



Les promesses libérales en éducation augurent bien pour les écoles de langue française, estime l'AEFO



Paul Taillefer, président de l'AEFO provinciale

Ottawa, mercredi 12 septembre 2007 - **L'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO) accueille positivement le programme électoral du Parti Libéral qui prévoit des investissements soutenus pour répondre aux besoins des élèves, notamment ceux des écoles de langue française.**

«Le gouvernement McGuinty maintient le cap en continuant à faire de l'éducation une de ses priorités. Nous nous réjouissons particulièrement des initiatives qui visent à appuyer la réussite de chaque élève et à aider de façon particulière les élèves en difficulté», affirmait le président de l'AEFO, Paul Taillefer.

«Bien que le programme électoral des libéraux ne précise pas pour l'instant les intentions du parti en ce qui touche plus spécifiquement l'éducation de langue française, nous croyons que la création d'écoles spécialisées et de centres d'alphabétisation familiale, de même que l'augmentation du financement du Programme d'utilisation communautaire des installations scolaires, pourraient faciliter le recrutement et la rétention des élèves dans les écoles de langue française. C'est-là un enjeu majeur pour notre communauté», d'ajouter M. Taillefer.

L'AEFO voit également d'un bon oeil l'engagement du gouvernement à examiner la formule de financement pour s'assurer qu'elle réponde vraiment aux besoins des élèves. «L'AEFO va suivre la campagne électorale de très près et inviter le parti libéral à préciser davantage ses engagements envers l'éducation de langue française et envers la communauté francophone. Toutefois, si le passé est garant de l'avenir, le parti libéral semble être sur une bonne voie», a conclu M. Taillefer.

L'Association des enseignantes et des enseignants franco-ontariens (AEFO) compte quelque 8 000 membres et représente les enseignantes et les enseignants des écoles élémentaires et secondaires de langue française en Ontario, ainsi que des travailleuses et travailleurs d'établissements francophones de l'Ontario.

Source : Éditions André Paquette

School plan 'a step backward'

Funding of faith-based schools will lead to Charter argument: expert

Lee Greenberg and Kate Jaimet

The Ottawa Citizen

Thursday, September 13, 2007

TORONTO - A Conservative election pledge to fund faith-based schools is a legal minefield that, if implemented, could send the province back in time, a leading constitutional expert says.

Lorraine Weinrib, a law professor at the University of Toronto, is sounding the alarm on a Conservative funding promise that she believes is dangerously unformulated.

"It seems that the proposal really has not been thought out in any detail," Ms. Weinrib said in an interview.

Conservative leader John Tory has promised a commission to iron out the details of the policy. But Ms. Weinrib said voters are owed the specifics before they decide on the issue.

"I mean, you're being asked to commit to an incredibly important public policy without knowing what it is."

However, supporters of Mr. Tory's proposal say it's a matter of fairness toward other religions, in a province where Catholics already receive full education funding.

A furor that erupted two weeks ago over creationism offers the first indication of just how problematic the proposal is, Ms. Weinrib said. Mr. Tory was forced to backtrack after saying creationism could be taught at the public, faith-based schools he plans on creating. He later said the religious creation theory, a direct rejection of scientific thought, would be taught only in religion class.

Ms. Weinrib, a former deputy director of constitutional law and policy in the Ontario government, wonders how it is possible to grant schools religious freedom while at the same time controlling which beliefs are taught, and where.

"Let's say they do teach the regular curriculum in the mornings. What are they teaching in the afternoon? It might be completely inconsistent," Ms. Weinrib said.

Under the provincial curriculum, students study the "big bang" theory of the origin of the universe in grade nine, and the theory of evolution in grades 11 and 12. Mr. Tory



CREDIT: Pierre Obendrauf, The Montreal Gazette

Legal expert Lorraine Weinrib says if a faith-based school funding pledge is brought into the public sphere, faith groups would have every right to demand millions for new schools.

has said one of three conditions for funding is that faith-based schools teach the provincial curriculum.

The Ontario Ministry of Education currently has no policy on how to deal with a school whose teachings of religious dogma directly contradict parts of the provincial curriculum, said ministry spokeswoman Patricia MacNeil.

