

September 22, 2012

Dear School Council Members,

Every year in September, People for Education looks forward to introducing our group to new school council members, and welcoming back those of you returning for another year.

People for Education is an independent organization working to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools. We support the important work of school councils and parent associations by publishing multi-lingual parent tip sheets, offering direct parent support through our toll-free help line, providing speakers and workshops for events, and conducting parent-friendly research and policy analysis on current education issues.

I am enclosing our September newsletter and a flyer for our conference on November 3 and 4. This year's conference will be better than ever, with a new location and amazing speakers and workshops. The conference is a great opportunity to network with other school council members, learn more about current education issues, and engage in lively discussions. Conference registration is now open – I hope to see you there.

You will continue to receive our bi-monthly newsletters, but an even better way to keep informed is to sign up for our e-newsletter. You will get more frequent education updates, as well as notice of upcoming conferences and events and helpful parent tips, all in one email! To sign up for our e-newsletter, visit the website at [www.peopleforeducation.ca](http://www.peopleforeducation.ca). While there, click on the "Discuss" button and check out the conversations happening in our online community. This is another great way to stay informed, share ideas, and seek advice from other council members and parents across the province.

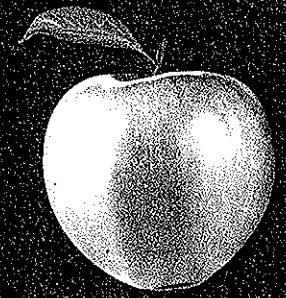
Finally, I want to thank each and every one of you for your ongoing commitment to your school, your community, and public education in Ontario. Here's to a great school year ahead!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "Jacqui Strachan".

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# PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION NEWSLETTER



BECAUSE EDUCATION MATTERS MOST

Volume 16 Issue 1 September 19, 2012

## PARTNERING TO MAKE OUR SCHOOLS STRONG

### PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION'S ANNUAL REPORT ON SCHOOL COUNCILS

Each year, People for Education sends surveys to all of the province's school councils. The survey asks about everything from the average attendance at meetings to councils' connections with their board-level Parent Involvement Committees (PICs). This year, councils from 68 of the province's 72 school boards participated.

This year's report shows an increase in school councils' connections with their PICs, but a drop in the percentage of councils reporting that they ask for parent feedback on school matters.

**Our school council works together to make our school a place where students want to be. We do a lot of activities to help support groups in our community and around the world. Our community is an inner-city area that has a lot of ESL families. We have great support from our board, principal, teachers and parents. We offer different languages for paperwork if needed. We also have programs where parents come in to spend some time to enhance their language. We are known as the "knights" in our community and are well recognized...In all we have a great community that supports the school. And the school supports the parents.**

*School Council Chair, Wellington Catholic DSB*

The comments from the surveys illustrate the energy and dedication demonstrated by school council members across Ontario. School councils support their local schools for the benefit of the whole school community.

But our survey results also capture some of the challenges for school councils. Concerns were raised, both by school councils and parents themselves, that the membership of many school councils is not

reflective of the diversity of parents within those schools. Under-represented groups include low-income families, newcomers, and Aboriginal parents. When asked if they organize activities to increase the diversity of council membership, only 36% of respondents indicated that they did.

Once again, the majority of school councils ranked "enhancing communication between the school and parents" as their most important activity: 75% this year, up from 70% last year. The survey results also show that social media is starting to have an

impact on school council communication. Only 12% of councils reported their use, but we expect that this will grow in the future.

According to our survey results, most school councils are focusing more on community-building and communicating with parents at home than on student achievement. The research shows that they're doing the right

thing, because it's what parents do at home that has the greatest impact on student achievement. See <http://tinyurl.com/parent-engagement-toolkit>

To read the full report, visit [www.peopleforeducation.ca](http://www.peopleforeducation.ca).

The 2013 school council survey will be sent to schools and available online in January. Don't miss out on the opportunity to participate in this important research project.

