

PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION NEWSLETTER



BECAUSE EDUCATION MATTERS MOST

Volume 15 Issue 2 January 18, 2012

THE PARTY'S OVER

Education Funding for 2012

According to the media and a number of sources inside education, this year may mark the end of years of increases in education funding. Dwight Duncan, Ontario's Minister of Finance, says that Ontario is facing a period of "unprecedented restraint during which time difficult decisions will have to be made."

WHAT DOES THE ECONOMIC SITUATION MEAN FOR EDUCATION AND SCHOOL BOARDS?

Boards may receive an increase of just 1% for the coming year. And a 1% increase will not cover the cost of things like:

- inflation (which currently sits at 2.9%),
- wage increases already set in place,
- increases in electricity costs,
- salary increases resulting from upcoming contract negotiations (teachers' four-year agreements expire at the end of August), and
- capital costs for new space needed for the expansion of all-day kindergarten.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR KIDS AND FAMILIES?

Last spring the Premier appointed Don Drummond, former senior economist with the TD Bank, to advise the province on how to reduce Ontario's \$16 billion deficit. His full report is expected at the end of January, but in recent interviews he has said that the staffing of all day kindergarten programs and the province's focus on class-size reduction are both expensive policies that may not be backed up by evidence.

There are a number of possibilities that may result from the Drummond report, the ongoing deficit and the economic downturn:

- the province might decide it can't afford to move quite so fast with the rollout of the all-day kindergarten program,
- there may be changes to caps on class sizes,
- funding cut from things like transportation and computers may not be replaced,
- school board administration cuts will continue - for an accumulated total of \$21 million in cuts since 2010,
- building renewal, replacement and repairs may be delayed,
- boards may contemplate more school closings, and
- negotiations with teachers may become difficult if the province decides to stick to its plan of 0% increases for the public sector.



It is possible that many of the funding changes won't have a direct impact on students and families because they will be focused on things like restructuring and amalgamating some services, contracting out others, and making cuts to administration. But the pain will be felt somewhere. And in the cases where school boards balanced their budgets last year by using their reserves, or where boards added new programs and services based on nearly a decade of funding increases, substantial changes will have to be made for the coming school year.

THE ANNUAL SCHOOL COUNCIL SURVEY –

Coming to a mailbox near you!

Yes, it's that time of the year again. Our annual school council survey has been mailed to every school in the province, and is also [available online](#).

The information gathered from the survey provides a better understanding of school councils and the work they do in their communities, and documents best practices and challenges from across the province. The survey findings are published in September in our [Annual Report on Ontario's School Councils](#).

This year, to ensure that we are tracking information that is both relevant and interesting to parents and school councils, we asked survey respondents and our Network members to suggest new questions that they would like to see included. The response was tremendous and the revised survey questions reflect the input we received from across the province.

Please take a few minutes at your next school council meeting to complete the survey and send it in. If possible, please complete the survey online.

Complete the survey –

English: <http://tinyurl.com/schoolcouncil-en>

French: <http://tinyurl.com/schoolcouncil-fr>

Read the latest school council report:

<http://tinyurl.com/schoolcouncil-2011>

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JOIN THE CONVERSATION

www.peopleforeducation.ca

FROM THE DESK OF ANNIE KIDDER



Happy 2012!

There is a lot going on in education right now – and probably many changes to come.

At People for Education, we're thinking about what other "indicators" we could use to

measure success in education and we've just added the 900th member to our **online community!** We're inputting data from nearly 1,000 principal surveys, and we're building a new "**Ask a Researcher**" section on our website.

We're also planning to work harder to bring attention to the appalling gaps that exist between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students.

In November, we presented **Roberta Jamieson**, president and CEO of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation, and **Paul Martin**, former Prime Minister and current head of the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, with the **Egerton Ryerson Award for Dedication to Public Education**. At the awards ceremony, it was made abundantly clear that it is time for all of us to take up the cause of Canada's First Nations, Métis and Inuit students.

Did you know that:

- each Aboriginal child receives \$2,000 to \$3,000 less in education funding per year than off-reserve children across the country, and that funding gap continues to grow?
- since the inception of Nova Scotia's Mi'kmaq Education Act – Canada's first self-government arrangement in

education – the annual graduation rate has increased from 50% to 70%?