It's not a problem in Ontario Catholic schools, which accept evolution and the "big bang," with God as the force behind these events, said Noel Martin, director of Catholic education for the Ontario Catholic School Trustees Association.

Mohamed Sheikh Ahmed, principal of the Ottawa Islamic School, said he sees no problem in teaching evolution and the "big bang" as scientific theories, while also teaching creation according to Genesis as an article of religious faith

"This is a faith. This is what you believe in. Other people believe in some other things. So there is no problem, there is no confusion here, saying: this is what I believe as your teacher, and this is what the scientific findings are saying," Mr. Ahmed said. "Darwinism is only a theory. ... As a Muslim, I believe in Genesis, but I have no problem teaching evolution as a theory, which is something to discuss. And some people believe in it: scientists, evolutionists believe in it. So there is no problem teaching the curriculum as it is."

Paul Triemstra, principal of the Ottawa Christian School, said his school treats the origin of life and the universe as open questions:

"God created the world. And how he decided to do that, whether he took six, 24-hour days some eight to 10,000 years ago; or whether he did that over billions of years through all kinds of different processes that scientists have looked at and theorized about, that's a very good discussion."

The cost of funding faith-based schools is also of concern, Ms. Weinrib said. Mr. Tory's \$400-million price tag assumes that 80 per cent of the roughly 53,000 students currently enrolled in private, faith-based schools will attend the new public schools. Ms. Weinrib believes that's a vast underestimation.

"There are all sorts of people in every community who simply can't afford this private religious education," she said. (Tuition at the private religious schools can run as high as \$35,000). "And if it turns out that it's going to be available for free, they're going to shift. I mean that's so obvious."

That was the case in Ontario Catholic high schools, which saw their numbers triple in their first 15 years of public funding. Originally, Catholic schools were guaranteed funding for the lower grades under the 1867 BNA Act. In 1985, the funding was extended to the end of high school, and enrolment grew to 200,813 in 2000, from 66,840 in 1985, according to government data.

Mr. Triemstra said public funding for other religious schools will allow for a potential growth in students among families with lower incomes, particularly immigrant families.

The \$400-million Conservative promise is also only based on operational funding (at about \$9,400 per student) to pay for things such as teachers, textbooks and janitors, according to officials. Faith-based schools would not be eligible for the same capital funding that other Ontario public schools receive, Conservatives say.

But Ms. Weinrib said that once brought into the public sphere, those faith groups would have every constitutional right to demand millions for new schools, which cost

between \$8 million and \$35 million depending on their facilities. If they don't get them, "you're going to have a Charter argument that there's discrimination on the basis of religion," she says. "They're going to want more. It's inevitable."

However, the most serious consequence of the policy is the potentially fragmenting impact it will have on Ontario society, Ms. Weinrib said. She worries it will undo years of progress Ontario has made in moving toward a more secular, inclusive society. Although Mr. Tory frames his policy as an issue of fairness, she said it is actually a powerful wedge issue designed to appeal to voters along religious lines.

"If we're going to create an education system, I think the last thing we would do is this. It really seems like a step backward," she said.

Mr. Ahmed and Mr. Triemstra disagree.

"I don't believe a bit of that," Mr. Ahmed said. "Canada is a country of communities. Having our different communities and keeping our own different cultures never makes us any less Canadian. ... The real goal behind the whole thing is giving parents a working alternative for how they want to raise up their kids."

© The Ottawa Citizen 2007

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of [CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.](#) All rights reserved.

Malbouffe dans les écoles

Québec revoit le menu



Le gouvernement Charest interdira la vente d'aliments vides dans les écoles. Une politique-cadre sera annoncée vendredi afin de contrer l'épidémie d'embonpoint et d'obésité, qui touche un enfant sur quatre.

Le gouvernement accordera quelques mois aux fournisseurs pour remplacer, dans les machines distributrices, les croustilles, le chocolat et les boissons gazeuses par des jus non sucrés, du lait, de l'eau et des barres santé.

Plusieurs écoles ont déjà pris des mesures pour éliminer la malbouffe et réduire les fritures, mais cela sera obligatoire à la fin de l'année scolaire.

