

The Effects of Government Funding on Private Schools: Appraising the Perceptions of Long-term Principals and Teachers in British Columbia's Christian Schools

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An increasing proportion of Canadian parents enrol children in private schools. This study evaluates the changes long-term principals and teachers of the largest organization of Christian schools in British Columbia perceive to have occurred since partial public funding began in 1977. Funding has been a factor in salaries, resources, and program diversity. Some schools have implemented distinctive approaches based on a religious and educational vision; others have accepted government policies and public school programs with little critical analysis. The data suggest that a school may maintain its educational distinctiveness, but only as long as and to the extent that (1) its leaders continue to have a compelling educational mission shared by a cohesive supporting community, and (2) funding authorities continue to countenance the schools as true alternatives.

De plus en plus de parents canadiens inscrivent leurs enfants dans des écoles privées. Cette étude évalue les changements que les directeurs d'école et les enseignants de longue date des principales écoles chrétiennes de la Colombie-Britannique ont remarqués depuis le début du financement partiel des écoles privées par le gouvernement en 1977. L'octroi de subventions a eu un effet sur les salaires, les ressources et la diversité des programmes. Certaines écoles ont mis en place des approches particulières fondées sur une vision religieuse et pédagogique; d'autres ont accepté les politiques gouvernementales et les programmes des écoles publiques en faisant peu d'analyse critique. Les données colligées donnent à penser qu'une école peut maintenir son caractère distinctif, mais seulement dans la mesure où (1) ses directeurs continuent à se donner une mission éducative claire, partagée par une communauté homogène et que (2) les instances assurant le financement continuent à accepter ces écoles comme des solutions de rechange valables.

During the past decade, a rising proportion of parents have enrolled their children in private or independent schools in all Canadian provinces except the Atlantic ones.¹ As elsewhere in the industrialized world, this trend has revived the debate about the desirability of government funding of non-public educational alternatives.² In British Columbia, which this study emphasized, the proportion of students attending independent schools increased from 4.3 to 7.2 percent between 1977 and 1990, partly because of government funding.³

A medley of provincial policies have resulted from the funding debates. Saskatchewan and Quebec have provided funding for many years, mainly at secondary level, whereas Alberta (1967), British Columbia (1977), and Manitoba

(1978) offer funding for both elementary and secondary schools. Ontario has not acted on the 1985 Shapiro Commission's recommendation that private schools receive grants upon association with a public school board. Jewish and Calvinist Christian schools launched a court action in 1991 to challenge Ontario's right to fund only one religiously-based school system, *viz.*, the separate Catholic schools.⁴

Do government policies increasingly constrict independent schools? Do the schools toe the line to retain funding? Does closer contact with the public sector lead to conformity? Or does funding bolster the schools' distinctiveness through more careful planning and supervision? Previous research has emphasized the effects of funding on private school policies. I, on the other hand, have been interested in the internal operations of the schools.

This study analyzes the perceptions of long-term principals and teachers about changes between 1977 and 1991 in schools belonging to the Society of Christian Schools in B.C. (hereafter, SCS-BC). As a founding member of B.C.'s Federation of Independent School Associations, the SCS-BC lobbied vigorously to obtain government funding.⁵ It sees the government's educational role as confined to equitable funding and to ensuring schools provide a responsible level of education in a safe and secure setting.⁶

This paper, then, investigates and evaluates how long-term staff members perceive the effects of government funding on the operations and programs of SCS-BC schools since 1977.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA

British Columbia's 1977 Independent School Support Act recognized two groups of funded schools: (1) those with adequate facilities that do not promote racial or religious intolerance or social change through violent means (eligible for a subsidy equivalent to 9 percent of public school per-pupil operational costs); and (2) those that, in addition, hire certificated teachers, allow evaluation teams to assess their administration and programs, and participate in provincial student assessment programs (eligible for 30 percent funding). The funding levels were subsequently raised to 10 percent and a maximum of 50 percent, respectively, with the eligibility period for funding reduced from five years to one year of operation.

