

Report on Ontario's Northern Schools



People for Education
October 2006

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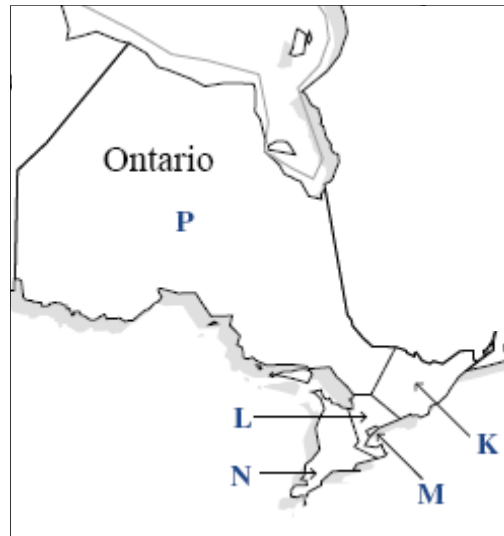


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The data used in this report is compiled from People for Education's *2006 Elementary School Tracking Report, 2006 Secondary School Tracking Report* and information from Statistics Canada and the 2001 census.

Regions are as defined by Canada Post. Northern schools are those with "P" postal codes.

We have focused on the areas where northern schools differ most markedly from schools in the rest of the province.



Report on Ontario's Northern Schools

Summary

The current provincial funding formula fails to sufficiently recognize or fund the unique needs of northern schools, and changes to the formula this year have added to the disadvantages for northern boards.

Ontario's northern schools have fewer specialist teachers, less access to special education supports and fewer full-time principals than schools in the rest of the province.

Most northern boards cover very large geographical areas, and their schools are, for the most part, very small and very far apart. Northern schools have a number of other unique characteristics: their enrolment is rapidly declining, they have higher than average heating and busing costs, a high proportion of aboriginal students, and less access to community supports.

- The average northern elementary school has 188 students, compared to an average enrolment of 356 in the rest of the province.
- Only 26% of northern secondary schools have a teacher-librarian, compared to 84% of secondary schools in the rest of the province.
- Most northern schools have no regular access to psychologists or social workers, despite having a high percentage of students who are considered at risk because of their socio-economic status.
- Compared to schools in the rest of the province, northern elementary schools have triple the percentage of elementary classes with three or more grades.
- Northern elementary schools are less likely to have music teachers, physical education teachers or guidance counsellors.

Staff in northern boards have introduced a number of unique programs to support students at risk and improve students' test scores, but many of these programs are now in jeopardy because of insufficient funding and insufficient recognition of the unique needs of northern schools.

School size and declining enrolment

As a parent, I feel proud to be part of this high school community. The students have taken on and are encouraged to take on leadership roles within the school. The older students are role models to the younger ones. The teachers and staff give nothing short of 101% to their students. They make themselves available to students and parents to help improve student success. Staff take part in extra-curricular activities from coaching after school sports to helping direct a theatrical production. All to help enhance the students' secondary school experience.

A secondary school in Near North DSB

Northern boards have a higher percentage of small schools than any other region in the province, some with enrolments of fewer than 100 students.

While abundant research shows that smaller schools can be more effective learning environments for students, it remains difficult in Ontario to keep small schools open and adequately staffed.

Recent changes to the funding formula included a new *School Foundation Grant* which provides funding for administrative staff for every school in a board regardless of its size. While this change ensures funding for principals and secretaries for every school, it, combined with other changes to the formula this year, resulted in a net loss for many northern boards.

Declining enrolment

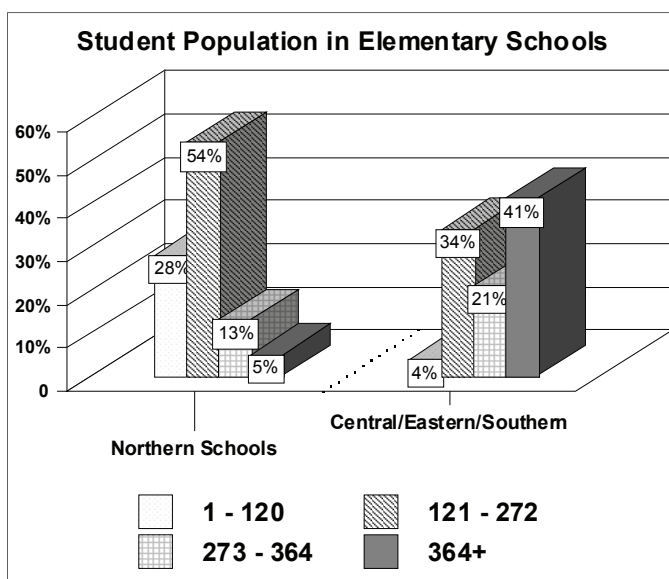
The funding loss that accompanies declining enrolment is one of the many challenges facing northern boards.

Enrolment is declining in the north at a higher rate than in other parts of the province—as a result of high job losses in northern industry, and as a result of migration to southern urban centres. The province provides boards with a *Declining Enrolment Grant* to help them make the

adjustment to lower funding levels caused by the loss of students, but this year boards were surprised to receive substantially less funding for declining enrolment than they had received last year.

School size and staff

Despite the new *School Foundation Grant*, school size remains an issue for the provision of other staff, including classroom teachers, teacher-librarians, guidance counsellors, and special education support staff, because funding for that staff is all granted on a per pupil basis. As enrolment declines it becomes more and more difficult to keep schools open and adequately staffed.



In 2006:

- Elementary schools in northern Ontario have an average enrolment of 188 students, compared to an average enrolment of 356 students in the rest of the province.
- Secondary schools in northern Ontario have an average enrolment of 479 students, compared to an average enrolment of 898 students in the rest of the province.

