

## Keynote Speaker


# Steve Paikin

During Campaign 2007, Steve Paikin was talking to a Catholic school trustee, who told the story of another faith-based leader wanting his support for full-funding. The Catholic trustee turned away from him and changed the topic. Steve Paikin said this was wrong. “Where was the Catholic leadership?” We have to be ready to defend our system against those who will propose one school system. The Green Party advocated one system and they have support, even amongst Catholics. Steve Paikin said he is not advocating one system; he is just a reporter passing on information. In fact, he told the audience that his daughter attends St. Monica Catholic School in Toronto. He had nothing but praise for the principal and the staff. He said it is a known fact that Catholic schools have better outcomes than public schools. Uniforms suggest that discipline is stricter and that Catholic schools are a better place to learn.

He did note that the cause of publicly-funded Catholic education has not been advanced by its Catholic partners. Steve Paikin stated that the current system is not intellectually defensible. He asked the question, “Could McGuinty be the one to unify public education?” During the election campaign one reporter said, “John Tory is doing the wrong thing for the right reason. McGuinty is doing the right thing for the wrong reason.”

According to Steve Paikin, former Conservative Minister of Education, Janet Ecker stated that the Conservative Party believes in choice. They were not on the best terms with teachers’ unions and it would be dangerous to have one system, as it would be much easier to shut down the education system. The NDP is ready to re-open the question of full-funding to Catholic schools. The reality is that many of the new immigrants coming to Ontario do not have a stake in Catholic education.

Paikin stated that what happened in Quebec and Newfoundland could easily happen in Ontario. Today, there is as toxic a mix of politics, religion and education as there was in 1985. He asked, “Do we want to continue to offer a choice?” Catholic education dodged the bullet during the last election, but the Catholic community needs to buckle-up and get ready to defend Catholic education. In answer to a question from the audience, Steve Paikin advised us to be accessible. We need to accept invitations to appear on *The Agenda*. We need to speak to reporters and to be able to talk about Catholic education. We need to sell ourselves. He was emphatic that “Public opinion is formed by those who bother to show up.” His presentation was thought-provoking and challenged us to articulate who we are as a Catholic school community; to show up for the conversation.

A black and white photograph of Steve Paikin, a man with dark hair, wearing a light-colored button-down shirt. He is standing behind a dark podium with a microphone, looking slightly to his right. The background is a plain wall with some faint text visible on the left side.

Steve Paikin, host of TVO’s *The Agenda* addressed conference participants on Friday morning giving the media’s viewpoint on the future of Catholic education. He commented that some of us would not like what he had to say, but he is a reporter. He is just relating the facts as he sees them.

Catholic education has fascinated Steve Paikin since June 12, 1984 when Bill Davis proclaimed the extension of full-funding to Catholic schools. When Davis took office, he swore that he would not extend funding. This gnawed at him for 13 years, until the day he made the announcement to grant full-funding to Catholic schools. However, it was Liberal leader David Peterson in 1986 who actually implemented full-funding.

Paikin commented that Catholic education had been *moseying* along for 20 years until the summer of 2007, when John Tory announced in his election platform that the Conservative Party would extend public-funding for education to all religious groups. This caused much controversy and cost John Tory the election, but the pot was stirred. Steve Paikin does not think that any political party will re-open the issue of extending funding to other religious groups in the near future. The focus however, will shift to the viability of funding two systems. Catholic education is being questioned and scrutinized. Rather than extend funding to other religious groups, some may advocate denying funding to Catholic education and supporting one publicly-funded school system.