

## WANTED: BROADER GOALS – BOLDER VISION

*Parent group says schools need to be at the centre of policy and of communities*

For immediate release

Toronto (May 31, 2010) – People for Education released its 13<sup>th</sup> *Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly-funded Schools* today at Ryerson Community School in downtown Toronto.

The report had one overarching theme:

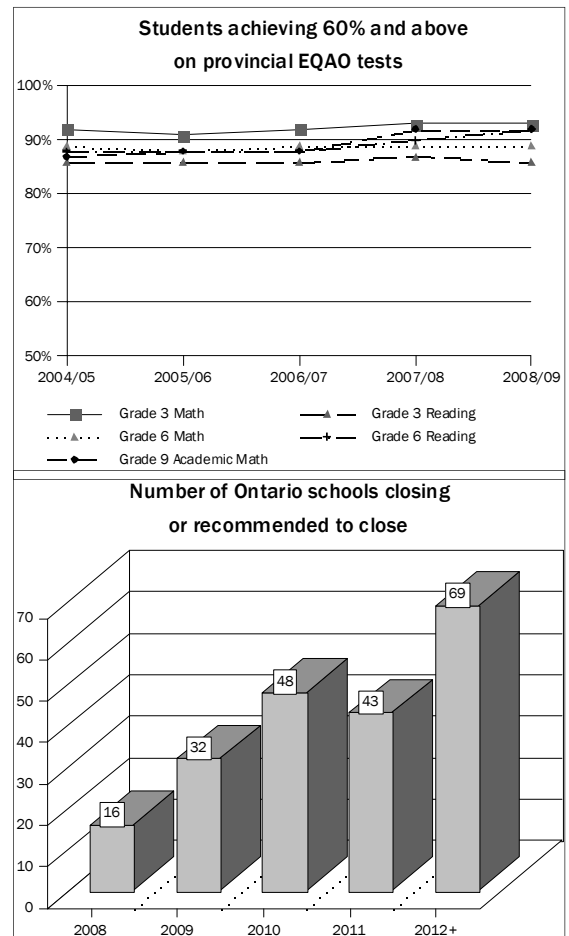
Ontario's public education system needs broader goals and a bolder vision to ensure schools equip all students to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The report is based on results from People for Education surveys distributed to every school in the province and consultations across the province, as well as data from the Ministry of Education, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and research from across Canada and around the world. It recommends Ontario develop policy to support schools' connections to communities, to municipal planning and to all of the interconnected services that affect children, youth and families.

"Our public schools must be part of an eco-system that provides children and families with everything they need," says People for Education Executive Director **Annie Kidder**, one of the report's authors. "It's time for Ontario to catch up to other provinces and countries, and situate schools at the centre of a cohesive vision for all children, young people, families and communities."

### Among the findings:

- Student achievement in Ontario is high. Nearly 90% of Ontario Grade 3, 6, and 9 students score 60% or higher on standardized tests – a result that has changed very little over the last five years. But a strict focus on targets for test scores has limited the system's ability to provide students with the broad education needed for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Ontario lags behind other provinces and countries in supporting community schools and integrated services. New Brunswick's *When Kids Come First* strategy will fund 75 community schools by 2012; Quebec funds *Community Learning Centres* – schools with a range of services open 7 days a week; in Manitoba, under the *Community Schools Partnership Initiative*, schools qualify for funding to act as hubs; and B.C. is investing \$30 million for nine model schools in nine districts to be built as *Neighbourhoods of Learning*.
- Declining enrolment has resulted in regional disparities in access to music programs, well-resourced libraries, health and physical education teachers and psychologists and social workers. It is also the cause of the highest school closing numbers since the late '90's – 160 schools are closing or recommended to close in the next three years; a further 139 are under review.
- Results of province-wide consultations show that Ontarians want schools for the 21<sup>st</sup> century that have strong links to their communities and that graduate



students with diverse skills and capacities; able to think critically and creatively, deal effectively with change, work with others and deal with risk and ambiguity.

### **Schools at the centre**

The report concludes that Ontario has the potential to lead the way in Canada, particularly if it moves forward quickly with the Child and Family Centres envisioned in the report from Charles Pascal, the Premier's Special Advisor on Early Learning.

According to Kidder, "Moving ahead on the Child and Family Centres is an important step in restructuring our education system so that it works not in isolation, but instead within a coherent, connected, integrated system of resources, programs and supports for families and children. The other step we must take is to develop a broad definition of success that includes a range of qualitative and quantitative goals. Then we will be able to build a new funding formula and new integrated structures that will allow us to make those goals a reality."