The Ministry of Education has since made its bureaucratic presence felt in British Columbia's independent schools. Schools funded at the higher level—including all SCS-BC ones—must show annually that they meet teaching time, course content, and teacher certification stipulations. Evaluation teams assess each school thoroughly, usually once every four years. Some Ministry officials assume, perhaps unthinkingly, that new general policies should apply to both public and independent schools. Thus a 1989 mission statement was to apply to

“everyone involved in education in our province” — despite objections from some independent schools.⁷ Moreover, as Barman has pointed out, private schools implicitly commit themselves to future government regulations, since ongoing dependence on funding, especially at the maximum 50-percent level, severely limits — if not blocks — continued operation without government grants.⁸

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

In the Netherlands, the government has fully funded non-public schools since the 1920s. Unlike in the United Kingdom and Australia, social class did not account for the establishment of Dutch private schools; religious values did. Schools offer required subjects a specified number of hours per year, hire qualified teachers (paid directly by the state), and administer uniform government exams.⁹

Although free to develop their own programs, most Dutch schools are uniform in structure, curriculum, and pedagogy. Exceptions are religious instruction, the interpretation of history and literature in church-related schools, and the methodology of Montessori and Waldorf schools. The schools’ homogeneity is mostly voluntary.¹⁰ Significantly, the publication of distinctive programs and textbooks for Dutch Christian schools reached a peak in the decade before full government funding.¹¹

The French government implemented modest support for private schools in 1951, assuming most of their operating costs eight years later. Private schools had to conform almost completely with public education programs. Their admissions policies had to be open and the conduct of classes was to be secular. As a consequence, few parents enrol children in Catholic schools for religious reasons. Private schools today offer academic, moral, or social security, rather than religious or educational distinctiveness. Their lack of determination to preserve religious singularity led French private schools quickly to become quasi-state schools, often functioning to segregate the social classes.¹²

Australia has provided comprehensive aid to private schools since 1964. This subsidy averages more than 50 percent of operating costs.¹³ The schools’ graduates do well at compulsory government school leaving examinations, with a disproportionate number obtaining placement in post-secondary institutions.¹⁴ The Labour Party government’s attempt to cut funding to wealthy private schools in the mid-1980s foundered in the face of a strong coalition of leading citizens and Catholic bishops.¹⁵ Private schools are not closely regulated. Yet state examinations, whose results yield upper-middle-class support for private schools, establish government control over curriculum.

In British Columbia, Donald Erickson headed a team between 1978 and 1984 investigating the consequences of funding independent schools.¹⁶ Erickson concluded that typical independent schools became more like their public counterparts in seeking provincial authorities’ approval. Hence, he claimed, schools became less responsive to parents and ceased to be close-knit com-

munities where commitment to special goals and to each other made education effective.¹⁷ Erickson's conclusions were based on a comparison of 1978 and 1980 survey results, unrepresentative in sampling and with a truncated time-span.

Moreover, Erickson's unpublished 1984 follow-up study showed his previous conclusions were untenable for Catholic and evangelical/Calvinist Christian schools. Government funding had resulted, for instance, in expanded programs and more parent involvement and enthusiasm. SCS-BC schools had undertaken substantial and unique curriculum initiatives, and Erickson expressed surprise that randomly-chosen parents could convincingly specify how the curriculum could and should embody a Christian life view—and all the while remain perceptive and critical of government influence.¹⁸

To draw general conclusions about the consequences of government funding for non-public schools is difficult. The political debate leading up to funding, the initial regulations accompanying funding, the proportion of the operating cost covered by funding, the determination of the supporting communities to maintain unique educational alternatives, the social milieu and educational context of the schools—all help to account for the consequences. In British Columbia, research has not yet convincingly unravelled these factors. In choosing to consider "Christian" schools, I have been guided both by comparative methodological considerations (the Dutch, Australian, and French examples), and by the current stage of development of research on private schooling in Canada. In this study, I had the possibility of "controlling" for two "variables": politics and religion. Later research on secular private schools will perhaps deal with other variables.

SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF SCS-BC SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

The Society of Christian Schools in B.C. comprised locally-controlled schools that grew from 2,494 students in 22 schools in 1977/78 to 7,479 students in 45 schools in 1990/91. In 1991, it embodied 20 percent of B.C.'s funded private school enrolment.²⁰ Although today its member schools include diverse Protestant church groups, SCS-BC was founded by Dutch Calvinist immigrants. Three-quarters of sixty-five long-term principals and teachers in this study had this background.

