

For the Love of Learning

Volume I: Mandate, Context, Issues

Chapter 2: Education and Society

*Regarding Ryerson through our backward prism
We find no madness in his Methodism,
But see in all those works he left behind
The logic of his energetic mind.
The House he built remains - though renovated
By many hands, as previously related;
Some minister, concerned to waterproof,
Deciding that he needs to raise the roof
Whereafter his successor with disdain
Decides she ought to lower it again.
Yet still there stands the ever open door
And cross the threshold still the children pour.
The teachers still their expertise bestow
And still the generations come and go.
And on foundations that still stand secure
The House that Ryerson built will endure.*

Hugh Oliver, from *The House That Ryerson Built*

En repassant, comme il m'arrive souvent, ces temps-ci, par mes années de jeune institutrice, dans une école de garçons, en ville, je revis, toujours aussi chargée d'émotion, le matin de la rentrée. J'avais la classe des tout-petits. C'était leur premier pas dans un monde inconnu. A la peur qu'ils en avaient tous plus ou moins, s'ajoutait, chez quelques-uns de mes petits immigrants, le désarroi, en y arrivant, de s'entendre parler dans une langue qui leur était étrangère. (...) Et je remarquai enfin qu'il avait presque une attitude de priant quand, après avoir écrit ses lettres, il s'accordait pendant un moment de les contempler. Quelle histoire écrivait-il donc, sans avoir besoin pour la connaître de pouvoir la lire? Peu à peu me venait à l'idée qu'il n'était pas commandé seulement de lui-même dans son acharnement à écrire. Mais peut-être par une faim lointaine. Une mystérieuse et longue attente.

Gabrielle Roy, dans *Ces enfants de ma vie*

In the next chapter, we record just some of the views of education in Ontario today that we heard; but first, we take a brief look over our shoulders, to see whether this is a unique moment in the history of education in Canada, or simply part of a recurring ebb and flow of issues and themes.

First, we begin with a brief history of Ontario's public education system, highlighting the architecture of "the house that Ryerson built." Second, we examine the more recent history of educational policy to find

out how the current system evolved. Third, we describe current socio-economic and demographic realities that affect the education system, and briefly examine funding. Fourth, we provide some descriptive statistics concerning the size and complexity of the Ontario school system as well as indicators of the state of the system. Finally, we look at the current national and international context for education reform.

Education in Ontario: A brief history

The history of schooling in Ontario has been written and rewritten many times and from many perspectives. As Professor Rebecca Coulter of the University of Western Ontario points out, the earliest histories (at least those written in English) document what was seen as the "glorious growth and progress of schooling,"⁽¹⁾ whereas some recent attempts take a more critical stance, exploring the ways in which schools have acted as agents of social control, and how they have operated to replicate class, language, ethnic, and gender relations. French-language historians have documented the development and struggles of schooling for the Franco-Ontarian community,⁽²⁾ a topic that has been given little attention by English-language writers.

When Ontario's school system was being established, few doubted that religion and schooling belonged together. The Roman Catholic Church was instrumental in starting French-language education in the 17th century; in the 19th century, the Anglican Church, led by the Reverend Dr. John Strachan, who was president of the General Board of Education, established English-language instruction for small numbers of children in the settlement at York, with the emphasis on grammar schools for the preparation of potential leaders of the community. Other religious groups, Methodists especially, promoted the concept of a basic education for all the children in the colony.

Individual parents played a strong role in early education, securing the services of itinerant teachers, or choosing one of their own to drill their children in the three Rs. Often the impetus for this initiative came from the fourth R - religion with local ministers reminding their flocks (in a largely Protestant population) of their duty to ensure that their progeny could read, understand, and follow the Bible.

Parental attempts to secure a modicum of education for their children got a boost in 1816 when some limited provision was made for government assistance. Professor Willard Brehaut notes: "As this support movement was extended, evidence of greater public control began to appear. Throughout Ontario's history, as in that of other jurisdictions, public support and public control have tended to go hand-in-hand."⁽³⁾

The Common School Act

In the 1840s, the school system was shaped, to a considerable degree, by a series of school acts, beginning with the Common School Act of 1841, which doubled the size of government grants in aid of schools, and introduced compulsory taxes on property as a means of funding elementary schools. In the early 1840s, a General Board of Education was established for the province and consisted of the superintendent and six advisors. By the end of the 1840s, the stage had been set for the centralized administration of schools, with regulations covering organization, classification of teachers, and prescription of textbooks.

