



ISSN 1180-4386

**Legislative Assembly
of Ontario**
Second Session, 37th Parliament

**Assemblée législative
de l'Ontario**
Deuxième session, 37^e législature

**Official Report
of Debates
(Hansard)**

Tuesday 12 June 2001

**Journal
des débats
(Hansard)**

Mardi 12 juin 2001

**Standing committee on
finance and economic affairs**

Responsible Choices for Growth
and Accountability Act
(2001 Budget), 2001

**Comité permanent des finances
et des affaires économiques**

Loi de 2001
sur des choix réfléchis
favorisant la croissance
et la responsabilisation
(budget de 2001)

Chair: Marcel Beaubien
Clerk: Susan Sourial

Président : Marcel Beaubien
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Published by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario



Service du Journal des débats et d'interprétation
3330 Édifice Whitney ; 99, rue Wellesley ouest
Toronto ON M7A 1A2
Téléphone, 416-325-7400 ; télécopieur, 416-325-7430
Publié par l'Assemblée législative de l'Ontario

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF ONTARIO

ASSEMBLÉE LÉGISLATIVE DE L'ONTARIO

**STANDING COMMITTEE ON
FINANCE AND ECONOMIC AFFAIRS**

**COMITÉ PERMANENT DES FINANCES
ET DES AFFAIRES ÉCONOMIQUES**

Tuesday 12 June 2001

Mardi 12 juin 2001

The committee met at 0901 in room 151.

**RESPONSIBLE CHOICES FOR GROWTH
AND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT
(2001 BUDGET), 2001**

**LOI DE 2001
SUR DES CHOIX RÉFLÉCHIS
FAVORISANT LA CROISSANCE
ET LA RESPONSABILISATION
(BUDGET DE 2001)**

Consideration of Bill 45, An Act to implement measures contained in the 2001 Budget and to amend various statutes / Projet de loi 45, Loi mettant en oeuvre des mesures mentionnées dans le budget de 2001 et modifiant diverses lois.

ONTARIO TEACHERS' FEDERATION

The Chair (Mr Marcel Beaubien): Good morning, everyone. It is 9 o'clock, and I'd like to bring the committee to order. If we are going to stay on time, we'd better start on time. Our first presentation this morning is from the Ontario Teachers' Federation. I would ask the presenters to come forward and then state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Roger Régimbal: My name is Roger Régimbal. I'm president of the Ontario Teachers' Federation. Accompanying me is Peter Vandenberk, a member of our staff.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation welcomes the opportunity today to appear before the standing committee on finance and economic affairs to offer its views on the proposed tax credit for private schools contained within Bill 45. The federation represents the 144,000 elementary and secondary teachers in Ontario's public, Catholic and French-language schools.

The province of Ontario has been responsible for the publicly funded education system for its citizens for almost 150 years. The public, or common, schools have long been regarded as one of the foundations of our civil society. The public education system is the largest single source of economic opportunity and advancement for individuals, and is the place where children from diverse ethnic, economic and cultural backgrounds learn to live and work together. The understanding of those different

from ourselves and the ability to work with others constructively and co-operatively are not only traits which benefit the individual. In today's rapidly shrinking world, these skills and attributes benefit our society as a whole, improving productivity and competitiveness. As Hugh Segal, president of the Institute for Research on Public Policy, told the governors of the OTF at a private meeting in 1998, "[The state of] publicly funded education is a proxy for [the state of] a civil society." It is for those reasons that, as a society, all taxpayers have been required to support publicly funded schools, regardless of whether they have children enrolled in those schools.

When public schools were first started in Canada, people were poor and believed enough in the need for public education to contribute their hard-earned pennies in order to make sure that we had a publicly funded system. The proposed tax credit is a significant move away from the principle that all members of Ontario society share in the costs and benefits of our common school system. We propose this morning to examine several key features of the proposed tax credit and their impact on the education system as a whole.

The need for accountable schools: the hallmarks or quality indicators of an excellent school system are a sound curriculum, qualified teachers and sufficient resources to ensure that all students have real opportunities for learning and success. Testing and other accountability systems are used to measure progress, to inform policy development and to improve instruction. The last six years have seen massive change and considerable stress in the system. Education budgets have been cut in real terms from 1995 levels, and a variety of system resources continue to be stretched to the limit: time, administrative and teaching.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation believes strongly in our publicly funded school system. We question the government's commitment to that system. The government proposes to reward those who opt out with a sizeable tax credit, rather than rewarding those who stay in with improved education resources.

What is the cost to the system of the tax credit? A tax credit represents a decision by a government to forgo revenues that would otherwise be owed to society's common purse. A refundable tax credit goes beyond a tax deduction. The credit is deducted against tax owing. If the credit is larger than the amount of tax owed, it is refunded to the taxpayer. The cost of this tax credit when fully implemented, based on current private school enrol-

ment, has been estimated at \$350 million. It is generally expected, however, that with the tax credit in place, private school enrolment will increase significantly, and might even double, resulting in a revenue loss to the government of \$700 million. Those lost revenues would otherwise be available for a variety of programs: education, health, transport. If we look at education alone, what could that money do? You have in the written brief different scenarios that you can read in there.

The cost to school boards in lost grants for pupils who leave the system: every student who leaves the publicly funded system for the private system reduces the funding of the school and school board by \$7,000. If only two students were to leave in each of 5,000 schools, the publicly funded system would lose \$70 million. If the present private school enrolment were to double, resulting in an average loss of 20 students for each of the 5,000 schools, the cost to the public system would be \$700 million. The funding formula is enrolment driven, but many of the costs of education are not enrolment driven. A loss of two to 20 students per school will not substantially affect the costs of heat, maintenance and administrative work and will have only a marginal effect on the number of teachers required.

The cost to the government to administer the tax credit: there are many hidden costs attached to it. There are a number of administrative issues that have not yet been ironed out or have cost estimates attached to them. Who will determine that a given private school is bona fide and should be authorized to issue tuition receipts? What will the criteria be? What auditing process will be required? How will the tax credit be reconciled? Will tax-credit-eligible private schools be required to submit yearly financial audits? What will be the added cost to the tax processing and collection systems?

0910

Some other important information: the Ministry of Education Web site currently contains the following important information on private schools. It states that, "In accordance with section 16 of the Education Act, operators of private schools in Ontario are required to notify the Ministry of Education annually of their intention to operate by showing a notice of intention to operate a private school. Inclusion of a private school in this directory does not imply that the instruction it offers has been approved by the ministry.

"The Ministry of Education may inspect a private secondary school that has requested inspection in order to authorize the principal to grant credits in subjects leading to the Ontario secondary school diploma. The inspection relates to the standard of instruction. The ministry does not inspect health equipment nor practices related to safety and staffing issues."

Private schools are not required to employ qualified teachers. Many private schools do not operate with qualified teachers. Unlike medicine, which requires a licence to practise regardless of the venue, teachers are only required to be licensed by the Ontario College of Teachers if they are teaching in the publicly funded system. The

complaints, investigation and disciplinary processes of the college, which are designed in the public interest, only apply to persons who are members of the college.

Policies of the Ministry of Education, like the safe schools policy, which establishes guidelines for the reporting of school-related violence, do not apply to private schools. The provincial government does not require teachers in private schools to submit to criminal reference checks. Private schools are not required to participate in provincial testing, except for the grade 10 literacy test, starting in 2001, because it is a diploma requirement. Elementary private schools are not required to follow the provincial curriculum. Will the public expect the Ministry of Education to issue a Good House-keeping seal of approval to private schools? What bureaucracy will be required to do this?

In conclusion, in each education reform that has been brought forward in the life of this government, the news releases, the background papers and the public statements have always made the issue of accountability one of the central reasons for the change. As I look back over the last six years, I and my predecessors in this office have repeatedly responded that teachers are not afraid of accountability. In fact we welcome it. It strikes me as highly ironic that I should be here today to address a government initiative which appears to be totally without any sense of accountability. I have to ask, where is the government's commitment to accountability on this issue? This is not the first time, however, that a president of the OTF has appeared before a legislative standing committee to urge review of hastily introduced public policy, to urge a sober second thought and a careful examination of all implications. I urge the government to take the time necessary to ensure sound public policy and appropriate fiscal management.

On this, we recommend that the government withdraw the sections of Bill 45 dealing with the equity in education tax credit in order to allow for further public consultations on providing a tax credit to parents of students enrolled in private schools; investigation into the administrative costs and processes which would be required to implement the tax credit; extensive public consultations on the standards of accountability to be applied to private schools which might be eligible for such a tax credit; and public release of the findings of the investigation and the public consultations. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have two minutes per caucus. I'll start with Mr Marchese.

Mr Rosario Marchese (Trinity-Spadina): It is curious that we are discussing a whole lot of education issues, yet this is a tax initiative. It is the tax guy who made this initiative. What he said was, "We are just giving people some money back because we think they deserve fairness." The implications are educational, but Ecker had nothing to do with this decision. At no time did they say, "Yes, there are implications, and we are going to deal with them." What do you say to that?

Mr Régimbal: As I said in my last paragraph, it was hastily done from the point of view that we can see. This

is a societal debate. Being a societal debate, you don't do that with just a small change in the tax credit system; it has to be the whole of Ontario society wanting this change.

Mr Marchese: Harris has pointed out in the past that such a move would fragment society along religious lines and that such a move would take \$500 million. They now claim people should have a choice. They all now claim there will not be an exodus, on behalf of parents who use public schools, to the other private schools. Do you agree that the government should do a study that would show there will not be an exodus before they do such a thing?

Mr Régimbal: I think there should be an in-depth study of all of this situation. What preoccupies us most, as you probably read in the brief, is the accountability side. If the government wants to impose an accountability framework on the public school system, anybody who accesses public funds should have to deal with the same accountability system.

The Chair: Thank you very much. To the government side, Mr Hardeman.

Mr Ernie Hardeman (Oxford): First of all, I want to say I agree with you that all taxpayers support public education because that's good for society. A good public education system is what we all want. That's why the government this year is putting \$360 million more into the public education system, because we agree with you that a top-notch public education system is very important. I had some concerns, though, in some of the individual items you mentioned about the public education system.

The first one was, as you were talking what identifies a quality school, all I heard was what we put into the system. Not once did you mention the students coming out of the system. That's how I would measure quality education. When the children have been educated, that's how you would see whether the system is working properly. I noticed that you didn't mention the students. You mentioned the input costs, qualified teachers and well-rounded products in the system. I had a little concern that that's where the focus would be on how you would measure quality.

You also mentioned that it was generally accepted by some that enrolment was going to double in the independent schools. I haven't heard anyone suggesting that it could be, should be or could possibly be to that extent.

The other point, that there has been no discussion about this: in my community, this discussion has been going on for 40 years, that people who make a choice, who want some different type of education for their children, should have that choice and, in fairness, they should not pay for educating their children in the public system totally. No one is objecting to them doing that. But they should not pay for that and then totally pay for their parental choices too, that they want something different. It could be in a Montessori school—

The Chair: Thank you, Mr Hardeman, but we have run out of time. I have to go to the official opposition; Mr Phillips.

Mr Gerry Phillips (Scarborough-Agincourt): It was less than two years ago that the government prepared—this is their brief arguing against extending funding; at least this is part of the material. It was extremely hard-hitting. I've quoted from it. This is the government, this is the Premier Harris government talking here in their submission opposing extending it. Among other things, they said it would “undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding. When diverse populations separate themselves from the general mix, the public system is the poorer because the opportunities for understanding and accommodating differences are diminished.” They go on to say it “would result in the disruption and fragmentation of education” in Ontario. This is Harris, the government speaking. “If full and direct funding were provided for private religious schools, it is difficult to see why it would not also be required for schools established on the basis of language, ethnicity or culture. The benefits which Ontario receives from a public education system which promotes the values of pluralism, multiculturalism and understanding would be diminished.”

0920

So there was an enormous amount of research done arguing against it. We've asked the government to present—I assume they've done a substantial amount of research now to justify changing their mind within two years. We've been told the research was that somebody looked at the Internet to see what happened to enrolment.

Has OTF been aware of any research the government has done—because I assume you must have been involved in it—that would justify a 180-degree turn in that short of period of time?

Mr Régimbal: We are not aware of any research that has been done. I'd like to respond to the fact that we have not mentioned the students there. That is because I truly believe the students that the publicly funded school system is producing are top-notch students. We just have to look at the Ontario society today: 98% of them are from the publicly funded school system, and they are leaders in our society.

As for the discussion part, which relates to Mr Phillips's question 2, up to a couple of weeks ago, the government's position on the issue was that they were not going to finance the private schools. At the last election, it was not an election issue. Therefore, there might have been discussions within the different communities, but it was not put on the table for the public to vote on as an issue in the last election. So it is not a question of a mandate that the government has to go ahead with it. If that's what they wanted, they should have made it an election issue.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. Au nom du comité, merci pour votre présentation ce matin.

TORONTO DISTRICT
CHRISTIAN HIGH SCHOOL

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from the Toronto District Christian High School. I would

ask the presenter or presenters to come forward, please, and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Ren Siebenga: It's truly an honour to be here today. In 1971, I was here with a whole bunch of school children and some principals and presented to then-Premier Davis and his Education Minister Welch.

We've collected 100,000 signatures from across the province saying that the tax dollars should follow the child to the school of parental choice, so it's been a long, long way. So this is a day that, in my communities, we are celebrating. I don't know all the politics that goes on and I'm not party to all that stuff in that I have a big enough job in what I'm doing. I'm the principal of Toronto District Christian High School. I've been a principal of independent schools for 30 years: a whole bunch of years in a place called Durham Christian High School in Bowmanville, and the last six and a half years in the Toronto District Christian High School here in Toronto.

Let me introduce some other folks that I have with me. To my left is Phil Vriend. Phil is an English teacher at Toronto District Christian High School. He lives downtown here in Toronto, so I picked on him this morning because he had the shortest way in. The rest of the folks are at school holding the fort, hopefully.

I also brought some students with me. I'll just introduce them for a minute.

0930

Reuben Grin is there on the end. Reuben is an OAC student at Toronto District Christian High School. He's a student from the Georgetown community. He's graduating this year. He's heading off to Calvin College, which is a Christian liberal arts college in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Reuben is studying physics and philosophy. He'll put them together, I'm sure.

Andrew Chorostecki here is from the Brampton community. He's also graduating this year. He's going to the University of Ottawa this coming year. Let's see, what's he going to study? Probably political science. Is that right?

Mr Phillips: There is no "science."

Mr Joseph Spina (Brampton Centre): Is it a fine art, Gerry?

Mr Siebenga: Then we have Brandon Weening here. Brandon is going to Queen's University. Brandon could study in almost any field. He's an incredibly gifted fellow. In fact, Queen's is giving him \$12,000 a year to go to Queen's this coming year.

Adele Konyndyk—oh, Robyn. I'm sorry. That's her sister. The principal doesn't always know the names of everybody. Brandon is from the Holland Marsh area. Robyn is from Georgetown, and Robyn is going to Redeemer Christian University in Hamilton this coming year to study journalism.

Toronto District Christian High School has produced about 2,500 graduates through the years. This is our 38th year of existence and there are students everywhere making their contribution to the culture.

My parents immigrated to this country in the 1920s to Lacombe, Alberta. My mother was eight. She came with her father and three siblings and had all her schooling in this country. My dad was 18 and had no schooling here and proceeded to work on farms. They immigrated just before the Depression. They were tough years. My father rode the rods, as they rode in those days, between Alberta and BC. He jumped off into the path of an oncoming train and lost both his hands. There was a major discussion about whether to send him back to Holland or not. The community, his parents, his brother and his siblings came to his aid and said, "He will never be a ward of the state; he will not accept the dole."

He rejoined his brother in Alberta. They homesteaded for many years. He was a beef farmer, a dairy farmer. He was a charter member of a Christian school. In 1945 they started a Christian school in Lacombe. He sent all his nine children through the Lacombe Christian School. I went to Bentley High School. From there I went to a liberal arts college. I then moved to Ontario, taught for a few years and became principal. I studied at Trent University and also at the University of Toronto. I got a master's degree in education at U of T. I have my OTC. I have my Ontario principal's certificate, and we require certification of all our teachers as well. In fact, we have a certification system. In addition to the Ontario system, we have a Christian certification system, so they have to get a CSTC, as we say, and our principals have to get Ontario Christian school principal certificates as well.

That's a little about the people. I'll give you a quick review of TDCH at this point. If you take your little booklets out, you'll see a little bit of our history here. Our present site is in Woodbridge. We have 11 acres of land which was purchased in the 1950s which was sort of the edge of Toronto at that time and was land that could be afforded. The school started in the early 1960s and has been a regional school all the years, taking in students from Alliston, Brampton, Georgetown, Mississauga, Holland Marsh and Richmond Hill. We have seven school buses that pull into the property every day. We have students who ride the city buses as well. That gives you a little bit of the history of the school.

Our programs are predominantly academic. We do not have a technical program per se. We run an advanced program. In the old days we called it advanced, general and basic; we had those three streams; those are being readjusted in the present four-year program. We have grade 9 through OAC.

0930

The purpose for schools like ours, the schools that my parents started and so on, has nothing to do with not liking public schools. They've been around for a long, long time, and whether the tax credit comes through or not, they'll still be around. It's all to do with passing on our faith to our next generation. We're Christians and we believe that everything we do in our life should be coloured by that perspective, particularly our education. We want to pass on what we believe to be true about life to the next generation, and schools are important for that,

and it has its implications in every little nook and cranny of the school operation.

The theory for that is well developed through the years, and if you want to get your hands on some of the material on that, you could read it. It's about passing on a way of life. It's about passing on a tradition. It's passing on a faith to the next generation and giving them the skills and tools with which to be Christian in our culture. We want them in the middle of the culture. We want them right in the middle of it, shaping and forming the culture for the Lord. We encourage our English teachers to figure out how to train in that way; we encourage our math teachers to do the same, our history teachers—all of our teachers.

When it comes to accountability—I heard the last speaker speak and I've heard quite a bit on that in the last while—our institutions have their ups and downs. We've been around a long time. All institutions have their good times and their not-so-good times, but a whole lot of that has to do with the quality of the education that goes on inside. When we produce a good product and when we're doing a good job of what we're doing, there are people knocking on the doors, and that's incredible accountability. Going through down times when you're cutting staff, and when you're releasing persons from your payroll, are not good times. We have been through those in our schools, but they usually have to do with quality, the stuff that's going on inside. If we are faithful to what we are supposed to be doing—that's educating for this culture, educating responsible citizens—we will have people knocking on our doors, and we do.

Our parents run the place. The board is made up of parents. I'm answerable to a board of trustees. We have education committees that govern the curriculum education side of the institution. Parents who send children are committed to giving of their time to help make the institution work, because it's their institution.

We are also inspected regularly by the Ministry of Education, and I mean inspected. They go from one end to the other. I have many friends who are in the public sector, and they have not seen inspectors for years; we see them every year. The reason we go through that is because we offer ministry diplomas. We have to do that in order to offer to offer the ministry diploma. We have major debates and fights with them from time to time on the stuff we're doing, but we work within the system to make it happen. We acknowledge that to give the diploma requires accountability to them as well. There are things they're concerned about that we have to grant to them.

I'll just mention a couple of other things here. I gave you quite a handout of questions and answers. There's all kinds of material there. For instance, there are comparisons with other provinces if you're interested in how other provinces are doing on this issue. There are some of the other questions that have been raised in a previous presentation

We are committed to a strong public school system. Our culture has to have it. It grieves me when it falls

apart and it grieves me when they're hurting. We do not want a hurting public school system in our culture. We need a strong public school system. We need a strong Catholic school system. We need choice. We need a variety of opportunities for parents to choose from.

That's what I want to offer you today, that all children should have tax dollars spent on them. Public schooling should be seen as one of the choices parents have.

Mr Phil Vriend: Are there any questions?

The Chair: If that completes your presentation, we have approximately a minute and a half per caucus, and I'll start with the government side.

Mr John O'Toole (Durham): It's a pleasure to see you again and to commend you for the ongoing struggle. I suspect the question I have is to reinforce the importance of standards and accountability, if you could just elaborate. It's been mentioned in many of the presentations by your counterparts in the public education system. Your teachers would all have a degree and some sort of teaching qualifications—you call them certified teachers—and you also have a rigorous inspection, which is really part of an accountability system. In some cases, the public system is lacking that annualized inspection, the teacher being validated in the classroom, actually being monitored. Maybe you could, in the general sense, comment on how rigorous it is specifically in your school.

Mr Siebenga: Every six years we are inspected by the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. They have outside inspectors who come in and shake us down from one end to the other. It's usually a two- to three-day inspection, and they produce about a 40-page document on our schools, which involves finance, education, every nook and cranny of the operation. We then put together a plan of action on behalf of our board to move all the "goods" in their recommendations to "excellents." I've been through a host of those through the years. They're pretty unnerving and make you rather vulnerable. We have a ministry inspection every year. We have to fill out the forms. They come in, and we pay for those inspections. We also have parental inspections. We have parents coming to the classroom to see what's happening.

The Chair: The official opposition.

Mr Phillips: Thirty years as principal and you look so young, it must be a good job.

Mr Siebenga: Look a little closer.

Mr Phillips: The government, just less than two years ago, argued strenuously on the other side of this issue, against extending funding. This was their brief; I have yet to see the rationale for changing it. I wonder if you might comment on one of the paragraphs they used when they were arguing against it, just to provide another view. The Harris government said at the time, a couple of years ago, "Extending funding ... would undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding." When diverse populations "separate themselves from the general mix, the public system is the poorer because the opportunities for understanding and

accommodating differences are diminished.” That was Harris’s argument two years ago.

Mr Siebenga: We don’t buy that argument, and we haven’t for years. Our idea is that we need to, in community, pass on our faith to our children to help them develop their self-image of who in the world they are, so that they can come to grips with who they are as people and make their contribution to the culture as the people they’re meant to be. We want to give them the skills and tools to do that. That’s our purpose.

Mr O’Toole: On a point of order, Mr Chair: If I could have Mr Phillips clarify where he is citing this material. Is it from the Waldman—

Mr Phillips: It’s from the Ontario government’s documents that were tabled yesterday with us—

Mr O’Toole: Could you cite it properly?

Mr Phillips: Sure.

Mr O’Toole: Is it from *Waldman v Canada*?

Mr Phillips: As you can see here, it’s Ontario’s draft of the state party’s response, the author’s communication sent to the government of Canada. It was sent by the Ontario government to Canada. You’ve got to get the documents out. Look for the one that’s dated February 22, 1999, about two years ago and then you flip in—

Mr Marchese: Monsieur Beaubien, s’il vous plait.

The Chair: Mr O’Toole, I think you know where to find the information.

Mr Phillips: Go to pages 2 and 3 then.

Mr Marchese: Give him the document.

Mr Phillips: Are you on page 2 now?

Mr Marchese: Give him the document, because—

Mr Phillips: See page 2 at the top?

Mr Marchese: You’ve got it.

The Chair: Mr Marchese, go ahead. Proceed.

Mr Phillips: Page 2 and then—

The Chair: Mr Phillips, that’s enough. I think Mr O’Toole knows where to go. Mr Marchese.

0940

Mr Marchese: Mr Siebenga, thank you for your presentation. Look, I respect the work you all do. My difference is not that. I support a strong public school system, as you said you do, and if people want to make a different choice, that’s a different matter. You’re saying choice should be universal, that everybody should be able to decide where they go, and I just don’t buy that.

In the public system, students are subjected to all sorts of things that the government has forced on them, and we have to live by them while they’re in office. Hopefully, after that things will change, but until then, we’re subject to it.

In your statement of educational philosophy, you say, “The Toronto District Christian High School, along with other independent schools, rejects the intrusion of government-imposed curriculum.” Some guidelines, OK, but, “The government may not dictate the contents or the religious philosophical direction of that intrusion. Only totalitarian governments attempt to invade the minds of its citizens.”

If the public system is subjected to that, and you’re saying, “We need choice and give us the money for that choice; however, we don’t want government intrusion,” how do you deal with that? How do you defend that?

Mr Siebenga: I think I mentioned that I expect there will be some government intrusion into our system—and I don’t know what this system is, the tax credit system and so on; I don’t have all the details of that figured out—but I would hope it would maintain the integrity of our system, that you would see our system and you would say, “That’s a good system. It should have its integrity maintained. We ought not to have an intrusion into that system that destroys it.”

How you would set that up, I don’t know, but I would invite you to consider it. How could you set up a system that would allow us to be the people we’re meant to be within the system, providing to the Ontario mosaic our gifts and our contribution. That’s what we’ve been asking for for years, and we’ve doing it at this same time, as you can see from students like this. We have 2,500 graduates in the present school I’m in—anyway, I won’t go on.

