



Important and Interesting Survey Results on the Public's Thoughts re One Public School System

The following text, in Arial font, is taken from the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) report entitled "MAC 207-14 One Public School System Work Group Report to the 2015 Annual Meeting of the Provincial Assembly" (AMPA). Comments by CRIPE are included in boxes and in Times New Roman font. Underlining has been added to draw your attention to important statements.

Work completed to date

The MAC 207-14 work group on the creation of a single publicly funded school system in each official language has continued its work throughout this past year. It has been guided by the belief that the prime motivation for any effort to move toward a single publicly funded system in each official language must be:

- to reinvest any savings arising from amalgamation in the education system; and
- to use such reinvestment to protect our members' work, recognizing that their work creates the high quality educational experience Ontario's students enjoy

It is interesting to learn that the "prime motivation", for an effort by OSSTF to move the government toward a single public school system, appears to be a selfish one.
However, as the survey results reveal, the Federation seems to be on the right track. See survey results on page three with regard to the effect of exemptions from religious courses and programs.

As proposed, the work group consulted a polling firm (Vector Research) to assist us with a strategy on the messaging that would best resonate with members of the public when it comes to introducing a single secular school system in both English and French. The first stage was to host focus groups of parents of children who attend the Catholic school system, both at the elementary and secondary school levels. The summary report allowed us to understand many of the motivating factors for sending children to the Catholic system.

Information from these focus group sessions allowed us to develop a quantitative survey of a broader group of parents, with children in either the public or Catholic systems, to get additional data on their respective impressions of both systems. This public opinion poll was done between July 29 and August 11, 2014. A final report has been submitted to the work group members for their review (see appendix A). In addition, messaging and arguments around moving to a single secular system were tested in the survey, giving the Work Group more reliable data to work with as we move into the next stage.

There is no doubt that, since initiating this discussion in our last

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Queen's Park lobby day, in December 2013, many voices are speaking about the possibility of altering our school governance structure in Ontario. Commentators, journalists, and political figures have mused publicly about the possibility. For example, retired MPP Greg Sorbara clearly supported this in his recently released memoir. He concludes that Ontarians must move toward the notion of one publicly funded system but highlights the political challenges associated with one single party leading a move in that direction. Charles Pascal, a former Deputy Minister of Education in the McGuinty government, recently stated that he too believes in ending public funding for Catholic education. He is quoted as saying, "Catholic educators have pioneered many innovations worthy of adoption by the public side. All good, but it is well past the time to pursue a single public system in Ontario." The near lone voices in opposition this year have been led by the Catholic School Trustees Association and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association.

Steve Paikin, the well-known TVO host of "The Agenda" blogged that while the de-funding of the Catholic system isn't on the government's agenda at this moment, he could imagine it in the near future. He writes, "...All over the province, enrolment in all four public school systems (English public, English Catholic, French public and French Catholic) is declining. More and more schools are being rendered redundant. We have increasing excess capacity in both schools and administrative buildings. Can we imagine this government saying to all four systems, "Listen, you're all operating in half empty buildings. Either you think about how you can make your collective situation more efficient, or we'll do it for you"? Yes. That conversation I can imagine.

Future work

The work group is currently considering the most appropriate campaign timelines. We must be aware of all of OSSTF/FEESO's priorities, (FEESO is the Franco Ontario affiliate.) including the fact that we are engaged in negotiations that are likely to be protracted and which will almost certainly involve public and government relations components. The work group recommends that the focus remain on lobbying decision makers and seeking allies rather than public campaigns at this time.

It was agreed that, with the assistance of Educational Services and Communications/Political Action staff, we will work on the following initiatives this year:

- Investigate the amount of money spent by each of the 4 systems to recruit and attract students to their board;
- Design lobby material to be used during our April Local lobby month. The message will promote the creation of a multi-party government task force or panel aimed at modernizing school governance and determining the opportunities for reinvestment arising from the amalgamation of systems;
- Consider avenues to promote support for student equity as a foundational aspect of a single secular System. Differences will begin to appear once the new Health and Physical Education curriculum is released;
- Hold discussions with various researchers and faculty who may be interested in authoring journal articles on the topic;
- Draft the principles to be proposed in a "Charter for Public Education", that allies may be willing to endorse;
- Begin discussions with an advertising agency, for the production of creative artwork to promote our policy; Conduct polling with representative samples of the voting public, to further refine our messages.

Recommendations:

That AMPA endorse the report of the MAC 207 Work Group.

