

OECTA'S Leadership TRAINING PROGRAM SPECIALIZED

Enrollment of Non-Catholic Students in Catholic Schools

SPEAKING NOTES

Should Catholic schools be admitting non-Catholic students?

Those decisions are made by school boards, guided by government legislation.

That said, it should be noted that Catholic secondary schools have long had open enrolment, and many non-Catholic families choose to send their children to these schools. The reality is that non-Catholic families choose to send their children to Catholic schools for a variety of reasons, including the lessons and programs that our teachers and schools are providing.

Does admitting non-Catholic students undermine the purpose of publicly funded Catholic education? Should we not just have one public system?

Ontario has four strong publicly funded education systems. While all follow the common *Education Act*, each makes a unique contribution to the overall success of public education in Ontario. And the system works – Ontario's students and graduates are widely recognized as world leaders in literacy, math, science, problem-solving, and other skills. We also have relatively low achievement gaps between low- and high-income students, and between Canadian- and foreign-born students.

The publicly funded Catholic education system is rooted in the province's history and culture, and it is as relevant today as ever. Our schools reflect the diversity of our communities. The values we teach – like fairness, compassion, respect, and concern for social justice and the environment – are woven throughout the curriculum, and help prepare students to be

responsible, contributing members of society. It is entirely in keeping with our inclusive Catholic values to share these lessons with everyone in our communities.

With declining enrolment, does it make sense to maintain separate school systems?

Certainly, declining enrolment presents a challenge for all publicly funded school systems, especially in rural areas of the province. However, any solutions should respect the province's history, and the ongoing needs and values of the affected communities.

Our Association has long been supportive of further co-operation among school boards in terms of transportation and other potential efficiencies. We have also urged the government to explore further opportunities for shared facilities, which would respect each system's unique structure and values, while making more efficient use of school space. Excellent examples of such arrangements exist in Toronto, Brantford, and elsewhere.

OECTA has also strongly encouraged the development of community hubs, which could use excess school space to offer much needed supports, such as child care and mental health services.

What do you think about school boards competing for students?

Decisions about enrolment and public relations are made by school boards. As Catholic teachers, we focus on developing thoughtful, caring, and engaged students.