The Chair: We’ve run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

PEEL DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from the Peel District School Board. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome, and you have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Ms Janet McDougald: Good morning. Thank you very much for allowing us to present this morning. I know time slots are limited and so we’re pleased to be able to be here.

My name is Janet McDougald and I am the chair of the Peel District School Board, which is Canada’s third-largest school district. With me today is Ruth Thompson, who is our vice-chair of the board, and Harinder Takhar, who is our associate director of educational services.

As one of largest school boards in Ontario, we believe we must add our voice to the groundswell of opposition to this government’s proposal to fund private schools with public tax money. Today, I will speak briefly on behalf of my board about the danger of this proposal in terms of fragmenting our communities, the potential weakening of the public school system, the lack of accountability measures and the lost opportunity to create more choice within public schools. I do not intend to speak for the full 20 minutes and, therefore, we will all welcome questions at the end.

Obviously as an organization, we are fundamentally opposed to this proposal. Let me illustrate why with a little imaginary journey. If I took all of you here to one of our 184 public schools in Peel, one of the first things you would see as we walked through the door would be a poster, our award-winning multilingual welcome poster.

With its image representing a mix of races and cultures, and the word “welcome” in the 25 major languages of Peel, it is a powerful symbol of what works in public schools today. In public schools, all are welcome and all belong. Schools remain a key cornerstone of an open and democratic society.

Our schools are within, and are integral parts of, diverse communities. One of the key roles of public education is to foster and nurture diversity to prepare our students for the world in which they will live. Every week I see this demonstrated in local school events and activities which reflect the diversity of the community as a given. If schools are microcosms of the community, then Peel schools are places where the message is not to simply tolerate other cultures but rather to embrace them.

To be blunt, this goal is not well served by a disguised voucher system which segregates, fragments and divides. For this government to support divisiveness is unconscionable, and our society will pay the price. The message that all belong is one that is learned through everyday life in a public school. This voucher system delivers the exact opposite message.

Clearly, we are also concerned about the money this government proposes to spend on this proposal. Although it is true that we have experienced a few satisfactory areas where funding has actually increased, such as in new school construction, we also know too well the shortages within our schools and our system. We know staff who have lost jobs through funding cuts. Scarce public dollars should not be spent on private schools, period.

You see, we take issue with a proposal that spends our taxpayer dollars based on an assumption of what parents want. Because if you ask parents and school councils for ways to spend \$300 million, they have many useful suggestions. They may request smaller class sizes, more textbooks, greater support for special education, more teaching assistants, lunchroom supervisors, more time for staff training and on and on. We can assure you, spending a single penny of their money on private schools would not be on their agenda. How do I know this? Because this year we asked our staff, parents and community what they wanted through our system planning for student success process. Over 3,000 responded and 94% supported our seven goals, including our goal of enriching diversity. Not one respondent asked for vouchers.

We must say as well that, as a board, we have been pleased, despite the times we may have disagreed on specific initiatives or processes, with this government’s stated commitment to strengthen public schools. This government has said repeatedly that its focus is on strengthening the public school system, not on vouchers. This latest flip-flop seems an uncharacteristic move for a government so committed to keeping stated promises. It is at best disappointing and at worst a betrayal.

As firm as this government’s commitment has been to promises made, promises kept, there has been an even greater focus on accountability. Public school boards and

public schools are buried in paperwork necessary to achieve these accountability measures. To prove that tax dollars are well spent, our teachers and principals complete countless forms and reports, so many that they tell us it has become a major workload issue. And we are speaking of measures beyond the required provincial student testing.

Now the proposal is to give private schools money, albeit indirectly, without a scrap of accountability. Will the government hold these schools accountable to the same standards as public schools? Specifically, will these private schools be expected to accept all students, both able-bodied and disabled? Will they be required to provide transportation? Will they be expected to employ certified teachers, accountable to the College of Teachers, and will they be tested? Will they have to follow the provincial curriculum and evaluate students according to provincial standards, including report cards? Will these private schools be required to follow the same health and safety standards as public schools?

0950

As taxpayers, the members of the Peel board see that this voucher system provides zero accountability for our tax dollars, a fact that is opposite the core belief of this government. What will the government do to guarantee the accountability of all schools in receipt, directly or indirectly, of government funds?

Finally, beyond our concerns about fragmentation, the removal of money from public schools and the complete lack of accountability, we are concerned that the government did not even look at a creative way to offer greater opportunities within the existing public school system. As a board, we are committed to creating greater choice within our public schools. We have a creative learning choices committee working to identify innovative and enriching new programs within our school. Recently, for example, we approved the launch of a new elementary school for the arts.

If the government truly wants to meet the needs of parents, then give public schools the funding and the legislative flexibility to offer more choice within the public school system. Could we not offer in some way some of the kinds of programs seen at some independent schools? Is there a framework that our board and the ministry could negotiate that would make this a possibility?

To us, this is very a worthwhile discussion to have. By offering greater choice within public schools, we strengthen public schools, ensure the government’s commitment to the existing system, enrich the focus of diversity and fulfill the necessity of accountability without creating divisiveness.

In the Peel board, at every level, we use a guiding principle: what is best for our students. This proposal does absolutely zero good, but has a serious potential to do harm. We teach our students to leave a legacy. What will this legacy be? A society divided, or one united by a strong, accountable, open public school system? That is the real choice here.

We hope that you will consider these issues as you continue the process of these hearings.

We're here this morning and would be pleased to answer questions, because I think in that way we might be able to get into a little bit of a discussion around some of the issues. Certainly we're more than willing to give you some specifics about the kinds of things that are happening within our public schools in Peel.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have a couple of minutes per caucus and I'll start with the official opposition. Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: I appreciate the brief from a well-regarded board.

The thing that has caught us off guard is that it was just two years ago that the government prepared a very comprehensive brief arguing against extending funding to private schools. I quote just a couple of things in here. They said, "It would result in the disruption and fragmentation of education in Ontario. It is difficult to see why it would not also be required for schools established on the basis of language, ethnicity and culture. The benefits which Ontario receives from a public education system which promotes the values of pluralism, multiculturalism and understanding would be diminished," and also speak to the point you raised. It goes on to say that extending the funding "would have an adverse effect on the viability of the public school system, which would become the system serving students not found admissible by any other system."

My question to you and your board, because you're obviously knowledgeable, is, have you an idea why the government changed its mind in that short a period of time? Are you aware of any research the government has done that said, "We were wrong two years ago. All the arguments we used against it have changed"? Can you help the committee in terms of what research they have done that would allow them to change their mind so dramatically?

Ms McDougald: I believe that was the flip-flop quote in my presentation. From our perspective I don't believe we're privy to the government's initiatives or their thinking or where they do it or how they come up with these kinds of things.

Certainly from a public school system perspective, we don't believe that this is good for kids and we also don't believe they have taken into consideration the fact that the public school systems have been meeting the needs of children for years and years and years. What would make this government believe we couldn't continue to do that, that we couldn't make room for some changes within the public school system and create more choices for kids, to be more inclusive? It wasn't too long ago, as a matter of fact, that we were all talking about consolidation and amalgamation: let's get rid of duplication of services, let's be more efficient and effective. That's why school boards were downsized. That's why municipalities were amalgamated. That's why we are in the mess we are in now. Now this government is deciding to divide and create more, when I thought we were trying to become

more efficient and effective. I'm as confused as you are, Mr Phillips.

Mr Marchese: One of the points about this, of course, is that it's a tax credit, an initiative by the Minister of Finance, not the Minister of Education. They said, "Here's the money. We're just trying to help people. That's it." What you and many other deputations have pointed out is that there are a lot of implications of public dollars—should they flow to the private schools? Are you not—I find it curious at least. Do you find it curious that the Minister of Education isn't around, isn't here, and that they're not talking about these implications, that for all intents and purposes, we really are not debating other educational issues because it is a tax issue?

Ms McDougald: No matter how you package it, I don't think you can fool the general public. I think they're bright and interested, and they have a lot invested in public education. You just need to walk into one of our public schools at any time and see the number of parent volunteers and the active school councils we have. No matter how they package it, it really doesn't matter. We all know it is a fundamental change to the way public education has been financed and offered. I don't think you're fooling anybody. When I talk to people within my community, they certainly see it as that. It has little to do with finances and everything to do with public schools.

Mr Marchese: The government members—Mr O'Toole in particular—say the one-size-fits-all philosophy is not appropriate around this particular issue, that we should allow people to have choice. "What's wrong with that?" is the argument they make.

Ms McDougald: Certainly we would agree that one size does not fit all, ever. Again, you need to look at a region such as Peel, where we move from urban right through to rural. We have an extremely highly diverse population. We have schools that have 30 or 40 cultures within a student body of just 600. If anybody knows about offering choice, it certainly is the public school system. We believe, as I said before, that public schools can meet those needs and those changing needs of communities, and we can do it best, rather than diverting money to all sorts of little interest groups.

You talk about accountability and those kinds of things. I can open a private school tomorrow that can absolutely guarantee that every student will go on to post-secondary education. I can guarantee it because that is the only kind of student I will take. So you can make all of those guarantees. But in public education we take everyone and we help every student reach their potential. As a citizen of this province, and certainly a lifelong resident of Peel, I believe that's the kind of public education system I want my grandchildren growing up in.

Mr Spina: Thank you, Janet, Ruth and Harinder. It's good to see you again; I know we see each other a lot. I just want, first of all, to compliment the board. In my opinion, our Peel board has probably been the best in working—

Mr O'Toole: Durham is the best.

Mr Spina: Durham argues. Do you have the posters these people have? I was pleased—for example, you talked about 25 languages. When we opened Great Lakes Public School a month and a half ago, I think there were 36 language flags in that school, which is fantastic.

You obviously are critical of a voucher system, and yet you want more choice within the public school system so that parents would have choice. Wouldn't you need a voucher system within the board if you did that, Janet? If you want to give people choice, and you had people in north Brampton who wanted to choose between Heart Lake Secondary or Mayfield—and Mayfield, of course, has a wonderful fine arts program—wouldn't you need a voucher system to be able to do that? I see that as a voucher system, not the tax credit. Please help me understand that better.

1000

Ms McDougald: I don't understand what you're suggesting. Are you suggesting our parents would actually take money to public schools to get into certain programs?

Mr Spina: No. What I'm asking you is this: in order to give people the choice within your system, within the public system, they would essentially be able to take a funding voucher, which is not cash in their hand, to Mayfield, Heart Lake Secondary, Notre Dame or whatever, and then that funding would flow through to that school. That, to me, is what a voucher is. The tax credit here doesn't even relate to that kind of voucher context.

Ms McDougald: We now have an open system in Peel. In fact, any student in Peel can go to any school they wish as long as there's room. In other words, you can live in the south of Peel and if you happen to work in Brampton and want your child to be close to your place of business, you can apply on what we call a flexible boundary and place that child in that school in Brampton as long as there is room and space. You can understand why that needs to happen. We can't afford to have some schools at 150% capacity and some schools at 50% capacity. I think your government would certainly agree with that, Joe.

Right now, we have that kind of flexibility. But when we're talking about choice, we're obviously talking about this voucher system also targeting people who, for religious reasons, want to take their children to other school systems. What we're saying is, your government didn't even ask public schools if we could address those needs. They didn't even say, "Here is a huge system that has been addressing every need kids have." Why didn't you come to public schools and say, "Is there something we can do to better address these needs within the public system that would satisfy some people?"

Mr Spina: But the public board is clearly saying—

The Chair: Mr Spina, I'm sorry—

Mr Spina: —that all religious education—

The Chair: Mr Spina, please come to order. We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

ONTARIO EDUCATION ALLIANCE

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from the Ontario Education Alliance. I ask the presenter or presenters to come forward. You have 20 minutes for your presentation and, on behalf of the committee, welcome.

Ms Jacqueline Latter: I'm Jacqueline Latter, and I'm here on behalf of the Ontario Education Alliance. I have the pleasure of having with me today a friend and colleague who is currently the president of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations. She has been a trustee of the Toronto board. She was vice-chair of the Toronto board at one time. She and I had the pleasure of co-chairing the heritage language committee for many years. I will speak first, and Tam Goossen will follow. Then we'll both be more than happy to answer your questions or get into discussion with you.

First of all, I won't say it's a pleasure to be here, because I wish we didn't have to constantly come to the defend our public education system against this government. I find it interesting to note that almost to the day a year ago, on Wednesday, June 7, 2000, Tam Goossen and I drove up to Barrie and made a presentation, again on an education bill. I believe it was Bill 74 at that time.

If Mr O'Toole would perhaps allow us the courtesy of listening, I think that would be much more—

The Chair: I'll make sure order and decorum are maintained. I don't think I need any help. If it gets out of hand, I will deal with it. If you'd continue with your presentation this morning, I would appreciate it.

Ms Latter: I will continue. I particularly mention Mr O'Toole because I note that—

The Chair: It's a tool I'm not going to let presenters use. It's an old tool and it's been well worn out. I think you should proceed with your presentation this morning.

Ms Latter: I have the Hansard with me from the day I mentioned, and on that occasion the member I just mentioned didn't even have the courtesy of staying in the room when we were presenting, along with Annie Kidder, with whom we shared our spot at that time. I would just hope this committee would recognize that we have differences—we have political differences, and we have philosophical differences—but in view of the fact we're talking about education, and I know we try to teach respect through the education system, I would hope we could just respect our individual differences and listen to each other.

I want to say a couple of things about this particular government and their focus on education. I don't think it's a secret that they have embarked on a campaign, since they were elected in 1995, that appears to a lot of us who care about the public education system is designed to dismantle our fine public education system in Ontario. There have been several billion dollars taken out of education funding. I know the government will argue those figures, but the reality is they have removed amounts of money from the system that have left it crippled across the province. They imposed an underfunding formula

based on square footage rather than on program or children's needs. In fact, as I'm sure they're aware, because it was said many times at the time, that the only institutions that base funding formulas on square footage are correctional institutions and zoos.

They've also managed to slash programs through underfunding, slash staff and starve special education and student services, and then they've blamed school boards and unions. They've tried to blame parents at certain points. They've certainly blamed teachers, and they've blamed students. We all know the famous crisis speech. They clearly wanted to create a crisis in order to create a favourable climate for education vouchers or whatever name you call it. I'm not going to argue the semantics of that, but that's where we are today.

I want to tell you, first of all, that I'm an immigrant. I came here from Scotland in 1969. I was immediately struck by the quality of the education system—I'd always been interested in education—and I paid a lot of attention to it, particularly in this city as it changed over many years. There was always multicultural diversity here, and I was very impressed by the way the education system here in this city, and then across the province, was able to handle the different diversities through public funding.

I'm also Jewish, and my children have been raised Jewish. We belong to a synagogue. For eight years, our children have gone to Hebrew school after school and on weekends. They stayed in the public school system for their education and, through that, I think they benefited from the multicultural, multilingual and multiracial diversity that offers. I think my children's education was made much richer by the fact they were able to be not only in contact with children from other cultures, other backgrounds and other religions but were able to learn from them and about them and vice versa. I think that's the kind of society we as Canadians are hoping to foster, a society based on tolerance and respect for all the types of diversities we encompass.

This particular proposal by this government makes absolutely no sense in the light of that. Many, many people of different religions, who are very committed to their religion and to the spirituality and the continuing of the traditions send their kids to public system.

1010

I had a very interesting conversation, actually, with one of your previous presenters from, I believe, the Toronto District Christian High School after his presentation. I was struck by his presentation. It was an eloquent presentation. I understood exactly what he was saying. In the hallway, I introduced myself to him and I said, "I appreciate your point of view. The only point that we differ on is who should pay for this." I don't believe that taxpayers in this country should be paying for religious or private school education. I don't believe this government has a mandate to ask to do that. I don't believe this government ever raised this in an honest, open, transparent way with the electorate before they went to the electorate in the last election, and therefore I don't believe they have a right to even consider

something like this, which is such a dramatic change of direction in the way education is delivered.

I'm going to stop now. I'm sure you will have some questions where I can go into more depth about what I was saying. I'm going to hand it over to Tam Goossen, the current president of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations.

Ms Tam Goossen: Thank you, Mr Chair. My name is Tam Goossen. I'm here really more as a former trustee in the Toronto Board of Education for nine years and as a parent whose two children graduated from our local schools.

I've had a great opportunity of working with many, many different parent groups, including parents from the Black, Chinese, Greek, Portuguese and Spanish-speaking communities. There was one common goal that bound all of us together: a passionate wish to improve the public education system to ensure all of our children, no matter from what background, can achieve to the best of their abilities in the schools.

We fought long and hard. For some of us who may remember those long, long meetings at the school board, we really were at the very beginning of a movement of immigrant parents who were passionate about the public education system. We fought long and hard with school boards and school principals to take down barriers which stood in the way of our children's success. It took years for our voices to be heard—you can imagine; a lot of those parents hardly spoke English—and for our concerns to be taken seriously. But it was a fundamentally democratic process that helped us build confidence in the public school system. We could point to our local schools and feel proud that our children and their friends were learning and growing together and that we as parents had something to do with it.

I'm really actually very, very sad and angry that ever since this present government came to power, they've done practically everything possible to destroy the confidence and the health of the public education system, that took decades to build. The last straw has to be this tax credit for private schools. I just wonder how much more we can take and how vulnerable all the communities feel right now because of the loss of confidence in that one system. As immigrant parents, we have not much choice when it comes to it. We really put our children in the hands of the teachers and schools, hoping that something good will come of it. Our future depends on how well they're educated.

In a 1997 Toronto Board of Education survey, 61% of our high school students were from the major religious groups. There are roughly 28,000 students in total, so 61% of that. The rough categories of groups include Christian, Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish and Hindu. This is just to augment what Jackie said earlier, that within the public system there are a lot of parents with strong religious faith but who also want their children to be in the public system, to be growing up together with all these children and families from other religious backgrounds. But under this proposal what essentially is

happening is that parents will be encouraged and indeed rewarded with as much as \$3,500 for removing their children from the public system. In turn, the public system will be punished to the tune of \$7,000 per student. I don't know what logic this has. I thought in Canada—I certainly learned this as an immigrant when I came from Hong Kong in 1970—education was the prime responsibility of the provincial government. The federal government always tells us, when we go to them, “It is not our responsibility. It is the province's responsibility.” So, who is making these decisions affecting the largest number of students and families in this country, upon whom we depend for the future of Canada?

There's the question of diversity. I believe—and this is shared by, I'm sure, all of you—that a strong public education system is key to a healthy democracy. Without true democracy, there is no celebration of diversity. Let's not kid ourselves. Over the years all the parents and students, from all racial, ethnic, religious and economic backgrounds, have put in a lot of effort to make sure our public system is more inclusive.

There was a question earlier around the choice within the public system. There is a choice for all well-off parents, say, from Rosedale to send their kids to St James Town. Is there a choice for parents from St James Town to send their kids to Rosedale? In theory there is, but in reality, you have to fight mighty hard.

My last words would be, let's not be fooled by all this political rhetoric, and let's just focus. There are so few resources at our disposal, let's just focus our energy, both public and private. I call on the supporters of religious-based schools that they too have to support a healthy public education system or their faith-based schools will be targets for attack and vandalism. That will be the end of all our dreams.

The Vice-Chair (Mr Doug Galt): Thank you very much for your presentation. We have approximately one minute left for each of the caucuses.

Ms Marilyn Churley (Toronto-Danforth): I'm very pleased that you were able to come and make a deputation today. I know, Tam, you were a school trustee at one time. So, she does know what she's talking about here. I wanted to ask you very quickly about the fact that the government has taken all references on curriculum, all references to equity out. The anti-racist secretariat is gone. Welcome House is gone. ESL and heritage language programs are disappearing. Yet the finance minister is saying that we need religious and heritage choices in education. How do you see those two coming together? The things we used to have, that we were building on within the public system, have been taken away by the government, which at the same time now is starting to give tax credits to people who want to go outside the system to get that.

Ms Goossen: It is really sad to watch, because you can see these pieces of government actions happening. It seems there's no deep understanding of a lot of the issues faced by parents, and a lot of the parents are from immigrant backgrounds. You can see that over 50% of

new immigrants coming to Canada settle in the GTA. There are many issues facing the public education system, but it doesn't seem to me that the government really is aware of the problems. The decisions are made more as—there's not a word for it—a knee-jerk reaction to different groups that are putting pressure on the government at the time. That's why, if you put them all together in perspective, it don't make sense as a whole, because if you are taking away some of the public support to help immigrant parents and their students to adjust to Canada—this is to Ontario—to begin to make a good contribution in the long term—

The Vice-Chair: We are running out of time for that caucus. We will have to move on to the government side.

Ms Goossen: The true investment is really in the public education system. When you take that away and take away the whole issue of how to make sure that our public education system—

The Vice-Chair: Sorry, we are going to have to move on to the government side. We've been over two minutes.

Mr Hardeman: I just wanted to clarify one thing. We've heard this from other presenters, that the government is going to give \$3,500 to people to make their parental choice on the type of education their children are going to get. I just wanted to make sure we all understood that—and this is a five-year program—in order to get the \$3,500, a parent would have to spend \$7,000 first. It isn't payment until they have contributed the full amount for their children's education and for their choice.

1020

What I really wanted to ask about, though, is this: the previous presenter—and I think you had said you were here for the presentation—talked about why couldn't we incorporate into the public system the parental choice for the types of education that parents are choosing. In my community, the independent school that I'm most acquainted with is a Christian school and it's been there for 43 years. My question would be—

The Vice-Chair: Mr Hardeman, we're out of time. We'll have to move on to the official opposition. My apologies.

Mr Phillips: The government had a very comprehensive study done two years ago, and your organization should look at it. It argued strenuously against extending funding and used some very strong language against it. We've got the evidence of why they felt that way two years ago, but they've suddenly changed their minds 180 degrees.

I read some of the language in here, because it is strong and it says that if they extend funding it would “undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding.” When diverse populations “separate themselves from the general mix, the public system is the poorer because the opportunities for understanding and accommodating ... differences are diminished.” These are Premier Harris's government's words, not mine.

Has your organization been aware of any research the government has done that justifies this complete reversal of the policy they had two years ago, where they—

Ms Goossen: I understand from questions asked in the House there is no research that this government has done for this.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Phillips, and thank you for your presentation, much appreciated. We've run out of time.

ONTARIO CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ASSOCIATION

The Vice-Chair: We now call on Mr Ray Hendriks, chair of the Ontario Christian School Administrators Association. Welcome. I appreciate your coming forward to present to the standing committee on finance and economic affairs.

To start out, please state your name for clarity, for the record for Hansard, and you have 20 minutes for the presentation. What's left of the 20 minutes after your presentation can be divided between the three caucuses.

Mr Ray Hendriks: My name is Ray Hendriks and I am, as identified, the chair of the Ontario Christian School Administrators Association.

Thank you for this opportunity to present to you. As in many of the stories you have heard here this morning, there is both a corporate story and a personal story. I'd like to share, just to give you a little bit of background, my personal story in all of this, to begin with.

I'm a graduate of Immanuel Christian School, located in Oshawa, Ontario. My parents were immigrants to this country. They were parents completely sold in the belief that the education system offered to their children had to be reflective of their value system, of their belief system. They worked very hard to begin a school in Oshawa. It was a small school at a time when private or independent schools weren't the most popular items around, and yet they worked very hard at that.

It was a school in which I had the privilege of carrying petitions that you heard about earlier, in the early 1970s, to search for funding. It was a school that was committed to justice in education. Next weekend I have a reunion of my grade 8 graduating class. As I looked through that list, I was pleased to see the large number of productive, responsible taxpaying citizens that graduated from that group.

That group is not an elite group of people. That group includes a couple of farmers, teachers, a pastor, workers or labourers at General Motors; there's a physician or two in that group; there's even a gentleman who attempted a number of times to run for the Conservative party in the Durham region. So there are a number of people who are graduates of that class who have—

Mr O'Toole: He won, right?

Mr Hendriks: As we look at that class, though, it strikes me that they cross a number of work and occupation lines. There are entrepreneurs in that group, and there are many good, solid families that contribute well

to the province of Ontario. They are products of that school system. There are many of those examples in Ontario.

Today, however, I speak to you on behalf of the Ontario Christian School Administrators Association. That's my responsibility today; that's my corporate job. I am currently the chairperson of that group of Christian school administrators and have been a member of the association for 16 years. I also serve as principal of Rhema Christian School in Peterborough. It's very difficult in my comments to separate the two, although I will try to do that as much as possible.