Pour éviter que les jeunes désertent les cafétérias au profit des chaînes de restauration rapide avoisinantes, Québec reconnaît la nécessité de travailler de concert avec les parents et les municipalités. « Si on n'explique pas en même temps aux parents et aux enfants pourquoi on le fait et ce qu'on vise comme résultat, on va échouer », a admis le ministre de la Santé Philippe Couillard.

© Société Radio-Canada. Tous droits réservés.

Tory will drop school funding plan: Watson

Liberal minister predicts Conservative leader will look for 'a way out' of controversy

Mohammed Adam

The Ottawa Citizen

Thursday, September 13, 2007

Conservative leader John Tory is facing intense criticism from his party on funding for religious schools and he'll find a way to drop it before voting day, Health Promotion Minister Jim Watson predicted yesterday.

"He is in trouble with his base. Some of his own members are getting quizzed and hammered at the door and I think he is going to try to find a way out of this. It is imploding on him," Mr. Watson said.

The Liberal MPP for Ottawa West-Nepean made the claim at a campaign appearance in Ottawa to drum home the party's message that the Tory policy would suck money out of public education and undermine Ontario's social fabric.

At a news conference with two former Ottawa school board trustees and the Ottawa Centre Liberal candidate, Yasir Naqvi, Mr. Watson said at a time when a public school board like the one in Ottawa is facing a deficit, the last thing anyone needs is a plan that would suck at least \$500 million out of a struggling public system.

Mr. Watson made it clear that public funding for the Catholic system would continue under a Liberal government because that party has no intention of dismantling it.

Mr. Tory's pledge to spend \$400 million to fund other religious schools stems from the fact that Catholics get public money for their schools, but other religions do not. The Conservative leader sees the issue as a matter of fairness, but the plan has generated a lot of opposition. Some Ontarians say religion doesn't belong in public schools.

An Ipsos Reid poll released Sunday found that in Eastern Ontario, 54 per cent oppose religious school funding while 40 per cent are in favour. Across the province,



CREDIT: Pat McGrath, The Ottawa Citizen
Jim Watson, right, predicts John Tory will bend to pressure building in his own party.



CREDIT: Pat McGrath, The Ottawa Citizen
Jim Watson, right, predicts John Tory will bend to pressure building in his own party.

62 per cent are against school funding and 35 per cent support it.

Mr. Tory however, has vowed the controversy will not sway him from doing what he believes to be the right thing.

But Mr. Watson said mounting pressure from Conservative candidates and party members could force a rethink.

"This will become a key issue when people go to vote, and I think Mr. Tory will find a way in the campaign to drop the issue," Mr. Watson said.

He said there are so many unanswered questions about the policy that a lot of people don't know exactly what they are getting.

He wondered, for example, whether there would be new school boards for the religious schools; whether recertification of some teachers is required, how that would be done and who would pay for the re-training and new salaries; whether the schools would require new buildings and how much that would cost.

Mr. Tory has not provided those details, but says a commission chaired by former premier Bill Davis would hold public hearings and come up with an implementation plan.

Elaine Hopkins, executive director of the Ontario Federation of Independent Schools, says Mr. Tory's approach is the best way to handle such a complex issue, but Mr. Watson disagrees.

He says any leader proposing such fundamental change in the province should have thought through all the details before making it party policy. It is not good enough to ask Ontarians to accept such a controversial policy and get the details after the fact.

"For him to hide behind a commission is not good enough. He should have thought about all the details before he made this the centrepiece of his campaign," Mr. Watson said.

Lynn Graham, a former chairwoman for the Ottawa public school board, said she opposes Mr. Tory's plan because it would set public education back and push the province into a religious and cultural divide.

"To silo children into different schools is not a good thing. Public education is a tremendously important instrument of social cohesion."

Joan Spice, another former school board trustee, agreed, but said the religious funding issue has distracted attention from the more important issues facing public education in Ontario.

"The big issue is the two million students in Ontario. We have very serious issues on student achievement, higher test scores, crumbling schools, the funding formula, good trade-based schools and the whole campaign is on faith-based schools," Ms. Spice said.

"It is a distraction."

© The Ottawa Citizen 2007

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc.. All rights reserved.

Thursday » September
13 » 2007

The truth about liberals' education record

Randall Denley

The Ottawa Citizen

Thursday, September 13, 2007

If you believe the Ontario Liberals, this provincial election is all about saving public education. PC leader John Tory, secretly a clone of former leader Mike Harris, is out to boost private education at the public schools' expense, harming our children and damaging social cohesion in the province.

