

Redefining school boards: have your say!

What kinds of things should trustees do? How should trustees work with school board staff? What kinds of decisions should they be involved in? How should we measure the effectiveness of school boards? When should the Minister take over a school board?

The Ministry of Education wants to know what you think about school trustees, school boards and directors of education. A committee, appointed by the Minister, will hold consultations and report in the late winter. It is chaired by Rick Johnson, the former chair of the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, and Madeleine Chevalier, past chair of the Centre-est Catholic French-language school board.

Shifting roles for school trustees

The Minister wants the committee to look at how trustees operate within school boards and in the community. Some corporations and boards use a "policy governance" model where trustees are only involved in the very big overall policy decisions. In this model, after a vote has been taken, boards must "speak with one voice" so that dissenting trustees are not heard from. The CEO or Director is the voice of the board and the only one accountable.

Some argue that this is very efficient for corporations, but perhaps not as democratic for entities like school boards where trustees are elected by the general public. Others argue that school boards where trustees are involved in more of the day-to-day decisions are inefficient. The committee will recommend a governance model for boards and a Code of Conduct for trustees.

Boards may be measured on test scores and graduation rates

The Minister has also asked the committee to expand parts of the *Education Act*. At present, a Minister of Education may intervene in a school board only for financial reasons. The committee is being asked to suggest changes that would allow the Minister to intervene or even take over a school board for educational reasons as well. For example, the Minister could step in if boards weren't achieving certain standards of student outcomes, test scores or graduation rates.

Let the committee know what you think

The Ministry's official questions are:

- What makes good board governance?
- What should trustees as a group be accountable for?
- What should Directors of Education be accountable for?
- What other duties, powers and accountabilities could be clarified in the sector?
- What would be a reasonable trigger related to student outcomes for the Minister to intervene in a board?

The committee will be holding meetings to consult with parents, boards and community members. They have produced a discussion paper and an online survey. Both are posted at <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/governance-review09>. You can fill in the survey as an individual or take it to your school or community group to answer the questions.

The new policy will bring about big changes to education, so 'get consulted' and make sure you have your say.

Open the doors!

Report calls for new policy for schools

We need to open the doors of our schools – for community use, for integrated services, for families and for students. So says a new report, *A Prescription for Change*, released this week by People for Education.

The report recommends a new vision for schools that reinvents them as assets to the whole community and as places where families, children and young people can find everything from education to health centres to community kitchens.

Integrated services already a reality in many schools

In many parts of Ontario and in other provinces there are already great examples of integration and cooperation happening in schools and communities. But the report says that to make these models common practice, it will take new policy, new thinking and inspired leadership.

Recommendations require more cooperation than money

Among the key recommendations in

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the report:

- It is time to implement the long-recommended Cabinet-level Committee to foster coordination and integration of services for families, children and youth.
- A local "coordination office" in each municipality should coordinate a local framework for services and planning, including the coordinated use of school buildings, and the harmonization of services in and around schools.
- Every school should have access to a paid school-community advisor responsible for outreach, and for assisting parents and staff in developing school-community links.
- Parent centres should be created in schools to support parents with advice and information about resources. These centres should build upon models already developed in a number of schools and communities and at the province (e.g., parenting and family literacy centres).
- Principals and vice-principals must have the resources and staff necessary to provide leadership in the school and the community. Training for principals should include a strong focus on community outreach and inclusion, working with parents, problem-solving and collaboration.
- There should be a compulsory module for new teachers focused on community/family/teacher relationships, and teachers should be provided with the support and time needed to engage parents and families.



Add your name to the signatories

In an unprecedented show of agreement, a wide range of groups and individuals signed on to the recommendations, including organizations like United Way Toronto, the Ontario Public Health Association, Children's Mental Health Ontario and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association.

Many of the recommendations mirror ones made in the *2002 Rozanski Report*, the recent report on the *Roots of Youth Violence*, the province's *Poverty Reduction Strategy*, released in

December, and a Discussion Paper from the *Association of Municipalities of Ontario and the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association*.

You can read or download all the recommendations and add your name to the long list of signatories at www.peopleforeducation.com.