OCSAA, the Ontario Christian School Administrators Association, is a support organization for principals in Christian schools in Ontario. The members of our group are predominantly, although not exclusively, from Ontario Alliance schools. Our 85-plus members represent 76 schools and just shy of 13,000 students.

While an overview and documentation about our organization is attached—I've enclosed that for you—I would like to highlight one item about our organization and my purpose for being here today. One of the stated purposes of the Ontario Christian School Administrators Association is to take a leadership role in Christian education in Ontario. In past years we have acted with our partner organizations in sending briefs to committees of the Ontario Legislature, including responses to reports such as the Radwanski report from years ago, and various other initiatives taken by the Legislature. At this critical time we appreciate the opportunity to speak once again.

OCSAA has been a functioning, active member of the educational scene in Ontario since its inception in the 1960s. This organization provides an accountability basis that encourages all principals in our association to maintain high standards of professionalism and competency. Some of these initiatives are, and you will have heard some of these from an earlier speaker: our support of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools school evaluation program, which is a thorough evaluation of all of our schools on a cyclical basis—about every six years we visit all of the schools in Ontario that are part of our alliance. That report is about 40, 45 or 50 pages long. It's conducted by two or three professional administrators who are trained in that process and we actively support that process, and you know as all of those evaluations go of schools, that that ends up also being an evaluation of our work in the schools.

In addition to that, we're active in professional development, and regularly hold workshops and conventions which have a high rate of membership attendance. Our people show up at these things. They're interested in learning, in developing the schools to the highest standards possible.

We have the sponsoring of regional principals' associations that meet for professional development and support. On almost a monthly basis, our principals meet throughout Ontario, again for development and support.

There is also a network of organizational committees—and I apologize for the quality of that chart in the

attachment—that oversee the developing work of administrators in Ontario Christian schools.

Finally, and probably most importantly for our purposes today, we have also developed a certificate and diploma program which operates on a near equivalency basis with similar public certificates to ensure that all of our administrators are qualified to lead schools in this province. Again, attached there's a list of those courses that are available.

I must admit it's with great excitement that I received the news of the refundable credit proposal announced by the Minister of Finance. This proposal honours the principles of justice in education for which we have been advocating. It brings us into the mainstream of educational reform and into the company of much of the rest of the western world, where educational choice has been a fact for years.

1030

We applaud this initiative for a number of reasons:

As administrators of Christian schools we know that for the majority of the parents of our schools, Christian schooling is not a choice—and I must emphasize that; it is not a choice—it is a requirement of their faith. My parents had this as a requirement of their faith; the majority of people who attend our schools have it as a requirement of their faith. It's an obligation, a necessity. For Christian parents, every aspect of schooling is religious and it is in schools within the general boundaries of their faith that their children must be taught. The Christian families of our school system believe that there is no such thing as a religiously neutral school system and therefore they must send their children to one which reflects their beliefs.

As administrators of Christian schools in Ontario, we are also very familiar with the financial sacrifices made by our parents, as well as time sacrifices. The majority of our families are not part of the wealthy private school parent group that has been described both in the media and by political opponents. I know that in my particular school a quick perusal of the family list would indicate that very few of our parents are independently wealthy and that the vast majority are part of the hard-working majority of the population of Ontario, with diverse occupations, including farming, teaching, sales, skilled trades, labourers in industry and building, entrepreneurs and small business owners. These parents recognize the injustice of the current system and applaud the refundable tax credit proposal.

As administrators of Christian schools in Ontario, we also witness daily the sacrifice of time of the parents in our schools. For those who fear that there will be a huge number of small private or independent schools beginning because of the tax credit, they need not fear. We recognize the tremendous time sacrifice made by our parents and supporters to keep these schools running smoothly. To put it plainly, folks, it's a lot of work to run a school, and money is not the dictating factor for that. Parents are involved in many areas of the school, from overseeing its integrity to its mission and vision, to the general repair and maintenance of the buildings.

I sat with a finance committee last night, struggling over how we are going to meet the needs of a number of parents who are struggling to pay the tuition for this year. We met till later on last evening, 10:30 I think, by the time we adjourned our meeting last night, and these are parents who work hard during the day, and they're there in the school. The schools that we administrate benefit from high levels of parental involvement, parents who realize that it is not a small task or undertaking to establish and maintain a school. This factor alone prohibits large numbers of private schools from beginning.

The media, political opponents and the public school teachers' groups have tried to make the case that this initiative will be to the detriment of the public school system. Again, there is no evidence for that at all. In areas where funding has been extended to private and independent schools, there was not a major exodus out of the public school system. In fact, in Alberta, where the most generous funding initiatives are in place, over 90% of parents still support public schools. Much of the western world practices some degree of educational choice. From the full voucher system found in Scandinavia to government-funded systems of choice throughout the world—I won't go through them all in light of time, but they're listed there—there is widespread acknowledgement of the positive value of school choice. In a recent study by the Fraser Institute, the author stated, "Evidence suggests that if the Canadian education system supported greater parental choice, student achievement would improve. It certainly has done elsewhere."

As administrators of Christian schools in Ontario we see our students graduate to become productive citizens of the high schools they attend and ultimately productive citizens of this province. Our students leave our school having received an education which allows them to be successful in the endeavours of life that are before them. I was proud to hear this week that six of my graduates received citizenship awards in the public and Christian high schools that they attend. That is a goal for us, that our children learn to live well in the culture in which they will live and do live, and we have that as part of our goal. Our students receive a quality education in our schools, an education which strives to adhere to the general principles of the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training and prepares them well for the rigours of high school, college, university and the workplace.

As administrators of Christian schools in Ontario, we are privileged to work with staff who are well-trained and qualified for the work of teaching in Ontario today. The staffs of our schools continue to work sacrificially, often giving well beyond the call of duty to offer a spectrum of activities, including intramurals, extracurriculars and other programs to benefit our students, including, by the way, special-needs programs and special-ed programs as they are required.

As administrators of Christian independent schools in Ontario, we are supportive of all initiatives to provide the public and separate schools of Ontario with adequate and appropriate funding. We applaud the increase in funding

proposed in the new budget. We acknowledge, at the same time, the need for all schools to be fiscally responsible. As independent Christian schools, our constituencies, working closely with a board and committees which closely monitor the financial actions of our schools, hold us highly accountable.

Let me summarize. Students who graduate from our schools do well in the schools and careers they encounter in the next steps of life's journey. They go on to be responsible and productive citizens and taxpayers of this province.

Our schools are fiscally responsible and highly accountable structures, with qualified staff and supportive communities. It has been our intent, and will continue to be our intent, to advocate for a strong public system. Independent school supporters want public education to be strong and dynamic, because all children, no matter where they are educated, are the future of this province. I remind you that Alberta, with the greatest range of educational choice and the most generous funding model for independent schools, still has over 90% of their students attending public schools, which by the way consistently rank at the top in academic achievement. There is strong and increasing evidence that educational choice improves education for all students.

Finally, our parents are exercising their obligations and rights as citizens of this province to choose the type of education they require for their children. The government's support of this is just and it's right. This is in accordance with article 26 of the United Nations' human rights declaration on education, which is attached, and the practices of much of the western world.

Members of this hearing, I believe the province of Ontario, and the education system in particular, will be enhanced by the proposal now before the Legislature of Ontario. The proposal to extend refundable tax credits to parents of independent and private schools is just and it's right, and, if for no other reason than because it's just and right, it therefore must be passed by this government.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you. I wish you great wisdom and great unity as you seek to serve the needs of all parents and children in Ontario.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have one minute per caucus, and I'll start with the government side for a quick question.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for the enlightening presentation. I want to go back to the question I had for the previous presenter, which was that this morning one of the public boards made a presentation that they believe the parental choice we're talking about could be achievable in the public system. What would be your comments on that?

Mr Hendriks: My comment would be rather blunt, that the government of Ontario and the Ministry of Education over the years and the courts in fact have made it very clear that the beliefs of Christians within the school system may not be taught as our parents require them to be taught. I think the phrasing there needs to be, "our parents require them to be taught." They need to be

integral to everything that occurs within the school system.

The Chair: The official opposition; Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: I use the government's brief on this which they prepared in some detail two years ago. It has a paragraph in here that is quite strong, and I'd like your opinion on it. It's very strongly worded. It says, "Extending funding would compound the problems of religious coercion and ostracism sometimes faced by minority religious groups in homogeneous rural areas of the province who would be faced with the choice of attending a full and directly funded school of the majority religion, where compulsory prayer and indoctrination is practised, or attend their own, virtually segregated, schools."

I want to make it absolutely clear that's the government's language. How would you respond to that?

1040

Mr Hendriks: As a Christian elementary school principal, it is my goal within our school to teach our children tolerance and love for every single citizen of this province. The fact that we teach out of our belief basis in no way reflects any of those kinds of comments and neither do our graduates become exclusionist or exclusionary as a result of the education they receive in our school. Frankly, I think the government is wrong in that statement.

Ms Churley: Thank you very much for your presentation. May I say that I applaud you for taking a position. Of course you would want to get this tax credit. I see you and many others, in this case, as a particular special interest group that this government said they would not cater to, but you have the right as a special interest to come forward and support this. That's what democracy is all about. I'm on the other side of this issue for a lot of reasons.

You mentioned in your presentation that you "strive to adhere to the general principles of the Ontario Ministry of Education." I want to ask you about accountability, because as soon as you start getting, as a private school, public money, you're not under a whole bunch of accountability structures that exist now. I don't have time to list them all. Would you be willing to become, as the public system is now, completely accountable in the same way the public system is? Because you're not right now.

Mr Hendriks: Before I would say yes or no to that, I would want to have a discussion as to how accountability takes place. We are a highly accountable school, to our parents, to the public schools we send our kids to eventually, to the workplace, to a board that is established. We are members of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools, which seeks to study all of the curricular requirements the government mandates for us. In many senses, we are already very accountable. However, I would acknowledge—

Ms Churley: But would you be willing to?

The Chair: With that, Ms Churley, we've run out of time, and I must bring the discussion to an end. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

ONTARIO ENGLISH CATHOLIC
TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Kathy McVean: My name is Kathy McVean, and I am the president-elect of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. With me here this morning are two members of our staff: Carolyn Stevens and Victoria Hunt. I believe you have copies of our briefs, and I would encourage you to read those. I'd like to make some opening comments and then leave some time for questions at the end.

First of all, I want to state upfront that the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, or OECTA, believes very strongly in a publicly funded education system, and we do not believe or support any vehicle of funding for private or for-profit schools. We believe the fundamental responsibility of government is to ensure a fully and adequately funded public education system that is available to all children of the province.

The government has removed close to \$2 billion from the education system since taking power in 1995. That has happened despite growing inflation and growing enrolment during that same period of time. The government is now not meeting that fundamental obligation of providing a publicly funded education system. We know all too well about the crowded classrooms, the many portables, the lack of textbooks for our students and the diminished services for our special-needs students.

The idea of a tax credit suggests that either the government is taking money from an already cash-strapped system or is prepared to fund education beyond that which is necessary to adequately support the publicly funded system. As educators, we know the latter is not the case and therefore we can only assume that the plan must be to fund a tax credit system by taking money needed by the publicly funded system. We oppose any plan that may now or in future put in jeopardy that publicly funded system.

Our members teach in a publicly funded system, the Catholic system. It is fully accountable to the taxpayers and it's subject to all the rigours of the other publicly funded systems. We believe that the opportunity for Catholic parents to educate their children in a faith-based milieu has not only enriched the educational program for those students, but it has also enriched the entire educational system in Ontario.

We believe it's the right of all parents to choose a religious-based education system for their children, and so we do support the right to public funding for all faith-based schools. But any time there is use of public funds to support education, there must also be accountability and responsiveness to the community. In fact, this government has built its reforms on accountability. It's the hallmark of this government.

What do we mean by accountability? We mean the schools must be open for all students, regardless of their intellectual ability, their socio-economic status or their past behavioural history. We believe that any schools that receive public funding must teach the Ontario curriculum. We believe those schools must implement the standardized tests that are required in all publicly funded schools. They must be subject to all government legislation, including the Teaching Profession Act, the Human Rights Code and the Labour Relations Act.

We believe that any schools that have access to public funding must have teachers who are fully qualified members of the College of Teachers and subject to its standards and scrutiny. We believe that those schools must be open to full public scrutiny and any extension of funding to faith-based schools must be on condition that accountability structures will be in place. But the proposal by the government is that of a tax credit that's available for students who attend schools that don't meet those kinds of public scrutiny and public accountability, and therefore we're opposed to that kind of model.

We also believe that any funding that would be available for faith-based schools should be in the context of a publicly funded system, that is, the faith-based schools would be funded through government operating grants as the publicly funded school systems are, and that those grants be issued through one of the existing systems now. We know that there are models of that already in existence in Ontario, where religious schools do operate under the auspices of a public school board.

So we are urging the government to consider five recommendations that we are bringing this morning.

The first is that the tax credit plan be withdrawn as part of Bill 45.

Secondly, that the government allocate then sufficient time to debate this plan in committee. We see this as a fundamental change in the direction of education in Ontario. We believe it's absolutely essential that the public of this province have time to debate all the ramifications of such a proposal and possible options.

Thirdly, we're recommending that all schools that receive public monies be made fully accountable to the taxpayer.

Fourth, that the government extend funding to faith-based schools, and to do that in the context of the publicly funded system.

Our final recommendation this morning is that the extension of public funding to faith-based schools be on the condition that the schools have accountability structures which enhance and protect the common good.

Thank you for the opportunity and I'd be available for any questions.

1050

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately three minutes per caucus. I'll start with the official opposition.

Mr Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale-High Park): I appreciate very much your brief today. I think it has been important for the balance of this committee. It has been

hard for us to achieve balance when the committee hearings are skewed. The government chooses a near majority of the witnesses. We have only this very short period of time in which to consider things. A lot of attention has been focused by the government's choice of witnesses on religion and on the need to have some kind of equity. I appreciate in your brief that you've set out what real equity would look like. In other words, something the government has not addressed itself to is, virtually you'd have to be inviting schools to be within the publicly funded system the way that Catholic schools are today. I just wonder if you want to elaborate a little bit more about how the present proposal doesn't offer that real equity in the terms that's it is being proposed.

Ms McVean: First of all, I think the tax credit that is being proposed is only a partial subsidy. It certainly is not going to help those parents who are not able to meet the balance of what would be required in terms of meeting tuition. That is very much an equity issue.

The other very serious concern we have with any operation of private schools as they exist today is that they have the ability to screen who they accept. High-needs students may be screened out. Students with particular needs may be screened out. In supporting the tax credit, it is taking money that is very desperately needed for those students in the publicly funded system. In a sense those students have a double jeopardy here. They really don't have access to those schools because, in many cases, they're not welcomed into them. At the same time, the monies they need in the public system are being diverted into another direction.

Mr Kennedy: If you look at the way the government has structured this—I guess it is deliberate; we heard yesterday the Minister of Finance had no research, had nothing to show about the impact of this—it is wide open. It is the most wide-open possible backdoor to public education. We think the government has that in mind. Maybe it doesn't know what it is doing, but it certainly plans to have a private, secular system to go with this. It could also harm existing publicly funded school systems, because it would allow for other spinoff schools and so forth, and it could undermine the constitutional protection that Catholic schools have enjoyed in this province. Would you agree with that?

Ms McVean: Absolutely. I think also an option is probably only going to be available to students who are in urban centres. It is not going to be available to students in rural areas, in northern areas and those places where there are no choices available now.

Mr Marchese: How much time do I have?

The Chair: You get three minutes.

Mr Marchese: You understand this is a tax credit. Because it is a tax credit, there are no obligations that come with it. The minister says, "Here's some money because we think you deserve it." All of you here are saying, "Wait a moment; there are educational implications." You already said it, so there's no point in repeating it, but I believe if they're going to do that, there should be some obligations that come in terms of the

consequences on the education systems. Do you think the government should come clean or say, "Yes, there are implications. We are going to have to address them"? Do you think before the end of this legislation they should deal with all those questions?

Ms McVean: I think there are two things the government needs to deal with, first of all, the adequate funding of the publicly funded system that is available to everyone without any limitations, and that system is not being funded adequately now. I identified some of the concerns that we have. Classrooms are very large, even an average class size of 24.5 means half of our classes are above that. That's what an average means. We have many students still in portable classrooms. We have many reports of students not having sufficient textbooks. We have 122,000 students in the Catholic system in combined-grade classes. The implications of that for their program are very serious, particularly for those students who are in the years where the testing is being done, in grade 3 and grade 6. That's our first major concern, that those children are losing out.

Mr Marchese: I want to tell you that New Democrats are not supportive of the extension of monies in this form, tax credit to private non-denominational schools and to religious schools. We don't believe in it. We believe in one inclusive system. We believe in a system that's open to all. I just thought I'd make that very clear for those who are watching.

By the way, just to support your opinion, Harris was very concerned about this, as you know. A year ago or so, he and Ecker both said that to fund religious schools would take \$300 million to \$500 million out of the public system. God bless him. He had the foresight to understand it. He also said that it would fragment society.

Ms McVean: He also suggested that up to \$700 million might come out.

Mr Marchese: It could be higher because, you see, they haven't done any studies, unlike OSSTF, which has a done a polling which suggests that 15% are willing to take this thing up, the tax credit. If that happens, we are talking billions of dollars. We hope it doesn't, because it will hurt our public system. Do you think the government should be obliged to do such studies before they get into such initiatives?

Ms McVean: Absolutely. I think they have a responsibility to the public to be accountable for any recommendations that they bring forward in the form of legislation, to be fully upfront with the public in terms of the implications that legislation will have for all members of the public, not just a particular segment.

The Chair: Thank you very much. The government side.

Mr Doug Galt (Northumberland): Thank you for your presentation. It's an interesting position that you people find yourselves in, with the Constitution that requires funding for a separate board. That's not necessarily true in other provinces. It happened to be when the Constitution came in and Ontario joined in.

It's also my understanding that OSSTF stands for one board in the province of Ontario, one school system in the province of Ontario, rather than the two. Your board represents one portion of the Christian faith. You're saying no to this tax credit which isn't money in the hands of the school board or the parent. It is a tax credit. It isn't a voucher. There's no money transfer. They get to keep a little more money in their pockets so they can spend it, and I'm sure that's what will happen. It will stimulate the economy like every other tax cut has.

But you also said you support other faiths. I'm confused as to the support that you have for education for other faiths if you don't support the tax credit. Would you support full funding such as the separate school system now has? What were you referring to? Would you take other faiths into your separate school board and train them there? I'm confused as to how you would support them.

Ms McVean: There are some models available in the province already where Christian schools are funded. They have access to the operating grants of the public school system. Those grants are funnelled through the public school system, but the schools operate with a degree of independence relative to the Christian aspect. I believe that they are all Christian schools at this point in time. We believe that a model like that could be looked at and expanded for other jurisdictions where there are a sufficient number of people who are interested in having one school centred around a faith base, whether that be a Christian faith, Jewish, Muslim, whatever. That money would be the same money that comes to all schools on a per pupil grant basis, that it be funnelled through a school board and that the same rigours of accountability be expected of that particular school as for all the publicly funded.

Mr Galt: So you'd welcome that into the separate school system?

Ms McVean: We are supportive of that.

The Chair: We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

UNITED JEWISH APPEAL FEDERATION BOARD OF JEWISH EDUCATION

The Chair: Our next presentation this morning is from the United Jewish Appeal Federation Board of Jewish Education. I would ask the presenter or presenters to step forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr Seymour Epstein: Good morning. My name is Seymour Epstein. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to thank you for this opportunity. As an educator, I value this demonstration of democracy at work and praise you for arranging this dialogue.

1100

I am neither blasé nor cynical about the workings of government, and in that spirit I ask you to hear me

without prejudice in a non-partisan fashion. My message, I think, crosses traditional party lines. I have made a written submission, which I am going to read and elaborate on, and I have also included my biography because I think it's illustrative of something I want to state.

The UJA Federation Board of Jewish Education serves 19 Jewish day schools and 35 supplementary schools—those are weekend and afternoon schools—in the GTA. Each school is autonomous and administered according to its own ideological stream of Judaism, while the BJE offers tuition assistance to poor families, in-service training to educational staff and a variety of city-wide coordinating services. Here in the GTA, approximately 17,000 children and their parents benefit from our services, but I should point out that there are other Jewish day schools in Toronto and in three other Toronto cities.

While others will advocate in favour of the proposed refundable tax credit by reference to human rights and the great injustice of these past decades and yet others will search for a tax formula that properly effects the will of this historic bill, I wish to argue the case in terms of what is best for a mature Ontario and what will greatly benefit the public system.

Not to belittle the other issues referred to above, I must state that the injustice to non-Catholics who desire a faith-based education continues to be intolerable, a veritable stain on the multi-coloured fabric of Ontario society. Put yourselves in our position for a moment to contemplate what this means, not only financially but psychologically, in terms of our place in this province. It is also true that specific regulations will need to be drafted to ensure that Bill 45 is justly applied. These details are critical to the government's noble plan, but they are not my area of expertise. I would rather look forward to a different future for Ontario, in which the public system truly reflects our multicultural reality and where pluralism has indeed a plurality of interpretations.

Much has been said about public schooling in the past few weeks, specifically the threat that Bill 45 poses to the public system, as if there were a dichotomy between public education and all of the other systems. I come from an ancient tradition that pre-dates public education by a few millennia, but that from its earliest moments taught that we must "teach our children with great care"—that's in Deuteronomy. My own training is a blend of the best western pedagogics and the treasures of Jewish history and literature. My languages are the two languages of this great country plus the ancient tongue of my people. My early schooling was in a Jewish day school here in Toronto, a Toronto public high school and various schools of higher learning in the United States, Canada and Israel.

More importantly and to the point, the institution I direct, the Board of Jewish Education, serves Jewish parents who are invested in both systems. This is critical to understanding what I'm about to say. We have day school parents who have children both in Jewish day schools and other children in the same family who attend

public schools, and we have parents who send their children to after-hours supplementary Jewish schools and public schools for their general studies during the day. The Jewish community is an excellent example in microcosm of the attitude we would like to see all of Ontario adopt. I say that without arrogance. The public system can serve all of the public with the funds it receives from that public.

Am I, then, arguing for public education? Yes, emphatically, but a different version of public education than that we presently have. I would look to jurisdictions around the world—the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, Spain, even the new republics of the former Soviet Union, where I used to work—as examples. These jurisdictions offer the option to their citizens to use public education resources for general studies in whatever reasonable setting they deem suitable to their own ethnic or religious persuasion. The question posed these last few weeks regarding the threat to public education need not be answered defensively by noting that no harm has come to public schooling in all parts of the world where public funding for alternative schooling exists. That of course is true. The answer, though, is much more positive than that. I have worked in many of these countries and I can tell you that public education and the broad public itself benefit from the cultural mix. I cite an example from Stockholm where I used to consult. The public schools in Stockholm decided to give the Jewish community its own junior high, along with similar arrangements for other minorities in Swedish society, and it did so to enrich the fabric of Swedish society.

The example I often cite, the illustration I use, is that of the restaurants in Toronto. We Torontonians all remember the scene in the 1950s when Toronto the Good had a variety of tasteless eating establishments that offered mostly boring fare. Now that the Italians, Portuguese, Caribbeans, Chinese and every other nationality have graced our city with their presence, there is every possible culinary delight available around the city. Our schools could and should reflect that very same reality. That would constitute an authentic interpretation of the British North America Act for our own times. The public has changed; so should public education. It need not offer the same menu to all of its citizens, but rather a full spectrum of every taste spiced with the delights of every single culture and ethnic group in our fair province.

Much has been written about the hidden curriculum in the past few decades. To simplify a technical pedagogic term that anyone can understand, this refers to all that happens in a school that is not the overt act of teaching subject matter to students. If, for example, a school grossly underpays its teachers, the lesson learned by children is that teaching is not a high-status career. Another example is that students may learn more values from staff attitudes than from actual material taught in class. In many situations, the research shows that the hidden curriculum has a greater effect on students than the overt study program. Here, too, Ontario schools could be teaching tolerance, democracy, human rights, justice

and pluralism, but in fact acting quite differently vis-à-vis our minorities. As we all learned from that great Ontario educator Marshall McLuhan, the medium is indeed the message. The schools cannot teach justice in an environment which is unjust. It was our native Canadians who taught us that true empathy comes from walking in another's moccasins for a while. Put yourself in our situation for a moment to feel the injustice if you still doubt it.

