

# Ontario's urban and suburban schools

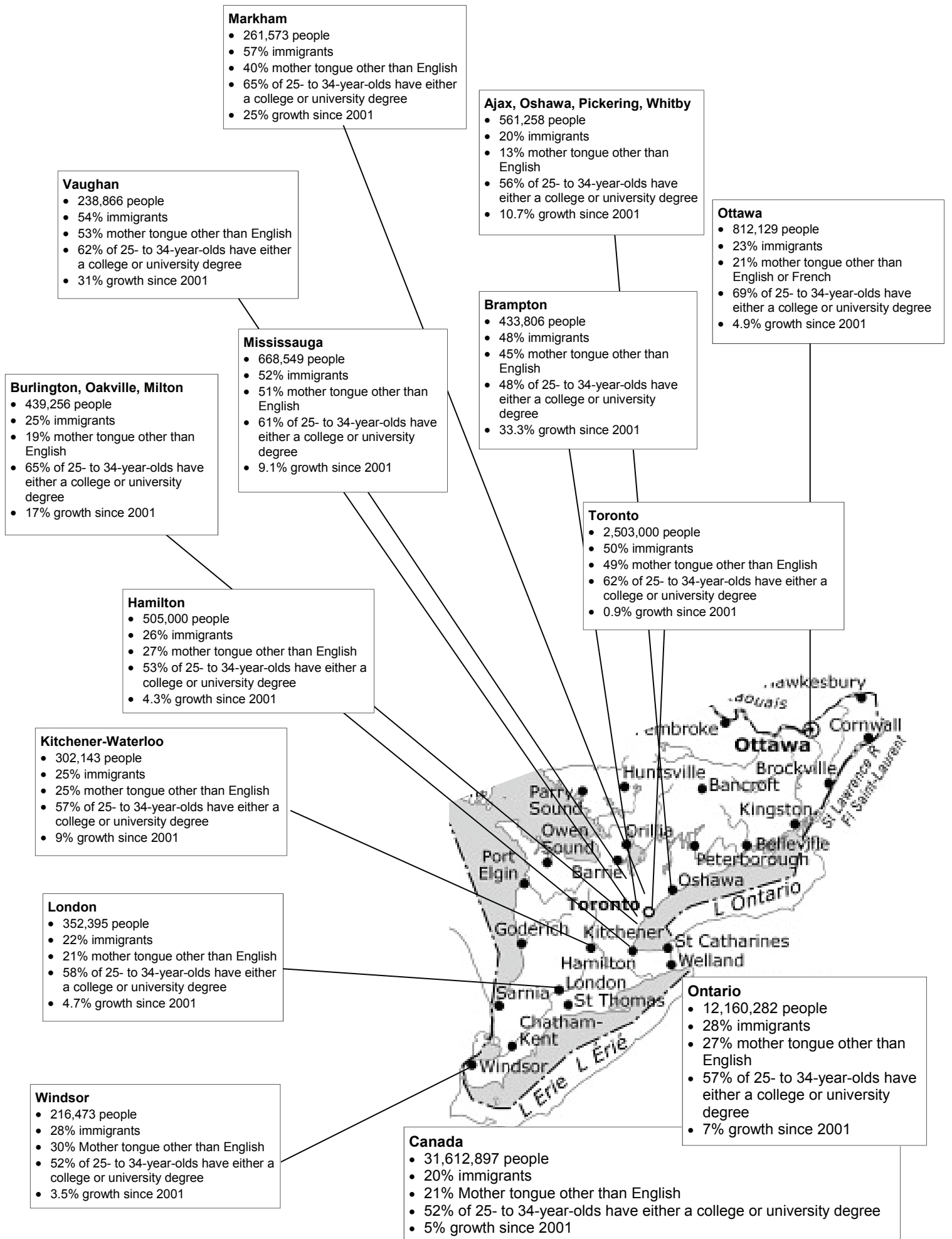


## *a prescription for change*

recommendations for new policy  
from a People for Education public think tank  
– *a 21st century schools initiative*



