

Ontario Parent Council Annual Report

July 1, 1997 – June 30, 1998

November 2, 1998

The Honourable David Johnson
Minister of Education and Training
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

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, 1997 to June 30, 1998.

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.

The members of the Council were pleased to be involved in the development of the revised elementary and secondary curriculum. In particular, we noted the level of cooperation among the education stakeholders that permitted the successful completion of the elementary curriculum. The OPC is continuing its participation in the revision of the secondary school curriculum but we remain concerned about the implementation of secondary school reform due to the short timelines.

We were particularly gratified this term to see that school councils were legislated through Bill 160 and that the Education Improvement Commission was given the task of examining the roles and responsibilities of school councils.

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,

Teresa Hartnett
Chair Ontario
Parent Council

The Year in Brief

With the continuing restructuring of education in Ontario, the Ontario Parent Council was very active in providing the Minister of Education and Training with advice on matters of concern to Ontario parents.

During the 1997-98 term, the Council met twice with the Minister, and with a number of agencies such as the Education Improvement Commission, the Ontario College of Teachers and the Education Quality and Accountability Office and with senior officials and staff of the Ministry of Education and Training to discuss, and provide input into, education reform initiatives.

The Council held seven general meetings between July 1, 1997 and June 30, 1998. During that time, the Council considered and formulated positions on major policy issues identified by the Council as being significant. Members were actively involved in consultations on many topics, including the elementary and secondary curriculum, secondary school reform and the funding formula. The Council provided the Minister with written advice and recommendations on these and many other subjects.

Highlights

On October 21, 1997, the Ontario Parent Council presented a Brief to the Social Development Standing Committee of the Legislature on Bill 160, *The Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997* and on February 16, 1998 made a presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on the pre-budget consultations.

Members of the Council devoted a great deal of time and energy to the development of the revised elementary and secondary curriculum documents through their participation in work groups established by the Ministry of Education and Training.

A newsletter outlining major areas of education reform such as curriculum, assessment, report cards and school councils was published in March 1998 and circulated to parents through schools in Ontario.

Activities

Communications

The Ontario Parent Council's major initiative in this area was the production of its fourth newsletter that was distributed to parents (through schools) in March 1998. The aim was to provide a clear and concise summary of the many changes and initiatives in education in the areas of school councils, elementary and secondary curriculum, assessment and reporting, plus a list of major sources to contact for further information.

Outreach activities continued to be a priority and members were able to accept most of the invitations extended to the Council during the 1997-98 term. Many volunteer hours were spent by Council members attending conferences and workshops and meeting with parent groups, educators, school councils, district councils and other organizations. Among other activities, members attended the annual meeting of the Ontario Public School Boards Association and of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, and the national Conference of Ministers of Education, Canada. The Chair gave a workshop at the Conference on Assessment and Reporting Achievement and made a presentation before the Principals and Vice-Principals Consultation Group.

In addition, the Council met with the Education Improvement Commission, the Education Quality and Accountability Office, the Ontario College of Teachers and the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation to discuss issues of common concern, policy initiatives and to share information.

Many members found they were 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 and other local press, Radio Canada, CBC radio and television in Toronto and Ottawa, TV Ontario and radio and television across Ontario.

We have seen a marked increase in the public's use of the Council's E-Mail address at opc@edu.gov.on.ca and OPC members are also increasingly using the internet to communicate among each other. In addition, the public continues to make good use of our 800 line (1-800-361-6483) and of our general line at (416) 314-0426. Information items such as the March 1998 newsletter, news releases and annual reports, are available through the office and are also posted on the Council's web page situated at the following address on the Ministry's web site: <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/abcs/abcs.html>.

Policy Issues

Curriculum

Throughout the 1997-98 term, the members devoted a lot of time and energy to the development of the revised elementary curriculum in the areas of Arts, Language, French as a Second Language, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Physical and Health Education and Social Studies.

The Council members have also been involved in the development of the secondary school curriculum through their participation on the subject panels established by the Ministry of Education and Training to provide guidance and recommendations to the writers of the curriculum documents. This process is ongoing and should be completed by early 1999.

Brief to the Standing Committee reviewing Bill 160

In September 1997, the Government introduced Bill 160, *The Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997*. On October 21, 1997, the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) presented a brief to the Standing Committee on Social Development reviewing the Bill. Below is a summary of the Council's position.

