



# ONTARIO EDUCATION CONSULTATION SUBMISSION

*December 2018*

CARDUS  
www.cardus.ca

Ontario should take incremental steps toward education reform that will increase diversity and innovation within the system while enhancing parental choice. This reform begins with establishing a more accountable and cooperative relationship with Ontario's growing independent school sector by creating a constructive and equitable policy environment.

This brief recommends a pathway toward this vision by, first, proposing a review and adjustment to specific policies concerning independent schools. Second, we recommend expanding educational choice for all Ontario families by extending partial funding to qualifying independent schools, which will alleviate fiscal pressure on the current education system.

Finally, we recommend improved integration of STEM into shop classes and manual competency learning. All students should achieve basic competency in working with physical materials as part of life-skills education.

This course of action serves all Ontarians. All education, whether delivered through publicly funded schools or independent schools, serves the common good.

## EXPANDING DIVERSITY WITHIN EDUCATION: TOWARD AN EQUITABLE POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The independent school sector in Ontario is diverse and growing despite an inequitable policy environment. Nearly 130,000 Ontario students attend independent schools, accounting for 6.1 percent of all students in Ontario—an increase from 4.9 percent in 2001.<sup>1</sup> Ontario's independent school sector is diverse in the pedagogical orientations, religious perspectives, and specialties offered by schools, but also in the families that depend on the sector. Families choosing independent schools come from a variety of backgrounds. Research shows that graduates of these schools in Ontario go on to establish a range of diverse social ties.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the positive contributions made by independent schools, the sector operates within an inequitable policy environment. The province can improve the relationship with the independent school sector by implementing incremental policy changes that foster an accountable and cooperative relationship with the sector.

1. Angela MacLeod and Sazid Hasan, "Where Our Students Are Educated: Measuring Student Enrolment in Canada—2017," Fraser Institute, June 27, 2017, 17, <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/studies/where-our-students-are-educated-measuring-student-enrolment-in-canada-2017>.

2. Beth Green, Doug Sikkema, and David Sikkink, "Cardus Education Survey 2018: Ontario Bulletin," Cardus, 2018, 17, <https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/cardus-education-survey-2018-ontario-bulletin/>.

## REVIEW THE INDEPENDENT SCHOOL POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The province has not conducted a significant policy review of the independent school sector since the 1985 Shapiro Report. A provincial review should consider the repercussions of the following inequitable policies:<sup>3</sup>

- The Ministry of Labour’s targeted inspections of independent schools and the declassification of independent school educators’ status
- Increasing inspection fees regardless of school size or operating budget for schools offering the Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD)
- Indicating on student’s permanent transcripts which OSSD credits are earned through independent schools
- The reduction of independent school access to federal grants supporting French-language instruction

In addition to addressing these inequalities, the province can take positive steps to create a cooperative relationship with the independent school sector.

## POSITIVE STEPS TOWARD A COOPERATIVE REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

The Ministry of Education can initiate a collaborative and mutually accountable relationship with the independent school sector by considering the following:<sup>4</sup>

- The Ministry of Education should provide equitable access to professional advice on curriculum and administrative issues when independent schools demonstrate that their programs and operational philosophies meet established standards.
- Develop a collaborative culture by including independent sector experts in projects and contracts that facilitate knowledge exchange
- Integrate school heads on inspection teams to foster cooperation between the Ministry and independent sector, and to improve knowledge-sharing within the sector
- Fund materials and textbooks that directly support the provincial curriculum
- Provide equal access to online curriculum-support materials from provincially funded agencies
- Remove burdensome fees, including the one-time Notice of Intention to Operate fee, inspection fees for schools that grant the OSSD, and per student fees for participating in EQAO testing

These incremental steps toward a cooperative and responsive policy environment increase diversity within the education system. These steps also serve as the first movement toward an accountable, funded independent school sector.

## PROVIDING PARENTS WITH CHOICE: FUNDING EDUCATION FOR ALL ONTARIANS

Ontario has fallen behind other provinces in offering families real choice within public and non-public education. The province should commit to the incremental goal of increasing independent school enrollment. Incremental growth allows for experimentation, innovation, and course correction with minimal amount of disruption.<sup>5</sup>

To achieve this goal, Ontario should consider the variety of funding structures for qualifying independent schools implemented by other provinces like British Columbia and Alberta. These examples provide parents with more choice while educating pupils at a lower per-student cost.

3. See Derek J. Allison, “Toward a Warmer Climate for Ontario’s Private Schools,” Cardus, September 4, 2014, <https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/toward-a-warmer-climate-for-ontarios-private-schools/>.

