

Ontario Parent Council

Annual Report

July 1, 1996 –
June 30, 1997

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The Honourable David Johnson
Minister of Education and Training
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
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December 15, 1997

Dear Mr. Johnson:

On behalf of the Ontario Parent Council, I am pleased to submit the Council's Annual Report for the period of July 1, 1996 to June 30, 1997.

Pursuing its mandate to advise from a parental perspective on elementary and secondary education, and seeking to promote parental involvement in education, the Council was active on several fronts during the year.

Developments of particular note were the release of the first elements of a new curriculum for Grades 1 to 8, the development of a provincial report card, the first tests by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), and the establishment of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT). Officials from the Ministry of Education and Training, the EQAO and the OCT communicated and consulted with the Ontario Parent Council at many stages as these initiatives took shape. Their willingness to do so greatly assisted the Council in its advisory duties, and is gratefully acknowledged by its members.

The Ontario Parent Council notes with satisfaction that school councils throughout the province continue to grow in number and in their range of activities. The Council commends parents and other members of the school community who are contributing their time and energy to their school councils, and continues to support steps that will make school councils a more effective vehicle for parental involvement in education.

This report provides details about many of the activities of the Ontario Parent Council during the year. Many thanks are due to my colleagues on the Council and to the Council's staff for the dedication, enthusiasm, and professionalism that made these activities possible.

Sincerely,

William B. P. Robson
Immediate Past Chair
Ontario Parent Council

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The Year in Brief

With significant reforms in the education system initiated in 1996-97, the Ontario Parent Council was very active in providing the Minister of Education and Training with advice on matters of concern to Ontario parents.

The Council began its 1996-97 term with a full complement of 18 members under its new Chair, William Robson. During the term, the Council met twice with the Minister of Education and Training, and also met with his Parliamentary Assistants on Education and with senior officials and staff in the Ministry to discuss education reform initiatives.

Between July 1, 1996 and June 30, 1997, the Council held six general meetings during which the Council considered and formulated positions on major policy issues, either referred by the Minister or identified by the Council as being significant. As the government proceeded with a rapid series of education reform initiatives, members were actively involved in consultations on many topics, including curriculum, assessment, reporting, funding and secondary school restructuring. The Council provided the Minister with written advice and recommendations on these and many other subjects.

Council members also met, either collectively or individually, with parent groups, educators and other groups and organizations. The Council tried, within a restricted time frame, to accommodate the many groups that asked to make a presentation before the Council.

Highlights

The Council prepared a formal response to the Secondary School Reform consultation in November 1996, and presented a Brief to the Social Development Committee of the Legislature on Bill 104, the *Fewer Boards Act*, on March 17, 1997. A great deal of time and energy was devoted to the development of school councils, and after distributing a survey in February 1997 regarding school councils to all schools in Ontario, the Council received a response rate of 32%. The results of the survey were analyzed and a report was produced entitled *Summary of School Council Survey*. Details regarding these particular initiatives are provided in the "Activities" section of this report and copies of these documents are available from our office.

Activities

Communications

In order to provide the Minister with well-informed advice from a broad perspective, Council members consulted widely through the education community, sharing information with parents, teachers and other stakeholders, and listening to their concerns. The Council met with the Education Quality and Accountability Office, the Ontario College of Teachers, the Education Improvement Commission and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation.

Thanks to many volunteer hours on the part of its members, the Council was able to accept most invitations during the 1996-97 term and the members met with over 100 parent councils, parent groups, educators and community organizations. Among other activities, members made presentations and gave workshops at the general meeting of the Ontario Public School Boards Association, at the Conference on Assessment and Reporting Achievement, at an information session with the Toronto Board of Trade, at the York University Science Fair and at the North York Parent Assembly.

In a year of rapid change, there were many requests for interviews from the news media. Most of this responsibility was borne by the Chair William Robson, but many other members found themselves called upon to participate in press interviews, radio phone-ins and television debates. The Chair of the Council and members were interviewed by the *Globe and Mail*, the *Toronto Star*, the *Toronto Sun*, *Le Droit*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, the *Ottawa Sun* and other local press, Radio Canada, CBC radio and television in Toronto and Ottawa, TV Ontario and radio and television across Ontario. The Council issued a number of news releases related to school councils, secondary school reform and Bill 104.