January 2009



Ontario's  
urban and suburban schools

*a prescription for change*

recommendations for new policy  
from a People for Education public think tank  
*– a 21st century schools initiative*



January 2009

# signatories

*The following organizations and individuals support the recommendations in this report.*

## organizations

Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development	Ontario Association of Food Banks
Bethel Group	Ontario Public Health Association
Campaign 2000	Ontario Public School Board Association
Centre for Urban Schooling, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto	Ontario Student Trustees' Association
Children's Mental Health Ontario / <i>Santé mentale pour enfants Ontario</i>	Pathways to Education
The Colour of Poverty Campaign	Spanish Speaking Education Network
Community Social Planning Council of Ottawa	Ready for School Connects, Davenport Perth Neighbourhood Centre
Community Social Planning Council of Toronto	Social Planning Network of Ontario
Eritrean Parents Association	S.P.A.C.E
Eritrean Youth Coalition	St. Stephen's Community House
Family Service Toronto	Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office
Inner City Advisory Committee, Toronto District School Board	United Way Toronto
Laidlaw Foundation	Urban Alliance on Race Relations
	YMCA of Greater Toronto
	YWCA Toronto

## individuals

<i>Zanana Akande</i> , community leader	<i>Joanne MacEwan</i> , Parent Involvement Committee, Ottawa Catholic School Parents' Association
<i>Peter Amponsah</i> , Community/Youth Outreach Worker, YOUTHLINK	<i>Cathy Mallove</i> , consultant
<i>Judith Bishop</i> , Trustee, Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board	<i>Lloyd McKell</i> , Executive Officer, Student and Com- munity Equity, Toronto District School Board
<i>Harold Brathwaite</i> , former Director, Peel District School Board; CEO, Retired Teachers of Ontario	<i>Joe Mihevc</i> , Toronto City Councillor
<i>David Crombie</i> , former Mayor of Toronto, chair of the Toronto Lands Corporation	<i>Huma Nauman</i> , SEPT Coordinator, Catholic Cross- cultural Services
<i>Michelle Dagnino</i> , Youth Action Network	<i>Marvyn Novick</i> , Professor Emeritus, Ryerson University
<i>Cathy Dandy</i> , Trustee, Toronto District School Board	<i>Ruth Sischy</i> , Manager and Policy Advisor, Parent ing and Family Literacy
<i>Grace-Edward Galabuzi</i> , Dept. of Politics & School of Public Administration, Ryerson University	<i>Marjolein Winterlink</i> , Canadian Council for Inner City Schools
<i>Jeff Kugler</i> , Executive Director, the Centre for Urban Schooling, OISE/UT	

*Individuals and organizations are still signing on in support of these recommendations. People for Education's website has an active 'sign-on' for members of the public and organizations to register their support for this document. Go to [www.peopleforeducation.com/news/urban-suburban](http://www.peopleforeducation.com/news/urban-suburban).*

# introduction

In early 2008, People for Education organized a meeting of a group of leaders from a wide range of backgrounds to talk about education-related issues for students and families in Ontario's urban and suburban areas. The participants were academics, city councillors, school board trustees and staff, early childhood experts, representatives of social planning councils and the United Way, parent and community leaders, and members of ethno-racial community organizations.

In the spring, the group released a discussion paper based on their conversations that outlined the vast changes taking place in Ontario's municipalities and called for focused strategies for urban and suburban areas. The full document is available at <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/urban-suburban-schools>.

The paper noted that Ontario's cities act as Canada's economic engine, accounting for 70% of Ontario's and 30% of Canada's Gross Domestic Product, and they are Canada's cultural and educational centres — home to industry, multi-national head offices, universities and major cultural institutions.

It also described the unique mix of families in Ontario's urban/suburban areas. They have both the highest and some of the lowest incomes; they are, on average, the most educated, and they represent the greatest cultural mix of any cities in the world.

