



Parent to Parent

Ensuring parents have a voice in Ontario's education system

Special issue
10th Anniversary!

Greetings from the Chair!

The end of November 2003 marked a special time for the Ontario Parent Council: our tenth anniversary! For 10 years, the members of the Council, from all corners of the province and from all walks of life, have devoted their efforts and passion to ensure parents have a voice in Ontario's education system.

Over its ten years of existence, the Ontario Parent Council (OPC) has always advocated for a strong parental role in education and local participation in decision-making by providing advice and recommendations to the Minister of Education. Working with its partners, the OPC has also participated in a number of committees to ensure the perspective of parents is taken into account.

A tenth anniversary is a good time to look back and take stock of the work done and the progress accomplished. We thought it would be a good time to share some highlights of the Council's work with you. It is also a good opportunity to celebrate parental involvement! Across the province, dedicated parents like you have devoted a lot of energy to make the school experience as rewarding and successful as possible for their children. We want to acknowledge parental involvement, because it has inspired us over the years!

This issue is devoted to an overview of OPC's work over the last ten years. It is summarized by topic, keeping to the main points. More details can be found in the series of OPC's Annual Reports, as well as in our Resolutions chart, started in April 2002. Check out the OPC website at www.ontarioparentcouncil.org.

Trudy Griffiths, Chair
Ontario Parent Council

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**Celebrating 10 years
of parental involvement!**

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**Let us know what you think
of this issue of e-news!**

The list of members of the Ontario Parent Council can be found in the section [About the OPC](#) on our website.

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It is available in French under the name *Entre parents*.

School councils

An important focus of OPC's work has been the creation and reinforcing of school councils to ensure a stronger role for parents and consistent support for their participation in education. The Council has been a key player in the establishment of school councils. Here are some milestones:

- ◆ 1994: OPC investigates and reports on the Establishment of "School Parent Councils".
- ◆ 1995: Implementation of Policy Program Memorandum (PPM) 122, directing school boards to establish "school advisory councils" in every publicly funded school.
- ◆ OPC provides information to parents; works on a handbook for school councils; gives advice to the Minister of Education on parental involvement and on legislation enforcing – and reinforcing – school councils and their role.
- ◆ 1996: OPC research and position paper on the development of school councils.
- ◆ 1997: An OPC survey of school councils finds inconsistent implementation of school councils, frustration and lack of clarity and accountability.
- ◆ 1998: OPC input to the Education Improvement Commission's consultation on the roles and responsibilities of school councils and response to its document "The Road Ahead III" to the Minister.
- ◆ 2000: Response to the Parliamentary Assistant's school councils consultation paper.
- ◆ 2001: Ontario Regulation 612/00 (on school councils) becomes effective. It reflects many of OPC's recommendations.
- ◆ 2001-2003: Continuous advice on the School Council Guide (original and revised version).
- ◆ 2001-2002: Advice then Report on compliance to Regulation 612/00.
- ◆ 2002-2003: Continuous advice to the Minister of Education on the support, training and resources needed by school councils.

Parental involvement and accountability to parents

Every OPC report or recommendation has always stressed accountability to parents, whether the advice concerned school councils, education reform, funding, accommodation review, testing or any other component of the education system.

- 1994-1995: Study on a Charter of Parental Rights and Responsibilities (Follow-up in 1998, 2000).
- 1996, 2001: Recommendation that an independent arbitrator or ombudsman be established at the Ministry level.
- 2001: Report of the OPC transition team on restructuring and new terms of reference for the Ontario Parent Council.
- 2002: Recommendations to the Education Equality Task Force.
- 2001-2003: Advice on the school council nomination process to OPC and the organization of Ministry regional forums.

Parents need to be recognized as legitimate leaders within the education system. Formal parent input in the development of the education system needs to be structured.

Representative and properly functioning school councils are the building blocks for such a structure.

