

Ontario Parent Council

Annual Report

July 1, 1998 –
June 30, 1999

Ontario Parent Council
101 Bloor St W, 5th Floor
Toronto ON M5S 2Z7

1-800-361-6483

(416) 314-0426

Fax: (416) 314-0425

E-mail: opc@edu.gov.on.ca

**Ontario Parent
Council**

101 Bloor St W, 5th Floor
Toronto ON M5S 2Z7
Telephone: (416) 314-0426 or
1-800-361-6483
Facsimile: (416) 314-0425

**Conceil ontarien
des parents**

101, rue Bloor ouest, 5^e étage
Toronto ON M5S 2Z7
Téléphone : (416) 314-0426 ou le
1-800-361-6483
Télécopieur : (416) 314-0425



The Honourable Janet Ecker
Minister of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1L2

October 1, 1999

Dear Ms Ecker:

On behalf of the Ontario Parent Council, I am pleased to submit the Council's Annual Report for the period of July 1, 1998 to June 30, 1999.

As our mandate directs, we provided advice from a parental perspective on a wide variety of issues concerning elementary and secondary levels of education. As well, we sought to promote maximum parental involvement in the education system whenever possible.

The members of the Council have been closely involved in the development of the secondary school curriculum, and have also continued to provide input into the elementary curriculum. The Council has stressed throughout this process, the importance of keeping parents informed of all changes to the education system in a timely and detailed manner. Education reform will work best when all stakeholders are involved and informed.

We were pleased to provide input to the Education Improvement Commission as they looked at the roles and responsibilities of school councils, and to present our response to their document "The Road Ahead III" to the Minister of Education. Many school councils have looked closely at this report, and look in anticipation to your response, and to a more defined mandate of their role.

The Ontario Parent Council was involved in a number of activities over the past year which are detailed in this annual report. The members and staff of the Council deserve a great deal of thanks for their commitment to the education system, and for their desire and dedication to offer whatever assistance they can to support student learning. We believe that when all educational stakeholders work together, student learning is maximized.

Sincerely,

Teresa Hartnett
Immediate Past Chair
Ontario Parent Council

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The Year in Brief

During this exceptionally busy year, the members of the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) met 10 times between July 1, 1998 and June 30, 1999. The OPC met with the Minister of Education on 5 occasions to provide advice, predominantly on education reform and school councils. In addition, the OPC provided the Minister with written advice and recommendations in many areas such as the importance of communicating rapidly and effectively with parents of children affected by high school reform, the timing of high school reform, exemptions from class size policy, the shortage of teachers, the Grades 9 to 12 report card, and how to increase parental participation and make it more effective.

During this transitional year, it was critical that a parental perspective be brought to the discussions taking place on education reform, and the members of the OPC spent many hours contributing to the development of education policies and programs. The OPC was intent on making sure that parents in Ontario received as much information as possible regarding changes to the education system. In addition to stressing to the Ministry of Education the importance of communicating quickly and effectively with parents, so they would have up-to-date information to make decisions about their children's education, the OPC also distributed a newsletter to all school councils in Ontario to provide relevant information to parents.

Activities

Communications

The Ontario Parent Council published and distributed a two-page newsletter in March 1999 which was sent to all school councils in Ontario. The newsletter gave an update on OPC activities and on various components of secondary school reform, such as the Annual Education Plan, Teacher Advisors and Community Service. An update was also provided on school councils, parent involvement, testing and the shortage of teachers.

The members of the OPC, through their various backgrounds, are involved parents in their communities. This exposure in their local educational environments enables them to bring grass-root concerns to the various stakeholder groups.

In addition, many members found they were called upon to participate in press interviews and radio phone-ins. The Chair of the Council and members were interviewed by the print media across Ontario and by Radio Canada, CBC radio and TVO.

During this period, the public used extensively the Council's E-Mail address at **opc@edu.gov.on.ca**, the 800 line at 1-800-361-6483 and the general line at (416) 314-0426. Information items such as the March 1999 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 of Education's web site:

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

Policy

Policy Advice to the Ministry of Education

This was a particularly busy year for OPC members as they participated on a number of committees and work groups set up by the Ministry of Education to address the many facets of education reform.