Percentage of Schools in Northern Ontario with sufficient students to generate funding for staff		
Staff	Funding Formula requirement	Percentage of Northern schools qualifying
Teacher-librarian, full-time, elementary	769	0%
Teacher-librarian, full-time, secondary	909	26%
Guidance counsellor, full-time, elementary	5000	0%
Guidance counsellor, full-time, secondary	385	35%

Small schools can create an intimate learning environment that is better able to address the needs of those within the school. Students, teachers, and parents may all be better served if the school is small enough to allow for communication to flow, opportunities for collaboration to cultivated, and meaningful relationships to be fostered.

University of Illinois at Chicago, Study 2000

Community use in northern schools

Northern schools are well used by their community with 93% of secondary schools, and 83% of elementary schools reporting that they are used by the community after school hours.

Two-thirds of northern schools provide space free of charge to community groups, a larger proportion of schools providing community space free of charge, than any other region in the province.

Course choices in secondary schools

Northern secondary schools have an average of just over half the number of students per school of their southern counterparts. Because funding for classroom teachers is generated by numbers of students, it is difficult for northern boards to provide sufficient teachers to allow small secondary schools to provide a range of programs and courses in each school.

For many students, it is difficult to find appropriate courses in their small, local secondary schools, and some must even leave home during the week to attend secondary schools in larger centres in order to have access to the courses they need.

It is also difficult for many northern secondary schools to offer technology courses and courses focused on industrial skills despite the fact that mining and logging are the prime industries in the north.

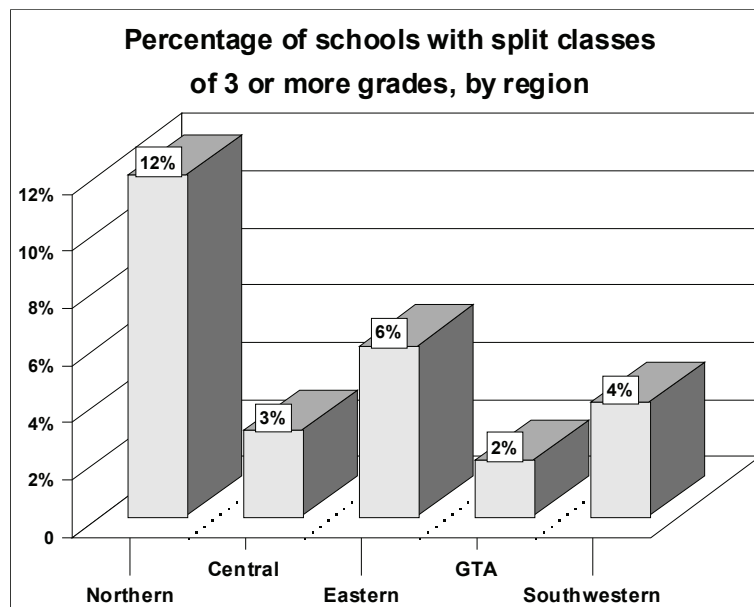
Class sizes

Because our school is so small, all classes are two grades together. We may be looking at triple grades and that would be a concern.

An elementary school in Huron-Superior CDSB

Low enrolment in northern schools results in lower than average class sizes in most elementary and secondary schools. In northern Ontario, 81% of elementary classes have 25 students or fewer, compared to 70% of elementary classes in the rest of the province.

Because there is no extra funding for teachers for a high number of small classes, northern schools have a much higher proportion of classes with 3 or more grades—12% versus 4% for the rest of the province.



Providing programs in northern schools

School libraries

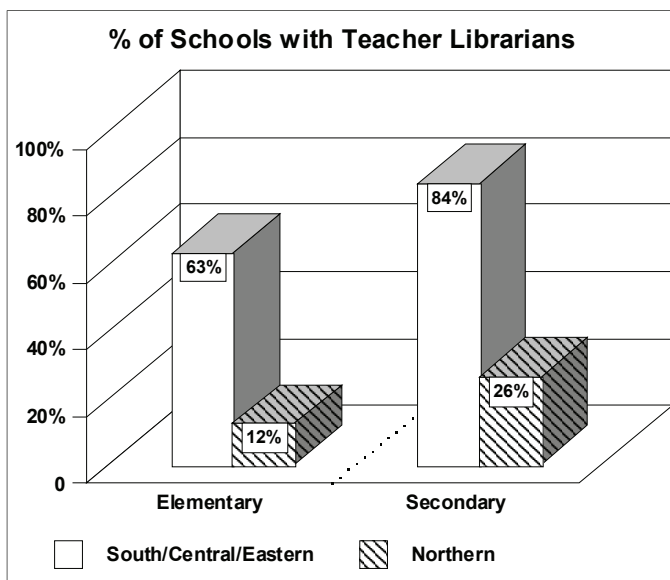
- *Grade 3 and 6 students in schools with teacher-librarians are more likely to report that they enjoy reading.*
- *Schools with trained library staff are more likely to have a higher proportion of grade 6 students who attained level 3 or higher on reading tests.*

School Libraries and Student Achievement, The Ontario Library Association, 2005

Students in northern schools are at a double disadvantage when it comes to libraries. Not only are they less likely to have libraries that are fully-staffed or open full-time, but in many northern communities, the school library is the only library. Students do not have the same access to public libraries in their communities as students in most of southern Ontario.

Despite evidence that the presence of a teacher-librarian has a positive effect on students' attitudes toward reading, and despite extensive research showing a relationship between library staffing and higher reading and writing test scores,¹ it is very difficult for northern Ontario boards to provide schools with library staff.

Northern boards are unable to afford teacher-librarians because the funding formula sets the number of students necessary to generate funding for one librarian at a level much higher than the province's average school size. None of northern elementary schools and just 26% of northern secondary schools have sufficient enrolment to generate funding for a full-time teacher-librarian.



