

***A Brief to the Commission on the Reform of
Ontario's Public Services***

November 21, 2011



**Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association**



Ontario Catholic School
Trustees' Association

OUR MISSION

Inspired by the Gospel, we provide leadership, service and a provincial voice for Catholic School Boards in promoting and protecting Catholic education.

OUR VISION

In keeping with our Mission, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association:

OPERATIONAL VALUES

- **Embodies** and promotes the values and traditions of our Catholic faith in all Association activities.
- **Respects** the principles of democratic and accountable governance.

POLITICAL ADVOCACY

- **Protects** the constitutional right of the Catholic community to govern, control and manage Catholic schools.
- **Promotes** education in our province that reflects the Catholic principles of social justice.
- **Advocates** for government recognition of the distinctive nature of Catholic education.
- **Advocates** for provincial policy, legislation and funding support that enable Catholic boards to provide quality Catholic education.
- **Influences** the strategic and political direction of the Ontario government and opposition parties regarding issues that impact Catholic education.

INFORMATION & SERVICES

- **Provides** faith formation and professional development resources and opportunities for its members.
- **Provides** to member boards information and services that recognize their diverse circumstances and needs.

COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLIC RELATIONS

- **Develops** effective structures that enhance communication and working relationships among OCSTA and its member boards.
- **Communicates** with member Boards and Catholic partners regarding relevant educational issues and OCSTA activities.
- **Promotes** public understanding of and support for Catholic education.
- **Celebrates** and **highlights** Catholic education's significant and continuing contribution to Ontario society.

PARTNERSHIPS

- **Stimulates** ongoing visioning of how Catholic education partners can collaborate to serve the interests of Catholic education.
- **Builds** significant partnerships within and beyond the Catholic community in support of Catholic education.

INTRODUCTION

The Ontario Catholic Trustees Association (OCSTA) is the provincial voice for all 29 English Catholic School Boards in Ontario. Approximately 600,000 students attend Catholic schools in this province.

The Catholic school system is an integral part of the four system approach to publicly funded elementary and secondary education in Ontario.

Catholic education in Ontario has denominational rights that are enshrined in the Canadian Constitution and the Canadian Bill of Rights. In the exercise of those rights, Catholic School Boards are careful not to act in ways that would neither diminish the quality of those rights nor fail to support the distinctive educational mission and vision of Catholic education. At the same time, Catholic school boards operate in a manner that is characterized by financial efficiency, transparency and accountability.

The denominational character of Catholic education is to be found in all aspects of what occurs in the school day. It is not restricted to a period of religious studies.

The funding of education in Ontario makes no special provision for the costs that are associated with delivering educational programs that are denominational in character. The curriculum expectations of the Ministry of Education are fully met within the context of curriculum documents that are specifically tailored by the Catholic community for the delivery of education in Catholic schools.

OCSTA thanks the Commission for this opportunity to make submissions. OCSTA has chosen to indicate some of the ways in which our member boards collaborate with other entities to deliver the most efficient and effective public services possible. The sharing of services among institutions is often seen as one of the most effective means of achieving efficiencies and cost savings. In fact, sharing services can be an efficient and effective way of operating, as long as certain principles are respected in the sharing arrangements. In the sections that follow we will demonstrate that it is possible to take a principled approach to the sharing of services and produce a sizeable array of arrangements -- some quite inventive -- that display a judicious use of financial resources on the part of Catholic School Boards.

Catholic School Boards take pride in the many ways in which they have achieved cost savings, including by developing a broad variety of collaborative arrangements with other entities. The purpose of this submission is two-fold: 1) to specify some of the principles that Catholic School Boards consider when deciding whether to enter into specific sharing arrangements; and 2) to provide information about and examples of the scope of the sharing arrangements that are extant today.

All Catholic School Boards in Ontario are involved in transportation consortia that have been mandated by the Ministry of Education. Many school boards entered into these arrangements voluntarily and before they were required to do so; a minority were compelled into these arrangements by Ministry policy. We will have nothing further to say about these arrangements.