(OPC Transition Team Report, 2001)

Education reform

The education system underwent significant reform during the last 10 years. The OPC provided advice from a parental perspective. A number of specific topics are mentioned later. Here are some highlights of more general advice:

- Consultation with the Royal Commission on Learning (1994).
- Key issue statements on a number of educational topics: curriculum and standardized testing, Junior Kindergarten, College of Teachers, school council implementation, and Secondary school reform and funding cuts (1995-96).
- Formal response to the Secondary School Reform Consultation Guide (1996).
- Brief on the Fewer Boards Act: support for stronger financial accountability of boards and freeing up resources for the classroom (March 1997).
- Brief on the Education Quality Improvement Act (1997).
- Participation in the Advisory Group for Secondary School Reform (1997-2000).
- Participation on the Double Cohort Focus Group and advice on accommodating the double cohort (1998-2000).

Education funding

Funding is a crucial element of the education system. The Ontario Parent Council has provided recommendations on funding since its beginnings. While endorsing the principles of the funding formula, OPC has regularly called for refinements to it, additional funding in a number of areas and more flexibility for boards to respond to local needs.

The Council also focused on more accountability, greater transparency and a stronger parent participation in the budget process.

- 1995-1996: Key issue statement on change to education funding to make it exclusively a provincial responsibility.
- Participation in the Standing Committee on Finance pre-budget consultations every year since 1998.
- 1997, 2001: Recommendations on class sizes.
- 1999: Brief to Ministry of Finance on funding for teacher training, remedial programs, new schools, junior kindergarten and French as a second language, special education and school councils, as well as university and training placements.
- 1999: Recommendations on adjustments to the funding formula (transportation, special education, school closures, combined grades / twinned schools).
- 1999-2003: Advice on transportation (standards, funding and safety) and participation in the Transportation Review Committee.
- 1999-2000: Advice on financial implications of the double cohort (SuperBuild).
- 2001-2002: Participation in the Learning Opportunities Grant committee.
- 2002: Advice on user fees and on education funding and accountability.
- 2002-2003: Recommendations on funding to the Education Equality Task Force, Ministry of Finance budget consultations and the Throne Speech consultations.

Provincial assessments

Since the creation, in December 1995, of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), OPC has provided regular advice to the EQAO, ensuring communications to parents were clear and regular, and that student needs were met.

- o Brief in support of the establishment of the EQAO (1996).
- o Participation on the EQAO Assessment Advisory Committee (since 1996) and Validation Committee (since 2001).
- o Participation in consultations on assessment and reporting (1996-2000).
- o Advice on the Grade 10 literacy test, especially related to students at risk of failing it (2000-2003).
- o Advice on remediation, accommodation of students with exceptionalities and responses to test results (2001-2002).
- o On-going communication with EQAO.

Communications with parents

The Ontario Parent Council has always put a strong emphasis on communications with parents, and on providing parents and school councils with an opportunity to communicate with one another. The OPC has published several issues of its newsletter to keep parents informed of Council's activities and education initiatives and to support their involvement in schools and school councils. It now reaches the same objectives through its website.

- ◆ Numerous meetings with and presentations to parent groups every year.
- ◆ Responses to thousands of calls, letters and e-mail messages from parents and the public.
- ◆ First newsletter, "The Ontario Parent Council News", published in February 1995 in a tabloid format and distributed through schools to all parents. Subsequent issues in February and June 1996 and in March 1998.
- ◆ Development of a distribution protocol for the newsletter with trustee and supervisory officer organizations (1995).
- ◆ The newsletter becomes "In Touch" under a letter-size format in March 1999; second issue in the fall of 1999.
- ◆ Development and launch of new website (2001). In its first 2 years of existence (*until October 31, 2003*), it has registered over 1.2 million page views (over 2.6 million hits) and more than 84,000 user sessions. It registered an average of 40,000 page views per month during year one, and 67,000 in year two (respectively 2900 and over 4000 user sessions).
- ◆ Input on the development of the first ever Ontario Parent Survey on Education – 2001.
- ◆ Advice on communication with school councils (2001-2002).
- ◆ Electronic newsletter Parent to Parent (Spring 2003).
- ◆ Advice on support strategies for the use of Information Technologies (1999-2000).
- ◆ First ever province-wide consultation with the Ontario Knowledge Network for Learning on the use of information and communications technologies in education (2002-2003).
- ◆ Participation in the Learning Partnership's Roundtable on technology and the Ministry's virtual coop education pilot (2001-2003).

