

Introducing:

Freedom of Choice to EDUCATION in ONTARIO

Annual spending on education in Canada in 1984-85 was estimated by Statistics Canada to be \$31.7 billion, a 3.8% increase over the previous year.

Where did all the money come from? Well, *governments* fund education, right?

Wrong! --- You do!

But governments *do* play a distinctive role in education today --- they compel us to fund it --- regardless of whether we have chosen to acquire an education ourselves or whether we have children receiving an education or whether we even *want* the type of education being offered. Unfortunately, under any system of *compulsory funding*, quality service at an affordable cost has never been sustained indefinitely --- the only certain consequence of compulsory funding is that payment for the service will always increase --- and will be perpetual.

When that happens, quality deteriorates and alternatives vanish.

Things don't have to be that way.

Freedom Party believes that the *purpose of government* is to *protect* our freedom of choice, *not* to restrict it.

Although freedom of choice does *not* exist in Ontario education today, there *is* a way to introduce it to the system without jeopardizing anyone's access to quality education -- *and* without bankrupting the province or the beneficiaries of education.

As long as the public continues to insist on it, there's nothing wrong with governments providing us with an *opportunity* to an education, but the costs of that education should ultimately be borne by those who choose to take advantage of the opportunity --- students and parents of students. Education "taxes" should be paid only by these groups, and the amount paid (over each person's "taxpayer life") should never exceed the actual cost of his or her education expense incurred.

Otherwise, as long as Mr. Smith is compelled to pay for the education of Mr. Jones (or his children), he has no way of controlling (or even of knowing) how much expense he'll ultimately have to pay for. And of course, Mr. Jones, knowing that Mr. Smith must provide him with a "free" education, has no incentive to take it easy on him. We have only to look at the current controversy surrounding the funding of education to see where this situation will ultimately lead us.

If we really "value" our educational system as much as we hear these days, then there's no reason why direct and indirect education recipients (students and parents) shouldn't ultimately assume the financial responsibility for it. If not, it's pretty obvious that the only thing we really "value" about the system is that someone else is being forced to pay the bill.

Unfortunately, that "someone else" is always *you*.

To help turn things around, **Freedom Party** advocates an educational "voucher" plan, through which education funding can be redirected from specific *institutions* to specific *students*, thereby leaving them free to "redeem" their vouchers at the educational institution of their choice. Most importantly, the ultimate source of government funding would be coming directly from education recipients themselves, while the amount they eventually pay will be limited by the actual education expense they incur.

In other words, instead of being faced by perpetual taxation at ever-increasing rates, education "taxes" under a voucher plan would operate more like a loan, whose eventual repayment would cause one's education taxes to cease.

THE EDUCATION VOUCHER PLAN COUNTING THE BENEFITS

- Education recipients could attend the educational institution of their choice, without fear of paying twice, due to current government-imposed restrictions upon those choosing this option. (See *The Voucher Plan & Independent Schools*).
- Access to quality education would not be limited by a student's (or parent's) current financial status --- only by his abilities or willingness to pursue a particular educational option.
- Education "tax" payments would be negotiable, from an established affordable minimum to any other arrangement suitable to the education taxpayer-recipient (including even a privately administered educational trust fund, exempting him from taxation).
- Competition* in education would flourish, resulting in:
 - a reduction of government bureaucracy, since its only involvement in education would be to act as "trustee" of each individual's education fund,
 - a reduction of government intervention in curriculum,
 - an elimination of the threat of labour disputes within the teaching profession,
 - an over-all reduction in the costs of education since, in addition to the above-mentioned factors, education recipients would *know*, in advance, how much their education is costing, and would have incentive to keep costs low.
- Diversity in education orientation, emphasis, philosophy, etc., would flourish, in place of the uniformity of education that now leaves so many students identically trained and skilled, thus competing for the same types of jobs in the marketplace.
- Given the knowledge that they will ultimately be responsible for the costs of their own education, students would be encouraged to pursue *marketable* skills and knowledge, better enabling them to be productive and self-sufficient in our society.
- Diversity in education *funding* would flourish, allowing for teacher-owned co-ops, parent-run co-ops, educational corporations, single proprietorships, corporate grants and scholarships, etc.

