

for immediate release

## **Watershed moment for education in Ontario**

*Annual Report finds improvements, but calls for action on old recommendations*

Toronto (May 22, 2008) – **Manitoba** has funding for “community schools”, **Saskatchewan** supports Schools<sup>PLUS</sup>, and **Quebec** has created “Community Learning Centres.”

But a new report released today finds that Ontario lags behind many other parts of Canada when it comes to integrating services in schools, integrating schools into municipal planning, and providing leadership to ensure that schools can act as community hubs.

### **Action needed on years of reports and recommendations**

According to the report, Ontario schools are dealing with a “perfect storm” of demographic and social factors. And they are perfectly positioned to have an impact on communities across the province. But they are hamstrung by a lack of policy and leadership.

Declining enrolment, an increased reliance on private money in public schools and ongoing funding issues can be used as an opportunity for revitalization and renewal.

Forty years ago in Ontario, the Hall-Dennis report recommended it. Six years ago, the Rozanski commission said it had to happen. It’s happening in schools in other parts of Canada and North America. But, according to People for Education’s *Annual Report on Ontario’s Public Schools*, Ontario has yet to implement recommendations that would allow schools to support a range of services for children, youth and families. And it has yet to provide the provincial leadership and policy to ensure inter-ministerial and inter-governmental cooperation or to allow schools to be an integral part of provincial and municipal planning.

### **Annual Report contains data from school surveys**

People for Education’s Annual Report on Ontario’s Public Schools includes results from surveys sent to the province’s 4,800 English, French and Catholic schools, and information from Ontario’s Ministry of Education, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and Statistics Canada.

### **Among the findings:**

- **Academic Success**
  - Ontario has more university graduates as a percentage of the population than any other province.
  - Among English-speaking provinces, in national tests, Ontario’s 13-year-olds came first in math, reading and writing and second in science.
- **Enrolment**
  - Overall enrolment in Ontario elementary and secondary schools has declined by nearly 90,000 students since 2002.
  - Elementary schools are, on average, 9% smaller than they were in 1997, and secondary schools are 11% smaller than in 2001.
  - The percentage of students attending private schools has increased only marginally from 4.8% in 2001, to 5.2% in 2005, the last year for which data is available.
- **Fundraising**
  - Ontario schools raised a total of \$596 million last year – through a combination of things like parent fundraising, fees for materials and athletics, vending machines and donations – a \$29 million increase from the previous year.

- **Class size**
  - Class sizes are smaller in the primary grades (only five boards have been unable to reach the provincial cap); in grades 4 to 8; and in compulsory English classes in high schools (or compulsory French classes in French-language schools).
- **ESL**
  - 48% of elementary schools have ESL students and no ESL teachers, an improvement since last year, but still far higher than in 1999, when 33% had ESL students and no ESL teacher.
- **Special Education**
  - There are fewer students waiting for special education supports, but 1/3 of elementary schools report they have identified students who are not receiving recommended support.
  - The ratio of Special Education teachers to Special Education students has improved slightly in elementary schools. It is now 29.8 to 1. But in secondary schools the ratio remains high at 52.5 to 1.
- **Reading, literacy and libraries**
  - An Access to Information request shows that the province is spending approximately \$75 million per year on the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, but EQAO data show that the percentage of students in Grade 6 who say the “like to read” has declined 15% since 2002.
  - Research shows students are more likely to enjoy reading when they are in schools with teacher-librarians.
  - Since 1997, there has been a 25% decline in the percentage of Ontario elementary schools with teacher-librarians.

## **The potential in public schools**

For the first time this year, the organization singled out ten schools to examine how they had changed over the last ten years. The schools, from all parts of the province, provide a glimpse into the real-life day-to-day challenges and triumphs in Ontario’s schools.

“We have some great examples of schools doing extraordinary things,” says Gay Stephenson, research analyst for the organization. “But in many cases they’re doing it against the odds. They’ve provided things like the ‘Wednesday Morning Drop-in’ to support their isolated community, but it is often hard for schools to come up with the funding or the staff. And many of them are very worried about the effects declining enrolment will have on them in the near future.”

Helen Bryce, principal of Earl Grey Senior Public School, one of the *Ten Schools Over Ten Years* in the report, says the role of principal has changed dramatically, but that in her school she was able to use creative funding and leadership to bring back one program. “It was a tragedy that we lost our Design and Technology program, and the teachers and I were determined to get it back,” she says. “Now our kids feel more prepared for high school and students who had been struggling now have a class that engages them and allows them to succeed.”

## **Recommendations**

Schools are closing, boards are dealing with dramatic enrolment declines, schools are raising hundreds of millions of dollars to augment their budgets.

