

Ont. Tories unveil plan to fund faith-based schools



Ontario Progressive Conservative Leader John Tory makes the announcement during a press conference on Monday, July 23, 2007.

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Conservative Leader John Tory vowed Monday to look into government funding for religious-based schools. The leader of the Opposition wants to extend public funding to institutions of other faiths, such as Islamic, Hindu, Jewish and Christian.

"I want to reach out to parents and children currently outside of the system of public education and invite them in," Tory said.

"I want children of all faiths to be part of ... a system that reflects our shared Canadian values."

Tory said the move would bring Ontario more in line with other provinces -- for a price tag of up to \$400 million a year if all the schools agree to teach the province's curriculum, participate in standardized testing and hire accredited teachers.

But Tory it shouldn't be done without extensive consultation and thought -- so he pledged to bring in the man who initially gave funds to Ontario's Catholic schools in the 80s.

The Opposition leader said he'd appoint former premier Bill Davis to look at the plan's feasibility. With the green light from Davis, Tory said pilot projects could begin around fall of next year.

There are some 53,000 students attending religious schools outside the public system and they deserve the same support children who attend Catholic schools currently get, Tory said.

All religions should be treated fairly and schools should reflect Ontario's diversity in the 21st century, he added.

The promise to extend public funding to religious schools who agree to be part of the public system was included in the Conservative election platform.

If elected, Tory said he'd like to see his vision fully implemented by the fall of 2010.

With a report from CTV's Paul Bliss

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