

Secular education debate isn't about racism

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At a local coffee shop, I heard the word "racist" uttered within the dialogue (more like an argument) concerning a campaign promise associated with the provincial Progressive Conservative platform. Needless to say, I was very disturbed.

With the election over, the issue of faith-based schools remain a hot topic as does whether the province should fund Catholic education with public money.

The average citizen wonders whether Ontarians should be divided along ethnic or religious lines particularly as immigration and identity are becoming mixed issues. The uproar in Quebec regarding a girl wearing her hijab during a soccer tournament illustrated this topic. The question really is how much we should allocate to ethnic and religious groups, whether it be funding schools or accommodating their differences as they become part of a larger, public and secular set of institutions -- including soccer leagues.

As Ontario and Canada continue to welcome newcomers from around the world and we put forth official policies that promote and govern multiculturalism, our policymakers must realize we are not racists if we believe it is important for newcomers to send their children to public schools. We are not racists if we want newcomers to recant ancient and ancestral feuds after they arrive here.

We are also not racists if we expect newcomers to forgo views of women as persons who are less than equal to men. We are not racists if we demand citizens accept democracy and free speech as the rights of every individual. We are not racists if we expect everyone to deplore discrimination based on race, gender, age, or sexual orientation. And lastly, we are not racists if we ask that religion be respected as a private matter and be separated from public schooling.

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