This argument, however, is insufficient without a clearer definition of "pluralism," as I use it in this context. Webster tells us that the word means "the quality or condition of existing in more than one part or form." Some use the word to support a melting pot theory of society, in which all groups are encouraged to eat in the same restaurant. Certainly, the menu will be altered somewhat so that it will include a taste of most ethnic kitchens, but this approach demands a public system that teaches tolerance in one uniform setting only. While those kinds of public schools are desirable for the majority and should be encouraged to be as inclusive as possible, they do not serve every element of the tax-paying public.

That quality of existing in more than one form, as Webster puts it, is in fact a more inclusive kind of pluralism that teaches, in both substance and form, values beyond mere tolerance. It allows not only for parents who desire one setting for all, but also for good citizens who desire a specific milieu for the education of their children. I argue with great force that this is the true pluralism of the Canadian dream. It is not the melting pot of our neighbours to the south, but rather the colourful mosaic that brought our immigrant parents and grandparents to this great country.

As I stated at the beginning, I come from an ancient religion that has thrived on every part of the globe and throughout all eras known to us. In order to preserve that religion, its sacred texts, its language and its history, we have found it imperative to add many hours to the general studies curriculum of the ministry guidelines. We know that from millennia of experience, and we have established Jewish day schools around the world to preserve a learning environment that succeeds. One need only look at the graduates of these schools anywhere on the globe to see what contributions they have made to their people and to the world at large—Jews deeply rooted in their own traditions and citizens of the world. Those of us who believe in Jewish day schools know that if one is truly steeped in one's own culture, history, literature and spiritual values, then and only then can one see the value in the world view of the other. It is called mutuality in the world of philosophy, and it works best when both parties are, *comme on dit en français, bien dans sa peau*: confident, knowledgeable and comfortable in their own skins. This old knowledge we Jews have permits us to value both public education and the right to complement it in our own settings. It also obliges us to recognize this same right for Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, and any other group that knows the value of its culture for society as a whole.

1110

I want to end with a story. I'm reminded of a story my grandfather used to tell us in the 1950s. He was the man who adopted my orphaned mother when she arrived here from the famine in Ukraine in the 1920s. He thought of himself as a modern Canadian Jew. He once spotted a Jewish mother in High Park. This was probably just after the war, and she was in High Park with her son. Both the mother and the son were dressed in Orthodox European dress. The boy had ear locks, the Orthodox ear locks that some sects consider obligatory. My grandfather berated them in Yiddish, the language that Jews spoke in Toronto in those days, arguing that such dress was no longer necessary in 20th-century Toronto. The woman answered in accented English, "Mister, it's a free country."

And so I argue for a different kind of pluralism and a different concept of public education, not so very radical. It exists in many countries around the world—most, actually. It will be part of a growing 21st-century Ontario, and by educating future citizens, will help Ontario grow to full democratic maturity.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately two minutes per caucus, and I'll start with Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Mr Epstein, I believe in the same things you do, but within a public system. I have never argued for uniformity in a public system, but rather for the kind of diversity you speak of. So I say, yes, diversity within a public system.

In that public system when I was a trustee, we defended the right to have the third languages taught in the public system, where many fought it. I must admit many fought it. Liberals, Tories and many in that system said, "No, this would be wrong. Kids wouldn't learn English." It was incredible. But we were teaching third languages in the Toronto board of ed. We introduced black studies, native studies, even labour studies, in spite of the objections of the Conservative trustee, who said, "Oh, my God, what's going to happen now?"

I think that diversity is beautiful and it should be taught and it should be addressed and it should not be uniformized simply because we have a public system. What I'm against is public dollars for religious schools and public dollars for non-denominational schools. If that is something that people want and it can't be gotten out of a public system, then that's a different choice people can make. That's my view of your comments.

The Chair: Go ahead. You may reply.

Mr Epstein: Briefly, I would say that it's good that we agree, but my sense of pluralism is broader than that. It is a pluralism that allows both for a very diverse public system—everything you said about the public system I agree with—but also allows for education within a specific milieu that I think will also enrich the fabric of Ontario's society.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I have to go to the government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for the presentation. I was very impressed with the explanation of the need for the parental choice on the type of education for individual parents, as we talk about what is needed within the system. You talk about it being all part of a public system, but that parents can make choices as to the type of education they want, whether it be cultural, whether it be religion or whether it be some way of teaching. I would totally agree with that.

You also speak quite extensively about the fairness for all parents that this at least takes us some way in achieving by providing the ability for more parents—more medium- to lower-income parents—to make the choice of the type of education they want for their children.

Just quickly, a previous presenter we had this morning suggested that the present structure we have has the ability to accommodate the needs of parents who make these choices within the present system. As it was described by one group of presenters who represented a teachers' organization in one of the systems, to me it sounded like a charter school system, that in fact we could have a Jewish school within the public system, operating completely independently but operated through one of the other boards. Do you see that, under our present structure, as a possibility?

Mr Epstein: Under the present structure it would be difficult, but there's no doubt that the structure could be re-engineered to look that way. Of course, that is the system that is used in most western countries. It's feasible, and I think it would be part of a brighter future for this province, in education at least.

The Chair: The official opposition.

Mr Monte Kwinter (York Centre): Dr Epstein, thank you very much for your presentation. I was really quite interested in it because you bring a perspective that we haven't heard so far from those people who are from religious-based institutions. You refer to the Swedish model, and I'm sure you're familiar with the Bernard Shapiro report, which effectively promotes the idea that you can have these religious-based schools within the public school system. We actually have that happening right now in some areas. When we were in St Catharines last Friday, we heard of the Eden school, which is a Christian-based school. It operates in the Niagara school board and operates within that system. I don't think it would take a great deal of restructuring to do that; there just has to be the will to do it.

Do you feel this is something that would address your concerns and still keep the teaching of faith-based schools within the public education system?

Mr Epstein: At the moment, I would not want to diminish the possibilities of seeing the tax credit go through and have it applied as a first step in the right direction. But there's no doubt that in a broader scheme we could see a system that would be much more aligned with other western systems where the public system in fact serves both in terms of its own needs and in terms of the diverse needs of individual communities that require separate schooling.

That's the issue: communities that feel they require separate schooling to do what they want to do in their system. That's not a nasty thing. There's no dirty word involved there. All other jurisdictions that have this possibility see that as a positive sign and a sign of ethnic health, and I think it's possible down the road. Right now, we're dealing with a proposal that makes the system much more just and more fair.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

Before I go to the next presenter, according to the notice of motion, and I'll read the clause, it says that, "Pursuant to standing order 75(c), the Chair of the standing committee shall establish the deadline for the tabling of amendments or for filing them with the clerk of the committee."

What I'm going to suggest, if it's agreeable to the committee, and I'd like to have your input, is that we start clause-by-clause at 10 o'clock on June 20. I would suggest that all the amendments be filed by 4:30 on June 19 or earlier at 1405 in the Whitney Block. Is that agreeable with the committee? We have to give the clerk's office some time to process them that night. Is that agreeable?

Interjection: That's fine.

The Chair: OK, thank you.

ONTARIO ALLIANCE OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS

The Chair: I'll go to the next presenter, the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. I would ask the presenters to come forward and state your names for the record, please. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this morning.

Mr George Smitherman (Toronto Centre-Rosedale): On a point of order, Mr Chair: Might I ask Mr Vanasselt to take an opportunity to apologize for the offensive comments he made on the issue—

The Chair: Mr Smitherman, I don't think it's a point of order.

Mr Smitherman: —when he referred to members—

The Chair: No, Mr Smitherman, it's not a point of order.

Mr Smitherman: —that homosexuality is not normal. I found that highly offensive.

The Chair: Mr Smitherman, it's not a point of order. You can deal with that in whichever way you will. I have to bring the committee to order, sir.

Sorry for the interruption. You have the opportunity to address the committee, and if you'd proceed with stating your name for the record, please.

Dr Adrian Guldmond: Good morning, Mr Chairman. My name is Adrian Guldmond. I am the executive director of the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. With me here this morning are Mr Vanasselt, our director of communications, Mrs Klamer to my left, who is secretary of the board of directors, and Mrs Lunshof, who is the treasurer of the board of directors.

They're here with me this morning to support our recommendation to this committee that you support Bill 45, and especially section 8.4.2, which is known as the equity in education tax credit. We believe this section of the bill deserves your support because it recognizes, after a long absence in this province's official education policy, the contribution of independent schools to the educational mosaic of this province.

1120

In our presentation this morning, we shall briefly elaborate on our motivation, rationale, and the benefits of this legislation in as much time as we have, and hope that we have some time for questions from the honourable committee members.

The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools was established in 1952. We are a service organization that serves 74 schools across this province. These schools provide quality Christian education for over 13,000 students, largely from low- and middle-income families. We have provided the background on our schools in the appendix to the brief.

All of these schools are independent and have financial aid programs in place to assist families who otherwise might not be able to afford sending their children to the school of their choice. The schools in the alliance serve Christian families across the denominational and demographic spectrum. We have approximately 25 denominations represented in our schools.

Students from the entire range of ability and disability are enrolled in these schools. Graduates of the alliance system have a high acceptance rate at universities and colleges and have been making valuable contributions to the social, economic and civic life of this province for the last half-century.

The alliance has pursued the vision of educational justice for all children for the past 30 years. We have used a variety of means, from mass petitions, such as the one you heard Mr Hendriks refer to earlier this morning, to various kinds of court actions and by various kinds of grassroots mobilization.

Our goal has remained constant. We have endeavoured to achieve equal educational recognition for all educational options, as well as financial equity with educational integrity for all the schools. Hence, we are on record as proposing partial funding in return for operational independence.

For the alliance, the primary motivation for advocating justice for all parents and students is the need for proper recognition of faith-based education in Ontario's post-modern educational environment. We believe that a mosaic of educational choices is consistent with basic Canadian values. In fact, we assert that the principal values of the Canadian charter mandate a public policy of school choice. Furthermore, we take the view that the values underlying the charter freedoms constitute a basic value system that should be central to all schools in the country.

Our own vision of this is probably most succinctly summarized in the Canadian Bill of Rights, which I have

included in the report and which I won't read. I'm sure you're all familiar with it. But it places special emphasis on the role of the family, free institutions and moral and spiritual values as the basis for rule of law in this country. That has been our inspiration for the ideals of justice, diversity and community which we have been pursuing.

We recommend timely passage of Bill 45 because we believe it's good public policy and because we believe it's good educational practice. Both of these are based on our view of education. The educational process is essentially a moral process which involves values, beliefs, principles and theories based on philosophies and world views. It's not just a technical information-gathering process; rather, it's a personal process which shapes souls and minds of students. We believe students and families have a right to determine that for themselves. That's why we believe the government's approval and support for the principle of parental choice is a fundamental public good.

I want to elaborate on that public good as a policy principle for a moment, if I may. We believe the tax credit proposal is consistent with the government's stated educational vision of providing opportunity, excellence and accountability, as outlined in the recent throne speech. We also believe the government's laudable reform of funding students and not systems fits with the character of this proposal. By providing parents who have made a prior commitment to educational choice with financial relief, the government has avoided the problem of having it spent elsewhere. The money parents will receive from the tax credit is money that has already been spent directly on the education of their children.

The tax credit complements the government's effort to encourage increased parental participation in education, regardless of the geographic or socio-economic status of the parents. All political parties around this table have made statements noting the importance of parental involvement in the education of their children. This tax credit ensures more parents will have that opportunity.

The tax credit also confirms Ontario's commitment to the highest principles of democratic freedom and human rights, responds positively to the ruling of the United Nations' human rights commission, and puts into action the wishes of a large majority of the population.

By providing room for independent schools to meet accountability standards on their own terms, we believe it achieves the democratic ideal of providing standards of literacy, numeracy and civic-mindedness for all schools in this province. Since their establishment, alliance schools have a half-century history of meeting and exceeding ministry expectations. Institutional diversity in education is a verified good, as the Edmonton Public School Board history has demonstrated.

In short, we believe the democratic ideals of freedom, creativity, diversity and choice, all of which are basic to a healthy society, will be advanced by this proposal.

In view of my problem with a cold, I'm going to ask John to make a few remarks about the debate that has been taking place.

Mr John Vanassel: Mr Smitherman, if offence was taken from my earlier comments, I apologize; none was intended.

In the course of the public debate on this issue of school choice, there have been many inaccuracies and a certain amount of misrepresentation on the part of those opposing the tax credit. In the interests of clarity and precision, we deem it important to address a few of these issues.

There is no evidence to show—and others have repeated this—that government-supported choice of schooling is harmful to public schools. To the contrary, there is a growing body of evidence that all schooling improves when parents have the opportunity to choose. Throughout the western world, governments provide funding for parents to choose where and by whom their children will be educated, all the while maintaining strong commitments to dynamic systems of public education. The alliance is pleased with the government's stated commitment to quality public education, thereby preparing all children for a life of responsible citizenship. All children deserve the support of their government.

The tax credit initiative is not a voucher program. Even when fully operational, the tax credit requires parents to make a significant financial commitment by way of tuition paid prior to claiming the tax credit. The Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools does not believe this tax credit will result in a drastic increase in enrolment for its schools. Most parents truly desiring a Christian education for their children have already made that choice and the accompanying sacrifice.

Education funding is not an either/or issue pitting independent schools against public schools. We are pleased with the government's commitment to maintain full funding, and we view parental choice as enhancing the educational landscape in this province. We agree with the Alberta Task Force on Education, which stated that choice of schooling is a public good. It is intrinsic to democratic society that choices in all areas of life, including education, be available to everyone. Christian-school-supporting communities have contributed to society and lived side by side with everyone else in this province for the last half-century. Fears of social fragmentation are irrational.

Contrary to statements on the fairness of the tax credit, we believe that low-income families with more than one child enrolled in an independent school will benefit most from this initiative. Under the present system, the benefits of the federal charitable credit decrease significantly with each child enrolled in one of our schools, to the point where a three-child family receives no benefit at all.

Contrary to charges that independent schools are not accountable, we note that even without funding there has been a greater amount of Ministry of Education involvement in Ontario's independent schools than in the funding provinces.

1130

As you know, in order to receive a graduation diploma, our students must take the grade 10 literacy test,

and our schools are inspected annually—and usually twice a year—by ministry inspectors. We recognize the government has a role to play in establishing standards for all education, thereby protecting the public interest, but we respectfully point out that the direct market accountability of paying parents is significantly more stringent and effective than anything required of public education. We've alluded to these evaluation procedures we have in place in other situations.

Insofar as the American scene has been brought into the debate by the opposition, we note that, as of the present, 37 states have passed some form of school choice legislation, most of it during the last five years. In the United States, there is a renewed awareness of the notion that democracy is better served through parental choice of schooling. There is simply nothing that suggests the sky is falling in western democracies. Quite the opposite: school choice is expanding.

In summary, the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools views the equity in education tax credit as one important element in the education reform which has been underway since this government took office. We firmly believe school choice is an effective means of improving education for all children of this province and strongly support the passage of the refundable tax credit as it was presented in the May 9 budget. Thank you.

The Chair: That completes your presentation?

Mr Vanasselt: Yes, it does.

The Chair: We have approximately two minutes per caucus. I'll start with the government side.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much for a very important presentation. Just to remark, I know you've worked very hard for many years for what you consider to be an equity and fairness issue. I was very intrigued by two or three presentations yesterday and today: one of them, by the way, was from the Toronto District Christian High School; the one the other day was from children from Hamilton, just a remarkable group of students who made a presentation; and yours today. What struck me as important—and to make sure it is clearly understood by the public who are pretty much engaged in this debate—is the whole issue of public dollars and accountability. I'd like you to comment on that.

What percentage of teachers are certified and, in that view, qualified? Quite obviously, there are those reckless few who try to characterize the just-us system as the only system. They discredit you by saying you don't have certified teachers, you're not inspected, you don't teach to standards and you discriminate against people. They marginalize you. You need to respond to that as clearly as possible and as openly as possible, because all of this is now part of the public record which legitimizes why you have an absolute right to be here in an equitable society.

Mr Vanasselt: Three fourths of the teachers in the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools belong to the Ontario Christian School Teachers Association. They are also members of the Ontario teachers' college, so they have Ontario teaching certification. The other fourth is

qualified and certified through different jurisdictions. Some of them have been educated in the States, and they haven't gone through the process of getting this transferred over to OTC. Some of them are educated in Alberta. But our schools—qualifications are right at the top of the list.

With respect to the types of students—you mentioned earlier that we distinguish on the basis of students' abilities or disabilities—we have students right across the range of disabilities and abilities in all of our schools. We have a series of special education programs in place right across the province. We offer to the same, and maybe even a larger, socio-economic spectrum than any individual school might in other systems.

Mr Smitherman: A moment ago you took an opportunity to say that if there was offence taken to your remarks, none was intended. I find it shameful, sir, that your half-hearted apology goes only that far. Of course offence was taken. You stood in a room not far from here and said that I'm not normal because I'm a homosexual. I'd like to say to you that, as a gay man, I've experienced a lot of the word of God thrown back at me as the gay community has fought for equality. I'd prefer to take the view of God as a loving and inclusive God. Regrettably, too many times, the Christian community for which you are a lead spokesperson has not taken that view. I'd like to ask you, in light of that, why should public dollars be offered to you, indirectly at least, so that you can continue to promote views which are contrary to defined Canadian human rights?

Mr Vanasselt: My view of God is the same as your view of God, a kind and loving God. We teach our children in each of our schools that by virtue of being created in the image of that kind and loving God, they need to respect and honour each and every individual. That happens in our schools. You can find it in the curriculum of our schools.

In terms of public dollars, I believe that the issue here is school choice, parental choice and that this government has seen fit to put education back in the hands of the parents, those who are primarily responsible for educating their children, that those parents can be trusted to make good choices for their children and that their children can get an education that will prepare them to live a full and responsible life of Canadian citizenship.

Mr Kennedy: Mr Vanasselt, you've referred now to the Premier and the Minister of Education as irrational; in your presentation, you said anyone who talks about fragmentation is irrational. The Premier, the Minister of Education, the government of Ontario said, in their report to the United Nations, that funding of this nature would result in fragmentation and disruption of education in Ontario. I just wonder how you can reconcile that view that the Premier expressed in a letter about a year and a bit ago, that fragmentation would result, that this was what would happen if you funded private schools. I wonder if you can tell us. You are now characterizing the Premier of this province as irrational in that particular view. Is that the correct interpretation?

Mr Vanassel: I don't believe I identified anyone.

Mr Kennedy: "Fears of fragmentation are irrational." It is a written statement in your—

Mr Vanassel: Yes, I stand by the statement. Gerard, our children live, figuratively speaking, side by side all over the province.

Mr Kennedy: Just the statement is what I was wondering—

The Chair: Mr Kennedy, you posed the question. I think you should give the presenter—

Mr Vanassel: We play in each other's backyards. We swim in each other's pools. We play together on sports teams. When we get older we work together at McDonald's and Canadian Tire. There's no fragmentation. You put too much emphasis on a particular school or system in terms of social cohesion here. It takes place all over society.

Mr Kennedy: I was asking you about the characterization—

The Chair: Mr Kennedy, we've run out of time. I have to go to Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: How much time is there again?

The Chair: A couple of minutes.

Mr Marchese: I've got a question here because it concerns me. I'm reading from a publication. Nexus is published by the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools. It says at the top of this page here, "The Christian sees the world differently from the non-Christian world view exemplified in the ministry curriculum perspectives." Clearly your perspective is different from the one that is in the ministry curriculum. That doesn't bother me so much, except that there are two different world views that we are talking about.

The other one is, "The Toronto District Christian High School, along with other independent schools, rejects the intrusion of a government-imposed curriculum." They say they should put out some basic guidelines, however, "The government may not dictate the contents or the religious philosophical direction of that instruction. Only totalitarian governments attempt to invade the minds of the citizens," says this other statement of purpose.

My concern? In our public system, the one I support, the one public system that I support, when we get direction from the government, we have to live by it. They tell us what we will do about report cards, about testing, about programs and about curriculum. There's no choice. Am I to understand from you that you want that choice? You want to be able to take the money and then be able to do what you want. Or would you abide by the same principles that we all abide by in the public system?

Mr Vanassel: We believe definitely that there ought to be standards. The public interest has to be protected. The standards ought to be outcomes: What does it require? What do students have to learn in order either to continue their education or to become productive members of society, whether they go to work or in the home or wherever they happen to go?

That's what schools are responsible to teach. Whether they teach it from a Christian point of view, a Jewish point of view, a secular point of view—as the courts have

required of the public schools—or a Catholic point of view, that's immaterial. The issue is that there are standards of literacy, numeracy, civic-mindedness and the participation in this country that is required. Our students more that meet those expectations—

1140

Mr Marchese: I understand the idea. Your notion of outcome I understand. I was just reading very clearly that you reject the intrusion of government-imposed curriculum, and the other one says that we see the world differently and the one exemplified in the ministry of curriculum perspectives is obviously contrary to what you have.

I understand outcome, but I'm saying you're rejecting that. What you're saying is, "We want to do be able to do what we do and as long as we need some outcome, then butt out," is basically what you're saying to the government. But you don't mind getting financial support from the government.

Mr Vanassel: No, we're not telling the government to butt out. We believe the government has the right to establish standards and we believe our students ought to meet those standards.

The Chair: With that, Mr Marchese, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this morning.

TORONTO BOARD OF TRADE

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the Toronto Board of Trade. I would ask the presenters to come forward and state your names for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome, and you have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Ms Elyse Allan: Good morning. My name is Elyse Allan and I am president and CEO of the Toronto Board of Trade. With me today is Terri Lohnes, who is staff economist with the board.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to appear before this committee during the consultations on Bill 45. We're pleased to be here today representing Toronto's business community and to speak in support of actions contained in Bill 45 that we believe will benefit Ontario. The Toronto Board of Trade represents all sizes of business across all sectors of the economy.

I had the pleasure to present the board's priorities for the 2001 provincial budget to this committee back in February. At that time, the board put forward a strong platform for urban renewal. This platform called for reinvestment in our urban centres, notably Toronto, and called upon the province to move forward in creating an environment within which urban centres could thrive.

This was based on several components, including investment in infrastructure such as public transit, roads, culture and housing, increased flexibility for municipalities and the continued pursuit of a fiscal agenda of aggressive tax and debt reduction.

The last point also resonated with the work of the Ontario business tax review panel, on which I was a co-

vice-chair. The panel had the opportunity to hear from businesses across the province on what they saw as necessary actions to support continued business growth and to attract international global investment. Taxes came up repeatedly, from the independent, small business person to the large corporation, from Toronto to rural and northern Ontario.

It was clear, then, from what the board has heard from our members and what the panel heard across the province, that more had to be done to foster a positive growth environment for Ontario on a tax basis. It is in specific relation to this point that I'll confine my remarks on Bill 45 on behalf of the Toronto Board of Trade.

On taxes, the Board of Trade's 2001 provincial budget submission concentrated both on corporate and personal tax competitiveness. Our recommendations on the corporate side included, first, legislating the implementation of the announced corporate tax reductions such that the 8% corporate tax rate is reached earlier than 2006 and, second, the elimination of all Ontario capital taxes.

The Toronto Board of Trade was supportive of Minister Flaherty's announcement in the May budget that the government would be moving on these recommendations. Bill 45, under part IV, specifically sets out these commitments and is welcomed by the business community.

The amendments to section 38 of the Corporations Tax Act, by legislating a time frame to move the general corporate tax rate from 14% to 8% by January 1, 2005, will provide Ontario businesses with greater tax certainty. As the board stated in our submission back in February, actual corporate tax reductions are much more of an investment incentive than proposed ones.

This time frame will now provide the certainty that's needed by businesses to plan their investment in Ontario, grow their businesses and, of course, create jobs.

The associated amendments to section 34 of the act are also welcomed, as it pertains to the competitiveness of the manufacturing and natural resources sector. The ultimate result is that by January 1, 2005, the general corporate tax rate and the rate for the manufacturing and natural resources sector will be equalized at 8%. This is long overdue and provides a much fairer tax platform for all Ontario businesses.

The board was also pleased to hear the Minister of Finance comment specifically on the negative impact of capital taxes on investment and job growth in Ontario. We have long advocated for the elimination of capital taxes because of their distortionary effect on investment. These types of taxes are profit-insensitive and are somewhat unique in Ontario. They are taxes our businesses simply do not face in other jurisdictions. They must be eliminated. As I mentioned earlier, this was reinforced throughout our consultations across the province with the Ontario Tax Panel.

The amendments to sections 62, 68 and 69 of the Corporations Tax Act signal the government's intention to reduce job-killing capital taxes. We had called on the government to announce a plan for the complete elimination of capital taxes in Ontario. We still believe

this must be a strategy for Ontario. We will continue to advocate strongly for such action.