THAT the MAC 207-14 Work Group, continue to meet in the 2015/2016 Federation year as required and provide reports to Provincial Council when appropriate;

THAT the MAC 207-14 Work Group, in consultation with the CPA committee continue to develop and distribute a lobbying plan and materials, social media messages, flyers, posters and talking points for members and local leaders.

Cost: \$100,000

Appendix A

Survey Summary

The following summary is taken from polling conducted by Vector Research between July 29 and August 11, 2014. It goes some way to indicating both challenges and opportunities in the effort to advocate for the Federation's preferred structure for publicly funded primary and secondary education.

OSSTF/FEESO efforts to create a single secular school system are not without challenges. Relatively few Ontarians are public school parents (25%). Three quarters of the population are not connected day-to-day with the public schools. Two thirds of Ontario households have no children under 18. Forging a single system will not be an urgent or important issue for many people without children in public schools. With only a quarter of the respondents in the survey having heard of a single-system proposal before the interviews for this survey, getting their attention could be difficult and costly.

Additionally, parents with children in Catholic public schools not only praise the Catholic schools, they disparage the public schools. These parents not only feel they chose a Catholic school for a Catholic education for their child but that they chose it for a *better* education. Therefore, opposition from this group is likely to be substantial.

Naturally, the top reason Catholic-public-school parents send their child to a Catholic school "instead of attending another school" is for a "Catholic education" — 45% rank a Catholic education the first or second most important reason. However, close behind among 10 reasons is that the Catholic school is close to home, presumably closer than "another school." This finding casts an interesting light on parents' commitment to the religious component of their children's schooling.

Allowing children in Catholic public schools to opt out of religious classes and other Catholic activities increases parent interest in having their children attend Catholic schools. More parents say they would be more likely to send a child to Catholic public schools if students can opt out of religious classes than say less likely. Again, this raises interesting questions about the commitment to the religious component of Catholic education as compared to perceived quality-of-education considerations.

Catholic-school parents mainly (60%) believe that allowing students in Catholic schools to opt out of Catholic modules in the curriculum "eventually" will lead to one school system "and the end of the public Catholic school system." Overall the public is evenly divided: half think opting-out will lead to the demise of the Catholic system (50%); half do not think so.

Considering the above two survey results, it appears that CRIPE's initiatives to make it easier for students to obtain an exemption are justified. CRIPE supported Oliver Erazo in his court case which resulted in a decision which left no question about the legality of the exemption process.

Thanks to Kyle Naylor, the website www.myexemption.com has been very busy. Another CRIPE initiative, to more solidly entrench the exemption process, is in the works. (See page 8.)

Most Ontarians (75%) haven't heard of a proposal to end "the current system" and replace it with one public secular school system not "connected with any religion." By 31% to 21%, Catholic-school parents are more likely than public-school parents to recall hearing about a proposal for "one public system with schools in each official language, English and French." These findings reinforce the notion that creating awareness of a proposal for a single publicly funded system in each official language will require intensive effort.

On the critical question of support for a single, secular public system, two-thirds of the public overall agrees with the idea. Among public-school parents, 74% support it; 40% of Catholic- public-school parents agree.

Supporters of the three major provincial political parties also endorse a single system (seven in 10 support it, a third "strongly"). Nearly half of Catholics overall (46%) favour a single system (but 32% strongly oppose it). Protestants overwhelming favour one system: 81% overall, 47% strongly.

Two thirds (65%) of all single-system supporters and 64% among public-school parents who support one system say they are more inclined to support a single system "because it would save money" than because they oppose "having the government fund schools connected with a religion".

Among Catholic-school parents who support one system, saving the government money is the reason for 85% of them. Saving the government money "over time" is not only the more powerful argument among single-system supporters, it also convinces more than a third of one-system opponents (36%) to say they might change their mind ("if you were sure by having one school system instead of two would save the province money").

The argument that rallies single-system proponents is saving money. Among one-system opponents, one third say they might change their mind if they were sure that having one system would save the province money.

Catholic-school supporters may be persuaded to support a single, secular system if it's a means to an end — **better schools for their children** — not an end in itself or a strategy to save money. The better argument — the message that resonates with Catholics, Catholic-public-school parents, and non-school-parents, **is better education for our children — Great Schools for All Your Kids.**

The above result supports the OSSTF's aim for moving to one school system, that is: "...the prime motivation ... to move toward a single publicly-funded system must be:"

- to reinvest any savings arising from amalgamation in the education system; and
- to use such reinvestment to protect our members' work, recognizing that their work creates the high quality educational experience Ontario's students enjoy.