One Methodist adherent in particular was key in making a wider view of public education at least a

partial reality in his day: Egerton Ryerson, who served as Ontario's superintendent of education from 1844 until 1876. Ryerson was steadfast in his support of a public education system that had a distinctly Christian, but non-denominational, basis.

The Roman Catholic Church established the first English-language Roman Catholic class in Kingston in 1839.⁽⁴⁾ From the beginning, the question of separate schools engendered considerable political debate. The Scott Act of 1863 provided more formal recognition and support to Catholic education, allowing for the election of separate school trustees as well as legislative grants to separate schools. The Constitution Act, 1867, confirmed that all provisions in place for denominational schools at the time of Confederation would remain in force and could not be diminished.

Ryerson had rigorously opposed any extension of funding to Roman Catholic grammar (what we now know as secondary) schools, on the grounds that money given to denominational systems would undermine a strong public system. Grammar schools received some public support as early as 1807 but, despite Ryerson's intentions, did not come under effective public control until 1871.

Compulsory and free

For many years, attendance in public schools was not mandatory. School fees, problems of transportation and travel, and the necessity of children's sharing chores in a rural wilderness made regular school attendance difficult. Not until 1891 were children between the ages of 8 and 14 compelled to attend school with penalties for parents or guardians who did not comply with the law; in 1919, the age was extended to 16.

Elementary school fees were eliminated in 1871 and, with that move, a barrier to access to education fell; secondary school fees were not dropped until half a century later. Both initiatives were accompanied by greater provincial regulation of schooling in the form of compulsory attendance laws.

Compulsory attendance at both school levels brought with it the problem of how to change the curriculum to meet the needs of widening segments of society.

Because it was obvious that many children were neither able nor willing to follow the traditional academic program offered at the secondary school level, it became necessary to offer a variety of programs and courses to meet the needs of a vastly increased number. To this end, manual training, domestic science, and other courses were introduced and later, technical and vocational schools were established.⁽⁵⁾

However, one effect of this type of differentiated programming was that young people were being sorted according to their socio-economic origins, which prevented them from moving beyond them.

Role and qualifications of teachers

In 1850, when Ontario first adopted official standards for qualifying teachers, the requirements were minimal: candidates were expected to read, spell, write, and to have some knowledge of geography and the basic rules of grammar. The highly variable quality of teachers of the time had prompted Ryerson, in 1847, to establish the first "normal" school, located in Toronto, for the instruction of teachers in the common schools. Ottawa was the site of Ontario's second normal school, which opened in 1875. (The term "normal school" was used well into the 1950s, when it was changed to "teachers' college.")

During the middle and late 1800s, the province also experimented with "county model schools" for

teacher training, which offered a lower standard of teacher certification; however, these were closed by 1907. Like the Ontario education system in general, teacher preparation of this period was characterized by strong central regulation.(6)

Manuals described in detail how normal school subjects were to be taught, and the provincial education department was also responsible for setting and marking final examinations for teacher candidates.

The organization and status of teaching was, for the most part, the result of work by the teachers' professional associations. Their importance was recognized by 1944, when the province enacted the Teaching Profession Act, granting teachers automatic membership in the Ontario Teachers' Federation and in one of its five affiliates. (Unlike those in some other provinces, the two Ontario associations for teachers in public English-language elementary schools are still split along gender lines.)

A growing system

The one-room schoolhouse was the model of Ontario education for generations, Ryerson's efforts to promote enlarged school areas notwithstanding. For generations local governance consisted of a three-man ("three fit and discreet men") board of trustees.

With an eye on efficiency and equality of opportunity, successive governments slowly developed larger administrative units, culminating in 1969 when the amalgamation of more than two thousand small school boards brought the number to slightly more than 190, most using the provincial county system as the administrative unit. It was at this point that the one-room schoolhouse, relic of Ontario's pioneer past, finally became part of history.

Curriculum and teaching methods

In the earliest days of education in the province, rote memorization, often of meaningless material, was commonplace. Teachers assigned a great deal but taught little until the advent of graded texts approved by the government, which permitted teachers to group students according to age and to their understanding of the texts being covered.

The curriculum of the pioneer school dealt with the three Rs (reading, writing, and arithmetic) and a fourth R, religion: reading texts frequently used were the Bible and various religious tracts. With the introduction of standard texts, teaching and learning methods changed. Through his *Journal of Education*, Ryerson was a primary proponent of these new methods, and in 1851 he established the Educational Depository, which made teaching aids, books, and lesson guides available to schools and libraries.