The Dutch Calvinists who came to Canada after World War II quickly established their own schools and sought government funding for them. Their beliefs that life is affected by one's faith, as well as their view that no one social institution should dominate any other, meant they distrusted government control of schooling. Many left Holland to escape what they considered the adverse effects of a life regulated by "socialist" decrees. In Canada, they were independent farmers and small-business persons. Many at first hoped to establish a Christian political party. By the 1980s their individualism led them to support the right-leaning Social Credit government that introduced independent school funding.

Today, observers note that SCS-BC parents are still involved in small local business enterprises (small construction firms, greenhouses, trucking), with family income levels apparently close to those of public school parents.²¹ Their conservative yet socially oriented sense of religious calling, and the individualism that, paradoxically, unites them, have meant that parents have stood solidly behind schools that would socialize their children into familiar traditions and patterns.

Having experienced government funding for religiously-based schools in Holland, Dutch Calvinists soon sought funding in Canada. They were outspoken and politically active in opposing government intervention in their schools, believing that parents and local boards should set and maintain educational policies. During the first decade of funding in British Columbia, SCS-BC leaders, principals, teachers, and parents regularly debated and queried the implications of government funding.

Can an independent school community such as this resist those contextual forces that cause private schools to resemble public ones? Does public funding inevitably accelerate the movement toward similarity? In the present case, will improving socioeconomic status of Dutch-Canadian Calvinists lead to demands for high but essentially public school standards? Will the influence of the media and of general social values on its second and third generations undermine group cohesiveness and thus their commitment to uphold private schooling as a distinct alternative? What is the effect of the increasing proportion of non-Calvinist Christian fundamentalists in the schools? Will epistemological paradigm shifts in theology, as well as in education, affect the thinking of leaders in the movement and, eventually, school programs?

METHOD OF INVESTIGATION

In studying changes in SCS-BC schools since 1977, I chose to gather the opinions of all currently active principals and teachers who have worked in SCS-BC schools both before and after the appearance of government funding. Where possible, I have supplemented my survey of opinion with other facts—social, economic, and administrative. Still, my chief source is the views and opinions of participants. Later research could and should extend the empirical base of research.

Of educators contacted, 77 percent had worked in SCS-BC schools continuously since 1977; 15 percent were employed after 1977 by schools completing the then-required five-year qualifying period for funding; and 8 percent worked for the schools in 1977 but today work in another educational setting. The principals and still-active ex-principals represent eighteen of the twenty-two SCS-BC schools in existence in 1977 and four of the newer ones. The teachers come from nineteen schools, four of which began operation after 1977. Seventeen of the nineteen current administrators, all fourteen previous

principals, and twenty-five of the thirty-two teachers returned a completed questionnaire (a return rate of 86 percent).

The questionnaire contained 87 specific questions in five categories (school administration, curriculum and instruction, student evaluation procedures, teachers and students, and parents and board). Almost all questions required two ratings on a scale from 1 to 5: degree of change (1, much less; 3, no change; 5, much more), and effect (1, very detrimental; 3, no effect; 5, very beneficial). The results were tabulated and arithmetical means calculated for all respondents as well as separately for the three subgroups (current administrators, previous administrators, and teachers). Whole-group means for individual questions varied from 2.6 to 4.4 for degree of change and from 2.3 to 4.5 for effect, suggesting the reliability of the questionnaire and/or the homogeneity of subjects.

Each section of the questionnaire asked for further comment. The final page asked two open-ended questions: "What, in your view, is the *one* outstanding benefit and the *one* major difficulty with government funding of Christian schools?" and "What is your overall evaluation of the effect of government funding under the Independent School Support Act?" Most respondents gave substantial comments throughout the questionnaire.

On the basis of the responses, a list of questions was prepared to obtain more reaction on issues where opinions differed markedly and on changes respondents did not ascribe solely to government funding. Using these questions, I conducted interviews with five administrators representative of diverse subcommunities in the SCS-BC (taking into account denominational background, size and location of school). Interview responses helped clarify and explain questionnaire input; quantitative results are based solely on questionnaire results.

TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND BOARDS

SCS-BC schools have used government funds variously. Tuition fees are much lower than they would be without government funding. Teacher salaries are higher, their qualifications improved, classes are smaller, and teachers attend more professional development activities. All of this has produced, according to questionnaire responses, an improved *esprit des corps*.

The boards of the schools, in most cases locally elected by parents' associations, take more care in setting enrolment and educational policies, and make decisions more professionally since funding. Two respondents mentioned that by having to spend less time on pressing financial concerns, they have become more aware of educational issues in a Christian framework. Board-staff relations have improved and become more relaxed, but only slightly so (3.3/3.3; the first number indicates a slight positive change; the second, a slight salutary effect). Boards review government directives for schools more closely, generally considered a positive consequence (4.0/3.7).

The combination of reduced financial jeopardy, and the care boards now take in making decisions and presenting proposals, have contributed to poor attendance at school association meetings. Yet parental perceptiveness of program quality is deemed to have increased. Although parental involvement and influence is considered unchanged, it has shifted from fund raising to work with students. This follows, according to some respondents, from a general social phenomenon rather than any effect of funding: parents are more knowledgeable and want to be directly involved in their children's education.

THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL

Principals, the respondents agreed, spend more time on administrative routines and paperwork than prior to government funding. At the same time, they think quantity and quality of teacher supervision and curricular and instructional leadership to have improved during the past fourteen years. Principals, for instance, today often work closely with new teachers to help them plan and implement programs compatible with school aims.

Respondents are divided about the overall effects of an "administrative" emphasis. Many principals feel "snowed under" with reading and paperwork pertaining to Ministry matters, with less time to attend to teacher and student needs. Just coping with the growth brought about by the legitimization of the schools, one principal claimed, leaves little time for educational leadership. One-sixth of teachers volunteered that their principals have become more isolated and bureaucratic, overemphasizing the implementation of government requirements.

Almost as many respondents, however, disagreed, pointing out that the amount of paperwork, changed little since 1977, has been made easier by computerization. They observed that principals generally use their increased administrative time for educational purposes. Teachers supported this contention; they indicated, for instance, that the effect of administrative routines and paperwork has benefited the schools educationally (3.9). Similarly, topics discussed among principals have shifted from fund raising and discipline policies to educational initiatives promoting Christian "uniqueness." Further, more teachers have been given educational leadership tasks through appointment as program coordinators, positions made possible by government funding.

The enhanced role of principals, most respondents believed, also stems from "growing professionalism" and the influence of SCS-BC education coordinators. Principals today, as opposed to 1977, are knowledgeable of government education policies, and spend more time thinking about the goals and direction of their schools. Whether this affects classroom teaching and learning, however, varies considerably with principal leadership styles and priorities.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Respondents believed three facets of teaching and learning to have changed considerably: attention given to new public school curriculum proposals (4.4), availability of resources and equipment (4.2), and overall quality of classroom instruction (3.9). These changes were deemed beneficial (3.7, 4.2 and 4.0 respectively). However, teachers appreciated the emphasis on public school program initiatives more than did principals (4.1 vs. 3.2). Teachers were neutral about adoption of public school time allotments (3.2) whereas principals believed this detrimental (2.5).

The quality of educational programs, respondents generally agreed, had improved (3.8), with teachers giving more and (they believed) beneficial attention to cooperative and long-term planning (change/effect, 3.6/3.7). Areas where respondents thought schools had experienced limited beneficial change included use of external curriculum guides and resources (3.4/3.4, both for public and for Christian ones), inclusion of the Christian perspective in everyday instruction (3.2/3.3), and time spent on curriculum evaluation (3.5/3.6). The use of textbooks written specifically for Christian schools remained almost the same after funding (3.1/3.3), although use of supplemental resources for Christian schools increased somewhat (3.5/3.6). Both the spread of numerical responses and the interviewee's comments indicated schools varied widely in these matters.

Respondents agreed that the quantity and quality of such special programs as learning assistance and the fine arts had increased. However, they were divided about the effect of funding on *uniqueness* of school programs. Six claimed government funding had caused greater emphasis on teaching "from a Christian perspective." Justifying programs for the government, added several, "has led to a clarification and renewed application of Christian goals and objectives." Yet nine others believed schools "are regularly nudged to move into the Ministry of Education fold." Still others claimed funding has had little impact on the Christian distinctiveness of schools' programs compared with the impact of work by provincial SCS-BC coordinators. Again, perceptions as well as realities differed a great deal from school to school.