As such, while we support these amendments as a short-term measure to reduce capital taxes, the board believes more aggressive action must be taken by the government in the future. At a minimum, the government should move to eliminate the differential in capital tax rates between financial institutions and other businesses in Ontario.

The Toronto Board of Trade also made specific recommendations on personal income tax reductions, notably around the need to reduce the surtaxes on upper incomes. As long as Ontario continues to levy surtaxes, the impact of the tax reductions implemented to date will not be realized for many taxpayers in Ontario.

At a time when marginal tax rates at all levels of income are dropping across the country and south of the border, Ontario must ensure that its top marginal tax rates are competitive. The current surtaxes do nothing to stem brain drain, nor do they enhance wealth creation opportunities for Ontarians. Simply put, the existence of these surtaxes is a barrier to competitiveness.

The federal government has eliminated its existing surtaxes as of January 1 of this year, and the board was encouraged to hear Minister Flaherty announce in the May budget that the province will start eliminating the surtaxes for Ontarians. The amendments to section 3 of the Income Tax Act, contained in part VII of Bill 45, serve as a first step in that process.

If at all possible, the board urges the government to speed up the implementation, such that this amendment becomes effective for the 2002 and subsequent tax years instead of 2003. We will continue to press the government for complete elimination of the surtaxes so that all Ontarians receive the full benefits of the tax reduction actions.

I would also like to speak favourably on the amendments to section 4 of the Income Tax Act that further reduce the tax rates for the lower- and middle-income tax brackets. Continuing the tax reductions is a necessary action in building Ontarians' competitiveness.

In closing, I would like to support the amendments to the Ontario Property Assessment Corporation Act, 1997, that were contained in part XIV of Bill 45. The board had the opportunity to submit recommendations to the review of OPAC undertaken by the Chair of this committee earlier this spring.

A key recommendation made at that time was the need for representation from the property taxpaying classes on the board of directors of the corporation. The changes to subsections 3(2) and 3(3) that change the composition of the board to include five representatives who represent the interest of the property taxpayers—we believe those recommendations are significant. This will imbue a more balanced representation on the board and greater transparency for property taxpayers.

We look forward to working with the reformed corporation to ensure the property tax assessment process is fair for all classes of taxpayers.

Thank you. I'd certainly now be pleased to take any questions.

1150

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. We'll start with the Liberals. We have just a little over two minutes for each caucus.

Mr Kwinter: Thank you very much for your presentation. I was interested in your strong position on how competitiveness is really related to tax, both personal and corporate, and capital tax. I notice that notwithstanding that the government has made some movement to do something about it, you feel that isn't enough or soon enough, and that if it were done sooner you would be more competitive.

One of the things that the Treasurer announced when he read his budget is that he's really getting to the point where he hopes that the corporate tax structure in Ontario will be the lowest in North America, in some cases fully 25% below what our competitors are. How do you feel about this race to the bottom, where it is quite feasible that the other jurisdictions aren't just going to sit there and watch it happen, and if they really feel it's a competitive disadvantage, they will match or better what the tax reduction is here?

Ms Allan: That's a great question. I think one of the challenges we have is how to make a competitive statement for our province. Just as when we think about businesses competing for market share, in some way we're competing constantly for global capital investment. So the question becomes, have we got a total package that achieves that competitiveness, or do we try to take certain specific areas and achieve a point of distinction? I think that continues to be the challenge that we have probably in the area of tax regime. For many years, we were not even in the game—we were barely in the race—as so many jurisdictions were moving well beyond us in terms of redefining competitive tax levels. What we applaud is that we have noted that we had a serious competitive problem. We have taken strong action to be in the game and to be competitive.

I think whether or not we can or need to be first continues to be a challenging question, because on what basis are we making that definition? It's not just corporate tax; we have the whole situation of capital tax. While the corporate tax rate may be competitive, we still have significant capital tax which most jurisdictions don't have. As well, we still have a personal income tax rate that is not competitive relative to what is in the States now and is happening. We can't look at one component; if we can achieve leadership in one, that might help offset areas where we're third or fourth or fifth relative to other markets.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much. We'll move on to the third party.

Mr Marchese: Ms Allan, you would know that the cuts to education have been in the order of \$2.4 billion, elementary and secondary. Cumulatively, the cuts to the post-secondary level have been \$1.2 billion. Our health care system is in a shambles, to the extent that this

government is looking at putting everything on the table, meaning that they want to privatize more; 35% already is. It's incrementally increasing, and it will increase more by way of moving it to a privatized system. We have a social service in this province that is diminishing by the year. Home care is disappearing. We're in trouble in terms of being able to hire nurses: we're not going to have them, and the need is tremendous. Anything you can think of—labour, environment—we're in trouble, and by the end of this next year we will have given out \$12 billion in individual income tax cuts and corporate tax cuts. Who do you think should be paying in this province in order to have decent health services, a decent educational system, a healthy environment, healthy labour? Who do you think should be paying?

Ms Allan: At the end of the day the taxpayers pay for everything, but I guess the question becomes how we're allocating those. If we are going to continue to have a healthy tax base which allows us the opportunity to invest in these various areas, we need to ensure that we have a competitive jurisdiction that attracts business here and attracts capital investment.

So I guess our first premise is and has been that we need to ensure that we have a strong and healthy competitive fiscal environment so we can enjoy the quality of life in the areas of health and education that we all want to achieve. Because if we don't get the tax base here first, the rest becomes a moot discussion. So, our first and foremost is to comment on that.

Second, as we said in our provincial budget submission, though I don't believe it's relevant to Bill 45, we specifically appreciate that the needs we have far exceed what the government can pay in any one area. That's why we continue to endorse the strong application of public-private partnerships, so the private sector can participate, and that means we need a strong fiscal environment so that we have a healthy, willing and strong private sector to participate with you in sharing the costs.

The Vice-Chair: OK, we'll move on to the government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you for the presentation. First of all I want to say I would have been quite surprised if you had agreed to the comments made by Mr Marchese about, "Did you know all these things?" because in fact they are not the truth. Spending in education has been going up; spending in post-secondary education has been going up. So I would have been surprised.

I appreciate the presentation that you made, particularly as you relate that you've also been involved in pre-budget consultations, to give advice to the minister on what would help create that environment in Ontario that would add further investment to create more jobs, to create a larger economy that could support all the things that the members opposite want to point to: a quality education system and a quality health care system. I appreciate your involvement there, first of all, and I thank you for that. That is what makes good budgets, when you get advice from all the people of the province. Then the minister puts it together to achieve those goals.

I was a little concerned or I didn't quite understand your comments about surtaxes, though I strongly support their removal, as the minister has done in the budget. You suggested that because some of them still exist and shouldn't, those people were not seeing the benefit of tax reductions. I wondered if you could explain to me the connection there.

Ms Allan: Why don't I ask Terri? She loves this area.

Ms Terri Lohnes: I guess what we're saying with respect to that comment is that while you have the general personal income tax rate reductions, you still have the surtaxes that apply to what could be considered middle- to upper-income levels. So in effect it acts almost as a clawback on the tax reduction. If you're looking at top marginal tax rates, which is where our concern rests when we're looking at trying to attract talent to corporations, to businesses, trying to attract the type of professional skills to Ontario and for our interests to the greater Toronto area, you need to make sure that the top marginal income tax rates are as competitive as possible, and what the surtaxes do is actually create a bit of a distortion with respect to that, and they're not as competitive as they could be. So while the general rates, yes, have gone down, when you implement the surtaxes on top of them, that actually increases the top marginal tax rates.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you for your presentation. It's much appreciated.

1200

VICTORIA PARK
SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNCIL

The Vice-Chair: The next presenter is Sue Lockington, chair of the Victoria Park Secondary School Council, if she would come forward now. You have 20 minutes for the presentation and questions and answers. Whatever is left over after your presentation will be divided three ways between the three caucuses. I'd appreciate it if you'd state your name for Hansard. The time is yours.

Mrs Sue Lockington: My name is Sue Lockington. I have three children. My oldest son has finished high school, my daughter is graduating from grade 13 in a few days and my youngest son will be in grade 12 this fall. As a parent, I can honestly say that I have seen the impacts that public education has had on my three children from senior kindergarten to grade 13.

I am here on behalf of our school council at Victoria Park Secondary School, where I am school council chair. Having spoken to many parents, I am hearing the same message over and over again: "Please do not pass Bill 45, which gives a tax credit to those parents who choose to send their children to private schools."

We have three main concerns. The first is destruction of the public education system; the second is increasing social intolerance; and the third is inequity.

A person's religion is a private issue. We should not reward those who choose to place their children in the

private system. It is your individual decision and we, the public taxpayers, should not be paying for your personal family choice.

We are concerned about the potential for social intolerance and racism that might develop with many different private religious schools. Bill 45 has the potential to allow different interest groups to segregate their children from others. We live in a very diverse multicultural society of which we are very proud. We have watched our children go through the public school system learning the cultural backgrounds of many different ethnic groups. It was amazing to see the wonderful acceptance that our children have for one another as they pursue their education. Even if they could not communicate with their language skills, they always found a way to play and make friends. It didn't seem to matter what colour your skin was, or what language you spoke. It has been a very healthy environment, where our children have learned to be tolerant of one another, they've learned about their differences and they've accepted each other for who they are as individuals. Currently, children of all creeds, races, religions, nationalities and economic circumstances mix and mingle in the public education system. This experience gives them a chance to outgrow the prejudices and intolerance that we in older generations may still harbour. Bill 45 is a strategic mistake that will ultimately foster a breakdown of our social and civil society.

The Conservative government's platform did not include what is outlined in Bill 45. As a matter of fact, Premier Harris and Ms Ecker stated that they did not agree with the tax credit concept in the past. The government seems to be in a hurry to push this bill through and make it law. But are they really taking into consideration the views of all taxpayers in the province of Ontario? We feel a referendum needs to be held on such an important decision. Have all the questions and angles been covered to determine the impact that this bill will have on the future of public education? Are students the main focus when these decisions are made? What is in the best interests of every student in the province of Ontario?

If the government is going to get involved in the private school situation, then the same rules should also apply to all schools. All teachers and students in Ontario should be tested and have to respond to the new system of continued education, whether they teach or attend private or public schools. We are also concerned about losing our very best teachers to the private schools, where the same rules don't apply at this time. At this point in their careers, less hassle and more respect are priceless.

No one really knows how many private schools might open. What is really going to happen to the validity and respect of the public education system? If we keep taking money out of the system, how can it survive and keep up with the ongoing challenges we as parents expect of the public school system?

The public education system is supposed to give equal opportunity for everyone, regardless of society status,

income, race and colour. We are concerned about money being taken out of the public school system as students leave to go to private schools. We should not be funding those who can afford to send their children to private school. With all the problems that the public school system has had since Bill 160 and Bill 74 were passed, many people are beginning to doubt the integrity and professionalism of the public education system. Bill 45 facilitates and encourages parents to take their children out of the public schools. How can public education compete with private schools when we have had so much money taken out of the public education system? Our public system is in turmoil, and we need the government to restore funding so we can provide our children with the best public education system in Ontario. Our teachers need to be held accountable, but they also need the appropriate time to teach the new curriculum and have time to do the extra curricular activities which our students so desperately deserve as part of their total educational experience.

In conclusion, I would like to say that Toronto is unique and our needs are different. Each child needs to have the same opportunity to learn and excel. Our public education system provides equality for all families.

We can have the best public education system. Parents want a strong and vibrant public education system, and we know we have to pay for it. Our children are worth it. Children are the future of Ontario and our most valuable asset, just as teachers are the most valuable asset of the public education system. Our government's agenda determines the quality of our public education system. Obviously they are not putting our children's best interests as number one. Saving money should not undermine the importance of a good-quality public education. We encourage you to make the right decision. Please reconsider the effects of Bill 45. The Taxpayers of Ontario need to be heard.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation. We have about three minutes left per caucus. Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Thank you, Mrs Lockington, for your presentation. I found something very curious about what this government has done with respect to this and wondered if you find it equally curious. Minister Flaherty came here yesterday and said he's heard from parents who say they want an education in their own culture and in their own religion. I found that very curious, because what he was saying is that we want to give them choice. They've been calling for that and we want to give them choice.

I contrast that with the fact that this government has eliminated all references to words such as "equity" in the new curriculum. They don't like it, presumably. Then they eliminated the anti-racist secretariat. They eliminated the Welcome Houses, those houses which used to receive new immigrants. They got rid of the ESL funding that was in the Ministry of Citizenship. The heritage languages we have on the Toronto board are about to disappear because there's no money to support them.

All of those things that respond to our differences—cultural, to some extent religious—yet this government has found somehow some new religion that says, "We've got to respect education and it's got to be done in their own language and culture."

Do you understand? Because I don't. Do you understand what this government is doing or what may have happened to them, for taking a new course altogether?

Mrs Lockington: I think at the present time it's what the government's agenda is and it's to save money. That seems to be the bottom line in everything I see. I'm concerned about, are students really at the forefront of your concerns when you make these decisions on the education system? I really think that you need to look at what the future is going to be for our children.

I can honestly say that I'm glad our three children have gone through without the prejudices, without concerns about people being different. I think it was very healthy for them. A lot of their best friends are of different ethnic backgrounds. At the formal that was held last week it was so nice to see all those wonderful grown-up kids accepting one another, making wonderful friendships. I guess we're concerned that that's in jeopardy.

Mr Marchese: Can I ask you—

The Vice-Chair: Just a little more, another 30 seconds.

Mr Marchese: Yes, just quickly. We used to be able, before we went to hearings, to divide the choice of deputants equally between the three parties. It was one third Tory, one third Liberal, one third NDP, and another third was appointed by the Chair, simply at random. We thought it was a fair process that we've adopted over the long years that they've been in government. All of a sudden this government has changed—

Interjection.

Mr Marchese: A third each between the three political parties, and another third, I said, the Chair's—four quarters.

What this government has done is to have decided that that wasn't good enough. What they have determined, because they have a majority, is that they should have a higher number of people that they select to come before this committee. So they have half of the selections now, and we have the other half. Do you think that's fair?

1210

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Marchese. Time is up. For the government side, Mr O'Toole.

Mr O'Toole: Thank you very much, Ms Lockington. I appreciate that. I could relate very much, as I was watching this on a television. I wasn't here, but respectfully—you made some points that I felt—I'm a parent as well, of five children. My wife is a teacher and I have a middle daughter who is a high school teacher. I see society changing. The pressures and demands certainly make challenging times in education.

I think a lot of the children are being deprived right now as part of a political argument, really. They are kind of hostages, really. It's unfortunate. It's not your fault or

individual teachers' fault, but it's not right. I'd say that intolerance right now is almost being taught in the classroom. It's almost militarized. Could you comment on that? You're involved as a parent in a school, on a school council. The tension sometimes is almost uncomfortable. I still go around, because I spend much of my time, much like you, as a parent-teacher association person. I see lineups at the bulletin boards there on little demonstrations. It's not healthy. Is there anything we can do?

This is just one more thing. They don't want any access to the public at all, in my view. This is part of playing that out. Perhaps you could comment on this, not just social intolerance right now but how come the public system has sort of got the fortress mentality somehow? They did it with the Liberals, they did it with the NDP and they're doing it with us.

Mrs Lockington: If I look at the students at this point, I think the students have been very mature through this whole situation. Still, at this point the morale is low, for sure. They feel they have been neglected, because they haven't had their extracurriculars, all the labour disputes, everything that has been happening. Yet they still are so mature about it. High school, to me—I lived for sports. That, to me, was wonderful, whereas for another student maybe it was the music program. Everybody has their different interests. For a student in the music program, if they can find their niche where they feel comfortable and make their friendships, they can survive through the system. But everybody has different interests.

I have to say I'm very happy to see how the kids have handled it. I don't know if I could have been as mature, because I sort of look at it as, if I were a student now in the system, knowing what we have lost—it's criminal. I think that's why I feel so badly about it.

Mr Phillips: Just to disassociate myself from the comments of Mr O'Toole, I do not believe teachers are teaching intolerance in the classroom.

The thing that we find curious—by the way, thank you very much for being here and for the work you do as a volunteer to help the students. It was just two years ago that the government prepared quite an extensive brief arguing strongly against extending financial support to private schools. They used language that I found—in many cases I was very supportive of the language. They said that in their view extending it “would undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding. When diverse populations separate themselves from the general mix, the public system is the poorer because the opportunities for understanding and accommodating differences are diminished.”

They went on to say in their brief—and this is, I stress, the Harris government arguing against extending funding—that extending it “would have an adverse effect on the viability of the public school system, which would become the system serving students not found admissible by any other system.”

My point is this: the one study we have from the government argues strenuously against extending funding.

We've asked the government to table with us, show us the evidence that led them to change their mind, to suddenly go from what they believed firmly two years, to turn around and go 180 degrees the other way, to abandoning essentially all their arguments. So far, we've found no argument. You're on the school council at Victoria Park. Have the school councils of Ontario been made aware of the evidence the government has that says they should essentially completely change their mind from their decision to not fund this two years ago?

Mrs Lockington: A lot of the school councils communicate through e-mail. We definitely have heard about the tax credit. We have been made aware. It's just hard to know if everybody is on the same page. We all live very busy lives. We have, over the past year, been focusing on trying to get extracurricular back into the schools. When you're spending all your time and energy trying to do what's best for children and for our public education system, it just seems like every time we think we might be over one hurdle or have made a difference, there's something else that's being thrown out. I'm worried about the system as it stands right now, because we still do not know the actual regulation to do with extracurricular, what that's going to be. Everybody's waiting. They can't do their timetabling because it is law right now that it's 6.67. Everybody is in a predicament right now. They're all waiting to hear what's happening. We have the double cohort that's happening in two years; my youngest son will be part of that.

Those are all things we're going to have to deal with. To then put the tax credit out the way they want to do this just seems to discredit the public education system. If I'm willing to trust my children with the teachers in the public education system, then I think the government also has to put some trust in those teachers. We have some bad apples in every barrel—that's in any type of business—but there are a lot of good teachers out there, and there are a lot of good students. I'm concerned about the total population. They're tired of hearing about problems with the public education system. Most of them don't really even know the concept or the main reasons behind it; they are just tired of hearing about it. I find that frightening.

The Chair: We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

This committee will recess until 4 o'clock.

The committee recessed from 1218 to 1600.

TORONTO FEDERATION OF CHINESE PARENTS

The Chair: I'd like to bring the meeting back to order. It is 4 o'clock. The first presentation this afternoon is from the Toronto Federation of Chinese Parents. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward, please, and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation.

Mr Doug Hum: This will be a joint submission by members of the Toronto Federation of Chinese Parents. This will be a submission that includes the Toronto Chinese Parents Association, of which I am the chair, and the North York Cantonese-Speaking Parents Association, represented by Sarah Tsang-Fahey, will complete our submission.

The Toronto Federation of Chinese Parents represents four Chinese parents' associations located in the former municipalities of Metropolitan Toronto. Our other members include the East Toronto Chinese Parents Network and the Scarborough Chinese Parents Association. The federation was founded almost three years ago by the four Chinese parents' associations, which came together to deal with common concerns and issues and to work together to try to ensure that our children receive the best that our public education system has to offer.

The Toronto Federation of Chinese Parents unequivocally opposes the proposed tax credit for private schools contained in the legislation of Bill 45. At the last meeting of our federation, we passed a resolution, with all four parents' associations represented and present, to oppose the tax credit proposal. We fear that this will undermine programs and services in the school system that our children and families need. This will take away resources for programs that build self-esteem, confidence and pride among our children. Programs that build intergenerational bonding and develop communication skills, which promotes linguistic and cultural understanding among all our diverse communities, will also suffer.

As a federation of Chinese parents, we greatly value the international languages and black culture programs offered by the Toronto District School Board. The international languages program recognizes and, in our view, values the non-English mother tongue of the student. It gives importance to the learning of a second or third language for our children. Because the school board makes these programs available to any student regardless of their cultural background, it helps to build understanding between cultures and awareness and respect for each other's languages among all our students. In terms of the program's value to family life, it is absolutely priceless to see the intergenerational bonding between grandmother and grandchild when they are able to communicate in their own mother tongue, especially when the child's mother tongue is enhanced by the international languages program.

With half of Toronto's population born outside of Canada, it is important that the Toronto District School Board receives the necessary funding and resources to fully support these programs. For the past three years, the international languages and black culture programs have been continuously under threat of having parts or all of the various programs either cut back or eliminated altogether. In particular, the integrated extended day programs which are offered during, and integrated into, the school day have been particularly at risk. The integrated model has proven to be the most effective for learning for the children in these programs. We under-

stand that the province does not fund the black culture program. All these programs need to be fully and adequately funded.

In terms of parents' choice, the current provincial funding model seemingly puts the school board and parents in a position where they have to choose between cutting back on language and cultural classes or closing swimming pools. They have to choose between music classes or athletic activities. These are not palatable choices, and parents should not be put in the position to have to make these choices. We are concerned that siphoning off resources to private schools will create more conditions for these unpalatable choices for our parents. With the growing diversity in our communities, these programs are important and vital to the children, parents and families in our communities. They address very real needs. With the current funding difficulties for these programs, we would respectfully request the province to not proceed with the tax credit proposal contained in Bill 45 and to provide all the necessary resources and funds so that the international languages and black culture programs are not continually at risk of being either cut back or eliminated altogether. Thank you for your consideration.

I now would ask Ms Sarah Tsang-Fahey to complete our submission.

Ms Sarah Tsang-Fahey: Thank you, Doug. On behalf of the Toronto Federation of Chinese Parents and the North York Cantonese Speaking Parents Association, I am speaking against the government's proposed tax credit of up to \$3,500 to parents of private school students.

If the government were to go ahead with the tax credit to the private school parents, the government would lose \$300 million in tax revenue, as cited by our finance minister. As well, with each student leaving the public system, the board will lose \$6,400. This will be the last nail in the coffin of the public education system.

In addition, we believe the tax credit will be a vehicle to segregation. It will facilitate segregation of citizens into haves and have-nots, faith and non-faith, we versus they. This segregation will have a direct impact on the quality of life for all citizens. There are plenty of examples of strife around the world created by misunderstanding and intolerance of each other's ethnic and/or religious upbringing. Even on our own home turf of Canada, language has been a major factor for discord over national unity.

The private school parents' tax credit is a lose-lose-lose solution. It is a band-aid that covers the wound, but it will allow infection to set in. This infection will lead to the death of the ideals of multiculturalism and democracy. One-sided indoctrination from home and school will create homogeneity, complacency and solidarity within groups and will eventually lead to difficulty in communication and tolerance between groups.

We live in an increasingly diverse and complex society, both locally and globally. Our children, having spent most of their formative years in school, have to be

able to share with each other their differences and their similarities. Working together side by side to solve problems that are unique to their generation is most valuable.

To address parental concerns and fears over losing their religious and cultural identities, we suggest the government incorporate religious studies into the curriculum, hence a more comprehensive and balanced approach to developing the whole person spiritually, emotionally and intellectually would be achieved.

The Common Sense Revolution has shaken the whole public education system. Now is the time to regroup and to restore public confidence. Now is the time for the government to consolidate the initiatives set in motion, not to create more unrest. This government needs to focus on certain priorities.

Mend the fence with teachers. Appeal to teachers who really enjoy teaching and want to nurture our children. Our children's education depends heavily on their morale and the school atmosphere, an atmosphere that is being poisoned by government heavy-handed tactics and union manipulation of members.

Secondly, we feel that the government needs to provide the necessary support for students going into grade 11. They will bear the brunt of being the first class who are to finish their high school career at grade 12 rather than OAC. These students need clear direction and guidance to chart their future. Their teachers need to know the content of their studies in order to teach effectively. Having new textbooks printed in July for courses starting in September is ridiculous. In fact, this happened last year. In July they were printing the textbooks for September classes for grade 10.

1610

Third, the government could take concrete steps to fulfill the promise to have effective space and resources available to accommodate the double cohort starting college and university in 2003.

Fourth, educate parents to better prepare their children for school so that they can come to school ready to learn. This will enable teachers to teach rather than to manage the class.

Fifth, include religious studies in the curriculum so that students are aware of each other's differences and learn to respect each other's beliefs and to live harmoniously with each other. Religious studies address the need for spiritual development, an integral part of being human, our quest for knowledge and reason, as well as our emotional stability.