The Liberals swept the Catholic vote in the June election, winning 43% of the votes among Catholics (17 points ahead of the NDP and the PCs). Among Catholic public school parents the Liberals won 38%, essentially the same share as the party's percentage of the overall vote. For a third of the voters a provincial party's policy or a candidate's position on funding Catholic schools would determine their vote. For a 66% majority, however, whether to fund the Catholic schools isn't a ballot-box question.

Naturally, funding the Catholic schools is a much more important political matter for Catholic-school parents: 59% of them say party policies on Catholic-school funding would affect how they vote.

Few people across the province expect most Catholics would accept an end to funding for Catholic schools without a fight. However, cracks in Catholic solidarity appear. Persons of colour who have children in the Catholic system are noticeably less likely than other Catholic-school parents to feel "most Catholics" will fight a withdrawal of government funding from the Catholic schools.

What if the government ends funding for the Catholic system? Where will Catholic parents enroll their children? Seven out of 10 households with children in the public Catholic system might send a child to a Catholic school that charges tuition ("assuming you could afford it"), according to the July 29-August 11 survey.

The survey also asked parents who would pay to send a child to a Catholic school (or who answered they're "not sure") how much they would spend, as a way to measure conviction. Respondents stated a wide range of fees with a 34% plurality naming a figure under \$500 a year. These findings suggest OSSTF/FEESO must remain conscious of crafting a message that emphasizes quality of education in order to maintain enrolment but, given the unrealistically low tuition fee figure cited by the plurality, should not act from fear.

Taken in sum, then, these survey results help to indicate some of the paths an OSSTF/FEESO campaign to promote our policy goals should take. It is gratifying that our position articulated at the outset, that savings arising from structural changes should be reinvested in quality education, has been supported by the polling results. Work will continue, with due consideration given to other Federation priorities, to construct a message that is most likely to contribute to the realization of our policy goals.

Background to exemptions from religious courses and programs in publicly-funded Roman Catholic high schools

The funding history and exemption process is best covered in an article by a prominent Roman Catholic school supporter.
 "Catholics Caught in a Bind"
 by Robert Dixon.

"... The change came when Premier William Davis in 1984 announced that the Ontario legislature would be completing the separate school system to the end of high school. No longer would Grades 10 to 13 be privately funded. They would be under the jurisdiction of separate school boards. Prior to his announcement, Davis met with representatives of the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops (OCCB) to convey several conditions. One of them was that there should be universal access to publicly funded Catholic high schools for children of both public and separate school supporters. OCCB's education officer, Msgr. Kenneth Robitaille, and an expert on separate school matters, Fr. Raymond Durocher, prepared for the bishops a commentary in response to Davis' proposal. With regard to open access for students, they wrote that that requirement did not make sense because the highest court in the land had described a separate school as one characterized by a class of people united by one faith, by trustees elected by these people, by teachers of the same faith selected by the trustees, by programs controlled by the trustees which reflect the tenets of the faith,

and by pupils of the same faith. In other words, separate school trustees have a constitutional right to admit only Catholics to their schools and to accept a non-Catholic student only on an exceptional basis. Section H - Resource Material 6. Nevertheless, the OCCB decided to accept the premier's condition. In a public statement and a pastoral guideline, the bishops expressed their assurance that the arrangements required with reference to the admission of non-Catholic pupils could be made without endangering the Catholic character of the Catholic high schools. They also expressed the concept that the admission of non-Catholic students was congruent with the ecumenical mission of the Catholic school. By the time the Ontario legislature considered Bill 30 on funding for Catholic high schools, there was a minority government under Liberal Premier David Peterson. His minister of education, Scan Conway, presented legislation which provided for non-Catholic students who needed to attend a Catholic high school for reasons of special programs or geographical accessibility, or who simply wished to enroll in a Catholic high school. Students attending the school out of necessity would be exempted from religious education. The others would have to apply for exemp-

tion to the separate board, which could grant or refuse the request. Furthermore, admission of non-Catholics would be subject to the availability of space. After first reading of Bill 30, the legislation was referred to the standing committee on social development. The Committee's New Democratic Party and Progressive Conservative members objected to the space limitation to open access and to the trustees' power to grant or refuse exemption from religious education classes and asked that these clauses be removed from the bill. Conway realized that refusal to accede to their demands could result in the defeat of the bill at second reading — the PCs and NDP constituted a majority of the legislature. **The final version of Bill 30 provided that any child of a public or separate school supporter could attend a Catholic high school and that no child of a public school supporter would be required to take part in any program or course of study in religious education where a parent or guardian applied in writing to the Catholic school board for exemption."**

The above is taken from the following website where more background material is available.

