



Education Equality in Ontario OneSchoolSystem.org

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Member, One School System Network

News Release

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Constitutional cop-out: Constitution no obstacle to amalgamation of Ontario's public and Catholic school systems

Ottawa, February 16, 2012 – The Constitution presents no real obstacle to the amalgamation of Ontario's public and Catholic school systems, say the directors of Education Equality in Ontario.

The directors of Education Equality in Ontario were still in a state of disbelief today at the absence of any mention of the overlap and duplication in the Ontario school system in the report of the Commission on the Reform of Ontario's Public Services. "It is incredible that a commission that was tasked with identifying 'areas of overlap and duplication that could be eliminated to save taxpayer dollars' could fail to comment on four public school systems serving overlapping territories", said chairman Geraint Jones.

"It was interesting and perhaps telling that rather than answer a question about that omission himself, Drummond passed the ball to fellow Commission member Dominic Giroux, a former Assistant Deputy Minister of Education and a well known advocate of Catholic separate schools", said president Leonard Baak. "Why would he do that? Was Giroux primarily responsible for the omission – and Drummond uncomfortable in being party to it? It certainly deserves an explanation."

In defending the omission, Giroux explained that the Commission had no mandate to address constitutional guarantees and therefore the Commission did not consider the idea of ending funding to the separate school system. "Nonsense", said Baak. "Even Premier McGuinty indicated that Drummond was not forbidden from making that recommendation – only that he would ignore it if he did." "So why didn't he at least make the recommendation?" wondered Baak, "Is there any greater or more obvious area of overlap and duplication in Ontario? They obviously didn't fail to notice it. The omission was calculated and deliberate."

"It is becoming increasingly common knowledge that Ontario's constitutional 'obligation' to fund Catholic separate schools is largely illusory", said Jones, "as it can be removed very quickly or can even be ignored."

Constitutional provisions notwithstanding, religiously segregated school systems like Ontario's have now been eliminated in Quebec (1997), Newfoundland and Labrador (1998), and Manitoba (1890). Denominational school rights in the Constitution were rescinded quickly by Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador through a straightforward bilateral agreement with Ottawa ([Section 43](#) of the [Constitution Act, 1982](#) provides the necessary bilateral amendment mechanism). Manitoba eliminated denominational school unilaterally, despite a Constitutional "obligation" to provide them that reads almost identically to Ontario's. Ontario could take either path to fiscally responsible education reform.

"The Commission's recommendations for cuts and restraint in our truly essential services imply a great deal of hardship for Ontarians regardless of their faith", said Baak, "It would be a great tragedy to enact these recommendations while costly and completely unnecessary duplication in education was allowed to continue."

"It is time for politicians to revisit Ontario's oldest sacred cow", said Jones "It shouldn't be too much to ask that government distinguish between our truly essential programs and those like religious school funding that are not essential at all. With Ontario's finances as they are, religious school funding for a single favoured faith is a frivolity we can no longer afford."

About Education Equality in Ontario

Education Equality in Ontario is a non-governmental human rights organization and education advocacy group. We seek the elimination of religious discrimination and duplication in the Ontario school system through the establishment of a single publicly-funded school system for each official language (English and French).

Reference (McGuinty comments):

Maria Babbage, "[Premier McGuinty untroubled by accusations that he's not a good Catholic](#)", Winnipeg Free Press, 12 Dec 2011.

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