The OPC was represented on the Ministry's External Advisory Group for Secondary School Reform which is made up of education stakeholders. During this past year, many issues of parental concern were brought forward by the OPC for the consideration of the Advisory Group, including communication with students and parents and funding and curriculum implementation. We are pleased to note that many of the OPC's recommendations were integrated into the secondary school reform process.

OPC members participated on the Secondary School Curriculum Policy Documents Feedback Panels for the development of the Grades 9 and 10 policy documents. These panels were set up in February 1998 by the Ministry of Education to give stakeholders an opportunity to provide input into the curriculum development process. The OPC members devoted a great deal of time to the analysis of documents for Grades 9 and 10 and will continue to do so for the development of the Grades 11 and 12 curriculum documents. Copies of the curriculum policy documents can be obtained from the following Web site:

www.ecoo.org/projects/deliverables/secondary.html

The OPC was represented on the Ontario Curriculum Exemplars Project Committee and provided advice on the preparation of the resource booklet, the *Ontario Curriculum – Exemplars, Grades 1-8: Writing, 1999*, which was released in the Spring of 1999. This document provides teachers, parents and students with samples of student writing based on the expectations of the curriculum. The Council is currently participating in the development of the Reading and Math exemplar documents. Copies of the Writing Exemplar can be obtained from the Ministry's Web page at **www.edu.gov.on.ca** or through the Government Bookstore.

Since parents have many concerns regarding the provision of safe and appropriate transportation to and from schools, the OPC participated on the Transportation Committee responsible for the development of a transportation funding formula.

As the Ministry proceeds with the implementation of the revised curriculum at the elementary and secondary levels, the OPC was asked to join the Curriculum Implementation Advisory Committee and Ad Hoc Advisory Committee which are responsible for overseeing the implementation process at the provincial level. At these meetings, the OPC continued to stress the importance of providing information about all changes, in a timely manner, to parents.

Policy Advice to Other Organizations

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) has been conducting a number of consultation and focus groups on issues related to the teaching profession. The Council provided the OCT with input on the draft Teachers' Standards of Practice, Language Proficiency Test for Teacher Certification, Teachers' Orientation Program, Professional Learning Framework for the Teaching Profession and Principals Qualifications Program. As well, the OPC provided the OCT with advice on the issue of teacher shortage and the use of supply teachers.

The OPC continued to participate on the Assessment Advisory Committee of the Education Quality & Accountability Office (EQAO). The EQAO has responsibility for province-wide assessment activities in Ontario and established the Advisory Committee to provide the organization with advice from key stakeholder groups.

Advice on School Councils

Response to the EIC Consultation on School Councils

In May 1998, the Education Improvement Commission (EIC) released a discussion paper on the future role of school councils in Ontario. The purpose of the discussion paper was to seek input from school communities on the issues confronting school councils, and their present and potential effectiveness. This feedback was used to form the basis of the EIC's recommendations to the Minister on the future role of school councils.

Following is a list of recommendations contained in the response of the OPC to the discussion paper:

- School councils should continue to perform an advisory function along the lines envisioned in PPM 122. School councils should have the option of taking on decision-making powers in the areas of school policy outlined in PPM 122 and other areas consistent with provincial legislation and should have the further option of participating in a decision-making capacity in the selection and performance review of principals.
- Accountability mechanisms should be put in place to ensure that principals and district boards seek and incorporate the advice of school councils.
- School councils should be democratically elected bodies, all meetings should be open to the public, minutes of meetings should be made available to the public on request and minutes should be posted in a public place in the school.
- The single term of office for school council members should be no more than two years, after which reelection may be sought. Members may serve up to two consecutive terms; at which point, they should have to wait a year before being eligible for reelection. Elections should be held yearly to fill vacant positions.