Unable to produce a newsletter for parents during the 1996-97 school year due to budgetary cuts, the Council prepared a pamphlet and other information material in English and French. Intended mainly for distribution at meetings and conferences, they briefly outline the purpose of the Council and ways to get in touch, including the toll-free telephone number and e-mail address. The Council was pleased to be given a sub-page on the Ministry's website: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/abcs/parentco> for posting items such as news releases, annual reports and other relevant material. Hopes remain high for an interactive website in the near future.

Policy Issues

With the significant changes affecting education that were either proposed or actually implemented during the 1996-97 school year, the Ontario Parent Council was active in providing advice on a wide range of key education policy matters.

Key initiatives of the Council in this area were:

- a Brief to the Standing Committee on Social Development that examined Bill 104 (summarized below);
- a response to the request for public input to guide the government in its secondary school reform (summarized below);
- a presentation to the Education Improvement Commission which provided recommendations on the length of school days and the school year, professional development, differentiated staffing, teacher education and class sizes;
- participation in the development of the grades 1 to 8 curriculum in Language and Mathematics.

Many of the recommendations of the Council have found their way into subsequent legislation or documents, as policy planners and decision-makers have sought to include a parent's perspective in the policies governing Ontario's education.

Brief to the Standing Committee Reviewing Bill 104

In January 1997, the Government introduced Bill 104, an Act to Improve the Accountability, Effectiveness and Quality of Ontario's School System (Fewer Boards Act). On March 27th, the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) presented a brief to the Standing Committee on Social Development reviewing the Bill.

The OPC summarized its position by stating that Bill 104 had the potential to bring about an improved system of education for Ontario students but that the emphasis had to be on the classroom and on providing schools with the resources and flexibility they needed to meet high standards and to respond to local conditions. In particular, the OPC supported the intent of the Bill regarding fewer school boards and fewer trustees, the strengthening of the financial accountability of boards, the freeing up of resources for the classroom, and the establishment of the Education Improvement Commission.

However, it was felt that Bill 104 needed strengthening in the area of local participation in decision making. There had to be a clearly defined place for parents and for school councils which would be key to the success of this new system. The OPC strongly urged the Committee that the establishment of school councils in Ontario's schools be mandated in Bill 104.

In addition, the OPC stressed that parents had to be heard when recommendations were being developed during the transition process through representation on the Education Improvement Commission and on the committees that it may establish.

Summary of the Response by the Ontario Parent Council to the Secondary School Reform Consultation Guide

In its response to the Secondary School Reform Consultation Guide, the Ontario Parent Council included the following recommendations:

- the reintroduction of credits for Grades 9s;
- the reintroduction of streaming for Grades 9s, but on a subject-by-subject basis rather than streaming the whole child;
- streaming according to level of difficulty in Grades 9 and 10;
- streaming according to post-secondary destination in Grades 11 and 12;
- opportunities for remediation such as summer school, beginning at least in the transition years if not sooner;
- retention of current 110-hour course length;
- requirement of 20 compulsory credits and 10 optional credits for diploma;
- optional co-operation education/work experience for credit;
- use of professional development days for students as well as teachers.

School Councils

The Ontario Parent Council took on the task of researching the role of school councils and forwarded a position paper to the Minister.

Summary of the School Council Position Paper

In 1994, the Ontario Parent Council called for the legislation of school councils in every school in Ontario. In 1995, Policy and Program Memorandum 122 (PPM 122) was issued by the Government, directing school boards to have their school councils in place by June 1996. The Council felt that experience since PPM 122, and the anticipated changes forthcoming in education governance, called for a review of the structure and role of school councils. Therefore, the Council recommended that legislation be enacted to:

- mandate the existence of a school council in every school, and District Councils at the District Board level;
- give direction to principals and boards that they must seek and incorporate input from school and district councils in regard to specific areas;

- stipulate the allocation of District Board funds and other resources to their school councils;
- stipulate the term structure of, and eligibility for office on, school councils;
- outline regular reporting and accountability structures.

That regulations accompany the above legislation to stipulate:

- procedural details;
- the role and responsibilities of the principal, council members and the District Board in relation to school councils;
- evaluation and reporting procedures.

That a dispute resolution mechanism, which includes an independent arbitrator or ombudsman, be established at the Ministry level.