In 2006:

- Only 12% of northern elementary schools have a teacher-librarian, down from 22% in 2002, and compared to 63% of elementary schools in the rest of the province.
- In northern secondary schools, only 26% are staffed with teacher-librarians, a decline from 33% in 2002, and a vast difference from the rest of the province, where 84% of secondary schools have teacher-librarians.
- In secondary schools where there are teacher librarians, the ratio of students to teachers is much higher than anywhere else in the province—1,376 students to 1 teacher-librarian, compared to the provincial average of 959.

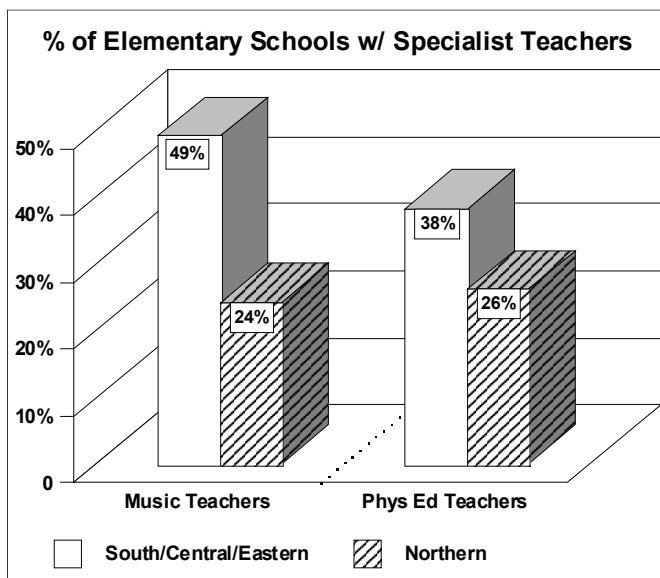
We do not have a functional library. The books are there and are not organized so that the children can use them.

An elementary school in CSD du Nord-Est de l'Ontario

- Total spending on elementary school libraries (from school budgets and fundraising) varies across the province, but the average amount per school is lowest in northern Ontario—\$2,161 compared to \$5,997 in the GTA or \$4,262 in Central Ontario.
- The average library budget in a northern secondary school is half the average budget in the rest of the province.

Specialist Teachers

Northern elementary schools are also far less likely to have specialist music or physical education teachers either full- or part-time, than schools in the rest of the province. Funding for specialists is provided through funding for preparation time for classroom teachers. Small schools have fewer classroom teachers, generate less prep time, and as a result, have fewer specialists.



In 2006:

- 24% of northern elementary schools have a music teacher, full- or part-time, compared to 49% of schools in the rest of the province.
- The percentage of northern elementary schools with physical education teachers has increased slightly since 2003—from 23% to 26%, but is still far lower than the rest of the province, where 38% of schools have phys ed teachers.

All-day kindergarten

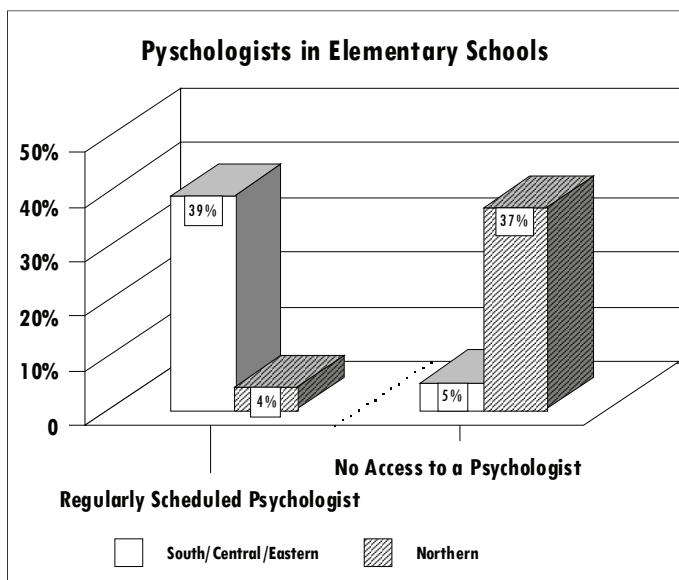
All-day every day kindergarten is one of the unique programs northern boards have provided for their students. The programs has been funded with boards' *Local Priorities* and *Learning Opportunities Grants*, but when the province moved funding out of those grants this year, it put those programs in jeopardy for 2007/08.

Research shows that students who experience early stimulation either at home or in early learning programs have a far greater chance for success

at school.² There are limited pre-school programs available in Northern communities, and all-day kindergarten provides students with the school readiness that is essential for future success.

Special Education

This year, northern boards were delivered a double blow: changes to special education funding resulted in cuts to a number of northern boards, and the federal government, which provides funding for First Nations students attending provincially funded schools, cut funding that helped supply educational assistants for high needs special education students.



Northern school boards, which serve large geographic areas and small student populations, have always faced serious challenges providing adequate special education assessment and support, but those challenges have increased this year because of changes to the way special education is funded.

In its revision of special education funding, the province eliminated the Intensive Support Amount (ISA). School boards now receive a combination of a standard *Special Education Per Pupil Amount* (SEPPA) combined with a per pupil amount based on the percentage of students that qualified for ISA funding last year.

Declining enrolment and special education

For the last few years across the province, the percentage of students requiring special education support has increased. For boards such as those in the north with a rapidly declining student population, funding granted on a strictly per pupil basis makes funding for special education precarious. As a result of declining enrolment, but increasing need, boards may have fewer students overall, but have a higher number of students who need special education services. With funding now based solely on numbers of pupils, as the population declines so does the funding—whether or not the number of students who need special education support increases.

We are too dependent on outside agencies with long waiting lists.

Special Ed services are not available through the school, and can only be accessed through other agencies.

An elementary school in DSB Ontario North East

In the north, it is difficult to distribute special education services evenly or provide the services in one central place because schools are too small and too far apart. Thus, in northern boards special education students may either go without service or spend hours on buses travelling to distant schools with appropriate special education programs. Providing this extra transportation is expensive, and these extra costs are not recognized in the funding formula.

