

Ontario Parent Council

Annual Report

July 1, 1999 –
June 30, 2000

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The Honourable Janet Ecker
Minister of Education
22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario
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March 22, 2001

Dear Minister,

On behalf of the Ontario Parent Council, I am pleased to submit the Council's annual report for the period of July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000.

In accordance with our mandate, we provided advice from a parental perspective on a wide range of issues related to elementary and secondary education in Ontario and we sought to promote a high level of parental involvement in the education system wherever possible.

Our activities over the past year are detailed in this report. We were especially pleased to provide input into the development of the Ministry of Education's proposals for school councils, the 2000 provincial budget as it related to the education funding model, and the ministry's proposals for teacher testing, and also to continue our involvement in the implementation of the new Ontario curriculum.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of Council, who have devoted a great deal of their time and energy to meeting both with parents in their local communities and with representatives from organizations in the broader education community. They remain committed to enabling parents to become involved in their children's education and to contributing to the overall improvement of the Ontario education system and student learning.

I would also like to thank the OPC staff for their support over the past year. Their hard work and dedication is most appreciated.

Sincerely,

Trudy Griffiths
Past Acting Chair, Ontario Parent Council

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The Year in Brief

In the period covered by this report – July 1, 1999 to June 30, 2000 – the Ministry of Education continued to implement previously announced reforms to public education in Ontario and announced new policy initiatives. In keeping with its mandate, the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) offered advice to the Minister of Education on these reforms and initiatives from the perspective of parents. Topics included secondary school restructuring, the new secondary school curriculum, policies on assessing student work, government spending on education, special education, teacher testing, and the role of school councils.

During the past year, the OPC met formally with the Honourable Janet Ecker, Minister of Education on two occasions, and it also met with the Minister's former Parliamentary Assistant, David Young, MPP, to respond to the ministry's proposals for clarifying the role and structure of school councils. In addition, the OPC met with senior officials from the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of the Attorney General to discuss a range of topics related to public education.

The Council held eight meetings of its own members between July 1, 1999, and June 30, 2000, to review and discuss issues and initiatives identified by both the Minister and itself.

Members of OPC committed a great deal of their time to consulting parents in their own communities and to forming partnerships with other groups in the education community. By keeping in close touch with parents and the broader education community, the OPC is able to provide the Minister of Education with well-informed advice on a wide variety of education issues.

Highlights of the OPC's work during the year covered by this report include the following:

- continued to contribute to the implementation of the new secondary school curriculum
- participated in the development of a framework for implementing the new Ontario curriculum at both the elementary and secondary levels
- submitted a formal response to the school councils consultation paper issued by the former Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education in February 2000
- presented a brief to the pre-budget consultation held by the Legislature's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs in March 2000
- submitted a position paper on teacher testing to the Minister of Education in March 2000
- contributed to consultations on school transportation funding and school bus safety, professional standards for the teaching profession, and strategies to assist students with both the new curriculum and the new four-year secondary school program

See the "Policy Issues" section of this report for further details on these activities.

On June 30, 2000, the last day of the period covered by this report, the Minister of Education announced new initiatives to increase the involvement and influence of parents in their children's education. These initiatives are intended to strengthen the advisory role of school councils and give them a voice on a new or restructured OPC.

A government regulation will be drafted for release in fall 2000 to require district school boards and principals to seek the advice of school councils and report back to them on how their advice has been taken into account in areas such as the development of school improvement plans, the review of recommendations of the Education Quality and Accountability Office, implementation of the provincial Code of Conduct, the selection process for principals and vice-principals, and local implementation of ministry policy initiatives.

At the same time, the Minister announced that she will restructure the OPC so that school councils will be able to nominate regional representatives to it. To help with the restructuring, the Minister established a transition committee of current and past OPC members, and she asked the outgoing acting chair, Trudy Griffiths, to chair this transition committee. The Minister's intention is that the new structure be in place by February 1, 2001.

Activities

Communication

Through its newsletter, *In Touch*, the OPC keeps school councils, parents, and other interested members of the education community up to date on issues that affect students and their parents, and answers parents' questions about changes to Ontario's education system.

This year's newsletter included a list of homework resources available to parents, answered a series of questions that OPC members are commonly asked by parents, and provided information on ways to get in touch with the Ministry of Education, government agencies, and district school boards. The newsletter was distributed to boards, school principals, and members of school councils across the province.

Parents can obtain copies of the newsletter from their local school council or from the OPC's website, www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/abcs/parentco/parentco.html.

