



## **Public Section**

### **THE MYTH OF SCHOOL CHOICE**

The Government's ongoing promotion of "school choice" has been successful according to the recent opinion piece in the Leader Post by Todd McKay of the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. But the truth is if you want to pursue a religious education for your child in Saskatchewan at any of the 40 other than Catholic religious schools, you have to pay. You don't get full funding. Full funding only applies to Catholic school divisions.

The Catholic community has had a Constitutional right since Confederation for a denominational school system for the children of Catholics but it doesn't qualify for funding non-Catholics. In the recent Court of Queen's Bench judgement regarding the Theodore case Justice Layh advised that the current government funding policies promote "the interests of the Catholic faith by enabling it to disseminate its teachings to non-Catholic students in a manner denied to any other religious group," and has enabled the development of "a second public school system grounded exclusively in the tenets of the Catholic faith".

He went on to say "if the purpose of separate schools is to provide choice to parents, many regions of Saskatchewan do not have Catholic schools so choice is largely restricted to urban centres. If choice is a government goal, choice should be reasonably available to all. Better choice to no one (aside from those constitutionally preferred), than choice to some based on the whims of geography and acceptance of Catholic doctrine."

"The Government's position, that Catholic schools should receive funding to educate students regardless of faith just like public schools, ignores the genesis of separate schools and erases legal differences between public and separate schools. Effectively the (government and the Catholic school boards) would give Saskatchewan two (parallel and competing public school systems) with little to legally distinguish them."

Rather than reversing an unconstitutional policy and its serious impact on public schools, the Government has decided it will override the Constitution and continue to fund Catholic schools to provide a Catholic education to non-Catholics.

This decision to invoke the notwithstanding clause suggests that the Government is less concerned with the rule of law, and more concerned with penalizing public schools for pursuing an important case to protect the public school system for our children.

Bert de Gooijer - Chair, Public Section

Larry Huber - Executive Director, Public Section