In this year's People for Education Tracking Surveys, parents and principals in northern schools reported that many students were not receiving adequate special education support. They said they relied on outside agencies, and even then, the support was hard to come by. In additional comments on the surveys, schools reported long waits for help and cuts to resource staff.

Psychologists

Over one-third of elementary and secondary schools in the north report they have no access to psychologists to assess students, make recommendations to teachers and parents as to appropriate special education placements, and assist students and their parents when psychological help is needed.

- 37% of northern elementary schools did not have access to a psychologist, compared to 5% of schools in the rest of the province.
- Only 4% of northern elementary schools reported having the regularly scheduled services of a psychologist, compared to 39% of schools in the rest of the province.
- 35% of northern secondary schools did not have access to a psychologist, compared to 6% in the rest of the province.
- 0% of northern secondary schools reported having the regularly scheduled services of a psychologist, compared to 34% in the rest of the province.

Social Workers

- Only 17% of elementary schools in the north have regularly scheduled access to social workers, compared to 41% of schools in the rest of the province.

We suffer from a distinct lack of professionals to support our students—from social workers to psychologist to mental health workers. Our high school is 1 hour away by highway to the next high school. Our whole board only has 5 high schools—all at least 1—2 hours apart.

A secondary school in Superior Greenstone DSB

Speech Language Pathologists

- 39% of northern elementary schools have regular access to a speech language pathologist. In the rest of the province, 46% of schools have regular access to these services.

The wait time for speech therapy evaluation can be up to a year.

An elementary school in CSDC Franco-Nord

In an August, 2006 letter to Ontario's Deputy Minister of education, fifteen directors and chairs from fifteen northern English-language Catholic and Public boards said that changes to the formula would have an impact on the services northern boards could provide to their students who needed extra support. (See Appendix "D")

Many Boards must reduce professional support staff such as child development counsellors and adolescent youth workers. These valued staff members have provided a great service enabling students to be more "ready to learn." Often in the North, there are limited community social services. Hence, the reduction of these school-based services will have a significant negative impact on student success.

For example, the Near North District School Board invested in several pilot programs during the current school year in order to provide alternatives to suspension. Suspension numbers have been reduced, retention has been improved and greater student success has been achieved. These programs will be reduced.

Letter to Deputy Ministers of Education from Northern Directors, August 2006

We have inadequate time for assessment and insufficient funding to cover the costs of assessment. The time to provide individual support is inadequate. Services are too diluted amongst all schools.

An elementary school in Lakehead DSB

Rozanski recommendations for integrated services

In 2002, the Minister of education appointed Dr. Mordechai Rozanski to examine the effectiveness of the provincial education funding formula.

He found that students' special education needs would be better met if Ontario were better at integrating its services for children and youth. He said integrated services would help more students come to school "ready to learn" and would help meet students special education needs.

This year, the Ministry of Education Working Table on Special Education also made recommendations about integrated services and cross-ministry cooperation. Both reports said that students would be better served if there were more co-operation and integration of services among the

ministries of Community, Family, and Children's Services, Education, Health and Long-Term Care, Public Safety and Security, and Tourism and Recreation.

We still do not have enough services for the children in need.

An elementary school in Algoma DSB

Children who require services from two or more government or non-government organizations often encounter gaps or duplication in service, which is frustrating for both the children and their parents. In my opinion, schools, community and social services, health professionals and agencies, recreational services, community police, and correctional and custodial services – and the federal, provincial, and municipal government ministries and agencies responsible for them – must collaborate in providing and in funding these services.

Integrated services would go a long way towards helping schools meet students' needs in all of the readiness-to-learn areas I have discussed in this section of the report, as well as special education needs.

*Dr. Mordechai Rozanski,
2002 report of the Education Equality Task Force*

Aboriginal Students

There are over 50,000 Aboriginal students in Ontario. According to Canada's last census, 9% of the population served by northern Ontario school boards are Aboriginal, compared to less than 1% in the rest of the province. In the northwest (Kenora, Dryden, Sioux Lookout etc.), this number rises to 34%. (See Appendix B.)

Education has changed radically over the last ten years, but for First Nations Students, there has been nothing. Things have only gotten worse.

*Matawa First Nation
Submission to the Rozanski Commission*

First Nations know that we must be educated to contribute and be competitive in a modern economy. Educating First Nation citizens will benefit all of Canada and it is time for the government to recognize that in its programs.

Shawn Atleo (A-in-Chut), chair of the First Nations Chiefs Committee on Education

Despite changes to education policy and funding over the years, both provincially and federally, a high proportion of aboriginal students continue to struggle in school. There is a wide gap between aboriginal and non-aboriginal students in school attendance and student achievement; and graduation rates for aboriginal students are much lower than those of the rest of the population.

Students at risk

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) defines students at risk as those students who are “in danger of failing in school and /or being unsuccessful in making the transition from school to work.” Among the factors the OECD sites that put students at risk are low family income, low parental education, single parent status, learning disabilities or mental health issues, mobility, and inadequate nutrition. Many First Nations students in the North bear *all* of these challenges, making success at school difficult.

- A report from the Canadian Council on Social Development, shows that 62% of First Nations youth living off reserves had less than a high school education by age 20—24, compared to 26% of the general youth population. For aboriginal students living on reserves, the numbers are even lower.³ Aboriginal students are also less likely to start school “ready to learn” than their non-aboriginal counterparts.
- According to Statistics Canada, Aboriginal peoples move much more frequently than other Canadians. This presents challenges for children in the continuity of their education program. It also makes it difficult to provide timely assessment and support of students’ special education needs.