The Council stressed the principle that the classroom should be the primary focus of education, and the importance of local input in decisions that affect individual schools. The OPC supported Bill 160 in the following areas:

Provincial authority to limit class size and increase instructional time

The OPC stated that there were insufficient safeguards in the system against increases in class size and lower instructional time. A particular concern centered around the use of complicated and inconsistent formulas for average pupil-teacher ratios that were often at variance with the situation in actual classrooms.

The OPC also saw a need to provide an option for local flexibility by permitting individual schools to appeal for modifications in provincially or regionally established norms, particularly if they were aimed at maintaining smaller class sizes, more instructional time or other similarly higher standards

The legislating of school councils

The OPC strongly supported the legislating of school councils and recommended that regulations be developed to ensure financing and access to school resources for school councils to ensure that they can communicate with their school communities.

Differentiated staffing

The OPC expressed its support for differentiated staffing in specific areas such as Early Childhood Educators in Junior Kindergarten and the hiring of personnel to perform functions such as library, career counselling and computer-related services if it can be demonstrated that program quality could be maintained and student safety ensured.

The OPC also urged that the Ontario College of teachers be asked to indicate what criteria they would use to certify non-teachers to assist in schools. Only if the College was not able to establish reasonable criteria within a reasonable period of time would the OPC see a need for a separate certification system.

Principals and Vice-Principals

The OPC recommended that supervisory officers, principals and vice- principals who have no classroom responsibilities not be members of the teacher unions. The OPC felt that such membership confused the principals' line of accountability and impaired the principals' ability to act as effective managers.

As a final note, the OPC recommended the establishment of a transparent and open regulatory process, and for a commitment from the Government that savings resulting from changes in the areas addressed by Bill 160 be reinvested in the classroom.

Brief to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on Pre-Budget Consultations

On February 16, 1998, the OPC made a presentation before the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on the pre-budget consultations.

The OPC stated that adequate funding was a key element in ensuring that education reform initiatives were successful and that program and learning quality should be maintained during the transition. Furthermore, that in judging the impact of education reform, most parents would focus on how those changes affected the quality of the learning that took place in their children's classrooms. When considering the impact of the budget on the classrooms, the OPC stressed that the Government should provide a level of funding that would ensure classrooms have the resources and trained teachers needed so students can meet the higher standards that will be demanded by the new curriculum. In addition, it was recommended that the funding provide a period of stability in which to implement these necessary reforms.

Others

The OPC participated as a member of the Assessment Advisory Committee of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). The EQAO has responsibility for province-wide assessment activities in Ontario and established the Advisory Committee to provide the organization with input from key stakeholder groups. The OPC also participated in the Ontario Curriculum Exemplars Project. Teachers from across the province were invited to provide samples of student work in Writing, Reading, and Mathematics. From these work samples, exemplars have been selected which demonstrate student performance at each grade and for each level of achievement. The publications are aimed at parents, teachers and students and will be available in the Fall of 1998 for Writing and in the Spring of 1999 for Reading and Mathematics.

School Councils

In 1997, the OPC conducted a School Council Survey to which over 30% of school councils in Ontario responded. The results of this survey, which are available from our office and our web page, were used as a reference for all the work undertaken this year by the members of the Council in relation to school councils.

As part of its mandate, Ontario's Education Improvement Commission (EIC) is to provide recommendations to the Minister of Education and Training "on the feasibility of strengthening the role of school councils over time" and "on the feasibility of increasing parental involvement in education governance." The results of the school council survey conducted by the OPC showed that parents on school councils across the province were seeking more information and clarification regarding their councils' mandate, members' roles and responsibilities, and the need for training. In view of the upcoming consultation in the Fall of 1998 by the EIC, a letter was sent to the Minister of Education and Training in January 1998 recommending that the EIC's consultation address issues such as governance, the roles and responsibilities of school councils, accountability, resources for effective functioning and communication and networking among school councils and parents.

In response to the EIC's subsequent request to provide input into the methodology of the consultation, the OPC sent a paper to the Commission in February 1998 entitled "Considerations for School Council Consultation." The paper provided recommendations on the best strategies for communicating with parents during the consultation, ensuring accessibility for all parents and school councils and methods for analyzing the data gathered.

The Council also recommended to the Minister that an inter-active web site for school councils be set up and maintained by the Ministry to allow school councils and parents to communicate, exchange information and share best practices.

Members of the Ontario Parent Council

1997-98 Term

The Chair of the Ontario Parent Council, **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.

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.

Janet Burghart lives in Mississauga. As a parent of two children in the public school system, she has been actively involved for the last 6 years as a school volunteer in the classroom, on the Parents' Association of her children's school and as a member of the Executive. Janet is also active with other community organizations.