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE REPORT:

Once again, enhancing communication is named as the most important role for the majority (75%) of councils, but fundraising is the activity on which they spend the most time.

37% of councils report having no connections/outreach to community organizations such as public health, municipal recreation programs, and settlement services.

47% of school councils report that they are always or often notified of education policy changes by their Parent Involvement Committee, up from 39% last year.

60% of councils report using email to communicate with parents, but only 10% report that the school provides parents' email addresses.

80% of councils report that their initiatives are conveyed to the teaching staff, but only 9% report being invited to a staff meeting.

80% of school councils report that they engage in fundraising, down slightly from 84% last year.

36% organize activities to increase the diversity of their school council.

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## NEW PIC HANDBOOK RELEASED

A new handbook released by the Ministry of Education outlines the four main responsibilities of school boards' Parent Involvement Committees (PICs):

- to develop strategies and initiatives that the board can use to communicate with parents and engage them in support of their children's learning at home and at school; and to advise on the use of these strategies;

- to communicate information from the Ministry to school councils and parents;

- to determine, in consultation with the director, how ministry funding for parent engagement initiatives is to be allocated; and

- to work with school councils:

  - to share effective practices to help engage parents in their children's learning, identify and reduce barriers to parent engagement, and help ensure that schools are welcoming to parents;

  - to support initiatives that help build knowledge and skills that will assist the PIC and school councils with their work.

The handbook is available at <http://tinyurl.com/pic-handbook>.

The handbook will hopefully be helpful for new PIC members, and a good resource to answer questions and resolve issues that may arise as PICs work to establish themselves and refine their work.

What do you think of the new PIC Handbook? Join the discussion at <http://tinyurl.com/discuss-pic-handbook>.



You can follow us on Twitter!  
@anniekidder  
@jacquistrachan

## EQAO TESTS SHOW MIXED RESULTS

There has been a slight increase in the percentage of grades 3 and 6 students who achieved the provincial standard—a "B-" or higher—on Ontario's 2012 provincial reading and writing tests administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). But there has been a decline in the percentage of students who met the standard in math.

### DATA USEFUL TO SHOW WHERE IMPROVEMENT IS NEEDED

The EQAO not only tests students, but it also keeps track of each student over time. In 2012, about half of the students who struggled in grade 3 reading and writing were successful in Grade 6—a substantial improvement over five years ago. It is clear that schools are getting better at intervening early to help students succeed in these areas.

Numbers for math tell a different story. The proportion of students who improved in math between grade 3 and 6 has actually declined in the last five years, and students who did not meet the standard in grade 3 math tests are much more likely to continue to struggle in grade 9.

### PROBLEMS WITH GRADE 9 APPLIED MATH

The EQAO numbers also show extensive problems with Ontario's Applied Math program. Many students take Applied math in Grade 9 and 10 because they think it will be easier than Academic math, or because they are not planning on going to university.

But it appears the courses are not serving them well. The majority of students taking Applied math do not achieve the provincial standard, and almost one quarter get "D" or lower.

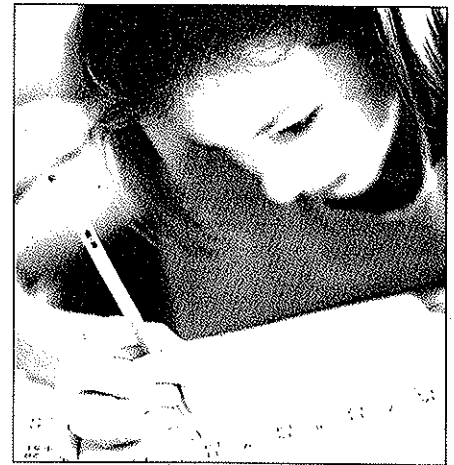
Even more worrying are the numbers showing that students who choose Applied math are more likely to struggle, no matter how they did in grade 3 and 6.

Of the students who met the provincial standard in both Grade 3 and Grade 6, 92% met it again in Grade 9 in the academic mathematics course, compared to only 79% in the applied course.

