

# **Ontario Faith-based Schools Should Be Funded Like Catholic Schools: Tory**

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TORONTO — Opposition Leader John Tory wants to give faith-based schools in Ontario the option of joining the public education system if the Conservatives win the Oct. 10 provincial election.

There are 53,000 students in Ontario attending religious schools that Mr. Tory believes should be eligible for the same funding as Roman Catholic schools in the province.

“I think there are some things on which you have to stand on principle, and in this case the principle is fairness to people of other faiths,” he said Friday in advance of the Conservatives' last convention before the election.

“I think what we want to do is try and replicate the successful experience of the Catholic schools, which are funded today, and do it in a way that expands the sphere of public education to accommodate the diversity that is Ontario today.”

Conservative party sources said Mr. Tory will make a commitment at the party's convention Saturday to add \$800 million to public education spending if he becomes premier.

Mr. Tory said he was not proposing to bring back the tax credit for private schools introduced by the previous Conservative government that was scrapped by the Liberals when they were elected.

There was widespread criticism that the tax credit mainly benefited wealthy families that sent their kids to expensive private schools.

But Mr. Tory said there would be rules — outlined in the party's platform to be released Saturday — to ensure only faith-based schools qualify for public funding.

“There will be clear conditions, and you will see some of the principles of that outlined tomorrow.”

Deputy Premier George Smitherman said Mr. Tory's proposal would weaken public education and divide Ontario students along religious and ethnic lines instead of bringing everyone together.

“Mr. Tory's vision of dividing Ontarians up into groups left, right and centre on the basis of ethnicity and religion for the purposes of education is not an approach worthy of leadership,” Mr. Smitherman said.

“That's where the kids in my neighbourhood learn about the different faiths and the different countries, where they get to know each other. It gives them the skill set that they need to be able to live together and to thrive together.”

Tory said it was unfair for Ontario to fund Roman Catholic schools while refusing to fund faith-based schools from other religions, so he wants to try to bring other religious groups into the public education system.

“I think that's a good thing for Ontario because it respects and reflects the diversity that is this province,” Mr. Tory said.

“It strengthens public education while at the same time allowing these schools to retain their uniqueness, such as has been the case with the Catholic schools.”

Frank Dimant of B'nai Brith Canada said the Jewish organization welcomes Mr. Tory's proposal, but also wants him to ensure all schools teach tolerance and respect of multiculturalism.

“We applaud the decision and we ask that together with that also comes a commitment to ensure that the curriculum is supervised effectively to include such things as core Canadian values,” Mr. Dimant said.

“We see too many educational systems around the world where hate is being taught. We don't want that kind of curriculum in this country.”

A 1999 United Nations committee found Ontario was violating the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights by funding Catholic schools while refusing to fund schools for other faiths.