

The Canadian Secular Alliance invites our government to support a single, publicly funded, secular school system



What is the Canadian Secular Alliance (CSA)?

- The Canadian Secular Alliance is a non-profit, public policy research and advocacy organization advancing church-state separation and the neutrality of government in matters of religion. We seek to represent all Canadians, religious and non-religious alike, who believe that the Canadian government should adopt public policies consistent with a secular state.
- The CSA believes in church-state separation — the idea that the government of Canada should not favour one religion over others, or religious belief over non-belief. Our commitment is to liberal-democratic principles of equality, fairness and justice for all under the law, regardless of religious belief or lack thereof.

Does the Canadian government use public tax dollars to fund religious schools?

- Yes. Education is a provincial responsibility — so government policy differs across Canada — but each province can be classified in 3 ways: (1) whether it offers full public funding to Catholic schools because of an archaic constitutional obligation; (2) whether it offers partial public funding to religious schools of any faith; and (3) whether it offers no funding to religious schools of any kind.
- Ontario, Alberta and Saskatchewan still offer full public funding to Catholic schools — a historical artifact originating from “denominational privileges” enshrined in section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867. All other provinces do not have (or have since eliminated) this constitutional obligation.
- British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Quebec offer partial funding (40-60%) to religious schools of any faith that meet some provincial criteria (typically, teaching the provincial curriculum, submitting to standardized testing, and employing certified teachers).
- New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland offer zero funding to religious schools of any kind.

Should public tax dollars be used to finance the religious indoctrination of children?

- No. Religious indoctrination should be left to the private sphere. Parents who choose not to use the secular public school system have no automatic or fundamental “right” to a taxpayer-financed religious alternative. The government should not use public funds to finance religious schools, either directly via full or partial funding, or indirectly via tax credits or school vouchers.

Is religious indoctrination in a child’s best interests?

- No. A child’s constitutional right to freedom of religion is best served by ensuring that they have the opportunity to embrace religious beliefs of their own choosing when they are mature enough to do so — not by being indoctrinated in the faith of their parents before they reach the age of reason, and by having their exposure to other religions and worldviews limited. The CSA believes that because religious indoctrination of children is fundamentally at odds with fostering their intellectual independence, personal autonomy, and religious freedom, it cannot in good conscience be financially supported by the state.

Is state funding of religious schools in the public interest?

- No. Public schools perform an important integrating function in Canadian society by contributing to social cohesion and inter-group co-operation. Faith-based education segregates students based on their parents' religious worldview, thus partitioning children into "silos" where they have little contact with others outside the religious group into which they were born. A vast body of empirical scientific evidence from sociology and psychology has shown that such segregation increases the frequency of prejudice and inter-group mistrust.
- Many religions advocate beliefs and practices that are contrary to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Government funding of religious schools puts Canada in the dangerous position of financially supporting the indoctrination of future citizens against its own liberal-democratic values.
- The potential solution — government regulation of publicly funded religious schools — puts the state in the equally dangerous position of evaluating the acceptability of religious doctrine. It is unclear what objective criteria could be used to decide which specific religious beliefs are worthy or unworthy of state funding, and any attempt to do so could legitimately be seen as unacceptable government interference in religious affairs.

Is state funding of religious schools in the best interest of the religious schools themselves?

- Not necessarily. Along with taxpayers' money comes the expectation of accountability. In fact, the entanglement of church and state in Ontario's publicly funded Catholic schools has already led to the judiciary ruling on matters of religious doctrine. Refusing financial subsidy from the state may actually be in the best interests of private religious schools, since they will inevitably come under public pressure to change any anti-liberal-democratic practices as a pre-condition of receiving public money. Declining public funding would eliminate this source of leverage and free religious groups to practice their beliefs without interference by the government or the courts.

Isn't it too difficult for Ontario, Alberta, and Saskatchewan to remove the constitutional obligation to fund Catholic schools enshrined in section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867?

- No. Quebec and Newfoundland both eliminated their archaic constitutional obligation to fund Catholic schools during the 1990s. It can be done with a simple bilateral constitutional amendment. Such an amendment can be as little as 12 words in length, and only requires the agreement of the province in question and the federal government.

Does Canadian public opinion support using tax dollars to finance religious schools?

- No. A poll conducted by Angus Reid in April 2009 found that a majority of the Canadian public opposes the funding of religious schools: 51% of respondents opposed funding Christian schools; 75% opposed funding Islamic schools; 73% opposed funding Hindu schools; 75% opposed funding Sikh schools; 70% opposed funding Buddhist schools; and 68% opposed funding Jewish schools.

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