- School council chairs should not be employees of the district boards and any individual running for a position on the school council should declare any association with the education system. Conflict of interest guidelines should be defined at the provincial level and their observance mandatory for all school council members.
- An upper limit of members calculated in relation to enrolment should help ensure effective functioning.
- Rules for a quorum should require that a majority of members be present and a majority of that number be parents.
- All voting processes should be transparent and open to the public.
- District boards should establish regular monitoring mechanisms to ensure that their school councils are following board and provincial policies and regulations. Boards should be monitored by, and held accountable to, the Ministry of Education for the establishment and consistent implementation of Ministry policies and directives on school councils.
- A dispute resolution structure should be established at each district board with an appeal mechanism established at the provincial level.
- Legislation should mandate that district boards establish District School Councils to consolidate input from individual councils. District boards should be mandated to facilitate and encourage communication between their school councils, and between school councils and their District School Councils.
- Secretarial services and school resources such as meeting rooms, paper and office supplies, copying and access to the school's computers, e-mail and Internet connections should be available to school councils.
- An interactive web site for school councils should be established and maintained by the Ministry of Education.
- Jurisdiction for deciding what information can be distributed to the community through the school should be delegated to school councils.

Following the November 1998 release of the EIC's *Road Ahead III, A Report on the Role of School Councils*, the OPC forwarded to the Minister of Education in December 1998 a series of recommendations related to this report. While the OPC supported the overall direction of the Report, it felt that it did not go far enough in defining most of its recommendations and that parents, as major stakeholders affected by this document, were looking for more details in many areas, especially those that were not fully defined in Policy/Program Memorandum 122 (School Board Policies on School Councils), such as the roles and responsibilities of school councils. The OPC also had a particular concern that the Report addressed the involvement of the general community in education on equal par with the involvement of the members of the school community. It was stressed that the emphasis should be

placed on the meaningful and valued participation of the members of the school community in the education of their children. A number of recommendations were made to the Minister regarding specific recommendations contained in the *Road Ahead III*.

Brief to Ministry of Finance

The Ontario Parent Council presented a pre-budget brief to the Ministry of Finance on March 3, 1999. There were significant developments in the area of school funding since the 1998 budget and most of the comments in the Brief related to specific concerns flowing from the funding formula. The OPC made the following recommendations:

- The Government must provide adequate funding for training programs for teachers so that they can deliver the new program at the elementary and secondary levels;
- Due to the rapid pace of education reform, funding for remedial programs must be made available throughout the province since some students will require help to meet the new standards and to succeed in meeting their education goals;
- Schools must have all the resources required to deliver the program equitably across the province;
- The Government should allocate additional funding for new schools since the building of new schools is an essential part of development, just as building roads or ensuring that all utilities are available is essential in new growth areas;
- Currently the funding formula for the Early Learning Grant provides funding for either Junior Kindergarten/Senior Kindergarten or French as a Second Language, Grades 1-3 but not for both. Both programs should be funded and made available to students throughout the province;
- Many areas of the province have seen an increase in the need for special education resources. While the funding formula addresses this area, there are still a lot of concerns as to whether there are enough resources available. The Government should ensure that special education programs and services are adequately and equitably funded;
- School councils continue to grow in their importance to the education system, and therefore, it is increasingly important that they have sufficient resources to be able to communicate with their communities and promote parental involvement. Specific funding for school councils should be provided in the funding formula so their essential role in the education system can continue to grow;

- From the year 2001 to the year 2015, there is a projected steep increase in the number of students who will leave high school. The Government should undertake now to fund the increased demand for university placements, training placements and adult education. This will allow university, community colleges and district boards to start planning now for this increased demand;
- Other emerging problems were also highlighted, such as the potential overcrowding of schools, school shortages throughout the province and the safe transportation of students to and from schools.

Representation

The OPC met with the Education Improvement Commission, the Ontario College of Teachers, the Education Quality & Accountability Office and with Ministry officials regarding the education funding formula, the development of the curriculum, and secondary school reform.

Members also participated on the Ontario Advisory Committee on Student Financial Assistance and on the Double Cohort Focus Group.

In addition, the members participated on a great number of committees and work groups and attended many meetings, conferences and workshops to provide information on the OPC, and to get a sense of parents' concerns and issues in order to be able to advise the Minister of Education in an informed manner. Some of these committees included the Ministry of Education's Curriculum Implementation Advisory Committee, the Ad Hoc Advisory Committee, the External Advisory Group for Secondary School Reform and the Transportation Committee. The OPC also participated on the Active Schools Provincial Partnership Committee of the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association.

