

A NEW GOAL FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION: SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

People for Education Annual Report
on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2010



THE
ANNUAL
REPORT ON
ONTARIO'S
PUBLICLY
FUNDED
SCHOOLS
2010

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DATA FROM THE SURVEY

If specific research data from the survey is required, it can be provided for a fee. Elementary school data has been collected since 1997, and secondary school data has been collected since 2000. Please contact info@peopleforeducation.com.

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People for Education is a registered charity working to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

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A NEW GOAL
FOR PUBLIC
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SCHOOLS AT
THE CENTRE

HIGHLIGHTS: QUICK FACTS

MEASURES OF SUCCESS

- The percentage of Grade 3's receiving level 2 or better (60% or above) on EQAO reading tests has remained steady at between 86% and 87% since 2004/05.¹
- The percentage of Grade 6 students receiving level 2 or better (60% or above) on EQAO mathematics tests has remained steady at between 88% and 89% since 2004/05.²
- Ontario has more university graduates as a percentage of the population than any other province in Canada.³
- 94.6% of Ontario students attend publicly-funded schools, a percentage that has remained relatively steady since 2001/02⁴

DECLINING ENROLMENT

- The average elementary school has 14% fewer students than it did in 1997/98 when the funding formula was developed.
- 160 schools are closing or recommended to close from 2010 onward.⁵

HEALTH AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- Only 14% of Ontario children and youth meet appropriate physical activity levels.⁶
- 40% of elementary schools have a Health and Physical Education teacher.
- 64% of elementary schools in the GTA report having a specialist Health and Physical Education teacher, compared to 29% of elementary schools in northern Ontario.

MENTAL HEALTH

- Between 15% and 21% of children and youth have a significant mental disorder.⁷
- Only 2% of northern elementary schools have psychologists regularly scheduled, compared to 65% of GTA elementary schools.
- 48% of secondary schools have regularly scheduled child and youth workers, a steady improvement since 2002/03 when only 20% had regular access.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

- Between 2004/05 and 2008/09, there was a 38% increase in the percentage of Grade 6 students receiving special education support.⁸
- Since 2002/03 there has been a 33% decline in the total number of elementary and secondary students on waiting lists for special education services or support.

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.⁹
- 67% of English-language 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.

INTRODUCTION

Strong schools linked to strong communities have the potential to be centres of change, innovation and equity.

For the past thirteen years, People for Education has been using our annual School Survey to keep track of the effects of policy and funding changes on Ontario's publicly-funded schools. Our goals are to engage parents, educators and the broader public in thinking about education policy, and to shine light on the wide range of factors that affect students' chances for success in school and in life.

This year, along with the surveys, we engaged in a new process.

We travelled the province talking to parents, students, educators, community members, university and college faculty, early childhood educators, police, business leaders and others. We asked them to imagine a school for the 21st century: "What would it look like? How would kids learn? How would you define success?"

Our findings from the surveys and the dialogues tell us that schools are just one part of an eco-system of policies and supports that have an impact on children and families. For too long we have thought of public services in individual 'silos', managed by different levels of government, and different departments or ministries within those levels.

This report presents the data on programs and resources in schools, but it also examines definitions of success, integrated services for families as they exist in other provinces and countries, and a potential vision for Ontario schools in the 21st century.

The report is called *Schools at the Centre* because we believe it is time to situate schools as a core element in an eco-system of influences on Ontario's families, its communities and its overall well-being.

THE STATE OF SCHOOLS IN 2009/10

Ontario's publicly funded education system is one that we can all be proud of. Virtually all parents choose to send their children to our publicly funded schools, and those schools are filled with people and programs focused on helping ensure that every child is successful.

As measured by test scores—provincial, national and international—the vast majority of Ontario's students are doing well in school. But Ontario lacks an overall vision for education beyond test scores and graduation rates.

Librarians, for example, can instil a love of reading in students, yet school libraries are now less likely to have teacher-librarians. Arts and sports programs play a key role in engaging students in school, yet the majority of elementary schools have no music teacher, and parent fundraising for the arts and sports continues to create inequities among schools.

Ontario's schools could act as hubs in every community, but there is little funding or policy to support their broader use, or to coordinate planning between municipalities and school boards. This year's data show that schools are closing at a rate not seen for over ten years.

Coordination and policy are also issues in the area of children's and teenagers' mental health. Between fifteen and twenty-one percent of children and youth have issues with their mental health, and schools are the ideal location to serve these young people, but we have no cohesive framework to support them.

Poverty too, is an issue for many of Ontario's children. Though some changes were made this year to funding that is meant to provide support to low-income students, boards continue to struggle to provide things like counsellors, social workers and extra help for the students who need it most.

TOWARD A BROADER VISION

In 2002, the Premier promised a formal review of the funding formula in 2010. That review has yet to materialize. But perhaps it is more important that Ontario first establish broader overall goals for children and families. Once we have established those goals *then* we can develop a funding formula that will allow us to achieve them.

DEFINING SUCCESS

...if schools and school systems have a broader vision, and express it in their teaching and curriculum, their students will become more interested in and committed to changing the world.

Andy Hargreaves, *The Fourth Way of Change* ¹⁰

To ensure that a public education system is truly excellent requires some consensus about what schools can and should accomplish. What are our goals? What constitutes true success?

TARGET-SETTING

Unlike some other jurisdictions with a wider range of success measures, the government of Ontario has set three overall targets for its public education system: 75% of grade 6 students achieving Level 3 (approximately 70–79%) or higher on standardized tests in reading, writing and math; 85% of high school students graduating after five years; and a reduced gap between low- and high-achieving students, again measured by test scores.

It may be difficult to reach the first two targets (the date set to achieve the first target was 2007/08 and for the second, 2010/11), but other, broader signs of success are evident:

- Ontario has more university graduates as a percentage of the population than any other province in Canada.¹¹
- Among all the English-speaking provinces, in testing of a random representative sample of 13-year-olds, Ontario came first in math, reading and writing, and second in science.¹²
- In international OECD tests of 15 year-olds, Ontario students scored among the top five in reading and science and in the top ten in mathematics.¹³
- Just under 95% of all students attend publicly-funded schools.¹⁴

ACCOUNTABILITY VS. SUCCESS

In jurisdictions around the world, there is an assumption that governments and publicly-funded systems (health, education etc.) must be accountable to the public for the vast amounts of money we spend on them. This often leads governments to develop narrow standards to measure the success or failure of a whole system. But accountability measures can have unintended consequences. What we

measure, rather than what we want to achieve, becomes the focus of the system. In health, for example, we measure wait times for hip replacement surgery; as a result, medical professionals report that other non-priority surgeries, which might be preventative in nature, are left to last.

In Ontario, one of our accountability targets is bringing 75% of grade 6 students up to Level 3 in math, reading and writing. To achieve this, provincial literacy and numeracy specialists are currently focusing on students who are just below that level. The thinking goes “if we could just get the top 10% of level 2 students up to level 3, we will have achieved our target.”

But what becomes of all the other aspects of education?

In a knowledge economy, many argue that social intelligence skills, creativity and capacity for innovation are paramount.¹⁵ Will focusing on the top 10% of level 2 students really get us what we need? Is that really the extent of our goal for our education system?

LOOKING BEYOND TEST SCORES

Other jurisdictions have taken a different approach to defining and measuring success. They recognize and include in their overall goals, things like strengthening family and community connections, access to health and service supports, and seamless learning and care while children are young. Among other things, they measure students’ access to arts and sports, hands-on learning including new information and communications technologies, and their sense of safety.

In **New Brunswick**, the mission for public education is to have “each student develop the attributes needed to be a life-long learner, to achieve personal fulfilment and to contribute to a productive, just and democratic society.” Test scores are only one measure of success among many. Among other things, New Brunswick also tracks, students’ sense of safety, their access to arts, trades and technology courses and the number of community schools established.¹⁶

In **Finland**, a country with 100% literacy and a world-renowned education system, there is no system-wide standardized testing, the arts are compulsory throughout

secondary school, and all students study a very broad curriculum in every school.¹⁷

Along with testing, **Singapore** urges its educators to “Teach Less, Learn More” and mandates that all teachers must have 10 percent of their time free to come up with independent lessons designed to enhance student motivation and creativity.¹⁸

England has long been a model for Ontario in the development of its test-driven Literacy and Numeracy strategy, including a strong emphasis on using test score ‘targets’ as a key part of education policy and politics. Test scores in England have been used to rank and “name and shame” low-achieving schools, and as part of a school choice program that actually increased achievement gaps.

