

Saskatoon Catholic Schools: Board of Education

Celebrating the Gift of Catholic Education in Saskatchewan 1905 - 2005

As part of its celebration of the centenary of the Province of Saskatchewan, the Board of Education for Saskatoon Catholic Schools gives thanks for the privilege and the awesome responsibility of gifting the citizens of Saskatoon and area with Catholic education.

The Catholic Christian tradition emphasizes that faith is connected to the world at large. The Church is not exclusively a community of faith, but also a community of reason.¹ Likewise, the story of Catholic education, as it is in 2005, can be told from two perspectives—a community of faith and a community of reason.

Community of Faith

The core purpose of Catholic school divisions in Saskatchewan is to offer a Christ-centred education. A Christ-centred education holds some things in common with other expressions of public education, but not unlike its counterparts, it also has distinct differences.

In common with public schools, Catholic schools operate in accordance with *The Education Act*, 1995, and its regulations, and they follow the curriculum adopted by the Province of Saskatchewan. Education is provided in such a manner that each student is enabled to realize her or his full potential. Academic excellence for all children and youth is about the search for truth, a foundational tenet of Catholic education.

Unlike public schooling, Catholic educators are commissioned to interpret Christian Scriptures for modern challenges and to do so with a certain modesty. Although the message of Jesus Christ cannot be distilled to a few pages of text, the Gospel narratives most especially affirm that a Christ-centred education is to proclaim the God-given dignity and sacredness of each person. All are welcome in Catholic schools where they are to discover the perfection of God's love for them. A Christ-centred education extends a special welcome to those who are most in need.²

Catholic education is commissioned to evangelize, but a Catholic school does not welcome students to experience its distinct project so that it can convert them to Catholicism. Rather, evangelization is about a conversion of the heart where Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and sisters and brothers of other faith traditions become better Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and members of other faith traditions. It can happen on occasion that God may choose to use an encounter with Catholic education to lead one to embrace Christianity or the Catholic faith. However, this is God's doing, not the result of some strategy on the part of Catholic education.³

A complete and authentic Christ-centred education dispels the position that there is a duplication of educational services in Saskatchewan. Duplication assumes that there are equal and similar services being provided by both public and separate school systems, that these systems are filling

the same role in society. If this is so, then it should matter little if the public system were absorbed into the separate system. Clearly, public school supporters would not agree to have one, Catholic, school system for Saskatchewan.⁴

Community of Reason

Catholic education is a champion of the primary right and responsibility of parents/caregivers to educate their children according to the schooling of their choice. Dr. Stephen R. Covey explains this right as a principle of life. In his words, “Behaviour is governed by values; consequences are governed by principles.” A society needs to “value principles.”⁵ The Province of Saskatchewan has valued the primary right and responsibility of parents/caregivers to educate their children through its support of public, separate, First Nations, francophone, historical high schools, associate schools, private schools, and home schooling.

In his publication *Saskatchewan Separate Schools*, Dr. Brian Noonan opines that separate schools show that Saskatchewan society does provide freedom for parents to educate their children according to their choice. Further, because separate schools have not been only about religious education, but also about other struggles such as French language rights, it seems that separate schools, to some extent, have helped decrease conflicts in communities by providing an outlet to release tensions and by helping to avoid more serious conflicts.⁶ It is good for a community to have choice. One size fits no one.

The assumptions with respect to the financial costs of two systems of education are not grounded in fact. The reported operating expenditures per student of the four western provinces in Canada disprove the claim that it costs more to have both separate and public schools divisions. In the provinces of British Columbia and Manitoba, separate schools are funded at a level of fifty percent (50%) of the operating grant afforded to public schools. In the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan, separate schools are funded at the same level as public schools. One would expect, therefore, that the operating expenditures of British Columbia and Manitoba would be less than Alberta and Saskatchewan. However, the most recent statistics available, 1999/2000, refute this expectation:

Operating Expenditures Per Student (adjusted for inflation)⁷				
	BC	Alberta	Saskatchewan	Manitoba
1999-2000	\$5,946	\$5,582	\$5,522	\$5,943

An analysis of the total per pupil expenditures in 2001 of Catholic and public schools divisions located in the four largest cities of Saskatchewan shows that, on average, urban separate school divisions spend \$267.70 less per student than their urban public counterparts.⁸

Likewise, Saskatchewan Learning’s statistical comparative report does not authenticate the administrative efficiencies of larger school divisions. For example, the per pupil expenditure on administration by a public school division with a total prorated enrolment of 4,443 students was \$129.40; whereas, its sister public school division with a total prorated student enrolment of 21,321 spent \$130.20 per pupil on administration. This finding is consistent with the research of

G. Erhardt and M. Redyk.⁹

Given the nature of the business of Kindergarten to Grade 12 education, that approximately 95% of the budget of school divisions are fixed costs, that Catholic and public school divisions have maximized operational efficiencies through educational partnerships, and other factors, there has been no evidence of financial efficiencies to be gained from having only one school system.¹⁰ Obviously, Kindergarten to Grade 12 education costs can be reduced by such means as increasing the pupil-teacher ratios, but these decisions are not contingent upon having one school system for all.