Conferences

The Ontario Parent Council was represented at the following events:

- The national joint meeting of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, and the Education Quality & Accountability Office to establish expectations in reading and writing
- National Dialogue Conference on Multicultural, Intercultural, and Antiracist In-Service Training for Teachers
- Annual meetings of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, the Ontario Association of School Business Officials and the Ontario Public School Boards' Association
- Public Education Symposium entitled "Student Transportation Matters"
- First Annual Youth Violence Prevention Conference

- Meeting of the Canadian Career Information Association
- Collegium of Work and Learning Conference
- Healthy Children, Healthy Communities Conference
- Participated on the TVO Teachers Awards' Panel
- The Toronto Sun's Teachers of the Year Awards for 1999
- Teachers for Excellence/Parent Network Conference
- National Children's Agenda Roundtable
- Year-Round Education Conference

In addition, the Ottawa-Carleton Parent Assembly, the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association, the Ontario Public School Boards' Association, the Elementary Teachers' Federation, the Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association and the Collegium of Work and Learning made presentations at one of the OPC meetings where information was exchanged and key issues and concerns were discussed.

Members of the Ontario Parent Council

1998-99 Term

The Chair of the Ontario Parent Council, **Teresa Hartnett**, lives in Hamilton and is the Executive Director of a local volunteer agency. She has 4 children, 3 in the elementary system, and 1 in the secondary system. She has been an active member of Our Lady of Lourdes Elementary Catholic School Council for 11 years and has served as Chair for the past 6 years, and is a member of St. Jean de Brebeuf School Council. She is also co-chair of the Joint Elementary Parent Advisory Group for the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board, as well as a member of the School Council Guideline Committee and the School Council Implementation Committee.

Gabrielle Blais lives in Orléans and is a manager at the National Archives of Canada. She has been involved in educational issues for over ten years as a school volunteer and chair of the Parents' Association, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of *Parents partenaires en éducation*. She is also 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'École élémentaire publique Jeanne Sauvé* and *l'École secondaire publique Louis-Riel* in Orléans.

Lois-Anne Brebner lives in Oakville with her husband and daughter. Lois-Anne has spent most of her career in the telecommunications industry and has an extensive background in marketing and telecommunications. She has held positions in business development, advertising and sales promotion, product management and currently leads a team of professionals who manage Bell Canada's Provincial Government Relations. Lois-Anne is a Director of the Agricultural Leadership Trust, a past member of the Advisory Board of the Bell Canada Economic Development Fund and a past Governor and member of the Executive Committee of St. Mildred's Lightbourn School.

Pamela Bryant lives in Haliburton. She has three children ages 12, 10 and 8 that attend J.D. Hodgson Elementary School in the Trillium Lakelands District. She has served on the J.D. Hodgson Parent Council this year and in the past has volunteered at Victoria Street Public School also in Haliburton. She has worked for the last ten years as an Office Manager, Kitchen Manager and Development Director for a children's non-profit organization.

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.

Philip Fernandez lives in Kitchener and is a Senior Business Analyst at Manulife Financial. He and his wife Joan have three children attending school in the separate school system. Philip has been actively involved with the Waterloo Catholic District School Board for the past eight years, and for the past two years as Chair of the St. Paul's Elementary School Council. He is actively involved in Junior Achievement of the Waterloo Region, as Project Business Consultant and Company Program Advisor and in community organisations and events, such as United Way, St. Mark's Roman Catholic Church, and Manulife Ride for Heart.

Paul Goulet, (Representative, Central Ontario) and his writer/publisher wife, live in Toronto and have three children, two of whom attend elementary school and one who recently graduated from an Ontario university. He is active in several businesses, including the provision of 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 the Parent/Guardian Association at Huron Street Public School, plus as a founder and two-term Chair of Toronto's Mid-Town Parent Council. He also represents Toronto's Church of the Messiah as Co-Delegate to the Anglican Synod.

