

Extend equal funding to all faith-based schools

The Kingston Whig-Standard

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Re: The Whig-Standard's Question & Answer interview with Ontario Education Minister Gerard Kennedy (Feb. 25).

Kennedy was asked how Ontario would comply with the 1999 United Nations ruling that the province must eliminate religious discrimination in **education funding**. He answered: "The people who have an objection to the existing arrangement need to be proposing that." Kennedy is not being forthright when he implies that he has not received a detailed, formal proposal for nondiscriminatory funding of non-Catholic, faith-based schools. In December, 2004, the Multi-Faith Coalition for Equal Funding of Religious Schools, representing the interests of Muslims, Sikhs, Jews and a wide range of non-Catholic Christians, gave Kennedy a comprehensive and responsible proposal for extending equal funding to all faith-based schools in Ontario. We made this proposal public last November, after months of being ignored. Unfortunately, the minister has repeatedly ignored requests to meet with us and discuss the proposal, and he continues to pretend that our proposal does not exist.

The proposal recommends direct funding for non-Catholic faith-based schools equal to the funding for Catholic schools, with equivalent accountability requirements and standards in place to ensure that the public interest is safeguarded. The same can be done by way of tax credits if appropriate accountability requirements are imposed, but that was not our proposal to Kennedy since we know he does not support tax credits.

Either way, continuing open religious discrimination in violation of international law is not a viable option. Ninety-three per cent of faith-based schools in Ontario are already fully funded. We are just asking for fairness for the other seven per cent, which get nothing since they are non-Catholic faith-based schools.

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