Our members are disturbed by the current state of public education: the degree of conflict between government, school boards, teachers and parents; the level of discontent and the poisoned atmosphere our children endure; the uncertainty and disarray as the new curriculum is forced into place. But to encourage parents to opt out of public education and withdraw badly needed funding from a system in crisis is like throwing a cement block to a drowning person. For the future of our children and for the benefit of society, this initiative must not go forward. We strongly oppose the tax credit for private school parents.

I'm sorry. Someone asked me to bring a copy, but I didn't distribute it. If you like, I'll be happy to let you have a copy. It's printed on both sides. I hope I was understandable.

The Chair: Does that complete your presentation?

Ms Tsang-Fahey: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have approximately two minutes per caucus. I'll start with the government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for the presentation. I have just kind of underlined here in the presentation the special program that we have for your community, the Chinese community in Toronto. Is it your understanding that this type of program is available to all students around the province?

Mr Hum: As far as we know, the policy, as I understand it, is that if the required number of students come together and request it, boards are supposed to make it available. That is the way I understand it's set up with the Toronto District School Board. I think the numbers are 25. If there are 25 students who wish to be enrolled in such a program, the board will establish it.

Mr Hardeman: The reason I question that is because I don't believe it's available in my community.

The other thing is, I noticed in the presentation the choices between some of the things in school and swimming pools. In my community, our schools do not have swimming pools. I guess if we're talking about fairness and equity in education, your proposal to stay with the status quo is not exactly achieving that fairness and equity for all students in the province.

With that, I'll turn it over to my colleague.

The Chair: Do you wish to reply to that, sir?

Mr Hum: Yes, certainly. The issue here in equity is not to take from one and give to the other, but all should have access to resources to address the needs in their own communities. You don't want to bring everything down to the lowest common denominator. It's to uplift and bring everyone up, all of our children and families up to a level where the services are supposed to be adequate for all of us.

Mr Hardeman: I just want to make sure that my parents also have the same parental choice your parents have to be able to provide for their children the type of education they think they need for them, which you are being provided but my parents are not.

Mr Hum: Certainly it would be important for your parents to speak to your school board trustees and to raise these issues as such, which the parents under our board have done.

The Chair: Thank you very much. I have to go to Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Just a comment. I know a little bit about the international languages. It was in 1975, I think, that Premier Davis introduced it with Minister Wells as Minister of Education. I happened to be honoured as chair of the school board that first approved international languages—led, I might add, by the Dutch community, the Greek community and the German community, and, as I

say, an enlightened provincial government. It is available to every school board that wants to use it.

But my question is along the lines of the presentation dealing with diversity. The only research paper we can find on this matter prepared by the government of Ontario was when they argued strenuously against proceeding with funding of private schools. This is the document prepared by the provincial government, and here's some of the evidence they quote.

They say, "Extending funding would undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding. When diverse populations separate themselves from the general mix, the public system is the poorer because the opportunities for understanding and accommodating differences are diminished." Then they go on to say that it will do significant damage to the public school system and will undermine promoting the values of pluralism, multiculturalism and understanding.

My question to you is, are you as a community group aware of any research the government has done that would allow them to decide that all the research they did two years ago going in one direction was wrong and now there's new evidence to say, "We're going to do a 180-degree turn"? Is your community group aware of any such research done by the province of Ontario?

Mr Hum: No, I am not aware. I listened to part of Mr Flaherty's submission. When he was asked about any Ontario studies, I believe his point was that his ministry relied on studies in other provinces and in the United States. I may be wrong, but I believe that's what he said.

Some communities may be short of resources. But if they forgo this program, that's an additional—I understand the cost of this program will come out to about \$300 million a year. If they forgo this program, that's additional revenue available to the different ministries for the swimming pools that are not available, for the kinds of programs that are lacking in other municipalities. There's no reason why we couldn't put that back into our system and set up First Nations language studies in Rainy River, Thunder Bay, Fort William, Timmins or Sudbury.

The Chair: Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: I wanted to thank you for your presentation and to say that I agree with much of what you both have presented here today.

Mr Flaherty came here in the morning yesterday and said he's been hearing people saying they want their own education, and in their own culture and religion. I'm not quite certain that's what people are saying throughout Ontario. What we've been saying to Flaherty and the others is, if you want to achieve the kinds of things that speak about diversity and multiculturalism, Toronto is a fine example.

As you said, the international languages, formally the heritage languages, is something people fought for. It wasn't given to us. In Toronto, we had to fight everybody to get those international language studies. That's not something one is given. The government only funds it on the basis that if you've got 25 students, you get support, but it leaves it to the boards to decide whether it's during

the day or after school, which is another complication. But we're saying that if you want diversity, international languages teaches language and culture and, to a great extent, religion too. We're also saying that in Toronto we have religious readings that reflect the diversity of our communities. We also have black studies and native studies. We could add—and it's something New Democrats support—the teaching of religion as a course of study.

If you do all of that, I think the majority of Ontarians would buy that as something that truly reflects our multicultural communities. Don't you agree?

Ms Tsang-Fahey: Oh, I definitely agree, actually. I think the tax credit is not so much about choice, because we definitely have enough choice even in our public education system. We have francophone, we have anglophone, we have Catholic and we have non-Catholic. So we have lots of choices. I noted last night Mr Flaherty was talking about this tax bill being about choices. I'm saying we have enough choices.

1620

The parents who opt out are choosing to isolate themselves, and the diversity will definitely be hindered. We will have no diversity when we segregate and ghettoize ourselves into different groups. I am Chinese. I would like to see my children be taught Chinese values. But for society's sake, I don't think it is feasible. For society's sake, for our children's future, it is not healthy for us to ghettoize ourselves, to, like the Chinese, indoctrinate our children 24 hours a day at home, then send them to school and do the same thing. When they grow up, they'll know nothing but their own culture. Much of the strife—I hate to bring in Ireland, India and the Middle East. I hate to bring that up. But that will be down the road, as I see it. You can see if we isolate ourselves, there's no diversity. We're all ghettoized, and the whole society suffers. The whole nation will suffer in the end.

The Chair: We've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

ONTARIO COALITION FOR EDUCATION REFORM

The Chair: The next presentation is from the Coalition for Education Reform. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes.

Ms Sheila Morrison: My name is Sheila Morrison. Does it matter where I sit?

The Chair: Right there, yes. Go ahead whenever you are ready.

Ms Morrison: My eyes are deteriorating. I just wanted to make sure I knew at least, somewhere, who I was looking at.

Thank you very much. I'm glad to be here. Let me say at the outset that I fully agree with the tax credits for parents for several reasons. However, I think some back-

ground is in order from a perspective I have not seen addressed by any columnist or anybody else, particularly by those who fear fracturing the system.

It is all well and good to say we must have a strong public system open to all, a concept in theory to which I subscribe. Unfortunately, aside from being open to all, we do not have a strong public system. For the last four years, 50% of the grade 3 to 6 students have failed, right across the province. The test was administered by the EQAO, which is not the best test available. The Canadian test of basic skills would have been better. It is a truly standardized test, and would have cost 90% less. Furthermore, a minuscule improvement, from 49% to 51%, would hardly set the world on fire, especially when you take into account the fact that weak students are encouraged to stay home to save them embarrassment—that's what they say—and special education students did not participate at all. That's a rather huge chunk of youngsters out there. Obviously, one wake-up call four years ago was not enough to wake up administrators and principals in the public schools.

As a result, we have parents who are willing to make great sacrifices to put their children in private schools where, if they are not satisfied, they can take them out. Most of those schools are not fancy, have no frills, no swimming pools, and make do with considerably less money than is bestowed on the public school system. Since I run a private school myself, I know what I'm talking about. When I think of my budget compared to theirs—and I feed them. Do you know how much teenagers eat nowadays, or any other kid, for that matter? There are those of us who think the public schools are over-funded. In the meantime, parents are paying tuition fees and also school taxes.

We have advocated school choice for years, and while it may be available in the system, it is often contingent upon space. If word gets out—and all schools have telephones—that their kid has a rabble-rousing mother, all the principal has to do is say, "Sorry, but there is no room at the inn." The school that would take your child is in north Toronto, and you live at the Beaches. So much for school choice in the system.

In 1975, there were 26 private schools in the province; now there are over 700—actually, 734. Private schools fill a need brought about by an inefficient, expensive public school system that defends its failing procedures to the detriment of the students and, eventually, society. It is no accident that lower- and middle-income families have decided to make the sacrifices to be sure their youngsters have the basic skills to make a living. These 700 private schools are a direct result of the failure of administrators of local boards to meet the needs of the community.

Since the grant given to the local board is roughly \$7,000 per student, if all 102,000 pupils were to return to the public schools, the ministry at the moment would go bankrupt, or so a previous minister told me.

To phase in a tax credit for parents, who are also taxpayers, is long overdue; \$3,500 five years later is only

half of the grant bestowed on the public system. To be fair, it should be the same amount given to the public schools. If the schools are so concerned, all they have to do to get these students back is to emulate the teaching methods, discipline and values of the private schools. It would put the private schools out of business, because most of the parents would rather save the money. In the meantime, the tax credit is a giant step in the right direction. Hail to the Honourable Jim Flaherty.

The Chair: We have five minutes per caucus, and I'll start with Mr Kennedy.

Mr Kennedy: Thank you, Ms Morrison, for your presentation. I wonder if I could ask you—you referenced the test scores. What kind of test scores were attained at your school?

Ms Morrison: I have a special-needs school. Youngsters come in to my school with graduation certificates, reading at grade 4. They come in at grade 10, reading at grade 2. These parents are desperate, or they would certainly not spend the kind of money that I have to charge to be sure I can save their lives, which I do. I use standardized tests, not the EQAO test. We use the standardized test; we've used the same one for years.

Mr Kennedy: That's an entrance test for, as you mentioned, your children with special needs?

Ms Morrison: No, no. We take kids nobody else will take, but we give a standardized test so we know where they are—not where they should be, but where they are.

Mr Kennedy: You know where they stand by that test.

Ms Morrison: That's right. When they walk in the door, we have to find out where they stand, because you can't believe the report cards. The report card says he's in grade 9 and he has seven credits, but he can't read beyond grade 3.

Mr Kennedy: Ms Morrison, you were talking in the early part of your remarks saying you were in favour of a strong public education system.

Ms Morrison: Yes, I am. I taught in it for years.

Mr Kennedy: You've expressed, I think, some disappointment in the status of the system. In fact, you've said that you thought the increase in achievement, as measured by the EQAO test, was no great deal at all and you think that's not much of an achievement.

Ms Morrison: If you know anything about testing at all—you're Mr Kennedy? I can barely see.

Mr Kennedy: Yes, I'm sorry.

Ms Morrison: No, it's not your fault; it's my eyes.

The thing is the EQAO test is not the most difficult standardized test, and over the last four years 50% of the population in this province has failed to pass that test—I got this from EQAO, and it was also in the paper—and also the grade 6 test. So by the time they've gone from grade 6 up to grade 10, they're surprised when they fail in grades 9 and 10?

Mr Kennedy: Ms Morrison, I'm wondering, because I think you've got views on this subject, why do you think the government is failing so badly to improve education?

Ms Morrison: I'll tell you exactly why. Let me tell you.

Mr Kennedy: They've been at it for six years. What's the theme; what's not going—

Ms Morrison: You asked me; let me tell you.

Mr Kennedy: I have an idea.

Ms Morrison: I know you want to tell me, but I know why: because, to be fair to the government, they brought in a new course of study which says they must teach phonics and spelling and so on and so forth. Nobody in the board—they would much rather defeat the government than worry about the kids. Nobody—very, very few schools at this point are teaching the course of study as it has been set out, grades 1 to 8. They are supposed to teach phonics in grade 1, grade 2, right up to grade 8—which is ridiculous, if you know how to teach—but in the meantime those children are not getting those skills. The very first time when all those kids failed, they should have started implementing that course. Where are the principals? Where are the superintendents? Where are the directors?

Mr Kennedy: Ms Morrison, is it your view—because I think you're agreeing here that after six years they're still floundering out there; failure is still taking place—

Ms Morrison: That's right.

Mr Kennedy: For whatever reason, the government has not been able to get the results. Is it your view that it is the intention of all those principals and teachers and administrators not to have their students succeed?

Ms Morrison: They don't really care, I would say by the look of the report cards that I see. I have two grandchildren. By the look of the report cards that I see, if you try to get an appointment with anybody, "Nothing is wrong, nothing is wrong, nothing is wrong. Just trust us." By the time your kid is 14 and reading at grade 3, it's time for something else, so you go to a private school.

Mr Kennedy: So do you think—because you said before, just very quickly, though, that you had some time in the public system, if I'm not mistaken.

Ms Morrison: I spent 20 years in it.

Mr Kennedy: Twenty years. Do you not think that somewhere in there are people who want to get a good job done?

Ms Morrison: Of course there are.

Mr Kennedy: You made a general statement. I'm sure it was—

Ms Morrison: Listen, there are people out there who know how to teach, who want to teach and who do teach. But the young teachers who are coming out have gone through the system and their skills are not as good as they ought to be, which is why our group suggested teacher testing. But we're not doing teacher testing; we're doing teacher reclassification or some stupid thing.

Anyway, doesn't anybody else want to ask me something, just you? What do you want to say?

The Chair: I'll give them a chance after.

1630

Interjections.

Mr Kennedy: Each of the parties will get a chance and they'll be happy—

Ms Morrison: But then I'll be out of time.

Mr Kennedy: No. The Chair is closely watching the time, and he'll be sure to get to the other people.

I think we appreciate you're dealing with people, you said, who are at the end of their tether. These are not your words, but I think the suggestion you made is that you're saving those kids because they're not doing very well and they're coming in. Just narrowly to the kids you know best now, the ones you're dedicated to, why couldn't we have programs like yours in public education dealing with kids who, if I heard you correctly, are way behind by your rigorous test? Right? They're far behind. Why don't we have a Sheila Morrison school or, if not a school, at least a program, that would address those kids in public education? What prevents that? Why does it have to be outside of the public system?

Ms Morrison: I think part of the reason is that most of them don't know how to teach because they haven't been trained in teachers' colleges. Every single faculty of education is different. They all have their own idea of what a good teacher needs. Western, I heard just the other day, has a program that's voluntary if you want to learn how to teach reading. At a faculty of education, it's voluntary, for heaven's sake?

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr Kennedy. Of course, Mrs Morrison, I have to go to Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Could we have some balance and go to the Tories first and then come back to me, if she would prefer?

The Chair: No, I think we'll keep the order, Mr Marchese. I'll go to you.

Mr Marchese: Ms Morrison, what is it again with your methodology of teaching that has created such success in your classrooms, just for me to understand?

Ms Morrison: I'm just doing the same thing I did for 20 years in the public schools.

Mr Marchese: Which is?

Ms Morrison: Which is teach reading, teach spelling, teach writing. Mark it, make them correct it; mark it, make them correct it; mark it, make them correct it. That's all you have to do, but you do it every day and every kid gets—

Mr Marchese: But it's so simple.

Ms Morrison: It's simple. That's right, it's very simple.

Mr Marchese: And that should do it?

Ms Morrison: I've been saying that and telling everybody. Nobody listens to me.

Mr Marchese: You may have seen—

Ms Morrison: This is not the government's fault. This has been going on since Premier Peterson, Mr Rae, and now here.

Mr Marchese: Ms Morrison, did you see in the Toronto Star a report that shows that where there is poverty, generally speaking, the grades tend to go down, that they don't succeed as well?

Ms Morrison: Rubbish, rubbish. I got that in the public school. At the first school I ever taught in, I was the only person in school who talked English. Every single kid was something else. It didn't even occur to me I had an excuse not to teach them, so I did. That's all anybody has to do, and also the poor ones; nobody is teaching them either.

Mr Marchese: OK, that's good, because Doug is so happy with your presentation he's laughing like a kid in excrement.

Interjections.

The Chair: That's borderline.

Mr Marchese: I think it's a little more complicated than that.

Ms Morrison: Well, it isn't. I've been at it for 35 years and it isn't any more complicated than that. I'm not even going to discuss it, because it isn't. I know what I'm doing.

Mr Marchese: So basically teachers are in disagreement with you or at least they don't seem to want to do it? What is it about teachers—

Ms Morrison: No, no, no. Teachers just want to do a good job, but if you don't know how and the principal doesn't come in and say, "Look, you're not doing it right, sister. Here's how you do it," there's the problem. The principals or the administration are not supporting the teachers, who would do a good job if they could.

Mr Marchese: You're saying that the private schools, the non-denominational ones and the religious ones, seem to have better practices, which is what you're suggesting, reading, writing, testing, marking and so on?

Ms Morrison: Right.

Mr Marchese: It's that simple, and the religious schools are doing it for some reason, so they've learned that magic?

Ms Morrison: It isn't magic. Their kids have to earn a living, so they've got the money. If they don't have it, they borrow it, the mothers go back to work, the grandparents chip in. Somebody helps to pay. They take two jobs. That's the answer.

Mr Marchese: I understand, but that's a different point. You were talking about how your methodology of teaching brings success and that the private schools seem to have the same methodology.

Ms Morrison: They're doing the same as I do. That's the same with everything. If we don't succeed, they take the kid out. It's as simple as that. The thing is, that's why these parents are making great sacrifices, and it's time they got a tax credit.

Mr Marchese: Ms Morrison, you said if they don't succeed, they throw them out.

Ms Morrison: Not me. No, I don't throw them out.

Mr Marchese: You said in the private schools if they don't succeed, they—

Ms Morrison: If the parents aren't happy is what I should have said. If the parents aren't happy, they take them out and put them someplace else in another private school.

Mr Marchese: Oh, in another private—and if they don't do well, they move them around to different private schools.

Ms Morrison: That happens, yes.

Mr Marchese: Or bring them back to the public system.

Ms Morrison: That's right, when they're all out of money.

Mr Marchese: Right.

Ms Morrison: Now it's your turn. Come on.

Mr Marchese: No, no, no. There's a couple of more minutes.

The Chair: He still has about 30 seconds, Ms Morrison.

Interjections.

The Chair: I have to be fair.

Mr Marchese: Ms Morrison, I won't put you through any more pain. I think you should go to them directly. I think you're absolutely right.

The Chair: Mr Hardeman.

Ms Morrison: You'd better be nice to me, the way I've been sticking up for you.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for the presentation. I suppose we have reached a point where finally someone comes in and says that maybe the way it used to be done wasn't that bad, that as we have changed, we haven't in every case improved in our system, that the system is not necessarily better today than it was 25 years ago.

Ms Morrison: Exactly. You're my friend for life.

Mr Marchese: I thought so.

Mr Hardeman: We've had a lot of discussion in the last couple of days when we've had these hearings about parents who choose, for whatever reason, an alternate education system, whether it be for religion, culture or the way they're being taught, that they should have a right in fairness to choose that.

Ms Morrison: That's right.

Mr Hardeman: The opposition have been quite emphatic about that and have taken every opportunity to suggest that not all children or not all parents can make that choice, that no school, no person like yourself, will take on the challenge of teaching children who are not as far advanced as some others. I'd just like to hear a little bit more about it, how you're into that in that program.

Ms Morrison: We take anybody who has so-called learning disabilities at this point, or dyslexia; most of them at this point have dysteachia. If we can bring a kid's grades up one and two grades in six weeks during the summertime, which we do at our summer school, I don't see why the school system couldn't do it in a year or three or four. I think this is the thing. We take kids nobody else wants and have sort of washed their hands of, and we really do turn them around.

The thing is, there are people in public schools who could do it too, but you have to be old to know the difference. The young teachers we have do what we say; otherwise, they don't know what to do. I think this is unfortunate. We at least are helping them. Most of the

people at private schools train their teachers. They have to train their teachers, but the public schools just sort of let them out there and flounder, and the teachers are getting the blame when they haven't been properly trained.

Certainly this tax credit is boon for these really poor—I was on the radio the other day. A man phoned and he was a cleaner. His kid was nine and said, “I can't read, Dad.” He said, “I got two jobs and I took him out and put him in a private school. In five years I've spent \$100,000, but it's the best money I ever spent.” I think that's the problem. Certainly that man deserves some return. Most of these parents try the public schools. I'm serious. If the public schools started to do what they used to do when I was teaching, the private schools would vanish and you'd save all that money.

Mr Hardeman: The other thing you mentioned when you started your presentation was that your school doesn't have a pool.

Ms Morrison: That's right. I would love one. We're trying to raise the money. If you want to get on our fundraising team, I'll welcome you.

Mr Marchese: He's very happy to do that.

Mr Hardeman: It is fair to say from your presentation that the majority of your emphasis is on the process of educating children as opposed to worrying about—

Ms Morrison: That's right. Whether they're good citizens—that's right. We just teach them and we improve their social skills and we improve their self-esteem. It doesn't do much for a kid's self-esteem when he's 14 and can't read, and he knows it, but nobody in the school system seems to know it, so they yank them out. I had a talk last night with a man whose wife is a teacher and this kid—she was on friendly good terms with the director of education—came to us and he was reading at grade 2 and he was 14. He is now reading at grade 6.

Interjection.

The Chair: Only one conversation at a time, please. Order.

Mr Hardeman: I really appreciate the fact, ma'am, that in your presentation so far, contrary to some other presentations we've heard, you've spoken almost exclusively about the student as opposed to the program and the facility that was available for the student, to talk about the benefits of educating the child. I really appreciate that. That hasn't been consistent with all presenters, so I very much appreciate it, and I turn it over to my colleague Doug Galt to ask some questions.

The Chair: You have one minute, Mr Galt.

Mr Galt: I have one minute left. Just a quick comment to you and maybe you can respond. We've brought in a lot of programs over the last six years: standardized curriculum, standardized report cards, regular testing, teacher qualification, College of Teachers, and the list goes on. You're noticing with the testing that it's not improving. You're supportive of the government, supportive of the tax credit. What is it that government should be doing to get these marks up? What's happening out there that's not—

Ms Morrison: I'll give you what I think is a very good line: the Tory government has done the right things, but they haven't done them right. If they had asked me, they would have been perfect.

The Chair: With that, I must bring the discussion to an end. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation. We have run out of time.

1640

COUNCIL OF ONTARIO UNIVERSITIES

The Chair: I would ask the next presenters to come forward. It's the Council of Ontario Universities. If you could please state your name for the record.

Interjections.

The Chair: Order. I can let the whole show go on and have conversations across the room; I'm going to be here till 6 o'clock. It's your choice. We can listen to what the people have to say or I can let you have your discussions across the floor. It's not my choice.

If you could please state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr Ian Clark: Thank you, Chair, and honourable members of the standing committee. My name is Ian Clark, president of the Council of Ontario Universities. With me are Ken Snowdon, vice-president, and Chris Torres, treasurer of the council.

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the May 2001 budget and the related budget legislation. The council regularly makes representations to this committee in pre-budget consultations, but it is not often we have the chance to meet for a post-mortem.

I have tabled our brief. I hope you have it. I'd like to take 10 to 15 minutes to take you through it, in which I'll offer some observations on university funding commitments in the budget and will relate these observations to the council's perspectives on Bill 46, the Public Sector Accountability Act. I hope this committee will be prepared to receive comments on Bill 46 as part of its deliberations. We understand the government may wish to treat Bill 46 as a budget bill, to follow the same kind of legislative timetable. Following my remarks, my colleagues and I will of course be happy to respond to questions.

The first page in the brief just recalls the key challenges facing the post-secondary sector. In our brief to you on February 15, we underlined the importance of securing a multi-year funding framework to enable universities to invest efficiently and plan effectively for the projected enrolment surge. As committee members know, this enrolment surge is driven initially by the double cohort associated with the change in the secondary school curriculum. We've set out some of the numbers, on this page, of the students expected and the faculty that we think are required.

Turning to page 2, many of you in this room—I certainly recognize one of you—have attended recent meetings organized by parent associations specifically to

question representatives of universities and government about whether we would be ready to meet the dramatic increase in enrolment that will begin in just 14 months. At the last meeting that I attended, when parents asked, "When will we know if there really will be enough places?" we answered, "Wait for the budget." I hope parents were as gratified as the universities over the budget commitment that the government will "increase operating grants to colleges and universities by an estimated \$293 million by 2003-04, directly proportional to the projected enrolment growth."

The parents were aware that the government had in earlier budgets committed substantial capital for new facilities through SuperBuild. University representatives assured them that the building was well underway. The key remaining issue was the financial ability to hire the requisite faculty and staff and to provide the necessary equipment and related learning resource materials. Council has stated that the budget's multi-year commitment to full funding for increased enrolment will enable universities to plan for the longer term, hire faculty and develop strategic plans that would otherwise be beyond the scope of a single-year budget. At future meetings with parents, government and university representatives will be able to say with confidence that there will be space for every qualified and motivated student.

