

Faith-based Funding and One School System

Category : Provincial Issues

Published by Rob Campbell [[Rob Campbell](#)] on 2007/10/1

It is unfortunate really that this issue has grabbed the headlines as it has when there are so many more pressing funding issues at stake. However, it is undeniably a major issue of principle that has seized the imaginations of Ontarians. I believe that it is important for you to know where your Trustee and your Board stands on this issue.

First the Board. Back some years ago now OPSBA, the umbrella group representing most Public Boards in Ontario (almost all English and one French one), sent out a survey to all Boards asking them what they wanted to see in terms of Boards by language or one Board over all in each region or Boards by religion (in the context of the public / catholic question). Our board at the time formally resolved, along with a majority of other Boards in the association, to support two boards in each region, one based on English and one based on French. This Spring, and well before Mr. Tory came forth with his religious funding extension proposal, the Grand Erie District School Board sought our Board's support to get the official OPSBA position promoted as it had sat quietly on the books without lobbying for some time. After the passing of a couple of elections since this had last been an issue at our Board and with a majority of new trustees it was believed important by most to see what the Board thought about this issue in 2007. The vote to support the GEDSB promotion proposal passed at our Board by 10 in favour, 1 against with 1 abstention. This was then taken to OPSBA by a number of Boards and a very important debate occurred there with long lines of speakers at mikes. In the end the promotion idea was defeated at this time by about a 60% / 40% split though the position remains on the OPSBA books. Subsequent to this by some weeks Mr. Tory came out with his proposal and this became a major issue in the Province. This is why during this election period our Association is altogether silent on the issue and the President of the Catholic Boards association is very much not. Our Board explains its position when called upon to do so but saves its energy for funding issues which are so crucial to us still. I personally agree with our Board's position on this issue though remain somewhat dissatisfied with the details of the OPSBA position on its books and very much dissatisfied with the comparative silence of the truly public boards provincially on this issue. Our Board has not taken a position for or against any particular party proposal but takes, and historically has taken, a relatively strong stand in favour of one school system for each language. I am personally concerned about the extension of funding to other religions for social siloing, for education finance and for education administration reasons. I won't debate this here. I do also believe that perhaps the time has come in Ontario to really talk about one school system per language. It is perhaps an idea which can no longer be avoided and for which a time has come, or at least which may be hulked around the corner. At some point it will have to be met head on. I will leave you with two statements to reflect on ... One is by Egerton Ryerson, the 'father of Ontario public education', who thought, manifestly incorrectly, that over time, without forthright or direct action, that we would naturally arrive at one system ... essentially he kidded himself into believing he could follow the easy path ... note that his words were written in a de facto 'all-Christian' context at the time (1852) ... "I always thought that the introduction of any provision for separate schools in a popular system of common education like that of Upper Canada, was to be regretted and inexpedient; but finding such a provision in existence, and that parties attached great importance to it, I have advocated its continuance, leaving separate schools to die out, not by force of legislative enactment,

but under the influence of increasingly enlightened and enlarged views of Christian relations, rights and duties between different classes in the community."The other piece of text I will leave you with is [very recent and it is the very clear position of the Canadian Civil Liberties Association \(CCLA\)](#) in a very recent public letter to Ontario's current Minister of Education Ms. Kathleen Wynne ...