

**People for Education Conference on Education Issues
Making Connections
York University, Toronto
Saturday, November 4, 2006**

Wendy Taylor, Chair, Education
Canadian Federation of University Women/Ontario Council

People for Education are celebrating ten years of being a strong advocate for public education in Ontario. A few parents around a kitchen table started this organization in 1996. Their focus at the time was their concern over fundraising for textbooks. Since then they have expanded to become a resource for parents, school councils, school boards, and other organizations interested in education in Ontario. The Ministry of Education consults People for Education and invites them to sit at all provincial education policy tables.

Opening Remarks: Annie Kidder, Executive Director, People for Education

Annie discussed the methods that People for Education has to reach parents in Ontario

1) Research Part

Sending tracking surveys to every school in Ontario. Surveys keep track of funding policies and any changes in the system.

Analyze the relationship between school libraries and children liking to read. Reading is the basis for learning.

2) Communication Part

Newsletter

Web site www.peopleforeducation.com

Schools are now using the media to get attention.

Outreach to the local newspapers.

3) Parent Support Part

Parents feel there are barriers to schools.

School Councils now receive some funding from the Ministry of Education.

Issues People for Education are looking at right now:

4) School Libraries:

In 1998, 80% of elementary schools had teacher-librarians, compared to 54% in 2006. School libraries make a difference in student's attitudes towards reading, test scores, and ability to do research.

5) Northern Ontario School Board Issues:

Students less likely to have music teachers, librarians, physical education, varied courses.

Funding formula gaps due to small schools with higher expenses from busing, utilities.

School closings.

ESL concerns, feel Toronto is taking more money, as there is a higher proportion of ESL students, funding EA's, and swimming pools.

6) Special Education in decline:

Continued erosion of support for students waiting to be assessed and receive the help they need. Over 40,000 children in elementary and secondary schools waiting to be assessed.

Panel Discussion: The funding formula in crisis (again)

The panel consisted of two Chairs for School Boards and Peter Gooch, Director of Policy, Strategic Planning, and Accountability, Toronto District School Board.

The panel explored the challenges facing the education funding formula, and discussed why many boards are facing deficits. The issues are many, but the consensus is that compared to 1997, School Boards are actually doing much better as the system has become more equalized. Prior to that the Boards were unbalanced and Toronto was considered to be the "rich" Board.

The areas of most concern are, salaries, transportation and special education. It was felt the funding formula will always be an issue due to collective bargaining and governance is out of line with reality, as a result of the Province controlling all of the revenue, leaving Boards caught in the middle. In conclusion it was felt the Province should give more responsibility back to the School Boards.

Panel Discussion: Evaluating Ontario's education system: how do we compare?

Avis Glaze, Chief Student Achievement Officer and CEO, Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, discussed the EQAO testing and the positive results. Literacy and numeracy are necessary for learning and the EQAO testing has raised the bar on learning. Results are up in all schools, French language is at 75% and the rest of the Boards are averaging at 64%. Ms. Glaze felt teachers are happier and are making effective use of the data.

Dean Fink, International Centre for Educational Change, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. **Positives of Education in Ontario**

Teaching staff is the best educated in the world.

Ontario gets the best of the best in teaching staff.

Quality administrators.

Superior results in international testing.

Ontario Government is spending money.

We presently have teacher labour peace.

Teachers value their profession.
Well-developed safety net.
Comprehensive schools that take all children.

Concerns about Education in Ontario

The trust factor is coming back but there remains wariness among teachers.
The present Government has fallen in love with short-term targets. Good politics, not good education.
EQAO is tied to targets that have created a narrowing of the curriculum. Schools focus on the bottom kids to make good test scores.
Curriculum is overstuffed. Not enough time to learn in depth.
Administrative leadership shortage.
Government can't make up its mind about Education. They want control and take credit when things are okay. The Boards are caught in the middle.
The Government needs to give Boards more responsibility.

Minister of Education, Kathleen WynnMs. Wynn commended People for Education on the significant impact they have had on education in Ontario and giving parents a voice in education. People for Education is one of her references and she respects the work that is being done to better enhance the education of all our children in schools throughout Ontario. Ms. Wynn discussed the new initiative of Parent Voice in Education. New policies on parent involvement have been developed. More money is going to school councils so that parents may spend resources on what they need in their individual school. Ms. Wynn also made mention that the Safe Schools Act would be reviewed as well as the funding formula before the next election. Many questions were asked concerning the ESL programs being in short supply, particularly in the Golden Horseshoe area of Toronto and Hamilton. The funding formula was a hot topic for questions. Ms. Wynn stated that she did not think they would be reviewing the funding formula until next year. A very mixed reaction followed. All in all a great conference to learn and meet people concerned with education in Ontario. Thank you for allowing me to attend and represent CFUW/Ontario Council. Respectfully submitted, Wendy Taylor, Chair, Education Standing Committee