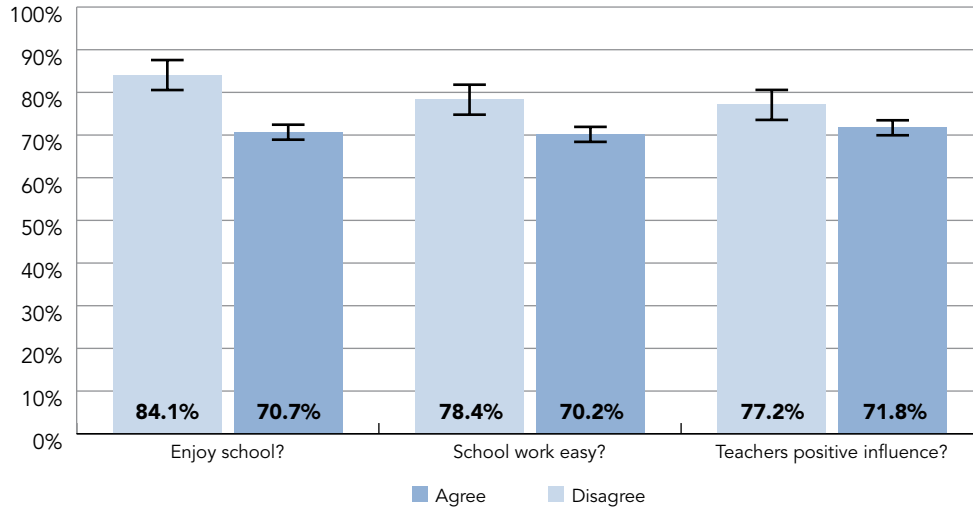
Survey respondents were also asked about their own previous experiences with school. Specifically, they were asked to rate their degree of agreement with the following statements:

- You enjoyed school.
- School work was easy for you.
- School teachers had a positive influence on you.

Parents whose own experiences with schooling were not particularly positive (i.e., who disagreed with the above statements) are more likely than those who report positive schooling experiences to see homework as stressful (see *Figure 12*).

Figure 12

Percentage of parents who agree or strongly agree that homework is a source of household stress, by their own experiences with schooling

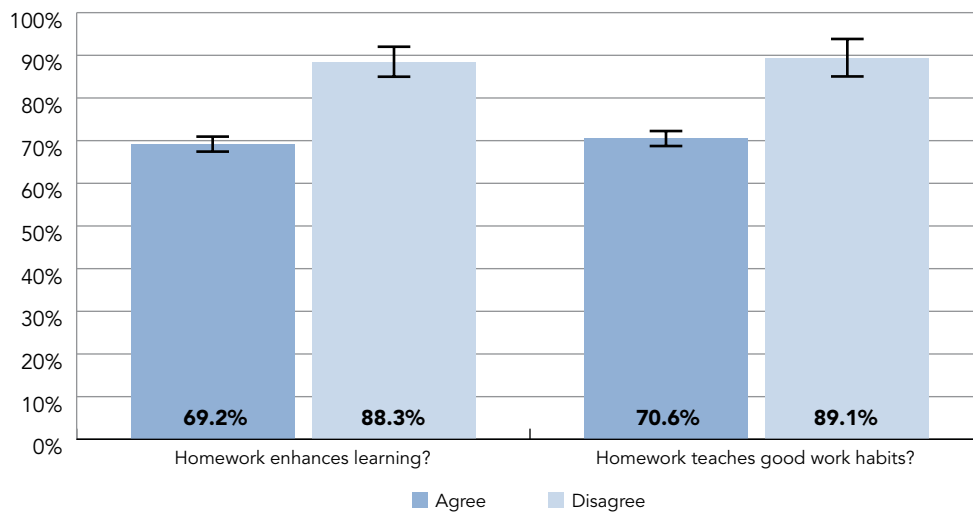


Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Parents' own beliefs about homework are also related to the likelihood of reporting homework-related stress. Parents who indicate that homework does not enhance learning or develop good work habits are more likely to report homework-related stress in their households (see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Percentage of parents who agree or strongly agree that homework is a source of household stress, by attitudes about the value of homework

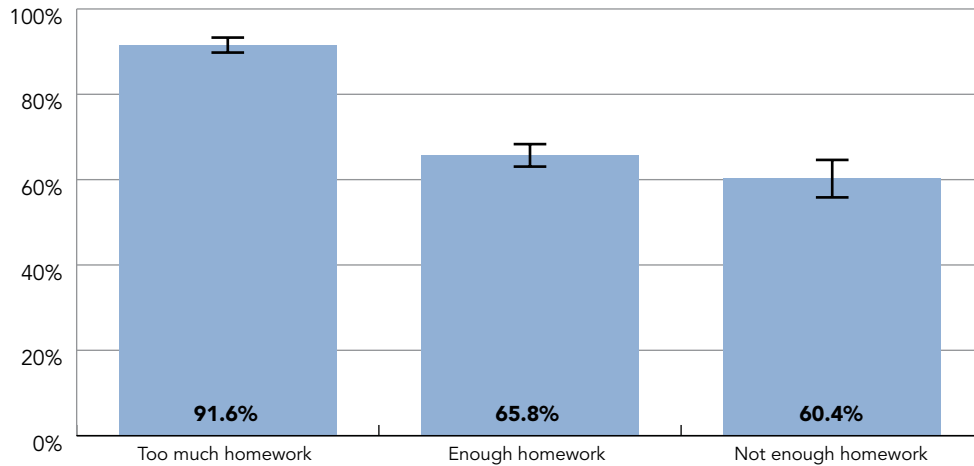


Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Finally, attitudes about the amount of homework students are assigned are tightly linked to reports of homework-related stress. Parents who believe students are assigned too much homework almost universally agree that homework is a source of stress. On the other hand, among parents who believe that students are not assigned enough homework, more than 60% still report that homework is a source of household stress (see *Figure 14*).

Figure 14

Percentage of parents who agree or strongly agree that homework is a source of household stress, by their opinion about the quantity of homework assigned to students



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

In sum, SCAL findings suggest that homework-related stress is a prevalent issue in Canada, affecting two-thirds of Canadian families. Homework-related stress appears to be a particularly significant issue among parents with limited education, families with high household incomes, parents whose children struggle in school, whose own experiences with school have been negative, and who are not generally in favour of homework.

A growing body of research suggests that homework helps promote self-discipline,²⁸ independence and study skills. Moreover, recent studies suggest that boys spend far less time than girls on homework,²⁹ and have greater difficulty completing homework assignments, a difference frequently associated with the greater educational performance and achievement of female students.³⁰ Parents' experience of homework-related stress may result, at least in part, from their (largely correct) perception that homework is an important contributor to their children's academic success. The fact that homework-related stress is so widely reported suggests that there is a need for a range of resources and initiatives that can better assist parents' efforts to support their children's engagement in and success with homework. It also lends credence to the argument made repeatedly in much of the research on homework that parents, students, teachers and administrators require appropriate tools to better understand the purpose, goals and expectations surrounding homework.³¹

Canadian attitudes toward tutoring

The role of tutoring in structured learning

Tutoring can be defined as supplementary instruction in academic subjects taking place outside of scheduled school time. Tutoring is no longer primarily geared towards low-achieving students requiring remedial instruction, but rather caters to a growing number of average and high-achieving students seeking to improve their learning and academic performance.