THE INFLUENCE OF GOVERNMENT DIRECTIVES AND EVALUATION TEAMS

Nine respondents commented that government-imposed school evaluation had encouraged their staffs to examine long-range plans, develop written goal-statements accentuating their Christian beliefs, and revamp their programs. Another eight said it had led to clarification of the school's vision and contributed to the incorporation of a "Christian perspective in education."

Yet fourteen respondents indicated their local boards reacted quickly and unthinkingly to evaluation teams' criticisms, leading one principal to point out

a need to “energetically get the board and education committee to look less at Ministry requirements and more at what the Biblical focus of our school curriculum and program should be.” Further, said another, although most government directives are not necessarily intended for independent schools, boards often receive them as directives “from above.”

Although most evaluation-team members are independent school teachers, retired public school inspectors have chaired most evaluation teams. As a result, some SCS-BC principals stated, the measure of independent school quality at times becomes the public school status quo, implicitly expecting their schools to conform. The Ministry’s Independent School Branch has sometimes applied such pressure explicitly: it tried to persuade some schools to implement aspects of the *Year 2000* program when they preferred more “traditional” approaches. The SCS-BC showed its concern in 1987 by publishing a policy paper that took issue with

the recommendation of some evaluation team chairmen that the goals of a school should be stated as measurable behavioural objectives; this brings with it a philosophical framework whose acceptance or rejection is the prerogative of the school.²²

The principals are gate-keepers for external recommendations, whether these come directly from the Ministry or from an evaluation report. One respondent stated that “some principals are aware and astute, and show some evidence of critical analysis. Many, however, buy into the philosophy of a document such as *Year 2000* without standing back. They give little attention to basic issues.” Some respondents believe principals as well as SCS-BC leaders have adopted the government’s educational agenda. One of these pointed to an “excessive emphasis” on the process of learning rather than on “culturally-meaningful generative knowledge”; another added that principals without strong theological and philosophical beliefs succumb to the implicit pressure to conform to the public sector. On the other hand, all interviewees said principals with a strong curricular or pedagogical direction *and* whose competence is trusted by the Ministry are able to maintain their educational autonomy.

STUDENT EVALUATION

Until 1990, funding had little effect on student assessment in most schools. Some revised programs on the basis of results of the mandatory Provincial Learning Assessment Program (for example, placing more emphasis on grades 4–7 geometry). The government’s recent new *Year 2000* program has made an impact, however, with some schools revising their assessment procedures and report cards. One school produced a 20-page primary report card consisting of criterion-referenced learning descriptors (one-third from *Year 2000*, one-third revisions of ones in *Year 2000*, and one-third consistent with the school’s unique character).

It is unlikely these changes would have been made without the schools' close contact with the Ministry due to funding.

Principals and teachers felt unanimously negative about the re-introduction of grade 12 school leaving examinations in 1984. Although they agreed that students' achievement in grade 12 courses has improved (3.8/3.9), the Christian emphasis in these courses has suffered (effect, 2.4). There is now more emphasis on formal teacher presentation (effect, 2.6) and factual memorization (effect, 2.3), and less on critical thinking (effect, 2.5). Although SCS-BC schools waged a vigorous (though unsuccessful) political campaign to set their own exams, even without funding the schools probably would have decided to participate in those examinations because they were required for students seeking university entrance.

THE RESPONDENTS' OVERALL IMPRESSIONS

Asked to name one outstanding benefit that had resulted from government funding, 51 percent of respondents mentioned improved educational programs; 29 percent, financial stability and affordability; and 20 percent, staff satisfaction stemming from salary increases. Only one person said funding caused schools to emphasize their programs' uniqueness.

Fewer than three quarters of respondents identified an outstanding drawback, and specific responses were more varied. One-third, the largest group, commented that schools had become less independent and distinctive, with their agenda now set by the public sector. Nine percent thought schools faced a major loss of personal commitment of both parents and staff, and another 9 percent decried "administrative hassles" as their major concern.