All of the collaborative arrangements discussed in the rest of this submission have been entered into voluntarily with “partners” who identified a mutuality of interests and a spirit of cooperation on which strong and lasting relationships might be created.

PRINCIPLES ON WHICH SHARING SHOULD BE BASED

1. Catholic identity and character of schools and the school board must be maintained.
2. The denominational rights of Catholic schools and school boards must be respected.
3. Each board must maintain the authority to determine which sharing arrangements, if any, it wishes to make and with whom.
4. Each board must maintain the authority to determine and implement local policies about service and standards.
5. Any provincial policy for sharing of services must include sufficient flexibility as to allow school boards to respond to local circumstances and needs.
6. The important work and valuable contribution of all staff employed by boards must be acknowledged and respected.
7. Initiatives with respect to shared services must result in cost efficiencies or improvements in service, at no extra cost, for all entities involved.
8. The right to withdraw from a shared service arrangement must be included as part of mechanisms to resolve disputes.

NOTE:

In keeping with the application of these principles, it follows that there are some types of sharing that are not suitable for sharing between Catholic and non-Catholic entities. They include the following: administration, budgeting and finance, Director and Superintendents, religious education and other educational programs, certified staff (principals, teachers), supervision of instructional programs and daily operation of schools, instructional services and classes.

TYPES OF SHARING ARRANGEMENTS

Six types of sharing or collaborative arrangements are identified: three types of third party arrangements; collaboration among two or more Catholic School Boards; collaboration on a contractual basis with one or more secular entities e. g., coterminous school boards, municipalities, hospitals, colleges, universities and community agencies; and certain collaborative arrangements that are less formal, usually ongoing, but sometimes *ad hoc*.

Third Party Arrangements

The three types of third party arrangements are the following.

1. Third party arrangements that are established, directly or indirectly, by Catholic School Boards themselves to meet needs that are specific to Catholic Boards. They may not be third party in the sense of a high level of independence from their membership, but they have their own organizational structure and are financed in different fashions by their members -- Catholic School Boards.
2. Third party arrangements that have been established to meet specific needs of all School Boards that may wish to participate in the programs and/or services offered on a regional or provincial level.
3. Third party arrangements that offer programs or services to school Boards as well as to other sectors of the community including, but not restricted to, municipalities/townships, colleges and universities and other community agencies.

Non-third party collaboration

1. Collaborative arrangements among two or more Catholic school boards that allow them to share programs or services, particularly those that are considered to be denominational in character.
2. Collaborative arrangements, that may be contractually based, between a Catholic school Board and one or more other entities that may include coterminous school boards, but are not restricted to them.
3. Collaborative arrangements between a Catholic school board and one or more other entities that may include its coterminous school boards, but are not restricted to them, where there is not sharing of staff, but where leadership is shared back and forth with respect to various activities, such as purchasing activities. In some instances coterminous boards come together on a regular basis to discuss and share best practices about various types of board operations.

EXAMPLES OF THE VARIOUS TYPES OF SHARING

Providing a list of all of the instances in which Catholic school boards are involved in shared service arrangements would take more time and space than is now available. Instead we will provide a number of examples of the intensity and scope of the different types of sharing arrangements outlined above. This should aid the Commission to develop an understanding that Catholic School Boards have provided good stewardship of the funding provided to them by the Province of Ontario. We trust that these examples will clearly illustrate, for the Commission, the good stewardship Catholic school boards have exercised over the funding, in this case by seeking out a variety of partnerships that produce a laudable range of efficiencies and/or service enhancements.