The widespread use of private tutors is a new feature of the Canadian educational landscape. The tutoring industry has recently received increasing attention and undergone significant growth in North America. According to one recent study,³² the number of tutoring companies grew between 200% and 500% in major Canadian cities during the 1990s.ⁱⁱⁱ In this section, we explore the demographics of Canadians hiring the services of tutors for their children and their reasons for doing so. We end with a look at the research evaluating the benefits and academic outcomes of tutoring.

Who is hiring tutors?

One-third of Canadian parents with children aged five to 24 report having hired a private tutor or a tutoring company to assist their child with reading and/or writing, math, science, or other subjects. A logistic regression analysis was conducted to examine the characteristics of parents who hire tutors for their children. Specifically, household income, parental educational attainment, home language, as well as country of birth were included as predictor variables and parental reports of having hired a tutor was the outcome.

Household income is the strongest predictor of parents' decisions to hire tutors. Families with annual household incomes greater than \$100,000 are almost three times more likely (2.9 times more likely) to hire tutors than families making less than \$40,000.

The logistic regression analysis (see text box on page 14) of the effect of parental level of educational attainment suggests that the effect of household income is moderated by parents' level of educational attainment. Further analyses indicate that parents who earn more money are generally more likely to hire tutors, except if they have less than a high-school diploma. In this case, higher earning parents who did not graduate from high school are less likely to hire tutors for their children than lower earning parents at the same educational level.

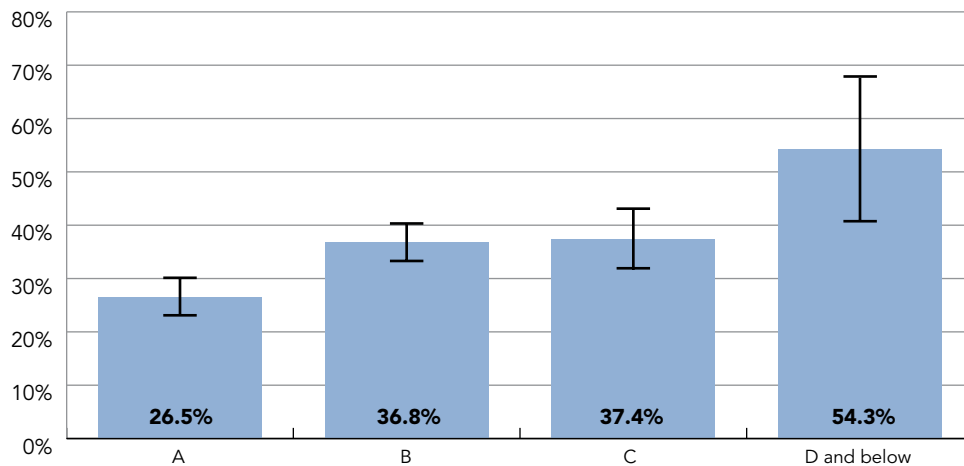
Immigrant status is not a significant predictor of parents' decisions to hire tutors: parents born in Canada and those born outside of Canada are equally likely to report hiring tutors. Home language is, however, a significant predictor. In homes where both English and French are regularly spoken, parents are more likely (1.7 times more likely) to hire tutors than in homes where only English or French are spoken. The same is true in homes where neither English nor French are regularly spoken (1.4 times more likely).

ⁱⁱⁱ Reliable data on the number of private, independent tutors are difficult to obtain as these are usually contracted informally and may not report their tutoring revenues.

Parents who report that their children struggle academically (i.e., those who estimate that their oldest school-age child's overall academic performance is in the C or D range) are more likely to report hiring tutors for their children (see Figure 15). However, most parents who hire tutors (73%) estimate that their children's overall academic performance is in the A or B range. Thus, the majority of tutors are hired by parents of children whose academic performance is average to high achieving.

Figure 15

Percentage of parents who hired a tutor, by reported level of overall academic performance of oldest school-age child^{iv}



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Tutoring for average- and high-achieving students is typically sought for enrichment in specific subjects, but also in order for these students to become more competitive with their peers, in particular for senior high-school students making college or university applications.³³ The rise in post-secondary education enrolments and increases in the cost of pursuing a post-secondary education have increased competition for placements in prestigious universities and for scholarships and merit-based awards.³⁴

Demand for tutoring services can also be understood in the context of the trend toward "intensive parenting," which encourages typically middle-class parents to provide cognitively stimulating activities and environments for their children, including classes in music and sports, in order to enhance their children's competitiveness and chances of future success.³⁵ Private tutoring for average- or high-achieving students can be seen as one manifestation of this phenomenon, which for some middle-class families represents an affordable alternative to private school.³⁶

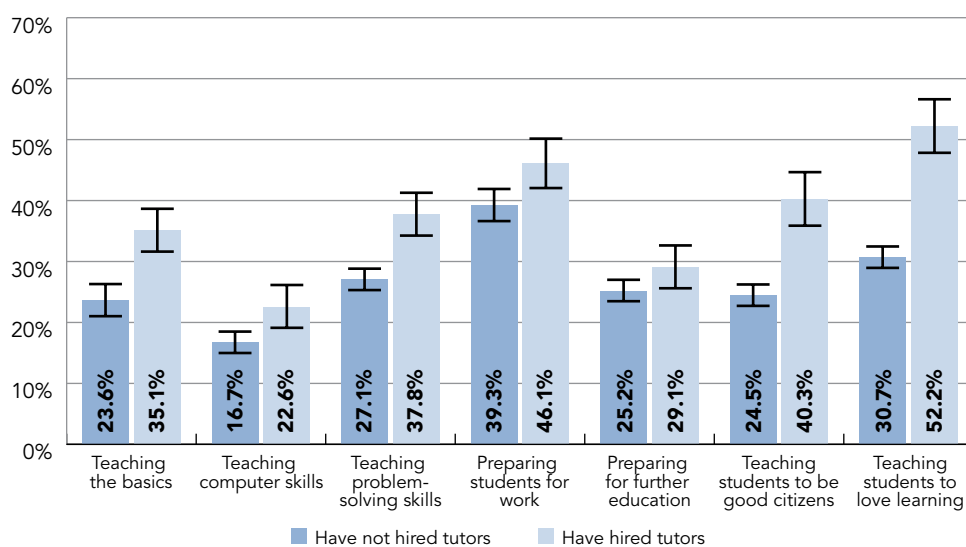
^{iv} Grades reported by parents are not necessarily the grade of the child receiving tutoring.

Why are parents hiring tutors?

SCAL data allowed for an exploration of a number of reasons explaining why parents hire tutors for their children. One possibility is that parents hire tutors because they are dissatisfied with the quality of education provided by their children's schools and SCAL data provide some evidence that this is, in fact, the case. Parents who have hired tutors are more likely than parents who have not to say that schools are falling below their expectations in a variety of areas, including teaching the basics and teaching students to love learning (see Figure 16).