When asked to give their overall evaluation of the effects of government funding, almost half said funding had been very beneficial. Twelve percent of respondents said they feared that Christian school independence would gradually erode, but an almost equal percentage claimed funding had forced their schools to clarify their vision. The majority agreed that 50-percent funding is a desirable plateau, with parents maintaining interest in and support for the schools, since they still pay substantial tuition fees, and the government not yet claiming total ownership.

A number of respondents remarked that lack of funding does not produce an absence of government control: non-funded private schools in Iowa and accredited private secondary schools in Ontario, they said, must meet more stringent stipulations and evaluations than funded schools in British Columbia. Nonetheless, in British Columbia, as elsewhere in the world, the government has insisted that certain regulations accompany funding of independent schools, if only to convince itself and the public that such funds are spent responsibly. Regulations may exist without funding, but funding will not occur without regulations. Funded schools that value independence will always experience some tension as they resist bureaucratization and deprivatization.

CAUSES OF CHANGE IN SCS-BC SCHOOLS

Government funding has improved certain aspects of SCS-BC schools. Teacher salaries have increased. Schools meet the needs of more students through special programs. Teachers are more involved in professional development and curriculum planning. Resources, equipment, and facilities are more readily available.

Changes that more directly affect the heart of the schools' mission present a decidedly mixed picture, however. Some schools clarify their vision and plan Christian learning approaches more zealously than before funding; others accept government directives with little consideration of their implications. Some boards spend more time considering educational issues that affect the school's direction; others jump hastily to implement government evaluation-team recommendations. Some principals have intensified their direction-giving leadership; others have become more bureaucratic as they comply with government policies. Some schools increasingly use teacher resource units developed specifically for Christian schools; others accept and use government textbooks and guides without critical analysis. Such data emphasize that the search for causal connections is complex and that change is not due solely to government funding but is also affected by social, political, and intellectual factors.

To garner continued support, Christian schools are compelled to be sensitive to parental attitudes. As Christian school supporters are assimilated into Canadian society, their attitudes toward schooling became less isolationist.²³ One questionnaire respondent said that his defensive, separatist stance of the 1970s reflected his immigrant mentality, and noted that today

the real objectives of parents in Christian schools . . . coincide rather closely with those of parents generally, i.e., a reasonable continuity with the home, academic/ intellectual challenge, a controlled environment, pleasant teachers, and better marks than the kid in the next desk.

Parents today may place more emphasis on a caring atmosphere or academic excellence and less on a unique educational program. Several responders added that the long-established non-funded Calvinist schools in Michigan are more like public schools than SCS-BC schools, leading them to conclude that cultural context affects schools more than does government.

Similarly, the trend toward professionalism some respondents identified cannot be attributed solely to funding. Not only have Canadian parents and teachers generally become better educated, but children of immigrants usually outdo their parents' educational attainments. The improved educational and professional background of supporters—as well as institutions' tendency toward increasing professionalization and accountability—contribute to boards becoming more astute in dealing with administrative and educational issues. Boards became more

demanding of principals and appointed provincial consultants. Government funding has, at most, accelerated this trend.

In British Columbia, funding for independent schools was introduced in a consultative and flexible manner. Through the Federation of Independent Schools, SCS-BC leaders had regular input into the interpretation of funding regulations. The Inspectors of Independent Schools allowed substantial curricular freedom; one respondent noted that his “fears of intrusive demands on the curriculum and the operation of the schools” were not realized. A confrontation with the Minister of Education, in 1984, about the imposition of grade 12 government examinations proved, nonetheless, the reality of the government’s ultimate control of funded schools. By then, economic dependence on funding and parents’ desire to enable students to go directly to university meant that, despite strong protests, all students wrote the exams.²⁴

Finally, the rapid growth sparked partly by funding has led to at least two changes in the schools’ intellectual and religious identity. First, the teaching force has become more heterogeneous, in both religious and educational background. The number of new teachers educated at Calvinist colleges dropped from almost 40 percent to less than 10 percent between 1977 and 1991. This may mean, for instance, that new teachers are more open to recent intellectual forces affecting education (for example, that humans *construct* knowledge). Second, an influx of fundamentalist parents has led to more conflicts about book choice and lifestyle standards. The effects of this changing composition require further investigation.

