

Community Living Ontario – Special Schools Issue

The Toronto District School Board has recently announced an initiative to open one or more “black-focused schools” in Toronto. Premier McGuinty spoke out against the proposal.

Community Living Ontario president Dianne Garrels-Munro urges Dalton McGuinty to include Ontario students who have an intellectual disability in his position on non-segregated schools. Here is her letter –

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February 5, 2008



**Open Letter To:
The Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen’s Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1**

Re: Black-Focused Schools

Dear Premier:

Community Living Ontario, an organization that supports and advocates on behalf of children and adults who have an intellectual disability, applauds your position on black-focused schools as per comments published this week in *The Toronto Star* article “*Reject Black-Focused School: McGuinty*”.

We support your position and belief that Ontario students belong and learn best when they learn *together* in Ontario’s classrooms. We respect and are encouraged by the fact that you have not, and will not, compromise your position on non-segregated schools whether it is from a faith-based or race and ethnicity-based perspective. However, as an organization that for nearly 54 years in this province has been advocating for the full inclusion of people who have an intellectual disability in community, and especially in our schools, we strongly urge you to extend your position to include Ontario students who have an intellectual disability. Far too many remain in publicly funded, segregated schools or classrooms.

Ontario's education system must do more to understand, include, and respond to the complex and diverse needs and challenges facing Ontario students of all backgrounds and abilities. All students deserve and need to be present and participating in the life and community of their schools, not separated from each other. Our schools need to reflect and celebrate the natural and rich diversity of this province. This is a principle and approach that benefits all students, providing them the opportunity to build friendships and relationships with all of their peers and providing a much richer education experience. Over the years, the Ontario government has played a substantial role in improving the quality of life and opportunities for Ontarians who have an intellectual disability. Why shouldn't our education system be a part of this progressive agenda?

Along with urging Torontonians to reject black-focused schools we ask you, Premier, to work with the Ministry of Education to forge ahead on a firm commitment to make our schools places where all students can learn together and build a strong foundation for successful, productive, and meaningful lives.

Sincerely,

**Dianne Garrels-Munro
President**

What do you think? Post a comment on our feedback site.