4. See Allison, “Warmer Climate.”

5. Michael Van Pelt, “Better Is Possible: A Proposal to Improve Schooling for All,” Cardus, November 2018, 7, <https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/better-is-possible/>.

Providing Ontarians with more choice in education, including religiously oriented options, contributes to the public good. The 2018 Cardus Education Survey (CES) found that graduates of religiously affiliated independent schools establish diverse social ties, engaged their communities, and commit to the well-being of their neighbours.<sup>6</sup> The results show that graduates of religious independent schools in Ontario are more likely to volunteer across a spectrum of opportunities compared to graduates from public schools.<sup>7</sup>

Ontario parents desire this option. Religiously affiliated schools account for nearly 48 percent of independent schools in Ontario.<sup>8</sup> While some are cautious about funding qualifying religiously affiliated schools, a 2017 Angus Reid Institute survey found that 61 percent of Canadians agree that religious and faith-based schools should receive some degree of public funding.<sup>9</sup>

The province has the opportunity to incrementally move toward increasing parental choice in education, which would contribute to the public good in Ontario.

## INTEGRATING STEM AND THE SKILL TRADES: MAKING MANUAL COMPETENCIES CORE EDUCATION

As children progress through the education system, their exposure to hands-on experiences working with materials diminishes. Manual competencies should be a core component of education. In pursuing this aim, STEM education should be integrated into shop classes and manual competency learning.

### INTEGRATE STEM INTO SHOP CLASS

The province should move toward integrating STEM learning into shop and building classes.<sup>10</sup> Hands-on learning enhances understanding of concepts and principles, and improves problem-solving skills. Studies show that working with physical materials improves math skills. Integrating STEM learning with manual-skills learning better prepares students for future opportunities.

### INTEGRATE PHYSICAL MATERIAL COMPETENCY INTO LIFE SKILLS EDUCATION

Building elements should be introduced into the K–12 curriculum to create familiarization with the skilled trades. Upon completion of secondary education, students should have basic competency working with physical materials. Students should acquire this competency as part of the suite of basic life skills.

Integrating hands-on learning improves competency and aids students' future employment. Competency with physical materials also enhances learning and development of life skills that benefit students.

Ontario families benefit from having educational choices in the public system and independent school sector. The province should act on the opportunity to build a cooperative and accountable partnership with the independent education sector through measured and incremental policy changes. The province also has an opportunity to enhance manual competency learning through the integration of STEM in hands-on learning and life-skill education.

6. Green, Sikkema, and Sikkink, "Ontario Bulletin," 17.

7. Green, Sikkema, and Sikkink, "Ontario Bulletin," 10.

8. Derek J. Allison, Sazid Hasan, and Deani Van Pelt, "A Diverse Landscape: Independent Schools in Canada," Fraser Institute, June 3, 2016, 9, <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/a-diverse-landscape-independent-schools-in-canada.pdf>.

9. "Poll Finds Strong National Support for Funding Religious Schools," December 14, 2017, <https://www.cardus.ca/news/news-releases/poll-finds-strong-national-support-for-funding-religious-schools/>.

10. See Ray Pennings and Brian Dijkema, "The Building Meaning Project: If We Can Build Meaning, We Can Build a Workforce," Cardus, November 19, 2014, <https://www.cardus.ca/research/work-economics/reports/the-building-meaning-project-paper-and-recommendations/>.

## FURTHER READING

Allison, Derek J. "Toward a Warmer Climate for Ontario's Private Schools." Cardus. September 4, 2014. <https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/toward-a-warmer-climate-for-ontarios-private-schools>.

Green, Beth, Doug Sikkema, and David Sikkink. "Cardus Education Survey 2018: Ontario Bulletin." Cardus. 2018. <https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/cardus-education-survey-2018-ontario-bulletin>.

Pennings, Ray, and Brian Dijkema. "The Building Meaning Project: If We Can Build Meaning, We Can Build a Workforce." Cardus. November 19, 2014. <https://www.cardus.ca/research/work-economics/reports/the-building-meaning-project-paper-and-recommendations>.

Van Pelt, Michael. "Better Is Possible: A Proposal to Improve Schooling for All." Cardus. November 2018. <https://www.cardus.ca/research/education/reports/better-is-possible>.



Cardus is a non-partisan, faith-based think tank and registered charity dedicated to promoting a flourishing society through independent research, robust public dialogue, and thought-provoking commentary.

[www.cardus.ca](http://www.cardus.ca)

