

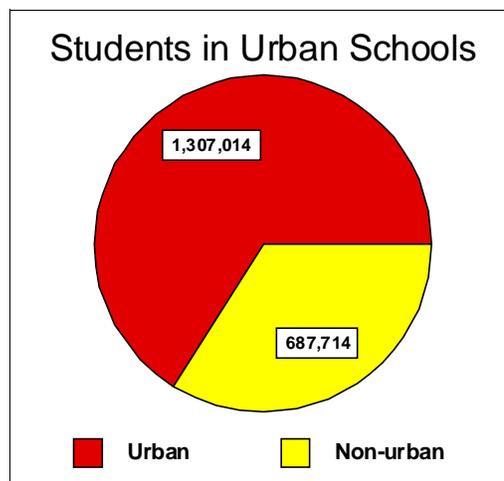
A New Strategy for Urban Schools

Two thirds of Ontario's students and 53% of the province's schools are located in urban areas.

Ontario's public education system needs an urban strategy to ensure urban schools can meet the unique needs of their students.

Urban school boards receive an average of 7% less per pupil than boards in the rest of the province. Funding urban schools at the same rate as the rest of the province would generate an additional \$700 million per year for urban schools.

People for Education's recommendations for a new urban strategy for Ontario's city schools would cost approximately \$1.1 billion.



1. Funding

Real funding for schools across Ontario has not kept pace with inflation for the last seven years.

Recommendation

People for Education recommends the province immediately release the \$674 million recommended in the Rozanski report to prevent any further increase in the gap between what boards receive and what boards actually spend for salaries.

ESTIMATED COST TO IMPLEMENT IN URBAN BOARDS \$400 MILLION

2. Multi-level planning

Over the last ten years, government cuts at all levels have had a cumulative negative impact on children and youth in Ontario's cities.

The federal government made substantial cuts in transfer payments to provinces for social services and health care, and reduced funding for public

housing, services for new immigrants and multiculturalism programs. The provincial government downloaded responsibility for many services onto cities and made cuts to funding for public education and social services. Municipal governments made cuts in funding for parks and recreation, implemented user fees for many services and programs, and reduced funding for child care and public health. Urban school boards have made substantial changes in the programs and services they offer to students and parents.

There is little coordination of services for children and youth among various levels of government or government departments. Often when changes to services are implemented by one level of government programs for young people fall through the cracks because the services are not picked up at any

Recommendation

People for Education recommends the province mandate advisory committees for each urban area to coordinate the planning and delivery of services for children and youth . The multi-level committees must meet at least three times per year and include representatives from school boards, federal, provincial and municipal governments.

Among the areas of responsibility for the committees:

- **immigration settlement services;**
- **English as a Second Language programs for adults and children;**
- **public health programs for children and youth to provide continuity of care;**
- **Delivery of therapeutic, psychological and social services to special needs students;**
- **early childhood education and child care;**
- **community use of schools, parks and recreation and physical education and outdoor education; and**
- **urban planning, including setting development charges, zoning for new schools and closing schools.**

other level.

3. Equity in Education Grant

Urban school boards have a higher proportion of students at risk than all other areas of the province except the far north. In urban areas, the proportion of the population that are new immigrants is more than five times higher than that of the rest of the province. Ontario's urban areas have a higher proportion of children living in low-income families. As compared to non-urban areas, cities have more than double the number of residents who speak neither English nor French as their first language.

Despite the higher proportion of students at risk in urban areas, the staff supporting these students have been cut substantially. Urban boards have cut guidance counsellors, psychologists, social workers and youth workers. Cuts to these staff have resulted in higher student/staff ratios, fewer hours that staff are accessible, and long waits for special education services.

- ◆ There are over 22,000 elementary school children waiting for special education services in Ontario cities;
- ◆ the number of urban elementary schools with regular access to psychologists has dropped by 36% in six years;
- ◆ there has been a 20% increase in the student/teacher ratio for guidance counsellors in urban secondary schools;
- ◆ only 14% of urban elementary schools have regular access to youth workers, compared to 26% of schools province-wide; and
- ◆ urban boards have made substantial cuts to staff assigned to help newcomer families understand and negotiate the education system, provide translation and oversee the implementation of equity policies.

Recommendation

People for Education recommends the provincial government remove per pupil funding for remediation programs from the Learning Opportunities Grant, and designate the grant solely for providing programs to mitigate socio-economic factors affecting students. Further we recommend the new Equity in Education Grant include a built-in accountability process to mandate that school boards report annually on the programs and services funded by the grant and on their effectiveness.