School councils must have a clear vision as to what their roles and responsibilities are, and must have proper support in place, particularly in the areas of training and communication, in order to function effectively.
(OPC's Response to the Education Improvement Commission's report *The Road Ahead III*, December 1998)

Curriculum

During this period, the Ontario curriculum was completely overhauled. The Ontario Parent Council participated at every stage of the process. OPC's position has always been that parents should have a say about what their children are taught and the standards they are expected to meet.

- ◆ 1994-1995: Participation in the Ministry's Implementation Committee on the Common Curriculum and the French and English Language Standards Committees.
- ◆ 1996-2000: Participation in the development of the elementary and secondary school curriculum and exemplars. At some point, OPC members were participating in over 15 committees for curriculum alone!
- ◆ 1997-1999: Advice on the new report cards.
- ◆ 1999-2002: Participation in the development of the Community Involvement policy and advice on these activities as a requirement for high school graduation.
- ◆ 2000-2001: Advice about co-instructional activities and about the global marking system.
- ◆ 2003: Advice on curriculum review.
- ◆ Since 1998: On-going participation in the Curriculum Implementation Partnership and the Ad-Hoc Advisory Committee.

Resolution 029-2003 Feb - To advise the Minister of Education that parents were integrally involved in the development of the current curriculum policy documents and likewise should be included at all levels in the curriculum review process. To this end, the Ontario Parent Council takes a leadership role in parent consultations. (Februarv 2003)

Health and Safety

- Participation in Work Group on violence prevention (1993-1994).
- Board member of the Ontario Physical and Health Education Association (since 1998-1999), and the Ontario Federation of School Athletics Associations (since 2001).
- Advice and resolutions on student fitness, use of schools as polling stations and concerns about students eating lunch off the floor.

Students At-Risk / Special Education

Since 1997, OPC has advocated for effective support for students with special needs or students at risk of failing or dropping out of school.

- Participation in the Minister's Advisory Group for Secondary School Reform, which published the discussion paper "Success for all students" (1997-2000).
- Since 1999, regular recommendations on remedial support for students.
- Since 1999, advice on special education (simplify process, improve accountability, funding).
- Participation in the ISA (Intensive Support Amount) Working Group (since 2001) and the Ontario Council of Administrators of Special Education (2001-2002).
- Protocol for information sharing with the Minister's Advisory Council on Special Education (2002).
- Participation in the At-Risk Task Force and the action plan that led to the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Course; Participation in the resulting Expert Panel on Numeracy and Literacy and the Program Pathways Work Group (2002-2003).

Teachers and administrative personnel

The Ontario Parent Council supports regular professional development for teachers and the participation of parents in teachers' and principals' performance appraisal.

- 1996: Brief in support of the establishment of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT).
- 1996-1998: Consultations on professional development, differentiated staffing and the status of principals and vice-principals.
- 1998-1999: Input to OCT on a number of documents related to the teaching profession, and advice on the shortage of teachers.
- 1999-2000: Participation in consultations on professional standards for teachers.
- 2000: Position paper on teacher testing.
- 1999-2003: Advice on labour unrest.
- 2001-2003: Advice and participation in committees on the Teacher Qualifying Test / teacher performance appraisal / administrative performance appraisals / qualification programs for principals and supervisory officers.
- 1999-2003: Advice on Teacher Recognition and celebrating teachers' contributions, including in the 2003 Throne Speech consultation.
- Presentations on school councils and parental involvement as part of the Principals and Supervisory Officers Qualifications Program.