However, England has not relied only on test scores as an indicator of school quality—or aspirations. Seven years ago *Every Child Matters* was established as an engine for reform.¹⁹ *Every Child Matters* set broad goals for children’s success: be healthy, enjoy and achieve, achieve economic well-being, stay safe, and make positive contributions. A focus on these goals led to structural changes in government.

England now has a combined Department for Children, Schools and Families which oversees education as well as other services for children and families. Local authorities have an enforced duty to cooperate and there is joint training across professions. School inspectors consider a range of factors in their evaluations, including things like school climate and schools’ cooperation with community agencies.

A broad definition of success that includes a range of qualitative and quantitative goals, allows policy-makers and citizens to more easily establish what’s working and what needs to change to make those goals a reality.

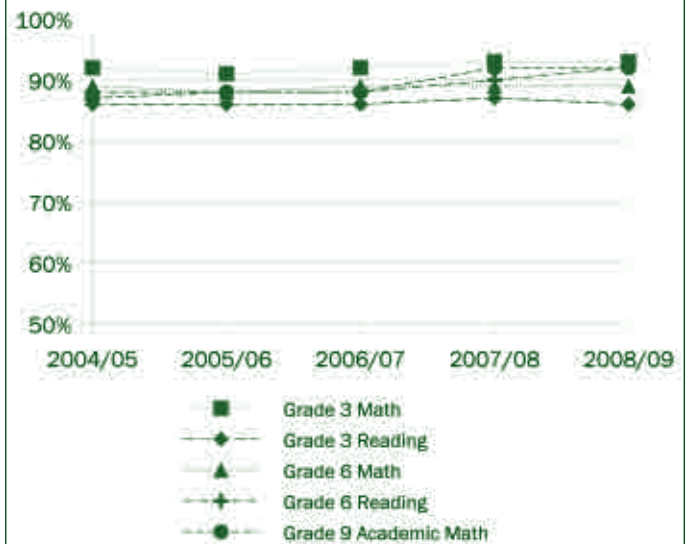
HOW STUDENTS SEE SUCCESS:

To garner academic success, we also have to acknowledge social success.

A successful public education system is one that can define a school not only by a grade average or test results, but by the richness of its learning environment. The successful school is a place where students learn academic skills, as well as life skills and those intangible skills that cannot be tracked on a literacy test. The successful school makes students of all backgrounds feel welcome, it gives students responsible ownership through leadership activities, engages students in sports, promotes creativity, and builds a student body that loves to learn.

Ontario Student Trustees Association

Students achieving 60% or better on provincial EQAO tests



Over the last five years, overall scores on provincial Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests have changed very little.²⁰

DECLINING ENROLMENT

Community schools have the potential to open minds, change lives, enhance and expand the learning experience, and build a community of support.

Saskatchewan Community Schools Association ²¹

Next year, Ontario schools will have nearly 80,000 fewer students than they did five years ago.²²

School boards react to declining enrolment in a number of ways: they close schools, compete for students by adding special programs and/or schools, or, in some cases, support low-enrolment schools by renting out space in the school, turning excess space into revenue.

Boards take these actions because approximately two-thirds of education funding is tied to enrolment.²³

SIZE MATTERS

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. Average secondary school sizes have also declined, with 9% fewer students than they had in 2000/01, when we started collecting data on them.

While a number of adjustments have been made to education funding in Ontario, much of it is still allotted on a per pupil basis, and much of it continues to assume enrolments more like those of 1997 than those of 2010.

SCHOOL CLOSINGS

Across the province, 160 schools are currently closing or recommended to close. A further 139 schools are undergoing Accommodation Reviews to decide which schools should close and which should stay open.²⁴ This represents the largest increase in school closings since the late 1990's when school boards reacted to funding cuts by closing over 250 schools.

Because enrolment is not declining in every board, school closings tend to be clustered in rural or northern boards or in urban centres. Enrolment is rapidly increasing in Ontario's suburban boards, such as Peel, Dufferin-Peel, York Catholic, York Region, Halton Catholic, Halton District and Durham.

QUICK FACTS

- Ministry of Education records show that enrolment has declined by more than 10% in over half of Ontario's boards over the last five years.
- The average elementary school has 314 students, compared to an average of 365 in 1997/98.
- There are 804 students in an average secondary school, compared to 879 students per school in 2000/01.
- 32 schools closed in 2009, and a further 160 are slated or recommended to close from 2010 onwards.

RECOMMENDATIONS WAITING FOR ACTION

In February 2009, the Declining Enrolment Working Group working group appointed by the Ministry of Education found that declining enrolment is a result of the declining birthrate, and, in some boards, a demographic shift to suburban areas. They reviewed the data on private school enrolment and found it has increased only marginally over the last ten years.

Some of the recommendations from the Working Group have been acted on, including rules for improved planning mechanisms and more cooperative planning among boards. Others have yet to be implemented, including recommendations that the provincial government:

- require all services and agencies it funds to consider using available school space before they build, purchase, or lease other space;
- create a Transition Adjustment Fund which would allow boards to use savings from closing schools to enhance, improve or upgrade schools or programs which are receiving the students from the closed schools;
- provide funding for Special Education based on need, rather than overall enrolment. The funding model currently assumes that as enrolment declines, the

number of special education students will decline proportionally—but this is not the case, the proportion of students requiring special education support is actually on the increase.²⁵

NO PROVINCIAL PLAN FOR COMMUNITY SCHOOLS OR MUNICIPAL/BOARD PARTNERSHIPS

There is currently no provincial mechanism to support mutual planning between municipalities and schools boards, integrated services in schools, or schools as community hubs.

School boards must offer unused space in schools to coterminous boards, community agencies or municipalities, but they are only funded for the “school” portion of the building. They receive little to no funding to support developing school buildings as hubs of services or as assets to the community, and neither municipalities nor government-funded agencies are required to use space in schools.

School boards do receive funding to subsidize the costs of caretakers and upkeep of schools so that not-for-profit groups can use schools after school hours at low, or no, cost. There is also funding to cover the cost of approximately one outreach coordinator per board to support community use, but the funding is insufficient for supporting shared planning or coordinating the integration of supports and services for school communities. Evidence from other jurisdictions and from pilot projects in Ontario shows that to truly support schools as hubs of communities, there must be at least a part-time staff person at the school to coordinate people, services and community outreach.²⁶

WHAT SCHOOLS TOLD US...

Things we would like to see: support for music programs in small, rural schools; support for smaller schools outside of funding formula (i.e., extra funding for custodians, secretary, non-teaching supervision); rural school transportation subsidies for activities in rural areas (i.e., sporting events, theatrical events, community events, cultural events); subsidy to make before- & after-school care achievable.

Elementary school in the Trillium Lakelands DSB

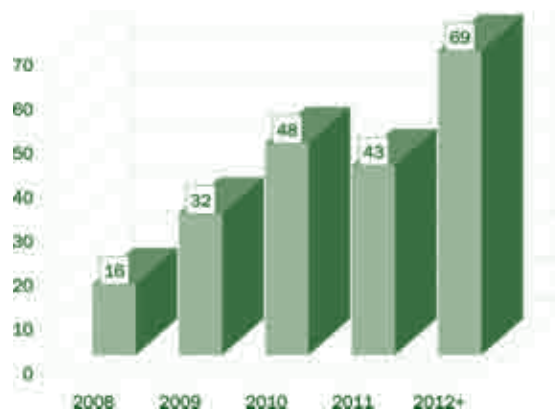
We experienced a difficult beginning to the school year as the formula for generating staff does not serve the needs of a smaller school adequately (you need to be able to run somewhat smaller classes to sustain program).

Secondary school in the Avon Maitland DSB

This year, due to declining enrolment, I lost a classroom teacher and both my French and Special Education has been reduced to half-time.

Elementary school, Renfrew County CDSB

Number of Ontario schools closing or recommended to close



Results from Accommodation Reviews show the largest increase in school closings since the late 1990's²⁴

SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

Quebec's Community Learning Centres are community schools supported by the provincial government. Each CLC has a local coordinator (funded by the province) who helps foster cooperation and integration of a range of programs and services to help meet the needs of students, their families, and the wider community. A CLC is open to students, families, and the community before, during and after school, seven days a week, all year long. One CLC reports that the local school coordinator costs the province approximately \$46,000 per year, but she has helped bring in over \$200,000 in funding to the school community.

HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

We have a huge problem with physical inactivity among schoolchildren around the globe and we should take action.

Regina Guthold of the World Health Organization in Geneva (March 2010)²⁷

Only 14% of Ontario children and youth meet appropriate physical activity levels.²⁸

In Canada, approximately 17% of children are overweight. In the teen years, this level climbs to 31% of boys and 25% of girls, nearly double the percentage of overweight teens in 1981.²⁹

Regular physical activity is essential for healthy growth and development. In adolescents, regular physical activity not only helps to maintain a healthy body weight, but it has also been shown to lower levels of anxiety and depression. The overwhelming majority of evidence shows regular exercise boosts academic achievement—even if it means less time teaching ‘academic’ subjects.³⁰

SCHOOLS’ ROLE IN CHILDREN’S HEALTH

Young people spend the majority of their time, and most of their formative years, in school. Thus, schools can play a key role in promoting physical activity, healthy eating and overall health, including mental, sexual and social health. But to do so, they need to make it a priority.

This year, less than half of Ontario’s elementary schools have a specialist Health and Physical Education (H&PE) teacher (either full- or part-time). Even in schools with a specialist, only 53% report that he or she teaches all students in the school.

The province has mandated that all elementary students engage in at least 20 minutes of daily physical activity (DPA) during instructional time, but 10% of elementary schools report students get their DPA during recess. Nearly three-quarters report challenges in delivering the DPA, including things like requiring more resources/supports, more teacher-training and “more time in the school day.” A number of schools raised concerns that pressure to achieve better test results and cover all of the priority requirements in the elementary curriculum may be having an adverse effect on their ability to provide strong Health and Physical Education programs and ensure all students are physically active.

QUICK FACTS

- Ontario education policy requires students to take some form of Health and Physical Education (H&PE) classes for at least nine years.
- 40% of elementary schools have a specialist H&PE teacher, a result that has fluctuated slightly over the last two years.
- Elementary schools with full-time H&PE teachers have, on average, 420 students. The average elementary school has 314 students.
- 72% elementary schools report additional supports are needed to provide provincially mandated Daily Physical Activity.
- 64% of elementary schools in the GTA report having a H&PE teacher, compared to 29% of elementary schools in Northern Ontario.

New Health and Physical Education curriculum has been developed for elementary schools, but it needs qualified, supported teachers to bring it to life. The new curriculum is comprehensive in its approach to Health and Physical Education and covers all aspects of young people’s health—from mental health and well-being, to sexual health, to physical fitness.

After two years of consultation, the province had planned to introduce the new curriculum in the fall of 2010, but a few groups raised concerns about the sex education component of it, so the new curriculum will be introduced in stages. The Ministry of Education has also introduced new healthy food and beverage policy for schools, to be implemented in the fall of 2011.

FUNDRAISING AND FEES FOR SPORTS

Not all Ontario students have equitable access to physical activities, particularly extra curricular sports. Data from People for Education surveys of school councils to be released in the fall of 2010 show that nearly half of Ontario elementary and secondary schools fundraise for sports. Last year's school surveys showed that some secondary schools charge fees as high as \$500 for extra curricular sports activities. Both things affect students' access to physical activities.

GOING BEYOND THE SCHOOL

Schools can play a role in creating opportunities for young people to be active after school, by providing safe places to play and access to organized activities and care. Some administrators have used community use funding to partner with municipalities or community organizations to provide after school recreation programs. But there continues to be a tremendous shortage of after school programs for school-aged children and youth.³¹

Public Health can also play an important role. Ontario's regional Public Health units are mandated to work with schools to promote and support all facets of student health, and in some parts of Ontario, schools have been able to partner with agencies like Public Health to provide health services and expertise. Unfortunately, there is no province-wide policy to support the coordination of health and recreation programs in school communities—either during the school day or after school.

WHAT SCHOOLS TOLD US...

We have ample resources however DPA is often skipped due to time constraints in the classroom.

Elementary School, Grand Erie DSB

Fitting everything required into a school day is very challenging to teachers.

Elementary School, Grand Erie DSB

Although we are doing the 20 minutes of DPA on days students don't receive Phys-Ed, this cuts into the delivery of other curriculum. The ministry needs to either reduce curriculum & mandatory programming requirements like DPA, or lengthen the school day.

Elementary School, Toronto DSB

DPA time cannot realistically be integrated continually with other subjects. It needs to have its own time in the schedule without taking away time from other subject areas. Doing aerobic exercises in a classroom is unsafe. More gym facilities are needed.

Elementary School, Grand Erie DSB

SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

In the City of Hamilton, schools and Public Health work together. Public Health provides an array of resources, including staff, to schools for programs such as: "active recess", where older children are trained to run games and sports for younger students; growth and development classes for students in grade 7 and 8; after-school-healthy cooking clubs; and bullying prevention programs.

INTEGRATING MENTAL HEALTH

School [is] the most underdeveloped site for effective health care of any in the country.

The Senate Commission on Mental Health ³²

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.

Between 15% and 21% of children and youth have a significant mental health disorder which affects their daily lives.³³ Fewer than a quarter receive treatment.³⁴ Depression, anxiety, and ADHD—the most prevalent conditions—can be treated, but the resources aren't in place to ensure that children are identified or receive services. In spite of this acute shortage of services, there has been a steady erosion of core funding to children's mental health agencies over the past decade ³⁵ and Ontario's system had its rating downgraded from 'good' to 'fair' between 2007 and 2009 by the Canadian Paediatric Association.³⁶

SCHOOLS AND MENTAL HEALTH

In 2006, the Canadian Senate Commission on Mental Health recommended that all schools have school-based mental health teams to help children and families navigate what is often a complex and difficult to access system.³⁷ In this way, schools could act as hubs of mental health services for children and youth, with teams that included social workers, psychologists and child and youth workers.

But in reality, most school board psychologists spend the majority of their time on assessment, leaving little time to provide actual support; and social workers are spread very thin. This year in Ontario, less than half of secondary schools have regularly scheduled access to either psychologists or child and youth workers, and just under two-thirds report any scheduled access to a social worker. Very few schools report having several of these resources clustered together, as envisioned in the idea of a 'school team'.

QUICK FACTS

- 27% of secondary schools and 37% of elementary schools in the province have regularly scheduled access to psychologists, an improvement over the last seven years.
- 65% of GTA elementary schools have regularly scheduled psychologists, compared to 2% of northern elementary schools.
- 48% of secondary schools have regularly scheduled child and youth workers, a steady improvement since 2002/03 when only 20% had regular access.

The situation is far worse in the north, where almost all the mental health or social services are available on an on-call basis; and approximately one-third of elementary schools have no access to a psychologist, 30% have no access to a social worker, and almost half have no access to a child and youth worker. What is particularly alarming is that these numbers, always the worst in Ontario, are falling dramatically. Six years ago, 20% of northern elementary schools reported having regular access to a social worker; now it has fallen to 8%.

Schools are also the best places for improving prevention and early intervention. "Where better to work than where the kids are?" asks Russ Larocque, at Algoma Family Services (AFS) in Sault Ste Marie. There, school boards and community agencies work together to support children and young people in the locally developed "Algoma Model."

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

Mental health issues have a deep impact on children's ability to learn and on their ability to participate in the school community. When waitlists for services are long—or services are unavailable—schools, like families, have no choice but to cope with the problems with limited support and knowledge. Teachers are often the first people to whom youth turn for help.³⁸ However, research shows that teachers

have very low levels of knowledge about mental health issues, and mental health has not been a priority for professional development.³⁸

MAKING SCHOOLS HUBS OF SUPPORT

When schools are part of a broader network they can be more effective in response to children’s mental health needs. But co-operation across sectors is challenging. Under-resourced agencies with unclear and often competing mandates sometimes feel under siege, and operate within what the Director of the Provincial Centre for Excellence in Children and Youth Mental Health calls a kind of “garrison mentality”⁴⁰ where cooperation doesn’t necessarily appear to be the best, and certainly not the easiest, choice.

Ontario has introduced the Student Support Leadership Initiative, to improve collaborative planning, coordination and referrals between school boards and community agencies, particularly in relation to mental health. But this \$3 million initiative is in no way comprehensive, unlike reforms in other jurisdictions.