Figure 16

Proportion of parents who say that schools are falling below their expectations in various areas, by reported hiring of tutors

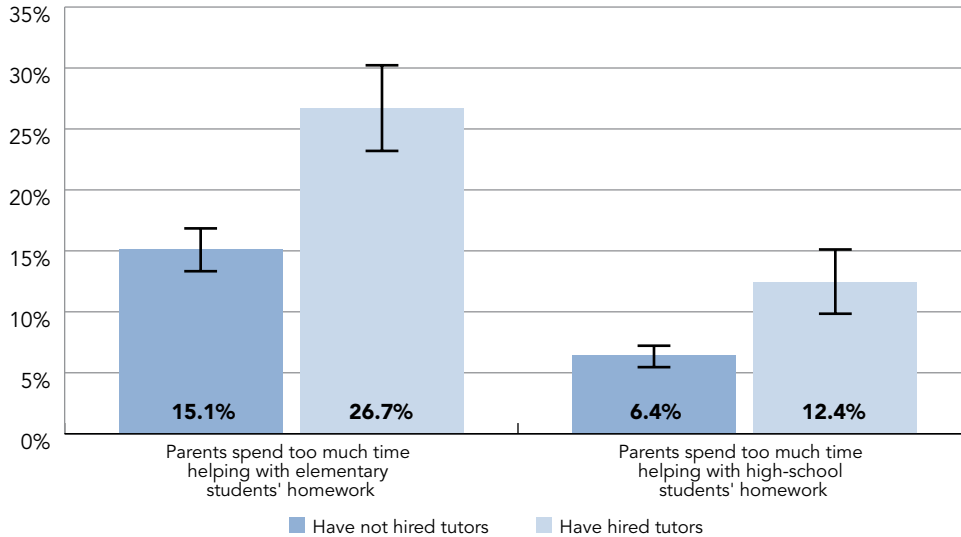


Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Parents who have hired tutors for their children are nearly twice as likely as parents who have not to report that parents spend too much time helping their children with homework (see Figure 17). Parents who hired tutors are also more likely to agree that homework was a source of stress. Eighty-one percent of parents who have hired tutors, in contrast to 68% of parents who have not hired tutors, agree that homework was a source of household stress. Overall, these results suggest that parents hire tutors because they are concerned that schools are not meeting their expectations, because they feel that they spend too much time helping their children with their homework, and because homework is a source of stress in their household.

Figure 17

Proportion of parents who believe that parents spend too much time helping their children with homework, by reports of hiring tutors



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

The decision to hire tutors seems to reflect strong parental involvement in their children's academic success. Other research has pointed to similar conclusions. For instance, some research has shown that parents who hired tutors did not do so because they lacked time to monitor their children's homework or because they employed tutors to serve as after-school caregivers. Rather, parents who hired tutors reported spending significantly more time helping with homework and volunteering at their children's school.³⁷ Findings from this research also suggest that parents who hired tutors were more likely to indicate that they would send their children to private school or to home-school their children if financial resources permitted.

Effectiveness of tutoring

Effects on tutees

Tutoring, whether provided as supplemental or remedial instruction for low-achieving students or for enrichment or competitive advantage to high-achieving students, is generally perceived as a valuable investment benefitting students; however, the quality of tutoring services is notoriously difficult to assess. Tutors differ with respect to their qualifications, training, age, and even motivations for tutoring. There is no guarantee that private, independent tutors can or will offer quality tutoring, as the most common characteristic of tutors is that they are older than the students they are tutoring. Tutoring companies, although they likely employ qualified and trained tutors, differ in the quality of instruction they provide and their orientation toward learning and education.³⁸ A common criticism of many tutoring companies is that they teach rote learning rather than comprehension of principles.³⁹

Nonetheless, there is evidence that tutoring can be effective. For example, findings from a meta-analysis of studies on the effectiveness of tutoring showed that tutored students showed higher academic achievement than non-tutored (control) students, as measured on examinations.⁴⁰ In another study of students at risk for academic failure, peer tutoring (in combination with parental involvement) was found to be effective in helping students make gains in classroom-based and standardized mathematical achievement tests. The tutored students obtained higher scores than the (control group) students who were asked to practice their math lessons on their own.^{41, 42}

Although the demand for tutors is typically in the area of mathematics—and some studies have shown that larger gains result from tutoring in mathematics than in other subjects such as reading⁴³—tutoring can also be an effective supplemental instructional strategy for reading. A recent study revealed large improvements in sight-word acquisition, and smaller gains in reading fluency and comprehension, among students identified as being at risk for reading failure and who participated in a peer tutoring intervention.⁴⁴

In addition to improving academic outcomes, some evidence suggests that tutoring positively affects students' self-confidence.⁴⁵ Tutored students develop positive attitudes toward the subject in which they are tutored,⁴⁶ particularly in a subject like mathematics where negative attitudes have been observed to be common. One-on-one tutoring, in particular, can help students overcome the anxiety often encountered in classrooms where rewards are based on performance. By contrast, the reward for tutored students is usually the learning process itself, and success is based on effort and practice.⁴⁷ Similar gains in self-confidence are made by at-risk students,⁴⁸ who also show improvements in classroom behaviour and self-control.⁴⁹

Effects on tutors

Research shows positive effects from tutoring on the tutors themselves. In Cohen, Kulik, and Kulik's meta-analysis, students who were tutors performed better on examinations and had more positive attitudes toward the subject being taught than (control group) students who were not tutors.⁵⁰

The underlying assumption is that tutors benefit from tutoring because of the positive cognitive effects associated with teaching. In short, this suggests that the tutor's own learning is enhanced by preparing to teach others. In preparing for tutoring, tutors find gaps in their knowledge and improve their understanding of the material.⁵¹

While tutoring fosters improved academic outcomes for many students, it is not generally an option available to all students. Given that SCAL data indicate that household income is one of the strongest predictors of whether parents do or do not hire tutors, it is very likely the case that the cost of tutoring prevents many parents from hiring tutors for students who would benefit from additional academic support. Hired tutors are not, however, the only effective form of tutoring; peer tutors can also be effective. An additional advantage of this approach is that peer tutors often benefit personally from the tutoring experience.

In short, many Canadian students would likely benefit from initiatives focussing on peer tutoring. Barriers to tutoring also present themselves for families living in rural areas, where the demand for private tutors might be greater than the supply and where tutoring companies are likely less interested in setting up a business venture. In these instances, peer tutoring can be a practical solution. As well, online tutoring programs offer accessible alternatives to conventional forms of tutoring, which might not be easily available to rural families.

Canadian attitudes toward language-immersion programs

Language-immersion programs in Canada

Language immersion is a popular second-language learning option in elementary and secondary schools across Canada. The objective of immersion programs is to promote the acquisition of a second language by using it as the language of instruction rather than as the object of instruction. In immersion, the second language is used to teach a variety of subjects, such as history, arts, mathematics, or the sciences.

Immersion programs generally differ along two main dimensions. The first pertains to the start of the program, which can vary from kindergarten or Grade 1 for early immersion programs, to between Grade 2 and Grade 6 for delayed- or middle-immersion programs, and finally to Grade 6 or later for late-immersion programs. The second dimension relates to the proportion of instruction time spent using the second language. This proportion varies between 100% for total-immersion programs, to as low as 40%–50% in a partial-immersion program. Typically, early immersion programs will start with 100% of the instruction in the second language and gradually will incorporate instruction in the first language to reach a somewhat equal proportion of instructional time in each language by the end of elementary school.