Tory is actually promising to spend more money to include faith-based private schools in public education, but let's not get all tangled up in the facts. Yesterday morning, Minister of Health Promotion Jim Watson was joined by Ottawa Centre Liberal candidate Yasir Naqvi and two former school trustees to take a turn at delivering the message the Liberals are pushing every day.

To listen to the Liberals tell it, we're in a golden age. More money is being spent, there is labour peace and test scores are up. Public schools are finally starting to heal from the horrific attacks of the Harris government.

It's obvious the Liberals like education, but history doesn't seem to be their strongest subject. Perhaps a little review of what has actually happened in the last four years is in order.

Let's start with the money, since everything in education seems to come down to dollars. In the last two years, Ottawa's public school board has been badly squeezed. Two years ago, the board used all its reserves to get by. This year, the province even sent in outside experts to help the board balance its budget. Couldn't be done, so the government gave the board special permission to run a deficit. The board still had to cut \$15.7 million, most of that classroom instruction.

The Liberals have been pushing through plans to reduce primary class sizes and add specialist teachers, but they haven't provided the cash for the board to do boring old things like pay the salaries of people who already work there.

Last year, then-board chairwoman Lynn Graham said "There are some very serious problems with the funding formula and our board has been saying that for years. It's beyond the time they should have been addressed."

Yesterday, Graham appeared at Watson's event to tell us all to vote Liberal because Mike Harris was a really bad guy. Her preferred party will look at those funding formula problems, but not until 2010.

Then there is labour peace. Yes, the Liberals did buy some, but it came at a price.

They paid teachers 10 per cent more over four years and increased the amount of preparation time for elementary teachers, which reduced time available to supervise children in the yard.

The generous contract offer wasn't readily accepted by the teachers unions. Toronto secondary school teachers worked to rule before graciously agreeing to accept the

raise. Only last-minute pressure from the government persuaded teachers to accept the Liberal offer.

Unfortunately, the four-year deal will soon run out and the unions are already hungry for more. The Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation has given notice that, despite declining enrolment, it expects teacher employment to expand.

The teachers and the government have been pretending to be partners in education, but the relationship is more like one you would have with a pet lion: It's OK until he gets hungry again.

The Liberal promise to keep pursuing smaller elementary classes is a great way to produce more teaching jobs, but what's the real academic advantage? The McGuinty target of 20 pupils in primary classes hasn't been met, but it has already meant more split-grade classes and more portables. It's simply not a useful policy.

Standardized test scores have crept up, although not to the 75-per-cent level the Liberals promised. Even with 75 per cent reaching the provincial standard, that would still leave one-quarter of our kids behind.

The Liberals talk of excellence in public education, but what the test scores actually tell us is that some public schools are failing. The Ottawa public board is below the provincial average in almost every aspect of testing, and some of its schools have scandalously bad results. Every year, educators say the same thing. They will review the results, develop a plan and so on. But what really changes?

The McGuinty Liberals do have a plan to spend \$43 million a year on volunteer tutors to give after-school homework help. Wouldn't that be the job of our highly paid teachers?

We haven't been hearing the real public education story because the Liberals have been artful in keeping trustees quiet. They put through a pay raise for trustees last fall, to help keep them happy. Then the government dumped \$186 million onto school boards in August, to more or less give them enough money to get through this year.

The head of the public school board trustees association is such a pal that he's running as a Liberal, rather than doing his job and speaking out for the needs of our schools.

What we need is for the province to pay school boards' real costs, an honest evaluation of the benefits of smaller classes, a rethink of the teaching methods that are producing such mediocre results on core subjects and a political party with the guts to put kids' needs ahead of big unions' demands.

The Liberals are giving us none of that. Instead, they are giving us a scare campaign based on a creative interpretation of events of a decade ago. It provides a useful distraction from their real record on education, but it won't do much for your children.

Contact Randall Denley at 613-596-3756 or by e-mail, rdenley@thecitizen.canwest.com

© The Ottawa Citizen 2007

CLOSE WINDOW

Copyright © 2007 CanWest Interactive, a division of CanWest MediaWorks Publications, Inc. All rights reserved.