

STUDENTS' VOICES

From the People for Education Annual Report
on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2011



STUDENTS' VOICES

...in some cases the voices of students provide the tipping point to shift the culture and practices of high schools. Combining collaborative and authentic tasks that build skills and confidence, and widening the arena of student influence, student voice processes can give students a credible voice in and impact on the institution that plays a major role in their lives.¹

Ben Levin and Sharon Pékruł

It is vital that students' voices are represented in conversations about education policy and funding.

People for Education asked the Ontario Student Trustees' Association to contribute this section.

There are just under 2 million students in Ontario's publicly funded schools. These students are truly the key stakeholders in the education system, as their future will be affected by the education they receive today.

This year, to get a better picture of what Ontario's students truly think about their education system, the Ontario Student Trustees' Association, in partnership with [Student Vote](#) and [ScholarshipsCanada.com](#), created the Ontario Student Survey. The survey is a tool to address important education issues identified by students themselves, and to build awareness of these issues in order for government and students to work together toward solutions.

The survey results have garnered attention from across the education community, as well as the general public. Perhaps most important of all, they have been read by thousands of students.

EVALUATION, TESTING AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS

In response to questions about their academic work, students expressed interest in having more input on important aspects of their education, and a better understanding of how they are assessed:

- Almost 75% of students say that they would achieve better results on their culminating activities (the large year-end projects required in most high school courses) if they were able to choose the project with their teacher.
- 92% of participants believe that students should be allowed to view their Grade 10 EQAO literacy test (which students must pass in order to graduate) after it has been marked.

ABOUT OSTA-AECO

The Ontario Student Trustees' Association-l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario (OSTA-AECO) is the largest student organization in Ontario's education system. The association represents students and student trustees in all publicly funded schools in Ontario.

Student trustees are elected by their peers to bring the student voice to district school board tables. Every school board must have at least two student trustees.

Student trustees also act as consultants on policy for the Ministry of Education, collaborate with others in the education community and work to unite all student trustees across the province.

Student trustees work diligently to ensure that the student voice is heard at both the school board and provincial level and play an integral role in crafting the future of public education in Ontario. All while keeping up with their regular school work!

The survey also asked students whether a later school day start time would have an impact on their academic success. The responses were evenly split on this issue, with half of the participants indicating that a 10:00 a.m. start time would benefit students academically.

STUDENT HEALTH AND SAFETY

The survey also included questions about student councils, guidance services and bullying:

- Only 57% of participants indicate that the guidance system is doing enough to support students.
- Over half of the students (54%) indicate that they had been bullied at school at some point in their education.
- 89% of students believe that all middle and high schools should have student councils.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SEXUAL HEALTH

When asked whether all students should be required to take health and physical education until the end of high school, 53% of the participants indicate that it should be mandatory.

The majority of participants (82%) also believe that information on all sexualities should be taught during sexual health classes.

CELLPHONES IN THE CLASSROOM

One of the most interesting findings from the survey, given the ubiquitous nature of cellphones for today's students, was their response to the question about the use of cellphones as a teaching tool in the classroom. A majority of students (72%) think that cellphones do not have a place in the classroom as an educational tool.

In the fall of 2011, the students will announce the results of a new survey, launched in 2011. It was launched with a complementary survey for parents in partnership with People for Education.

For more information about Ontario's student trustees and their important work, please visit www.osta-aeco.org.

NOTES

- 1 Levin, B., & Pekrul, S. (2005). *Building student voice for school improvement*. Retrieved from <http://webpace.oise.utoronto.ca/~levinben/MSIP%20st%20hdbk%20chapter%20Oct05.doc>



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

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To read the full 2011 report, go to <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/07/Annual-Report-on-Ontario-Schools-2011.pdf>