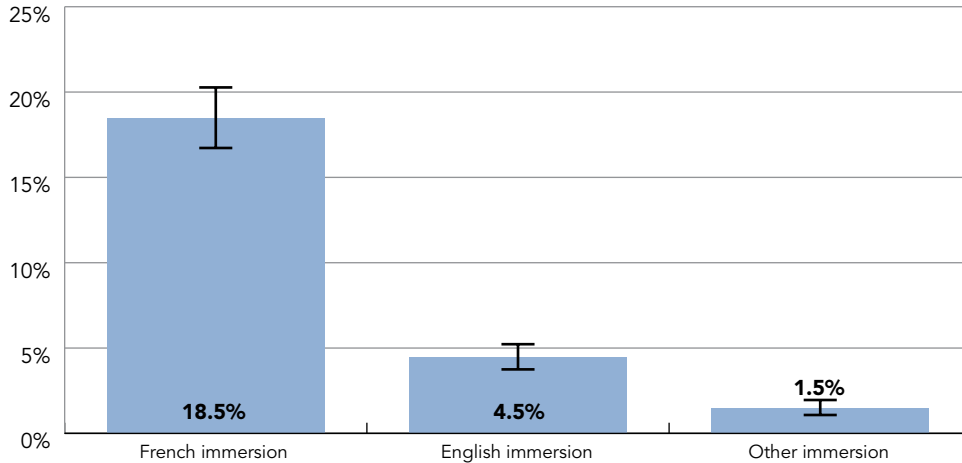
In Canada, immersion programs are offered in many languages, though the most common are in French, and to a much lesser extent English. During the 2005–2006 school year, there were more than 309,000 students enrolled in French-immersion programs across the country (which represents nearly 8% of the total eligible population).⁵²

Enrolment in different types of language-immersion programs

Parents of children aged five to 24 years were asked whether they had ever enrolled any of their children in some form of language-immersion program at the elementary or secondary school levels. Approximately one-quarter of respondents indicate that they have done so, and French immersion is by far the most popular immersion program in Canada (see *Figure 18*).

Figure 18

Percentage of parents whose children aged 5 to 24 were ever enrolled in a language-immersion program at the elementary or secondary school level

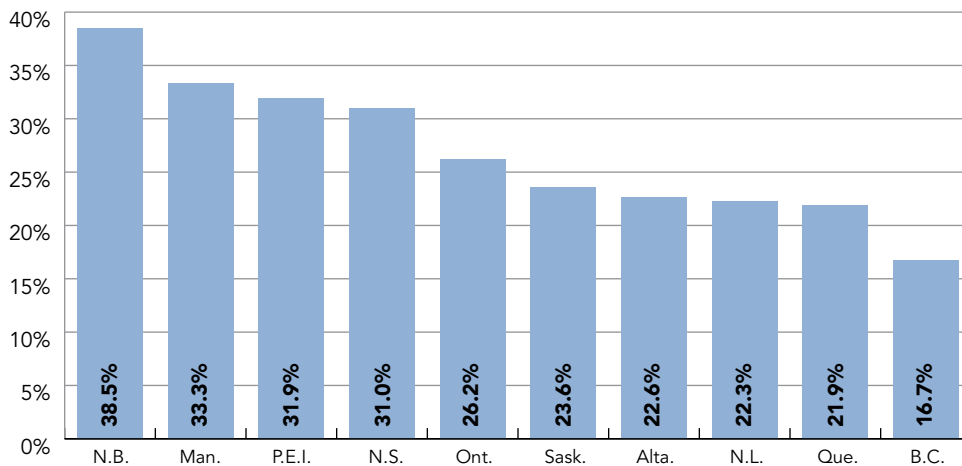


Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

The popularity of language-immersion programs varies widely by province. More than one-third of parents in New Brunswick and Manitoba report having ever enrolled their children in immersion, but a much smaller proportion of parents in British Columbia report having done so (see Figure 19). These findings are consistent with enrolment data indicating that New Brunswick had one of the highest French-immersion enrolment rates in the country in 2005–2006 and British Columbia had one of the lowest.⁵³

Figure 19

Proportion of parents of school aged children in each province whose children have ever been enrolled in a language-immersion program at the elementary or secondary school level



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Characteristics of parents who enrol their children in immersion

In order to examine further the variability in the popularity of language-immersion programs, a logistic regression (see text box on page 14) was performed to determine the characteristics of parents who have enrolled their children in language-immersion programs. The predictor variables included home language, parental level of educational attainment and household income, and the outcome was whether parents enrolled their children in language-immersion programs.

Immersion related to language spoken at home

Of the three variables included in the regression analysis, home language is the single strongest predictor of participation in language-immersion programs. In homes where French is the language spoken most often, parents are much less likely (.04 times as likely) to report enrolling their children in immersion, compared to homes where English is the language spoken most often. In homes where both English and French are regularly spoken, parents are nearly five times more likely (4.5 times more likely) to report enrolling their children in immersion, compared to English-only homes. While language-immersion programs (specifically French immersion) were originally developed in the 1960s for the Anglophone community in Quebec, immersion programs now appear to be most popular among bilingual households.

Immersion and socio-economic background

Parents with the highest household income are more than twice as likely (2.3 times as likely) as parents with the lowest household income to report they had enrolled their children in French-immersion programs. This is consistent with reports indicating that children enrolled in French-immersion programs tend to come from higher socio-economic backgrounds, although this pattern may not be characteristic of all provinces.⁵⁴ For instance, a study examining the family backgrounds of students enrolled in French-immersion programs and those of students enrolled in regular English programs in New Brunswick found no difference in their socio-economic backgrounds, although a slightly higher proportion of children in French immersion had parents who had a university degree.⁵⁵

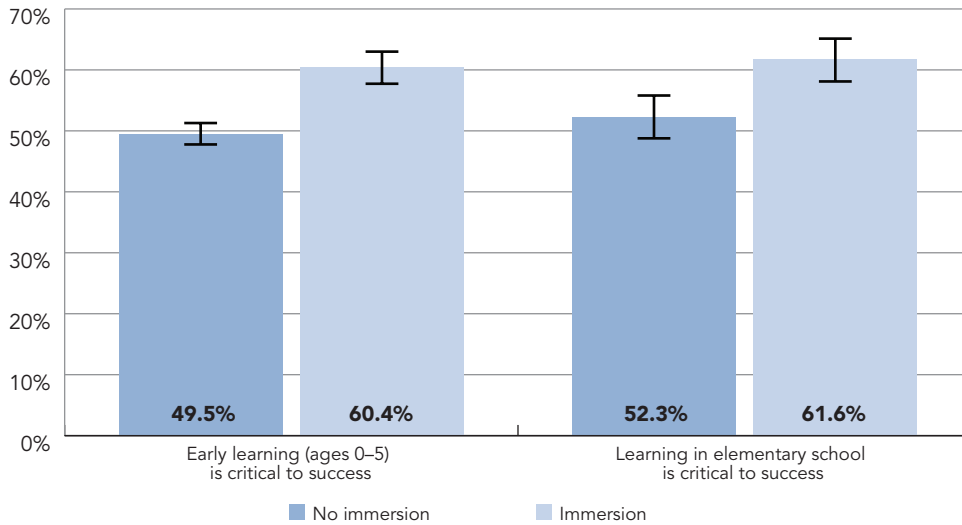
Parental educational attainment is not consistently linked to participation in language-immersion programs. For families in the lowest income quartile, parents with more education are more likely to enrol their children in immersion; this is not true of the other three income quartiles.

Parental attitudes toward learning and schools

Parents whose children have been enrolled in immersion programs are more likely to agree strongly that learning between birth and the end of the elementary school years is critical to success in life, when compared with parents who have not enrolled their children in language immersion (see Figure 20). This belief could be related to the greater involvement of these parents in their children’s learning. Support for this possibility can be found in a recent study conducted in New Brunswick that reported higher parental involvement, as perceived by teachers and school administrators, in French-immersion schools than in non-immersion schools.⁵⁶

Figure 20

Percentage of parents who strongly agree that early learning and learning during elementary school are critical to success in life, by participation in language-immersion programs.

