



April 18, 2017

Dear Stakeholders of Catholic Independent Schools in BC,

The following is an article I wrote for the Diocese of Victoria newspaper, called the *Diocesan Messenger*. I thought that other stakeholders of Catholic Schools in BC might be interested in reading the article and/or sharing it with others.

The Provincial election in British Columbia is looming, so what does that have to do with our Catholic schools? All Catholic schools in BC are independent schools and some people in the province are trying to make funding for independent schools an election issue by lobbying for the elimination of funding to independent schools. It is important that the general public understand the implication if such a decision by any provincial government were to take place; the end result would yield an even greater financial burden on the education system in this province.

Independent schools provide “choice” in education and it is important that parents continue to have that choice. Recent statistics (2015-16) published by the Federation of Independent School Associations BC (FISA) indicate that the 350 independent schools in the province account for approximately 13% of all school aged children in the province (81,659 students). Faith-based schools account for approximately 60% of the independent school enrolment; 21,923 of the 81,659 students attend Catholic schools. At the same time, independent schools receive approximately 6% of the Ministry of Education dollars allotted to all schools in the province. This is less than half the operating costs if these students were educated in the public sector.

Most independent schools receive either yearly operational funding of 50% (for Group 1 schools) or 35% (for Group 2 schools) of their public counterpart in the area that they are located. For example: in 2015-16 a student in the Victoria area was funded at \$7654 in the public school system while a Catholic school student in the same area was funded at \$3827. Suffice it to say, independent schools save the government money each and every year, just in operational costs.

Then there are capital costs - independent schools receive no money for capital expenditures (land, buildings, furnishings and equipment). Capital expenditures must be paid for by the local school community through fundraising efforts, donations and/or taking out loans. In Catholic Schools, all seismic upgrades, renovations and rebuilds we must fund ourselves. It is important to note that many community groups use independent schools throughout the province.

“It is interesting to note that independent school parents continue to pay taxes for public schools even though their children attend independent schools. There is no system of directing property taxes to specific systems, as there is in some provinces.” (FISA media fact sheet, March 2014)

So what would happen if operating grants to independent schools were eliminated? Simply put, many independent schools would be forced to close and children would end up going to their local public school. If this happened then the provincial government would be faced with a greater financial challenge of increased operational costs as well as the need to find space for a vast majority of the independent school students.

Comments also are made that independent schools do not accept children with special needs; again, this statement incorrect. In 2012, 4.5% of public school students were designated students with special needs and were funded accordingly in public schools; just over 4% were designated and funded in independent schools.

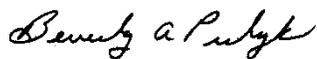
Other comments are that only well off parents send their children to independent schools; this also is not true. Most independent schools tend to enroll students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds.

As the election approaches, be prepared to educate others by having conversations about the facts of independent schools. Ask the politicians running for office their views on independent schools. Only by educating others can we protect choice in education!

The Federation of Independent School Associations BC, established in 1966, is the voice for all independent school members, and acts as a liaison between the schools and the provincial government, and other educational institutions. To know more about FISA, visit <http://fisabc.ca/>.

On a totally different note – blessings to you all; may the joy of the Easter Season fill your hearts and homes!

Together in Christ,



**Beverly Pulyk
Superintendent, Island Catholic Schools
and
Chairperson of the Catholic Independent Schools Committee of BC**

