

PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION NEWSLETTER



BECAUSE EDUCATION MATTERS MOST

Volume 14 Issue 5 May 30, 2011

THE MEASURE OF SUCCESS: WHAT REALLY COUNTS

New report provides a snapshot of Ontario schools

People for Education's [2011 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools](#) shows that there have been some improvements in Ontario schools in 2011, but poverty and systemic inequalities continue to have far-reaching effects on Ontario students.

GOOD NEWS AND BAD NEWS

Surveys from over 1,000 English, Catholic and French schools reveal that, this year, there are more schools with all-day kindergarten, there is more communication between child care and schools, and there are fewer students waiting for special education services. There has been a slight improvement in the percentage of schools with health and physical education teachers, and only 9% of elementary schools report they have 10 or more students who require English language support but have no English as a Second Language teacher.

But schools also have fewer teacher-librarians, more part-time principals and a lack of staff to support school-community connections. Few schools report that they have strategies to promote information literacy, and less than half of Ontario elementary schools have either music or physical education teachers.

\$174 MILLION GAP IN SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

Despite some improvements in special education, serious issues remain.

School boards receive funding for special education based on a formula that has not kept up with students' needs. To clarify the issue, People for Education obtained

information from the province outlining the gap between what the province provides, and what boards actually spend on special education. Surprisingly, 67 of the province's 72 school boards spend significantly more on special education than they receive.

SIZE MATTERS

The report also exposes disparities between Ontario schools: In regions where most schools are small, schools are less likely to have a full-time principal, a specialist music teacher, a specialist health and physical education teacher or a teacher-librarian.

MONEY MATTERS

There are also disparities caused by fundraising and fees. Most high schools charge fees for courses, athletics and student activities, with some schools reporting Athletic fees as high as \$1,800.

Schools also augment their budgets through fundraising. Individual schools report fundraising anywhere from \$0 to \$275,000. But the top 10% of fundraising schools raises the same total amount as the bottom 78% together. And schools with a high proportion of low-income families raise, on average, less than half the amount raised in schools with a low proportion of low-income families. Thus, students whose families can fundraise or pay fees have access to better learning materials, more arts enrichment and more extracurricular and athletic activities.

[Click here to read the full report.](#)

[To discuss issues in the annual report, click here.](#)

QUICK FACTS

PRINCIPALS

- 49% of elementary school principals have been in their schools for two years or less.
- 12% of elementary principals are part-time, double the percentage in 1997/98.

FEES & FUNDRAISING

- 97% of elementary and secondary schools fundraise.
- 68% of secondary schools charge course fees.

LIBRARIES

- 56% of elementary schools have a teacher-librarian, compared to 80% in 1997/98.
- 66% of secondary schools have a teacher-librarian, compared to 78% in 2000/01.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

- There are about 33,000 students on waiting lists for special education services or support, down from 46,000 in 2000/01.
- Schools with a high proportion of students living in poverty have longer special education waiting lists and more students who are not receiving recommended special education supports.

THE ARTS

- 47% of elementary schools have a full- or part-time music teacher, down from 58% in 1997/98.
- 53% of secondary schools charge fees for art courses and 26% charge fees for music courses.

IN THIS ISSUE:

The Measure of Success	1
From Annie's Desk	2
Healthy Schools	2
Bright Idea	2
Exploring Creativity in Depth	3
New PIC Handbook	3
Fundraising Guidelines	3
Notes from around the province	4

From the desk of Annie Kidder



Egerton Ryerson, the founder of Canada's public education system, said that education "is as necessary as the light; it should be as common as water, and as free as air."

With that in mind, there are two worrying findings in this year's annual report: First, we have narrowed our definition of success in education so that it's focused almost exclusively on test results in literacy and math. And second, we're not giving all students equal access to the educational supports they need, or to the enrichment that is a vital component of a well-rounded education.

This year, for the first time, we compared data from our surveys with data from the Ministry of Education's School Information Finder. We found that in schools with a high proportion of students who live below the low income cut-off (approximately \$30,000 for a family of four), students are more likely to be on special education waiting lists, less likely to be receiving appropriate special education supports and the schools raise, on average, less than half the fundraising amounts raised in schools with more well-off student populations.

Our schools have the potential to change children's lives. But to do that, all students must have access to the right kinds of supports, a wide range of programs, including thriving school libraries, and all the enrichment in the arts, technology and athletics that schools now fundraise for.