Great Britain, for example, has a combined Ministry for Children, Young People and Families with responsibility for education, social services and children’s health.⁴¹ All schools (86% by 2006)⁴² are mandated to provide ‘extended services’ including ‘quick and effective’ referrals to necessary services. There is a human resources strategy in place to support a ‘Common Assessment Framework’ to be used by education, health and social services personnel and there are multi-professional teams mobilized around children and families with complex needs.

Ontario continues to be without an overall framework for children and youth which would provide a structure to support integrated planning, services and goals.

WHAT SCHOOLS TOLD US...

Need more support for students with mental health issues and families that need support as well.

Elementary School, Toronto DSB

...We are an urban high school with some challenging inner city characteristics. We are fortunate to have a highly professional and caring staff whose sole aim is to support all students. Having a social worker—full time—would make a significant change in how we address students’/parents’ needs.

Secondary School, Toronto DSB

Like most schools in our County we need more support and understanding of mental health and special ed issues.

Elementary School, Simcoe County Catholic DSB

Part of the problem is that we are still critically underserved ...the waiting lists are still as long as they’ve always been. So it’s like we say “Hey, I know where you can get some help with this...ahhh...but you have to wait 6 months.”

Secondary School, Huron-Superior CDSB

SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

Together with a number of community partners, including the public and Catholic school boards, Algoma Family Services in Sault Ste. Marie has developed The Algoma Model, a joint initiative to deliver comprehensive, integrated services for children and youth. The model includes things like addiction workers in schools, access to crisis intervention and early prevention programs, and a web portal that identifies all the services offered in the district.

The WRAP (Working to Reinforce All Partnerships) program in the Bluewater District School Board, operated in partnership with Keystone Child and Family Services, includes teams made up of behaviour specialists from the board, and social workers and community workers from the agencies. They work with students and their families—most recently, there is a new WRAP team for children under 6 years old.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

[we]...need to work towards “schools for all”—institutions which include everybody, celebrate differences, support learning, and respond to individual needs.⁴³

UNESCO. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education

There are fewer students on special education waiting lists this year, but school boards continue to report they must ration services, deal with funding shortfalls, and figure out how to support an ever-increasing proportion of students with increasingly complex needs.⁴⁴

Despite increases in funding, and advice from a number of Working Tables and Expert Panels, disagreements remain about the best methods for funding special education and about the best ways to identify and serve students. The Ministry of Education is currently working to build in “measures of variability” that will be more responsive to changing numbers and the actual need in each board.⁴⁵

WAITING LISTS DOWN BUT RATIOS REMAIN HIGH

Funding for special education has increased over the last few years, but so too has the proportion of students with special education needs. This has led to higher student to teacher ratios. In secondary schools, the ratio increased since last year, from 51 students per special education teacher, to 58.5. In elementary schools the ratio has remained relatively steady since 2002, at 30 to 1.

The majority of schools (over 86%) continue to report waiting lists for services, but there are far fewer students waiting now than in 2003—a decline from approximately 48,000 to 32,000 elementary and secondary students.

There are a number of reasons for the reduction in special education waiting lists, including declining enrolment, one-time funding from the Ministry of Education to reduce backlogs, and a shift in school and board policies about the need for formal assessments. School boards have made a conscious effort to reduce the number of assessments and the need for formal identification of students as a requirement for receiving special education services.⁴⁷

Waiting lists shrink when fewer students are referred for assessment. But it is hard to know if the need for services has actually changed.

QUICK FACTS

- Approximately 15% of Ontario's elementary school students receive some form of special education support—ranging from adjustments in teaching methods in a regular class to withdrawal to special classes that meet particular needs.
- 30% of elementary schools report that not all identified students are receiving services, down from 39% in 2003/04.
- The percentage of students with special needs achieving at or above EQAO standards has increased in reading, writing and mathematics.⁴⁶

PROS AND CONS OF FORMAL IDENTIFICATION

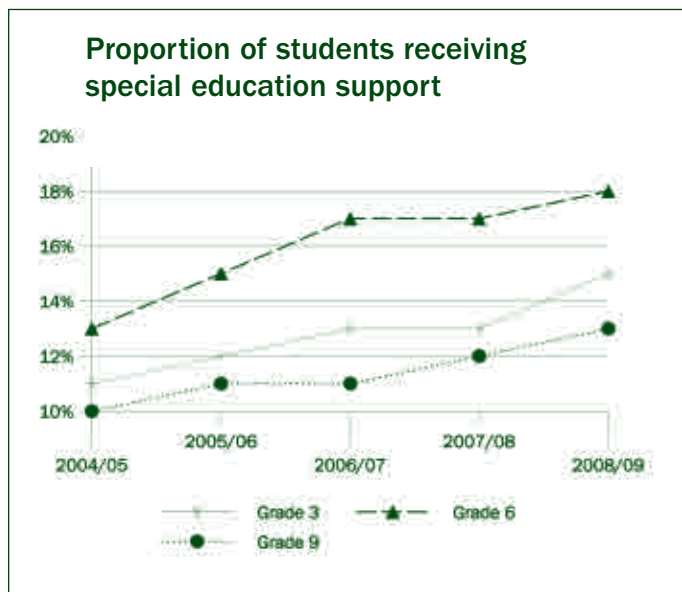
Boards and schools have considerable discretion to decide which students should go through the formal process set out in the *Education Act* (the Identification and Placement Review Committee, or IPRC) and which ones could have a less-formal Individual Education Plan (IEP). Schools may also provide services to students without any official process.⁴⁸ A significant number of students (26,257 in 2007-08) are served without any formal identification.⁴⁹

In his 2008 report, Ontario's Auditor-General described one board which, instead of formally assessing so many students, transferred resources from the identification process to hiring more special education teachers. He said classroom teachers were happy with the special education support they received. While this evidence might support less formalization, he also found that province-wide, less than fifty per cent of IEPs were completed, there was little evidence of parents being kept up to date, and decisions and benchmarks were poorly documented. Gaps in written records create problems both in terms of assessing progress, and for transitions as a child moves between teachers or schools.⁵⁰

Tipping the balance away from process and paperwork and towards children's learning is appealing, particularly if teachers are supported and empowered in the process. But there are catches: most importantly, the IPRC process is how students are formally identified as exceptional. Formal identification triggers a legal obligation on boards to provide special education programs;⁵¹ it also allows families to challenge assessments or placements they consider unsuitable for children.

KEEPING TRACK

If it is increasingly the policy to limit IPRCs in favour of less formal IEPs, it will be important to keep track of how students are doing, and in particular potential differences between students who have gone through a formal assessment and the students with less formal IEPs. It will also be important to track the types of services children are receiving, to ensure that we do not create new inequities in the system—where children whose parents know how to work the system have better services because they push for their rights using IPRCs.



Data from the EQAO shows a substantial increase in the proportion of students receiving special education support.⁵²

WHAT SCHOOLS TOLD US...

Due to the fact that we know we can usually only test/place approximately six students per year, we do not keep a waiting list. We prioritize students at the start of each year, looking at last year's data as well.

Secondary School, Peel DSB

In the north, distance is a big concern. Our speech therapists, autism spectrum disorders workers travel 3 hours to visit students at this school. They try to come every 6 weeks but weather sometimes interferes. Currently five students need speech therapy. However, there is easily double that number who have serious speech concerns that seem to be interfering with progress.

Elementary School, Superior-Greenstone DSB

The number of identified Special Education students at [our school] continues to increase. As a result, resources are stretched. Support via commensurate increase in Educational Assistant/Special Needs Assistant allocation has not been forthcoming, even though needs of students become increasingly challenging (e.g., autistic students). Intensive support via core programming is extended only to IPRC'd Special Education Students. Close to half of [our school's] population have IEPs.

Secondary School, Toronto DSB

All the energy we're putting into early identification [of very young children] falls flat when they get into school.

Nora-Lynn McIntyre, VOICE for Hearing Impaired Children

SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

The Upper Grand District School Board has introduced an early Learning Needs Assessment to ensure very young children are seen as early as possible for assessments and to develop early interventions as soon as possible when they begin school. The Board also has follow-up sessions for teachers after children have assessments, to select goals that will make the biggest difference for children's academic success.

SCHOOL LIBRARIES

I have always imagined that Paradise will be a kind of library.