CONCLUSION

SCS-BC schools have changed as a result of shifts in their own communities and social context, as well as due to government funding. The schools differ substantially from each other, however, in how much they diverge from the taken-for-granted norms of the public sector.²⁵ Seventeen respondents claimed that funding resulted in more attention being paid to mission-driven planning and the implementation of a distinct Christian approach. Almost as many (fourteen), however, believed that government regulations and evaluation-team recommendations had eroded their school’s distinctiveness.

The continued uniqueness of funded independent schools depends on three necessary (but not sufficient) conditions. First, it requires effective, proactive, principled, and convincing leadership at both the local and provincial levels, leadership based on clear goals. Second, the school community must form a cohesive *Gemeinschaft*, with a strong sense of shared commitment, that insists on its school reflecting its identity. Third, the government must be willing to view independent schools as responsible educational *alternatives*. Under these conditions, for instance, in one homogeneous, conservative community a highly respected principal changed the school’s program considerably during the years

of government funding, making it much more distinctly Calvinist in its orientation.

What characterized interviewees whose schools had maintained distinctive features was their readiness, determination, and willpower to maintain constant vigilance with respect to government regulations. Although some respondents believed the control exercised by a well-focused value community can outweigh the political and bureaucratic control accompanying funding, most feared that future government policies and decreasing sensitivity to their potential risks might ultimately destroy the schools as singular institutions. When questioned, they perceived, for instance, that an open enrolment policy or the inability to hire teachers who “fit” the schools’ religious purpose would undermine the school as a *Gemeinschaft* and hence, in the long run, as a viable and effective alternative.

Can funded independent schools resist the powerful social, political, and intellectual forces that press them to abandon their distinctiveness? My evidence suggests many SCS-BC schools have thus far not lost their distinctiveness, and in some instances have augmented it since funding came into effect, albeit only within an overall framework for schooling expected by society-at-large. Unless independent schools have passion for their mission and wariness about government control, however, funding may well accelerate erosion of the schools’ distinctiveness.

NOTES

- ¹ In British Columbia, the term “independent” describes all non-public schools, including, for example, Catholic and Protestant Christian, Montessori, Waldorf, and “elite” British-type schools. This paper uses the terms “private” and “independent” interchangeably. Ontario’s private school enrolment declined between 1985 and 1991, but only because private Catholic senior secondary schools became public separate ones.
- ² See, for instance, William Lowe Boyd and James G. Cibulka, eds., *Private Schools and Public Policy* (New York: Falmer, 1989); William Lowe Boyd and Herbert J. Walberg, eds., *Choice in Education: Potential and Problems* (Berkeley, CA: McCutchan, 1990); John Chubb and Terry Moe, *Politics, Markets, and America’s Schools* (Washington: The Brookings Institute, 1990); Geoffrey Walford, *Private Schools in Ten Countries: Policy and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989); and the December 1990/January 1991, vol. 48, no. 4 issue of *Educational Leadership*.
- ³ Information supplied by Statistics Canada and the Federation of Independent School Associations in B.C. See also John Bergen, “The Emergence and Expansion of Private Schools in Canada,” in Y. L. Jack Lam, ed., *The Canadian Public Education System: Issues and Prospects* (Calgary: Detselig, 1990), p. 13.
- ⁴ For funding arrangements in various provinces, see, Stephen T. Eaton, *Education in Canada* (Vancouver: The Fraser Institute, 1988), pp. 81ff. The court action is described in the Ontario Alliance of Christian Schools *High School Digest* (April 1991): 1. An August 1992 Ontario Court of Justice decision that the Ontario government’s funding policy, although contrary to the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, is within its “reasonable limits” escape clause is being appealed (*Christian Week*, vol. 6, no. 9 [25 August 1992]: 1).

