



It's time for a U-turn

Leg up for families or voucher tryout?

In April 2020, the Ford government announced it would provide a one-time payment to Ontario parents, the Support for Families program, of \$200 per child up to 12 years of age, and \$250 for those up to 21 years of age with special needs.

At first blush, that program appeared to be an innocuously generous means of softening the financial burden on families of the COVID-19 pandemic. But, what if this payout, projected to cost \$350 million, represented a trial run of parental choice vouchers? If so, it would constitute a potentially slippery slope toward an erosion of a fully publicly funded education system in Ontario.

Alberta is the only Canadian province with established charter schools, and this is not a road down which Ontario should travel. Charter schools and their ilk funnel tax dollars, intended for publicly funded education of all children, to support independent and private education institutions which are not inclusive. Similarly, so-called parental choice initiatives, like vouchers, can starve the system of sustained levels of needed funding and thereby create a crisis of confidence in the efficacy and value of public education.

It is a harmful myth that school vouchers and the like improve students' academic performance or outcomes. The use of school vouchers undermines publicly funded schools which represent important hubs in our communities. Supporting families during a pandemic is important and so is ensuring that, going forward, we continue to reap the benefits of having a viable, healthy and publicly funded education system in Ontario.