# Theme THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM OF CANADA

Education is one of the highest priorities for the Canadian government. For the most part, children in Canada attend kindergarten for a year or two at the age of four or five by choice. School then becomes mandatory as of grade one, which tends to be at the age of six years old.

Education across Canada is generally divided into four stages: pre-school or early childhood education; primary or elementary education; secondary education and post-secondary or tertiary education, which includes college and university programs and vocational/technical schooling.

Education is compulsory up to the age of 16 in every province in Canada, except for Ontario and New Brunswick, where the compulsory age is 18. Canada generally has 190 total school days in the academic year, typically starting in September (after Labor Day) and concluding near the end of June—usually the last Friday of the month, except in some cases in the Province of Quebec, when the last day of school occurs just before June 24, a holiday in the province.

In terms of educational attainment, about 90 percent of all Canadians possess at least a high school diploma, and one in seven individuals hold a university degree of some type. The ratio of high school graduates versus non-diploma holders is changing rapidly in the country, partly due to changes in the labor market that require people to have a high school diploma and, in many cases, a university degree.

In addition to public schools, there are also thousands of private schools in Canada, both secular and religious-based institutions. When Canada was first formed, all the provinces originally had education systems divided by religion, but most provinces have now abolished these “public-religious” systems. The provinces of Ontario and Alberta, the Northwest Territories, and certain cities in Saskatchewan are exceptions to this, as they still maintain publicly-funded separate district school boards (usually Catholic but occasionally Protestant). In Quebec, the Catholic/Protestant divide was replaced with a French/English one in 1998. Quebec students must now attend a French school up until the end of high school unless one of their parents previously attended an English-language school somewhere else in Canada. Likewise, access to French school in most of the other provinces is limited to children having at least one French-speaking parent, or a parent who is a Canadian citizen having received French-language primary instruction in Canada.

Most Canadian education systems continue up to grade 12 (age seventeen to eighteen). In Quebec, the typical high school term ends after Secondary V/Grade 11 (age sixteen to seventeen); following this, students who wish to pursue university education must attend college.

For each type of publicly-funded school, the province is divided into school districts or divisions. For each district or division, board members, known as “trustees,” are elected by voters within that specific district only. Normally, all publicly-funded schools are under the authority of their local school district board. In turn, the school boards typically follow a curriculum set up by the province in which the school district is located. Only Alberta allows public charter schools—schools which are independent of any district school board. Instead, these schools have their own board of trustees, which reports directly to the province.

**Pre-elementary Education in Canada**.

Most provinces and territories provide kindergartens, operated by the local education authorities and offering one year of pre-first-grade, noncompulsory education for five-year-olds. In one province, kindergarten is compulsory; in others, pre-school classes are available from age four or even earlier. At a pan-Canadian level, 95 per cent of five-year-olds attend pre-elementary or elementary school, and over 40 per cent of four-year-olds are enrolled in junior kindergarten, with large variations among the jurisdictions. The intensity of the programs also varies, with full-day and halfday programs, depending on the school board.

**Elementary Education in Canada.**

The ages for compulsory schooling vary from one jurisdiction to another, but most require attendance in school from age 6 to age 16. In some cases, compulsory schooling starts at 5, and in others it extends to age 18 or graduation from secondary school. In most jurisdictions, elementary schools cover six to eight years of schooling, which can be followed by a middle school or junior high before moving on to secondary school. The elementary school curriculum emphasizes the basic subjects of language, mathematics, social studies, science, and introductory arts, while some jurisdictions include second-language learning.

**Secondary Education in Canada**

Secondary school covers the final four to six years of compulsory education. In the first years, students take mostly compulsory courses, with some options. The proportion of options increases in the later years so that students may take specialized courses to prepare for the job market or to meet the differing entrance requirements of postsecondary institutions. Secondary school diplomas are awarded to students who complete the requisite number of compulsory and optional courses. Students typically begin their education at age 5 and end at 18; although it is compulsory from ages 6 to 16.

**The preparation of elementary teachers in Canada**

Canada is only industrialized country without a national department of education or any mechanism to regulate national policy for education. Each of Canada’s ten provinces and three territories has the exclusive right to pass legislation on matters of education. Each jurisdiction has its own school act defining how education is provided. So the preparation of teachers in Canada varies from province to province and from institution to institution. Elementary teachers are educated in colleges and universities. The length of study varies from 4 to 6 years.

The Department of Elementary Education is сommitted to preparing teachers who are competent to teach all subjects and facilitate the learning of children ranging in age from four to 12 years in Kindergarten to Grade 6.

The minimum qualification required to teach in an elementary school is four years of post-secondary education leading to a bachelor of education (B. Ed.) degree.

**Answer the questions:**

1. What degrees does university give?
2. What age is compulsory for schooling in Canada?
3. What can you say about teacher preparation in Canada?