In time, the Ministry centralized provincial curriculum and authorized texts through Circular 14, a list of textbooks approved for use in Ontario schools.

Education rights of the French-language minority

French-language schools in Ontario go back more than 300 years, to 1634, when a school for Native children was established in Huronia (the area around present-day Midland). Schools for the children of French settlers followed later in the century, beginning with a class in Fort Cataraqui (now Kingston) in 1676.

Until the late 19th century, French- and English-language schools were financed in the same way and enjoyed the same status. Because most were Roman Catholic, they were subject to the same rules and

restrictions as their English-language counterparts and received no funding past Grade 10.

Disputes about French-language instruction were a constant feature of Ontario education. Although the British North America Act provided protection for the rights of francophones, these rights proved to be somewhat fragile. Following Confederation and into the early years of the 20th century, the province curtailed the rights of Franco-Ontarians; as a minority group, they lacked the power exercised by the English-language majority.

When Regulation 17 was passed in 1912, restricting teaching in French to Grades 1 and 2, Franco-Ontarians immediately organized strong resistance, led by the Association canadienne-française de l'éducation de l'Ontario. Although in effect only until 1927, Regulation 17 was not repealed until 1944. This struggle was a defining event for the Franco-Ontarian community, providing it with an initial focus for demands for educational rights, and control over their own schools.

Questions of purpose

The debate about the purposes of schooling was born with the schools themselves. Was it training for work, for individual fulfilment, as a preparation for citizenship, to infuse a sense of patriotism, to support the Christian ethic, or simply because of the intrinsic value of a liberal education? Not only were there disagreements about purpose, but each of these distinct purposes was defined very differently at different times.

A researcher observes:

Over the course of the last 150 years, the schools have been used for several purposes. In important senses, almost all people agree that schools are suitable places to build character, to engage in initiatives to improve the world, to teach citizenship and to prepare the young for work and life. The disagreements have arisen in debates, however mute, about what kind of character, what kind of social reform/justice, what form of citizenship, and what kind of work education. In seeking to achieve one or more of these purposes, the question has been whether we want to create young people who will fit seamlessly into the existing society or whether we want graduates who will challenge their world and work for change.(7)

Although sharing this general ambiguity of purposes relating to the wider goals of schooling, Roman Catholic and French-language schools have always had the specific purposes of maintaining religious and/or linguistic identities in the midst of a large majority of (until recently) Protestant and English-speaking people.

We turn now to recent educational policy in Ontario in order to understand how the publicly funded system has met the challenges of the past 30 years.

More recent educational history

Living and Learning: *The Hall-Dennis report*

In 1965, following a massive expansion of the school system, the Department of Education responded to the ferment about social and educational issues with the Hall-Dennis report, published in 1968. The report, vastly different from any previous government-sponsored document on education, sought to modernize the education system so that it would be able to address the needs of both the student as an

individual and of society as a whole.

An academic commented at the time on this dual emphasis:

This emphasis may be seen as an attempt to counterbalance two possible tendencies in education: the reflection of a collectivist view of man [sic], and the imposition of a single pattern of schooling (in manner and content) on all children, regardless of individual differences.(8)

A contemporary commentator said that in the report, "the child and, to a large extent the teacher, occupy the centre of the stage, with the subjects, the administrators, and the experts relegated to supporting roles."(9) Among the report's 258 recommendations were calls for a curriculum more closely related to students' experiences, a decrease in rote learning, and an increase in parental and community involvement in schools. Some of these recommendations remain controversial issues. Lloyd Dennis, co-chair of the Hall-Dennis Inquiry, believes key elements of the report were never treated seriously by the government of the day.

Elementary schools

As recently as 1967, Curriculum P1, J1, the Department of Education's key policy document for education in Grades 1 through 6, stated that the aims of education, first promulgated in 1937, were still applicable. It declared that "the schools of Ontario exist for the purpose of preparing children to live in a democratic society that bases its way of life upon the Christian ideal," and described the relationship of the individual to society as follows:

From each individual a democratic society expects the finest service of which he is capable and a willingness to make sacrifices for the common welfare. It demands that he recognize and accept his responsibility to act not only in the interest of self but in the interest of all - Co-operation in a democratic group requires self-control, intelligent self-direction, and the ability to accept responsibility.(10)

It went on to outline the "threefold task" of the school: to help the child to understand the nature of the environment in which he or she lives; to lead the child "to choose and accept as his own those ideals of conduct and endeavour that a Christian and democratic society approves," and to assist the pupil to master the essential abilities for living in a modern society. The 1967 document did, however, point out that the Hall-Dennis report, anticipated the next year, might be expected to lead to major changes.

