



Catholic Education: Confronting Fiction with Facts

In the past few weeks there have been questions asked about publicly-funded Catholic Education in Alberta. As President of the Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association, I would like to offer the following information for clarification:

Fiction: It has been suggested that eliminating Catholic Education in Alberta would be easy.

Fact: Catholic Education has been operating in Alberta since the 1840's and has held a longstanding, distinct role in Alberta's public education system for all of these years. It is enshrined in the *Constitution of Canada*, Section 93, solidified in the *Alberta Act 1905* and further supported by the *Alberta School Act*. Alberta Education is currently ranked 5th in the world overall in the area of Education and Skills (per the Conference Board of Canada) and Catholic Education in Alberta is proud to be an integral part of this success story.

Fiction: Amalgamating Catholic and Public Schools would lead to substantial savings of taxpayer money.

Fact: Catholic Education in Alberta serves over 175,000 students (approx. 30 per cent of all Alberta Students) in over 430 schools. The only way to save taxpayer money would be if all 175,000 students simply stop having access to education altogether. There has been no study that has indicated any money would be saved by eliminating Catholic Schools: the same number of students, educated by the same number of staff, driven to school by the same number of busses, maintained in the same number of schools (which the province is currently short of) would be needed. In fact, studies done on the amalgamation of municipalities, health authorities, and schools in other provinces have seen the administration cost increase considerably due to the effects of amalgamation.

Fiction: Catholic School Boards never work together with Public School Boards.

Fact: The vast majority of Catholic Separate School Boards and Public School Boards do work together collaboratively to actualize efficiencies while respecting each other's differences, through shared bussing, Joint Use Agreements, Joint Purchasing Partnerships for Utilities and other examples. There are even several successful archetypes of shared facilities whereby Catholic and Public Schools operate independent schools in different wings of a building complex with a joint use space in the middle (often a public recreation center or public library.)

Fiction: Catholic Education is overly influenced by the church.

Fact: Catholic Education is a unique partnership between the school, home and parish. Together this partnership is a close relationship between the faith community and the Church, through locally elected trustee representatives who independently create policy and govern their Boards. It seeks to develop a student's whole person by integrating academic excellence permeated in faith. The central focus of Catholic Education is Jesus Christ.

Fiction: Only Catholics can go to Catholic schools.

Fact: Catholic Schools are open to all students and families that choose a fully Catholic Christian faith based education experience. As per the Alberta *School Act* Catholic schools must accept all Resident Students (of the same faith) and if there is space and programs must accept Non-Resident students.

Fiction: Catholic schools are public schools with a crucifix on the wall and a religion class.

Fact: Catholic Schools are distinctive faith communities that nurture the spiritual, academic, emotional and physical wellbeing of students through the integration of the Alberta Education curriculum with gospel values and a sacramental life. Christ is the center of the Catholic School and his presence and teaching permeate the whole of the school day and the whole of the school building.

Fiction: Catholic schools teach intolerance and hate towards some groups.

Fact: Catholic Education is inclusive of all students and strives to have all children recognize their inherent beauty as children of God. Children are encouraged to see themselves as more than the sum of their parts; more than their race, religion, ability, gender, colour, sexual orientation, etc. This inclusiveness and moral imperative is supported by safe and welcoming school board policies & strong anti-bullying policies.

Fiction: Catholic schools do not teach about sexuality and wellness.

Fact: Catholic Schools teach comprehensive provincially mandated Health and Wellness Programs which are age appropriate. Programs on sexuality do include abstinence, a transcendent view of the person, and are taught from a Catholic worldview. The goal is to provide students with the information to make good and responsible choices.

Fiction: Public schools subsidize Separate schools.

Fact: There are two distinct constitutional rights regarding taxation: the right to access the property assessment base for financial support and the right to equity and fairness in funding. Catholic Education is funded through education property taxes, grants and general provincial revenue, exactly the same as public schools. Funds for schools in Alberta are pooled provincially and then distributed to schools based on enrolment numbers. The pooling of funds allows for a balanced approach to allow resources to go where parents choose to send their children to school. Each Alberta student carries funding into the education system of their choice.

Maintaining the current taxation base is a vital connection between school boards and their electors, especially those electors without children in the school system. It provides a mechanism for direct accountability of school board trustees to their electors for the quality of education provided. It provides a clear link between taxation and representation, the most fundamental principal of any democratically elected organization and it further creates a structural interest in the local school board, because of the investment required by the electors in that board.

In closing, I would like to stress that Catholic Education in Alberta has and will continue its proud legacy of cost-effective excellence in teaching within a welcoming, safe and caring faith school environment, honouring the sacred trust of our parents and of our community.

Adriana LaGrange



President, Alberta Catholic School Trustees' Association