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From the President

Two-Tier Education?

In our latest survey, we asked whether OQE supporters favoured publicly-funded schools with a Black culture emphasis. All but one of our respondents were opposed. In explaining their position, most wrote of their strong desire for one great school system where all children attend a common-denominator neighbourhood school.

At present, Ontario parents are — at least theoretically — allowed to send their children to a school other than their neighbourhood school.

Their options include: moving to a better neighbourhood; sending their kids to Catholic or Francophone schools (in Ontario, Catholic and Francophone parents can choose between public schools or fully-funded Catholic or Francophone schools); working the system to get their kids into better schools (perhaps by enrolling them in gifted, International Baccalaureate, or French immersion programs); sending their kids to independent schools; or home-schooling.

In practice, however, there is a large group of Ontario families who are quite unlikely to be able to access any of these options. That group is English-speaking lower-income non-Catholics.

It is very common for parents to choose non-neighbourhood schools for their children. OISE professor emeritus Mark Holmes estimates that over half of Ontario students are attending a school other than their neighbourhood school. However, these students are not representative of the population as a whole, being predominantly either Catholic or Francophone or from higher-income families (or some combination thereof).

Given the amount of school choice already operating, the concept of the neighbourhood school is more honoured in the breach than in the observance, except when it comes to English-speaking low-income non-Catholic families. These students, who typically attend their neighbourhood school out of necessity, are serving as cannon fodder for those who oppose school choice. This is unfair.

There are two possible ways to end the unfairness: either force *all* students to attend neighbourhood schools or else make it possible for *all* students to choose their schools.

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