In 1975, the Ministry issued *The Formative Years*, and a support document, *Education in the Primary and Junior Divisions*, which gave teachers new directions for elementary education. It pointed out that:

The experiences of these early years mould the child's attitudes to learning and provide the basic skills and impetus for his [sic] continuing progress - It is the policy of the Government of Ontario that every child have the opportunity to develop as completely as possible in the direction of his or her talents and needs.(11)

In his introductory statement to *The Formative Years*, the then-Minister of Education, Thomas Wells, asked all teachers, administrators, trustees, and parents to "remember - always that the individual child in the classroom is the ultimate reason for the existence of our schools."

This concern about the individual was further emphasized in such statements as "the philosophical

commitment of our society [is] to the worth of the individual"; moreover, one of the major goals of education was described as to help each child "to develop and maintain confidence and a sense of self-worth." The document also said that, under a new policy, education should be conducted in a way that would not limit children's opportunities by sex-role stereotyping them.

The Formative Years also drew attention to the need for careful curriculum planning by individual teachers, by groups of teachers and by school staffs collectively, in order to ensure that the overall curriculum achieved a consistent focus and eliminated excessive repetition and overlap. It also pointed out that parents, as well as the children themselves, should be involved in the planning process in appropriate ways, and that supervisory officers and principals have a responsibility for providing leadership in planning.

The document outlined specific objectives in terms of providing children with "opportunities to acquire competence" in certain areas at the end of the Primary and Junior Divisions, rather than identifying outcomes or levels of competence to be achieved. In addition to objectives in language and mathematics that were listed for each division separately, it also identified objectives for areas such as music, drama, visual arts, physical education and health, science, and geography, which had been part of elementary education for some time, as well as new areas such as the individual and society, decision-making, values, perception and expression, and Canadian Studies, which clearly flowed from the recommendations of the Hall-Dennis report, *Living and Learning*.

The Formative Years and its support document continued to set the direction for elementary education until they were replaced by *The Common Curriculum* in 1993.

Secondary schools

For more than a hundred years, the debate about the formal education of adolescents has focused particularly on the best ways to bridge the last years of elementary and the early years of secondary school, the relevance of the curriculum to students with very different needs, and the extent to which schools and programs should be tailored to academic and vocational outcomes.

In the 1930s, experiments that involved combining Grades 7 and 8 (and, sometimes, 9 as well) into one organizational and administrative unit, in order to better serve the needs of adolescents, reached their peak. But political opposition from teacher federations, and the implications such groupings would have if funding of the separate school system were ever to be extended, forestalled this as a general model.

In 1950, the Department of Education directed school boards to create committees of teachers from Grades 7 to 10, to plan "local instructional programs for the Intermediate Division" but these were largely ineffective. In the 1950s, however, a limited number of junior high schools were established.

The 1961 *Program of Study for Secondary Schools* (named the "Robarts Plan") reorganized secondary education into three programs of equal status: arts and sciences; business and commerce; science, technology, and trades. Students were streamed into one of three options: a five-year program leading to university; a four-year program leading to entry into employment at the end of Grade 12, or to the new system of colleges of Applied Arts and Technology; and a two-year program designed for direct employment after age 16.

Robarts's successor as Minister of Education, William Davis, replaced the Robarts Plan with *Circular H.S.1: Recommendations and Information for Secondary School Organization Leading to Certificates*

and Diplomas 1969-70. It organized programs into four areas of study: communications, social sciences, pure and applied sciences, and arts, and gave students a wide choice of subjects.

The circular also introduced the system under which students are awarded a credit for each subject completed in a school year, allowing them to advance in that subject to the next year; any subjects failed must be repeated. This means that students are promoted in subjects, not grades. A certain number of credits had to be earned in order to attain a Grade 12 diploma, and an additional six credits for the Honours Graduation Grade 13 Diploma. In place of two-, four-, and five-year streams, subjects were organized at four levels of difficulty: advanced, general, basic, and modified.

A scant four years later, *Secondary School Diploma Requirements H.S.1 1974-75* stipulated that there would be more compulsory credits (nine) and fewer student choices.

A paper by several researchers, looking back at Ontario education in the mid-1970s, points out that *central control [had been] reasserted. The age of expansion was over. Issues of declining enrolment, reduction in the funding available for education, and an oversupply of teachers led to a mood of pessimism.*(12)

That pessimism brought with it renewed criticism of secondary education and, in response, in April 1980 Minister of Education Bette Stephenson established the Secondary Education Review Project (SERP).