- In a 2004 study which included 1,800 First Nations' children in the Sioux Lookout area, psychologist Mary Beth Minthorn-Biggs reported that more than 80 % of the children were as much as two grade levels behind their peers by the time they were in grade 4. By grade 8, 95% would be behind. By Grade 12, nearly 60 per cent will have dropped out.
- Research from the British Columbia Ministry of Education shows that the percentage of Aboriginal students identified in Special Education categories is much higher than the percentage of non-aboriginal students.
- Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) is more prevalent among Aboriginal children across the country, but FAS is not recognized in Ontario under current Special Education identification requirements.

Federally-funded students

First Nations' students living on reserves in Ontario's north may either attend federally-funded, First Nations-administered schools on reserves, or provincially-funded schools off-reserve. The federal government pays for students who live on reserves but attend provincially-funded schools through tuition agreements with school boards. According to the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, 38 percent of on-reserve students attend provincially-funded schools.

This spring, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs limited the funding for special education Aboriginal students attending provincially-funded schools under tuition agreements. The funding cap made it very difficult for school boards to provide the supports and programs that improve students' chances for success in school, in particular educational assistants for high needs special education students. In some cases, school boards say they cannot provide the needed support for these high needs students, though they must admit them if there is no federally-funded school for them to attend. Parents and community agencies report that students must often wait weeks or longer to be admitted, causing potentially damaging disruptions to their education.

Provincial funding

Aboriginal students who do not live on reserves are funded on a per-pupil basis exactly as all other students. Despite recommendations from the Education Equality Task Force led by Dr. Mordechai Rozanski four years ago, there continues to be little or no recognition in the funding formula of the unique status and needs of Aboriginal students.

School boards do receive some funding through the *Learning Opportunities Grant* (LOG), based on the number of students in the board likely to be considered “at risk” because of their socio-economic status, (Aboriginal status is one of the socio economic factors recognized in LOG funding), but that grant was cut by nearly one third this year, and the funds moved into the funding envelope for classroom teachers.

It is essential that Aboriginal students are engaged and feel welcome in school, and that they see themselves and their cultures in the curriculum and the school community.... Collaboration among governments, educational institutions and Aboriginal families and communities is essential for the implementation of education programs and services designed to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal students, regardless of where they live.

Draft Aboriginal Education Policy Framework 2006, Framework Principles.

Rozanski report recommendations

In his report, Dr. Rozanski addressed the need for changes in funding and policy for Aboriginal students.

I am concerned that the present LOG may not be providing boards with sufficient funds to meet the needs of [Aboriginal] students.

I understand...that other provinces have introduced special grants for Aboriginal students.This targeted grant requires school districts to spend this money on Aboriginal education with a view to improving this at-risk group’s level of achievement. While there is insufficient data to determine the magnitude of the funding needed to meet the education needs of Aboriginal students in Ontario’s publicly funded school systems, and such a needs assessment is a necessary first step, I am nevertheless recommending as a priority, that once this data has been gathered, the Ministry of Education implement a grant targeted at the educational needs of Aboriginal students who are not living on reserves.

New strategies required

There has been research across the country showing that, for a variety of reasons, Aboriginal students are more likely to require extra support in school. The same research shows that it is imperative that schools have the capacity to recognize and support the variety of cultures of Aboriginal students.

Over the last several years, federal, provincial, school board and First Nations governments have discussed improving frameworks for the delivery of education to Aboriginal students in Ontario. The Ontario Ministry of Education has recently released a draft paper that outlines some of the strategies required to Aboriginal students’ chances for success in the education system. The strategies include improvements to teaching methods, curriculum that reflects Aboriginal cultures and perspectives, more effective counseling and outreach, and school environments that encourage Aboriginal student and parent engagement.

The new draft policy framework does not address funding issues.

Busing

The high number of small communities and the great distances between those communities make the provision of adequate transportation services a constant challenge for northern boards. Students in northern boards spend longer on buses than students in any other part of the province, and northern boards struggle with very high transportation costs.

- Northern elementary schools reported students on buses for as long as three hours per day.
- 61% of northern secondary schools reported one-way bus rides of one hour or more, compared to 49% of secondary schools in the rest of the province.

Funding for transportation is granted on a per pupil basis, and boards received a 2% increase this year—but costs for transportation increased far more than 2%. Since 1997, the government has been working to develop a provincial model for funding transportation. In its release of this year's grants the government says is presently undergoing reform to “increase transparency and effectiveness.”

Funding formula for northern schools

Per pupil funding for education has long put northern school boards at a disadvantage in providing equitable services for northern students. Costs are higher in the north, access to support staff such as psychologists and social workers is limited and the populations are small. There have been numerous attempts over the years to address some of these issues, but none have fully compensated northern boards for their unique needs.

“The loss of dollars coupled with the timing of the funding release is devastating. Staffing costs represent 76% of our budget and contractual commitments and necessary planning for the fall have made this million dollar revenue loss a tough blow. When we have to cut \$1M from approximately one quarter of our budget, it makes for some hard decisions.”

Rainy River District
School Board

This year, northern school boards received a new blow when the province restructured several of the grants that had helped northern boards deal with their extra costs and their unique needs. The *Local Priorities Grant* was eliminated altogether and the funding moved to cover the real costs of teachers’ salaries. Some of the funding in the *Learning Opportunities* and *Remote and Rural Grants* was redistributed around the province. The province also discontinued extra funding in the *Declining Enrolment Grant* that had been supplied in the previous two years.

Because northern boards received a high proportion of their funding from all of these grants, they were hit hard in the re-distribution, and they lost proportionately more funding than other boards. The chart in Appendix “B” shows that when boards with similarly declining enrolment are compared, northern boards suffered disproportionate losses.

As a result, northern boards, like many boards around the province this year, were forced to use reserves to balance their budgets. But they also had to make cuts to educational assistants and support staff such as child development counsellors and adolescent youth workers, and they are now contemplating eliminating all-day kindergarten in 2007.