Trudy Griffiths, a self-employed consultant, lives in rural Northwestern Ontario with her husband Doug and their daughter Blaire a grade 6 student at Eagle River Public School. Trudy is an active volunteer in the community and in the elementary classroom, and has served as Chair of the Parents' Association and the School Council and sits on the System School Council for the Keewatin-Patricia District School Board. She has submitted proposals and presentations to the board on current issues of concern, participated in site and action planning, the writing of school and board policy and has organized school and community computer, information and safety seminars.

Philip Leong and his wife Grace live in Oakville with their three children, two of whom attend Our Lady of Peace Catholic School in Oakville. Philip immigrated to Canada from Hong Kong in 1987 and has been in the investment and banking profession for 15 years. For ten years he has been the principal of Dr. Sun Yet Sen Chinese School, which provides language and heritage programs for students of Chinese origin. Before being appointed to the Ontario Parent Council, he was a member of the Ontario Investment Services. Philip is an active participant in the Chinese Community in Canada and has been involved in many cultural groups including the Chinese Community Centre of Ontario and the Chinese Canadian Intercultural Association.

Donna Lucas-Astley lives in Bowmanville with her husband Bob and their son who is a grade 8 student. She has been actively involved as a member of the Catholic Parent Teacher Association and Catholic School Council for the last 6 years. Donna is currently one of the parent organizers for the Clarington Boys Slo-Pitch Association and is Vice-President of the PVNC Regional Council of the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education. Donna has been particularly interested in the new Ontario Curriculum developments and is also interested in helping to improve information and communication networks for parents.

Alain Mainville lives in Moose Creek. He has three children ages 14, 10, and 7 who attend school in the *Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien*. He has been actively involved as a member of the Parent Teacher Association and of the new school council since his first child started school. He was the liaison between the PTA and the *Fédération des associations de parents francophones de l'Ontario* and worked on the school board's School Council Workgroup. Alain has his own accounting business.

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 a 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 (Regional Representative – Eastern Region) lives in Prince Edward County. She and her partner own and operate a small business in the City of Belleville. They have two sons who attend school within the Hasting Prince Edward County District School Board. Martina is past Chair of the Kente Public School Council and present school council member of both the Kente and Moira Secondary School Councils. She is also a member of her District Board's School Council

Advisory Steering Committee and Board Member of the United Nations Association in Canada – Quinte Branch. She remains an active participant in her sons' education and committed to promoting parental involvement in education.

Greg Reid, his wife, and two sons reside in Welland, where Greg operates a sales and marketing consulting agency specializing in business services and technology. He has been very active in the school community as a volunteer, and is serving his third term as a member of the Quaker Road Elementary School Council, of which he is a past Chair. Greg also participates in the Ontario Business Ambassador Volunteer program, has served as a director of the Tyke Division of the Welland Minor Hockey Association, and is a volunteer with the Ontario March of Dimes. Greg is committed to improving accountability in the education system.

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 Corporate Sponsorship Co-Chair.

Ken Slemko is a Senior Consultant and Financial Services Practice Group Leader with GPC Government Policy Consultants in Ottawa. His two children attend elementary and secondary schools in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB). A member of Hopewell School Council's Executive, he represents the Council on the Assembly of OCDSB School Councils. Ken previously chaired the Parent Advisory Committee and the Renovation Committee. Ken also coaches soccer and cross-country skiing.

Pam Tate resides in Mississauga with her husband and three sons. She runs her own business and has been a long-time advocate for parents as partners in education; chair of her children's School Councils (elementary and secondary) for over 12 years collectively; and is the current Peel Regional Director for the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education (formerly known as O.F.C.S.A.). Pam has organized and hosted several parent information forums at the local school, School Board and Regional levels and continues in her commitment to improving information and communication networks for parents.

Financial Report

Financial report for the period April 1, 1998 to March 31, 1999

Budget:		\$303,300
Expenditures:*		
Salaries and wages	\$ 103,573	
Transport and communications	100,640	
Services and rentals	59,844	
Supplies and equipment	10,073	
Total:		274,130
Balance:		\$29,170

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