Jorge Luis Borges

When librarians and teachers work together, students achieve higher levels of literacy, reading, learning, problem-solving, and information and communications technology skills.⁵³

The role of school libraries goes far beyond simple support of the curriculum. A staff member who is both a teacher and a librarian has been shown to have a significant effect on students' enjoyment of reading and their achievement on provincial tests.⁵⁴

A positive attitude towards reading is associated with reading more and seeking deeper knowledge, and developing deeper conceptual understanding—all factors strongly associated with higher academic achievement, as well as active social and civic engagement.⁵⁵ EQAO surveys of Ontario's student population show that in 2008/09, 61% of children in grade 3 "like to read."⁵⁶ As they get older, facing more independent learning, children are even less likely to report they like to read—only 56% of those in grade 6 reported that they liked reading.

ONTARIO LIBRARIES CONTINUE TO LOSE GROUND

In 2009/10, just 57% of elementary schools had a teacher-librarian on staff—and most (81%) of those worked part-time. Even in secondary schools—where libraries are larger, and where students tend to be engaged in more complex research and more wide-ranging learning—only 68% of schools have a teacher-librarian working full- or part-time; a number that has been falling fairly steadily from a high of 80% in 2003-04.

Some schools without teacher-librarians have library technicians (32% of elementary and 28% of secondary schools). Technicians have specialized knowledge in developing, organizing and maintaining library collections but they are not trained as educators, and only some of them interact with students.

QUICK FACTS

- Results from the EQAO survey of students in grade 6 show 56% say they "like to read."⁵⁶
- Only 57% of elementary schools have a teacher-librarian, most of them part-time. This is a slight increase since last year, but far below 80% in 1997/98.
- 90% of elementary schools in the GTA have a teacher-librarian full- or part-time, compared to 15% of elementary schools in northern Ontario.
- Just over half of secondary schools have a full-time teacher-librarian.

LIBRARIES AS KNOWLEDGE HUBS

In the 21st century, it is vital that students become information-literate. We operate in an increasingly technology-driven environment, and libraries often act as both computer labs and information hubs. New types of virtual resources and search powers create opportunities for much greater equity of access to information, and adaptive technology allows a wider range of learners to take advantage of information as it becomes available.

When students have access to both a well-equipped school library and teachers with expertise in navigating the virtual world of knowledge, they no longer need to be near the source of the information. Students in smaller and remote schools are less limited by physical collections and can have the same access to knowledge as students in urban centres.⁵⁷

Unfortunately, it is those small or remote schools that are least likely to have staffed libraries. In Northern Ontario, only 15% of elementary schools have a teacher-librarian; in Eastern Ontario only 26% of schools have access to that key resource. Without the staff to help them navigate the virtual world, students in these areas are disadvantaged in terms of their opportunities for inquiry-based, information-rich learning.

LIBRARIES, LEARNING AND COLLABORATION

Libraries have the potential to support everyone in the school as learners, including the teachers. An Ontario study of exemplary school libraries found that the teacher-librarian can have a “broader educational role within the school, providing support for classroom teachers through partnering and collaboration, supporting all students through shared teaching and cross-curricular support or integration of curriculum.”⁵⁸

Key support roles can include accessing international language resources to support home language literacy, and establishing high-interest activities to engage reluctant readers. They can facilitate teacher learning by providing resources, coaching and supporting the implementation of technology in classrooms, and by using the library’s space for teachers to work together.

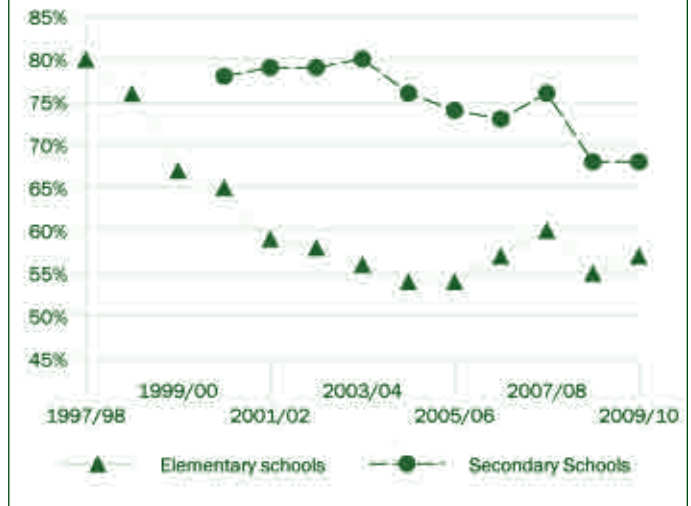
Ontario’s school libraries could be the information, learning and collaboration hubs of every school, but they require appropriate staff and support to live up to this potential.

WHAT SCHOOLS TOLD US...

Our school currently does not have a library. An extension was added to the school about 3 years ago. This included a new gym, a music room, and a library. The former principal, upon consulting with senior administration, decided to “house” all music resources in the Girls’ change-room and the library books in the Boys’ change-room. These resources are no longer used effectively nor are they catalogued or tracked. The reason for making these changes was in order to have more space.

Elementary School, DSB, Ontario, Northeast

Percentage of schools with teacher-librarians, full- or part-time



*Students in schools with teacher-librarians are more likely to report they like to read*⁵⁹

SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

The library at Agnes MacPhail Public School in Toronto is a hub of collaboration for all of the teachers and students in the school. The teacher-librarian has the students go with her to choose books and other materials for the library’s collection, and the library boasts one of the largest comic and graphic novel collections in the province. Recently all of the school’s Grade 7 and 8 students participated in an “Ultimate History Project” housed in the library, which they have been asked to share with social studies teachers from across the province.

THE ARTS

It's obvious that not every drama student will win an Oscar, not every music student will play at Carnegie Hall. What is obvious is that by giving students the necessary tools to learn and practise art, you help them attain skills that will allow them to be successful in life.

Montreal-based composer Darren Fung ⁶⁰

In March 2009, the European Parliament passed a resolution recommending that arts education be compulsory at all school levels.⁶¹

THE IMPACT OF ARTS EDUCATION

Educators and thinkers over the years have outlined the influence of the arts on students' ability to learn, on their capacity for articulate expression and creative thinking, and on their facility with solving complex problems. The arts provide students not only with direct skills in music, drama, fine art and dance, but also with core competencies that affect all other forms of learning and growth, including:⁶²

- Creative expression
- Concentration
- Self-discipline
- Hand-eye co-ordination
- Teamwork
- Leadership skills
- Analytical skills
- Responsibility
- Communication skills
- Goal setting
- Cultural and historical awareness
- Respect and collaboration

For many students, schools provide their first, and for some, their only, experience of the arts.

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ARTS IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

Less than half of Ontario's elementary schools have specialist music teachers on staff. A further 28% have itinerant music teachers who may be in the school a few times a week for programs such as band or strings, or acting as the music teacher. Only a very small proportion of music teachers are full-time, and generally in very large schools.

There are even fewer schools with specialists in the other arts. In schools with grades 7 and 8, only 18% report having a visual arts teacher, and 8% have a drama teacher.

QUICK FACTS

- 46% of elementary schools have a music teacher; the vast majority are part-time. This is an improvement since 2003/04, but still well below the 58% of schools reporting music teachers in 1997/98.
- In 2008-09, 54% of secondary schools charged fees for art classes and 23% charged fees for music classes.
- 18% of schools with grades 7 & 8 have a visual arts teacher.
- 36% of schools in Northern Ontario report having a specialist music teacher on staff, either full- or part-time.

NO FUNDING FOR ARTS SPECIALISTS

Ontario has strong and detailed arts curriculum, and in elementary school the arts are a compulsory subject. But it is difficult for non-specialists to teach all aspects of the curriculum, and there is no specific funding for arts specialists.

In elementary schools, funding for specialist teachers comes from teacher preparation time. Every teacher must have time during the school day to prepare lessons, contact parents and work with other teachers. During that time, another teacher covers the class. Thus, funding for preparation time is actually funding for other teachers.

Over the last five years, increases to preparation time have resulted in funding for an average of approximately two full-time specialists per school. But that funding must be divided among a range of specialists, including core French teachers, literacy teachers, and music, physical education, guidance or other specialist teachers. Schools with more students (and thus more teachers) produce much higher amounts of preparation time and thus are much more likely to have specialists.

INEQUITABLE ACCESS TO THE ARTS

Students' access to rich arts programs often depends on the ability of their parents to fundraise, or, in secondary school, the flexibility of students' schedules and their capacity to pay fees.