Of the students who had not met the provincial standard in Grade 3 or 6, 53% did not meet it in Grade 9 in the academic mathematics course compared to 70% of students in the applied course.

Of the students who had not met the provincial standard in Grade 3 but had met it in Grade 6, 77% met it in the Grade 9 academic mathematics course, compared to 61% in the applied course.

The results for Applied math have been low since the testing began. But the differences in success for similar students appears to show that there are not only problems with the curriculum, but that there may be problems with teaching methods in Applied math. Teachers may also have lower expectations for these students, which may affect their chance for success.



### NARROW MEASURE OF SUCCESS

The EQAO results show that Ontario students are doing very well overall. Over 90% of students get a "C" grade (level 2) or better on reading, writing and math tests, with the exception of Grade 9 Applied math students, where only 77% get "C" or higher. And when our grade 8's are compared to grade 8 students across the country in national tests, they score higher than all other provinces and territories in reading and come second in math and science.

But scores on standardized tests are only one narrow way of measuring success. They do not show how engaged students are, whether they are healthy, know history or geography, or if they are going to grow up to be contributing citizens.

To see results for each school and school board in Ontario, go to [www.eqao.com](http://www.eqao.com).

# CONTROVERSIAL EDUCATION BILL PASSED

It's hard to find an objective view about Bill 115, the new education law recently passed in Ontario's Legislature.

The bill was introduced ostensibly to deal with an impasse in bargaining with teachers and support staff. But the bill does much more than that; it shifts significant control out of the hands of school boards and schools, and up to the province. The law will be in effect for at least two years, but also grants the Minister of Education the right to impose permanent changes that would limit principals' control over teacher hiring and boards' control over diagnostic assessments.

The bill imposes a two-year wage freeze on all school board staff (which most teachers' federations had already agreed to), three unpaid days off in 2013/14 (a 1.5% salary cut), cuts to paid sick days, and changes to retirement benefits.

Many objections to the bill are focused on the extraordinary powers it grants to the province. Among the new powers in the bill:

It prohibits the Labour Relations Board or arbitrators from inquiring into or making decisions about the constitutionality of the Act.

It gives the province the right to use the Labour Relations Act to enforce the new law, but the Labour Relations Act doesn't apply if it conflicts with the new law.

It forbids the use of the courts to question or review any of the terms or conditions in the Act.

No arbitration can over-ride the province's stipulations for the contracts.

Strikes and lock-outs during the two-year period the legislation are banned and deemed unlawful. It will be unlawful to call for a strike, threaten a lock-out, or encourage employees to go on strike.

All contracts between school boards and their employees—including unionized and non-unionized employees (e.g. principals)—must be approved by the Minister and must follow most of the terms laid out in the Memorandum of Understanding between the province and the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association. If they don't, the Minister can impose a contract.

## THE IMPACT ON EXTRA CURRICULARS

In response to the new bill, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF) called for a one-day boycott of extra-curricular activities, and the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) told teachers to "take a pause" in their volunteer activities, but didn't specify for how long. As a result, some curriculum nights have been cancelled, team sports postponed, clubs shut down, and music trips put on hold.

People for Education has called upon all involved - the federations, the unions, school boards and the province - to find a way to re-instate extra-curricular activities while they try to settle the dispute. It is unfair to penalize students when the adults in the system can't work out their differences.

## HELP! WE'VE GOT HOMEWORK!

As the school year gets into full swing, homework issues may be starting to pop up in homes across Ontario. Students will struggle with homework on occasion. But, before engaging in a homework battle with your child, arm yourself with a few facts! Our homework tip sheet (<http://tinyurl.com/homework-tipsheet>) will alleviate some of parents' most common concerns, and provides tips to support your child at home.

There is also free homework help available in the community and online. The Independent Learning Centre has a free online tutoring service for high school students (<http://www.ilc.org/aat/chat.php>). Certified teachers are available on the website Sunday through Thursday, and the Centre also offers an essay-feedback service. Many schools, public libraries and community centres have homework clubs after school, and some school boards offer online lessons and learning activities for different grade levels. Many high schools also have peer tutors—students who have completed the course and can help with subjects like math and science.