When the students arrive, they will expect and deserve a high-quality education. You will recall that our brief in February was built on the theme of access to excellence. With the budget's multi-year commitment, the universities now have the basic enablers to deliver on the access part of the goal, although a huge amount of work remains to be done on campus to get there. The next challenge will be to work with all contributors, especially government, to deliver on the excellence part of that goal.

The government provided impressive assistance in that direction with the budget's \$100-million commitment to address maintenance costs for facilities in colleges and universities. The investment in maintenance will allow universities to improve the physical environment for our students and our researchers. Ontario universities greatly appreciate this expenditure of public funds.

A key priority of the universities that will be the focus of future discussions with government will be to secure funding for students who are currently in the system but who are not funded. This step will correct a situation that currently places many of our universities in the position of having to plan for expansion of their enrolments from a financially disadvantaged position. Another priority will be to ensure that unavoidable cost increases do not erode the funding that has been provided for enrolment growth. As many committee members know, the 2001-02 increase in the operating grant for most universities is directly tied to an anticipated increase in enrolment of 1.6%, with an approximate additional 0.4% linked to performance funding. The two funds are in fact considerably less than projected cost increases, so that most universities will have this year to undergo further cost-cutting. This process will have far-reaching implications over

time, as universities struggle to meet the budget targets established by their governing boards. We will be working with the government over the next year to secure funds to cover normal operating increases.

As noted earlier, we would like to work with the government to find ways to bring the faculty-student ratio closer to those in comparable jurisdictions. Many aspects of effective university teaching and learning require personal contact with faculty. While we all recognize that educational quality involves more than increased numbers of faculty, it is fair to say that few universities internationally recognized for their teaching have faculty-student ratios that are anywhere near as low as those in Ontario.

Now let me turn, on pages 3, 4 and 5, to issues associated with Bill 46.

Ontario universities recognize that government must ensure the efficient and effective use of existing public funds. When we met in February, we were confident that the government-appointed Investing in Students task force would conclude that Ontario universities operate at among the highest levels of administrative efficiency of comparable institutions in North America. We were gratified that the task force, in its March report, gave Ontario universities a clean bill of health and concluded that they are responsibly managed and cost-efficient compared to other jurisdictions. Moreover, the task force pointed out how impressed it was with the degree of co-operation and efficiency-producing measures that occurred within Ontario universities, working collaboratively.

During last year's hearings of the Ontario Financial Review Commission, we presented a brief that emphasized the progress made by Ontario universities in strengthening the institutional accountability framework. Many of the measures introduced in the last decade were aligned with the recommendations made in 1993 by the government-appointed Task Force on Accountability of Crown Corporations. For example, the task force made a series of recommendations to improve the role, composition and effectiveness of governing bodies.

Most institutions have made these improvements. The task force also recommended specific management information and policy reviews. All institutions have since taken steps to improve the flow and quality of management information to the governing boards. Virtually every institution now publishes annual reports that cover the institution's financial affairs, mission, goals, progress and produces reports that focus on management indicators. The council provided the Ontario Financial Review Commission with sets of institutional documents that comprise the accountability framework at individual institutions.

Ontario universities support the concept of a Public Sector Accountability Act. Indeed, we believe that a carefully constructed legislative and regulatory framework could increase the public's confidence that the public expenditure in our sector is a wise investment. Such a framework could even help reduce the myriad

reporting requirements that are now in place. However, Ontario universities are concerned that the bill could unintentionally become a significant impediment to sound financial management, and we urge the government to give careful consideration to the design of the act and its regulations.

For several years, we have been involved in consultations with the Ministry of Finance on the development of a Public Sector Accountability Act. We were not, therefore, surprised to see it recommended in this spring's report of the Ontario Financial Review Commission, which recommended such a framework.

One element of the bill came as a complete surprise to us, however, and that was the requirement for annual balanced budgets. We do not believe that this provision recognizes the university sector's enviable history of responsible financial management.

1650

Many universities have effectively used multi-year budgeting to achieve their planning objectives. Given the nature of university programs, the need for long-term staffing commitments and the fact that students flow through the institution over a period of years, the multi-year budgeting approach is a reasonable and responsible planning and fiscal management tool. An absolute, across-the-board requirement for annual balanced budgets would not help universities but would, in fact, impede sound planning and financial management. We believe that, in the interest of best practice, the provision for annual balanced budgets, as written, should be reconsidered, where appropriate in certain sectors, to facilitate the most efficient financial and management planning.

Today's universities are incredibly complex entities. If the laudable goals of the Public Sector Accountability Act are to be achieved in the real world of university management, we believe it is essential that the definition of the ways in which sound fiscal performance are to be achieved, measured and reported be tailored to the sector.

Let me give you just a few examples of definitional issues that arise. Let's start with the phrases "the organization's anticipated expenditures for a fiscal year" and "anticipated revenues."

Universities receive funding from provincial governments, students, donors, other governments, the private sector and sales of services and by investing their own resources. Provincial government funding now comprises, on average, only 40% of total revenue. In many cases the terms of the funding are, in fact, established by the funding agency, donor, private partner or terms of a service agreement. For these reasons, universities continue to use fund accounting as well as the nomenclatures "restricted" and "unrestricted" to define, manage and control the different kinds of funding arrangements. When coupled with the myriad institutes, affiliated colleges, foundations and incorporated businesses on many campuses, the idea of a single "budget" is truly an abstract concept.

Other considerations that need to be addressed are the complexities associated with changing accounting conventions. That's why I've asked Chris Torres, who is a former member of the committee of accounting standards for the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants and is currently the treasurer of COU, to be here, in case there are questions on that score.

The reality is that the need for universities to diversify their revenue streams has led to a much more complicated set of financial arrangements. We would ask for the government's help in ensuring that these complexities are recognized in regulations applicable to the university sector, and we'd welcome the opportunity to work with the government to this end.

Another definitional issue is defining the institution, because the institution has to produce a business plan and will be held accountable for the results. But one will have to be careful about how one defines the institution, because many of the universities have affiliated colleges with their own boards, they have research institutes with their own boards, and technology transfer agencies often have separate boards. They are separate entities with their own financial statements and management structures, so the nature of the legislated responsibility of the host university for the business plans of the affiliates requires careful consideration.

The current wording of the bill prescribes a set of information that the business plan must contain. But some of these requirements, as defined, may unintentionally duplicate more valuable information which is already being produced. Again, we suggest that it would be wise to be careful in the definition of this so we don't unnecessarily produce other less valuable information at additional cost to the institutions.

Finally, a word on the legislated responsibilities of the boards. We would suggest that it's crucial that the role and responsibilities of the boards of directors be reinforced. We would recommend that the government be careful not to unintentionally undermine this role in the wording of the legislation.

To close, on the last page, I would like to return to those challenges and how the Ontario budget has helped to meet them. Ontario universities and the government have been working together for almost three years to plan for enrolment increases. In the past 10 months, Ontario universities have developed institutional enrolment plans that, when combined, meet the demand projections. With the budget's multi-year commitment to full funding for increased enrolment, these plans are now moving to the next level of detail. There is a great deal of work to be done on our campuses, but we are confident that there will be a place for every qualified and motivated student at Ontario's universities. Given the ongoing commitment by government and all universities to work collaboratively in addressing problems as they arise, council is hopeful that Ontario universities will be able not only to provide spaces for these students, but also will be able to provide the quality of learning experience that they deserve.

Frankly, I think members of this committee, and indeed all Ontarians, can be proud of the process that has brought us to this point, and we encourage all sides to continue to work together on this multi-year agenda. Thank you.

The Chair: We have two minutes per caucus.

Mr Marchese: Welcome to this committee. For a moment I thought you were going to injure those members with kindness, but they're still intact; that's good.

You obviously realize that every system that is connected to this government is underfunded. The elementary school system and secondary school system have suffered \$2.4 billion in cutbacks. The health care system is reeling. We don't know what to do. This government says, "Everything is on the table now. We're going to privatize whatever we can, because we've got to work with the private sector to help solve the health care problems."

The post-secondary education system cumulatively has lost \$1.2 billion—I think \$1.2 billion or \$1.6 billion—and yesterday they put some back, but they're still reeling from that. We're going to have 90,000 students by the end of this decade. I'm not sure how we're going to accommodate them. I know you're convinced; I'm not, and I'm not sure people are.

Tuition fees have hit the roof: a 60% increase in tuition fees in the last six years in the regulated programs, and in the unregulated programs they've gone up close to 500%. Things couldn't be in a worse mess. We're going to need faculty, and these people are not hiring the faculty that you need. So my view is that we've got serious problems.

How do we deal with that? Is your answer, "We're working very nicely and carefully with this government, and the announcement they just made of a couple hundred million is better than nothing"? Portals and Pathways suggested more, but at least you got some, so you're happy. Is that the approach we take to this government?

Mr Clark: Mr Marchese, we assume this is not the end of the discussions we're having with government on dealing with this. What the government has done is provide a funding approach, a formula and a multi-year commitment which will enable the universities to meet that quantitative target of providing a space for every student. That's what we believe. It's very hard. It's not ideal.

I think the difference, the explanatory variable between what you see and what we're describing, is found on the quality side. Clearly, if we have more resources, we can provide a better quality university education: the class sizes can be smaller, there can be more personal contact, there can be less multiple-choice questions and so on.

Mr Marchese: Would you be willing to give up your tax cut in order to get some money back into the system?

The Chair: Mr Marchese, we've run out of time. Now we have to go to the government side.

Mr Hardeman: Thank you very much for the presentation and for the positive comments to the budget.

Mr Marchese would have you believe that this budget doesn't increase funding to post-secondary education. As you mentioned in your presentation, and I just repeat, there is \$141 million for the renewal of the present infrastructure that is there for post-secondary education. That's over and above the billion dollars over the past year and a half that we've put in to create those pupil spaces that you speak of that we need for the double cohort, to find a space for every qualifying student, and the \$293 million by the year 2003-04 to help fund the operation of those spaces. We appreciate being able to do that, for the students who will be coming in. I think it's important for the record that, contrary to what Mr Marchese would say, there are investments there in post-secondary education.

What I really wanted to ask about is your comments, first of all agreeing with the challenges that are there and that working together, the government and the universities, is the only way we'll solve those challenges. You mentioned the issue of the legislation, Bill 46. Obviously you've seen the bill. The way it's presently written, do you believe it has the ability to meet the challenges that you're suggesting, or are there changes that need to be made, where we need to go further before we can make regulations that would solve the problems you've addressed in your presentation?

Mr Clark: I would recommend that the government provide enough flexibility in the legislation so that it can develop a regulatory regime which is appropriate to each of the sectors, because they are so different, so we wouldn't be unintentionally caught with some across-the-board notion that was thought about for some other sector but would have deleterious effects on the system.

The Chair: Mr Kennedy?

1700

Mr Kennedy: Unless you have a new policy of the university council around private school vouchers, I'd like to ask you about the quality issue you brought up before. I also want to make the remark that you didn't get that much money this year. That's a down payment of what you've been promised in years following, so we'll all sit tight and see how that turns out at the end of the day.

I want to ask you about the quality you mentioned. As far as I'm concerned, it's incumbent on this government, if they want to remove a certain number of students out of high school a year early, if they want to make that happen, then it's their obligation to make the exact same opportunity available to each of those students as the ones who were in other, more normal years. So I want to ask you very carefully, because I think we need an update, we need to know where we're headed, we need to know what kind of confidence we can have, based on the knowledge you have today and what you've been promised so far, will those students get exactly the same opportunity as in other years or not?

Mr Clark: The government's commitment, as I understand it—and certainly we're working very closely with them to try to make it happen—is that the grade 13s

who graduate that year will have the same opportunity and have the same kind of entrance standards apply as the grade 12s. It is hard to make assessments of quality of one year versus previous years. Our basic premise for many years has been that because the student-faculty ratio has been increasing, it's hard to believe that isn't having an effect on the quality.

Mr Kennedy: I think that point has been taken and well noted, and we advocate about it regularly, but on the double cohort issue, are you saying that today you feel confident—because these are temporary spaces. After four years, you're not going to need them any more. How are you going to track the faculty? How are you going to have those things? You're going to need some of them but you're not going to need all of them.

Mr Clark: Our position, our analysis, is that we will need all of them.

Mr Kennedy: By this time—this is the first you've heard about the funding—will you have the same kind of quality opportunities available? You already said you are guaranteed the quantity, but will that be the same quality, based on what you've received? You brought up the quality issue. You said you weren't sure about it. I want to know what that means. I want to know whether we're able to make the assurance today to those students and their parents that they will get the same quality of opportunity, as well as having a space. Normally we certainly would hope they wouldn't be mathematically cut out simply because the government changed the policy.

Mr Clark: That's one of the issues we have to continue to work on with the government. I can't give you a definitive answer but—

Mr Kennedy: Is there any information you could give us—

The Chair: With that, Mr Kennedy, I think we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon. I'm sorry I have to cut it short.

UNITED STEELWORKERS TORONTO AREA COUNCIL

The Chair: Our next presentation is from the United Steelworkers Toronto Area Council. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward and state your names for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon.

Mr John Humphrey: I'd like to thank you very much for agreeing to hear from us today. We've given you a cross-section, we think, of our membership in Toronto. We have 20,000 members in the Toronto area. Each of us is going to talk a little bit from our own individual perspective on the issue before us.

The Chair: Could you introduce your colleagues, please.

Mr Humphrey: My name is John Humphrey. This is Pearl Henry, this is Najib Soufian and this is Fred Shipley.

Personally, I am a machinist. I work for a company called Ontario Store Fixtures, which is in the Weston-North York part of Toronto. It's the second-largest manufacturer of store fixtures. It's a big industry which lots of people don't know about.

I'm the president of Local 5338, which has 2,400 members. We're scattered, in terms of where we live, throughout the southern 905 area and the north of the 416 area. The very hard-working work for us, I have to say, and the predominant feature is that at least 90% of our working members are first-generation immigrants. We've come to Canada, and that includes me, from all parts of the world, from all continents, from all cultures, from all religions. We have a very big Sikh membership from the Punjab. We have a very large Buddhist population from Vietnam. We have a very large Catholic and Protestant population from Latin America and the Caribbean; Muslims from the Middle East and Africa; Hindus from India, and so on and so forth. We have a very diverse workforce.

To recent immigrants, education is very near and dear. It's a very important factor of their lives in Canada. They come to Canada to get better lives, not just for themselves but often even more for their children. In fact, they come and they sacrifice for their children, and education is a key component of what they're looking for in Canada and is, generally speaking, what they get from Canada.

I think above all they are looking for the public education system to provide, first of all, obviously, skills, language and so on that will help their children to get ahead; secondly, an acquaintance with Canada, knowledge of how things work on this continent and in this country; and, then, they want their children to become part of the mainstream of Canadian life. That's a very important part of public education.

I think there are growing concerns about the state of public education which get voiced in our membership meetings: the impact of cuts, the decline of facilities, of extracurricular activities, and some of the tensions that we know have been in the system very recently and so on. But generally speaking, there is an overwhelming commitment to public education.

The issue of this tax credit, I would say, concerns 0.01% of our membership. I give it a figure because you should never say never and there are probably one or two of our members who maybe scrimp and save and for some reason have their children in private education. But we're talking about people from a whole variety of cultural backgrounds, and I would say that private education absolutely doesn't register on their radar screen as an issue for them. So this is not offering them something they are fighting for. In fact, I think it offers to siphon stuff away from what they are fighting for. I think we regard this legislation as helping to divide the school population, that young population, rather than to unite them and bring them together and advance them.

Speaking personally, as I say, I'm a first-generation immigrant myself. My partner and I have six children, four of whom have gone through the public system, one

of whom is still in the elementary system and one of whom is in the middle school system. I have to say, from my involvement with the schools they're in and have been in, I value the spirit of multiculturalism, of curiosity about all parts of the world and so on that is instilled in the public system. I think it's a great advantage and it's better than I got when I went to public school in England. I think they get values of tolerance, respect, knowledge and so on that are crucial elements of the immigrant experience, and I would hate to see that divided up. I think there are elements in this tax credit which offer to do that.

Our fear is—and the other members will talk for themselves—that we are seeing here the beginning of a two-tier system. I know that Brother Flaherty is holding up a hand-written sign saying, “No two-tier education,” but we're seeing other people doing that and we believe there is a push in that direction. That's really what we want to fight. We are concerned with our workplaces but we're concerned with our social life, our communities and so on.

Our members, as I say, are not interested in this and they see it as a threat to what they came to Canada for.

I will hand it over next to Brother Najib Soufian.

Mr Najib Soufian: My name is Najib and I'm working in the furniture industry as a polisher. I'm really glad to be here in front of you to present my viewpoint regarding public education.

As a matter of fact, I have three children in the public system who are aged from seven to 12 years. My experience is that for a few years, since the cutbacks, I've been experiencing a lot of shortage in my family. As a matter of fact, every night I come with unexpected expense, my three children asking me for \$7 or \$5 for activities. I cannot even regulate my budget.

1710

As a matter of fact, I am a Muslim, and when I look at these public schools—and I am a practising member of the Muslim faith—I believe strongly in Ontario's public education system, like most immigrants in this country. I came here for my children, and I want them to grow up in faith. That's important to me, especially, to follow my religion and my culture, my language, in every respect, in every walk of life. But I also want them to become Canadians. I don't want them to be different from other Canadian students. I want them to experience the diversity of Canada and I want them to believe there is every possible opportunity to succeed.

For those goals I depend on the public education. I cannot afford to send three kids, if I want to be a Muslim faith follower, to separate school and pay for separate education. As I said, I'm a devout Muslim, but I do not want my children to be educated in a Muslim-only environment, and I want them to experience the richness of all Canadians, all cultures and education. I think those other children also benefit from the fact they are sharing the school experience with my kids.

I have got one simple message for the government: get back to the real job of strengthening Ontario's public

education system. Funding private schools is a bad idea, and funding private schools when the public school system is in chaos because of cuts and underfunding. I remember my first child, when he went to school about 10 years ago. I have never worried about sending him to school with some money in his pocket for some kind of activity, like swimming, playing soccer, or some kind of visit to the science centre and those kinds of things. But today I am going through that kind of thing for three kids. My job depends on how much I can work in a day, and I come home once a week with a paycheque which is already divided into my life's system. I don't have extra cash to pay for any extracurricular. But today this situation is putting me in a very hard situation. Furthermore, if this situation eliminates into a private—my kids today benefit from a lot of Canadian kids. I am scared to death whether they are going to reach the higher education where I aim my goal.

Ms Pearl Henry: Good afternoon, gentlemen, ladies. My name is Pearl Henry. I work for Ontario Store Fixtures. I am a Canadian citizen. Also I am a Steel-worker and proud of it.

I came here today because I have a great concern regarding the educational system. I need to say something about myself and the reason why I came to Canada and why I'm worried. I am from Kingston, Jamaica, and when I was in Jamaica I won—in Jamaica, you have a system where you pass, not all scholarship but half. My mother was a poor woman. She couldn't afford to send me to the private school, to pay half of it, so I ended up having to leave school because she couldn't afford it. I came to Canada at 19 and I had my first kid here. I swear to God that I don't want the same thing happening to my kid that happened to me when I was back in Jamaica.

I often hear from people that it's important in public education—the meeting place for kids, for children of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds—and about their concern that funding of private education will determine what important role—and I did agree with that.

As I said, I'm an immigrant woman of colour. I came to Canada and I have my kids here. This bill is permitting every family to send their children to a private school of their choice. It's about supporting the choice of high-income families to send their kids to private school, and by doing so it supports the segregation of children of this province by social class. It points toward an Ontario in the future which is one that everyone who can afford to do so will send their kids to private school and in which someone who cannot afford to do so will send their kids to public school. This is a two-tier system, having two education systems, one system for the poor and one for those who, if they can afford, will get out of it.

I would like my daughter to stay in the school that she's in, to get involved with kids of different cultures, different classes, rich or poor, and be proud to be poor. I'm asking you to deal with it in the right way and help rich kids, poor kids, the same way. Help build a public school system back to what it was before when I came to Canada and what my dreams for my kid were.

Mr Fred Shipley: Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Fred Shipley. I'm with Canadian Facts, which is a large market research company located in downtown Toronto. I thank you very much for the opportunity to say a few words to you this afternoon.

I personally have two children. They are both graduates of Ontario's elementary and secondary system. I have to say that I'm glad for them that they are not in the system now to experience the chaos that the Harris government's cuts in funding have created.

A healthy public education system could not be more important to Ontario's economic future. A healthy public education system could not be more important in building the mutual respect and understanding of our differences that is so vital to the future of this community, a culturally diversified community, Toronto being the most culturally diversified community in the world.

I believe that nothing could be worse for Ontario than an attack on public education, yet that is exactly what the government of Ontario is doing with this bill. Public education is already starved for funding thanks to the policies of this government. The bill will make things worse. It would direct funds that should be used for public education into private schools. It will provide a strong incentive for more and more people to abandon the public education system in favour of private schools and will pave the way for fully privatized, voucher-driven education that could destroy the public system.

The \$300 million that this bill would divert away from public education will further contribute to the damage that this government has already done. Ladies and gentlemen, I ask you to defeat this bill. Thank you for your time.

The Chair: Thank you. We have a minute and a half per caucus. I'll start with the government side.

Mr Galt: Thanks for your presentation. It's obvious that you're not exactly in support of some of the programs that we've brought in. It's interesting to note that as we've brought in quite a few programs, the opposition have of course opposed them, the union has opposed them. We brought in things like improved curriculum, standardized report cards and regular testing, and it's amazing how, down the road, the teachers very much support these various activities.

I've had some difficulty following that the unions have disliked every Minister of Education. I was on a school board in the late 1970s and Bette Stephenson was the minister at that time. Lo and behold, they disliked that minister and they've disliked every minister ever since. What's the problem? Isn't there possibly a minister, over 25 years, that the teachers' union might have liked, might have supported? They have been opposed to the ones in the Liberal government, the ones in the NDP government. What's wrong with this picture? I don't follow.

Mr Humphrey: We're not talking about individual ministers. We're talking about the specific policy

proposals. This isn't a personal thing. We're dealing with the actual policies. That's our only concern.

Mr Galt: I'm just taking it back over the years—

The Chair: Mr Galt, I've said a minute and a half and I have to interrupt. I have to go to the official opposition. Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: I thought you had spoken to the bill and to the content of the bill and your concerns about it. It had nothing to do with whether you're a union or not. I disassociate myself from Mr Galt's remarks. I appreciate the Steelworkers. They're a well-regarded and well-researched union.

1720

Your concern about it was echoed very much by the government when they presented this brief two years ago to the United Nations. I would urge the Steelworkers to get the brief, because then Premier Harris was making exactly the same arguments you're making today. Let me quote to you a couple of things he said, because then they were arguing against expending funding.

They said that if we were to extend funding, it would "undermine the ability of public schools to build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding. When diverse populations separate themselves from the general mix, the public system is the poorer because the opportunities for understanding and accommodating differences are diminished." This is the Harris government talking, the same language you just used, I might say. It "would result in the disruption and fragmentation of education in Ontario.... If ... funding were provided for private religious schools, it is difficult to see why it would not also be required for schools established on the basis of language, ethnicity or culture. The benefits which Ontario receives from a public education system which promotes the values of pluralism, multiculturalism and understanding, would be diminished."

Two years ago they were making almost the identical argument the Steelworkers have made to us today. Why do you think the government has suddenly done a 180-degree turn on this and headed in the opposite direction?

Mr Humphrey: That's for the government to answer. I think those things that were said, as you say, echo what we are saying.

The Chair: With that, Mr Phillips, I have run out of time. I have to go to Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: New Democrats appreciate your presentation. It reflects the view of many people of Ontario. What we're saying as New Democrats is that we are unequivocal. We don't support the idea of public dollars for private education, not for religious schools and not for the private schools, which don't need our help, because at some of these schools they pay \$16,000 for tuition fees. Those people don't need our help.

We are saying that the public system already offers some good stuff to reflect our diversity. We offer international languages at the Toronto board, although they're disappearing because the government isn't giving it much support any more. International languages teach language and culture. We also do religious readings that

reflect the different communities. We teach black studies in part of that international program at the Toronto board, and native studies as well. We could also provide religious education for those who want to study and learn about education. Don't you think that's the better way to go in terms of reflecting our diversity?

Mr Shipley: We certainly do.

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

THE MAPLES INDEPENDENT COUNTRY SCHOOL

The Vice-Chair: Brian Logel, principal of The Maples Independent Country School. In total you have 20 minutes for the presentation and also for the responses from the three parties. Whatever time you don't use in your presentation will be divided three ways. Just state your names for the sake of Hansard and go ahead with your presentation.