But the paper also said that urban/suburban areas face a number of unique challenges. There is unprecedented growth, and the majority of newcomers to Canada settle in those areas. Services to these areas have not kept pace with change and, over the last decade, urban/suburban municipalities have been saddled with many new costs downloaded from the provincial government.

The recommendations in this report stem from the discussion paper. We know there are many great examples of integration and cooperation that currently exist in a variety of schools and communities across the province. We have included a few examples with the recommendations. But we also know that to make these models common practice, it will take new policy, new thinking and inspired leadership. We hope these recommendations spark all three.



In **Finland**, where there is wide-spread public support for public education, school buildings are viewed as integral parts of their communities. Schools are open at night and on weekends for the community to use. Senior secondary students even have keys to the school so they can use computer labs after hours.

# recommendations

## overall

### in schools

We need to open the doors of our schools – both figuratively and literally – for community use, for integrated services and for the day- and night-time use of the families, students and communities the schools serve.

### in municipalities

Joint planning and coordination of services for children, youth and families has the most immediate effect at the local level. Each municipality should have a local “coordination office” with representatives from the municipality, including municipal planners and representatives from local Boards of Education, Public Health, Parks and Recreation, Housing, Mental Health, Child Care, Social Services and organizations like the United Way, local Social Planning Councils and community agencies.

### at the province

We must integrate and coordinate our policy and our goals for families, children and youth. Education cannot exist in isolation from other social services or from other aspects of family life.

It is time to implement the long-recommended Cabinet-level Committee to foster coordination and integration of services for families, children and youth.

The Committee must include the Ministers of Health, Health Promotion, Education, Colleges, Training and Universities, Children and Youth Services, Citizenship and Immigration, Culture, Community and Social Services, Aboriginal Affairs, Recreation, Criminal Justice, Municipal Affairs and Housing.

The Cabinet Committee should be supported by a *Secretariat* responsible for developing a set of outcome measures to assess our progress toward a standard of equitable academic and social outcomes for all children and young people. The *Secretariat* should maintain a repository of effective integration models; it should facilitate knowledge exchange, track research, monitor new initiatives, and foster linkages among sectors.

## at the province

***Collaboration and integration can happen at many levels, but it is up to the provincial government to take the lead – by providing clear goals, by supporting integrated policies and by fostering holistic thinking about appropriate services and adequate supports to ensure equitable outcomes for families, children and youth.***

### ***We recommend:***

- that the province develop a framework for the integration of services for families, children and youth. The framework may build upon work already undertaken in Public Health Units, and by organizations like the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (OPHEA) and the United Way and Action for Neighbourhood Change, by the Toronto Model Schools Initiative, World Health Organization, and the Education Quality and Accountability Office. It should include a funding mechanism and a range of outcome measures for student success, student and community engagement, community health, integration of services and equity of outcomes.
- that social services funding be adjusted to address changes in demographics in urban and suburban areas and to recognize the interrelation between social services and education outcomes.
- that the province develop a provincial equity and anti-racism framework that includes adequate support for local implementation.
- that elementary and secondary curriculum is reviewed to ensure that it is not only framed within an equity and social justice lens, but also flexible enough to allow schools and teachers to adjust the content to engage their students within a local context.
- that education funding for programs and services to mitigate demographic pressures on students, currently based on out-of-date census data, be separated from general Student Success funding and updated to reflect current demographics. After a review of effective programs, the funding should be provided in a new *Equity in Education Grant* and should include a mechanism for annual reports on the programs and services funded by the grants and on their effectiveness.
- that the province provide a framework and funding for all-day early learning and care that integrates education and early childhood development and provides supports for families.

Education is universally seen as one of the best ways out of poverty and as a sound investment in the future of individuals, families and communities, and thus in the social fabric of our entire society.

*Roots of Youth Violence,  
the Honourable Roy McMurtry,  
the Honourable Alvin Curling*

- that the province establish an independent body to foster communities of practice at local, regional and provincial levels. This body will allow educators, researchers and community workers to showcase their experiences, and will foster collaboration, integration and the practice of “whole-community thinking”.