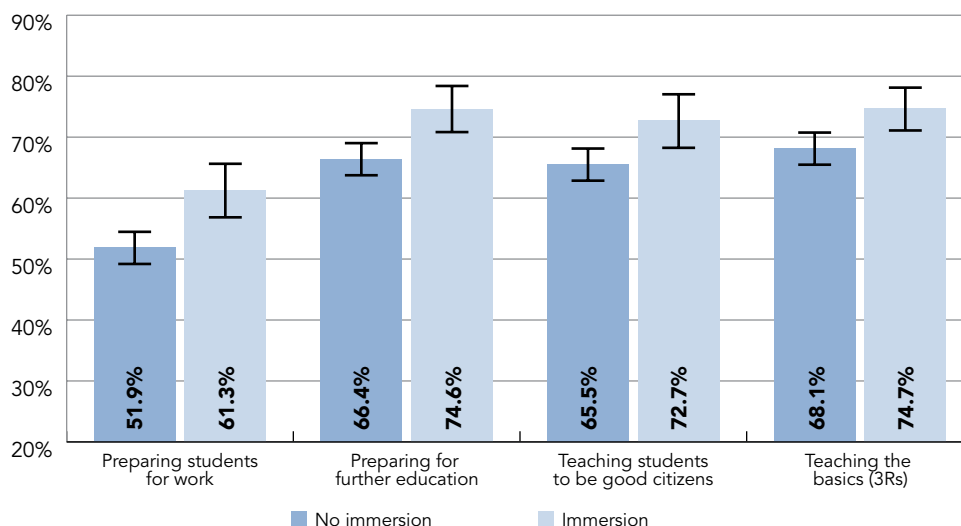


Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Parents who report having enrolled their children in immersion programs tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with elementary and secondary schools. In fact, a larger proportion of parents whose children have been enrolled in immersion report that elementary and secondary schools are meeting or exceeding their expectations with regard to preparing students for work, preparing students for further education, teaching students to be good citizens, and teaching the basics, when compared to parents whose children have never attended immersion programs (see *Figure 21*).

Figure 21

Percentage of parents who feel that schools are meeting expectations, by participation in language-immersion programs



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Reasons for choosing immersion

Past research on participation in immersion programs highlights several factors as key to parents' decisions to enrol their children in immersion programs.⁵⁷ First, parental commitments to the bilingual goals of immersion influence their decision to enrol their children in such programs.⁵⁸ For example, in a study conducted in Manitoba, parents were asked to rate their level of agreement with the following statements about the importance of becoming fluent in French:

- It will enable students to get better jobs in the future (85% of immersion parents agree, vs. 62% of non-immersion parents).
- It will enable students to better understand French-Canadian culture (65% of immersion parents agree, vs. 32% of non-immersion parents).
- It facilitates travelling and visiting in Quebec (85% of immersion parents agree, vs. 52% of non-immersion parents).

One of the main reasons for the development of French-immersion programs in Quebec was to provide English-speaking children with the opportunity to develop their French skills and become more competitive in Quebec's job market.⁵⁹ Recent studies suggests that this remains an important reason cited by parents for sending their children to French immersion, along with program quality and classroom climate.^{60,61} Consistent with the above findings, results from SCAL 2007 indicate that nearly 60% of Canadians cite increased job opportunities as a reason for enrolling their children in immersion programs

Parental decisions about enrolling children in immersion programs are also influenced by their skepticism about such programs. For instance, in a study conducted among parents of kindergarten and Grade 1 children in Manitoba,⁶² half of parents who enrolled their children in a regular English program agreed that French immersion was still in an experimental stage, compared to just 6% of parents who enrolled their children in French immersion. Moreover, 45% of parents with children in non-immersion programs believe that French immersion has negative effects on English-language development, compared to just 7% of parents with children in French immersion.

Many of the organizational aspects associated with immersion programs can prevent parents from enrolling their children in immersion programs. For example, resistance to change and issues regarding transportation⁶³ or parents' concerns about assisting their children with their schoolwork in their second language may deter parents from choosing immersion programs.

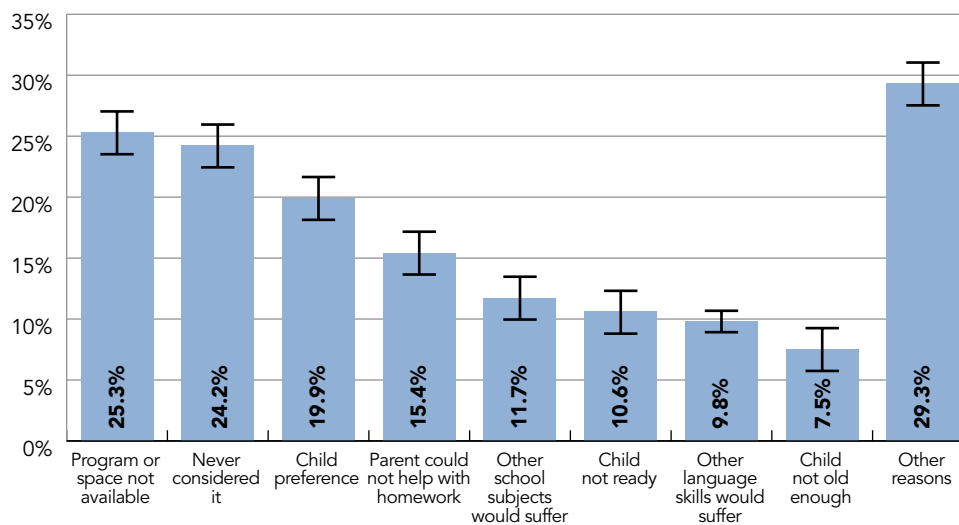
A fourth influencing factor involves parental attitudes and reactions to the broader socio-political context, including their beliefs about the importance of bilingualism in Canada, their attitudes toward French–English relations and the rights of minority-language populations in Canada. Bienvenue (1986) reported that more than 80% of parents in her study who had children in French immersion agreed or strongly agreed that losing French-Canadian culture because of Quebec separation would be a loss for the whole country, compared to approximately half of parents whose children were not in an immersion program.⁶⁴

Results from SCAL 2007 reveal that approximately one-quarter of parents cited a lack of programs or spaces as a reason for not enrolling their children in an immersion program in elementary or secondary school. Almost 25% said they simply never considered immersion as an option. Many parents (16%) avoid immersion because they feel they could not help with their child's homework.

Negative parental views of immersion programs are also cited as reasons for not enrolling their children in immersion. More than one in 10 parents believed their child's performance in other school subjects or other language skills would suffer as the result of an immersion program (see *Figure 22*).

Figure 22

Percentage of parents whose children aged 5 to 24 were never enrolled in an immersion program, by reason for lack of enrolment in immersion



Source: Canadian Council on Learning, Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Implications

A significant number of parents report that language-immersion programs or spaces are not available for their children. This is also reflected in reports of qualified immersion teacher shortages throughout the country.⁶⁵ The benefits of language-immersion programs have been well documented (for more on the benefits of French immersion, see CCL's *Lessons in Learning* article titled "French-immersion education in Canada,"⁶⁶ and the work of Rebuffot⁶⁷). However, parents are not always aware of these benefits, so common misconceptions about immersion programs abound. Generally, researchers have found that immersion students' second-language comprehension skills are near native-like and that their ability to speak is significantly better than that of students who learned the second language by more traditional means. Students' first-language skills have not been found to suffer in the long term and immersion students generally perform as well, or better, than non-immersion students in other subjects, such as science, math and history. Research also suggests that language-immersion programs can benefit some students with disabilities, provided they receive adequate support and services. These findings suggest that language-immersion programs are effective in teaching a second language while maintaining first-language skills and developing other academic skills.

Two main conclusions can be drawn from the results of SCAL 2007 questions on language-immersion programs.

