

November 2025 Speaker, Sue Winton

Privatization Of Public Education

The privatization of public education in Ontario and the rest of Canada is increasing from “creeping to scaling up” and that’s harmful to democracy, contended education expert Sue Winton. She has extensive credentials: Professor in York University’s Faculty of Education, York Research Chair in Policy Analysis for Democracy, and author of *Unequal Benefits: Privatization and Public Education in Canada*, published by University of Toronto Press in 2022. She also is Director of the Public Education Project (PEX) which “creates and shares knowledge about education privatization.” Her focus is on kindergarten through grade 12.

She said, “No school in Canada is meeting what public education should strive for – the ideal – collective benefits in learning, potential, and self-esteem. Privatization prioritizes the individual.” She said the shift began in the 1990s, rooted in overall government deficits, and has got worse. As evidence she referred to a May 2025 report by the non-partisan Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives which studies social, economic. and environmental issues. It said: “School board funding accounts for about 75 percent of government education funding. The \$260 funding gap per student per year represents a total funding gap of \$561.7 million for the 2025-26 school year compared to what school boards received in 2018-19. Government funding hasn’t kept up with enrolment growth and inflation and the total gap over the past seven years is \$6.3 billion.”

Schools have turned to their own fund-raising: movie nights, pizza parties, cookie dough, fun fairs, fees to join school clubs, for yearbooks, locks, to apply for athletic teams (\$30) and for uniforms (\$150). “However, only half of the revenue in general winds up with the school; the rest goes to pay suppliers.” Grants from families, religious organizations businesses, and philanthropists are another source of financing. “Shifting the responsibility to the public lets the government off the hook for adequately funding schools,” she charged.

Because of this, students obtain unequal benefits- those at financially well-off schools “get better technology, more arts and library books, expert speakers, and field trips. “The Toronto Catholic District School Board is able to spend twice as much per student that the Toronto District School Board,” she said. “Social factors and location are impactful. Urban schools receive more than rural and schools with a largely white student population from the middle or richer classes are better off. There is competition between schools and school districts for support.”

“We must re-commit to public education through letters, blogs, and meetings.”

After her talk she was asked, “What would the cost be in tax dollars to fix?” to which she replied, “I don’t know. Funds could be redistributed.” Other members’ comments: “How we vote in elections is important.” “When I was teaching thirty years ago I was aghast when students were referred to as ‘clients’ and students in poor districts did assignments on the inside of empty cereal boxes.” “For some parents donating \$50 is nothing, in others ten cents is a big thing.” “A lot of bad feeling can develop.” “Better-off schools should share.” “People don’t want to share; their sole focus is their children’s school.”

Susan Goldenberg