The OPC offers support to parents and school councils across the province through its toll-free telephone number, 1-800-361-6483. Calls are answered by OPC members.

As part of the Council's outreach activities, members accepted invitations to speak with many school councils and community organizations to hear the views of parents first-hand and to foster a shared perspective and understanding through dialogue. They also participated in workshops and were interviewed by members of the media on education issues.

Members of Council made presentations at the following events:

- the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario's supervisory officers' qualifications program
- School-to-Work Transitions 2000
- the Education Improvement Commission's Shifting the Balance conference
- Transport Canada's public consultation on school bus safety
- the Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning's symposium

During 1999–2000, the OPC met with the presidents of the three provincial principals' organizations: the Ontario Principals' Council, the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario, and the Association des directions et des directions adjointes franco-ontariennes. Parents identify the principal as the key to positive parental involvement in children's education and to effective school councils. By building bridges to these organizations, OPC maintains vital links that help it to represent parents' interests and concerns. In addition, over the last year the OPC also met with representatives of the Ontario School Counsellors Association.

The OPC shares representation on the Curriculum Implementation Partnership with the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education, the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, and Parents partenaires en éducation, representing common parental concerns with one voice.

At the invitation of the Honourable Diane Cunningham, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities, the OPC represents parents on the Ontario Student Assistant Program (OSAP) Committee and the OSAP Review Committee. OPC met during the year with representatives of the Council of Ontario Universities and the Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario to discuss strategies to deal with the double cohort of secondary school graduates expected in 2003.

Policy Issues

Significant changes have been made to Ontario's education system. The OPC has provided advice to the Ministry of Education on a variety of issues, often, as noted above, as a representative to other advisory committees. These issues have included assessment policies for elementary students, the development of exemplars for teachers and parents ("exemplars" are samples of student work that illustrate the four levels of achievement established by the ministry for assessing students), transportation funding and school bus safety, the validation of the new curriculum for grades 11 and 12, and implementation of the new four-year high school system.

OPC's direct input into the various stages of policy and program development enables it to work with its education partners to improve Ontario's education system.

During 1999–2000, the OPC made several recommendations to the Minister of Education on the accountability of education partners. In particular, the OPC recommended that the government take action to ensure that district school boards communicate regularly with parents to inform parents of the remedial programs offered by boards and the eligibility requirements for student participation in the programs. The OPC also recommended that the Ministry of Education develop clear guidelines to require boards to offer students a range of remedial programs. The OPC believes that all students should have equal access to remedial programs, and it will continue to advise the ministry on this issue.

The OPC made accountability-related recommendations to the ministry as well about parents' involvement in board reviews of accommodation, and about a range of communication issues related to ensuring that parents are made aware of their rights and of issues involving their children's education in a timely and accessible way. The OPC remains committed to making sure that parents have the information and resources to become involved in their children's education.

Response to the Parliamentary Assistant's Discussion Document, *School Councils – A Background Paper*

In 1995, the Ministry of Education and Training issued Policy/Program Memorandum 122, requiring all school boards to develop policies about, and to direct their schools to establish, school councils. Over the years, it became apparent that more clarity about the role of school councils and more support were required to help the councils function better.

In February 2000, the former Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education, David Young, released a background paper and held consultation sessions on the ministry's proposals for clarifying the role of school councils and helping them work more effectively.

The OPC summarized its position by stating that the best decisions are often made when positive, collaborative relationships exist between schools and their communities. To facilitate successful partnerships and encourage parental participation at the school level, the OPC strongly urged the ministry to provide clear direction on the advisory role of school councils. In addition, it noted that, to work more effectively, school councils require sufficient funding, training, resource materials, and opportunities to share information and network with each other at the local, regional, and provincial levels.

Some of the OPC's specific recommendations included the following:

Clear roles and responsibilities

- that school councils participate in the development of both a principal's profile and the hiring criteria for principals, and that a parent representative be included on the principal selection committee
- that school councils, on a board-wide basis, organize workshops in partnership with principal/vice-principal associations
- that provincial-level parent organizations such as the OPC play a role in the development of training programs for school councils
- that, within district school boards, school council chairs or their representatives meet to discuss both individual school issues and board-wide concerns
- that the guidelines for school councils be revised, that copies be made available to newly elected school council chairs, and that future publications and resource materials aimed at school councils be developed in consultation with parents and school councils

Effective operations

- that the number of teacher representatives, non-teaching staff representatives, and community representatives on school councils be specified to ensure that parents form the majority on school councils
- that the Ministry of Education direct all district school boards to establish assemblies of their school councils, and that, once established:
 - a) plans be developed to create elected regional councils, and
 - b) consideration be given to forming an elected provincial assembly of regional councils

