

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

TheStar.com - comment - Across the great divide

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Comment on – “Faith-based schools study already exists” – August 5

I agree with Anna Morgan that the Conservatives' proposed funding of Ontario faith-based schools according to the same treatment now given to Roman Catholic schools is fair, reasonable and expected by like-minded Canadians. Ontario's long-standing funding of Catholic school boards – to the exclusion of all other faith-based education – is morally, culturally and ethically indefensible. Moreover, this retrograde policy has been criticized not just once but twice by the United Nations for being discriminatory.

Ontario Progressive Conservative leader John Tory now wants to commission a study exploring the extension of funding to other faith-based schools in this province. But why waste public money to study an issue that is already more political than educational? Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba and Quebec all provide some public funding for faith-based schools.

One dimension of the issue that has not been honestly debated is the spread of Islamophobia among some commentators, who are urging the Ontario government not to "rush into" the funding of faith-based ("Islam-based") schools.

If critics of faith-based schools are accusing the Conservatives of attempting to secure the religious minority vote, they are right. This is one issue for which the party will get my vote on Oct. 10, and I predict that the same is true for a majority of Ontario Muslims – those who send their children to faith-based schools, as well as those who do not.

Khurram Awan - National President-Youth Chapter, Canadian Islamic Congress, Mississauga, Ont.

Anna Morgan reminds us that this discussion is old news and she suggests possible modifications of the current system, using Ontario public-supported Catholic schools as a model. She claims children already live separately in every school jurisdiction – but in fact, the public school system blends students of many faiths and backgrounds. But Catholic students do not attend school with others, and vice versa.

A course for a few hours a year in segregated schools will not create comfortable co-existence amongst our children. Life is not a short course, it is every day. The BNA Act justification for segregated schools is a smokescreen. Other provinces have already merged Catholic and non-Catholic schools without constitutional violation.

The faith-based school movement wants the public purse to fund a personal choice by parents to send children to a private school. The citizens of our multi-ethnic, multi-religious society need to reject a call for further segregation.

Dr. Allan J. Fox, Toronto

Religious schools of all faiths should absolutely be funded. If the practice of funding only Catholic schools is stopped, it will most likely take a long time to wean Catholic schools from public funds or to integrate these schools into the secular public school system. In the meantime, religious schools of all faiths should be funded equally. It is the only fair and democratic course of action available.

As it stands now, the government of Ontario seems at ease with its prejudiced practice of funding only one religion out of many. This situation is unacceptable. Is this not supposed to be an egalitarian and pluralistic society? What are children learning when the education system itself discriminates based on religion?

As long as a religious school has certified teachers, standardized testing, and complies with all government regulations and guidelines, it should be funded even if it is not Catholic.

Ben Young, Toronto