- Teachers would have more flexibility and independence, under a system where they could respond quickly to consumer demand and market preference.
- Education funding conflicts and political manipulation of the system would end, under the understanding that each individual is ultimately responsible for the costs of his education.
- People who choose *not* to have children or *not* to acquire further education would reap the immediate benefit of their choice --- no education taxes.
- Educational priorities would return the student and parent to the head of the list, replacing government policy, bureaucracy, and monopoly.

The Voucher Plan and INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

Of the \$31.7 billion spent annually on education in Canada, the provincial governments provide \$20.7 billion, municipal governments \$5.2 billion, federal government \$3 billion, tuition fees \$1.5 billion (only 5% of the total expenditure), and other sources account for \$1.3 billion.

Although these costs reflect *increases* in over-all expenditures, enrolment in public schools has *decreased* over the last eleven years from 5.6 million students to 4.7 million students while, in contrast, enrolment in independent schools has nearly doubled (152,000 in 1973 to 231,000 by 1984). The fact that more and more families are willing to pay an extra \$2,000 to \$5,000 per year per student to avoid "free" public education must say something about the quality of that education --- and more importantly -- about consumer preference in education.

Freedom of choices does *not* exist in Ontario's education system, despite official government proclamations that "Individual rights are protected in that there is no limitation on the voluntary choice to be made between an education in the public system and attendance at a private school." (*Shapiro Commission on Private Education*). But to say that individual rights have been "protected" by citing a single restrictive option, available only to those who can afford to financially support *two* education systems, is a complete abrogation of the term.

Currently, parents wishing to send their children to an independent school must pay, in addition to the fee necessary for their children's attendance at such schools, the compulsory education tax. Since children, even according to the government's own criteria, should have access to the best education available, and since parents should have it available at the most affordable price, compelling them to financially support an education system with whose standards and objectives they obviously do not agree, is blatantly wrong -- and represents a *violation* of, not a *protection* of, individual rights.

Worst affected by this policy are the children of (as usual) poor-, low-, and middle-income families who are financially discouraged from seeking alternative independent education by the knowledge that there is no legal escape from having to support the state school system. Least affected by the policy are the children of high-income families whose parents can obviously afford the extra burden of supporting *two* educational systems: the one of *choice*; the other of *compulsion*.

OUR ONLY CHOICES

We won't pretend that our proposed "voucher" plan is *perfect*, but with its options provided, it *is* an *ideal* one, given the current crisis in public education funding today. Certainly there will always be those few who find that they cannot afford to pay the entire expense of their education, but they should not be any greater in number than those who find themselves currently unable to pay taxes--after all, that's how they're paying for education now. However, that's no reason to use these people as a justification for giving "free" education to *ourselves*, because "free" is one thing that education is not.

Somebody pays --- and that somebody is always you.

Like it or not, when it comes to education funding, we've only got *two* choices:

(1) We can pay for the education *we* receive, knowing what our expenses are, and being able to control them,

or

(2) We can pay for the education *someone else* receives, and never know of or be able to control expenses, to the ultimate destruction of any educational options at all.

Though your freedom of choice has been restricted in the educational marketplace, you can still make a choice in the political marketplace where, unfortunately, the future of education in this province will be determined.

Consider that future now. And while you're at it, remember that if **Freedom Party** is your only *freedom of choice* alternative in the political marketplace, then it's your only *freedom of choice* alternative in the marketplace of education as well.

After all, *freedom of choice* is what we're all about!

Call us

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Freedom Party is founded on the principle that: Every individual, in the peaceful pursuit of personal fulfillment, has an absolute right to his or her own life, liberty, and property.