If our definition of success in education goes beyond test scores, as it should, and instead includes a range of competencies that will prepare students to be successful, happy and contributing citizens, then it is time that we come up with a broader vision for education with bigger goals and a more concrete description of the kinds of programs, resources and supports that all students should have access to, no matter where they live, how rich or poor their families, or what their learning needs... Something to think about as the provincial election approaches.

Have a great summer!



You can follow us on Twitter
[@Anniekidder](https://twitter.com/Anniekidder)

COMING SOON . . . HEALTHY SCHOOLS, HEALTHY CHILDREN!

New tip sheet, survey tool for health and physical education

What's up with all this talk about healthy food policies? Why should my child be playing around in gym when she could be spending more time learning to read? What the heck is DPA?

Parents often have questions about what role the school plays in supporting the healthy growth and development of students. People for Education has developed a new tip sheet, with support

from the Heart and Stroke Foundation's Spark Advocacy grant, to help parents better understand the important role that schools can play in ensuring that children develop a strong, positive attitude toward health and physical activity.

We have also created a simple survey tool that parents and school councils can use to assess how "healthy" their school is.

[Click here to check out these new resources.](#)

You can also join the "[Idea exchange to promote healthy eating and increased activity for our children!](#)" [discussion](#) in our online community.



BRIGHT IDEA

Bringing Canadian films to a school near you

Does your school show Canadian films? According to a survey commissioned by REEL CANADA, it's unlikely.

Enter stage left REEL CANADA, a national initiative that brings Canadian films to Canadian schools. It provides teachers with information about the Canadian films they could and should be showing to their students, along with a host of teacher resources, including a unit plan.

REEL CANADA also offers a travelling film festival: Each event includes films chosen by the students themselves from a curated program of features, documentaries, animated programs and shorts. Special guest speakers, including actors, directors and other prominent personalities, present the films and take part in Q&As with students and encourage them to plug into Canadian culture.

[Click here to connect with REEL CANADA.](#)

NEW PIC HANDBOOK RELEASED

Guidelines to help engage parents

Parent Involvement Committees (PICs) are board-level committees with a mandate that focuses on parent engagement, communication and supporting school councils. The Ministry recently released the long-awaited draft handbook for Parent Involvement Committees, [*Making a Difference: A Practical Handbook for Parent Involvement Committee Members*](#).

A PIC FOR EVERY BOARD

Much like [the school council guide](#) released in 2001, this handbook includes an overview of the roles and responsibilities of the PIC, information on how to establish by-laws and organize the committee, and tips on handling conflicts and running effective meetings. Also included are sample by-laws, agendas, minutes, and Codes of Ethics.

The Ministry mandated that every school board in Ontario must have a PIC established by February of 2011. However, many school boards already had well-

established PICs long before that. Those who have already written their own by-laws may have to re-visit them to ensure that they meet the guidelines as laid out in the handbook. However, for boards that are still working to establish their Parent Involvement Committee, this tool may provide valuable guidance.

MINISTRY SEEKING FEEDBACK

The Ministry is asking Parent Involvement Committees across the province to use the draft handbook and provide feedback to penny.patrician@ontario.ca by November 30th, 2011.

You can also share your thoughts in the [“Parent Involvement Committee \(PIC\) – What is the Status?” discussion](#) in our online community.

EXPLORING CREATIVITY IN DEPTH

Study shows profound impact of art on students

Is art education worth the investment? And if so, do teachers have enough time in the school day to devote to art? A new study involving 4,000 students from grades 1 to 8 reveals how profoundly art can affect students and provides insights into the challenges facing teachers.

IMPRESSIVE RESULTS FOR STUDENTS

Austin Clarkson, PhD, Professor of Music emeritus (York University) conducted the study of students and their teachers who participated in a program called [Exploring Creativity in Depth](#), a school-based art program.

As a result of participating in the art program, classroom teachers noted positive changes in their students:

- 96% reported a positive change in the use of creative imagination,

- 82% reported an increase in students’ confidence and self-esteem and
- 61% reported students had an improved ability to pay attention.

CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS

The study also reveals the challenges classroom teachers face. Half of the participating teachers reported they would like to spend more time teaching art, but lacked the necessary knowledge/skills, while 43% had the skills but felt they did not have enough time in the school day, given other curriculum demands.