# in municipalities and school boards

*Everything from recreation programs to affordable housing affects students' chances for success. Working together, school boards and municipalities can create strong integrated communities and ensure fewer young people fall through the cracks.*

***We recommend:***

- that municipalities and school boards establish an office to coordinate a local framework for services and planning, including the coordinated use of school buildings, and the coordination of services such as public health, child care and recreation.
- that school boards, working within the context of a provincial equity framework, develop local equity, anti-racism and employment policies.
- that school boards provide leadership, guidance and support to administrators to assist them in creating welcoming schools and in reaching out to their school communities.
- that hiring policies in Ontario school boards include a process to involve school communities in the selection of principals to allow the community to play an active part in shaping the culture of the school.

The Community Coalition on Refugee and Immigrant Concerns in collaboration with **the Kitchener Downtown Community Health Centre** have built partnerships with 12 schools to provide leadership training to parents focusing on the similarities and differences between the education systems in different countries. The training allows parents to understand the Canadian school system and the schools to understand the needs of ethno-racial communities. Goals of the program include increasing involvement in school councils, volunteering, encouraging parent advocacy, and helping parents become leaders in the community.



# in schools

***Schools and school buildings have the potential to be the centres of communities. They can and should be used for multiple purposes. And they should have the capacity to provide every student and every student's family with a range of services, with a sense of "belonging" and with an equitable chance for success.***

***We recommend:***

- that each school community, working collaboratively with school staff, parents and other community members and agencies, develop a set of principles and goals for community engagement that includes community outreach, integration of services for the school community, and inclusive practices and engagement strategies. Using these goals and the provincially established outcome measures, schools should survey their communities annually to assess progress on community engagement and cooperation.
- that the development of the local school as community "hub" should be a locally developed and driven process with stakeholders from all sectors involved.
- that the provincial government develop a collaborative policy that includes funding to allow community agencies and not-for-profit organizations access to schools for free or at a very low cost. This funding and policy should be jointly administered by school boards, municipalities and provincial ministries.
- that funding for community use of schools be expanded to ensure that a range of not-for-profit programs have access to schools, including sports and teams, art programs, cultural programs, and health programs directed towards children, youth, adult and seniors in communities.
- that all schools should have access to paid school-community advisors (provided based on numbers of students and demographics of the community), responsible for fostering school-community links, for outreach and for assisting the school leadership in playing a role in building community cohesion. Schools with a high proportion of newcomers should also have trained Settlement Workers to assist both newcomer

**Cathy Wever Public School** is located in downtown Hamilton. The Hamilton Police, Rotary Clubs, Parks and Recreation and Public Health are part of a Community Committee that funds after-school activities every night at a minimal cost to the students. These include active recreation and league sports, homework clubs and crafts. The school has a public health nurse funded by the City of Hamilton, an after-school program funded by the Hamilton Community Foundation, free community use funded in part through the Ministries of Education and Recreation and in part from the school board, and a Best Start program funded through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services. The local recreation centre is across the playground, and the YMCA runs a Virtual Y program out of the school.

students and their families in negotiating the education system.

- that at least once a year, every school community should hold a community function that brings together parents, staff, community members, community agencies and students – to showcase programs, celebrate community diversity and provide a space for learning about community resources and making connections.

## for families

***Parents and families play a key role in students' ability to succeed. By providing a range of services, programs and supports for families, we ensure that all students have an equitable chance for success in school and in life.***

