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Local 196 SPOTLIGHT



Public Systems Under Pressure: Privatization in Education and Health Care

Across Alberta, educators and health care workers are raising similar concerns about the growing privatization of essential public services. Recent events in both sectors reveal a trend toward shifting public funds and responsibilities into private hands—often under the language of “choice,” “efficiency,” or “innovation.”

In Alberta’s education system, the effects of privatization are becoming more noticeable. During the recent labour action by the Alberta Teachers’ Association, the provincial government approved a ballot question asking whether public funds should support private schools. This decision came at the same time thousands of teachers and supporters were rallying to protect public education. Many educators and advocates argue that directing taxpayer money to private and charter schools reduces access, increases inequality, and weakens the foundation of Alberta’s public education system.

Organizations such as the Alberta Teachers’ Association and Support Our Students Alberta have documented how public funding formulas increasingly favour private and charter schools. They point to growing gaps in resources, classroom supports, and learning conditions between publicly funded neighbourhood schools and schools that are able to select students or charge additional fees. Analysts argue that these changes move Alberta toward a two-tier education model, where a family’s financial means can influence the quality of its children’s learning environment.

Privatization in education is not new. In a 1996 study published in the Canadian Journal of Higher Education, Peter Rae examined how privatization often begins: through cost-shifting measures, tuition increases, reduced public funding, and expanded partnerships with private industry. Rae warned that these changes gradually redefine education from a shared public benefit to a private investment—accessible to some, but not equally to all.



“Did You Know?”

- Over \$300 million in public funds goes to private schools in Alberta each year.
- Private schools receive up to 70% public funding on top of tuition fees.
- Charter schools have grown faster in Alberta than anywhere else in Canada.
- More private schools → fewer resources for neighbourhood public schools.
- Equity declines when essential services depend on a family’s ability to pay.

“Redirecting public funds to private and charter schools does not expand choice; it shifts resources away from the students who need them most.”

— Support Our Students Alberta

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“Whether in hospitals or classrooms, the pattern is the same: underfund the public system, introduce private alternatives, and call it efficiency.”
— The Tye (2025)

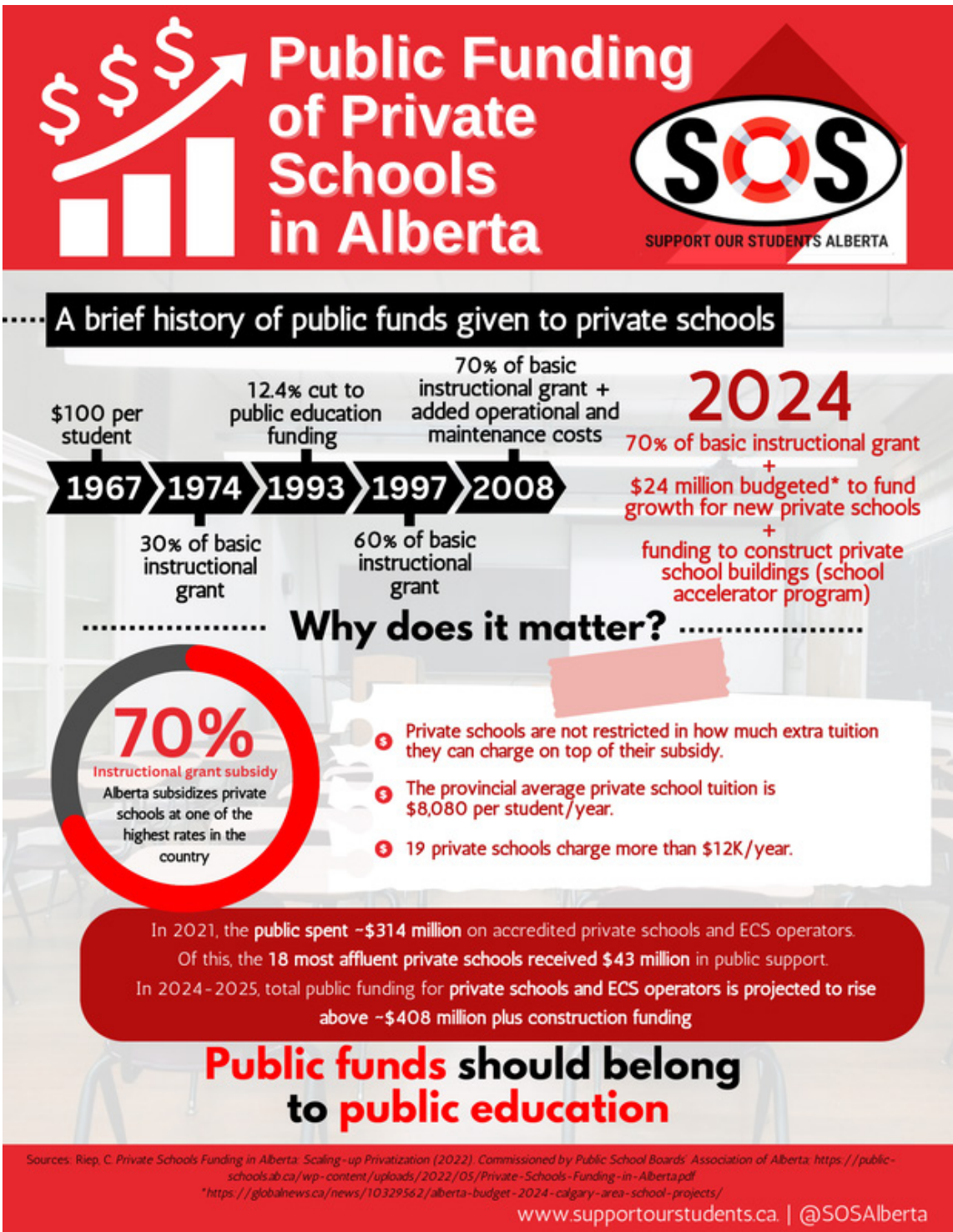
Parallel Pressures in Health Care

For nurses, these developments may feel familiar. Alberta’s health care system has experienced similar pressures toward privatization: contracting out lab services, expanding private surgical centres, and shifting community health programs into private or non-profit hands. Like in education, these changes are often framed as increasing efficiency or offering more choice.

However, nurses have seen firsthand how privatization can stretch public systems, create staffing instability, and increase disparities in access.

When private providers rely on public funding but are not required to meet the same accountability standards, the overall system becomes fragmented. This can lead to longer waits in the public sector, inconsistent quality of care, and increased costs over time—particularly when private operators focus on the most profitable services while leaving the rest to the public system.

Privatization in health care and education alike risks fragmenting systems that depend on equity and collective investment. Nurses understand that publicly funded, publicly delivered systems are built on principles of equity, universality, and collective responsibility.



Whether applied to a classroom or a clinic, these principles help ensure that every Albertan—regardless of income, background, or location—has access to the tools needed to live a healthy and fulfilling life.



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