Based on the SERP report and on reaction to a Ministry response, *The Renewal of Secondary Education* (ROSE), in 1982 the Ministry released Ontario Schools: *Intermediate and Senior Divisions* (OSIS), to be implemented in 1984. It emphasized the need to improve the transition between elementary and secondary schools, and to encourage students to stay in school. It suggested that courses be offered at three (instead of four) levels of difficulty - basic, general, and advanced - and that they be designed specifically to meet the needs of students in basic and general classes, rather than offering watered-down versions of advanced-level courses.

In the mid-1980s Premier David Peterson was concerned about what he considered an unacceptably high drop-out rate for Ontario students. He commissioned George Radwanski, then an editor of the *Toronto Star*, to review the problem. Radwanski's report, the *Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education, and the Issue of Dropouts*, published in 1987, concluded that the education system had become irrelevant in an economy where the emphasis was shifting from manufacturing to services; moreover, many students were uninterested in what they were being taught at school, and they lacked appropriate skills and knowledge.(13)

He developed a series of recommendations designed to increase the percentage of students completing high school: early childhood education; province-wide standardized testing to identify learning needs; a shift to outcomes-based education; "destreaming" of high schools; and the abolition of the credit system in favour of a common core curriculum.

Though several of Radwanski's key recommendations were not implemented, the following changes have taken place since his report was released:

- Destreaming, under which all students are taught together rather than being separated according to their abilities, is now being implemented in Grade 9.
- The Ministry's *Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9* (1993), initiated a province-wide discussion on outcomes-based education - in which the focus is on what is actually learned. The curriculum is

built around four areas - language; the arts; maths, science, and technology; and the self and society.

- A number of tests are being administered at provincial and national levels.

Declining enrolments

If the mid-1960s had been a time of new and challenging ideas, the mid-1970s were years of caution and retrenchment: in the wake of financial constraints imposed by the provincial government, school boards were forced to make difficult decisions about closing schools and laying off teachers.

Most school boards were facing the effects of the declining enrolments that resulted from the declining birth rate after the "baby boom."⁽¹⁴⁾ In 1978, in *The Final Report of the Commission on Declining School Enrolments in Ontario*, Robert Jackson made clear how substantial the decline and its probable consequences would be on school organization, staffing, and funding. However, by the time the number of students in secondary schools began to drop, enrolment began to stabilize at the elementary level. Student numbers have remained stable for the last several years and are now projected to increase slightly over the next decade.

Major legislation in the 1980s

Bill 82 and special education

In 1980, Bill 82, which made school boards responsible for providing programs and services for students in need of special education, had a tremendous impact on schools. Many children who had previously been cared for or educated in other institutions or who had never gone to school, entered the school system. Many teachers had to develop new skills to deal with the needs of children they had not encountered previously. And many trustees, as well as school and board administrators, had to make provisions for large numbers of students whose educational needs they had not heretofore been required to meet.

A significant number of health and psycho-social service professionals became part of the school system. To some extent, the system also had to adjust to a much higher level of advocacy by parents and groups representing students with special needs.

Bill 30 and extension of funding of Roman Catholic secondary schools

In 1984, Premier Davis announced his government's intention to publicly fund Roman Catholic separate schools beyond Grade 10 to graduation level; two years later the legislation, Bill 30, was passed in the Legislature with the support of all three parties.

In 1984, Mr. Davis also announced that commissions were being established to report on implementation of the extended funding and on funding issues in general, as well as on the specific question of funding for private schools.

Bill 75 and French-language governance

In 1986, Bill 75 introduced legislation under which the Franco-Ontarian community was given responsibility for French-language education, although with limited decision-making powers. The French-language sections within existing school boards, with trustees specifically elected to them, have some measure of independence from both the anglophone public and the anglophone Roman Catholic

sections. In 1991, the report of the French Language Education Governance Advisory Group (also known as the Cousineau report) recommended criteria under which several French-language governance structures, including French-language school boards, would give the province's francophones full control of their own system. This report has not yet been implemented.

Financing education

In 1985, one of the commissions established by Premier Davis, and headed by H. Ian Macdonald, issued *The Report of the Commission on the Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education*. It examined the adequacy and distribution of school funding, both provincial and local, as well as such issues as fiscal accountability, and alternative methods of financing to overcome existing disparities and inequities. Its 54 recommendations were built on three principles: education is primarily a provincial responsibility; the quality of education should be maintained or enhanced; and the province should strive towards the goal of equal educational opportunity for all.