<http://www.myexemption.com/History.html>

An Open Letter to Kathleen Wynne

By Aviva Rubin

a "...Toronto-based writer of all sorts of stuff..."

Reprinted with permission. <http://nothinginmoderation.ca/about-aviva-rubin>

Dear Kathleen,

I'm sorry I was so quick to imply that you were unlikely to take on the fight to end the too-long entrenched, unnecessary, and costly funding of two school board systems in Ontario.

Everything I know about you so far tells me you are thoughtful, smart, conciliatory and someone who will stand up to injustice. As a woman and an out lesbian you have already defied the public opinion that suggested this province was not ready for you.

When marginalized people step into positions of power it's hard for them to make decisions that may be ethically right but risk votes and accusations of being *that left-wing black guy who crushed our God-given right to own assault rifles to play with at shooting ranges and, ohya, protect ourselves*. Directly following the joy I felt when Obama was inaugurated in 2009, was the understanding that never in American history did a president have so far to fall, with everyone watching, and so many hoping he would fail.

So I understand that confronting such a fraught issue head-on is a

hard thing to do. But you are no longer the Minister of Education. You are the ultimate decision maker, the Premier, who is currently facing harsh economic decisions and a labour dispute with teachers that is hacking away all the richness from our children's education and deeply souring their experience. I know. I'm the mom of two young boys, and I've watched them lose many things they love to this fight.

All this, we are told, is a matter of scarce financial resources that the Government wants to ensure go into the classroom and not into teachers' salaries and benefits. (A distinction I find flawed, but that's another article.) Has no one considered the exorbitant cost of managing two huge bureaucracies, one of which is religiously-based, dogma-driven and thus exclusionary?

One of the comments on my last article suggested that Mr. Erazo stop wasting taxpayer money forcing the Catholic school system to legally defend itself, and just put his kids in public school. As I already said, they are in public school — the really good one, in their neighbourhood. But I agree that the Catholic board

shouldn't have to waste public funds defending itself.

And much as I'd like them to, they don't have to change church dogma on homosexuality or reproductive choice. But knowing who they are, knowing what they believe, knowing Catholics are no longer at risk of religious persecution in this province, how can we continue to think it's acceptable to use public money to educate children according to Catholic beliefs?

So here you are at the helm of this brilliantly diverse province, a woman, and a lesbian, who, it is worth noting, could never be at the helm of anything in the Catholic church, with the power to do something about this.

Don't let us down Kathleen. If they could do it in Catholic Quebec, we can do it here. Don't fall back on empty political rationales like the Constitution Act or the will of the people. Do the right thing. Rip off the Band-Aid. I believe the majority in this province, some Catholics included, will rise to support you.

With hope for the future,

Aviva Rubin

OECTA and the further destruction of Catholic education

From "Catholic Insight" Mar. 2014

<http://catholicinsight.com/oecta-and-the-gay-pride-parade>

In a move that can only elicit shock and anger in faithful Catholics, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association (OECTA) has announced they will march in the WorldPride Parade in Toronto this year after a motion was passed at OECTA's recent annual general meeting. A rationale attached to the motion reads:

"Registering for, and marching in the WorldPride Parade is a visible symbol of solidarity with one of the most marginalized groups in the Catholic community." Thank you to LifeSiteNews for bringing this scandal to our attention.

This move is a blatant assault on the Catholic Church from the very people who are supposed to be teaching our children about the Faith. In truth, no one should be surprised at this development because our Catholic schools are not really Catholic at all.

This latest development continues the meteoric destruction of publicly-funded Catholic schools in Ontario. The seed of this latest affront can be traced back to the introduction of the religious textbooks currently used in Catholic primary and secondary schools. The *Born in the Spirit* textbooks used in primary schools are woefully negligent in teaching the fundamentals of the Catholic Faith. The *Fully Alive* family life program, a euphemism for sex education class, does not teach modesty and chastity but contributes to the desensitization of our children in sexual matters. The textbooks used in high school are no better. In grade eleven, our children learn about world religions when they don't even know about their own. In

the primary and secondary grades, most teachers teach their personal interpretation of the Faith instead of faithfully teaching the Magisterial teachings of the Catholic Church.