The grant would fund programs such as:

- **lower pupil/teacher ratios, educational assistants, adapted curriculum, tutors, and expanded kindergarten;**
- **early childhood education, child care and seamless day programs and parenting centres;**
- **counsellors, social workers, early assessment, mentoring, orientation and life skills, parenting classes, home/school linkages, stay-in-school and school re-entry programs;**
- **intensified remedial reading programs, and summer school programs;**
- **breakfast/lunch programs, extracurricular activities, before and after-school programs, and recreation and sports activities; and**
- **homework help, computer-aided instruction, arts and culture programs and outdoor education.**

ESTIMATED COST TO IMPLEMENT IN URBAN BOARDS: \$120 MILLION

4. English as a Second Language Programs

The number of urban schools with English as a Second Language Programs continues to decline despite increased immigration to Ontario's urban centres.

Ontario has a higher proportion of people born outside the country than any other province in Canada and higher than most jurisdictions in the world. In the Greater Toronto Area more than 41% of the population speaks a language other than English at home. In the school population the proportion of new immigrants is even higher than in the general population since new immigrants tend to be younger and have families.

- Although 76% of urban elementary schools report having English as a Second Language (ESL) students, only 26% have ESL teachers.
- The number of urban secondary schools with ESL programs has dropped by 21% since 2000/01.
- The performance of ESL students on all standardized tests is generally declining. In secondary schools in 2002, 66% of ESL students failed the Grade 10 Literacy test, a 5% increase over the previous year.

Recommendation

People for Education recommends that the provincial government:

- **change the criteria that qualify a student for ESL funding to recognize that most children take longer than three years to acquire the language,**
- **provide funding for ESL instruction until students are proficient in English, and**
- **modify the Secondary School Grade 10 Literacy Test to address the needs of ESL students.**

ESTIMATED COST TO IMPLEMENT IN URBAN SCHOOLS: \$60 MILLION

5. Class Size

Teachers in urban schools face classes of students from very diverse backgrounds. In an average urban classroom, 12% of students speak English as their second language, 12% are receiving Special Education assistance and well over a quarter may be living below the poverty line.

Students in urban schools are more likely to be in classes over the government mandated average class size.

In Ontario's urban areas, close to three quarters of mandatory English classes in secondary schools and nearly half of all classes elementary schools are above the

Recommendation

People for Education recommends the provincial government lower the student to teacher funding ratio in the foundation grant and fund a cap on class sizes to ensure:

- **no more than 20 students from Kindergarten to Grade 3,**
- **no more than 24 students from Grade 4 to Grade 6, and**
- **no more than 30 student from Grade 7 to Grade 12.**

ESTIMATED COST TO IMPLEMENT IN URBAN BOARDS: \$300 MILLION

government mandated class size.

6. School Buildings

Fifty-three per cent of the schools in the province are in urban areas. Nearly half of them are over forty years old, and many are in need of repair. In 2002, school boards were asked by the Ministry of Education to identify schools that would cost more to repair than to replace. Of the 270 schools identified as “prohibitive to repair,” 124 are in urban boards. In his report, Dr. Rozanski found that the cost of repairs needed for schools is substantial, and that a backlog has accumulated as a result of many years of inadequate funding for

Recommendation

People for Education recommends the provincial government:

- **implement the recommendation in the Rozanski report for annual funding to allow boards to begin addressing their deferred maintenance needs, and**
- **increase the operating benchmarks in the funding formula to recognize higher staffing and maintenance costs in urban areas.**

ESTIMATED COST TO IMPLEMENT IN URBAN BOARDS: \$185 MILLION

school renewal.

7. Community use, parks and recreation, outdoor education and physical education

Students who participate in activity programs are more successful at school. They have higher grade point averages, better attendance records, lower drop-out rates, and fewer discipline problems.

Activity programs are especially important for students at risk.

Many urban areas have reduced funding to parks and recreation programs or added user fees for programs. At the same time, school boards have cut outdoor education programs, reduced the number of physical education teachers, and

reduced the community's access to school facilities.

- There has been a 123% increase since 1998/99 in the number of urban elementary schools reporting charging fees for community use; over the same period the number of elementary schools reporting the community uses their facilities has dropped by 15%.
- The number of urban elementary schools with physical education teachers

Recommendation

People for Education recommends the provincial government amend the funding formula to recognize and fund the community use of schools, physical education teachers in elementary schools and outdoor education programs. We also recommend the coordination of activity programs for children and youth in urban areas as per recommendation number 2.

ESTIMATED COST TO IMPLEMENT IN URBAN BOARDS: \$100 MILLION

has dropped by 17% since 1999/00.