The commission recommended the sharing of commercial and industrial taxes by public and Roman Catholic boards in the same geographic area, further consolidation of public school boards, the creation of co-operative service units (e.g., shared busing or payroll systems), a review of programs and funding, and a system of province-wide collective bargaining for teachers.

While the recommendation that commercial and industrial taxes be shared is being implemented, certain issues (consolidation of school boards in some regions, for example) continue to be contentious. Other measures - including the idea of sharing busing, administrative purchasing, computer use, audio-visual resources, athletic facilities, and professional development activities - are being carried out by some boards and being investigated by others. The question of province-wide bargaining for teachers has not been pursued at all.⁽¹⁵⁾

Legislative reports

Between 1988 and 1990, the Select Committee on Education, an all-party group of members of the Legislature, prepared four reports, all of which attempted to grapple with a range of issues relating to education and broader social needs, reflecting concerns about such issues as race, language, family violence, and child abuse.⁽¹⁶⁾

The Committee also called for reforms to educational funding policies to make them simpler and more effective, and for smaller class sizes. In 1988, the Ministry stipulated that Grade 1 and 2 classes must not exceed 20 students, with the downsizing to be phased in over several years. The Ministry also established the Education-Finance Reform Project, to re-examine funding.

The Select Committee also considered issues related to early childhood education, including junior and senior kindergarten, the drop-out rate, and destreaming, and urged improvement of inter-ministerial co-ordination of policies and programs dealing with children. It also suggested that the Ministry work with faculties of education to restructure and enhance teacher training in regard to young children.

Premier's council

Two reports dealing with the apparent connection between education and the consequences of today's globalized economy were published by the Premier's Council, which includes representatives from business, labour, education, and community organizations. *Competing in the New Global Economy*

(1988) and *People and Skills in the New Global Economy* (1990) consider Ontario's place in the world market, and attempt to analyze the policies needed to protect the province's relative prosperity. Like other similar documents, these take for granted a cause-and-effect relation between schooling and prosperity that, as we'll soon see, is asserted rather than demonstrated.

As well, a committee of the Premier's Council on Health, Well-Being, and Social Justice published a report, *Yours, Mine, and Ours* (1994) on children, including education issues as they relate to larger questions of children's healthy development and growth.

Public funding to private schools

The issue of extending public funding to private schools continues to be raised in the courts and hotly debated among groups and in the media. Although the *Report of the Commission on Private Schools in Ontario*(17) (the Shapiro Commission) recommended in 1985 that religious schools be allowed to apply for "associate" status with local school boards, the recommendation has not been adopted. Court challenges to current funding arrangements have been unsuccessful, most recently in an Ontario court decision handed down in July 1994.(18)

Anti-racism and ethno-cultural equity initiatives

In 1993, Bill 21 amended the Education Act to give the Minister power to have school boards develop anti-racism and ethno-cultural equity plans, which would require Ministerial approval, and then to implement those plans. In addition, the Ministry began to implement some of the education-related elements of Stephen Lewis's Report on Race Relations, including his recommendation that an assistant deputy minister for Anti-Racism, Equity, and Access be appointed.

The significance of recent policy changes

In order to place educational reform in its proper context, we need to look, however briefly, at the changes to educational policy in Ontario, particularly over the past eight to ten years. During that time, various governments have, among them, created a plethora of task forces and inquiries (some already mentioned), which recommended, among other changes, reducing class size in early grades, restructuring schooling to accommodate review and consultation at all levels, destreaming, implementation of anti-violence and anti-racist policies, and employment and pay equity. Recently, the Ministry of Education and Training (MET) identified four fundamental elements for setting policy: equity, excellence, accountability, and partnership.

Over the years, some recommendations have been transformed into policy, but these initiatives have not always been either consistent or carried into practice. As a result, they have often been perceived as somewhat random or unrelated, rather than as parts of a rational vision of what education should be. Many educators who spoke to the Commission said that policies are perceived as a patchwork rather than as a coherent framework for educating students.

The changes, combined with funding cuts, have created what some believe is a "war zone" between MET and many school boards. This is complicated by a sense that non-educators in government have taken the lead in making policy. School board trustees and administrators often feel that politicians and bureaucrats with little professional expertise have undue influence in this field, and the result has been a loss of confidence in the Ministry.

Reflecting on change

What began as an educational system for a privileged few has, over the years, become a system for the many - although there is clear evidence that those who enter it from privileged backgrounds still benefit most. Because schools matter so greatly in shaping the destiny of each child, they have always been the focus of intense, often unfriendly, attention. Criticisms of the system have always been abundant, and the targets of dissatisfaction have remained virtually the same over generations.