In the last few years, many northern boards have introduced very successful programs to improve students’ achievement and support their high needs students. Because of this year’s funding cuts they

“The cuts will negatively impact about 23 Northern Boards and School Authorities and these communities are already suffering economically, caused by multi-job losses and business downturn. Only about 5% of public school students live in northern communities so we have to stand up and be counted.”

Trustee, Rainy River
DSB

were unable to expand the programs which included programs that provided alternatives to suspension and new lead literacy teachers.

In their letter to the Deputy Minister of Education, the northern directors and chairs outlined their concerns about changes to the funding formula.

...there is a serious concern about the future as we strive to meet the educational targets set by the Provincial Government....Boards have abandoned most, if not all, of their plans for any expansion of discretionary programs and services....Boards have reduced a variety of programs and services....Boards are universally accessing their reserve funds to “bridge” several programs and services for the coming budget year while planning for further cuts in 2007-08.

Conclusion

School boards across the province have struggled to balance their budgets this year, relying on short-term solutions such as using reserves or delaying spending. The problems are particularly acute for schools and students in Ontario’s north.

A number of organizations have recommended a full review of the funding formula to ensure that it reflects Ontario’s education policy, provides all students with equitable access to the education that meets their needs, and has the flexibility to support the unique requirements of Ontario’s diverse schools.

Recommendations

People for Education recommends that the government revise the funding formula in the following areas:

Small Schools:

- add funding for additional staff to the new *School Foundation Grant* to ensure that all students have access to teacher-librarians, specialist teachers and sufficient administrative support.

Staff:

- provide funding to ensure that boards with small populations have access to psychologists and social workers, and
- recognise the challenges faced by northern boards to attract and keep teachers and fund the extra costs incurred.

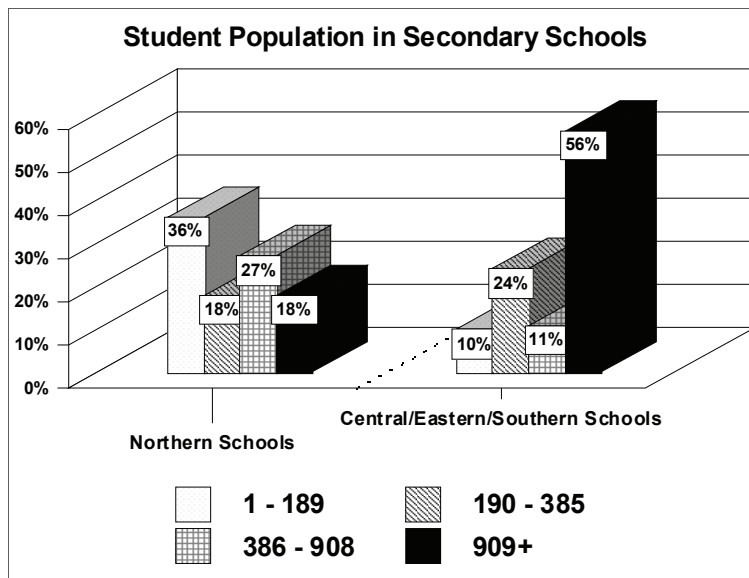
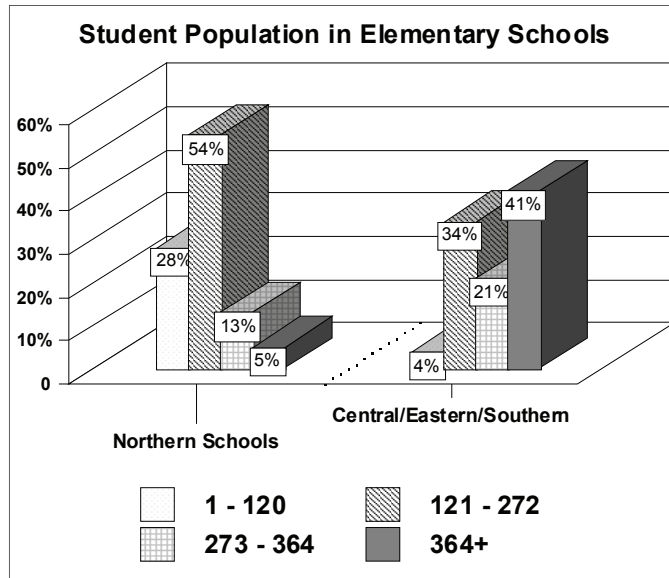
Transportation:

- update benchmarks annually in the transportation formula to reflect current fuel costs,
- set a limit on the amount of time any student may spend on the bus per day, and
- acknowledge the additional funding required in rural and remote areas to transport special education students to locations for programs and support.