- in 2006, the proportion of the Aboriginal population aged 25 to 64 without a high school diploma (34%) was 19 percentage points higher than the proportion of the non-Aboriginal population of the same age group (15%)?

Ensuring Aboriginal young people have all the supports they need and access to strong, culturally relevant education, is critical for the health and strength of our whole society and a responsibility for us all.

So let's get to work!



You can follow us on Twitter

@**anniekidder**

@**jacquitrachan**

@**gaystephenson**

IT'S SCHOOL CLOSING SEASON AGAIN

Across Ontario, there are approximately 130 schools either slated or recommended to close, and many more are under review in newly-formed Accommodation Review Committees.

DECLINING ENROLMENT LEADS TO CLOSED SCHOOLS

When enrolment declines, classrooms in schools may sit empty, funding from the province drops, and kids have less access to a range of courses and programs.

Declining enrolment is an issue across the country. People are having fewer children, and they're moving away from small towns, rural areas and even from downtowns in big cities. In Ontario, student populations are growing only in the suburbs.

When a school closes there can be an impact on the whole community, and school closings often evoke strong reactions from the parents and students affected as well as community members. But school closings are not a black and white issue.

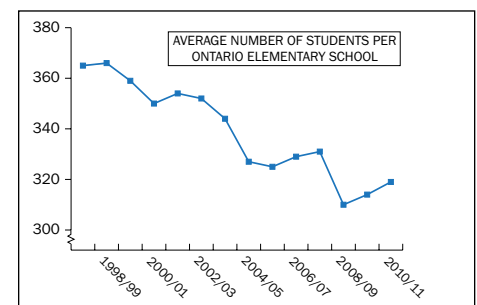
IN SOME CASES SCHOOL CLOSINGS COULD BE PREVENTED BY:

- updating the provincial funding formula to more accurately reflect the smaller size of Ontario schools in 2011.
- making a commitment to fund a full range of programs in some smaller schools despite the higher cost.

- providing financial and policy support for schools that act as community hubs with multiple users/services sharing the space.

IN SOME CASES CLOSING SMALLER SCHOOLS MAKES BOTH FINANCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL SENSE BECAUSE:

- students from smaller schools may be accommodated at one larger school with more "bells and whistles" (libraries, gyms, science labs etc.) and with more programs and course choices.
- consolidating two schools that are not too far apart may save hundreds of thousands of dollars in operational costs. That money could go to improvements such as better school libraries or arts programs or more special education support.



People for Education keeps track of school closings and we need your help. Please check out the accommodation review/school closing database on our website and let us know if there are new developments in your board:

<http://tinyurl.com/2011-schoolclosings>

What do you think about school closings? Has your board been affected? Join the discussion in the online community:

<http://tinyurl.com/discuss-schoolclosings>

HELP, I'VE GOT QUESTIONS!

- My child is sick and cannot go to school for over a month. Can we have a teacher come to our house?
- There seem to be graduation ceremonies for everything – kindergarten, grades 6,8,12. They can be expensive and require parents to take time off work – what can we do about it?
- Is there any discussion in the ministry of education to lessen the academic load of elementary grades?
- Who has final control of the money that school councils fundraise?

When it comes to your child's education, there is no such thing as a stupid question. In fact, if you have a question about school, you can be pretty sure that there are a bunch of parents out there wondering the same thing. That's why we are encouraging people to **post their questions** in the FAQ section of our website. You can browse questions that have already been asked, or ask your own and we'll notify you when a response has been posted.

So go ahead and **ask!** All those other parents will thank you for it: <http://tinyurl.com/p4e-faq>

BEYOND BULLYING:

Legislation promotes acceptance, introduces consequences

On November 30, 2011, the Ontario government introduced new legislation to ensure that all students feel safe and accepted in their school.