### ***We recommend:***

- that, building on models developed in a number of schools and communities and at the province (e.g., Toronto Model Schools, Parenting and Family Literacy Centres), funded parent centres be developed to support parents with advice (e.g., at transition points for students, or for navigating complex systems such as special education), information about resources (e.g., Settlement Workers, school community support workers, human rights offices, community agencies, youth and family programs) and to collect information about successful initiatives that support parents, families and students in other jurisdictions.
- that provincial policy be developed and supported to ensure that parent and community outreach can be a focus for school councils and school communities.
- that the province continue to provide grants to parent/school councils, Parent Involvement Committees and parent and community partnerships to allow them to act as advocates, to do community outreach and to be “agents of change” for their own children, in their communities and within the education system.
- that each high school or cluster of high schools host an *Orientation Week* for incoming grade 8 students. During the Orientation Week, trained and paid peer counsellors should provide training and support to incoming students; teachers should be hired to work with students and their families; and families should be provided with workshops to help them play effective role in their children's education. These orientation weeks are particularly important in schools with a high proportion of newcomer students and/or a high proportion of students who may be at risk for socio-economic reasons.
- that newcomer families have access to community advocates to assist them when they need help (e.g., Welcome centres, Settlement Workers, Immigration Centres).
- that *Best Start, Family Resource Programs* and *Early Years Centres* are provided with sufficient resources to allow them to engage in outreach to parents and provide training, support and settlement assistance.

Ours is an inner city school identified by our Board as an ESL centre and “engagement school.” This year, we have a pilot project which gives us an engagement staff member who follows up on students who are at-risk and missing school. In an inner city school, there is not time for a principal/vice-principal or teacher to do this job. This school has a huge number of after-school programs, intra-mural sports and clubs for the students.

*An elementary school in Ottawa*



# in faculties of education, in principals' training, and in staffing schools

***Strong leaders have the capacity to change not only the culture of the school, but also the culture of the community, and schools with staff who are invested in the community can build invaluable school-community bridges.***

***We recommend:***

- that the province evaluate the changing role of principals and vice-principals to ensure that these school administrators are supported and have the resources and staff necessary to provide leadership in the school and the community.
- that principal qualification programs be revised to include a strong focus on community outreach and inclusion, working with parents, problem-solving, system analysis and collaboration.
- that school boards implement employment equity policies to enable schools to hire staff who reflect the diversity of their communities.
- that faculties of education work to ensure that more of our future teachers reflect the diversity of our student body, and that they provide a compulsory module for new teachers focused on community/family/teacher relationships explored through an equity lens.
- that classroom teachers are provided with support and time to engage parents and families.

The links between low literacy, inadequate achievement in school and poverty are absolutely clear: 65% of those receiving welfare and 70% of criminals in our prisons have low literacy skills. And while low literacy affects children from all economic strata (and thus can have an important bearing on their earnings later in life), disadvantaged children and adolescents tend to be the most vulnerable, particularly the children of Aboriginals and recent immigrants.

*The Cost of Poverty: An analysis of the economic cost of poverty in Ontario,*  
Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB), November 2008



# the context

*These are some of the concerns raised by our March 2008 discussion paper.*

- 63% of Ontario's students attend urban and suburban schools, but Ontario has no urban/suburban strategy for these school communities.
- Over one million newcomers arrive in Ontario each year and, on average, 10% of the population in Ontario's cities has been in Canada five years or less.
- At the same time as Ontario's population has shifted to urban areas, responsibility for many programs and services has been downloaded to municipal governments. But municipalities did not receive new funding to accompany the new responsibilities. As a result, many public programs in cities have been either severely cut or cancelled altogether. And many of the cuts have had a disproportionate effect on young people. Recreation programs, for example, have an impact on students' success in school, but access to free recreational programs has declined in urban/suburban areas.
- Outside of the north, Ontario's urban/suburban areas have the highest proportion of low-income families in the province, and the percentage of children living in lone-parent families is at least two percentage points higher than the provincial average.
- Research continues to show a disproportionate drop-out rate among certain racialized communities, and students continue to find that curriculum does not reflect their reality, their heritage or their diversity. Teachers, principals, support staff and even members of school councils continue to be predominantly white and there continue to be wide disparities among boards and schools in how they address issues of race, exclusion and inequity.
- Ontario's urban and suburban schools, which have high numbers of students whose socio-economic status puts them at risk, continue to struggle to provide the programs, resources, teaching methods, curriculum and supports that would provide equitable outcomes for all students. Funding for these targeted programs has been reduced, is based on out-of-date census data and is now focused on narrow academic interventions.
- Despite new policy and some new funding, community access to schools has not fully recovered from funding cuts imposed a decade ago. In 1997/98, 89% of urban/suburban schools reported the community used the building; in 2006/07, that number had declined to 79%. Over the same period, the percentage of schools charging fees for community use doubled.
- Governments in many other jurisdictions (for example, the United Kingdom, Saskatchewan, Quebec) have created departments to oversee joint responsibility for schools, children and families, but despite numerous recommendations to do so (such as the Rozanski report), Ontario has not.