Furthermore in 2013, Gay-Straight Alliance clubs were introduced by our Catholic school boards. The supposed reason for the GSAs is to stop bullying of homosexual students. While bullying of any student, including homosexual students, is sinful, GSAs by their very nature advocate the acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle. That is unacceptable in a Catholic school.

It's time for faithful Catholics to take back our Catholic schools. Publicly-funded Catholic schools are broken beyond repair. The rot has reached to the core. It's time to establish parochial schools that are authentically Catholic.

Our bishops need to take a stronger position in the religious education of Ontario's children. Concerned Catholics need to be able to look to the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario, lead by His Eminence Thomas Cardinal Collins (President), to ensure that our children are properly formed in Catholic teachings.

End the secularization of Catholic schools. End the widespread dissension that is destroying the faith of our children. We must speak up and defend the Faith. We must be a unified force for Truth and the future of Catholic education.

Catholic schools on slow march to extinction

An excerpt from "The Standard" of St. Catherines, an opinion column by Grant LaFleche Sept. 2014.

<http://www.stcatherinesstandard.ca/2014/09/05/catholic-schools-on-slow-march-to-extinction>

Catholic schools are increasingly under pressure to wake up and join the 21st century. Kept alive by the dusty British North America Act, they are rapidly losing relevance and keep ending up on the wrong side of high profile issues.

A growing number of parents, whose children go to a Catholic school largely because it is the closest, or only, public school within reach, don't want their children taking Catholic dogma classes. They understandably would rather their kids stayed focused on academics.

Catholic school boards, as you might expect, don't agree.

In April, the courts told the schools that students can be exempt if their parents wish it.

The Catholic boards reacted by jumping into bed, pulling their blankets over their heads and pretended the court ruling doesn't exist.

They're trying to get around the court ruling by using a half-baked argument that if you selected to support Catholic schools on your property taxes, you cannot exempt your kid from religious classes.

Apparently, they forgot the old system of paying for separate schools through property taxes died in 1980.

Catholic schools are paid for by the Ministry of Education using general tax revenues. Which is why the argument "If you don't want to attend Catholic classes, don't go to a Catholic school," is a completely impotent one. If these schools were privately funded, like every other sectarian school in Ontario, that argument would work. But they are not. Hence the court ruling.

No one is saying they cannot have their religion classes, they just cannot force students to take them. Such is the price of accepting public dollars.

WHO WE ARE

Civil Rights in Public Education, Inc. is an organization composed of citizens of differing backgrounds, living in more than 155 communities across Ontario, committed to one strong public education system, which offers neither privilege nor prejudice to anyone.

OUR AIMS ARE

- To serve as advocates for civil rights in public education so that the public is informed about the issue of publicly-funded separate schools.
- To hasten the day when Ontario's education policy recognizes the dignity and worth of all children, their right to equality, and their right to freedom from religious discrimination.

**OUR LOGO**

Our logo is composed of a background scroll representing the charters of rights which guarantee fundamental freedoms to all individuals; the numeral "1" signifies equality and social unity in one public education system for each official language; the flame above is the universal symbol for freedom.

Major Initiative In The Works

It is of considerable interest to us, that the survey undertaken through Vector Research (results on pages 1 through 4) by the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, has revealed that CRIPE is on the right track. That track is our efforts to weaken the publicly-funded Roman Catholic school system through our efforts to widen the adoption of exemptions from religious courses and programs by students in the high schools of that system. See page 3 immediately above the box.

To continue along this line, CRIPE has embarked on a project to increase the acceptance of exemption requests by Roman Catholic separate high schools. By making exemptions easier to obtain, we feel that more students will opt for an education in the publicly-funded Roman Catholic high schools and therefore detrimentally affect 1) the membership of OSSTF and 2) the number of students in the Public school system. Such a result will encourage OSSTF and the Public School Boards to act in such a way as to support our aim—the elimination of public funds to the R.C. separate school system.

This initiative is only made possible by the efforts of many CRIPE associates, but in particular, Oliver Erazo and Kyle Naylor. A delay in our progress was necessitated when our lawyer dropped the ball at a critical time. We will be asking for major donations in 2016 to support this initiative.

A Thought to Consider

Throughout history,
no major change for the better
was ever brought about by a majority.

It has always been
the work of a determined few.

Tom Harpur, columnist.

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**ABOVE ALL WE MUST MAKE SURE THAT NO CITIZEN OF
ONTARIO, NOW, OR EVER IN THE FUTURE, IS PRIVILEGED
OR DISADVANTAGED PUBLICLY BECAUSE OF HIS/HER
FAITH, OR ABSENCE OF FAITH.**