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A case for one school system

By RON BANNERJEE

Funding faith-based schools in Ontario is a recipe for disaster, which will fray the ties that bind our society.

A broad coalition of Ontario groups has formed the One School System Network. This coalition opposes the current discriminatory system of preferential funding for Catholic schools, and is equally appalled by attempts to channel public funds to schools of other religions. The coalition includes humanists, anti-sharia activists, school trustees, and representatives of Canada's Hindu community.

The position adopted by the Hindu Conference of Canada is based on the values of Hindus today and throughout history. In India, the world's largest democracy with a Hindu majority, Hindus do not receive government funding for educational schools. Scholarship and independent thought have always played a critical role in Hindu civilization: The world's oldest universities were founded in India. These institutions operated independently from temples and religious teachings.

Interestingly, progressive organizations in India are trying to implement a "one-school system" there. Currently, while the Hindu majority receives no school support, minority schools and religious institutions receive massive government funding. This has created resentment and division. The opposition Bhartiya Janta Party supports implementation of a proper secular and egalitarian system eliminating public funding for schools and mosques.

Various private schools are part of the Ontario Multifaith Coalition, which is lobbying for funding for faith schools. The possibility of hate and violence being taught within some private faith schools is a clear and present danger in Canada.

Some notorious links

Kim Bolan of the Vancouver Sun has reported that in B.C., Ripudaman Singh Malik -- who was charged in the Air India bombing, the worst terrorist act in Canada -- is the founder of a society which has opened two Sikh Khalsa schools in the area.

Some privately-funded schools are linked to notorious people and organizations; the possibility of these schools applying for public funding raises the nightmare of unwitting government involvement in the promotion of terror and hate.

Proponents of the multi-faith alternative will undoubtedly assure us that schools receiving public funding will adhere to an approved curriculum.

This argument is flawed: Ontario institutions already suffer from massive shortfalls in resources. We cannot muster the resources to monitor teachings within faith schools.

Given the limitations of our public institutions, the addition of public funding to the faith-based schools, some of them very radical, is a prescription for division and disaster. The only publicly funded school system appropriate for a secular democracy is one where all Canadians can read together from a common curriculum which outlines our shared values and vision.

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"One School System Network" (www.onessn.org).