But the content of complaints has varied substantially, often depending on the mood of the moment: it was different in the self-satisfied 1950s compared with the rambunctious 1960s or the anxious 1990s. As well, there have been changing notions about child development, the nature of teaching and learning, as well as changes in political trends, fiscal priorities, student enrolments, teacher supply, and other issues. As a result, a core curriculum shifts to a system of streaming, with many options and, in time, goes back to destreaming and what is now called a common curriculum. Over time, teaching strategies also change: as the benefits of individualized attention are better understood, the emphasis shifts from rigid lesson plans to co-operative, small-group learning and other flexible concepts.

In this atmosphere, it is often difficult to distinguish between the latest fads, caprices, and political game-playing, and the reforms that are based on a thoughtful understanding of the most successful means to turn our students into literate citizens predisposed to remaining lifelong learners. It is a trap we hope this report has been able to avoid.

Our examination of historical trends and recent educational policy discussions and initiatives makes clear that some issues keep coming up in different forms in different eras, and are never fully resolved. Issues of the purposes of education and how secondary schooling should be organized are as current today as they were three generations ago. Other issues, however, are new, or at least becoming increasingly important; among them are the broader social needs of students, and recognition that equity issues have to be addressed in a much more substantive way.

They reflect the fact that Ontario's education system exists in a society that has, itself, undergone enormous change, particularly in the last 15 years, and that those changes have an impact on education. In Ontario, poverty, identified as a crucial factor in learning, has increased; immigration from the Caribbean, Asia, Africa, and the Middle East has brought larger populations of visible minorities to urban centres unprepared to deal with change; family structures have shifted dramatically, as has their role. Even a brief review shows how extensive the shifts have been in our society.

Ontario: Picture of the province

Today, as people struggle to comprehend and adapt to our post-modern age, with its focus on information as an economic resource, lifelong learning has become essential. Therefore, Ontario's education system must expand its reach to encompass toddlers as well as older adults. Most important, it must resolve fundamental questions about the roles that, realistically, it can play and the responsibilities it can hope to assume in today's complex, demanding social and economic climate.

All of this must be achieved in a province of astonishing contrasts. It holds more than a third of Canada's population, and its mix of populations mirrors the country's history and development. The province's ten million people live in Canada's major metropolis and in some of its biggest cities, as well as in thousands

of small villages and towns; in its northern reaches, tiny communities are surrounded by hundreds of thousands of hectares of unpopulated wilderness. The result is a province of enormous variety, geographically, climatically, historically, culturally, and socially.

Today's Ontario has little in common with the province that existed even three decades ago. In the past 20 years, immigrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa have outnumbered those from traditional European sources. The manufacturing sector that was once the wellspring of Ontario's prosperity is declining, and service industries are expanding. Not only is everything changing, the pace of change is, itself, increasing. And there, squarely at the centre of change, stands the school system. There are several especially significant shifts that affect our schools. What follows is a short description of some of those factors.

Ontario's changing economy

Unemployment

The facts speak for themselves: between February 1990 and February 1991, approximately 260,000 jobs were lost in Ontario, many in the manufacturing sector. In that time, in the Greater Toronto Area alone, almost 10 percent of the employment base disappeared, more than three times the rate for Canada as a whole.⁽¹⁹⁾ (However, in October 1994, the GTA recorded a growth in job creation for the first time since 1989.) Many smaller centres were particularly hard hit when the one or two companies on which they depended most heavily downsized, closed, or moved away.

In 1992, more than 10 percent of Ontario's adult population was receiving unemployment insurance or social assistance.⁽²⁰⁾ And there has been a disturbing decline in the economic well-being of families headed by people under the age of 35: their median income - the point at which half the population has a higher, and half a lower, income - has dropped 5 percent. For the first time in our collective memory, families no longer anticipate that their children will be better off than they are, and stories of the educated unemployed haunt both parents and children.

Social programs, of which public education is but one, frequently become targets for retrenchment when tax revenues fall and the costs of the social safety net escalate. Often, in these circumstances, the funding of one social program takes place at the expense of another.

Poverty

Of all the economic problems that affect the school system, none has a greater impact than poverty - and there is ample evidence that, in recent years, more and more school-aged Canadian and Ontario children have become impoverished.

