

Comparison of the Funding of the English Public and the Roman Catholic School Systems in Ontario

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ABSTRACT

An analysis of annual grants from the Ontario Ministry of Education to English school boards of Ontario demonstrates that the Roman Catholic system has received \$148 per enrolled student more than the Public school system for each of the last 8 years for a total preferential funding of about \$650M.

It is shown that a re-alignment of the school systems to one non-sectarian school system, thereby eliminating all preferential funding to Roman Catholic boards, will eliminate at least \$345 per enrolled Roman Catholic student for a yearly reallocation of about \$193M or about \$1.5B if it had been accomplished 8 years ago.

It is further argued that there has been an indirect cost to Public school board efficiency of at least \$50 per enrolled Public school student, which could add another \$66M per year or about \$528M over the last 8 years.

The total cost of maintaining the English Roman Catholic school system is at least \$193M and probably more like \$259M per year to the taxpayers of Ontario.

A. Introduction

Ontario has a dual system of schools. It funds both a regular public school system, open to all students regardless of any cultural or religious conditions, and a semi-private school system for Roman Catholics. As such it is one of very few states in the world to offer state-supported education to just one religious group. Many states in the world pride themselves on not funding any religious schools from public funds..

In this study we wish to look at the degree to which Ontario's dual system represents financial fairness for each of those two groups of taxpayers, Public and Roman Catholic. In a nutshell, is either of those groups paying for the other's childrens' education?

Ontario demographically has very close to 33%, or 1/3, of its population who identify themselves as Roman Catholic by religion. That leads to about 2/3 who have another religious or non-religious identity. Accordingly the public school system educates about 2 for every 1 Roman Catholic student. The ratio of the average enrolments for the last 8 years for the two systems was 2.35.

So the question of having independent taxpayer support for the respective systems evolves to 'Did the ratio of funding also break down at 2.350:1? The answer is no. It averaged 2.306:1.

The first question that one could ask 'Is the difference 2.306 to 2.350 significant? To understand that consider how much more money would have been received by the public system if it had been perfectly 'fair'. The public school grants have averaged about \$10.35B for the period of study. If the Roman Catholic allotment had remained what it was that difference in ratio of funding translates into a \$197M shortfall to the public system - per year - or just short of \$1.6B in accumulated underfunding over that time. Conversely if the Public allotment had remained as granted, the Roman Catholic excess funding would have amounted to about \$84M per year or \$672M over the 8 years.

So to maintain the ratio of funding in proportion to the student enrolments, one can conclude that either

- a. The Public system has been shortchanged \$1.6B in the last 8 years or
- b. The Roman Catholic system has received about \$670M more than its share in that time

Many Public school trustees would strongly argue for the first interpretation based on the sad state of repair of their system.

The second question that many others in the world, particularly citizens of the United States, would be free to ask, apart from why a special privilege was offered to a religious minority in the first place, is 'Why is the majority of Ontarians paying any taxes, let alone hundreds of millions of dollars per year, for minority schools?'

In the next sections a more refined analysis is given of data provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education on a web site listing the summary of grants to all school boards within each of the public and separate systems. That site is given by www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/0708/.

The following analysis of the English school boards will show where measurable imbalances occur - and where further indirect costs of maintaining the preferential funding to a religious minority are likely found.

B. Analysis of Ontario School Grants 2000 to 2008

1. English Public School Funding

We began by calculating the grants to the English Public school system divided by the number of students it has enrolled, in each of 24 categories, for each of the past 6, the present (2006-7) and next year's projected funding. The results are listed below in Table 1. All values are in \$ except enrolment which is expressed in millions of students.

Several aspects are worth noting. The grant monies from 2000 to 2008 have gone up by an average of about 30.8%. Also, presently about 5.1% of grants to Public boards are for capital projects.

Otherwise the tabulated values are probably only meaningful in comparison to others as shown later.

