

# 168 YEARS OF SUCCESS

## ONTARIO'S CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

*An integral part of public education*

Catholic schools have been educating students in mind, body and spirit in Ontario since before the birth of the province. For nearly 170 years they have provided educational excellence, in a school culture imbued with the Gospel values of Jesus Christ. Catholic education has been the foundation for millions of students to develop their full spiritual, academic, physical and social potential.

### ***A History of Success***

Ontario's Catholic schools go back as far as the 1600s. A formal system was established in 1841, and the Scott Act of 1863 gave 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 Catholic education system consistently produces high levels of student achievement. Further, graduates are taught the virtues and values of the Catholic faith – including community, responsibility, accountability, collaboration, caring and family – making them not just good students, but good citizens.



### ***Distinctly Different***

Ontario's Catholic education system is not a duplicate of other school systems. While it adheres to Ministry of Education requirements, it does so from a Catholic perspective. The curriculum 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 in 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.

### ***The System Works***

Directly supported by 2.4 million ratepayers, Ontario's English and French Catholic schools annually educate approximately 670,000 students – a third of all students in the province. Catholic education is an essential pillar in Ontario's publicly-funded education system, which is admired around the world. The distinctive partners in the system work cooperatively, creating a stronger whole.



### ***Challenging Times***

In recent years, there has been growing discussion around the funding of faith-based education. Despite its longstanding history of academic excellence and contributions to Ontario society, the funding of Catholic education has been drawn into this debate. The 2007 Ontario

election campaign was a particular focal point, in some areas re-invigorating the efforts of interest groups that want to end public funding for Catholic schools in Ontario.

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 – as much as any other institution. Catholic education is built on a strong foundation supported by parents, students, teachers, administrators, religious sisters and brothers, the clergy and the community. It is a proven success.

There is simply no good reason to destroy a system that is working so well.

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

### **Fairness**

Some contend it is unfair for only one faith to have publicly funded schools. Historically, Ontario's Catholic education system was established in fairness to Catholics, 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, and 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. Governments of all political stripes, for various reasons, have decided against it. At the same time, Ontario governments throughout the history of the province have recognized not just the legal rights of the publicly-funded Catholic education system to continue, but 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.

### **Other Provinces**

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 is unlike any other. 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 Ontario, and should not be compared.

### ***The United Nations***

In opposing Catholic education, some critics say the United Nations has called Ontario's funding system "discriminatory." In fact, the U.N. 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 U.N. or any member government.

### ***Financial Savings***

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 cooperating 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.

***Join in the celebration of Catholic education in Ontario – a proven success for almost 170 years.***

***Spread the good news about Catholic Education!***

For more information about Catholic schools in your community, please contact the Halton Catholic District School Board at 905-632-6300 or visit: [www.hcdsb.org](http://www.hcdsb.org).

*A publication of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association and the Catholic Dioceses of Ontario. ©2009*

