



Education Equality in Ontario

P.O. Box 11117, Stn H, Ottawa, ON, K2H 7T8

February 2, 2007

Dear School Council Members:

My name is Leonard Baak. I am writing to you on behalf of Education Equality in Ontario to seek your support in the initiative to build a stronger, non-discriminatory school system for *all* Ontario children. We are a non-governmental human rights organization and education advocacy group that seeks the merger of Ontario's public and separate school systems into a single, secular, school system for each official language (one English, one French).

We are writing you today to ask for your help. Please give our appeal your serious consideration. Our organization is participating in a petition campaign to pressure the Ontario Government to end the discrimination and costly duplication in our school system. Full details on the campaign, including a document explaining the petition in detail, are available at www.OneSchoolSystem.org/petition.html. We are hoping to write to every public school council in the province, asking that they join us in what we are calling our "10 x 10" plan.

The "10 x 10" plan involves getting school councils to find at least 10 people who will obtain at least 10 signatures each for the petition (at least 100 signatures per school community). That is a very modest and achievable goal. Polling has consistently shown that most Ontarians – even many Ontario Catholics¹ – support one school system. Between spouse, friends, relatives, and colleagues, most people can obtain 10 signatures for this petition in very little time and with very little effort.

We are also looking for local petition organizers and those who might be interested in forming a local group similar to our own (see www.OneSchoolSystem.org). Please let us know if you can help. Complementary new organizations will help our cause enormously, adding to the chorus calling for change.

The unnecessary duplication in our school system is a financial millstone that should have been removed long ago. That costly duplication is a significant contributor to the annual school board funding crises that threaten the viability or even the existence of programs and facilities of great value to the communities they serve. For the sake of all Ontario children, it cannot be allowed to continue.

It is also time to end the discrimination that sees members of a single *non-disadvantaged* faith group enjoying greater choice in publicly-funded education and related employment opportunities. Until grade 9, only Catholic Ontarians are guaranteed a choice of publicly-funded schools offering the provincial curriculum. Similarly, only Catholic Ontarians are guaranteed consideration for publicly-funded teaching positions in the separate school system. That unjustifiable discrimination offends the dignity of all non-Catholic Ontarians and puts Canada in violation of its international human rights obligations.

Recent constitutional history has seen both Quebec and Newfoundland eliminate denominational schools and move to a single public school system in the interests of equality and fiscal responsibility. Both provinces had constitutional obligations to provide denominational schools similar to Ontario's. Both eliminated those obligations through a simple bilateral agreement with the Federal Government alone. Manitoba eliminated denominational schools unilaterally in 1890, despite a constitutional obligation to provide them *virtually identical* to Ontario's. Both the bilateral and unilateral mechanisms for change are open to Ontario.

¹ Vector Research polls conducted in 2001 and 2005 found that approximately half of Ontario Catholics support a single public school system. See www.OneSchoolSystem.org/fast_facts.html for more information.

One school system will put an end to the discrimination that characterizes our school system and will help to alleviate the financial challenges facing our school boards. One school system will facilitate the creation of additional non-exclusive education options such as arts, technical, and sports programs – options that are open to all children without discrimination. One school system will reduce average bus commutes and result in more students walking to school. One school system will also enable school boards to rationalize their inventory of seriously under-enrolled schools in a manner that minimizes the impact to the communities they serve. That rationalization is coming whether we like it or not, but by merging under-enrolled public and separate schools, many communities now facing the total loss of their school will be spared that eventuality. Such merged schools will operate more cost-effectively than those they replaced; creating more savings that will add to the possibilities for program enhancements.

It is time to rethink the place of religion in Ontario's publicly-funded schools. The religious segregation of Ontario school children results in de facto racial and ethnic segregation². Religious schools are also inherently exclusive in nature (discriminating against students and teachers on prohibited grounds) and as such properly belong outside of the publicly-funded system. Full or substantial public funding of religious schools will encourage an exodus from the public system, undermining its role in promoting tolerance and respect between Ontarians of different backgrounds by increasing the segregation of Ontario children. Such segregation can only contribute to the marginalization and isolation of minorities within our society. Multiculturalism should mean respectful and mutually enriching engagement, not physically separate development. It is time to stop the fragmentation of our school system and to reverse that which we already have.

More information on the arguments supporting one school system can be found in the enclosed pamphlet and on our web site, particularly in two presentations summarizing the financial and ethical arguments supporting one system:

1. www.OneSchoolSystem.org/documents/Justice2006.pdf
2. www.OneSchoolSystem.org/documents/Finance2006.pdf

School councils have a government mandated advisory role and are entitled to advise their principals and their school board on *any* matter. The current government, more so than any in recent memory, has been very active in soliciting parental input and comment on the education system and related government policies. Please take your advisory role seriously. Join us in speaking out in favour of a single, secular, public school system for each official language. Join us in demanding better stewardship of the funding committed to the education of our children and in demanding religious neutrality from our government. As a council and individually, write to the Premier and to the Minister of Education requesting a move to one school system. Ask the parents in your school communities and your public school trustees for their support in the one school system initiative.

Let's show our government that there is a strong desire to protect what we have, to restore what we've lost, and to improve the quality of our public schools for all Ontario children.

Thank you for your consideration.



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² 2001 Census data (Statistics Canada) revealed that the members of most visible minorities are far more likely to be non-Catholic than Catholic and the members of two such minorities are far more likely to be Catholic. In general, the rate of adherence to different religions by different racial and ethnic groups is not uniform. Racial and ethnic segregation is thus an inescapable consequence of segregating children by religion.