



# Minister Wynne Confirms Commitment to Catholic Education

By **Marisa Celenza**, Editor

Kathleen Wynne, the minister of education addressed the CPCO conference participants on Friday, April 20. She began by praising President Don Rait for his “perpetually optimistic spirit” and CPCO for travelling as a companion on her journey, both collectively and individually.

Kathleen Wynne knows and acknowledged the critical importance of principals’ and vice-principals’ roles in schools. It is very evident to her that we set the tone of a school, by the way in which we interface with our communities. Although, this can be very trying at times, it is critical.

She stated that Catholic education is on the leading edge of student achievement. The liberal government through Kathleen Wynne expressed an unqualified support for Catholic education in this province. Although there is much discussion among those that would like to change this reality, she stated emphatically, “We are not going there!”

Publicly funded education is a work in progress with issues such as demographic shifts, declining enrolments in some areas and pockets of growth in others. These are realities that need to be dealt with, not only in education, but in the larger social services area.

The issues of “bricks and mortar”, small secondary schools and how to better share resources are ones that need to be discussed and addressed, even though they are threatening areas to some.

Kathleen Wynne stated that this government has honoured commitments made in the area of education. Primary class sizes are lower, student scores are up, the grants are out early, 3.5 billion dollars have been added to the education budget, graduation rates are up and most importantly, there is stability in education.

Education has the second highest provincial budget. Although, enrolment is down, there are areas that have not been addressed in the budget. Specifically, these are adult education and special education, especially in the area of those with fragile medical needs. The liberal government is trying to find innovative ways to do the things that need to be done. Kathleen Wynne stated that many of their initiatives and ideas come directly from the field.

The ministry looks forward to continuing to work with and support CPCO in their mentorship program and in their partnership in the Institute for Educational Leadership. Other issues that are currently being discussed are workload issues of support staff, possible legislation to relieve administrative burdens, supervision, and the provincial stability commission review.

Kathleen Wynne discussed the changes to the Safe Schools Act due to issues with some of the previous government’s provisions. Consultation sessions were held around the province. There was a perception that there could be human rights issues and that the safe school legislation was discriminatory. They did find evidence that the legislation was being applied differently around the province. The ministry’s goal is to have a more progressive model of discipline in place; to consider what has been done before and after suspension. Thirty-one million dollars have been allocated to put programs in place to address student behaviour. Minister Wynne stated:

*If we do not deal with them in the education system, we will deal with them in the justice system. It is short-sighted to not deal with them now.*

She concluded with a heart-felt “Thank you for everything” then proceeded to answer questions from the audience.



From left: Lou Rocha, Joan Duckitt, Don Rait, Kathleen Wynne, Dan Tighe, Paul Carr