



Parent to Parent

Ensuring parents have a voice in Ontario's education system

Greetings from the Chair!

Welcome to the Ontario Parent Council's new initiative: our electronic news bulletin. Like a regular newsletter, this contains education information for parents and useful links to more details.

We have named it Parent to Parent (just like the section with the same name on our website), which emphasizes the idea of parents networking and sharing experiences. Ontario Parent Council (OPC) members are parents, and we really want to pass on practical information that is valuable to you as a parent, and hear from you as well.

The OPC is offering this e-news bulletin in MS Word so schools are able to print, photocopy and distribute it easily. It also allows your parent community and school council to choose information that is the most relevant, copy it, reformat it and insert it into regular communications with parents (electronic distribution, school or school council newsletter, etc.).

If you do this, we would appreciate if you could credit OPC as the source of the information and include our website address

www.ontarioparentcouncil.org. We want as many parents as possible to know about our great website!

Let us know how you like this new initiative, if you find it useful and what other topics you would like to see covered in it. We are looking forward to hearing from you!

Trudy Griffiths, Chair
 Ontario Parent Council

IN THIS ISSUE

Education funding: Ensuring accountability.

Tidbits: short news on the parent survey component of the Teacher performance appraisal, the updated School Council Guide, provincial tests and reports on Early Reading and Early Math.

How effective are your guidance, career education and coop programs? You'll soon find out through a survey!

A place at the table – Parents and school improvement: an article by Dr. Peter Ross, former Chair of EQAO.

School improvement planning

You will find useful information and links in the [Parent to Parent section](#) of our website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org

EDUCATION FUNDING

A number of announcements have been made recently by the Ontario government about education funding. This is in response to the report from the Education Equality Task Force (the Rozanski report) released last December.

The Ontario Parent Council is very pleased to see additional funding for special education, transportation, teachers' salaries, school resources, small, rural and northern schools, school renewal and students at-risk. There has been a significant increase announced in the budget for this new fiscal year and for the next two years. The Ontario Parent Council recommended increases in funding.

However, we have also focused on accountability. Boards' decisions on spending must be transparent and involve the whole school community. We encourage parents to ask questions! You will find more details about this under [OPC announcements](#) in the What's New section of our website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org.

A Place at the Table: Parents and School Improvement

Dr. Peter N. Ross

At a recent meeting with the Ontario Parent Council, I was asked: “how can school councils become involved in the planning for improvement process at the school level?” The complaint was that in many schools, parents and their council are not involved.

This seemed an odd question in 2002. In 1988, Anne Henderson wrote in Educational Horizons: “Substantial research in the past few years has shown that when parents are involved in their children’s education the children do better in school and the schools improve.” We have learned so much since 1988. Clearly, school council involvement provides a major opportunity for principals and teachers.

Why should parents be involved in planning for improvement? They make a **value added** contribution to the planning process. They provide energy to the process and bring commitment to improving the school. After all, they have the highest stake in supporting a school that provides quality education. It seems obvious that the wider the participation and the deeper the commitment, the greater the possible improvement.

It is essential for the school district and school to make the planning process transparent and the roles clear. The leadership at the district level must ensure that schools value the parental contribution and provide a substantial avenue for participation. The difficulty emerges in the operation of this ideal. In a large school all the parents could not be involved in the actual detailed planning for improvement; yet all must be given the opportunity to contribute and to react both to the test results and to the finished plan. Moreover, parents need to be represented at the table, on the planning committee.

The most important thing to understand is that the EQAO tests stand out as dramatic features in the process, but the daily teaching and evaluation from kindergarten through Grade 12 is the real focus. When a student writes the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Tests, he or she is demonstrating the skills learned throughout a school career. If this is understood, it is clear that improvement planning involves all teachers and classes. We do not want higher scores; we want better schools.

The planning process is cyclical. It begins with the careful analysis of the results of tests and the identification of areas requiring serious attention. This is a detailed and careful matter of reviewing the actual school results. The committee agrees on priorities and states the goal for the next year. It then selects the best strategies to achieve the priorities and sets down the indicators of success that would satisfy everyone that the plan is working. The committee finalizes a draft school plan. To give them an opportunity to ask questions and to make suggestions, the improvement plan should be shared with all parents. In this way everyone has the opportunity to know and own the plan. Next year with the new results the process is repeated.

At the centre of the process is the commitment to change and improvement. The EQAO Guide (2002) prompts the school to ask: “What should we do that is different than we are currently doing to help us reach our goal?”

There is so much that parents can do as members of the community to ensure a safe and secure school, to talk up learning, to support a good community library service, to send children to school learning-ready, and to mobilize other parents in constructive action. Finally, parents owe it to teachers to support their efforts, not as critics, but as partners.

Dr. Peter Ross was until December 2002 the Chair of the Education Quality and Accountability Office.