Table 1

Year	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1
0 Enrolment	1.33	1.35	1.35	1.32	1.32	1.31	1.30	1.29
1 Foundation	3744.4	3843.2	4046.0	4156.5	4241.2	4436.5	4146.2	4296.1
2 School Foundation	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	566.3	585.3
3 Primary Class Size	138.2	191.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
4 Special Education	709.8	708.1	820.2	934.6	941.3	1010.4	1028.7	1063.7
5 Language	195.5	205.8	213.0	221.3	245.9	244.1	247.1	255.1
6 Native, Metis & Inuit	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	5.7
7 Geographic	47.4	54.8	54.5	70.5	85.4	89.4	48.7	50.7
8 Learning Opportunities	126.8	127.3	143.0	221.5	260.9	267.3	202.6	210.1
9 Program Enhancement	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	17.5
10 Continuing Education	46.4	47.9	48.4	48.7	48.1	50.0	51.8	53.7
11 Cost Adjustment	322.3	303.4	304.5	327.5	342.0	318.2	355.4	399.6
12 Early Learning	24.8	8.2	6.3	4.7	4.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
13 Transportation	261.2	259.7	281.8	296.8	317.8	334.3	348.8	360.0
14 Declining Enrolment	0.0	0.0	19.9	58.8	51.1	74.0	41.4	49.8
15 Administration and Governance	214.4	216.1	220.4	225.9	231.0	236.7	241.3	246.8
16 School Operations	705.0	706.5	729.0	756.0	810.9	850.8	869.4	889.3
17 Phasein Funding	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
18 Stable Funding	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
19 O&M subtotal	6536.2	6672.1	6887	7322.8	7580.2	7911.7	8147.7	8483.4
20 Retirement Gratuities	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
21 School Renewal	123.3	125.3	137.9	152.9	168.6	166.2	184.4	211.2
22 New Pupil Places	67.2	107.8	122.5	140.6	156.3	166.6	171.3	180.7
23 Other Capital Programs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
24 Capital Commitments	151.5	122.3	106.2	139.5	105.4	85.8	73.7	67.4
25 OMERS Recovery	-42.5	-13.8	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
26 Capital Subtotal	299.5	341.6	366.6	433.0	430.3	418.6	429.4	459.3
27 Overall Total Funding	6835.7	7013.7	7253.6	7755.8	8010.5	8330.3	8577.1	8942.7

2. English Separate School Funding

A similar analysis for the English Roman Catholic boards is presented in Table 2. The grants to this system have increased by 31.1% compared to 30.8% for the English Public system during the study period, virtually the same in relative growth. Also the ratio of capital to total

grants is about 7.0%, which is a factor of 1.35 higher than those to the English Public system.

Also note that the total grant to a Roman Catholic student has exceeded that for a Public school student each year.

Table 2

Year	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1
0 Enrolment	0.56	0.56	0.57	0.56	0.56	0.57	0.56	0.56
1 Foundation	3715.4	3818.7	4024.7	4136.2	4224.9	4420.1	4137.1	4293.4
2 School Foundation	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	567.0	585.1
3 Primary Class Size	140.5	191.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
4 Special Education	632.5	630.4	781.0	906.5	920.5	963.6	983.6	1013.4
5 Language	160.4	168.1	173.9	183.9	202.2	205.6	209.3	218.8
6 Native, Metis & Inuit	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	4.7
7 Geographic	55.6	76.4	76.8	96.0	109.3	109.0	65.8	72.6
8 Learning Opportunities	141.8	141.6	157.6	227.5	260.8	264.2	197.1	203.9
9 Program Enhancement	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	17.8
10 Continuing Education	57.8	56.0	57.7	60.3	59.5	60.8	63.7	66.9
11 Cost Adjustment	302.2	287.4	300.6	323.2	343.1	338.9	389.5	421.4
12 Early Learning	1.2	3.4	2.5	1.5	1.4	0.0	0.0	0.0
13 Transportation	307.6	307.5	331.0	346.5	359.9	376.3	387.0	397.0
14 Declining Enrolment	0.0	0.0	13.2	42.5	27.1	32.7	14.4	16.6
15 Administration and Governance	232.2	236.3	240.6	246.5	251.8	257.4	262.5	268.9
16 School Operations	662.0	667.5	691.7	713.3	767.3	801.8	819.4	839.6
17 Phasein Funding	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
18 Stable Funding	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
19 O&M subtotal	6409.2	6585.0	6851.3	7283.9	7527.8	7830.4	8096.4	8420.1
20 Retirement Gratuities	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
21 School Renewal	104.9	107.9	119.4	132.0	145.9	142.2	152.2	165.1
22 New Pupil Places	208.1	287.2	307.3	316.8	343.3	341.6	352.8	372.1
23 Other Capital Programs	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
24 Capital Commitments	223.4	198.6	187.3	225.7	162.7	151.8	108.7	97.0
25 OMERS Recovery	-41.3	-13.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
26 Capital Subtotal	495.1	580.1	614.0	674.5	651.9	635.6	613.7	634.2
27 Overall Total Funding	6904.3	7165.1	7465.3	7958.4	8179.7	8466.0	8710.1	9054.3

3. Time Trend to Funding of English School Boards

To gain some idea of whether the situation of preferential funding is growing larger or smaller with time, consider the following Table 3 which shows the difference in per student grants between the English Roman Catholic and Public boards over an 8 year time span.

The greatest imbalance (\$212) was in place under the former Conservative government about 4 to 5 years ago but in the past 4 years has decreased to roughly a half of its previous maximum (\$112).

Table 3

Year	-6	-5	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	Average
Funding Difference	68.6	151.4	211.7	202.6	169.2	137.7	133.0	111.6	148.0

4. Program Funding to English Boards

A more poignant analysis for those, like trustees, who manage our school boards is where does the grant money go - or not go.

The following Table 4 summarizes the 8 year averaged data of previous tables by program. It adds another 2 columns which are the difference between the two school systems. A positive value indicates that the Public system receives more on the average in this category, and a negative indicates the imbalance goes to the Separate boards.

