

One School System Network

Press Conference, Queen's Park

Oct 3, 2007

Justin Trottier

My name is Justin Trottier and I am the executive director of the Centre for Inquiry Ontario as well as the President of the Freethought Association of Canada. Since my colleagues have summarized the reasons why our One School System Network coalition was built and updated us on how far we've come since we were formed in May, my goal here is to present an update on our petition initiative and then primarily to introduce into our network new allies – new member and supporter organizations.

Our petition, entitled “One Public School System for Ontario” was begun over a year ago and has been worked on by many of the member and supporter organizations within the One School System Network. Our current signature count for petitions we will be submitting to parliament this month, stands at over 2,000 which, coupled to those already submitted over the course of the last year and which we are awaiting to receive from the rest of the province, brings us to over 4,000 signatures. We are quite pleased that so many individuals, representing a huge diversity of faith and non faith groups, including many, many roman catholics, have supported this initiative.

I'll now move on to welcome our new member and supporter groups.

Firstly, the Humanist Association of Canada, an organization dedicated to the humanist worldview, which is a non-theistic, non-religious ethical philosophy of life based on the principle that human beings are responsible for giving meaning and purpose to their lives relying upon their human capacities of reason and responsibility and natural and social resources. We welcome their support.

Secondly, we've been joined by the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, which is an organization bringing together those who see themselves as moving outside the box

of traditional Christianity and providing support to individuals and organizations exploring the development of spiritual thought relevant to contemporary needs and meaningful to contemporary humanity. We have with us the Chair of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, Gretta Vosper, who will share some words following my presentation.

Thirdly, I would like to welcome the Oraynu Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, which includes a diverse group of secular, cultural, humanist, agnostic and atheist jews. Karen Levy, the Program Coordinator of the Oraynu Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, sends her regrets that she can not be here, but has asked that their public policy position on school funding be read, which I will now do.

ORAYNU CONGREGATION FOR HUMANISTIC JUDAISM

PUBLIC POSITION ON SCHOOL FUNDING

Dated September 8, 2000

The Oraynu Congregation agrees with the recent United Nations ruling which describes as discriminatory the current educational policy of the Ontario Government. This policy is one in which the Catholic School System receives public financial support while other religious groups do not. This is clearly contrary to the spirit of democracy. Our proposal is one which protects the integrity of the public school system, upholds the principle of democracy, abolishes the untenable policy of diverting tax dollars into religious institutions and reaffirms the separation of religion and state.

To these ends, Oraynu Congregation urges the Ontario Government to:

1. strive to amend the Canadian Constitution so that neither the Catholic School System nor any other religious school system will be able to draw upon public funding for its support;
2. ensure that no public funding be extended to private schools;
3. ensure that private schools be allowed to exist if they meet public academic standards and are self-supporting; and
4. ensure that 100% of every educational tax dollar goes into the public school system.

Oraynu Congregation for Humanistic Judaism

14 -156 Duncan Mill Rd, Toronto, ON, M3B 3N2

Phone: 416-385-3910 www.oraynu.org

And finally, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association has endorsed the one school system position, releasing a week and a half ago the document “Fostering a more tolerant society: a joint statement against the funding of religious schools”, going so far as to state in a publicly released letter to Education minister Kathleen wynn “No matter what happens in the forthcoming elections, the situation is such that this issue is not likely to fade from the scene. As long as the Roman Catholic separate schools remain fully funded out of the public purse, the other religious communities will feel like victims of unjust discrimination.

We thank the CCLA for coming out in support of one secular school system and welcome our allies in the Humanist Association of Canada, the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity and the Oraynu Congregation for Humanistic Judaism.

I now ask Gretta Vosper of the CCPC to share a few words. Thank you