Most schools rely heavily on parent fundraising to support the arts. This year, over 40% of elementary and secondary schools reported raising funds for the arts.⁶³ Last year, 23% of secondary schools charged fees for music classes and 54% charged fees for art classes. Students who attend schools in more affluent areas, where fundraising amounts tend to be higher, are thus more likely to have access to the arts enrichment.

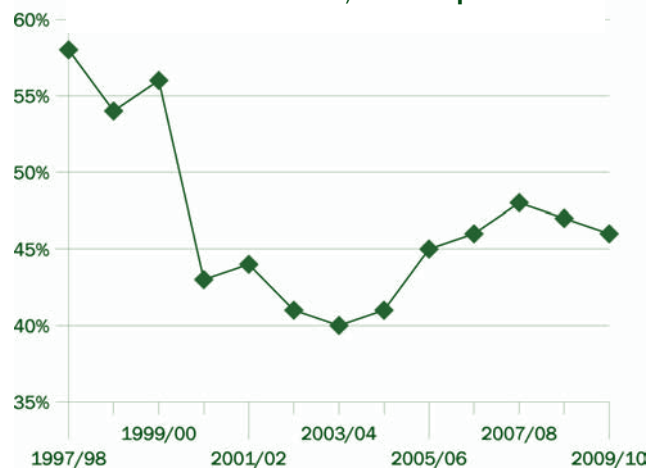
While there is no funding targeted specifically for the arts in schools, boards do receive a Program Enhancement Grant funded at a rate of \$9,400 per school. Boards may spend the grant on arts or any other enrichment, but there is no requirement on how these funds are spent. Boards may spend it on sports or arts, but they may also simply pool the funding with their general revenue. There is currently no provincial information available to show how this funding is spent.

WHAT SCHOOLS TOLD US...

I have a dynamic music teacher who is brand new to our school this year, but with declining numbers, she will possibly be declared surplus come June. Who will teach instrumental music to the students now? The school has been very fortunate to have a strong music program over the years, but declining numbers and no security has this teacher possibly leaving me. I know that the staff and community will be most upset. How are we supposed to support the music curriculum when these teachers are not protected?

Elementary School, York Region DSB

Percentage of elementary schools with music teachers, full- or part-time



SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

The Canadian National Arts and Youth Demonstration project showed that the benefits of community arts programs went beyond the youth they were meant to serve. The delivery of community-based arts programs (for the most part in schools) also resulted in an improved perception of the neighbourhood and an increased sense of belonging for the whole family.⁶⁴

SUPPORT FOR NEWCOMER STUDENTS

*The teachers have been supporting and appreciating me. I was the only person in grade 5 who wore cultural clothes. The teachers liked what I wore. They talked to me and asked me questions. I liked telling teachers about my culture and religion it made me feel more comfortable and welcome.*⁶⁵

Sidra, age 12; 2nd year of learning English after moving to Canada from Pakistan

Every year, Ontario welcomes more than 100,000 newcomers to Canada.⁶⁶

Outside of our First Nations population, Canada is a country of immigrants, and Ontario is the province where most immigrants choose to settle. Our high immigration rate helps to stimulate the economy and enrich Ontario's cultural and social life. In some parts of the province, particularly the GTA, over half of the population come from other countries.

Many immigrants come here to ensure a brighter future for their children, and our schools can play a key role in smoothing the transition to life in Canada for these families.

SCHOOL POPULATIONS CHANGING

Ontario has English-language and French-language schools, and in both systems there are students who need language support. In English schools, we refer to English Language Learners (ELL), and in French schools, students are enrolled in Actualisation Linguistique en Francais/Perfectionnement du francais (ALF/PDF) programs.

In English elementary schools this year, 67% report having ELL students, a steady increase from 43% in 2002/03. In GTA elementary schools, that number increases to 94% of the schools. Fifty-one per cent of all English secondary schools have ELL students.

In schools with only one or two ELL students, support is usually provided by a classroom teacher. But this year's results show that many schools with a higher percentage of students requiring language support do not have specialist ELL teachers. Province-wide, 51% of elementary and 33% of secondary English-language schools have ten or more ESL students. Of the elementary schools, 26% with 10 or more students have no ELL teacher, an increase from 22% last year.

Several schools commented that more ESL students are entering the system at Stage 1 (minimal to no English), and that more Canadian-born students are starting school without having learned English at home.

QUICK FACTS

- 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.
- In French-language elementary schools, an average of 20% of students are French Language Learners, a proportion that has increased steadily since 2003/04.
- In provincial EQAO tests, the gap between ELL students and their counterparts is shrinking but remains wide. In Grade 3 math, ELL students are 8 percentage points behind, and in Grade 6 reading the gap is 20 percentage points.⁶⁷

Parents who attended school in French or who have come to Canada from a French-speaking country, have the right to send their children to French-language schools. But many of their children need support in French, particularly because they often live in English communities. In French-language elementary schools, 77% have ALF/PDF students, and 90% of those report having 10 or more students; 43% have ALF/PDF teachers.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN HIGH SCHOOL

Younger newcomer children often adapt quickly to school in Canada and learn English with relative ease. However, students who arrive as teenagers find it more challenging to function academically in English and face more social barriers to inclusion. Comments from the surveys show increasing need for support for newcomer students, with principals reporting more gaps in their education and more social/emotional needs beyond language support.

Survey respondents raised concerns that immigrant students are not choosing ELL courses offered at high school. Students may not be selecting these programs for several reasons:

- they over-estimate their ability in English;
- they want to avoid any stigma that may attach to studying ELL courses; or
- parents with language barriers may not have a full understanding of the course selection process and the options available to support their children's learning.

ELL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

One of the issues raised by immigrant parents is that their children are being inappropriately placed in special education instead of ELL programs. Comments from the surveys show there may be some legitimacy to their perception, as some schools indicated that they run their ELL program as part of the special education program. This may be due to the way funding for ELL works. The province provides funding based primarily on the number of years students have been in Canada. It does not provide funding based on students' proficiency in English or French.

In 2007, a new policy to support English language learners was introduced by the province.⁶⁸ But because the new policy does not make it mandatory to spend ELL funds on ELL programs, cash-strapped boards may use these funds for other programs. The Ministry of Education does require that all special education funding be spent on special education programs, so ELL students may be placed in these programs as a way of providing them with support.⁶⁹

WHAT SCHOOLS TOLD US...

ELL courses are offered on the course selection sheet however students do not choose the courses.

Secondary School, Toronto DSB

The 1.5 ELL teachers are servicing all of the Rainbow [board] elementary schools.

Elementary School, Rainbow DSB

85% of our students are ELL students. The self-contained classes allow us to have manageable numbers of students in our primary and junior grades.

Elementary School, Toronto DSB

We are seeing an increase in the number of ELL students and the students are Stage 1 versus being more proficient.

Elementary School, Toronto DSB

SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

Settlement Workers in Schools-Hamilton (SWISH) supports recently arrived newcomer families with children in school. The services are free, and settlement workers, who are often immigrants themselves, provide newcomer families with information about navigating the education system, English courses, employment, housing, Canadian law, and health care. They help families find translation and interpretation services and family-related financial assistance and they help build collaboration between families, students and school staff.

THE EARLY YEARS

...early childhood centres are more effective when they function as a community hub of interconnected services for families, and act as a frontline mechanism for child well-being, screening and prevention.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development⁷⁰

Canada has been criticized for having a “patchwork” of early childhood education and care services.⁷¹ Ontario is no exception—schools in our survey report a wide variety of arrangements for the education and care of young children.

A NEW VISION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

In June 2009, Dr. Charles Pascal, the Premier’s Special Advisor on Early Learning, released his report outlining an “Early Years Vision for Ontario.”⁷² The report made recommendations for:

- an Early Years Framework to be overseen by the Ministry of Education and to include a vision and policies for children from birth to age twelve;
- full-day, every-day early learning programs for four- and five-year-olds (including access to seamless programs before and after school, school holidays and summer);
- before and after school, school holiday and summer programs for six- to twelve-year-olds;
- new professional development requirements in early childhood development for teachers teaching the early learning program;
- Child and Family Centres to provide a range of services and programs for families and their children, including child care, access to health services, early assessment services, adult education, etc.; and
- a new integrated framework that would support partnerships between municipalities, school boards and other children’s service providers.