Schools in Ontario's cities – whether downtown or in suburbs – should be able to act as community hubs, easily accessible and filled with a range of services, supports and activities for students and families.

*Ontario's Urban and Suburban Schools*  
People for Education, April 2008

# acknowledgements

*We would like to express our appreciation to all those who participated in the initial discussion on February 8, 2008, and who have given extensive feedback to produce the discussion paper and recommendations.*

Carl Corter, **Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, ICS, OISE/UT**  
Hugh Mackenzie, **Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives**  
Huma Nauman, **Catholic Cross Cultural Services**  
Janet Davis, **Councillor, City of Toronto**  
Ed Reed, **City of Toronto, Community and Neighbourhood Services**  
Zanana Akande, **Community Leader**  
Cathy Mallove, **Consultant, and Meeting Facilitator**  
Andre Lyn, **Community Social Planning Council of Toronto**  
Ilda Januario, Michael Kerr, **Ethnocultural Community Network (TDSB)**  
Deborah Konecny, **Families Are Important Resources, Family Service Association**  
Barry Wansbrough, **Licensed to Learn**  
Alejandra Bravo, **Maytree Foundation**  
Sandra Lopes, **Maytree Foundation**  
Jeff Kugler, **OISE U/T Centre for Urban Schooling**  
Colin Husbands, Marjolein Winterink, **Canadian Council for Inner City Schools**  
Lance McCready, **OISE/UT**  
Binna He, **Parent**  
Carolyn Acker, **Pathways to Education**  
Marvyn Novick, **Social Planning Network of Ontario**  
Ann Fitzpatrick, **SPACE Coalition**  
Esthela Cuenca, Eira Ramos, **Spanish Speaking Education Network**  
Naly Lima, **St. Christopher House**  
Ruth Sischy, **TDSB Parenting and Family Literacy Centres**  
Cassie Bell, **TDSB Inner City Advisory Committee Co-Chair**  
Jehad Aliweiwi, **Thornccliffe Neighbourhood Office**  
Diane Dyson, **United Way**  
May El Abdallah, **Urban Alliance on Race Relations**  
Catherine Fife, **Trustee, Waterloo Region District School Board, OPSBA**

## notice of copyright and intellectual property

Questions about use of intellectual property should be addressed to the Executive Director, People for Education at (416)534-0100 or [info@peopleforeducation.com](mailto:info@peopleforeducation.com)

### Document Citation

This report should be cited in the following manner:

***“Ontario’s urban and suburban schools: recommendations for new policy”  
People for Education***

We make most of our publications available free on our website. Making a donation or taking out a membership will help us continue to provide people with access to our parent support and research free of charge. You can make a donation or become a member on-line at <http://www.peopleforeducation.com/donate>. Or you can contact our provincial office at 416-534-0100 for more information.

Suggested donation for this publication: \$10 or what you can afford.

© **People for Education, 2009**

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

P.O. Box 64, Station P  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5S 2S6

phone: 416-534-0100  
fax: 416-536-0100  
e-mail: [p4e@peopleforeducation.com](mailto:p4e@peopleforeducation.com)  
website: [www.peopleforeducation.com](http://www.peopleforeducation.com)

---

This report was produced with the support of  
the Atkinson Charitable Foundation, the Canadian Auto Workers,  
the Canadian Council on Learning,  
and the contributions of citizens across Ontario.