First, the majority of parents who have chosen to enrol their children in immersion programs appear to be doing so primarily because of the “instrumental” advantage that comes from having more than one language, as reflected in their belief that such a skill is likely to contribute to their children’s long-term career prospects. This stands in contrast to the persistent, albeit unsupported, belief among many parents that language-immersion programs can compromise children’s learning in other areas, such as verbal and written competence in one’s first language, mathematics and science. The existence of such different beliefs underscores the need for greater public education about the social, economic and cognitive benefits of possessing two or more languages, as already widely documented in the literature.

Second, SCAL 2007 results suggest that the demand for immersion programs, and French-immersion programs in particular, may be much greater than actual enrolment figures suggest. The considerable proportion of parents who indicated in our survey that they had not enrolled their children in immersion programs due to lack of space or availability of programs suggests that more effort and resources need to be allocated to establishing quality language-immersion programs and to attracting and retaining qualified immersion teachers.

Canadian attitudes toward bullying

Bullying in Canadian schools

Bullying is an important issue in Canada and around the world.⁶⁸ According to the World Health Organization's Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey, rates of bullying and victimization exceed 65% in some countries.⁶⁹ Canada's bullying rate, although not the highest, still sits above the international average.⁷⁰ In fact, with bullying rates exceeding 40%, Canada ranks ninth out of 35 countries for the highest bullying rate among 13-year-old children.⁷¹

Results from SCAL 2007 suggest that a large majority of Canadians are concerned about bullying and that, far from diminishing in importance, this is an issue requiring greater public attention. In addition, SCAL data suggest that rates of bullying are quite high across the country and among all Canadians.

There is abundant research about bullying, much of which is dedicated to examining the consequences of bullying. The research is remarkably consistent in its findings and conclusions: being bullied is related to various forms of maladjustment, including depression, loneliness and low self-esteem. The available evidence indicates that bullying is an issue requiring dedicated and widespread attention.⁷²

Types of bullying

Bullying tends to fall under four categories:

1. Physical bullying

- punching
- kicking
- pushing
- tripping
- pinching
- pulling hair
- forced confinement

2. Relational bullying

- social exclusion
- spreading rumours
- gossip
- sending nasty notes

3. Verbal bullying

- name-calling
- verbal intimidation
- mocking
- insulting

4. Electronic or "cyber" bullying

- similar to relational and verbal bullying but occurs online
- sending false e-mails using the victim's name
- forwarding private e-mails, pictures or information

Although bullying can take many forms, researchers and experts in the field generally agree that bullying behaviour includes three key criteria:

- repeated negative action
- the intention to do physical or emotional harm to another
- the existence of a power difference between aggressor and victim^{73,74,75,76}

Harmful actions can include any physical or verbal action that is intended to cause distress on the part of the victim. Bullying can be direct, such as physical contact, or it can take more indirect forms, such as making mean faces or gestures, spreading rumours, or intentionally excluding someone from a group.⁷⁷ Regardless of the form it takes, inappropriate behaviour turns into bullying when the intention is to cause physical, emotional or social harm.

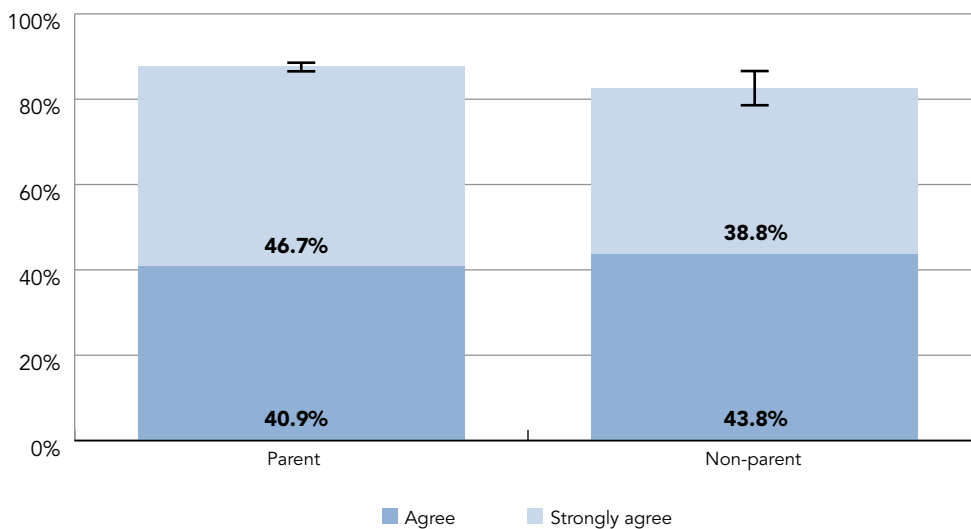
Research suggests that the cycle of bullying is particularly difficult to break because prolonged exploitation of power inequities by bullies tends to lead to the solidification of power imbalances and a sense, among victims, of increasing inability to defend oneself.⁷⁸ It is not surprising that such victimization can have long-lasting effects on children.

How do Canadians feel about bullying?

More than 80% of Canadians agree or strongly agree that bullying is one of the most serious issues affecting students today. These sentiments do not vary substantially with age or parental status, although non-parents and younger Canadians are less likely to feel as strongly about the issue (see figures 23 and 24).

Figure 23

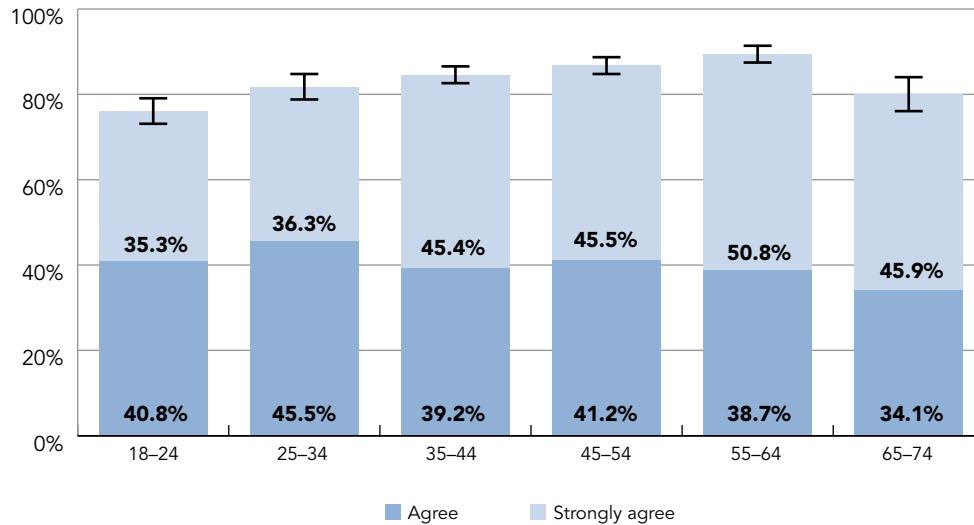
Percentage of parents and non-parents who agree or strongly agree that bullying is one of the most serious issues affecting students today



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Figure 24

Percentage of respondents in each age group who agree or strongly agree that bullying is one of the most serious issues affecting students today