This fall, the Government of Ontario began implementing some of the recommendations. As an initial step, it committed to bring early learning into publicly-funded schools over the next five years, offering full-day, every-day kindergarten to all four- and five- year-olds. Progress is slower for the provision of extended-day and full-year programs. Boards will be required to offer some form of before and after school

QUICK FACTS

- 5% of English-language elementary schools outside of Northern Ontario currently have all-day kindergarten.
- 35% of elementary schools with on-site 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.
- 13% of English schools with on-site child care report that there is coordination on curriculum between the school and the childcare program, compared to 24% of French Schools.

programs for four- and five-year-olds to complement the all-day learning, but requirements for extended day programs for six- to twelve-year-olds, year round programs for all children, and the on-site Child and Family Centres have not yet appeared.

ESTABLISHING THE BASELINE—THIS YEAR’S SURVEY

This year, People for Education introduced a new section in our survey focusing on the expanded Early Years Framework. This data will be a baseline as schools undertake significant changes. Already, the data reflect a wide variety of practices. Schools in Northern Ontario and in the French-language systems are much more likely to have full-day programs for four- and five-year-olds. In many cases, these programs (some of which are funded) were put in place either to strengthen students’ French-language skills or to shore up students’ readiness to learn before entering grade 1.

- 35% of English-language elementary schools have a school-based child care centre, compared to 80% of schools in French Boards.
- Currently, 5% of English-language schools outside Northern Ontario report having a full day kindergarten program.

- 33% of English schools have daily before and after school programs, compared to 62% of French schools.
- 21% of English schools report having some family support programs, compared to 18% of French schools.
- 33% of English schools with on-site childcare report they have a system to keep track of children with special needs coming out of childcare, compared to 46% of French schools.

NOT JUST FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Next year, 600 schools will offer full-day learning to four- and five-year-olds during the school day. Teachers and Early Childhood Educators will work together to provide enriched, play-based learning opportunities for young children. Research suggests that classroom-level integration by these groups is a challenge, requiring significant time and commitment.⁷³ The province and teachers' federations are providing support for professional development this summer for both ECE's and teachers, but the professional development will not necessarily be provided to both groups together.

Economists have found that the cost/benefit of investment in early childhood education programs is higher than any other public investment.⁷⁴ But to maximize the potential for making a difference in the early years, families require easy access to services, from health screening and early identification, to supports for young children with special needs, recreation programs and opportunities for adult learning.

WHAT SCHOOLS TOLD US...

I am a great believer in partnerships and community schools. I brought Early Years programs into some schools previously and added before and after school programs in others. [Our school] would be an excellent place for partnerships as we are in an isolated area, and bringing partners into school would benefit students/parents/partners.

Elementary School, Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB

We have a *Best Start* program contained in our school. We work closely with them in sharing the curriculum being covered in the kindergarten program. We invite the *Best Start* to some school-based presentations when they are age appropriate. We also have access to a Family Resources Center to provide support to families as needed.

Elementary School, Simcoe-Muskoka CDSB

SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

In Bruce Public School in downtown Toronto, a pilot project called Toronto First Duty provides full seamless day child care and education. Teachers and ECEs work together to provide a continuum of services including parent support, parent child literacy and playgroup activities, flexible childcare and referrals to services like counseling. In and around London, school boards work with Early Years Centres, community and health agencies to deliver a four-part kindergarten readiness program now in more than 72 schools.

SCHOOLS AT THE CENTRE

*The curriculum of education for the twenty first century must be transformed radically...
The arts, sciences, humanities, physical education, languages, and math all have equal
and central contributions to make to a student's education.*

Sir Ken Robinson ⁷⁵

Ontario citizens want schools that are more flexible, more open to the outside world and with broader definitions for success.

A VISION FOR ONTARIO

In October 2008, People for Education launched a series of dialogues held in Kingston, Toronto, Thunder Bay, Sudbury and online. Participants included parents, students and student trustees, young business and community leaders, university and college faculty, teachers, principals, police, early childhood educators, community organizations, city officials and others.

The dialogues had two overarching goals: fostering new thinking about the links between education and the rest of our society; and collectively creating a renewed and forward-thinking vision for public education in Ontario.

Participants were asked to imagine a school for the 21st century: What would it look like? How would kids learn? How would you define success?

A CONSENSUS ACROSS THE PROVINCE:

1. Connections

Strong two-way connections between the school and its community are essential. Schools must be the centre of a locally developed, inter-connected network designed to meet the community's needs. Depending on the community, schools might include education, health, recreation, arts programs, seniors' centres, community kitchens and neighbourhood programs as well as a range of community services.

The 21st century school will also be connected to a global community, both through technology and through strong links developed between schools and universities and colleges. Connections must also be nurtured with local businesses and with community and businesses leaders. Thus schools become hubs, not just of communities, but of broad learning energized by the world outside of school.

2. Environment

The environment and overall design must be recognized as a key component of a 21st century school. The building should provide students and the community with innovative, flexible and accessible learning and community spaces. These schools will act as hubs of green energy projects, home to experiments in advanced technologies, and labs for eco projects.

3. Atmosphere

A 21st century school has an atmosphere that supports experimentation and collaboration. The diversity of the population is not only embraced, but celebrated, and there is space and time for dialogue, for exploring new ideas and for challenging the status quo. The school is truly inclusive, in that everyone—all students, their families and members of the community—feels a sense of belonging.

The 21st century school will recognize, value and support human connections among the students, between teachers and students, and between parents and teachers.

Students who participated in the dialogues talked particularly of the importance of their relationships with teachers and how important those human connections are to their success.

4. Ways of Learning

The 21st century school will be broad in its scope and flexible in its approaches to learning; it will recognize and embrace the fact that all students have different learning styles. Self-directed learning, experiential learning such as co-operative education and internships, and individualized learning will all be part of the school's regular programming. The school will also place a high value on critical and creative thinking and recognize the importance of social intelligence skills.

The curriculum will be broadly-based and include strong programs in the arts, physical education, and social sciences as well as science, reading, writing and mathematics.

All dialogue participants, from the Emerging Leaders Network of Toronto's City Summit Alliance to the community members in Sudbury, Thunder Bay and Kingston, agreed that schools of the 21st century must support students' desire to learn from a range of people. In their vision for the future, these schools will use the expertise that exists both inside and outside of the school, in the community, in business, trades, the arts and technology to support student learning.

5. Success in school and in life

The goal of these 21st century schools will be to have students graduate with diverse skills and capacities: able to work with others; confident, centered, and able to deal with risk and ambiguity. Students leaving these schools will have the capacity to think creatively and deal effectively with change.

Surprisingly, participants consistently identified happiness as an important component of any description of success. They want students to leave school happy, with a sense that they are able to navigate their grown-up lives.

In the 21st century, it is imperative to establish a wide-ranging definition of success both for individual outcomes and for the public education system itself.

Measures of success for the individual may include the achievement of goals set in individualized learning plans, student-led portfolio assessments and self- and peer-assessments. Students will work toward goals that are academic, social, character, extra-curricular and community-service based.

For the system, participants want accountability, but the measures for accountability need to be broader and reflect the new definition of success. Potential tools include random sample curriculum-based testing; surveys of students, parents and teachers about their satisfaction with their schools and with the education system as a whole; and tracking students' participation in extra-curricular activities, attendance, and punctuality.

Because the goals of public education are connected to the overall health of society, there must be a set of measures to determine the effectiveness of the education system over the long-term, tracking students' success five or ten years after graduation.

WHAT DIALOGUE PARTICIPANTS TOLD US...

The building itself should be sustainable, visibly efficient, low energy, with great technology and be a showcase for water usage. The classrooms should be modular so that they can be reconfigured.

Emerging Leaders Toronto City Summit Alliance

Schools should function as the central node of a social network for students and parents and be connected to society.

Social Planning Council (Kingston)

There should be flexibility in the curriculum so students have a chance to explore creativity and be critical thinkers.

Community Meeting (Thunder Bay)

Success should include ensuring that students are successful not only while they are at school, but after they graduate.

Ontario Student Trustees' Association

WHAT OTHERS TELL US...

Make classrooms agile. A learning space that can be reconfigured on a dime will engage different kinds of learners and teachers.

*Bruce Mau, designer and author, The Third Teacher: 79 Ways to Use Design to Transform Teaching & Learning*⁷⁶

Ongoing community dialogue is important in ensuring that support offered by the school remains relevant to its community, whose needs may change over time.