Elementary teachers out of provincial bargaining

In Ontario, teachers' federations negotiate contracts on a board-by-board basis. But in the last two rounds of negotiations, the province has provided an overall framework for teacher and support staff contracts. The framework gives a broad structure for agreements, covering things like salaries, prep time, supervision time and professional development.

Over the last few months, the province has been negotiating with teachers and support staff for a new four-year framework. Most teachers' federations and support staff have settled, but the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) has been unable to sign on.

Now ETFO will negotiate directly with school boards and the Ministry will no longer provide a guarantee of funding for salary increases over four years. Instead, ETFO will negotiate two-year contracts.

In early January, ETFO President David Clegg issued a deadline for school boards to submit their contract offers. He says that ETFO must see real "signs of progress" by Feb. 13, or the union will "initiate strike votes."

"A great conference!"

So said the 250 people who came from across the province to York University in November for People for Education's 2008 conference.

Conference responses showed that 92% rated conference sessions excellent or good, as well as useful. The sessions focused on topics like all-day kindergarten, assessing students, Balanced Day scheduling, integrating special education students, e-learning, and school council challenges. The keynote

speaker, Michael Tymchak, described how a new integrated way of thinking about schools and communities has evolved in Saskatchewan. And the Minister of Education addressed the conference and answered many parents' questions.

Notes from many of the sessions are posted on our website.

And don't miss out next year! Mark your calendars for the 2009 conference: **November 7, 2009.**

people for
Education

BECAUSE EDUCATION MATTERS MOST

The People for Education Newsletter

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People for Education is an independent parents' group working to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

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Do marks really matter?

What do grades mean? More important, what should they mean? Should they be emphasized in our schools as much as they are? Does a grade reflect whether or not the student has actually learned anything? How does the obsession with 'good' marks affect the process of learning? Are there better ways to assess students' learning?



How students are evaluated involves the complex relationship between teacher and student, a philosophy about what learning should have taken place, and a method of evaluation that can range from assessing a performance, to an oral exam, to a pen and paper test (which could be anything from a multiple choice test to essay questions).

At our November conference, people heard two very different points of view on student evaluation.

Sharon Friesen, from the University of Calgary, noted that grades have been used in the education system to identify weaknesses in schools, which students to exclude from programs, and which schools which should be closed. The rationale for grading students is because "we've always done it", and because parents, employers and post-secondary institutions demand it.

But in her view, marks are not necessar-

ily reflective of what or whether a student has learned, and in fact can depress creativity and undermine interest in a subject. They can be used to reward and punish students. And at present, she says our testing abilities are not sophisticated enough to adequately assess students' progress; we can just assess facts and information.

Friesen feels that students, parents and teachers should be involved in deciding how students should be assessed. The two traditional forms of assessment are *formative assessment*, which is ongoing while the student is learning, and *summative assessment*, which occurs after all learning has taken place. To Friesen, summative testing is the best tactic, but she noted that the value of other forms of evaluation such as peer- and self-assessment.

University of Western Ontario sociology professor James Côté addressed how grade inflation has affected secondary and post-secondary education over recent decades.

Côté notes that in the early 1960's only 5 to 10% of students had 'A' grades in grade 13 provincial exams, compared to the current 40% of students graduating with an 'A' average.

He believes that this dramatic increase has been caused by a number of fac-

tors: changing perceptions of what is acceptable (only an "A"); pressure from parents who all want to believe their children are "gifted"; and a sense of entitlement to a degree regardless of a student's performance.

He says grade inflation means that true excellence can no longer be recognized, and it acts as a disincentive to good students to reach their highest potential.

According to Côté, failure is useful; it tells students that they are not proficient in an area and need to do more work or try something else.

In his view, students at all levels must be uniformly graded, and we must destigmatize the concept of 'average' (only a third to half of university students are above 'average').

You can see the session notes and Powerpoint presentation at www.peopleforeducation.com/conference2008/presentations.

Parents have their say on class size

The Canadian Education Association (CEA) is conducting a study to help the Ministry of Education look at the impact of reducing class sizes in Junior Kindergarten to Grade 3. People for Education was hired by the CEA to collect feedback from parents. Over 3,500 parents responded to our online survey between Nov. 24 and Dec. 3. Thanks to all who participated!

