

PRESS CONFERENCE : PUBLIC FUNDING OF FAITH BASED SCHOOLS
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I am horrified that the Ontario Conservative Party would even contemplate using public funds to support faith based schools. I could talk for hours about what's wrong with this proposal.

Things such as

What will be the state of the public school system in 5 years after so much money would be siphoned off to private schools?

Or how many community public schools would be closed?

Or how do we define 'faith based'?

What are religions and what are sects and what are cults?

Will the Humanists of Ontario get funding for private schools?

Will girls and boys all be offered the same curricula?

And much, much more

But I will restrict myself to just these few following comments.

No one denies that parents have the legal right to raise their children as members of a specific religion.

That, however, is a far cry from demanding publicly funded schools to serve them in isolation from others.

If it is true that religions require their own publicly funded schools in order to function effectively, then soon we will hear the same demands made of the health system since

Some religions do not allow doctors to see unclothed patients of the opposite sex,

Some religions forbid abortion as an option,

Some religions prohibit life saving actions like blood transfusions

We have to look at our education system as well as other parts of our society as an inter-related whole.

To say that we are a secular society that encompasses a secular school system does not mean that we are an anti religion society.

It means that we make public decisions without reference to religion.

If our children are divided into faith based schools, there is the very strong probability that they will develop a we–they dichotomy. There will be ‘us’ and ‘the others’.

In a single secular public school system, children won’t just read about other cultures, religions and points of view. Indeed their classmates will **be** from those groups. They will learn to understand and to empathize with each other. They will truly be friends. They will all be ‘us’. Canadians.

A single secular public school system would emphasize our similarities. Children would not only understand that we are all Canadians, but they would see that our similarities outweigh our differences.

It is only by direct daily contact in normal everyday experiences that we truly learn to understand, and most importantly, empathize with others.

I studied West African history and culture as part of my History degree, but I can tell you, nothing, but nothing, gave me the insight and compassion that my one month visiting West Africa did.

The same is true for our society and for our education system.

An educated, egalitarian, informed, socially responsible and above all, **integrated**, society requires a single secular public school system.

Please, Do not divide our children.