*National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services, UK*⁷⁷

What if decisions about education policy were made by first asking, What works best for children? What if the education, health, housing, public safety, recreation and business systems within our communities aligned human and capital resources to provide coordinated service to kids and families? What if policymakers at all levels worked with educators, families, and community members to ensure that we as a society meet our social compact to prepare children for their future rather than our past?

*ACSD, international educational leadership organization*⁷⁸

METHODOLOGY

This is People for Education's thirteenth annual survey of resources in Ontario elementary schools, and tenth in secondary schools.

The survey acts as an information tool for parents and Ontario citizens. It focuses on the quantifiable resources available in schools across the province, tracking any changes which occur. The resulting data provides an annual picture of the effects of education policy and funding shifts.

Surveys were mailed to every Ontario elementary and secondary school principal in October 2009, with an explanatory letter requesting that they complete it. Translated surveys were sent to French-language schools. Reminders were faxed in December and January. Surveys could also be completed online.

Confidentiality of all individual school responses is guaranteed. Where direct quotes are used that might identify a school, permission has been obtained. Only aggregated data is released.

This year's sample of 922 elementary and secondary schools equals 19% of the province's schools and 19% of its 1,910,585 students. Schools in 70 of the province's 72 school boards participated. 56% per cent of the elementary and secondary schools in the sample also participated in 2008/09.

ANALYSES AND CALCULATIONS

The analyses in this report are predominantly based on descriptive statistics (such as frequency distributions) and two-way cross-tabulations. The data in this study was analysed using SPSS 17. Calculations have been rounded to the nearest whole number where necessary, and therefore, do not always add up to 100%. Where appropriate, comparisons by school size, region or year-over-year are noted.

Where significant shifts were found in year-over-year comparisons, the trends were confirmed by a comparison with the smaller sample of repeating schools. Some results, such as special education waiting list totals, were extrapolated to include the total number of elementary or secondary schools in Ontario, using average amounts as the basis for the calculation.

Student-to-staff ratios were calculated for schools which reported both the total number of students and the full-time equivalent for staff positions. The student-to-staff ratio for the province is the mean of the distribution of the student-to-staff ratios of reporting schools.

REGIONAL VARIATION

To make regional comparisons, schools were sorted into postal code regions and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The Greater Toronto Area includes all the schools in Toronto (M postal code) and schools in the Regional Municipalities of Durham, Peel, Halton and York (all part of the L postal code). The Central Region, for the purpose of regional comparisons, includes all the schools in the L postal code, minus the schools in the Greater Toronto Area.

Copies of the French and English 2009-10 school surveys (sent to principals) and the school council survey are available on our website www.peopleforeducation.com/school_survey

OTHER PROVINCIAL DATA

Since People for Education first started to survey schools and report on its findings, other data has become available. In particular, over the past four years, the Ministry of Education has been collecting data from all schools and districts through a program called Ontario Student Information System (OnSIS). People for Education has been in discussion with the Ministry to better understand what information is collected through OnSIS, and how it might compare. At this point, OnSIS data is not available from the Ministry for any time later than 2008, and neither the data nor the questions are published in a form readily accessible to the public. The OnSIS questions, definitions and data were not received by People for Education prior to the publication of this report.



Schools were sorted according to their postal codes into geographic regions. The distribution of respondent schools is representative of their distribution in Ontario.

Postal Code Region	% of schools in survey%	of schools in province
Eastern (K)	17%	18%
Central without GTA	10%	15%
GTA	35%	35%
Southwestern (N)	21%	21%
Northern (P)	18%	12%

HOW FUNDING WORKS

In 1997, the provincial government took control of education funding in the province. A funding formula for education was developed and, though many adjustments to the formula have been made since then, the basic structure of the formula remains.

HAS THE FUNDING FORMULA CHANGED?

Over the last thirteen years, a number of adjustments have been made to the funding formula. Funding has been added to support the province's smaller schools and to somewhat cushion the blow that declining enrolment causes. But two-thirds of education funding continues to be tied to enrolment.

Even funding to heat, light, maintain and repair schools depends on student numbers. There is funding to maintain 104 square feet per elementary student, 130 square feet per secondary student and 100 square feet per adult education student. There is a small amount of "top up" funding for schools that are just below the provincially-designated capacity.

While a proportion of boards' funding is based on numbers of students, there are other grants added to the "per pupil" base (Special Education, ESL, Transportation, Declining Enrolment, etc.). Per pupil funding is not meant to be equal, as different boards have different needs. But it is meant to be equitable in order to provide equal educational opportunity for all students.

WHERE ARE THE DECISIONS MADE?

The province

The Ministry of Education provides funding to school boards based on a number of factors, including the number of students in a board, the number of schools, the percentage of high needs special education students, the number of students who have either English or French as their second language, and based on some unique geographical needs (a high number of small schools, very far apart, for example).

But only the special education funding is "sweatered," meaning it cannot be spent on anything but special education. Most other funding can be moved from one category to another, which means that many funding decisions are made at the board level.

The school board

School boards decide on individual schools' budgets, on whether there will be programs like Outdoor Education or all-day kindergarten, and on things like how many students a school must have in order to get staff such as teacher-librarians or vice-principals. Boards distribute funding for teachers to schools depending on the number of students and, in some cases, depending on the number of students who might struggle to succeed – either because of socio-economic factors or because of other special needs. Boards also decide which schools should stay open and which should close, and how many custodians, secretaries and educational assistants each school will get.

The school

Principals receive a budget for the school from the school board. They make decisions about school maintenance and repairs within that budget, and about the distribution of teachers and class sizes. They decide how to allocate educational assistants and whether their school can have staff such as a teacher-librarian, a music teacher or department heads. Depending on the size of the school, principals may also allocate funding to different departments.

Number of Participating Schools, per District School Board

District Board of Education	# schools	District Board of Education	# schools
Algoma DSB	12	Lambton Kent DSB	19
Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic	6	Limestone DSB	14
Avon Maitland DSB	25	London District Catholic SB	4
Bluewater DSB	11	Near North DSB	11
Brant/Haldimand-Norfolk CDSB	2	Niagara CDSB	7
Bruce-Grey CDSB	5	Nipissing-Parry Sound CDSB	2
CDSB of Eastern Ontario	0	Northeastern CDSB	4
CSD catholique Franco-Nord	6	Northwest CDSB	3
CSD catholique de l'Est Ontarien	4	Ottawa CDSB	12
CEP de l'Est de l'Ontario	6	Ottawa-Carleton DSB	20
CSD des écoles catholiques du Sud-Ouest	7	Peel DSB	38
CSD du Centre Sud-Ouest	22	Peterborough Victoria Northumberland CDSB	3
CSD catholique Centre-Sud	13	Rainbow DSB	19
CSD catholique de Centre-Est de l'Ontario	4	Rainy River DSB	5
CSDC des Aurores Boréales	4	Renfrew County Catholic DSB	8
CSDC des Grandes Rivières	15	Renfrew County DSB	10
CSD de Nord-Est de l'Ontario	1	Simcoe County DSB	19
CSD du Grand Nord de l'Ontario	3	Simcoe Muskoka Catholic DSB	6
CSDC du Nouvel-Ontario	16	St. Clair Catholic DSB	1
DSB of Niagara	5	Sudbury Catholic DSB	5
Dufferin-Peel Catholic DSB	18	Superior-Greenstone DSB	9
DSB Ontario North East	17	Superior North Catholic DSB	3
Durham DSB	16	Thames Valley DSB	33
Durham Catholic DSB	3	Thunder Bay CDSB	5
Grand Erie DSB	15	Toronto CDSB	16
Greater Essex County DSB	18	Toronto DSB	179
Halton CDSB	2	Trillium Lakelands DSB	13
Halton DSB	19	Upper Canada DSB	23
Hamilton-Wentworth DSB	14	Upper Grand DSB	19
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic DSB	3	Waterloo Region DSB	18
Hastings and Prince Edwards DSB	11	Waterloo CDSB	2
Huron-Perth Catholic DSB	3	Wellington Catholic DSB	4
Huron-Superior Catholic DSB	5	Windsor-Essex Catholic DSB	5
Kawartha Pine Ridge DSB	37	York Catholic DSB	11
Keewatin-Patricia DSB	1	York Region DSB	10
Kenora Catholic DSB	1	Not known	2
Lakehead DSB	8	School Authorities	2

Total Schools Participating 922

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