

Years of Polling Demonstrates Majority Support for Merging Education Systems in Ontario

Over the past 15 years, poll after poll has shown that there has been increasing support to merge Ontario's publicly-funded education systems into one system. In 2001, polling by Vector Research and Development Incorporated showed that 48% of Ontarians supported merging the systems. Since that time, support for one system of education in Ontario has steadily increased.

In 2002, polling showed that 53% of Ontarians supported a merger of the systems. That support increased to 61% by 2012 and peaked at 70% from 2013 through to 2017. Looking at the polling data from Vector from 2017 in more detail, only 16% of Ontarians said that they strongly opposed merging the systems. In addition, 51% of those who identified as "Catholic School Parents" said they supported the merging of the systems. This demonstrates that the support to maintain a fully funded Catholic system of education alongside the public education system appears to be falling, even among those who have children in the Catholic system.

This same poll asked all of those supporters why they wanted to see the systems merged. Participants could choose one of two options: Because it would save the government money, or because they opposed government funding religious schools. Saving money was the response among 61% of supporters. For most Ontarians, the issue is not about religion. It is about saving money because of the duplication of services created by running multiple systems. Imagine how much better our schools could be if those savings were to be reinvested back into one system to make Ontario's schools even better.

Other polls in the last 15 years corroborate these findings. The CBC reported in 2007 that in an Oraclepoll Research survey conducted that year, 58% of Ontarians supported the creation of one public system of education, while 29% said that they were opposed, and 13% said that they "don't know." Those same polling participants were given a number of reasons to choose from to say why they either supported or opposed moving to one school system. The top two responses – There should not be separate / different boards, and cost savings.

A poll conducted by Forum Research in 2012 also showed that a more Ontarians supported merging the school systems than those who did not. This poll showed that 48% of Ontarians supported a merging of the systems, while 43% were opposed.

Unfortunately, politicians from the three major parties in the Ontario Legislature have yet to acknowledge years of public support for merging the education systems. When confronted with the results of the Forum Research poll results in 2012, the then Minister of Education, Laurel Broten, was quoted in the Toronto Star as saying, "I acknowledge and know that there are many different opinions when it comes to the number school boards we should have."

There is no doubt that the Ontario public has a strong appetite for change when it comes to our publicly-funded education system. While the reasons for merging the systems may differ, one thing is clear. Ontarians are ready to move to one system of education.