The CEA's review of current research shows "class size reduction can help improve student achievement on standardized tests, increase student academic engagement and decrease negative social consequences, but it is not a 'magic bullet.' In practice, class size reduction has not always been implemented as evenly or effectively as intended." See www.cea-ace.ca/media/en/ClassSizeReduction_Sum.pdf.

The final report, including field research and results from teacher and parent surveys, will be published this year.

Provincial funding woes may affect boards' budgets

Minister of Education, Kathleen Wynne, has cautioned school boards that there may be no budget increases this year and that there may in fact be cuts. At a recent meeting of the provincial Education Partnership Table she explained, "When we put together that four-year funding projection for education a year ago, the world looked a lot different than it does today." She said the provincial government will run a deficit this year and there will be a significant demand

for more social services. Wynne warned that education may be entering a world of revenue decreases.

Her Parliamentary Assistant, Liz Sandals, will be consulting with boards, parents' organizations, teachers and others about what is most needed in this year's education funding.

You can contact Liz Sandals at lsandals.mpp@liberal.ola.org.



Bright Idea In the Upper Grand DSB, the parent-run *ABC's of Giving Program* is helping students learn about philanthropy. As part of the program, parents and children are encouraged to make contributions in their teacher's name to a worthy cause, instead of giving a traditional gift. The response to the program has been overwhelming. Children are learning about



the benefits and responsibilities of global citizenship, and teachers are helping to make the act of giving more meaningful for students and their parents. For more information about this initiative, contact Judy Carrick at judy.carrick@gmail.com.

Justice for Children and Youth is a non-profit legal aid clinic providing select legal representation to low-income children and youth in Toronto and vicinity. It gives summary legal advice, information and assistance to young people, parents (in education matters), professionals and community groups across Ontario. The agency specializes in protecting the rights of those facing conflicts with the legal system, education, social service or mental health systems. Go to www.ifcy.org/ for more information.

Helping Students Dream L'Arche Educational Materials Responding to requests from high school teachers,

L'Arche Canada has produced a body of highly regarded secondary school curriculum materials for leadership, civics, social studies, religion and philosophy. Jean Vanier's L'Arche philosophy invites students to have a dream for their lives and to help build a world where everyone belongs. Sammy Tewelde, a grade 12 student and school president at Jean Vanier High School, says, "Jean Vanier's

wisdom supersedes the boundaries of age and culture. The students truly understand his message of unconditional love for humanity." L'Arche materials (video and audio) deal with themes of bullying, creating an inclusive school environment, and welcoming interfaith diversity. For more information, contact education@larche.ca.

Families Are Important Resources (FAIR) Project The FAIR project, a three-year initiative to foster civic engagement and community participation among parents in several Toronto neighbourhoods, wrapped up in December. To read more about the findings from the project, visit: www.familyserVICEToronto.org/programs/quhd/fair.html.

The Healthy Schools Recognition Program is back! It encourages students, parents, school staff and community partners to work together in activities

that help create a healthy school environment. Healthy students are better able to learn, and are more likely to lead healthy, active lives in the future. Over the last two years, more than 1,700 schools pledged to undertake over 4,600 healthy activities. Participating schools receive a pennant and a pledge certificate. Schools should apply by April 16, 2009. The application form and success stories can be found at www.ontario.ca/healthyschools.

Upcoming Events

January 12, 2009: Dufferin District School Council will be hosting a meeting at Island Lake Public School in Orangeville, starting at 7 p.m. For more information, contact Tony Maxwell at tmaxwell@headwatersmedia.com.

February 12, 2009: The Central Committee for Catholic School Councils (Dufferin-Peel CDSB) presents an evening with Joe Rich – family counsellor, TV personality and author, at the Mississauga Convention Centre at 7 p.m. For more information, contact Sandi Ham at [Sandi.ham@dpcdsb.org](mailto:Sandra.ham@dpcdsb.org).

Every Tuesday at 9 p.m., Ontario-wide, *Your Voice* is a live online forum for parents, hosted by Cheryl Jackson and presented by TVOntario. Chat with guest experts and other parents by phone and email about new topics every week. Visit www.tvoparents.com.

Questions about school? Give us a call! People for Education Parent Support Line: 1-888-534-3944

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