“THIRD PARTY” ARRANGEMENTS FOR DENOMINATIONALLY SPECIFIC NEEDS

Catholic school boards in Ontario all belong to the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association. The Association provides a broad range of services to its member boards with respect to the protection and promotion of Catholic Education. It is involved in such things as making representation to the Ministry of Education about programs, services and funding. It develops resources for such endeavours as Catholic Education Week and the professional development of Catholic Trustees. It also serves as the “hub” of links among Catholic educational organizations. Through their membership in OCSTA, Catholic School Boards are involved in the Institute for Catholic Education, whose founding partners were OCSTA, the Ontario Conference of Catholic Bishops and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, and nationally in the Canadian Catholic School Trustees' Association. Catholic School Boards have created and participate in a network of regionally based Catholic Curriculum Cooperatives, which develop curriculum documents for Catholic school boards, facilitating the delivery of the provincial curriculum from a perspective that is grounded in Catholic teachings and theology.

THIRD PARTY ARRANGEMENTS FOR ALL SCHOOL BOARDS

Ontario School Boards' Insurance Exchange (OSBIE)

The *Education Act* requires that school boards carry liability insurance. In the mid 1980s all of the small number of providers of such insurance notified school boards that they would soon stop offering such coverage. In response, school boards inventively worked together to form the Ontario School Board Insurance Exchange (OSBIE), which is now in its 25th year. Essentially school boards agreed to share risk in the context of an insurance reciprocal that not only allowed them to meet the requirement of the *Education Act*, but in many cases to pay less for liability coverage that they were previously paying. All school boards in Ontario obtain service from OSBIE, which now offers insurance coverage that goes beyond general liability insurance to property, boiler/machinery, employee crime and fleet automobile coverage.

Ontario Education Services Corporation (OESC)

The Ontario Education Services Corporation (OESC) was founded in 2002 for the specific purpose of reducing the cost to school boards of obtaining legally mandated police record checks of employees, volunteers and other persons involved in schools. Almost all Ontario school boards obtain services from OESC. OESC services include the School Energy Coalition that intervenes on behalf of its members at tribunals where rate increases have been sought for electricity and natural gas. As of 31 August, 2011 the Coalition had saved about \$88 million over the previous eight years. Among the other services provided to school boards by OESC are professional development materials for school trustees.

Catholic School Boards Services Association (CSBSA)

The Catholic School Boards Services Association (CSBSA) has over 50 partners that jointly purchase energy as well as a range of other goods and services.

Northern Ontario Education Leaders (NOEL) & Eastern Ontario Staff Development Network (EOSDN)

In some cases the cooperatives are regional. For example, Northern Ontario Education Leaders (NOEL) has a prominent history of service. It is a non-profit organization comprised of the leaders of educational organizations from eight regions in Northwestern Ontario. It serves as a collaborative forum where directors, principals, teachers, and school board staff can discuss

issues of common concern, develop projects and optimize budget resources. NOEL is composed of educational leaders from the following School Boards: Keewatin-Patricia, Kenora Catholic, Lakehead, Rainy River, Superior-Greenstone, Superior North Catholic, Northwest Catholic and Thunder Bay Catholic.

Another regional cooperative is the Eastern Ontario Staff Development Network (EOSDN). It is a consortium of eastern Ontario District School Boards and the Faculty of Education at Queen's University. Catholic boards particularly use those consortium services that provide professional development and collegial sharing for administrative personnel. The consortium is comprised of five Catholic School Boards, four secular school Boards and Queen's University.

THIRD PARTY PROVIDERS NOT RESTRICTED TO SCHOOL BOARD "CLIENTS"

Throughout the province there exist purchasing cooperatives that serve, with varying memberships, school boards, municipalities, hospitals, colleges and universities as well as other community agencies. Many of these cooperatives purchase various forms of energy at prices that could not be obtained without the very large bulk purchases that the cooperative makes possible. Various supplies that are commonly used, such as paper, are also purchased in bulk at levels and prices that no individual institution could match. Among these cooperatives, of which Catholic school boards are members, are the following: Cooperative Purchasing Services of Waterloo Region; Golden Horseshoe Gas Consortium; Grand River Purchasing Cooperative; Halton Cooperative Purchasing Group; Ontario Education Collaborative Marketplace; School Board Cooperative, Inc. (SBCI); and York Purchasing Cooperative.