Tidbits

Do you have the “**School Councils: A guide for members**”? The guide has been recently updated to include additional information and explanations. Please note that the legislation on school councils has not changed. The Ministry of Education encourages you to get your updated version electronically at

www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/council/guide.html.

You can download the entire guide or simply download the updated pages. A limited number are available from your regional district Ministry of Education office (contact information is on the Ministry of Education website at www.edu.gov.on.ca) or available by contacting the Ontario Parent Council.

Parents interested in the **provincial assessments** will find a lot of useful information on the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) website at www.eqao.com. EQAO has now released the results of the 2002 grade 3 and grade 6 reading, writing and mathematics assessment, the grade 9 mathematics assessment and the 2002 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (grade 10 literacy test). Check out the results for your school, your board or the province. EQAO has also published two documents: a brief overview of these results as well as the international assessments in which Ontario students participate, [EQAO Provincial Achievement Results, 2001-2002](#), and a flyer, [How to Help Prepare Your Child for The Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test](#).

It is a good idea for your school council to discuss these latest results with the principal and cooperate on a school improvement plan.

Did you know that the new **teacher performance appraisal** system includes a **parent survey** that parents can fill every year for each teacher of their children? School boards are supposed to develop this survey in consultation with, among others, school councils and interested parents, and administer it starting this year. Grade 11, 12 and OAC students also have an opportunity to complete a survey about their teachers. You can find more information in the [Teacher Performance Appraisal section](#) of our website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org.

If you haven't heard from your board about this, you may want to contact the board and ask about the mechanisms to have input into the questions and format of this survey. You may also want to know when parents will receive the survey to complete. The Ontario Parent Council feels it is very important that parents be involved in this. Let us know how this initiative is working in your board!

Program Effectiveness Survey

How effective are your guidance, cooperative and career education programs?

Parents and school councils will soon be involved in a survey to assess the effectiveness of their guidance and career education program and their cooperative education program.

Choices into Action: Guidance and Career Education Program Policy for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, 1999

describes the goals of the program and outlines the program considerations and delivery components. **Cooperative Education and Other Forms of Experiential Learning** is the name of the policy document that outlines the types of experiential learning opportunities recommended for secondary school students and the policy requirements for each. Find more information on the Ministry of Education's website at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/choices/index.html and www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/coop/coop_ed.html.

Guidance and career education policy requires that, every three years, all schools survey parents, students, teachers and community partners on the effectiveness of these programs. The time for this survey is this year, from March 2003 to June 2004. The cooperative education policy requires that every four years, schools survey students, employers and parents as part of the ongoing assessment of the delivery of cooperative education and work experience. The time for this survey is 2004 and it may be conducted as part of the Program Effectiveness Survey for the guidance and career education program.

The school's Program Advisory Team and the principal are responsible for preparing and coordinating the survey and reporting on the results.

Tidbits *(continued)*

Parents of children in elementary school might be interested in two reports the Ministry of Education has recently released on **early reading and early math**. The reports were prepared by two expert panels established by the Ministry of Education and composed of leading Ontario educators from school boards and universities. Their mandate was to examine the core knowledge and instructional know-how that are needed to teach reading and math effectively to learners in the primary grades. The reports provide advice based on current research from around the world on ways to teach reading and math as well as methods for assessing the needs of students. Not surprisingly, they emphasize how teachers are key and how parental involvement is important in developing reading and math skills in young children. You may download the [Early Reading Strategy](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/reading/index.html) report at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/reading/index.html or the [Early Math Strategy](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/math/index.htm) report at www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/math/index.htm for your own personal interest. All teachers from JK to Grade 3 and all elementary principals should have received a copy of both reports.

Program Effectiveness Survey

(Continued)

Program Advisory Teams may be formed in individual schools or at a family of schools or board level. The principal should first establish a Program Advisory Team if one does not already exist, or a school-level survey committee if the existing Advisory Team serves several schools.

Results of the survey won't be reported to the Ministry of Education. They are for the entire school community, including parents, to become aware of what is already being done, and for the school and Program Advisory Team to plan improvements in the delivery of these programs.

To support Program Advisory Teams, a whole kit has been prepared by a consortium of several boards, education researchers and other stakeholders, with the support of the Ministry of Education.

The kit contains a practical guide and a CD-Rom detailing how to get started, how to conduct the survey, how to interpret the data and how to use the results.

The CD-Rom contains a bank of field-tested questions covering both policy documents and a database ready for inputting and compiling results. Information sessions have recently been held for all boards.

The Ontario Parent Council strongly encourages parents and school councils to become involved in this evaluation. If you want to know more about this, consult your principal or your board. This is your opportunity to celebrate the school's successes and provide input in the improvement plans. This initiative is really about helping all students succeed.

To get in touch with the Ontario Parent Council:

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Let us know what you think of our first e-news!

The list of members of the Ontario Parent Council can be found in the section [About the OPC](#) on our website. This bulletin is available electronically in the [Publications](#) section of our website. It is available in French under the name *Entre parents*.