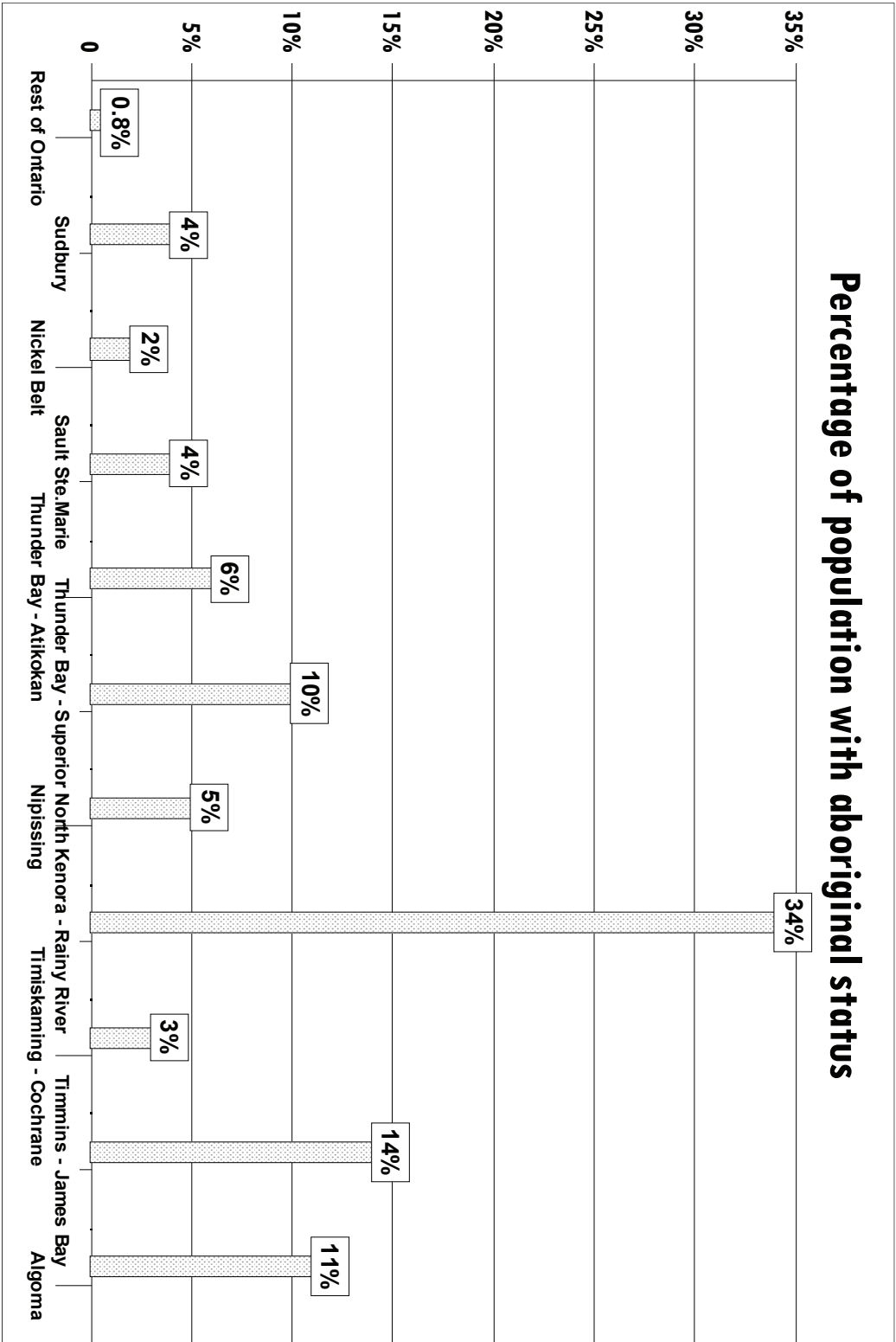
Aboriginal Students:

- amend the *Languages Grant* in the funding formula to recognize that some Aboriginal students do not have English or French as their first language,
- broaden the criteria in the *Learning Opportunities Grant* and in special education funding to address issues of mobility, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome and to recognize the unique needs of many Aboriginal students, and
- implement the recommendations for Aboriginal students in the Rozanski report, including
 - a new grant targeted at the educational needs of Aboriginal students who are not living on reserves, and
 - that the Province work with Aboriginal leaders and the federal government to ensure that there is an integrated approach to and adequate funding for the education of Aboriginal students.

Appendix A: School Sizes



Appendix B: Aboriginal Population by Federal Riding



data from Statistics Canada, 2001

Appendix C: School boards' budget and enrolment changes *

Board Name	Enrolment increase/ decrease	Funding increase/ decrease
DSB Ontario North East	- 3.51%	- 1.01%
CSD du Grand Nod de l'Ontario	- 3.50%	+ 0.94%
Keewatin-Patricia DSB	- 3.14%	- 1.94%
Trillium Lakelands DSB	- 2.49%	+ 1.14%
St. Clair Catholic DSB	- 2.79%	+0.09%
Kenora Catholic DSB	- 1.77%	+3.16%
Near North DSB	- 1.90%	+1.26%
Renfrew County catholic DSB	- 1.84%	+1.29%
CSD catholique de l'est Ontarien	- 2.09%	+1.54%
Avon Maitland DSB	- 1.64%	+2.49%
Bruce-Grey CDSB	- 1.88%	+0.93%
Lakehead DSB	- 3.99%	- 1.40%
Northeastern Catholic DSB	- 3.93%	- 0.76%
Bluewater DSB	- 4.01%	+ 0.57%
CSD Catholique des Grandes Rivieres	- 4.44%	- 1.56%
Superior North catholic DSB	- 4.08%	- 7.02%
Algoma DSB	- 3.72%	- 1.14%
Huron-Superior CDSB	- 3.78%	- 1.26%
Thunder Bay Catholic DSB	- 0.22%	+ 4.04%
Sudbury Catholic DSB	- 1.32%	+ 2.80%
CSD catholique du Centre-Est de l'Ontario	- 0.53%	+ 5.47%
Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic DSB	- 0.62%	+ 3.50%
CSD catholique Centre-sud	- 0.82%	+ 4.97%
Brant Haldimand Norfolk CDSB	- 0.37%	+ 4.81%
Wellington Catholic DSB	- 0.59%	+ 5.18%
CSD Catholique Franco-Nord	- 0.48%	+ 2.20%
Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic DSB	- 2.65%	+ 1.77%
Hastings and Prince Edward DSB	- 2.55%	+ 0.91%
Huron-Perth CDSB	- 2.71%	+ 0.75%
CSD catholique du Nouvel-ontario	- 2.62%	+ 0.31%
Rainbow DSB	- 0.34%	+ 3.00%
Renfrew County DSB	- 0.90%	+ 1.68%
Rainy River DSB	- 11.95%	- 5.39%
Superior Greenstone DSB	- 0.48%	- 5.67%

*northern boards highlighted

Appendix D: August 2006 Letter from northern Directors of Education

Northern Boards 2006-2007 Ministry Funding Projections

Current and Forecasted Impact of Grant Changes for English Public and Catholic School Boards in Northern Ontario

The release of the Grants for Student Needs at the end of June 2006 has had an immediate impact on the 2006-2007 budgets of school districts across Northern Ontario. In addition, there is a serious concern about the future as we strive to meet the educational targets set by the Provincial Government that have been embraced by all Boards.

