

**Pre-Budget Submission
to the Ministry of Finance**

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1) The Canadian Secular Alliance: Organization Profile

The Canadian Secular Alliance (CSA) is an incorporated not-for-profit public policy research organization advocating church-state separation and the neutrality of government in matters of religion. The CSA seeks 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 the separation of religion and state - 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.

2) Budgetary savings of at least half a billion dollars annually can be achieved by moving to one school system in Ontario

Given the province's mounting public and private debt, unemployment above the natural rate and a large deficit that is expected to persist until at least 2017-18, Ontario's government has an increasingly pressing obligation to ensure sound stewardship of public funds [1,2].

Additionally, over a 10-30 year time horizon Ontario will experience a large drop in labour force participation due to population aging. This will be a major drag on tax revenues and health care costs. According to the Macdonald-Laurier Institute, insolvency will become increasingly probable if our long-term fiscal challenges are not addressed [3]. It is therefore incumbent upon government to demonstrate value-for-money with respect to all its expenditures.

Financing two parallel education systems for each official language (public and Catholic) that service the same geographic area is an inefficient use of public resources. Tremendous duplication costs are incurred in particular due to overlapping school boards, operating schools well below enrolment capacity and otherwise unnecessary student transportation distances.

Although the exact savings realized depend on what the amalgamated school system that would replace the status quo would look like, the savings under any reasonable set of assumptions amount to hundreds of millions of dollars per year [4]. Ontario currently has over 600 schools operating at less than 50% of capacity [5] and in November 2014 Education Minister Liz Sandals stated to the Legislative Assembly that Ontario is "currently spending about \$1 billion on empty seats" annually [6].

It is worth noting that Newfoundland once financed 5 distinct religious schools boards: Roman Catholic, Anglican, Salvation Army, United Church of Canada, and Pentecostal Assemblies [7], but the prohibitive economic burden of maintaining this religiously segregated school system ultimately compelled it to adopt a single, secular school system in 1997 [8,9].

3) Ontarians support the creation of one publicly funded school system

Six polls have been conducted by Forum Research since 2012. All six polls found that a majority of respondents were opposed to public funding of Catholic schools [10].

4) Recommendation

As the government is no doubt aware, courts will continue to rule that public funding of Ontario Catholic schools is protected by section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1867 – courts cannot rule otherwise until the government chooses to modernize this anachronism. Three other provinces (Quebec, Newfoundland, and Manitoba) have eliminated their constitutional obligation to fund Catholic schools, and Ontario should follow their example.

The Canadian Secular Alliance recommends that Ontario:

- adopt a bilateral constitutional amendment (involving only Ontario and the federal government) analogous to that adopted by Quebec, which simply reads: “93A. Paragraphs (1) to (4) of section 93 do not apply to Quebec” [11];
- merge the public and Catholic school systems into a single, secular, publicly funded school system for each language.

5) Rationale

Moving to one school system is sound public policy for a variety of reasons [12]. In addition to fiscal savings, it will allow Ontario to:

- end the use of public funds to segregate students based on their parents’ religious affiliation – which former Finance Minister Greg Sorbara correctly pointed out is “no longer defensible in a pluralistic society” [13];
- end the unfairness of exclusively funding the religious schools of one particular faith;
- avoid being censured for a third time by the United Nations for violating article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights [14,15];
- end the unfairness of legalized employment discrimination against non-Catholic teachers (roughly one third of Ontario's publicly funded teaching positions – those in the Catholic school system – are closed to non-Catholics [16]);
- ensure that equity policies protecting gay and lesbian students from discrimination are consistently applied in all publicly funded schools;
- avoid embarrassing instances in which proposed reforms to the curriculum (for instance, around sexual health) are successfully vetoed by the Catholic Church [17];
- avoid embarrassing instances in which public health measures (for instance, school-administered HPV vaccinations) are successfully vetoed by the Catholic Church [18];
- abandon the pointless exercise of having Ontarians declare public/Catholic school support on their municipal property tax assessments – especially since this revenue source represents a very small percentage of total school board funding [19].