School Council Survey

Following the preparation of this document, it was apparent to the Council as a whole that there was a need to intensify its efforts to communicate with local school councils. Therefore the members developed a questionnaire and forwarded it to all school council chairs, with three main objectives:

- to assess the success of the school council initiative thus far;
- to determine the ongoing support needs of school councils;
- to develop a registry of school councils which would enable the Ontario Parent Council to network and communicate effectively with them.

Over 1800 schools responded (32%) with detailed information about their various needs, concerns and opinions. The Ontario Parent Council hired a consulting company to analyse the large amount of data. A final report on school councils was prepared and made available to the public. It has provided the Council with a great deal of insight into the needs of school councils, and recommendations from this report were developed and forwarded to the Minister of Education and Training.

The *Summary of the School Council Survey* is available from our Web page which can be located at:

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/abcs/parentco>

Biographies of Members of the Ontario Parent Council

The Chair of the Ontario Parent Council, **William Robson**, of Toronto, is an economist with the C.D. Howe Institute. He has three children attending public school in Toronto. Bill is a Vice-President of the Organization for Quality Education, and a founding director of the Coalition for Education Reform.

Gisèle Acheson is a community occupational therapist living in Navan. She has two children in the secondary and the elementary systems. She has long been involved in the École Saint-Hugues and the École secondaire catholique Garneau Parent Teacher Association committees. Gisèle is past chair of the Ottawa-Carleton Roman Catholic French Language School Board's umbrella parent association and now serves as a School Council parent member at her daughters' schools.

Kathy Anstett lives in Mississauga and has been actively involved in parent associations in Nova Scotia and Ontario. Her four children are all currently attending different schools within the Peel Board of Education. She is Co-Chair of the Camilla Road Senior Public School Council, is currently on the Board of Directors of the Cooksville-Munden Park Homeowners Association and is active in her church and other community organizations. Kathy has returned to college part-time in pursuit of a CGA designation.

Susan Bistrovich resides in Grimsby and is an accountant with Dofasco Inc. in Hamilton. As a parent, she has long been involved in her two children's elementary and secondary school parent associations and on their executives. Susan is immediate past director of the Federation of Catholic Parent-Teacher Associations of Ontario where she served from 1992 to 1996. Susan continues to be an active participant in the Niagara Region, where her children attend secondary school, in the CPTA for Lincoln-Welland.

Gabrielle Blais lives in Orléans and is a manager at the National Archives of Canada. She has been involved in educational issues for over eight years as a school volunteer and chair of the Parents' Association, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the Fédération des associations de parents francophones de l'Ontario. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Cumberland Community Resource Centre. She is also active in national archival and historical associations. Gabrielle has three children who attend l'Ecole élémentaire publique Jeanne Sauvé in Orléans.

Elizabeth Elliott, of Kingston, is a single parent of a 10 year old son in the public school system. She is an active volunteer with many community organizations and, for many years, has been employed and has volunteered at local schools helping with children, some having special needs. She is currently employed in the purchasing department of a large Canadian-owned company.

Martha Harron is a Toronto writer, the author of *A Parent Contradiction* and co-author of *Debunk's Illustrated Guide to the Canadian Establishment*. Her three children attended Toronto public schools; the youngest has just entered high school. An active volunteer, Martha received a Riverdale Appreciation Award in 1993 for her work as president of the Riverdale Collegiate parents' association. Former editor of the *Quality Education Network Newsletter*, she reviews books on education and parenting for *Quill & Quire* magazine.

Lakshaman Heenatigala, from London, is a Financial Advisor specializing in Retirement Planning and Estate Planning. His youngest son is a Grade 6 student at St. Mary's Choir School in London. His two elder children both attended elementary and secondary schools in Ontario and graduated from the University of Western Ontario. Lakshaman is a director/member of the Canadian Club in London, of the London Multicultural Youth Association and of the Council of Canadian Immigrants. Lakshaman is a Toastmaster, an award winning public speaker and writes a column on Canadian Politics in *Lanka News*.

Mary Margaret Laing from Cambridge is a nutritionist and owner of a health care marketing business who works in health care communications. She has three children attending elementary and secondary schools in both public and separate boards in Waterloo Region. She has been an active member of the St. Ambrose School Community Association for the last four years, and served on the Waterloo Region's Social Resources Council for five years, chairing in 1993. Mary Margaret served on a committee of the Waterloo Region Separate School Board to implement school councils in their schools. She is also director on the Cambridge Memorial Hospital Board.