All English Catholic and Public School Boards in Northern Ontario have been surveyed. Preliminary results reveal how these Boards are responding in the short term. First, Boards have abandoned most, if not all, of their plans for any expansion of discretionary programs and services. These are programs and services that both serve the unique local needs of their communities while remaining closely aligned with the Province-wide focus on improved student learning and achievement. Second, the Boards have reduced a variety of programs and services. Finally, Boards are universally accessing their reserve funds to “bridge” several programs and services for the coming budget year while planning for further cuts in 2007-2008.

With respect to the discretionary spending, it can be simply stated there are no local “wish list” items being pursued by Boards. Almost all school boards have reduced the number of Educational Assistants who might have been hired for the upcoming school year. For example, the Nipissing Parry Sound Catholic DSB has dropped its complement by approximately 13%. Algoma District School Board will need to reduce its special education spending by 1.5 million dollars. It is noted that while Boards are in enrolment decline the incidence rate of students with special needs is not declining at the same rate.

Several Boards, such as Huron Superior Catholic, would have liked to institute or add more “lead” literacy and/or numeracy teachers from discretionary funding. This has been curtailed. Algoma District, who has been recognized for its system-wide improvement in literacy, has relied heavily upon its “flex funding” to hire additional staff. This may not be sustainable in the future.

All Boards are reducing operational expenditures as a way to try and balance budgets, primarily through staff cuts to an already lean complement. However, demands on administration due to various Ministry and local requirements have not been reduced. Major legal expenditures continue to escalate. For example, District Board Ontario North East has had to reduce several budget lines by \$1.7 million. Furniture and equipment along with the replacement of computers are included in this amount. This same Board has reduced school secretaries and board office staff by 15.60 FTE.

Kenora Catholic while receiving an increase of \$400,000 for 2006-2007 reports that they have cut available cost centres by 5%; don't have any “wish list”; have no reserves left to draw upon; and, no flexibility for local priorities.

One of the major impacts of the current situation, that will probably grow in the future, will be the loss of complementary “social services” for students. Many Boards must reduce professional support staff such as child development counsellors and adolescent youth workers.

These valued staff members have provided a great service enabling students to be more “ready to learn.” Often in the North, there are limited community social services. Hence, the reduction of these school-based services will have a significant negative impact on student success. For example, the Near North District School Board invested in several pilot programs during the current school year in order to provide alternatives to suspension. Suspensions numbers have been reduced, retention has been improved and greater student success has been achieved. These programs will be reduced.

With only a few exceptions all Northern English Boards offer full time everyday senior kindergarten. Some offer full time junior kindergarten as well. No Board is reporting that they will abandon these extended programs for the 2006-2007 school year. They are highly valued by parents and the Boards and it is too late in the school year to cancel these programs now as a cost saving measure. Boards in the North understand the limited availability of pre-school programs and readiness status of students entering our kindergarten programs. Accordingly, we have invested heavily using our discretionary funds, to provide these enhanced and important learning readiness programs. Early evidence would indicate that our young students are making academic and social gains. The loss of support and tenuous future of the Best Start initiative would seem to reinforce board-based initiatives such as these full day programs. Unless there is a better financial outlook the forecast for these kindergarten programs will be in jeopardy in 2007-2008 school year and will have an effect on improved student learning.

The impact of the 2006-2007 budget situation must be seen in context. Our boards had embraced the idea of using some “flex funding” to support the Provincial agenda and have continually used it in a responsible manner at the local district level to this end. Our Boards have shown the expenditure gaps encountered in a Northern rural and remote environment and welcomed the acknowledgement of this in our grants. We have worked to invest “where we can” to achieve a positive learning environment for Northern students.

The impact of the funding changes will be felt in September but most important a continuation of this design, even after an effort to make appropriate adjustments, will change the complexion of program and service delivery in the North.

Algoma DSB

Chair, Wanda McQueen
Director of Education, Mario Turco

Huron Superior Catholic DSB

Chair, Marchy Bruni
Director of Education, Jack Stadnyk

DSB Ontario North East

Chair, Juergen Leukert,
Director of Education, Linda Knight

North Eastern Catholic DSB

Chair, Colleen Landers
Director of Education, Paul Toffanello

Keewatin-Patricia DSB

Chair, David Penny
Director of Education, Janet Wilkinson

Kenora Catholic DSB

Chair, Jim Ames
Director of Education, Allan Craig

Lakehead DSB

Chair, Ron Oikonen
Director of Education, Terry Ellwood

Thunder Bay Catholic DSB

Chair, Doug Demeo

Director of Education, Carol-Lynne Oldale

Near North DSB

Chair, Alan Bottomley
Director of Education, Colin Vickers

Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic DSB

Chair, Donald Houle
Director of Education, Anna Marie Bitonti

Rainbow DSB

Chair, Dena Morrison
Director of Education, Jean Hanson

Sudbury Catholic DSB

Chair, Paula Peroni
Director of Education, Zandra Zubac

Rainy River DSB

Chair, Ron McAlister
Director of Education, Jack McMaster

Superior North Catholic DSB

Chair, Sandra Svenkeson
Director of Education, Barbara Spadoni

Superior Greenstone DSB

Chair, Bette Bartlette
Director of Education, Patti Pella

Notes

1. People for Education and Queen's University. *School Libraries and Student Achievement in Ontario*, April, 2006. <www.peopleforeducation.com/tracking/topic/topic.html>
2. Canadian Council on Social Development. *The Progress of Canada's Children and Youth*, 2006. <<http://www.ccsd.ca/pccy/2006/>>
3. Ibid.

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People for Education works to
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