Mr Brian Logel: Brian Logel.

Ms Philomena Logel: I am Philomena Logel.

Mr Logel: We own and operate a small, independent elementary school just outside of Orangeville. We support the government's tax credit initiative as an equity and justice issue. We thank the committee for inviting us to speak to you today.

We represent a school that's solely funded by tuition from 93 families. We receive no funding except a small grant from the federal government for teaching French. This is our 12th year of operation. We have 115 students. We teach from junior kindergarten to grade 8. We don't provide transportation but our students are drawn from a radius of about 50 or 60 kilometres. About 80% of our families are middle or lower-income families. We have some single-parent families. Our population reflects the ethnic diversity of the area. We have a good mix of gifted, regular and slow learners.

Our school follows the Ontario ministry curriculum for all subjects in all grades. We use the ministry standardized report card, IEP forms etc. We use standardized testing to evaluate our students. We have no uniforms but we do have a strict code of behaviour. We offer a full curriculum including French, computer education and physical education. We offer an extensive arts program including instrumental music. We offer values education, which is a social skills and non-denominational religious education program. We limit our enrolment to 15 students per class. We have a waiting list in many of the grades.

Our teachers have all got Ontario teaching certification and university degrees. We supply all the textbooks and supplies for our students. Our annual fee is \$6,400, but we offer a family rate if there is more than one child in the school.

We contribute to our community, to the local tax base in our community through our very high property taxes. We pay GST on all of our services and goods. When we

built our building, we had to pay the local school board levies for new construction, both to the Catholic and public schools.

Our parents do some additional fundraising to provide extras for the students. Philomena and I are Ontario certified teachers. We taught for over 20 years in the public and Catholic systems for several different school boards. We began the school 12 years ago because we were looking for an alternative for our own three children. We only had three choices in our area: public, Catholic and a small Christian school. So our solution was to rent a community hall and form our own independent school.

We opened with 12 students and have grown steadily ever since. We are currently at our third location. We rented the church basement and we used portables until we were able to afford to build our own school. We used our equity in the school to mortgage the construction of our building, and last year we mortgaged our own house to finance an addition to the school of a gym and a library.

We feel the parents we serve are being discriminated against. They pay education taxes and they pay tuition fees. Each year we lose families because they cannot afford the tuition. Many of our families make do with old vehicles take or no vacations in order to have their children at our school. We feel that the method the government has chosen to right this injustice is very sound and right-headed. Giving a tax credit may help make a difference for some of our families who perhaps could not stay with us for more than a short time.

It comes much closer to really offering the citizens of Ontario a choice of how their children are educated. Many of the things we've heard this afternoon in this room indicate to us that there's quite a lack of knowledge in the province as to what independent education is all about and what we have to offer. I would like to invite all present to visit an independent school in their area. You're welcome to come to our school at any time and see that some of the statements that were made here today are not correct.

The Vice-Chair: We have about three minutes for each caucus, starting with Mr Phillips.

Mr Phillips: Thank you for your very thoughtful presentation. Obviously there are conflicting views on the issue, and strongly held conflicting views, for understandable reasons. I always find it useful to quote the government's document because it's less confrontational, I find. You're aware, I think, that the government of Ontario, the Harris government, presented a brief to the United Nations arguing against extending funding. They used quite a few arguments that frankly I find persuasive. Let me read you one. Just help us along as to why you feel this wouldn't happen.

1730

They said in this brief, "Extending public school funding rights to private religious schools"—in this case I realize you're not a religious school but a private school—"could result in a significant increase in the

number and kind of private schools and school systems, especially in heterogeneous urban centres. In addition, if public funding were provided for private schools established for the purpose of meeting specific religious needs, it's difficult to see why public funding would not also be provided for private schools established to provide other specific needs of language, or ethnicity, or culture. This would have an adverse affect on the viability of the public school system, which would become the system serving students not found admissible by any other system. The benefits which society now derives from a public school system would be reduced. Such potential fragmentation of the school system is an expensive and debilitating structure for society."

That's the Harris government's argument when they were arguing against it, that that would fundamentally weaken the public system and the public system would end up with, in the language they use, "serving students not found admissible by any other system."

Mr Logel: I guess perhaps the government has become more aware and educated in the meantime since that brief was put forth, and has obviously changed or modified their position. Once again, I applaud them for seeing the wisdom of their errors and changing to a more equitable system.

Mr Phillips: No, I understand that. Help me a little bit about why, though they haven't yet tabled any research to say why they changed their mind, you think that the public system—

Mr Logel: There's research from seven other provinces. There's research from New Zealand and from European countries saying that the funding of private education has not caused the public systems to deteriorate, but in fact the other systems have improved. There is research that I'm sorry I didn't bring with me today to suggest that introducing competition to the system has improved the public systems as well. Perhaps the Harris government wasn't aware of that. Maybe we weren't doing our jobs well enough to educate the government previously. Thank goodness, as I say, they have looked into this matter and have righted this wrong.

Ms Logel: There has not actually been a mass exodus from the public schools, even as this tax credit was announced. We haven't had great enrolment since then.

Mr Phillips: This was just two years ago when they had all that information.

The Vice-Chair: Thank you very much. We're up to three and a half minutes. We'll move on to Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Mr Logel, what I gathered about your school that is different from other, public, schools is that your enrolment is 15 students.

Mr Logel: Yes, that's one of the differences.

Mr Marchese: Can you briefly, because I have a few other questions, tell me what else you do that is different from public schools?

Mr Logel: Actually we do what the Ministry of Education is recommending for all schools in Ontario. We just do it more efficiently for less cost.

Mr Marchese: You probably do; I have no doubt about it. What parents wouldn't want to be in a school where the enrolment is 15? I would want that and most of the Tory parents there would want that. Everybody would love to have that choice. But I don't think we can afford that kind of choice, because the government otherwise would have put in the money, but to give you that choice, to give you funding so you could keep your level of 15 as the enrolment—

Mr Logel: You're not giving the funding to us. You're giving it to the parents so they have that choice.

Mr Marchese: It doesn't matter to me. No, I understand.

Mr Logel: Right now they don't have that choice.

Mr Marchese: I appreciate that, but to give it to the parents so they can have their choice to have an enrolment of 15, whereas the public system has to have an enrolment that varies anywhere from 23 to 39, in some of the Catholic schools, is there a problem with that view, do you think?

Mr Logel: Yes, and I think what you're saying is that—maybe you can help me out here, Philomena—everybody should have that choice. Right now, not everybody has that choice. There's a financial restriction. So if the choice were made, if some finances were transferred to individuals, they could have the education—

Mr Marchese: But New Democrats don't want that system to break up.

Mr Logel: But it doesn't break up the system. Has the public system in any other province broken down since those schools are funded?

Mr Marchese: Sorry, but I'm saying, why would I want to give a parent who says, "Oh, I'd love to have a norm of 15," the ability, by paying them so they can go to a school where the enrolment for them is 15, but in the public system it's 25 or 30? Why would a government be crazy to do that?

Mr Logel: Why wouldn't we make this available to everybody?

Mr Marchese: No, I'm sorry. I believe in one public system, you see. I don't believe in the idea that I should fund someone so they can go somewhere, have their little school, and the ratio is 1 to 15. I believe we need to protect the majority of students, 92% of whom are not in private schools—92%, 93%, 94%. They're the ones who desperately need the help, because this government is not giving it.

Mr Logel: Why are these small schools a threat to the public system?

Mr Marchese: I can tell you the threat.

Mr Logel: In other provinces where the funding comes—

Mr Marchese: But let me tell you—

The Vice-Chair: Mr Marchese, let him answer.

Mr Logel: —enrolment doesn't rise; the numbers enrolled in independent schools do not rise dramatically.

Mr Marchese: But Mr Logel, here's the trick: if enrolments decrease—

The Vice-Chair: We have to move on to the government. Mr Tilson.

Mr Marchese:—automatically people are going to opt out because they want a school where the enrolment—

The Vice-Chair: Mr Marchese.

Mr Logel: They haven't opted out.

The Vice-Chair: It's now Mr Tilson's turn.

Mr Marchese: Oh, you've done research. The government hasn't done the research, and neither have you. Sorry.

Mr David Tilson (Dufferin-Peel-Wellington-Grey): The worst is over.

Mr Logel: Thank you.

Mr Tilson: I want to tell members of the committee that this school is in my riding.

Mr Marchese: God bless.

Mr Tilson: Absolutely. I support this school 1,000%. They do an outstanding job in our riding.

Mr Marchese: Of course they do.

Mr Tilson: It is not the wealthy school that the NDP and the Liberals continually talk about, a school for the rich. It is not a school for the rich. I know many of the people whose children attend this school, and they are not wealthy individuals; they are everyday, average people in our community, absolutely.

These people are outstanding educators in our community. They've proven that over the years. I have attended their school many times and have observed the programs they have put through. I have observed some of the people who have graduated from that school.

My question is—because the end of the world, according to the Liberals and the NDP, is coming with this legislation. The end of the world is coming; the end of the public school system is coming. They have said that over and over, that this legislation is the breakup of the public school system. I would like you to comment on those allegations.

Mr Logel: As I say, I continue quoting, it hasn't happened elsewhere; why would it happen in Ontario? If this was the end of the system, why hasn't our phone been ringing off the hook with people wanting to jump? The people who have been sacrificing and want to be there are there already. The people who have chosen to remain back in the system, for whatever reason, will continue to do that.

Mr Tilson: It has been alleged that these independent schools will conflict with the principles, the economics—I guess this is similar to the first question I had—of the public schools to such a degree that it will destroy the system. That's basically the same question, but it's put in that way by the Liberals and the NDP. Could you comment on that?

Mr Logel: We don't see how that could happen. We don't see how the independent system could alter the public system to that extent.

Mr Tilson: I thank you for coming to Queen's Park. Keep up the good work.

The Chair: On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

ONTARIO PRINCIPALS' COUNCIL

The Chair: The next presentation is the Ontario Principals' Council. I would ask the presenter or presenters to come forward, please, and state your name for the record. On behalf of the committee, welcome. You have 20 minutes for your presentation this afternoon. Go ahead whenever you're ready.

Mr Rick Victor: Thank you. My name is Rick Victor. I'm the president of the Ontario Principals' Council.

The Ontario Principals' Council is a voluntary organization of principals and vice-principals in publicly funded schools in Ontario. We number about 5,000. Although it's voluntary, 95% of all the principals and vice-principals are members. We are one of the three principal organizations in the province. The Catholic principals have about 1,500 members and the French have 450, to put in perspective the number of schools that we represent.

1740

We are the collective voice for principals and vice-principals of public secondary and elementary schools. Our mandate is to advocate for students; to promote publicly funded education; to contribute to education policy development; and to work with the government and opposition parties, district school boards, school councils and other members of the education community to ensure exemplary schools for Ontario's students.

We were formed in 1998, when we were removed from our original federations. Since then, we have concentrated on not only protection of principals and vice-principals, but more importantly on the professional development of our members and also on researching education and educational trends in the province. We base our decisions on the expertise of school leaders, and we have a huge polling process and an e-mail process to make sure we represent our members.

I can tell you that as advocates of the public system, we cannot support the government's current proposal under Bill 45 to provide tax credits to those who send their children to private schools. We have been very, very hesitant to criticize governments about their actions. We believe the government has a right to govern. However, in this case we have decided to come forth and say that we think the approach the government is suggesting is wrong and that it should be abandoned.

In addition, in order for a diverse and multicultural society such as ours to thrive and succeed, the students in that society—we believe that we are the creators of future citizens. We, with the parents, with the communities, believe the public school system—an open, inclusive, and non-judgmental system that teaches respect, tolerance, understanding and acceptance of all students—is the system that should be endorsed and financed by the government through tax dollars.

A tax credit is financing private schools. No matter how you shake it, it's still doing that. We believe that channelling scarce tax dollars to private schools at the expense of public schools can seriously undermine a strong public education system and lead to its ghettoization. We cannot allow this to happen in Ontario.

Every child in this province has the opportunity to attend a publicly funded school and receive a high-quality education. Access is not dependent on income level or on academic performance. The provision of public education is good practice. It allows us as a society to ensure that all students have the ability to learn and succeed.

We recognize, though, that the government has a right to decide whatever it wants to do based on the democracy that we're in. We believe that, should the government decide to go forth with the proposed tax credit plan even though it would not be endorsed by our organization, the schools that become recognized for their students and the parents of the students to get a tax deduction must follow the same patterns and expectations, the same requirements and same levels of accountability as the publicly funded schools in this province.

Therefore, if a private school is given a number that would allow the parents to have a tax deduction, we believe that private school must be open and accessible to any student who wishes to enrol, regardless of race, culture, religion, ethnic origin, income level, disability or academic performance. The private schools must adhere to the Ontario Human Rights Code. They must, if they are going to be funded, be required to participate in the standardized testing by the EQAO. They must, depending on the results of the EQAO testing, develop action plans for continuous improvement. They must teach students at all grades and must follow the provincial curriculum. They must abide by all standards as outlined in the Safe Schools Act, 2000. They must maintain Ontario student records according to the Education Act. Teachers must be qualified educators and be members in good standing with the Ontario College of Teachers.

Teachers in private schools that are given recognition must be subject to any testing programs that are mandatory for public school teachers. Principals in private schools must be accredited educators and be subject to performance reviews, just as they are in the publicly funded system. Private school budgets must be part of the public record. And private schools must be inspected and accredited by the Ministry of Education if they are going to be funded from the public purse.

In conclusion then, on behalf of the Ontario Principals' Council, principals and vice-principals are on the front lines in the schools across this province. We have been working hard to introduce and implement all of the reforms that have been asked of us. We want to make sure that the reforms are in place and are working so that our students can learn, succeed and compete in today's society.

Despite the challenges, we are wholly committed to the principles of public education. We believe that public

education is good education and provides students with a quality education and an opportunity to learn alongside those who may be from different ethnic, religious or social cultures. The inclusiveness of the public system also allows students to learn about, understand and accept the diversity of the world in which they live.

Every day we work with dedicated teachers and support staff to foster an environment that not only encourages academic performance but also promotes tolerance and is nondiscriminatory. In this way, children become not only better students but also better citizens. Scarce public resources must be used to ensure that our system of public education is maintained and enhanced, not weakened. We want to welcome students and parents into our system, not encourage them to leave through financial incentives. We cannot have the education system of Ontario fragmented.

Thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the Ontario principals and vice-principals of publicly funded schools.

The Chair: Thank you very much. We have four minutes per caucus and I'll start with Mr Marchese.

Mr Marchese: Thank you for your presentation. Sorry, I had to step out for a few moments to deal with something else.

This is a tax credit proposal. The Minister of Finance introduced it. It's not an education proposal and they're not dealing with any of the educational implications. It's intended to give parents a choice. They want to help people who want that choice to be able to ease up on some of the financial difficulties they are having. The implications are tremendous, yet most of them don't want to deal with those educational implications in terms of accountability or certification or curriculum requirements, supervisory requirements and so on. What is your view of that?

Mr Victor: The most formative years of a student are their preteen and teen years, and the more they interact with students with other beliefs, with other histories, with other backgrounds, the more they interact on a day-to-day level with them, the better they understand each other and the more tolerant they are.

Mr Marchese: I understand that. It was a different question, but I'll get to your answer by phrasing another question. Mr O'Toole was saying yesterday that the opposition is threatening—he didn't mean threatening but perhaps that we are fearmongering is what I think he might have wanted to say. He said fragmentation is not going to happen, so you and I are wrong to say that. Harris said it a while ago, so he was worried. Now they all deny that Harris ever said that. But I'm profoundly worried about the funding of religious schools, because it does encourage people to go into religious schools. I certainly don't support money going to private non-denominational schools, because they certainly don't need my help. But in terms of the silos, I fear those silos. Are we threatening, are we fearmongering, or is this just a view that we feel different from the others?

Mr Victor: Our concern is not the competition but the concept. The concept is a promotion of fragmentation.

That's what the whole idea is. It's an enticement to leave the public system. Everyone who leaves causes a financial burden on a system that right now is financially strapped. So are we afraid of everybody leaving? No. That's not why we're here. We're here because we don't believe philosophically it's right. Philosophically we believe in a publicly funded, excellent education system that should be endorsed by the government of the day, no matter who the government is, because it is an excellent system. This tax incentive seems to me an implication that one should go elsewhere. That fragmentation is encouragement for students to leave what is a system that we believe creates wonderful citizens. We keep registering number one in all of the world, and it's because of the tolerance level we have, and we believe that tolerance level is because of the publicly funded system that we have right now.

Mr Marchese: OSSTF did a study—

The Chair: Mr Marchese, you've run out of time.

1750

Mr Galt: Thank you for your presentation. We had a presentation earlier today and I'd like to read a paragraph from it to see if you agree with them. It's from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. They, like you, do not agree with the tax credit that we are presenting.

In 1.01, "The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association is committed to the best education for all students in Ontario. Our faith impels us to respect the dignity and wishes of all faiths. It is the primacy right of all parents who desire religious education for their children to have that desire realized whether in the publicly funded system or in alternative schools. That right is not reserved solely for Catholic parents."

Under 1.02, "OECTA has a long history of support for public funding of faith-based schools on the condition they are accountable to the public."

Can you agree with these statements from that organization?

Mr Victor: I'll centre on the accountability. We've already said that as a government you have a right to fund other schools, to fund the presently non-funded schools. But the accountability part of it must be there also. In our document, which you have a copy of, we've gone through all of the aspects and it just says that all children—those children we all have a responsibility to—must be given an equality of educational opportunities and that equality is arrived at through accountability. It's an accountability in the level of instruction, it's accountability in the curriculum and it's accountability in having an open, see-through, very clear picture of what's occurring to those students in their education. That can be arrived at through the items that we've said any private school must have in order to be one of the registered private schools that a parent could get a tax credit for.

Mr Mike Benson: I don't think you would have any argument from us around the notion that there should be accountability for tax dollars, both in terms of efficient use and in terms of the return for that investment in a

quality education. Sure, no large public institution is perfect, of course. We work and struggle to improve it. A lot has happened in Ontario recently that arguably will address a lot of that. We disagree with some of it, we agree with a lot of it.

The question becomes, is it OK to have a faith-based system so long as it's accountable? We believe certainly there should be an accountability, but there's even a problem with a faith-based system, in our view, because it becomes very difficult to start to define that. We have our more traditional kinds of—we have the Roman Catholic system that's constitutionally present in Ontario, one might say other of the traditional kinds of groups. We understand those groups and maybe that's OK. But where do you start to draw the line on who does it? Should it be totally up to the parents? That's one argument.

If we really believe in a pluralistic kind of society that we have with many faiths and traditions and so on, that we need to live as a group in harmony and tolerance, that kind of that thing, I don't think we're necessarily helping get there by siloing our education based on various religious groups. Are the Wiccans OK? You can take it to ridiculous extents, I agree, and I don't want to be flippant about it or anything like that. But I think we believe that the better way to ensure a tolerant society and one with a quality education system is to have a public education system that teaches about religious tolerance, but the religion part perhaps is something that's more appropriate in the home, as opposed to in the publicly funded system.

Mr Phillips: Thank you for your presentation. I use the government's brief. People say the Liberals are being alarmist. I always quote from the government's brief. If you haven't got it, the clerk will get you a copy. It's the brief that the government presented to the United Nations two years ago. It uses language much like the language you used. I haven't quoted this one before but it says, "One of the strengths of a public system of education in a province and a country which are committed to a policy of multiculturalism is that it provides a venue where people of all colours, races, national and ethnic origins and religions interact and try to come to terms with one another's differences. Such a process is not without its problems and frictions, but the fact that the public school must deal with the varied needs and interests of the total population makes it a valuable institution for the creation of better understanding among the various groups. In this way, the public schools build social cohesion, tolerance and understanding."

That was a paragraph used at the time arguing against extending funding. The document is filled with comments like that.

The principals' association is obviously in a leadership role in the province. Are you aware of the research the government must have done to change its mind? Have you seen any studies that say, "What we believed two years ago and felt strongly about is no longer right, and we've suddenly changed our mind"? Has the principals' association been involved in anything of that sort?

Mr Victor: No.

Mr Marchese: How come?

Mr Victor: The simple answer is no. We have not been involved with anything with the government that would lead to the change in philosophy you are referring to.

Mr Phillips: My colleague has a question, I think.

Mr John Gerretsen (Kingston and the Islands): I have a question with respect to your standards of accountability. I think you've set out very clearly the 11 or 12 different criteria that, in effect, would make it almost become like a publicly funded school. First of all, does your association also include individuals from the separate—

Mr Victor: Yes. We're open to any practising principal or vice-principal in the province in a publicly funded school.

Mr Gerretsen: All right.

Mr Marchese: But they have their own association.

Mr Victor: Yes, they have their own associations. But, again, they're voluntary.

Mr Gerretsen: I would say that one of the areas where the private schools would have a problem is in your very first criterion, that they should be open and accessible to any student who wishes to enrol, because certainly a lot of the religiously based schools aren't that way. You have to adhere to the principles of that particular religion.

Would you agree with me that this tax credit business is akin to taking, in effect, anywhere from \$300 million to \$700 million out of what otherwise would be available for the public school system?

Mr Benson: It's only one consolidated fund. Presumably money not going in is the same as money coming out.

Mr Victor: Every student who decides not to attend a publicly funded school is a loss of \$6,000 to \$7,000 to that school board.

Mr Gerretsen: So, if you make more money available through tax credits or whatever to a private system, there's going to be less money for the publicly funded system.

Mr Victor: Even if the money were increased, we would not agree with the process, because we do not agree this is in the best interests of the collective beliefs of a creation for the citizens of this province. We think it crystallizes beliefs and doesn't promote an understanding of those beliefs.

Mr Gerretsen: When you set out these principles in this brief, it is purely in sort of an alternative situation. It's basically saying to the government, "We don't agree with it. But if you're going to implement it, at least have these criteria as part of the foundation on which this tax credit system can operate." That's what you're basically saying.

Mr Victor: We clearly understand that the government has a right to govern. That's what the whole thing's about. We wanted to clearly articulate that we are very opposed to it. We don't use the word "wrong." I'm a teacher. I don't say "you're wrong" very often. In fact, I can't remember saying "you're wrong." We decided to write "you're wrong" into our brief to emphasize how much we disagree with it. However, we do believe in a democracy. The government has a right to make decisions. And if that decision is going to be made, though we feel it's not in the best interest of the collective, at least then the principles we articulated should be put in place to make sure the students are protected, that they're given the quality education we believe presently exists in the public system—

The Chair: With that, we've run out of time, Mr Gerretsen. On behalf of the committee, thank you very much for your presentation this afternoon.

We are now adjourned until 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

The committee adjourned at 1759.

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 12 June 2001

Responsible Choices for Growth and Accountability Act (2001 Budget), 2001, Bill 45, Mr Flaherty / Loi de 2001 sur des choix réfléchis favorisant la croissance et la responsabilisation (budget de 2001), projet de loi 45, M. Flaherty.....	F-137
Ontario Teachers' Federation.....	F-137
Mr Roger Régimbal	
Toronto District Christian High School.....	F-139
Mr Ren Siebenga	
Mr Phil Vriend	
Peel District School Board.....	F-142
Ms Janet McDougald	
Ontario Education Alliance.....	F-145
Ms Jacqueline Latter	
Ms Tam Goossen	
Ontario Christian School Administrators Association.....	F-148
Mr Ray Hendriks	
Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association.....	F-151
Ms Kathy McVean	
United Jewish Appeal Federation Board of Jewish Education.....	F-153
Mr Seymour Epstein	
Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools.....	F-156
Dr Adrian Guldemon	
Mr John Vanasselt	
Toronto Board of Trade.....	F-159
Ms Elyse Allan	
Ms Terri Lohnes	
Victoria Park Secondary School Council.....	F-162
Mrs Sue Lockington	
Toronto Federation of Chinese Parents.....	F-164
Mr Doug Hum	
Ms Sarah Tsang-Fahey	
Ontario Coalition for Education Reform.....	F-167
Ms Sheila Morrison	
Council of Ontario Universities.....	F-171
Mr Ian Clark	
United Steelworkers Toronto Area Council.....	F-175
Mr John Humphrey	
Mr Najib Soufian	
Ms Pearl Henry	
Mr Fred Shipley	
The Maples Independent Country School.....	F-178
Mr Brian Logel	
Ms Philomena Logel	
Ontario Principals' Council.....	F-180
Mr Rick Victor	
Mr Mike Benson	