The report recommends that the province act now:

- Implement recommendations from the 2002 Rozanski report for a cabinet-level committee to coordinate services for families, children and youth;
- Integrate school buildings into municipal planning;
- Provide funding, policy and support to integrate services in schools for families and communities;
- Develop provincial policy for private money in public schools; and
- Establish a forward-thinking vision for Ontario’s education system in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Backgrounder

### People for Education Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools May 2008

People for Education's *2008 Annual Report on Ontario's Public Schools* shows that schools are thriving in some areas and that most students are doing very well academically compared to previous years, and compared to students in other countries.

#### Ten years of keeping track

People for Education has been keeping track of programs and resources in Ontario schools since 1997. Every year, surveys have been sent to school councils and principals in each of the province's 4,800 French, English and Catholic publicly-funded schools, covering everything from class sizes to fundraising.

This year's *Annual Report on Schools* includes survey results from over 800 schools and information from Ontario's Ministry of Education, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and Statistics Canada.

#### Highlights from the 2008 Annual Report

##### School sizes

- Since 1997, the average enrolment in elementary schools has declined by 9%.
- In secondary schools the decline is 10%.

##### Class sizes and split classes

- Class sizes are down overall for the fourth year in a row in elementary and secondary school.
- Three-quarters of elementary schools report they have split grade classes. In those schools, on average, 36% of the classes are split.

##### Fundraising

- The amount boards' report in their "school-generated funds" was \$596 Million in 2006/07 – a \$29 million increase in one year in the total amount parents, students and teachers fundraise and schools raise through fees, donations from local businesses and things like vending machines and cafeterias.
- Fundraising per school ranges from \$0 per school to \$500,000.
- 45% of elementary schools fundraise to pay for improvements to the school grounds
- The top 10% of fundraising schools raise as much as the bottom 80% put together.

##### Special Education

- Approximately 15% of Ontario students are in some form of special education.
- One third of elementary schools report they have identified students who are not receiving recommended support.
- On average, there is one special education teacher for every 29.8 special education students in elementary schools, a ratio that has improved steadily for the last four years, but which is still higher than the ratio of 22.4 to 1 found in 2001.
- In secondary schools, the ratio of students to teachers is 52.5 to 1, a number which has not improved since last year and continues to be higher than the ratio in 2001.

##### Libraries

- 60% of elementary schools have a teacher-librarian, a fairly steady improvement over the last four years, but still far lower than in 1997/98 when 80% of elementary schools had them. The vast majority are part-time.
- Libraries with teacher-librarians are open and staffed just over 3 hours per day.
- Students in schools with teacher-librarians are more likely to report they like to read.

- EQAO surveys show the percentage of students in Grade 6 who say they “like to read” has declined 15% since 2002.

### **The arts in schools**

- 48% of elementary schools have music teachers, continuing an upward trend established over the last five years, but still below 1997/98 levels when 58% of schools had them.
- Many schools rely on parents to supply the funding for arts programs and enrichment. This year, 47% of secondary schools and 53% of elementary schools report fundraising for arts enrichment in their schools.
- A majority of secondary schools charge fees for Art classes, and nearly one third charge fees for music.

### **Physical education**

- 44% of elementary schools have a physical education teacher, after six years of decline, this is a steady increase since 2003.
- 25% have full-time phys ed teacher, fairly steady increase.
- Though schools report they are doing their DPA, they also report it is difficult to get done, because of space issues, teacher capacity and time.

### **ESL**

- 33% of English-language elementary schools have ESL teachers – a slight improvement over the last two years, but far below the 41% that had them in 98/99.
- 48% of elementary schools have ESL students and no ESL teachers, up from 33% in 99/00, but slightly better than last year.

### **Support Staff**

- Psychologists
  - 37% of elementary schools have regularly scheduled psychologists, up steadily over last five years, but still lower than 1997, when 56% had them. There are large regional variations, for example, 64% of GTA schools have regularly scheduled psychologists, compared to 6% of northern schools.
  - Only 17% of high schools have regularly scheduled psychologists, a substantial drop from 2001, when 29% had them.
- Social Workers
  - 42% of elementary schools and 58% of secondary schools have regularly scheduled social workers, an improvement over the last few years.
- Child and Youth Workers
  - 35% of elementary and 38% of secondary schools have regularly scheduled youth workers – a fairly steady improvement.
- Speech Language Pathologists
  - 42% of elementary schools have speech language pathologists, fairly steady over last few years, but lower than it was in 97/98 when 50% had them.

### **Grade 7 & 8**

- Only 7% of schools have Design and Technology teachers, compared to 22% in 1998/99; and 14% have guidance teachers, compared to 25% in 1997/98.
- Family Studies is disappearing altogether – only 5% of schools have these programs.

- 30 -

For more information please call:

People for Education 416-534-0100  
Annie Kidder (cell) 416-508-1484