The Accepting Schools Act

(<http://tinyurl.com/acceptingschools>):

- Adds a definition of bullying to the Education Act, and states that bullying behaviour includes “the use of any physical, verbal, electronic, written or other means.”
- Introduces tougher consequences for bullying and hate-motivated actions
- Allows the Ministry to develop policies and guidelines that provide support for both victims and bullies, “to assist them in developing healthy relationships, making good choices, continuing their learning and achieving success.”
- Requires all school boards to support students who want to lead activities that promote gender equity, anti-racism, understanding and respect for people with disabilities and people of all sexual orientations and gender identities, including groups with the name Gay-Straight Alliance.
- Designates the third week of November as Bullying Awareness and Prevention Week, to raise awareness about bullying and encourage more people to stand up against bullying.
- Requires organizations using school property to follow standards consistent with the provincial Code of Conduct.

- Allows the Ministry to develop policies establishing a process that parents or guardians can follow if they have concerns about the support provided to their child (whether a victim or a bully).

The legislation also requires school boards to:

- Develop policies and guidelines on progressive discipline and bullying prevention and intervention that include supports and resources for students.
- Develop and implement equity and inclusive education policies.
- Create greater transparency and accountability by requiring boards to report on progress against goals for establishing a positive school climate for all students.

HAVE YOUR SAY

The topic of bullying is always a hot one. How do we ensure that our schools are warm, welcoming and safe for all students? Does the new legislation go far enough? Is there more bullying now than there used to be? Should all students have the right to start Gay-Straight Alliances and call them that?

Join the conversation that’s happening right now in our online community:

<http://tinyurl.com/discuss-bullying>

ATTENTION: GRADE 8 PARENTS!

It’s already time for you and your child to begin making decisions about high school. Sometime soon, grade 8 students should be bringing home forms about registering for high school and for grade 9 courses. There are a number of choices that you will have to make. And it’s important to try and make them together.

Talk with your child about their interests, skills and abilities. High school offers many pathways for students, so there are lots of ways to earn the 30 credits needed to graduate.



In addition to regular courses, students can take Dual Credit courses, Cooperative Education, Specialist High Skills Majors, on-line courses, summer school and apprenticeship courses.

There are also different types of courses in grades 9 and 10 (Applied, Academic, Locally Developed, and Open), and the type of course students take in grades 9 and 10 affects their options in grades 11 and 12. Your child’s grade 8 teachers may make recommendations about which type of course might be the best suited to your child, but the ultimate decision is up to you and your child.

If you have more than one high school to choose from, find out when they have open houses, go to them with your child, and ask lots of questions. Ask about the courses available in each grade, extracurricular activities, what types of clubs and sports are available. Ask if the Student Council is active and what they do. Find out if there are special programs such as co-op, dual credit, and Specialist High Skills Majors.

For further information:

See Ministry of Ontario resources:

<http://tinyurl.com/on-studentsuccess>

See People for Education

<http://tinyurl.com/tipsheet-highschool>

READY, SET, GO!

Learn how you can help make your school healthier!

Eat better, get some exercise, lose weight – does this sound like a New Year’s Resolution list? How about adding one more... “make our schools healthier”? It is time to get serious about the health and well-being of our kids, and schools are the ideal location to start.

On February 15 at 7:00 p.m., [join us online](#) to learn how you can make your school healthier. The webinar will be presented by People for Education and the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association.



Using our new toolkit for healthy schools, you’ll find out:

- why schools are an ideal place to focus on improving kids’ health,
- how you can use a simple form to assess your school’s health promotion programs,
- what you can do to make your school a healthy school.

This online workshop will be useful for parents, school councils, principals and teachers, and is made possible through funding from the Heart and Stroke Association’s Spark Advocacy Grants. Every participant will receive a free Healthy Schools Toolkit. [Register Online!](#)

READING ENJOYMENT ON THE DECLINE IN ONTARIO SCHOOLS

A new **report** from People for Education shows there has been a dramatic decline in the percentage of Ontario students who say they “like to read.”

According to surveys of grade 3 and 6 students administered by Ontario’s Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), the percentage of Ontario students in grade 3 who report they “like to read” dropped from 76% in 1998/99 to 50% in 2010/11. The number of students in grade 6 who “like to read” fell from 63% to 50% in the same time period.