The net advantage to the Public system is \$197 and that to the Roman Catholic system \$345. The Public boards have a net positive comparatively in the non-capital programs. However several non-capital programs which show a significant net advantage to the Roman Catholic system are noted in red. They are Geographic Circumstances, Continuing Education, Transportation and Administration and Governance, with a combined grant of \$97 per Roman Catholic student.

The later is often cited as a cost saving if the two school systems are merged. Clearly there is no reason why these imbalances in their respective grants would continue in a one school system. The extra cost savings of having a common school system with one transportation system, no additional geographic circumstances, one administrative structure etc would be \$54M per year to the taxpayers of Ontario.

On the other hand, the additional capital which has been and continues to be received preferentially by the Roman Catholic Boards is about \$240 per enrolled Roman Catholic student or a net advantage over the Public boards of \$135M per year.

It is interesting to also look at where the Public school boards receive advantageous funding - special and language education, declining enrolment and school operations. The designation and placement of special needs children of Roman Catholic children in the Public system may be associated, in part if not totally, with the first cost. The extra costs for language education represent the preference of new immigrants to Canada to attend non-religious or at least non-Roman Catholic schools so that extra funds are needed in the public schools to accommodate the demographic imbalance. Declining enrolment is occurring in the Public and Separate systems. However with some internal migration of students to Roman Catholic schools, which may be both newer and closer, enrolment is an extra important problem to the Public boards. The extra grants for declining enrolment in the Public board offset somewhat the cost of competition from the Roman Catholic schools for non-Roman Catholic students.

The extra grants to the Public system for school renewal are a reflection of the fact that the bulk of the Public system was built, often more than 50 years ago, and needs extra maintenance. By encumbering the school systems with artificial capacity rules, that lock student space in older, inner-city urban schools with declining enrolments against the needs for new

schools in the suburbs, the Public system finds itself with more such schools requiring special Ministry grants. By continuing to not offer sufficient capital funding to the Public system by funding Roman Catholic capital projects above their demographic representation, the school renewal imbalance has been forced by the capital imbalance.

How much of these extra costs born by the Public board can be ascribed to the existence of the separate Roman Catholic system? Certainly not zero and certainly not 100%. The Ministry of Education data here does not provide enough information to make a definitive estimate.

However, of the roughly \$135 per student which is in some direct way affected by interaction with the Roman Catholic Boards, it is reasonable to estimate it could be of the order of \$50 per student in the public school system or about \$66M per year to the Public system.

Table 4

	Public	Separate	Advantage	
			Public	Separate
Enrolment	1322095.3	562614.8		
0 Enrolment	1.32	0.56		
1 Foundation	4113.8	4096.3	17.4	
2 School Foundation	144.0	144.0		-0.1
3 Primary Class Size	41.2	41.5		-0.4
4 Special Education	902.1	853.9	48.2	
5 Language	228.5	190.3	38.2	
6 Native, Metis & Inuit	0.7	0.6	0.1	
7 Geographic	62.7	82.7		-20
8 Learning Opportunities	194.9	199.3		-4.4
9 Program Enhancement	2.2	2.2		-0.0
10 Continuing Education	49.4	60.3		-11.0
11 Cost Adjustment	334.1	338.3		-4.2
12 Early Learning	6.1	1.3	4.8	
13 Transportation	307.6	351.6		-44.1
14 Declining Enrolment	36.9	18.3	18.6	
15 Administration and Governance	229.1	249.5		-20.5
16 School Operations	789.6	745.3	44.3	
17 Phasein Funding	0.0	0.0	0	
18 Stable Funding	0.0	0.0	0	
19 O&M subtotal	7442.6	7375.5		
20 Retirement Gratuities	0.0	0.0	0.0	
21 School Renewal	158.7	133.7	25.0	
22 New Pupil Places	139.1	316.2		-177
23 Other Capital Programs	0.0	0.0	0.0	
24 Capital Commitments	106.5	169.4		-62.9
25 OMERS Recovery	-7.0	-6.9		-0.2
26 Capital Subtotal	389.5	604.9		
27 Overall Total Funding	7832.1	7980.4	196.6	-344.6

C. Conclusions:

From the above tables, it is concluded that the Roman Catholic school system receives about \$193M ($\$344.6 \times 0.56\text{M}$ students) apparently due to its inefficiency as a smaller system and its preferential status for capital grants..

In addition about \$66M can be qualitatively identified as indirect costs to the Public system for having to bear major support of demographic problems, such as immigrant language costs, not supported fully by the Roman Catholic system. That would mean the total yearly cost is probably about \$260M to the taxpayers of Ontario.

Those annual costs mean that in the 8 years of data used in this study the accumulated cost of the dual school system was at least of the order of \$1.5B ($\$193\text{M}/\text{year} \times 8$ years) and arguably in excess of \$2.1B ($\$260/\text{year} \times 8$ years).

Interestingly a simple calculation of about \$1.6B, given in the introduction, based only on demographics and total funding, has proved to be a good estimate of the minimum (direct) cost to the taxpayers of Ontario for supporting a dual English school system in Ontario.