



Catholic Schools in Canada



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To be Catholic is to be universal. While we are intensely interested in Catholic education in Toronto and Ontario, it is appropriate that we realize what is happening in Catholic education across Canada.

CANADIAN CATHOLIC SCHOOL TRUSTEES' ASSOCIATION (CCSTA)

The Canadian Catholic School Trustees Association's (CCSTA) head office is located in Toronto at the Catholic Education Centre, 80 Sheppard Avenue East (416-229-5326). The president for 2001-2002 is Louise Ervin from Waterloo, Ontario.

NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

Education in Newfoundland and Labrador was based on religious denominational control until 1997 when the provincial government sought and obtained a constitutional amendment that allowed it to create a single, secular school system. About 45,000 students in Catholic schools lost their schools. In addition the government assigned church-owned school properties to the newly created secular school boards. Although the decision was unsuccessfully challenged in the courts, the issue is still alive. However, so is the spark of Catholic education as evidenced by the emergence of two private Catholic schools—St. Bonaventure's College in St. John's and Immaculate Heart of Mary in Corner Brook.

MARITIMES

- Prince Edward Island had the first English-speaking high school in Canada, but the last Catholic school closed in 1970.
- New Brunswick has no Catholic district school boards, nor does it have any Catholic schools. The Common Schools Act of 1871 abolished non-constitutional Catholic schools in New Brunswick, although a compromise allowed Catholic schools to continue to operate through local arrangements with the public school board until 1967, when the amalgamation of school boards made the continued operation of Catholic schools unviable. The issue of Catholic schools is being revisited in this province.
- Nova Scotia has no publicly funded Catholic schools. Prior to Confederation Sir Charles Tupper, then Premier of the Nova Scotia colony, had given the Archbishop of Halifax a personal assurance that Catholic rights would always be safeguarded. Over the years, however, the original 'gentlemen's agreement' eroded and without legal constitutional guarantees, the Catholic population was left with no recourse to safeguard Catholic schools.

QUEBEC

Quebec abolished denominational schools shortly after the amendment of the Constitution three years ago. The constitutional guarantee for Catholic and public schools was replaced with guarantees for French and English schools; religion gave way to language. This was possible because the English Protestant minority who support public schools felt that they would gain, not lose, through this constitutional change. The present 'religious compromise' that exists is a program

Representing

Elementary Schools

Annunciation
 Canadian Martyrs
 Holy Cross
 Holy Name
 St. Aloysius
 St. Bernadette
 St. Brigid
 St. Catherine
 St. Denis
 St. Isaac Jogues
 St. John
 St. Joseph

Superintendent

Bernice Brand

Secondary Schools

Notre Dame
 Senator O'Connor
 St. Patrick

Superintendents

Michael O'Keefe
 Colleen French

Parishes

Annunciation
 Canadian Martyrs
 Corpus Christi
 Holy Cross
 Holy Name
 St. Brigid
 St. Catherine
 St. John
 St. Joseph

called "Ethics in Religious Culture" in the secondary schools. In elementary schools, parents may choose one of three religious education options: Catholic, Protestant or Moral. Further, a Religious Affairs Committee has replaced the former denominational committees, which advise the Ministry of Education.

ONTARIO

Presently, there are 29 English Catholic school boards and 8 French Catholic school boards in Ontario, responsible for more than 600,000 students, with representation from 245 trustees (73 newly elected, including myself, in November 2000). John Stunt is the new executive director of the Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association for 2001-2002. A book called "History of Catholic Education in Ontario" is currently being written by the OCSTA.

The Ontario Catholic Conference of Bishops position on education is that government should financially support any faith/culturally-based and parental choice education that meets basic provincial requirements. The present focus is on World Youth Day 2002 in preparation for the Papal Visit.

School boards across the province are also awaiting the results of the provincial leadership race and its potential impact on education funding.

MANITOBA

The government of Manitoba and the schools of the Catholic Church were fine until 1890, at which time the Province abolished separate schools. The Supreme Court of Canada ruled against the Province, but the Privy Council of England (top court until 1949) overturned the Canadian court. Catholics fought back by establishing private schools, which continue to operate today.

There have been two improvements over the years. One was some aid that came from Federal funds (i.e. for French language education), and partial grants from the Province (this year they received grants equal to 50% of the public school grants). The second is the incorporation of the Manitoba Federation of Independent Schools in 1974, which includes Catholic (Ukrainian Byzantine Rite as well), Protestant, and Jewish private schools.

SASKATCHEWAN & ALBERTA/NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

In 1901, Saskatchewan and Alberta were part of the Northwest Territories, and were guaranteed Catholic schools, which continued when they entered Confederation in 1905. Yellowknife Catholic Schools is the only Catholic district in the Northwest Territories, and operates in cooperation with the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association.

In Saskatchewan, two years after entering Confederation, the provincial government passed the Secondary Education Act, which ended full funding of Catholic high schools. This was not amended until 1964. Today, Saskatchewan has full funding. There are 19 Catholic school boards in Saskatchewan.

Alberta has a different story than the other Prairie province. The Constitutional guarantee worked well for 30 years until 1935 when the Province amended the Alberta School Act to give advantages to large administrative units. What this meant for the minority Catholic schools was that in rural school districts, the smaller boards were not allowed to expand their boundaries beyond the four-mile-by-four-mile designation of the 1901 Act. This has existed until now.

Recently the province approved new legislation that provides greater opportunities for Catholic education to be available across the province. As well, provisions are being made to ensure that French parents have access to separate school rights as well as French language rights. Currently, there are 18 Catholic school boards in the province.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

In British Columbia, the first Catholic school opened as early as 1849, but a later political decision removed full funding of Catholic schools, which had been enshrined in the Canadian Constitution. Today, all Catholic schools are independent schools and belong to the Federation of Independent Schools Association. In 1977, the Independent School Support Act was passed, which meant that the provincial government would provide some funding on a per-pupil basis. The schools would be accountable financially and academically, but the government would infringe as little as possible on the autonomy of independent schools. The current funding for Catholic schools stands at around 50%--the Provincial government funds the operating costs, and educational/medical services of running schools. There is a present teachers shortage.

I would like to acknowledge Ward 1 Trustee Mark Stefanini for his efforts in producing "Catholic Schools in Canada, Update 2002". I believe the information contained in this Update is important for all of us in Catholic education.