- ⁵ See L.W. Downey, "The Aid-to-Independent Schools Movement in British Columbia," in Nancy Sheehan, J. Donald Wilson and David Jones, eds., *Schools in the West: Essays in Canadian Educational History* (Calgary: Detselig, 1986), pp. 305–23; and Jean Barman, "Deprivatizing Private Education: The British Columbia Experience," *Canadian Journal of Education* 16:1 (Winter 1991), pp. 12–31.
- ⁶ See, for instance, H. Van Andel et al., "Report on Government-School Relationships" (Society of Christian Schools in B.C., 1976), and Board of Trustees of the SCS-BC, "Ministry of Education Regulations Affecting SCS-BC Schools" (Langley, BC: The Society of Christian Schools in B.C., 1987), p. 4.
- ⁷ British Columbia Ministry of Education, *The Primary Program* (Victoria: Queen's Printer, 1989).
- ⁸ Barman, p. 24.
- ⁹ Karen Seashore Louis and Boudewijn A. M. van Velzen, "A Look at Choice in the Netherlands," *Educational Leadership*, vol. 48, no. 4 (December 1990/January 1991): 67; and Estelle James, "The Netherlands: Benefits and Costs of Privatized Public Services—Lessons From the Dutch Educational System," in Walford, pp. 179–99.
- ¹⁰ Louis and van Velzen, p. 68. See also Charles L. Glenn, "Parent Choice in Four Nations," in Boyd and Walberg, pp. 69–76.
- ¹¹ A never-repeated example is the extensive curriculum developed by W. G. van de Hulst et al. in *Verdieping and Belijning* [Deepening and Structuring] (Groningen: Noordhof, 1921), 2 vols.
- ¹² Richard Teese, "France: Catholic Schools, Class Security, and the Public Sector," in Geoffrey Walford, *Private Schools in Ten Countries: Policy and Practice* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 133–50; and Frances C. Fowler, "The French Experience with Public Aid to Private Schools," in *Phi Delta Kappan*, vol. 68, no. 5 (January 1987): 356–59.
- ¹³ Don Smart and Janice Dudley, "Australia: Private Schools and Public Policy," in Walford, p. 222.
- ¹⁴ Denis P. Doyle, "Family Choice in Education: The Case of Denmark, Holland, and Australia," (Washington, DC: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1984), p. 17; Smart and Dudley, p. 122.
- ¹⁵ See Doyle and chapters 7 and 8 in William Lowe Boyd and James G. Cibulka, eds., *Private Schools and Public Policy: International Perspectives* (Philadelphia: Falmer, 1989).
- ¹⁶ Donald Erickson et al., "Characteristics and Relationships in Public and Independent Schools" (San Francisco: Center for Research on Private Education, 1979), and "Victoria's Secret: The Effects of British Columbia's Aid to Independent Schools," Parts 1, 2 and 3 (Los Angeles: Institute for the Study of Private Schools, 1984, unpublished monographs).
- ¹⁷ Donald A. Erickson, "Disturbing Evidence about the 'One Best System,'" in Robert B. Everhart, *The Public School Monopoly: A Critical Analysis of Education and the State in American Society* (Cambridge: Ballinger, 1982), pp. 415–17.
- ¹⁸ Erickson, "Victoria's Secret," p. 15:55. See also pp. 12:19ff, 13:25, 13:26, 13:28, and 14:35ff.
- ¹⁹ Barman, "Deprivatizing Private Education: The British Columbia Experience."
- ²⁰ Based on information supplied by the Society of Christian Schools in B.C. and the B.C. Ministry of Education.
- ²¹ Harro Van Brummelen, *Curriculum: Implementation in Three Christian Schools* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1989), p. 28; Frances Bula, "Where Christ Is at the Top of the Class," *Vancouver Sun*, April 2, 1991; and Stephen Easton quoting Erickson in *Education in Canada* (Vancouver: Fraser Institute, 1988), p. 88.

- ²² Board of Trustees of the SCS-BC, "Ministry of Education Regulations Affecting SCS-BC Schools" (Langley, BC: The Society of Christian Schools, 1987), p. 2.
- ²³ See, for instance, H. Ganzevoort and M. Boekelman, *Dutch Immigration to North America* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society, 1983), and Harro Van Brummelen, *Telling the Next Generation: Educational Development in North American Calvinist Christian Schools* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986).
- ²⁴ Van Brummelen, *Telling the Next Generation*, p. 286.
- ²⁵ For a detailed description of three different SCS-BC schools, see Harro Van Brummelen, *Curriculum: Implementation in Three Christian Schools* (Grand Rapids: Calvin College, 1989).
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