READING ENJOYMENT IMPROVES STUDENT SUCCESS AND ENGAGEMENT

International studies show that students with a positive attitude toward reading tend to be more successful in all subjects, and that “engaged” readers are more likely to be socially and civically engaged as well.

TEACHER-LIBRARIANS HAVE A POSITIVE IMPACT ON STUDENTS’ ATTITUDE TOWARD READING

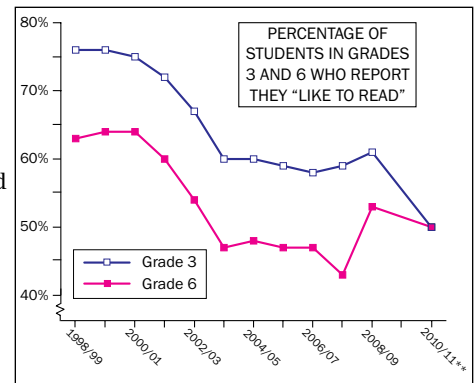
There may be many reasons for the change in students’ attitudes toward reading, including an increase in time spent in front of TV and computer screens.

The decline in the percentage of schools with teacher-librarians may also have affected students’ attitudes toward reading. A 2006 report by People for Education and Queen’s University found that

in schools with teacher-librarians, students’ reading enjoyment scores were 8 percentage points higher than average.

EXPANDING THE MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Ontario currently measures the success of the education system based, for the most part, on provincial test scores in reading, writing and math. This focus on targets for test scores and the “mechanics” of literacy may also be having an impact on student reading enjoyment.



Over the next five years, People for Education will be working with parents, educators, academics, experts and the public to develop a wider range of success indicators that include more of the factors that contribute to overall success – both in school, and in adult life. People for Education has recommended that one of those indicators should be improvements in the percentage of students who report they “like to read.”

The full report is available on People for Education’s website at <http://www.peopleforeducation.ca/document/reading-for-joy/>



GREAT IDEA FOR PICs!

The Community Volunteer Income Tax Program is starting up again and it is a great opportunity for PICs to partner with the Canada Revenue Agency and school councils

in low income areas to provide free income tax preparation to parents and community members that meet the criteria. Volunteers receive training and a FREE copy of tax preparation software that they can use to complete their income taxes. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/pic-tax>

FEBRUARY 6: NOMINATION DEADLINE FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE AWARD

The Premier’s Awards for Teaching Excellence recognize educators and staff who are helping Ontario students realize their full potential. You can nominate outstanding teachers, support staff and early childhood educators in your community. For more information, visit:

<http://edu.gov.on.ca/teachingawards/>

FEBRUARY 11, WHITBY: DURHAM CPIC AND PARENT CONFERENCE

Presented by Durham Catholic Parent Involvement Committee. The theme for this year’s conference is “Promoting inclusiveness and equity in our school environments.” For more information, contact Jim McGrorey at mcgrorey25@rogers.com or Roxanne Horwitz at roxannehorwitz@yahoo.com.

FEBRUARY 17: NOMINATION DEADLINE FOR PREMIER’S SAFE SCHOOL AWARDS

The Premier’s Safe Schools Awards recognizes exceptional and innovative work being done to



create a safe and caring school environment. This year, ten safe schools teams are being recognized. For more information, visit <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/safeschools/award.html>

FEBRUARY 29, TORONTO: PREVENTING RISK AND PROMOTING RESILIENCY IN ADOLESCENCE

The Ontario Injury Prevention Resource Centre’s 3rd annual Forum will discuss the current research and programming focusing on preventing adolescent injuries/risks and promoting resiliency in adolescence. For more information, visit: <http://www.oninjuryresources.ca/home/>

MARCH 3, TORONTO: ADOLESCENCE, THE STORMY DECADE

Presented by Helping Other Parents Everywhere (HOPE). A practical and comprehensive workshop about teenagers and pre-teens, for parents, educators and youth workers. Dr. Ron Clavier, renowned clinical psychologist, neuroscientist, and author of *Teen Brain*, *Teen Mind* will be the speaker. For more information, contact HOPE at 1-866-492-1299.



People for Education is an independent research and advocacy organization that works to support public education in Ontario’s English, French and Catholic schools.

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