

Do we have to?



Whenever I hear, "Do we have to?" burst from the lips of my children, it sets my teeth on edge. Even reading it, I can hear the whine, the upward pitch on 'we', and the drawn out pronouncing of 'have'. I can picture the body language, complete with slumped shoulders and large lower lip. All these things display how my dear children would rather endure multiple root canals on their upper incisors than make a team effort to complete a spring clean-up chore.

Of course, because we are adults, we tend to keep the whine out of our "Do we have to?" questions. We ask it in a more real way than our children do, because budgets are tight and expenses are high. The question of necessity comes into conversations a lot.

When you have children in a Reformed Christian day school (or two), paying for your child's **education is likely one of the largest expenses on your household budget.** It is possible that you have asked whether or not sending your child to a Reformed Christian day school is something that you *have* to do. Are parents who send their children to a League school fulfilling a want, or a need?

To say that setting up day schools for our children is a scriptural imperative is to read more into the Lord's commands about how to teach our children (Deut. 6; Prov. 22; Matt. 19) than is actually there. The Lord commands parents to instruct their children in the fear of his name, but day schools are never mentioned. Nor are they mentioned in the vows parents take (and the congregation witnesses) at baptism (BoP, p. 598). In their vows, parents promise to have their children instructed in the doctrine of God's word to the best of their ability – they do not promise to send them to the local Reformed Christian day school.

Since the school, as the organization that we know, is neither demanded in scripture nor specifically promised at baptism it is very difficult to argue that parents, and other

church members, *have* to support the school (either by sending children, or sending money). This, I think, is a reason for thankfulness.

Why thankfulness? Because it moves our schools from the realm of something we *have* to do, to something that we *want* to do. This changes the type of energy that we are willing to invest into doing it well.

We want to do the things we love. If we love to hunt, it is all we want to do and we make time to practice, plan and participate in hunting. If we love a certain TV show, we follow every episode-scheduling our lives around when it broadcasts, and if something else gets in the way of that schedule the show is sure to be recorded. **Everyone has something into which they pour their energy, not because they have to, but because they want to. This is what our schools should be.**

Our attitude toward these activities changes if they become necessities. If hunting becomes a necessity, then an unsuccessful hunt means going hungry. If sitting through a program at a specific time on a specific day is demanded of us, we are more likely to see the hour as restrictive. And, if a Reformed Christian school is forced upon us ... we try to maintain it with the fewest resources possible.

Does this mean that in order to keep love for League schools high we need to treat them as optional? Perhaps, but then only in the sense that the Three Forms of Unity are optional for churches in the Reformed tradition. Their value as a tool for understanding how the Lord works in this world makes them something we want to keep.

The Reformed Christian day school is a place where the whole communion of saints is able to work together to educate the children God has given us. Together we ensure that covenant children are taught in an environment where God's word infuses the entire curriculum. Day schools allow us to use the individual gifts, given to us by God, for the benefit of the entire community. **There is no model of educating our children that does this better.**

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Government update



On April 4, Education Minister Liz Sandals announced that the province of Ontario has developed a new strategy for improving student scores in math (which have been declining). The basics of the strategy- more time, more teachers and more money.

The plan calls for all elementary schools to schedule a minimum of 60 minutes of math time every day. This time is what the Ministry of Education calls protected learning time. In other words, it needs time allotted for the subject of math. Any other math related items taught in science, geography, or another subject will not count toward that time. This is an interesting directive; the only other subject where the Ministry speaks about 'protected time' is in Physical Education, where teachers are expected to provide opportunity for 20 mins of physical activity every day. The Ministry also encourages teachers to spend 100 minutes a day on literacy, but this can be, and is, woven into different subject areas.

The Ministry of Education has also called for every elementary school to have at least one, and up to three, math 'lead teachers'. What that means is every school will have staff members who have taken courses specializing in the teaching of mathematics to children. These teachers become experts not only in the subject of math, but also how math should/could be taught at various age levels. In addition to this, the Ministry is supporting the implementation of a dedicated math Professional Development Day, where educators can deepen their knowledge about teaching and learning in math.

There will also be spending to back up this plan. A total of 60 million dollars will be added to the budget line for education earmarked for developing better practice for math instruction. The money will be spent not only in training teachers (and select secondary

school principals) in the area of teaching math, but also in setting up support systems which parents, teachers and students can access if they need help with their understanding of certain concepts.

By now, people may be wondering what all this information has to do with League schools. To start, **we should be clear that exactly 0% of the 60 million taxpayer's dollars slated to be spent on math will be directly available to help our teachers** upgrade their skills. However, when announcements like these hit the press, companies that provide professional development for teachers invest in new modules which reflect the areas where money will be spent. Our teachers are able to participate in these, which means that there may be interesting opportunities where they can upgrade math teaching skills inside the next year.

This announcement is also an opportunity to reflect on our own practices. Independent schools do not need to follow the ministry guidelines about how much time we should be spending on various subjects. That being said, knowing the numbers our principals and Education Committees have an excellent opportunity to reflect on our own practices and ask ourselves questions. Questions such as: How much time do we currently spend on Math? Have our class averages in math been increasing, decreasing or remaining flat over the past few years? Will more math time help? If there is more math time allotted, will it be more of the same, or will it look different? What do we think about the concept of having a lead math teacher at the school- one who is specifically trained in the area of how to teach math effectively and tasked to help other staff members be more effective? **Even though there is no tangible benefit for our schools from this decision, it is a good opportunity to reflect on our own practices.**

League of Canadian Reformed Schools Committees:

Assistance for the Special Child (ASC)

Compensation Committee

Curriculum Assistance for Reformed Educators (CARE)

Government Contact Committee (GCC)

Pension Committee

Professional Development Committee (PDC)

The Government Contact Committee

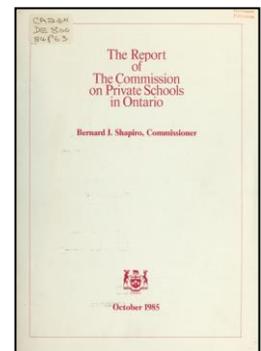
The **Government Contact Committee (GCC)** is tasked to monitor and respond to the activities of government bodies in general, and the Ontario Ministry of Education in particular. It also has in its mandate to carry out public relations activities and promote the cause of covenantal education with the authorities who have jurisdiction over the operation of our schools. This would include the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Health, Community Care Access Centres, Canada Revenue etc.

The GCC has a long history with the League, first appearing in the minutes (as the Public Relations Committee) in 1975. Members of this committee have been involved in promoting our schools with local members of parliament. They have worked to represent League interests in government reports, like the Shapiro Report of 1985.

More recently, the members of the GCC have been actively representing the League's interests with other school associations. Members of the committee sit on the board of the Independent Schools Association of Ontario (ISAO). The ISAO is a loose organization where different independent school associations meet to share best practices

and information about what is happening in the independent school sector.

The GCC is has been actively recruiting new members over the last few months. There is a lot of work that needs to be done to monitor and report on areas where government regulations intertwine with the operation of faith based, not-for-profit, Christian schools. Qualified and interested people are needed who are both willing and able to monitor areas of importance. Thankfully the Lord has provided individuals who are actively willing to work together to promote positive relations between our schools and those He placed in authority over us.



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