

What's so Important about the Equity in Education Tax Credit?

By John Vanasselt, Director of Communications, OACS

Religion is not private

The *EETC* has clarified the "freedom of religion" guarantee found in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Government support for school choice confirms that religious beliefs have public consequences, a fact of life demonstrated by the existence of religious schools. This is progress over the other view which presumes religion must be confined to the personal and private segments of our lives. Since all reasonable people are motivated by what they believe, it is good to note that government in this province respects parents choosing schools based on religious beliefs as well as those choosing public schools which are based on non-religious beliefs.

Parents are paramount

The *Equity in Education Tax Credit* recognizes parents as the most important people in the education of children. On May 9, 2001, when Minister of Finance, Jim Flaherty, announced the *EETC*, he explained it was "time to put students and parents first." Mr. Flaherty's courageous statement was the first time an Ontario government signaled a basic trust in parents to make good educational decisions for their children. It is parents, not governments or bureaucrats, that have the primary responsibility to direct the education of their children, and the *EETC* affirms that fact.

The foundation is the family

On a broader level, the *EETC* also affirms that the family is the foundational unit in a democratic society. The primacy of the family unit is not only a scriptural given, it is a foundational element in all free and moral societies. The freedom for families to live as they see fit, within the confines of the common good, is maybe **the** most basic liberty of all because it assumes a number of other rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association, and so on. The *EETC* recognizes that the beliefs and traditions of the parents have practical implications for raising children, and that education is a vital family activity in child rearing. This tax credit is

an encouragement for parents, especially those in lower income brackets, to become more involved in the education of their children.

Society benefits

OACS schools teach that Christians have wide ranging civic and social responsibilities to contribute to the welfare of society by bringing biblical principles to bear on every area of life. These responsibilities are not goals; they are requirements of the Christian life. We live in a society that allows an amazing range of freedoms, but offers little or no guidance on how to use them. Christian schools provide clear and useful moral direction, based on scriptural principles as interpreted from a reformational perspective. In short, in an age where Christian reliance on absolute standards of morality has often been derided, the *EETC* is an acknowledgement that such standards are just as sensible as others. Christian schools are good for Ontario and initiating the *EETC* affirms it.

It will be an election issue

There will be a provincial election before the *EETC* is extended to its full potential, and it is quite clear that the tax credit will be an election issue. Dalton McGuinty has stated publicly and often that, if elected he will repeal the *EETC*. The NDP has voiced opposition to the *EETC* since it was first announced. Neither opposition party has a plan for some alternative means to support parental choice and involvement in the education of children. Both of these parties deny the public place of religion, the active parental role in education, and the foundational place of the family that are encouraged by the *EETC*.

On the other hand, the new premier has publicly committed himself and his government to the full implementation of the tax credit, noting "parental choice strengthens our entire education system." As a matter of fact, all of the recent PC leadership candidates expressed their commitment to the tax credit and the heightened level of parental involvement it promotes.

Parents should get involved

Historically, many OACS parents have fulfilled their civic duty to vote in provincial elections. These parents are politically aware and exercise their right of suffrage in greater percentage numbers than the overall population. These parents are not single-issue voters. They weigh a variety of factors before making the final decision about who will get their vote. They bring their Christian principles to the entire spectrum of public policy debates including all social and fiscal issues. That's excellent. Democracy is not a spectator sport and only when citizens make it their business to be informed and to participate in the political process, does the system of representation really work. Only when Christian citizens raise the claims of Christ's kingdom in the public square, can they pray for the Lord's blessings on their efforts.

The OACS role

OACS encourages Christian school parents, and all members of the Christian community, to be a part of making the future of this province by increasing their awareness about public policy and the policy makers. OACS provides information to help you get to know MPPs and make sure they know your priorities. Learn about the vision, the policies, and the personal values of all those who would govern this province, whether they are now MPPs or will seek that office in the future. Bring scriptural principles to bear on all aspects of political life when participating in the public debate about the future of Ontario. Vote in the next election.

Most voters categorize issues as "main" or "swing" when deciding who will get their vote. For many OACS parents, the matter of government funding became a main issue with the implementation of the tax credit. It is very clear that tax credit supporters will be very important participants in the political process up to and during the next election campaign. As we noted at the outset of this article, the *EETC* is important for a variety of reasons, many of them not directly connected to money. This province is a better place with the *EETC*, and we should work to ensure it stays.

OACS will continue to provide information on education in general and the tax credit issue in particular. Schools are asked to attach **Queen's Park Updates** to school newsletters, and the OACS website at www.oacs.org provides current information. For further information contact the OACS office by email at oacs@oacs.org or by phone at 905-648-2100.

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