A comparison of the construction costs of two joint-use facilities, St. Gabriel School in Regina and St. Michael School in Yorkton, with a stand-alone facility, Mother Teresa School in Saskatoon, have confirmed the following:

¹¹	St. Gabriel	St. Michael	Mother Teresa
Capacity at Construction	375	257	301
Total Cost	\$5,403,904	\$5,442,724	\$4,942,374
Cost per Student	\$20,014.46	\$21,177.91	\$16,419.85

The preceding numbers demonstrate there have been no economies of scale in the construction of joint-use school facilities in Saskatchewan. However, it is conceivable that joint-use schools can be constructed at less cost than stand-alone schools, just as stand-alone schools have been constructed at less cost than joint-use schools. Any target can be achieved, even if it means building schools with cardboard walls.

With respect to joint-use facilities, there are also operational and human costs to consider. Research on school size reveals that any savings to staffing and operational costs begin to diminish when a school exceeds 500 students. Other costs of large schools include increased student truancy and behavioural problems, a compromised safety and well-being of the school community, increased need for support systems, less student participation in co- and extra-curricular activities and lower student achievement, to name a few. One of the most significant costs of large schools to society is the dramatic increase in the number of years, on average, in comparison to smaller high schools, for students to complete the requirements for a Grade 12 diploma. Education costs, productivity, and the well-being of students are all negatively affected by large schools.¹²

The common objection to 'public funding' of separate schools does not acknowledge the demographics of the Province of Saskatchewan. Saskatchewan Learning (2003) reported that 20.5% of students in the provincial system attend Catholic schools. Statistics Canada reports that 31.7% of the population of Saskatchewan is Catholic. It is reasonable, then, to extrapolate that the Catholic population pays 31.7% of the taxes in Saskatchewan. In urban centers, Catholic school systems collect 29.5% of the property taxes in their communities, but educate 34.2% of the children in those communities. The taxes paid by the Catholic people of Saskatchewan fairly pay for Catholic education. There is no 'public funding' of Catholic schools. On the other hand,

there seems to be ‘Catholic funding’ of public education.

A final consideration of the community of reason is the ‘requirement of efficiency.’ Experience demonstrates that the existence of dual school systems leads to a more financially efficient and a higher quality of education for all students. Having more than one place to shop is simply good business.

Conclusions

Catholic education is part of the fabric of the Province of Saskatchewan.

Catholic education is not a duplication of public education.

The provision of Catholic education has not been an unreasonable financial or administrative burden on the people of Saskatchewan.

To actualize the core purpose of Catholic education, the Board of Education prefers stand-alone Catholic school facilities, but may discern other arrangements that are consistent with its Principles of Shared School Facilities and Other Educational Services.

References

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3. Putney Michael, DD, Bishop of Townsville, Queensland, Australia. *Catholic Schools and Ecumenism*. Catholic School Studies. May 2002
4. Catholic Section – Saskatchewan School Boards Association. *Submission to the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education*. October 29, 2003.
5. Covey, Dr. Stephen R. *Unleashing Your Leadership Potential*. Saskatoon Leadership Conference 2004.
6. Noonan, Dr. Brian. *Saskatchewan Separate Schools*. The Author. 1998.
7. British Columbia Department of Education Inter-Provincial Education Statistics Project. <http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/schools/interprovincial/inter02.pdf>
8. 2001 Province of Saskatchewan Statistical Comparative
9. Catholic Section – Saskatchewan School Boards Association. *Submission to the Commission on Financing Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education*. October 29, 2003.
10. In the May 6, 2004 edition of the *Star Phoenix: Time to Have Just One, Public School System*, Ailsa M. Watkinson, an associate professor in the faculty of social work, University of Regina, writes, “If we provided one public education system, we would not be putting teachers out of work, as the number of students would remain the same.”
11. McDonough, Ken & Associates. *Report to Catholic Section – Saskatchewan School Boards Association*. February 2004.
12. Knowledge Works Foundation. *Dollars & Sense: The Cost Effectiveness of Small Schools*. 2002