



August 19, 2011

Ontario Liberal Party Response to Saving Public Access to Community Space Everywhere (SPACE Coalition)

- 1. There are several barriers to school accessibility. Examples include:**
- fee increases planned by school boards that find current levels of community use of schools (CUS) funding inadequate;
 - red tape and rules;
 - school boards that do not have "Priority Schools" (no charge for community use);
 - over-subscribed Priority Schools; and
 - fewer dates when schools are available.

All of these barriers reduce equitable and affordable access to schools. What, specifically, would you do to maintain and enhance affordability, equity, and accessibility?

Ontario Liberals believe schools are the hubs of our communities — they are places where students, parents and the greater community can learn and play together. That is why we became the first province in Canada to provide funding to school boards to help open schools for community use in the evenings, over weekends and in the summer.

This year we will invest more than \$42 million in our Community Use of Schools program, which supports healthy, active lifestyles and student achievement by enabling not-for-profit groups to offer affordable activities to their communities. This includes \$7.5 million to support the Priority Schools initiative, which helps 220 schools in 32 boards provide free access to school space outside of regular school hours in communities that need it most. Our government also invests \$6.4 million annually for all school boards to employ Community Outreach Coordinators, who are helping schools to become true community hubs.

...2/

Ontario Liberal Party, 10 St. Mary St., Suite 210, Toronto, ON M4Y 1P9

Phone: (416) 961-3800, 1-800-268-7250 Fax: (416) 323-9425 E-Mail: info@ontarioliberal.com
Web: www.ontarioliberal.com

Across Ontario, there are countless examples of the positive impact the Community Use of Schools program is having on students. One example involves the Youth Association for Academics, Athletics, and Character Education (YAAACE)'s Boys to Men Summer Institute at C.W. Jefferey's Collegiate Institute in Toronto:

Devon Thompson devotes his summers to supporting youth through the YAAACE's Boys to Men Summer Institute. Devon is a coach, mentor, volunteer and will soon be a teacher as well. He is absolutely committed to partnering with parents and mentors to empower young people by guiding them to become caring citizens in their communities and helping them develop self-confidence, self-discipline, and ambition for the future. Devon's work has enabled youth in his community to go on and complete college and university degrees, some even through athletic scholarships. Right now, Devon works with 325 young men through the Boys to Men Summer Institute.

Prior to 2003, PC cuts to education forced many school boards to price their grounds and facilities out of reach for many community groups. Now, the \$14-billion PC platform hole will mean deep cuts to schools, hospitals and community programs. Support for Community Use of Schools could be eliminated to help fill that hole. Ontario Liberals look forward to building on our progress to date by further expanding the availability of schools for community use. Working together to help youth reach their full potential is the Ontario Way.

2. Many school boards are facing the possibility of closing schools due to declining enrolment. This means both fewer schools available for permitting and increased use of remaining space. How would you improve the community consultation process regarding closing schools and how would you retain the benefits of community use of school space?

Ontario Liberals believe in community schools. We have been working hard since 2003 to give small, local schools more support to help keep them open and viable. Our commitment has not wavered, even as enrolment has dropped by more than 120,000 students in the past eight years.

Under the PCs, more than 500 public schools closed. Parents and communities lost confidence in public education, and enrolment in private schools boomed. Ontario Liberals have built 400 new community schools, and 150 more are planned or underway. Today, our publicly funded education system is one of the top 10 school systems in the world. In part, that is because we believe in the vital role public education plays in our communities.

We made it the law to consider a public school's value to a community before any decision is made about its future. Those decisions are now made by locally elected trustees only after extensive open consultations with parents, educators, municipalities and community groups. Everyone has a stake in a local public school, and we believe everyone has the right to share their opinions and advice. We changed the way schools are funded to offer new support, new dedicated staff and other investments in single-school communities so that schools can remain open and viable. We have more to do, and will continue to find new ways to bring communities together to support local, community schools.

3. SPACE has recently published a report showing youth in particular have difficulties accessing community space. In addition, many more youth want to be involved in Focus On Youth (FOY) than there are spaces available, both in communities already receiving FOY funding and also in communities without current FOY opportunities. What would you do to support youth access to community space?

We are working in partnership with school boards and not-for-profit community agencies to offer youth positive activities that help them focus on learning, gain work experience and build a promising future. Ontario Liberals introduced the Focus on Youth program, which provides free use of school space for community-based not-for-profit programs, and provides learning, leadership and employment opportunities for the youth in priority neighbourhoods.

Last year, almost 25,000 children and youth from high-needs neighbourhoods participated in the Focus on Youth program on a daily basis. About 275 schools were made available for free to community users and more than 1,300 students were hired for summer employment through the program. The PCs could eliminate these kinds of programs if elected due to the \$14-billion hole in their platform. That could mean less funding for successful, innovative programs like Focus on Youth — and that could in turn cause more kids to drop out, get into trouble in the community, and fail to reach their full potential. Ontario Liberals believe that would be a tragedy, and our choice is to invest in kids that need our help the most.

Focus on Youth is one of the many programs our government has introduced to increase access to community space, and to ensure safety in our communities. While the PCs and NDP will look to make cuts to education funding, Ontario Liberals will continue supporting youth and increased access to community space through programs like Focus on Youth.