

CARDUS EDUCATION POLICY ROUND TABLES

In the fall of 2017 Cardus Education hosted four by-invitation education policy round tables across Canada.

PURPOSE AND GOALS: Cardus' education research is intended, in part, to support further understanding of and vibrancy within the independent school sector. The Round Tables were convened for the purpose of conversation with key sector participants to learn about research and sector information that is most needed. The goals for the days were to identify key policy issues and needs in each province, to identify key stakeholders in each province, and to inform Cardus' plans for future research and dissemination.

DATES AND LOCATIONS: The Round Tables took place on October 17 in Calgary at The Kahnoff Centre, October 19 in Surrey at Pacific Academy, November 14 in Ottawa at the Cardus office, and November 16 in Halifax at the Discovery Centre. Mornings featured presentations of latest relevant research by three or four presenters, including Dr. Jim Farney, University of Regina, Dr. Derek Allison, University of Western Ontario, and Dr. Beth Green and Dr. Deani Van Pelt of Cardus. Afternoons consisted of several short breakout groups with full-group feedback sessions around several key questions. Engagement was high, participation robust, and a widespread sense of satisfaction prevailed during and following the events.

PARTICIPANTS: In total 46 guests participated in these sessions. Interest in participating was widespread, and many parties offered sincere regrets due to date conflicts. The superb range of participants included executive directors of independent school associations, heads of independent schools, home school association leaders, heads of foundations and advocacy groups, university professors with scholarly expertise in school choice, a former minister of education, a member of provincial parliament, and research directors. Typically participants were previously unknown to one another and many expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet and share focused conversation around pressing and similar interests.

KEY QUESTIONS: Going into the sessions it was Cardus' perception that several of the key issues for the non-government education sector included pressures around religious schools, equality of access to schools of choice, and on-going misunderstandings about independent schools and home schooling.

KEY ISSUES RAISED BY PARTICIPANTS: During the round tables more than 60 issues were raised. They included concerns surrounding curriculum, funding, demographics of families choosing education outside of the public government schools (far more low-income families in the sector than is generally realized), access to independent school sector by students with special needs and concerns that not all families have access to choice, accuracy of statistics on enrolments and schools in the non-government education sector particularly in homeschooling, silos in the non-government sector and the need for more communication within the sector, variation in the regulation of independent schools, and numerous hidden costs of choosing an education outside of the government public schools including the lack of access to resources available in government school systems.

KEY RESEARCH AND INFORMATION NEEDS: Participants identified a wide variety of research ideas (more than two dozen) that would assist in filling in the gaps about independent schooling, home schooling and related sectors in Canada. These included learning more about the schools themselves especially the unique new ones, learning from other jurisdictions about how to better regulate and support them, learning more about the families that choose these schools, and more about the students that graduate from non-government approaches to education. In addition, more than 40 specific suggestions for several of Cardus Education's current initiatives were identified.