Join in the celebration of Catholic education in Ontario – a proven success for 175 years.

Spread the good news about your Catholic school.

For more information about Catholic schools in your community, please contact your local Catholic school board. A directory of Catholic boards is available online at: **www.ocsta.on.ca**

175 Years of Success

Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association

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Ontario's Publicly Funded Catholic Schools

Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association

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A Long History

Catholic schools have been educating students in mind, body and spirit in Ontario since before the birth of the province. For 175 years, they have provided educational excellence within a school culture imbued with the Gospel values of Jesus Christ. Publicly funded Catholic education has been the foundation for millions of students to develop their full spiritual, academic, physical and social potential.

Ontario's Catholic schools go back as far as the 1600s. A formal system was established in 1841, and the Scott Act of 1863 granted the Catholic community the right to establish and operate publicly funded Catholic schools. Since then, Catholic schools have made a tremendous contribution to the vitality and success of Ontario's education system, which ranks among the best in the world.

Today, Ontario's publicly funded Catholic schools consistently demonstrate high levels of student achievement. They nurture the values inherent in the Catholic faith – including responsibility, accountability, collaboration, and caring within family and community – producing not just good students but good citizens.

Distinctive and Essential

Ontario's publicly funded Catholic schools are an integral and distinctive part of Ontario's education system. While adhering to Ministry of Education requirements, Catholic schools deliver curriculum that is enhanced by Gospel values. Teachers are professionally trained and committed to serving in Catholic schools.

At the heart of Catholic education is the person of Jesus. Faith development is integral to every part of Catholic education, as students are called to respect the dignity of all human persons within a caring community.

In the Catholic education system, home, school and parish form a vital partnership. Through participation in the community and involvement with the parish, students are guided by the Gospel values, principles and standards that reach into every facet of school life.

Directly supported by 2.4 million ratepayers, Ontario's English and French Catholic schools educate about 600,000 students annually, which is approximately one-third of all students in the province. Catholic education is a cornerstone of Ontario's successful education system—an education system that has been internationally acknowledged as being one of the best in the world. The distinctive partners in this education system work co-operatively to deliver quality education to Ontario's students.

Challenging Times

Recent years have seen increased debate regarding the public funding of Catholic education, despite its longstanding history of academic excellence and contributions to Ontario society. The 2007 Ontario election campaign was a particular focal point for this discussion, in some areas re-invigorating the efforts of interest groups wanting to end public funding for Ontario's Catholic schools.

These detractors miss a crucial point: Catholic education is an integral part of Ontario society. It has deep roots throughout the province's history and culture and is one of Ontario's most respected institutions. Catholic education is built on a strong foundation supported by parents, students, alumni, teachers, administrators, religious sisters and brothers, the clergy and the community. It is a proven success story. There is no justification for eliminating a system that is working so well.

Nonetheless, it is important to be vigilant and to refute attacks. Following are responses to some of the arguments critics have used to try to end funding for Catholic schools in Ontario.

An Integral Part of the System

Some contend it is unfair for only one faith to have publicly funded schools. Historically, Ontario's Catholic education system was established to address the needs of Catholics, at that time a religious minority in this province. In 1867, the British North America Act guaranteed that all educational rights held by minorities at the time of Confederation would be constitutionally protected. Without this protection of denominational schools, Confederation would not have been achieved. The Supreme Court of Canada has upheld this pillar of our nation.

Whether other faiths should receive public education funding is a matter of public policy debate. Ontario governments throughout the history of the province have recognized not only the legal rights of the publicly funded Catholic education system to continue, but also the merits of keeping it in place.

The fact is, Catholic schools have maintained and enhanced their foundational place in Ontario's public education system as it has evolved. It would be unfair to the Catholic community and the people of Ontario to dismantle a school system that has been an integral part of publicly funded education since 1841. It would also set a dangerous precedent for minority rights in Canada.

Catholic schools are fully or partially funded in six other Canadian provinces. Education is a provincial jurisdiction, and school governance in each province is unique – including Ontario, where the history, commitment and support for Catholic education are unlike any other province.

Support from Governments

Two provinces in particular are often cited as moving away from Catholic schools. Quebec changed its system to a language-based model in 1997, to reflect that province's linguistic and cultural reality (which is far different from Ontario's). In Newfoundland and Labrador, a 1997 referendum supported a single education system to replace the historical model of a myriad of denominational schools.

In both instances, the circumstances were dramatically different from those in Ontario, and should not be compared.

In opposing Catholic education, some critics say the United Nations has called Ontario's funding system "discriminatory." In fact, the UN has not made such a ruling. It was the opinion of members of one committee – and never moved beyond that committee.

Both the Canadian and Ontario governments responded to the opinion, strongly defending the existing system. Notably, the matter has not been pursued by the UN or any member government.

The Amalgamation Myth

The notion that creating a single education system in Ontario would save money is unfounded. As amalgamation in the education, municipal and health-care sectors has demonstrated, bigger is not necessarily better or more efficient.

Funding in Ontario is based on per-pupil calculations. Amalgamation would not reduce the number of students – who would still require similar levels of teaching and support staff, classroom space and administrative support in the schools and board offices. Economies of scale have already been achieved, with Catholic and public boards co-operating in areas such as transportation, school financing, purchasing and energy management.

In fact, trying to amalgamate into a single system would cost more money – not to mention time – to sort out the complex details. It would also unleash a period of great upheaval for students, parents, teachers and administrators throughout the education system.

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