6) Conclusion

Funding two parallel education systems (public and Catholic) that service the same geographic area is not cost-effective. This waste and duplication does not demonstrate sound management of public funds, especially in a fiscal climate in which cuts to truly essential services and tax hikes are being contemplated. Ontario should take steps towards a single, secular, publicly funded school system that brings students of all religious and ethnic backgrounds together in an atmosphere of mutual respect and equality.

Notes

[1] CTV News, 2015 January 23. Sousa won't rule out tax hike to help eliminate deficit by 2017-18 <http://toronto.ctvnews.ca/sousa-won-t-rule-out-tax-hike-to-help-eliminate-deficit-by-2017-18-1.2202907>

[2] Statistics Canada, 2015 February 9. Labour force characteristics, seasonally adjusted, by province <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/lfss01b-eng.htm>

[3] Macdonald-Laurier Institute, 2012 October. Provincial Solvency and Federal Obligations <http://www.macdonaldlaurier.ca/files/pdf/Provincial-Solvency-October-2012.pdf>

[4] Canadian Secular Alliance, 2011 May 28. The Financial Cost of Religious Discrimination <http://secularalliance.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/the-financial-cost-of-religious-discrimination.pdf>

[5] 2014 Ontario Budget, page 86 <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/budget/ontariobudgets/2014/interactive/files/basic-html/page86.html>

[6] Legislative Assembly of Ontario Hansard Transcripts, 19 November 2014 http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/house-proceedings/house_detail.do?Date=2014-11-19&Parl=41&Sess=1&locale=en

[7] Zinga, D, 2008. Ontario's Challenge: Denominational Rights in Public Education. Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy, 80, 19 Aug 2008. http://www.umanitoba.ca/publications/cjeap/pdf_files/Zinga2.pdf

[8] Canadian Civil Liberties Association, 2007 September 21. Submissions to the Honourable Kathleen O. Wynne Minister of Education for Ontario Re: The public funding of religious schools. <http://ccla.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2009/02/2007-09-21-brief-on-religious-school-funding-final.pdf>

[9] Chung, A, 2007 September 16. Newfoundland offers religious school lessons. Toronto Star. <http://www.thestar.com/OntarioElection/article/257102>

[10] Forum Research, 2014 October 9. <http://poll.forumresearch.com/post/164/half-disagree-with-public-funding-for-catholic-schools/>

[11] Constitution Act, 1867. <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-4.html#docCont>

[12] Canadian Secular Alliance, 2009, September 28. Canadian Secular Alliance policy on Public Financing of Religious Schools. <http://www.secularalliance.ca/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/csa-policy-on-public-financing-of-religious-schools.pdf>

[13] The Catholic Register, 2014 November 19. Prominent Catholic politician calls for end to Catholic school system <http://www.catholicregister.org/item/19216-prominent-catholic-politician-calls-for-end-to-catholic-school-system>

[14] Waldman v. Canada. Communication No. 694/1996, U.N. Doc. CCPR/C/67/D/694/1996 (5 November 1999).
[http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/b3bfc541589cc30f802568690052e5d6?Opendocument](http://www.unhcr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/b3bfc541589cc30f802568690052e5d6?Opendocument)

[15] Concluding observations of the Human Rights Committee: Canada. 20/04/2006
<http://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/55/a5540vol2.pdf>

[16] OneSchoolSystem.org, 2014. <http://www.oneschoolsystem.org>

[17] Ferguson, R & Benzie, R, 2010, April 22. McGuinty backs down on sex ed changes. Toronto Star. <http://www.thestar.com/breakingnews/article/799313--mcguinty-postpones-sex-ed-changes>

[18] Ogilvie, M, 2007, September 19. Catholic schools debating moral issue of HPV shot. Toronto Star. <http://www.thestar.com/News/Ontario/article/258142>

[19] Bezeau, LM, 2007. Educational Administration for Canadian Teachers (7th ed.).