Valerie Mills-Daly is a Registered Nurse in Kenora and has three children in the public school system. She has long been active in various parent committees at her children's schools and with a number of community organizations. Valerie is currently serving on the Kenora Board of Education's Parent Advisory Committee.

Marlene Morrison Nicholls is an insurance broker and part owner of an insurance brokerage in Lindsay. She and her husband Ken have 3 daughters ages 13, 10 and 7. Marlene has assisted in policy setting of both a Behaviour Code and a Homework Policy at her daughters' school, and last fall was appointed by the Mayor to facilitate a large United Nations' Anniversary celebration. In addition, she is a director on the Ross Memorial Hospital Foundation, an active member of St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, has held all executive offices of the local Insurance Brokers Association and is a member of the School Advisory Council at Parkview Public School.

Roy Paluoja is a twenty year resident of Scarborough. He and his wife have two daughters in high school and he has been a member of both his daughters' Parent Councils for the last five years. He has served Scarborough as President of Human Services of Scarborough and as Vice Chair of the City of Scarborough's Environmental Advisory Committee. He has also served the Government of Canada as a member of the Canadian Multiculturalism Council. In addition, he has been Vice-President of the Estonian Central Council in Canada. For 17 years, he has been a professor at Seneca College in North York.

Dona Pollard of Fort Frances has three children, two of whom are in post-secondary programs and one who is in the secondary school system. She has taught school and was a member of the local Board of Education for seven years. She is involved actively in educational issues and the Music and Drama Festival as treasurer. For many years, she was Sunday School teacher and superintendent of Knox United Church. Being secretary-treasurer of her husband's company has further broadened her perspective on education.

Shari Ritter (BSc.N) lives in Nepean and has been involved in the planning and delivery of numerous community health programs, including: an inner-city multi-service clinic, college health service, needle exchange program, emergency psychiatry unit and home care services. She is presently a member of the Ottawa Jewish Community Relations Committee, the Sir Robert Borden High School Community Advisory Council, DES Action (national) and formerly a member of the Nepean Police Community Advisory Council.

Ken Slemko is a manager in the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions in Ottawa. His two children attend elementary and secondary schools in the Ottawa Board of Education (OBE). He is Treasurer of the Joint Council of OBE Elementary and Secondary Advisory Committees. A member of the School Council for Hopewell Avenue Public School, Ken previously chaired the Parent Advisory and the Renovation Committee. The 85 year old school is currently undergoing major renovation. Ken also coaches soccer and cross-country skiing.

Ann Smith lives in Pembroke and works for Bell Canada. She has two children, one in Grade 11 and the other attending college. Ann was President of Hillcrest Home and School Association and Fellows High School Home and School Association and has served on the board of Directors of Ontario Federation of Home and School Association for 10 years. She is also newly elected as the Co-Chair of Fellows High School Council and was President of Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations.

Susan Somers is a homemaker who lives in Burlington. Her two sons are in high school, one in a French Immersion program. She is past president of the Clarksdale Elementary School Parent-Teacher Association, and is currently involved with the M. M. Robinson High School Parent Advisory Council. She has been a school volunteer for ten years, spending much of that time working in an elementary school library. Susan has served on a Board committee developing a policy on Ethno-Cultural and Race Equity.

Richard Zelinka of London is an urban and regional planning consultant with three children, two of whom are in the secondary school system. He is past chair of the Banting Home and School Association and a past president of the Lord Roberts Parent Teacher Association. He was a volunteer ESL teacher for two years and a PTA liaison person at the London Board of Education for seven years. Richard is currently chair of the Banting School Council.

Financial Report

Financial report for the period April 1, 1996 to March 31, 1997

Budget:	\$259,300
Expenditures:*	
Salaries and wages	\$105,205
Transport and communications	58,268
Services and rentals	51,667
Supplies and equipment	56,004
Total:	271,144
Balance:	\$(11,844)**

* Statement of expenditures was provided by the Ministry of Education and Training.

** Due to a mid-year budget reduction of 50%, the Council overspent by \$11,844. This was absorbed by the Ministry of Education and Training.