- that the ministry develop resources to assist school boards and school councils in establishing assemblies of school councils
- that school councils, on a board-wide basis, organize workshops in partnership with principals to facilitate an exchange of information

Improved communication

- that a registry be developed to enable school councils to network and communicate with each other
- that a school council newsletter be developed and distributed four times a year throughout the province by the Ministry of Education

Other areas

- that a dispute resolution structure be established at each district school board with an appeal mechanism at the provincial level
- that district school board funds and other resources be allocated to school councils
- that annual in-service (professional development) sessions for principals and vice-principals include communication skills, operations, roles, and responsibilities related to school councils

Pre-Budget Submission to the Legislature's Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

The OPC's submission, on March 3, 2000, dealt with the education funding model introduced in 1998-99. The new model is intended to provide equity of funding to all school boards across the province. It replaced the 34 different types of grants in the previous funding model with 3 funding envelopes and 11 grants.

While this approach has simplified the process for determining grant allocations, the OPC recommended further refinements. In particular, it recommended that district school boards be given greater flexibility to allocate funding to address local needs. It also recommended that the funding levels under the accommodation and special purpose grants be protected at least at current levels.

The OPC also urged the government to move ahead with its plan to strengthen the financial accountability of school boards.

Highlights of the recommendations include the following:

- that the funding of full-time Junior and Senior Kindergarten be continued as an option past the year 2001
- that enhanced funding be provided for early identification of children with special needs in Kindergarten and the primary grades
- that the elementary student-teacher ratio be reduced (that is, fewer students per teacher) to match the secondary student-teacher ratio
- that a separate line with adequate funding be included in the foundation grant under non-classroom expenditures for an allocation of funds to school councils based on the number of students at a school

- that, under the foundation grant, funding for library technicians be included and the ratio of students to counsellors used in the grant calculation not be allowed to rise beyond an appropriate threshold
- that the accommodation grant be flexible enough to accommodate special circumstances and needs in rural and remote areas
- that the government examine the best way to use the province's school-based infrastructure as a year-round public resource
- that the three-year funding cap in the language grant be extended to ensure that the needs of English-as-a-second-language students are met
- that school boards receive adequate funding under the language grant to provide primary school students with both Junior and Senior Kindergarten and with French-as-a-second-language programs in Grades 1 to 3
- that the funding formula provide adjustments to ensure that district school boards that are affected by the sparsity calculation in the geographic and school authorities grant receive an adequate allocation of revenue
- that the adult and continuing education grant provide sufficient funding to school boards to ensure a continuum of programs, including transition courses and summer school
- that boards that cover large geographic areas, rural boards, and boards with special transportation needs receive extra transportation funding on a temporary basis until the revised transportation funding formula is in place, so that they can provide safe and essential services to their students

Summary of the OPC's Teacher Testing Position Paper

On March 30, 2000, the OPC submitted a brief to the Minister of Education that included recommendations for the ministry's proposed teacher testing program.

To be successful, the OPC said, the program must include a range of assessment methods that ensure that teachers have the knowledge and skills to meet the high standards of a demanding curriculum and the new four-year secondary school program. It noted that remedial programs, guidelines for professional development mentoring programs, recertification tests, acknowledgement of exemplary achievement, and parental involvement in the assessment process are all important measures in ensuring excellence in the teaching profession.

The OPC is pleased to report that the ministry included these measures in its teacher testing program. The ministry announced in May 2000 that it would begin to phase in its teacher testing program, starting with a language proficiency test for new teaching professionals.

Highlights of the recommendations in the brief include the following:

- that a written test be considered as one component of a comprehensive evaluation system for teaching professionals
- that parents be given the opportunity to provide input into the performance evaluation of teachers
- that a standard provincial teaching curriculum be developed to ensure a common standard of academic excellence at all faculties of education in the province
- that the faculties of education introduce an entrance examination and/or screening process to ensure that candidates are prepared for the demands of the profession
- that a provincial exit exam be developed and implemented for student teachers leaving the province's faculties of education, that the exit exam be in line with recertification tests, and that a standard literacy test be implemented
- that mentorship programs for teachers and by teachers be made mandatory for first-year teachers

Participation in the Curriculum Implementation Partnership

The OPC continues to work with other education stakeholders in the Curriculum Implementation Partnership and the partnership's Ad Hoc Advisory Committee to support implementation of the new Ontario curriculum. The partnership has developed a framework or "outline" to guide implementation over the next two years. Copies of the partnership's newsletter, *Curriculum Update*, and the two-year outline can be obtained from the following website: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/update/winter00/winter00.html.