Students can also ask friends or older siblings for help.

So before booking expensive tutoring sessions, check out what is available in your community.

## SAVE THE DATE! NOVEMBER 3-4, PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE

This year's conference features exciting speakers, information-packed workshops, and a fabulous new location in downtown Toronto. The keynote speaker will be Roger Martin, Dean of the Rotman School of Management at University of Toronto and a leading proponent of Integrative Thinking—a bold new approach to decision-making.

Saturday's workshop topics include student health, parent involvement, shifting powers in school decision-making, flipped

classrooms, and more. On Sunday, participants will use their newly developed problem solving skills to look at some of education's big issues - goals for our world, our country, our citizens and the future of our children, and how they should inform our goals for, and measurements of, public education.

For more details, please see the enclosed flyer. Space is limited, so make sure to reserve your tickets early.



# WHO'S ASKING? STUDENTS ARE!

When we launched the Frequently Asked Questions feature on our website, we anticipated that most of the users of the service would be parents. What has come as a surprise is the number of high school students seeking our advice. And the most common question they have is "What subjects do I need to take to be a ...?" The careers mentioned range from pediatrician to police officer to pilot.

The first thing that we recommend is to visit the guidance office at their school and speak to the experts! Parents are also welcome to contact the guidance department for an appointment to talk about the options available. But there are also several online resources that families can access when planning for the future.

The Ministry of Education has information about high school courses and graduation requirements posted at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/students/curriculum.html>.

For students considering a college education, [www.ontariocolleges.ca](http://www.ontariocolleges.ca) provides information about Ontario's 28 colleges and the programs they offer. Students can apply to programs and accept offers of admission as well.

For students thinking about a university education, [www.electronicinfo.ca](http://www.electronicinfo.ca) provides information about all of Ontario's universities, including programs available, course prerequisites and grade requirements, as well as scholarship and residence information.



For students interested in pursuing a career in the skilled trades, the Ministry of Education provides information about apprenticeship programs at <http://tinyurl.com/trades-apprentice>.

Several school boards offer online course selection tools such as 'myblueprint.ca'. Students can create their own file, input the courses they are taking, find out about pre-requisites for future courses, and explore different career paths and post-secondary programs.



## OCTOBER 11-12, ALLISTON

2012 Ophea (Ontario Physical and Health Education Association) Conference. For

more information, visit <https://conference.ophea.net>

## OCTOBER 11-14, MARKHAM

CADDAC 4th Annual ADHD Conference. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/caddac-conf>

## OCTOBER 20, BURLINGTON

Halton DSB 5th Annual PIC Conference. For more information, visit <http://registrations.hdsb.ca/picreg>

## OCTOBER 25-26, TORONTO

Summit on Children and Youth Mental Health. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/opsba-summit>

## OCTOBER 27, OTTAWA

Ottawa Catholic School Parents Association Parenting Now Symposium. For more information, visit <http://www.ottawacspa.ca>

## NOVEMBER 7, ST. CATHARINES

Niagara DSB PIC Conference "Parenting in the 21st Century: Raising the Whole Child" For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/niagara-pic-conf>

## NOVEMBER 10, BURLINGTON

Halton Catholic DSB's 5th Annual Parent Conference. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/halton-parent-conf>

## NOVEMBER 15-16, CALGARY

ArtsSmarts' 2012 Knowledge Exchange: Cultivating Creative Communities, presented by ArtsSmarts. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/artssmarts2012>

## NOVEMBER 17, TORONTO

6th Annual Parents Make a Difference Conference, presented by the Toronto District School Board's Parent and Community Involvement Office and the Parent Involvement Advisory Committee. For more information, visit <http://tinyurl.com/tdsb-parent-conf>



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You can also find us on Facebook, Flickr, Twitter, Slideshare and Youtube!

People for Education is an independent research and advocacy organization that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

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