CATHOLIC BOARDS: SERVICES THAT ARE DENOMINATIONAL IN CHARACTER

Catholic Boards have, at times, shared with a neighboring English Catholic or French Catholic board the services of one or more Catholic Supervisory Officers and Religion and Family Life Coordinators. Social workers and youth workers have also been shared on occasion.

CATHOLIC BOARDS AND SMALL NUMBER OF OTHER ENTITIES (CONTRACTUAL)

There exists in this province an enormous variety of arrangements where Catholic school boards share certain services with their coterminous school boards on a contractual basis. There are many examples of joint agreements with respect to certain maintenance services, such as information technology, plumbing, electrical work and specific types of repairs. Some major, one-of-a-kind purchases are also done jointly, such as the purchase of a Wide Area Network that may serve two or more school boards.

Many Catholic school boards have reciprocal agreements with their municipalities where the municipality looks after the maintenance of playing fields in exchange for being able to use those facilities when not used by the schools.

There are instances where Catholic school boards have shared with their coterminous boards some positions such as Aboriginal Liaison Officer and Full Day Kindergarten Coordinator.

Some coterminous boards share persons or firms that assist with the development and/or defence of Education Development Charges.

Some arrangements are unusual, but display the ingenuity with which school boards find partners and come to mutually beneficial solutions. A small Catholic board in Eastern Ontario has partnered with the local Children's Aid Society to share an Internet tower.

CATHOLIC BOARDS AND SMALL NUMBER OF OTHER ENTITIES (NON-ONTRACTUAL)

There exists a wide array of arrangements that have been developed between Catholic School Boards and their coterminous boards to share information and expertise with respect to parts of various operations. On some items one board may take the leadership, while on a different item or topic a different board may assume leadership. In that way both boards reduce the duplication that might otherwise occur. It is of interest to note that these types of sharing arrangements are to be found among larger boards as well as among smaller and medium size boards.

A number of Boards have cooperative arrangements with government ministries, e. g., Ministry of Community and Youth Services and Ministry of Government Services.

A NOTE ABOUT PAYROLL

No Catholic School Board is involved in a sharing arrangement that involves payroll. Some boards have, at various times and in various places, initiated discussions to do so. In each case, discussions terminated without a sharing arrangement being reached. One or both potential partners concluded that there were too many issues to address to make sharing feasible. Among these issues are the following: lack of confidence that all partners could actually achieve savings in costs or improvements in service; difficulties in reaching suitable funding arrangements; ability to respond quickly and effectively with local needs and circumstances; and concerns over confidentiality and security of information

CONCLUSIONS

We hope that the Commission will reach at least six conclusions from the information provided above.

1. Catholic School Boards in Ontario have articulated specific principles upon which various types of sharing should take place.
2. Those principles do not appear to have been obstacles to finding partners or developing a broad array of sharing arrangements with many different community, regional and provincial partners.
3. Some types of sharing are highly similar across a broad cross-section of Catholic school boards; e. g., liability insurance through OSBIE; moderating energy prices through participating in the OESC School Energy Coalition; and production of curriculum documents by participating in Catholic Curriculum Cooperatives. The extent and types of sharing are not the same for all School Boards and not all boards share with the same types of partners; some share purchasing with coterminous boards, others share some purchasing as part of much broader purchasing cooperatives. Each sharing arrangement is one that meets the needs of that school board and its partner(s) and that is the reason why it continues to exist.
4. The fact that all of the partnerships and sharing arrangements mentioned above have developed voluntarily and, in many cases, have been in place for quite some time suggests that voluntary arrangements are to be preferred and compulsory ones eschewed.
5. Protection of the denominational character of their system has not kept Catholic school boards from developing a broad range of relationships that have resulted in efficiencies in many parts of their operations and enhancement of services in others.
6. The record of past achievements with respect to sharing and cooperation offers reason to be optimistic that Catholic school boards will in the future conduct themselves with an eye to developing mutually advantageous routines of collaboration with a broad range of partners. Their commitment to sound stewardship of the resources entrusted to them manifests itself in their pursuit of efficiency, transparency and accountability.

Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association
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2011-2012

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