[Click here to read Clarkson’s report, “My mind a beautiful thing”: Imagination, art, creativity in the elementary classroom.](#)

CONSULTATION ON FUNDRAISING GUIDELINES

New types of fundraising allowed

The Ministry of Education is conducting consultations on new draft guidelines for fundraising.

In addition to fundraising already done in most schools, the new draft guidelines propose to allow fundraising for such core costs as:

- school improvement projects (e.g. outdoor structures and skating rinks),
- upgrades to school facilities that do not increase the square footage of the school (e.g. retrofitting auditoriums and upgrading science labs),
- upgrades to sports facilities (e.g. running tracks and specialized recreation facilities) and
- technological investments (e.g. computer and media labs).

INEQUITIES MAY INCREASE

If the draft guidelines come into effect, it’s possible that students from families with the capacity to fundraise in the hundreds of thousands of dollars may have better science labs, new gyms and auditoriums and greater access to 21st century technological advancements.

HAVE YOUR SAY

The consultation ends on August 30th, 2011, and the new guidelines will come into effect in September of 2012. [Click here to read the complete guidelines.](#)

To comment on the guidelines, please contact fundraising@ontario.ca.



notes from around the province



BAKE IT UP!

Published by the [Ontario Public Health Association](#), *Bake It Up!* is a collection of recipes that meet the

standards of the new provincial [School Food and Beverage Policy](#).

According to the collection's introduction, the recipes can be used for school bake sales, as well as school events and home baking. Some people have raised concerns that the cookbook, produced with public money, encourages schools to fundraise.

[Click here to download a copy of *Bake It Up!*](#)

What do you think? Let us know in the ["Bake It Up" discussion](#) in our online community.

STUDENT SUCCESS AT WIDDIFIELD

Widdifield Secondary School in North Bay has led its district in overall credit accumulation for the last three years, thanks in part to its Student Success program: peer tutors are paired up with students who are at risk of not achieving their credits. Students work hard with their tutors, who provide positive feedback, organizational help and explanations of material.

To learn more about Widdifield's Student Success Program, please contact Lucio Pavone, Principal, at 705-472-7015 ext. 8012 or PAVONEL@nearnorthschools.ca.

HEATED DEBATE AROUND TEACHERS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

The [Ontario College of Teachers](#) (OCT) is cautioning its members about their use of Facebook and other social media platforms. This has sparked a heated discussion among members in our online community.

[Click here to read the advisory.](#)

Share your opinion in the ["Staff/students & Facebook" discussion](#) in our online community!

NEW PEEL DSB REPORT ON PARENT INVOLVEMENT

An extensive study has been released about parent involvement in the Peel District School Board. The study, which involved parents, teachers and principals, discusses many obstacles to parent involvement (particularly those faced by newcomer parents) and provides valuable recommendations for encouraging and maintaining parent involvement.

[Click here to download a copy of the study.](#)

SAVE THE DATE!

**People for Education's Annual Conference
November 5th-6th, 2011**

GOT NEWS?

Do you have news or an event that you'd like to share? Send an email to lindsay@peopleforeducation.com.

THE BRAND NEW 2 MINUTE PARENT POLL!

Have your say about sex ed & cyberbullying

The Ontario Student Trustees' Association and People for Education have created a poll for parents who have children in Grades 7-12.

[Speak your mind about a range of important issues by filling out the poll today!](#)

The deadline to complete the poll is June 16th.

NEW WEBSITE

Our website is getting a new look!



People for Education is building a new website hub to help you connect with all the education research, news and discussions going on across this province.

So over the summer and fall, check out our new site and tell us what you think!

The official launch of the new website will be at our conference in November.

people for Education

BECAUSE EDUCATION MATTERS MOST

[People for Education](#) is an independent research and advocacy organization that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

Here's how you can reach us:

mail: 641 Bloor St. W., Toronto, ON M5V 3N3 • phone: 416-534-0100/1-888-534-3944

fax: 416-536-0100 • email: info@peopleforeducation.com • web: www.peopleforeducation.com

You can also find us on [Facebook](#) or [Flickr!](#)

Contributing writers: Annie Kidder, Karen McDonald (Peel DSB PIC), Carolyn Samuel (Widdifield Secondary School), Gay Stephenson, Jacqui Strachan • Editor: Lindsay Cornish



Printed on recycled paper

This newsletter is funded in part with the generous support of