Lucy Cywink lives in Elliot Lake and is a district Public Health Nurse with the Algoma Health Unit. She has two children attending elementary and secondary schools, in both public and separate boards in Elliot Lake. She has been an active member of the Our Lady of Lourdes School Community Council for the last four years and was the first and past co-chair of the school council. She is also a member of various coalitions and committees within the community which address population-based health promotion needs and activities.

Paul Goulet, and his writer/publisher wife, live in Toronto and have three children, two of whom attend Huron Street Public School and one who recently graduated from university. Paul operates his own business which includes advisory services for joint ventures and technical transfers between North American companies and partners in the Far East and Latin America. Paul has served two separate terms as Co-chair of Huron's Parent/Guardian Association, and is now serving his second term as Chair of Toronto's Mid-Town Parents Council. He also serves on the Advisory Council of the Anglican Church of the Messiah, Toronto.

Trudy Griffiths, a self-employed consultant, lives in rural Northwestern Ontario with her husband Doug. Their daughter Blaire is a grade 5 student at Eagle River Public School. Trudy has been an active volunteer in the community and in the elementary classroom where she has served as Chair of the Parents' Association and of the School Advisory Council. She has submitted proposals and presentations to the board on current issues of concern, participated in site and action planning, the writing of school policy and has organized school and community computer, information and safety seminars.

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.

Teresa Hartnett lives in Hamilton with her husband and four children, three of whom attend elementary school and one who attends high school. She is involved in the community as director of Birthright, an emergency pregnancy service, teacher of a sexuality course at a local maternity home, and member of her parish council. She is actively involved in the education system as chairperson of Our Lady of Lourdes Elementary Catholic School Council, Co-chair of the Joint Elementary Parent Advisory Group for the Separate School System and as a member of the School Council Implementation Committee for the Separate School Board.

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, 14, 11 and 8. Marlene has assisted in policy setting of both a Behaviour Code, and a Homework Policy at her daughters' school, was appointed by the Mayor to facilitate a large United Nations' Anniversary celebration in 1996. She is also 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 has served as 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.

Martina Prokop lives in Prince Edward County. She and her partner own and operate a small business in the City of Belleville. Martina has two sons who attend school within the Hasting Prince Edward County District School Board. She has been involved in alternative education for 10 years with a focus on parent participation in the classroom. Martina is currently the Chair of the Kente Public School Council and a member of the Moira Secondary School Council and is a charter member of the local United Nations Association of Canada and was a volunteer and Board member of Quinte United Immigrant Services.

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.

William B. Robson, of Toronto, is an economist with the C.D. Howe Institute. He has three children attending John Ross Robertson Public School (elementary), where he serves as secretary of the school council. Bill is a director of the Organization for Quality Education, the Ontario Coalition for Education Reform, and the Society for the Advancement of Excellence in Education.

Lesley Schuurs lives on a dairy farm outside of Ingersoll, with her husband John and two children ages 12 and 6. She has been actively involved in the education of her children for the past eight years. Lesley is a charter and lifetime member of the Oxford Council of Home and School Associations. She has served on the Safe School Committee, Financial Strategies Committee and the parent/student sub-committee of the local Education Improvement Committee of the Oxford County Board of Education. Lesley has held many positions within the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations over the years and is currently on the Board of Directors as Policy Chair.

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-Carlton District School Board. He is a member of the Assembly of School Councils of the Ottawa-Carlton District School Board. 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 was renovated in 1996-97. Ken also coaches soccer and cross-country skiing.

Susan Somers is a homemaker who lives in Burlington. Her two sons are in high school, one in a French Immersion programme. 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.

Pam Tate lives in Mississauga with her husband and three sons. She has been very active in the education of her children and is the Peel Regional Director for the Ontario Federation of Catholic School Associations. She is the current Chair of the St. Martin's Secondary School Advisory Council and the past Chair of the St. Jerome Elementary School Education Committee and of the Dufferin Peel Separate School Board Education Committee Advisory Group. Pam has hosted many parent information forums and is committed to facilitating and improving information and communication networks for parents.

Financial Report

Financial report for the period April 1, 1997 to March 31, 1998

Budget:	\$259,300
Expenditures:*	\$100,971
Salaries and wages	63,416
Transport and communications	56,874
Services and rentals	67,889
Supplies and equipment	<u>\$289,150</u>
Total:	
Balance:	<u>\$(29,850)</u> **

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

** Due to a budget reduction of 50% over the last two years, the Council overspent by \$29,850. This was absorbed by the Ministry of Education and Training.