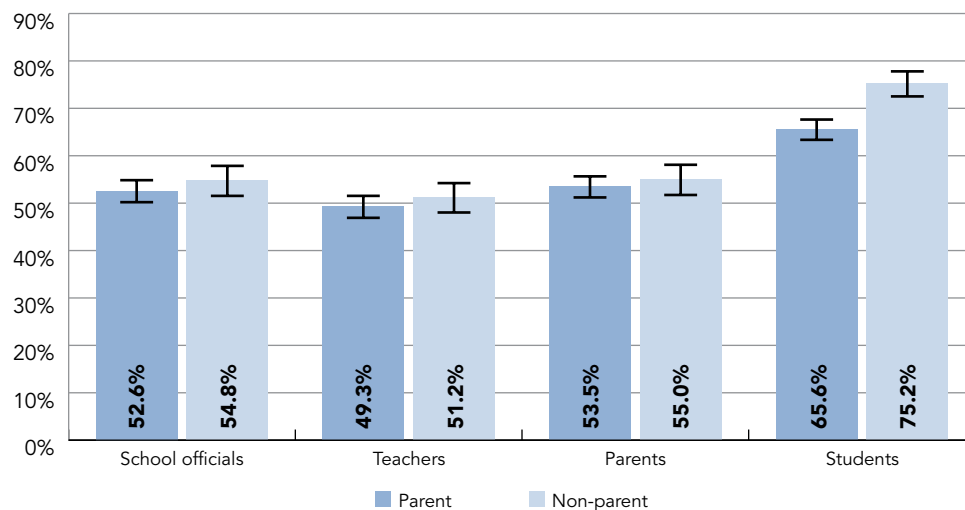


Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Canadians also appear relatively united in their belief that no particular group is currently doing enough to address bullying issues. More than half of Canadians disagree or strongly disagree that school officials, teachers, parents or students are doing enough to address or prevent bullying. Canadians appear to see preventing and addressing bullying as a widely distributed responsibility, a belief that is not affected strongly by parental status or the age of the respondent, although younger Canadians are particularly likely to suggest that students should do more to prevent and address bullying (see figures 25 and 26).

Figure 25

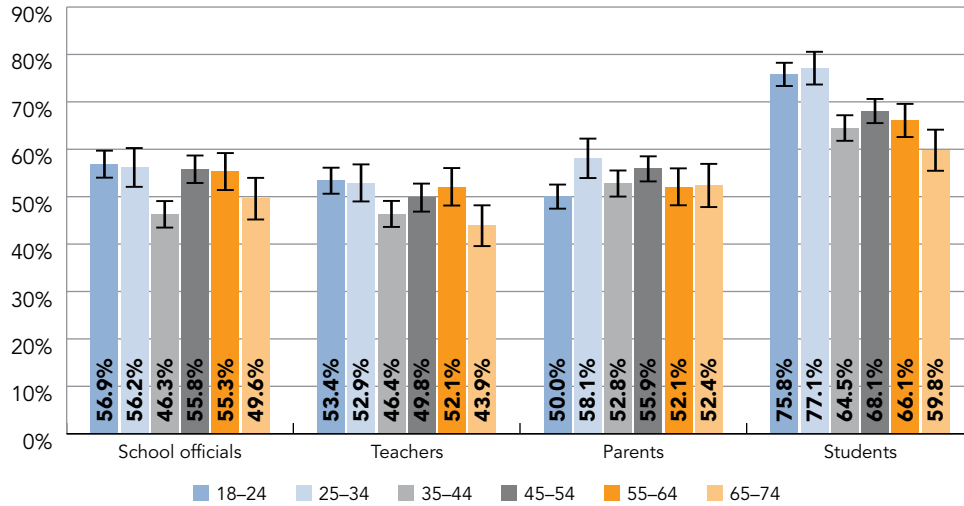
Percentage of parents and non-parents who disagree or strongly disagree that each group is doing enough to address or prevent bullying



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Figure 26

Percentage of respondents in each age group who disagree or strongly disagree that each group is doing enough to address or prevent bullying



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

Prevalence of bullying

When asked to recall their own experiences, 35% of Canadian adults indicate that they were bullied in school (25% occasionally; 10% frequently). Nearly half (49%) of parents with children aged five to 24 years report that their child has been bullied at school (32% occasionally; 17% frequently).

These results match the findings of other studies on bullying. As part of the 2001–2002. Health Behaviour in School-aged Children survey (an international collaborative survey conducted on behalf of the World Health Organization in 35 countries), Canadian youth between the ages of 11 and 15 were asked to indicate how often they had been the victims of bullying. Twenty-seven per cent of girls and 34% of boys reported being bullied at least once during the previous two months, whereas frequent victimization, defined as having occurred at least twice in the five days prior to taking part in the study, was reported by 18% of girls and 17% of boys.⁷⁹

In a more recent study, children in grades one through 12 were asked to report whether they had been bullied in the two-month period preceding the investigation.⁸⁰ This study found that rates of perceived bullying were highest in the early grades and generally dropped off as children matured, with the exception of a noticeable spike in Grade 9.

Which parents report that their children were bullied?

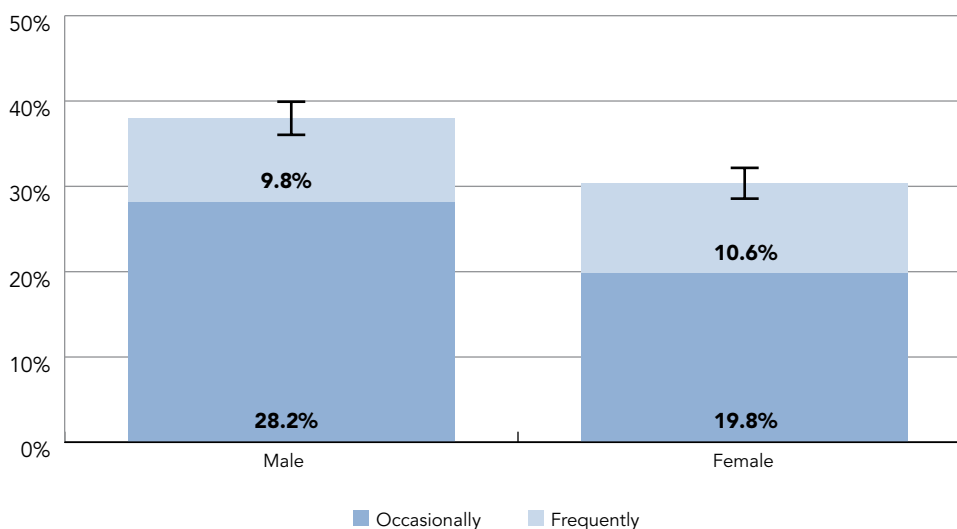
A logistic regression (see text box on page 14) was performed to determine the characteristics of parents who report that their children, aged five to 24 years, had ever been bullied in school. The predictor variables included home language, country of birth, parental educational attainment and household income. The outcome was parental reports of bullying among children.

In households where French is the language most frequently spoken, parents are almost half as likely (.53 times as likely) to report that their children have been bullied, compared to English speaking households. None of the remaining predictor variables were very strongly linked to parental reports of bullying.

These findings suggest that parental indicators are not strongly predictive of their reporting bullying. Although parental reports of bullying may not reflect actual prevalence of bullying in their children, these findings indicate that parental characteristics or family background may be less related to bullying than children's characteristics. For example, victims of bullying have typically been characterized as submissive, inhibited, less likely to get involved in aggressive play (i.e. rough-and-tumble play) and less socially competent.^{81,82,83}

SCAL data do not identify the gender of the children associated with parental reports of bullying; however, it is possible to examine the gender of respondents who reported having been bullied when they were children. Results suggest that while males experience victimization at school more often than females, females who are victims of bullying experience it more frequently the male victims (see Figure 27).