Philip Fernandez lives in Kitchener, where he is a senior business analyst at Manulife Financial. He and his wife Joan have three children in the Catholic school system. Philip has been actively involved with the Waterloo Catholic District School Board for the past eight years, for the past two years as chair of St. Paul's Elementary School Council. He is actively involved in Junior Achievement in the Waterloo Region, as project business consultant and company program adviser, and in community organizations and events such as the United Way, St. Mark's Roman Catholic Church, and Manulife's "Ride for Heart."

Paul Goulet (representative, central Ontario region) 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. Paul 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, as well as being 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.

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 10 years he has been the principal of Dr. Sun Yat-sen Chinese School, which provides language and heritage programs for students of Chinese origin. Before being appointed to the Ontario Parent Council, Philip was a member of Ontario Investment Services. He 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, a Grade 9 student. Donna has been actively involved as a member of the Catholic Parent-Teacher Association and Catholic School Council for the last seven years. Donna is one of the parent organizers for the Clarington Boys Slo-Pitch Association, and she is also vice-president of the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Regional Council of the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education. Donna is particularly interested in the new Ontario curriculum, and she is also interested in helping to improve information and communication networks for parents.

Alain Mainville lives in Moose Creek. He has three children, aged 15, 11, and 9, who attend school in the Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien. He has been actively involved as a member of the local parent-teacher association (PTA) and of the new school council

since his first child started school 11 years ago. Alain was the liaison between the PTA and the Fédération des associations de parents francophones de l'Ontario, and he worked on the board's school council workgroup. Alain has his own accounting business.

Dona Pollard of Fort Frances has three children, two of whom are in postsecondary programs and one of whom is in the secondary school system. She has taught school and was a member of her local board of education for seven years. She is involved actively in education issues, and is treasurer of the Music and Drama Festival. 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 (representative, eastern Ontario region) lives in Prince Edward County. She and her partner own and operate a small business in Belleville. They have two sons who attend school in the Hastings and Prince Edward District School Board. Martina has been an active volunteer for over 25 years with a strong focus on youth and education. She is chair of the board's school council steering committee, chair of the Moira Secondary School Council, community representative on the Kente Public School Council, and a board member of the Quinte branch of the United Nations Association in Canada. After 12 years of participating in her sons' education, Martina remains 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 active in the school community as a volunteer and served three terms as a member of the Quaker Road Elementary School Council, of which he is a past chair. Greg has also participated in the Ontario Business Ambassador Volunteer program and has served as a director of the Tyke division of the Welland Minor Hockey Association. Greg is committed to improving accountability in the education system and to enhancing the role of parents in their children's education.

Lesley Schuurs lives on a dairy farm outside of Ingersoll, with her husband John and two children, aged 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 served on the safe school committee, financial strategies committee, and the parent/student subcommittee of the local education improvement committee of the Oxford County Board of Education. Lesley has held many positions with the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations. At present, she serves on the federation's 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 Avenue School Council's executive, he represents the council on the Assembly of OCDSB School Councils. Ken has also chaired the board's parent advisory committee and renovation committee. Ken coaches soccer and cross-country skiing.

Lise Lefebvre lives in Iroquois Falls and is a registered nurse with the Cochrane District Community Access Centre. She has three children, the two youngest of whom attend elementary and secondary school in the Conseil scolaire de district catholique des Grandes Rivières. For the last 12 years Lise has been actively involved in the school life of her children. She is a member of the Alex-Pelletier Catholic Secondary School Council, as well as the board's special education advisory committee. Lise is the representative on the OPC of Parents partenaires en éducation, the only provincial education organization representing francophone parents.

Kathy McNeil lives in Peterborough with her husband Tony. They have two daughters in Grades 7 and 11 in the Peterborough Victoria Northumberland and Clarington Catholic District School Board. Kathy has 12 years' experience at the local level with the Catholic parent-teacher associations of her children's schools. Most recently, she is a member of the Catholic School Council, an executive member of the St. Peter's Secondary School Council, and the executive secretary of the Ontario Association of Parents in Catholic Education (OAPCE). Kathy has been involved in the OAPCE for five years, three as a member of the executive. She volunteers at the elementary school level and works part-time for Duracell Canada.

Financial Report

Financial report for the period April 1, 1999, to March 31, 2000

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.