

Public Statement  
of  
*Progressive Trustee Network*  
by  
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In Ontario, there is a network of progressive trustees – both French and English– who have stood up and continue to speak out for a strong all-inclusive public school system – just one for both official languages of Canada. Like me, they are the locally elected political voices for their communities' schools and advocates for the children they serve.

Of course, all trustees in Ontario care deeply about children and their education in the province. Likewise, advocates of private religious schools also care deeply about their children and their education needs in the province.

That said, the central issue in this election has been the funding of private religious schools, and more importantly, whether we should publicly fund any form of religious education in schools.

During this “education funding war”, the public has strongly opposed extending public funds to private religious schools. They have sided against John Tory's promise of funding all. He has backed down. This is a good move.

But the public – if polls, letters to the editor, comment sections of newspapers, blogs, talk shows, at doorsteps, and in coffee shops, are any indication – shows a strong yearning for one all-inclusive public system of education in Ontario.

No major political party has stepped up to the plate, become the public champion.

But all of them like to abuse the word “fairness.”

*In all fairness, wars are costly and peace is priceless.*

We need political leadership to do the right thing by all children and their education needs in Ontario.

We could save millions of dollars, yearly, if we combined our financial resources, staff expertise, and school buildings. Instead of dividing, we should be measuring and aligning our legacy for public education. We should be calculating the potential savings across the province.

Imagine what we could do together in education, for all kids, regardless of wealth, status, race, religion, with a single public school system for each official language only. We could direct our savings into effective and sustainable student programs, services, and school classrooms.

*Our priority would be investing in students instead of investing in organizational structures.*

A student-centered funding strategy would enable us to provide quality educational programs and better-specialized supports with more overall choice for all students, as well as better overall supervision to increase safety and to optimize education outcomes. Smaller class sizes for all would become the norm. A properly funded transportation system would treat all student riders equally and provide better bussing service. We could clear the air by upgrading and retrofitting our remaining school buildings, do much needed capital repairs and complete long overdue maintenance orders to make our schools healthy and environmentally friendly. By properly funding music, art, drama, sports programs, and popular extracurricular activities, we could finally dispense with student fees and fundraising for these essentials.

The common public school system, as the Canadian Civil Liberties Association suggests, brings all children into the classroom and lays the foundation for unifying our Ontario society. It helps to foster understanding and civility amongst its younger citizens.

Remember, Schools are social hubs in our communities.

Moving on after this election requires a formation of a Legislative Committee to examine the issue of public funding of religious schools. What education system would be best for Ontario? At the very least, it must be non-discriminatory, equitable, efficient, and sustainable over time so that our education legacy lives on.

We need to stand up for public education. Progressive trustees demand it. The public demands it.

Our kids live together and play together in their communities, let's have them learn together too! Let them teach us.

Jan Johnstone, a proud public school trustee

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