### **A range of groups support the new vision**

**Arsema Berhane**, co-chair of *Ontario Youth Matter!*, says, "Young people want schools that provide a broad education, but we also need schools that are connected to the other things that affect our lives – employment, mental health supports, recreation programs, health and social services, cultural programs etc. We want better coordination and more collaboration, and we want accountability for a broad set of goals within a framework for youth."

A parent from northern Ontario, **Aimee Gerdevich**, who also serves as President of the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, is pleased that the report points out that northern schools don't always get a fair shake. "Our children deserve to have librarians in their schools and access to physical education teachers and desperately need timely access to mental health supports. We have unique needs and challenges all across our northern schools and communities; many of those needs are not met in the current funding formula and our students/children cannot wait."

"We're seeing a plateau, not just in the test scores, but also in things like the percentage of schools with music teachers and teacher-librarians," says **Kelly Gallagher-Mackay**, a doctoral candidate from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto. "But some fundamental issues are not being addressed. Schools are having a hard time balancing the drive for higher test scores with the provision of a broad education, and we continue to lack coordinated connections to important services in the community."

**Camille Quenneville**, Director of Policy and Communications at Children's Mental Health Ontario, agrees. "For too long, we've left families to navigate the system on their own where it comes to children's mental health. We know that students are far more likely to succeed in school when they are well. But families, teachers, and peers are forced to deal with the effects of a children's mental health system that is difficult to access, disconnected from the school system and often only responsive in emergencies. That has to change if we want all of our children to have an equitable chance for success in school and in life."

The report was delivered to the Minister of Education and to Ontario's Premier. The full report is available at [www.peopleforeducation.com](http://www.peopleforeducation.com)

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**PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION**  
**2010 ANNUAL REPORT ON ONTARIO'S PUBLICLY FUNDED SCHOOLS**

## **Background**

### **FINDINGS FROM THE REPORT:**

#### **Student success:**

- Ontario has more university graduates as a percentage of the population than any other province in Canada.
- The percentage of Grade 3 and Grade 6 students receiving level 2 or better (60% or above) on EQAO reading and math tests has remained steady at between 86% and 89% since 2004/05.

#### **Declining enrolment/school closings:**

- This year, the average elementary school in Ontario has 314 students, 14% fewer than when Ontario's Education Funding Formula was developed in 1997/98.
- 32 schools closed across the province in 2009. A further 160 are slated or recommended to close over the next three years, representing the largest increase in school closings since the late 1990's when school boards reacted to funding cuts by closing over 250 schools.

#### **Health and physical education**

- According to Active Healthy Kids Canada, only 14% of Ontario children and youth meet appropriate physical activity levels.
- In Ontario, 40% of elementary schools have a Health and Physical Education teacher, but in northern Ontario that number falls to 29%.

#### **Mental health**

- Between 15% and 21% of children and youth have a significant mental disorder, and 27% of Ontario secondary schools and 37% of elementary schools have regularly scheduled access to psychologists, an improvement over the last seven years.
- Only 2% of northern elementary schools have psychologists regularly scheduled, compared to 65% of GTA elementary schools.

#### **Special education**

- Between 2004/05 and 2008/09, there was a 38% increase in the percentage of Grade 6 students receiving special education support.
- The number of students on waiting lists for special education services or support has declined from approximately 48,000 in 2002/03, to 32,000 this year.

#### **School libraries**

- Only 57% of elementary schools have a teacher-librarian, most of them part-time, compared to 80% in 1997/98.
- 68% of secondary schools have a teacher-librarian, either full- or part-time, compared to 78% in 2000/01.

#### **The Arts**

- 46% of elementary schools have a Music teacher, compared to 58% in 1997/98.
- In 2008/09, 54% of secondary schools charged fees for art classes and 23% charged fees for music classes.

#### **English language learners**

- Every year, Ontario welcomes more than 100,000 newcomers to Canada, and two-thirds of Ontario elementary schools have students who are English-language learners (ELL).
- 26% of English-language elementary schools with 10 or more ELL students have no ELL teacher, an increase from 22% with no teacher last year.

#### **The early years**

- 35% of elementary schools with onsite child care report they have a system to keep track of children with special needs as they leave child care and enter the school system.
- 5% of English-language elementary schools outside of Northern Ontario have kindergarten programs that are full-day every day, compared to nearly 100% of French-language elementary schools.

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