



Provincial Report

Ontario

AFOCSC – Association franco-ontarienne des conseils scolaires catholiques

CCSTA AGM - Victoria, B.C. June 4-6, 2009

Government funding for education 2009-10

In a period of economic downturn in Ontario, one might have expected some drastic cuts to education funding. In reality the news is not all rosy but the Minister of Education Kathleen Wynne was able to convince her colleagues that it is always wise to invest in the youth of the province. As a consequence, we all breathed a sigh of relief when the budget figures for 2009-2010 were announced. There will be some belt tightening but boards will be able to continue to deliver high quality programs to its students.

In the 2009 Ontario Budget, the government will build on the achievements of the past five years and continue to invest in three core educational priorities — supporting higher levels of student achievement, reducing gaps in student achievement and increasing confidence in publicly funded education. Education sector spending is projected to rise to \$14.2 billion in 2009-10, a \$0.9 billion increase over the previous year. The funding increases noted above will support provincial framework agreements between trustee associations, teacher federations and unions. ¹

¹ Ontario Ministry of Finance web site

In its brief to the Minister of education, prior to the budget announcement, AFOCSC reminded the minister that cuts cannot be made that would be contrary to constitutional rights. Boards have shown a willingness to find efficiencies within their budgets in light of the financial stress of the day. The brief also underlined the persistent discrepancies in areas of transport, special education and expenses for administration.

Governance review

In 2008 the provincial government created a committee to examine the practices of school boards to see if they were as effective as they could be. Examples of best practices were to be found in many cases. These were used as a background in the committee's report to the government in which it presented 25 recommendations. In general, the committee recommended that the government clearly outline the mandate of boards, which is to promote

student success, provide appropriate and effective programs and make sure that monies are well spent.

Some of the recommendations in the report:

- Clarifying the roles of individual trustees, chairpersons and Directors of education
- A code of conduct for all trustees
- Providing opportunities for professional development for trustees

AFOCSC presented a brief to the Committee on governance which included 14 recommendations and in which it highlighted the values of evangelical teaching which is to be found in the style of governance of Catholic boards. The importance of preserving the autonomy of local boards was also stressed in the document.

Good news – increase in enrolment

Contrary to a tendency of declining enrolment in the last few years, our member boards in general benefit from increases in their numbers. A brief from AFOCSC to the Declining Enrolment Working Group stressed the fundamental role and contribution of French catholic schools to the development of francophone communities. Our boards are still in a developmental mode and require investments in infrastructure to accommodate the increase of students. A happy predicament!

Professional development for our trustees

In order to equip our trustees with the tools to better pay their role as ambassadors of catholic education, a workshop was presented to all our member boards beginning last fall. Entitled "*Des mots pour le dire, des gestes pour le vivre*", (Words to say it, actions to live it), the aim was to give the trustees confidence in replying to questions from the public or the media. A series of documents called *outils* (tools) will become available on a secured section of our web site. These will give trustees information and techniques to better defend Catholic education.

Political action

In 2008, AFOCSC adopted its 5 year strategic plan. It has enabled the association to better target its lobbying efforts and also to modify its marketing campaign whose slogan is *C'est un plus!*, (It's a plus!). The directors of education and their communications experts were instrumental in redesigning the marketing plan which highlights the excellence of Catholic education, proof of which is the constant improvement of student results obtained in EQAO tests. The intention is to also target board personnel as well as the parents to bring them closer to a model of spokesperson and defender of Catholic francophone education.

A number of meetings with political personalities of every party both at the federal and provincial levels were held during the year. These were more selective and focused to achieve a greater impact.

The association, even with its limited budget and human resources, made itself more visible by addressing a number of issues by means of briefs. This has added to AFOCSC's credibility within the political community.

As was reported earlier AFOCSC was granted intervener status in the Nguyen case (*Nguyen vs. prov. of Québec*). The issue is whether the majority of instruction need be in the language of the minority in order for a parent to claim rights under Article 23 of the Charter of Rights. This question has national implications as it directly involves governance issues as pertains to a board's ability to determine who has access to its schools. The case was heard in the Supreme Court of Canada December last. A decision is expected this summer.

Meetings with the francophone bishops

It is now a well established tradition and an important one that twice a year, in the spring and in the fall, AFOCSC, OPECO, (The provincial office for Catholic faith education in Ontario), the directors of education and the francophone bishops of Ontario meet to discuss matters of interest to all concerning catholic education. Some noteworthy developments from these gatherings:

School-family-parish collaboration

A committee was formed to develop a strategic plan to enhance closer collaboration among the Catholic community. At the same time the intention is to also foster a closer collaboration between board and diocese.

Relief committee

This committee will undertake efforts to identify in the school boards and in the dioceses, those individuals with the expertise to teach the Additional Qualification courses in Religious Education, as well as validate and elaborate the policy guideline documents the pedagogical tools and the training sessions in Religious Education. A second phase will place emphasis on increasing the number of individuals holding Masters or PhD degrees in the area of faith development. The third phase will attempt to make secondary students aware of the possibilities of studying and working in the field of faith education.

Policy document in Religious Studies for the secondary panel

The revision, in its final phase, should be submitted to the bishops' Education Commission in mid May for approval in June and the document distributed in early fall.

Provincial negotiations

AFOCSC was actively involved in contract negotiations to establish a provincial framework which would then be used to finalize the particulars at each board level. The provincial bargaining groups included AEFO and FEESO representing the teachers, and CUPE representing the non-teaching staff. The French Catholic boards succeeded in achieving an understanding vis-à-vis the provincial framework and concluding agreements with the local

bargaining units within the time lines laid out by the ministry. This will contribute to a period of peace and stability, which was the goal of the government. The agreements expire in 2012.

Symposium 2011

A working group was struck to begin preparations for a provincial gathering on Catholic education which would be held in Ottawa in 2011. A Symposium of this nature was held in 2001 and it was felt that it was a means to re-energize the Catholic community in the province. It is too soon to be able to give a detailed account of the committee's decisions.

Changing of the guard

AFOCSC works in close collaboration with the directors of education of our boards. This collaboration has enabled the association to initiate or to develop many projects that make our schools true models of what is best in Catholic and francophone education. This year two directors who have been stalwarts of French Catholic education in the province and models themselves for their colleagues, Charlotte Laforest and Bernard Lavallée will retire. They will not be forgotten. AFOCSC wishes both of them a happy and well deserved retirement.

New Assistant Deputy Minister

Dominic Giroux who had been the Assistant Deputy Minister has moved on as president of Laurentian University. Replacing him is Raymond Théberge who was the Director General of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC) since 2005. AFOCSC has sent him a letter congratulating him on his appointment and indicating its eagerness to work with him in helping to build upon our successes. M. Théberge begins his official duties on May 4th, 2009.

AFOCSC - AGM – May 1st to 3rd in Kingston, Ontario

AFOCSC's 11th AGM carries the same theme as our professional development workshops which were held at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009: "*Des mots pour le dire et des gestes pour le vivre.*" (see above). We were pleased to have the former Supreme Court of Canada judge Michel Bastarache accept to be the guest speaker this year. The Honourable Michel Bastarache now works as counsel in the litigation group in the firm Heenan Blaikie in Ottawa. Among the other notables to attend are Kathleen Wynn, Minister of education; Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services and Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs and possibly the new Assistant Deputy Minister, Raymond Théberge.

The prize for excellence in Catholic education will be awarded for the second time, having been instituted for the first time last year on the occasion of our 10th anniversary.

Joseph Bisnaire, AFOCSC representative