Figure 27
Percentage of respondents who report having been bullied



Source: Canadian Council on Learning. Survey of Canadian Attitudes toward Learning, 2007

These findings are mirrored by other research on bullying.⁸⁴ For example, a number of studies have shown that boys are more likely than girls to bully or be bullied.^{85,86,87} Research on gender differences also suggests that there are differences in the most common forms of bullying engaged in by girls and boys. Girls are more often involved in relational or verbal bullying whereas boys tend to engage more frequently in physical bullying.

Preventing bullying

As noted previously, the results of SCAL 2007 reveal an overwhelming proportion of Canadians who feel that bullying is one of the most serious issues faced by students. In addition, between 50% and 69% of Canadians are not satisfied with the level of effort made to address bullying by school administrators, teachers, parents or students. However, it is worth noting that more than 60% of Canadians agree that schools are either meeting or exceeding their expectations for teaching students problem-solving skills and how to be good citizens. Parents of children who have been bullied feel roughly the same, reporting 58% for problem-solving and 63% for good citizenship skills.

If Canadians are satisfied with schools in how they are teaching students the skills that are central to reducing bullying and victimizing behaviours, then where does the prevention answer lie? Perhaps Canadians feel that bullying is not simply a school issue, but rather one that requires a consolidated effort on behalf of all Canadians. Some bullying researchers suggest that such a concerted effort is in fact the best method of addressing bullying.⁸⁸

Significant empirical research exists about bullying and violence prevention programs and a number of national, provincial and school-district bully prevention programs have been developed.⁸⁹ Olweus is acknowledged as being the first researcher to identify the alarming rates of bullying occurring in schools, and is credited with inspiring researchers worldwide to address the issue in their own countries.⁹⁰ The Olweus Bullying Prevention Program (OBPP) is one of the most widely recognized and adapted programs that exists. Olweus found a 50% reduction in bullying behaviour two years after he implemented his bullying prevention program in his home country of Norway.⁹¹ Since then other countries, including Canada, have attempted to implement OBPP and found mixed results. Recently, researchers found no overall effect when they assessed 10 Seattle middle schools implementing the OBPP.⁹²

Wilson and colleagues conducted a meta-analysis of studies that assessed school-based programs designed to prevent or reduce aggressive behaviour.⁹³ They discovered that studies evaluating programs designed and implemented by researchers reported larger effect sizes than studies examining existing school programs—a result that typically reflects biased over-estimation of the impact of programs implemented and evaluated by the same researcher, but also suggests that the fidelity of program implementation is critical to the success of prevention programs. Wilson and colleagues also noted that different types of programs generally demonstrate the same overall level of effectiveness, as long as the integrity of program implementation was high. Research by Whitter and Dupper supports this conclusion and adds that a common mistake made by school administrators and staff is the partial implementation of prevention programs due to time and resource constraints.⁹⁴ They argue that watered-down, incomplete or inadequate implementation of prevention programs often leads to ineffective or diluted results.

Many of the studies attempting to evaluate prevention programs have documented common challenges across settings. Because no two schools are exactly the same, and school personnel often implement prevention programs differently, assessing the effectiveness of any given prevention program in a particular location is very challenging. Part of the difficulty associated with creating truly effective bullying prevention programs lies in the fact that bullying and victimization cross all social and demographic boundaries—there is no single or easily addressed issue underlying the problem of bullying. SCAL data, along with a large and growing body of research, suggest that children from all walks of life can be victims of bullying, irrespective of gender, ethnicity or socio-economic background.

Conclusion

Overall, the results of SCAL 2007 indicate that Canadians hold a complex set of attitudes toward structured learning in Canada's elementary and secondary schools.

Most Canadians feel that these schools are meeting or exceeding their expectations, but levels of satisfaction are lower among parents who hire tutors for their children and higher among parents who enrol their children in language-immersion programs.

Homework remains a controversial subject. Most Canadians support the use of homework as an important learning tool, but most Canadians also indicate that homework is frequently a source of household stress.

Many parents choose to hire tutors for their school-age children. Household income is a strong predictor of parents' decisions to hire tutors; thus, many more parents would likely hire tutors if they were not prevented by financial constraints from doing so.

Language-immersion programs are an increasingly popular approach to second-language learning. These programs are particularly popular in bilingual provinces (e.g., New Brunswick) and in bilingual households.

Finally, a majority of Canadians believe that bullying is one of the most serious issues facing students today. Nearly half of parents of school-age children report that their children have been bullied. Canadians hold all relevant parties (including teachers, administrators, parents, and students) responsible for doing more to prevent and address bullying in schools.

Appendix: Questions Asked

1. To what extent are Canadian elementary and high-schools meeting your expectations in the following areas...
 - ... teaching the basics like reading, writing and arithmetic.
 - ... teaching computer skills.
 - ... teaching problem-solving skills.
 - ... preparing students for work.
 - ... preparing students for further education after high-school.
 - ... teaching students to be good citizens.
 - ... teaching students to love learning.

2. To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements:
 - Class sizes are too big in the Canadian elementary schools that you are familiar with.
 - Class sizes are too big in the Canadian high-schools that you are familiar with.
 - Homework generally enhances learning.
 - Homework helps children develop good work habits.
 - In your experience as a student or a parent, homework has often been a source of household stress.

3. Students in Canadian elementary schools are generally assigned...?
 - Too much homework
 - Enough homework
 - Not enough homework

4. Students in Canadian high-schools are generally assigned...?
 - Too much homework
 - Enough homework
 - Not enough homework

5. In your experience as a student or a parent, how much time do parents spend helping...
 - ...their children in elementary school with homework?
 - Too much time
 - Enough time
 - Not enough time
 - ...their children in high-school with homework?
 - Too much time
 - Enough time
 - Not enough time

6. Have you ever hired a private tutor or a tutoring company to assist your child or children, aged 5 to 24, with the following elementary or secondary school subjects?
 - Reading and writing
 - Math
 - Science
 - Other subjects

7. Which letter grade would best describe the overall level of school achievement of your oldest child, aged 5 to 24, during the most recent year of elementary or secondary school?

8. Have any of your children, aged 5 to 24, ever been enrolled in a language-immersion program at the elementary or secondary school level?
9. What were the reasons for enrolling your child or children, aged 5 to 24, in an immersion program?
- To learn or maintain additional language skills
 - To increase cultural awareness
 - To improve future job opportunities
 - The school's good reputation
 - It was more challenging than the regular program
 - It had better resources than the regular program
10. What were the reasons for not enrolling your child or children, aged 5 to 24, in an immersion program in elementary or secondary school?
- Other language skills would suffer
 - Other school subjects would suffer
 - The child did not want to enrol in an immersion program
 - The child is/was not ready for immersion in other ways
 - You could not help with the schoolwork
 - The program or space was not available
 - The child is not old enough yet or waiting until later
 - You never considered it
 - Other reasons
11. When you were in elementary school or high-school, were you ever enrolled in a language-immersion program?
12. What were the reasons for your enrolment in an immersion program?
- To learn or maintain additional language skills
 - To increase cultural awareness
 - To improve future job opportunities
 - The school's good reputation
 - It was more challenging than the regular program
 - It had better resources than the regular program
 - Other reasons
13. To what extent do you disagree or agree with the following statements about bullying in elementary and secondary schools:
- Bullying is one of the most serious issues affecting students today.
 - School officials do enough to prevent bullying or address it when it occurs.
 - Teachers do enough to prevent bullying or address it when it occurs.
 - Parents do enough to prevent bullying or address it when it occurs.
 - Students do enough to prevent bullying or address it when it occurs.
14. Were you ever bullied in school?
15. Was it occasionally or frequently?
16. As far as you know, have any of your children ever been bullied at school?
17. Was it occasionally or frequently?

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