In Ontario, the reality of poverty continues to cast dark shadows on many families. In 1992:

- 1,400,000 Ontario residents, 14 percent of the population, lived on low incomes;
- Of that percentage, almost a million were members of the province's 308,802 low-income families (the rest were single);
- These families accounted for more than 11 percent of all families in Ontario;
- 41 percent of low-income families were headed by sole-support parents, almost all of whom - 92 percent - were women;

- Of children under 18 living with their families, 16.2 percent lived in low-income families;
- More than half the children living in female-led, sole-support households were in low-income families, compared with only 10.2 percent of those living with both parents.(21)

Poverty has an impact on student achievement: according to a report of the Canadian Institute of Child Health, "Poor children are almost three times more likely to drop out of school early than non-poor youth."(22) Statistics for 1991 indicate that 13 percent of poor 16- and 17-year-olds dropped out of school, compared with 5 percent of children who were not poor. "Poverty," education professor Benjamin Levin points out, "is the enemy of education."(23)

The essence of poverty is that it is a vicious circle: poor children are more likely to be of low birth weight; low birth-weight children are more likely to have physical and developmental problems; children with physical and developmental problems are more likely to have difficulties in school; even when there are no such problems, many poor families are so overwhelmed with the miseries that come from being poor they cannot provide a home environment that supports school learning; children who do poorly in school are more likely to have employment problems.

Another vicious circle: when jobs are scarce, tax revenues decline. If parents are either dependent on social welfare or are working but poor, children become more needy. This puts added pressure on financially squeezed schools to provide physical, social, and emotional support for children who need help - at a time when the taxes that support schools are declining.

Are education and economic prosperity connected?

The link between the economy and the education system is problematic. Anxiety about an uncertain economy often translates into calls for schools to "do more," on the premise that a strong educational system is vital to the future.

There are two points of view: the first, and currently most dominant, is that education drives the economy - that our economic well-being is dependent on a well-educated workforce able to compete in the "new global economy."(24)

The other view rests on a different assumption: that economic health is not primarily dependent on the skills and knowledge of the workforce, but economic health does help create educational opportunities.(25)

Given these different points of departure, different economic futures are offered. According to the Conference Board of Canada's Employability Skills Index, most future jobs will require the kinds of high-level skills and knowledge that were once necessary only for a few, high-end positions. But others see a "pear-shaped" economy in which the mass of jobs are in the low-level part of the service sector ("McJobs"), or in which many people will simply be unemployed.(26)

What is clear is that the service sector in Ontario has grown: it accounted for 65 percent of workers in 1981 and 72 percent in 1991,(27) with much of the increase in part-time work.(28)

Current Canadian research suggests that the greatest potential for growth is, paradoxically, both in well-paying professional occupations requiring relatively few people with high levels of education and in poorly paying service occupations requiring low levels of education and employing large numbers of

people.(29)

What are the implications for the education system of these figures and forecasts? Some researchers and policy analysts (Henry Levin in the United States, for example)(30) suggest that unless a person has considerable education - at least at the university graduate level with some post-graduate work schooling is not related to increased income. Already, the growing number of people who have degrees has begun to devalue university credentials as a step to employment. Clearly, the educational system does not cause economic crises, and it cannot cure them.

On the basis of research and policy analysis, we have concluded that predictions about educational ties to the economic future are uncertain at best; it is difficult, if not impossible, to be sure which jobs will be available and which specific skills will be required. Although it seems reasonable to suggest that an increasing number of positions will require high-level technical and scientific training, it is entirely possible that the number of such jobs created by these new positions will be small.

Henry Levin's review of American research concludes that overall educational requirements in the year 2000 are likely to be quite similar to those today.(31) But his is not the dominant voice being heard in either the U.S. or Canada. Although no-one can demonstrate how it would work in practice, many insist that school reform must be based on the needs of the economy whatever those turn out to be in a future that seems even harder to predict than usual.

Demographic factors

Before society can decide how to shape its schools, it needs to know who, exactly, will be in them; educational policies, after all, have to be built around people. Because most students are between 5 and 18 years of age (and, therefore, most probably living in families), it is important, as well, to consider the student, not in isolation, but in the family context. A key question for today's policy makers is: In what ways have '90s families changed from those of the 1960s and '70s?

The family

The majority (83 percent) of children in Ontario are being raised in two-parent families, but that number includes blended or recombined families. The "norm" may now be two working parents, or it could be a single-parent or other kinds of family arrangements that result from the greater number of divorces and remarriages in our society. We are only starting to understand the impact on schools of this shift in family structures and roles.(32)

In addition to the fact that families are smaller and more likely to have come from other countries and other cultures, one of the most significant changes in the lives of people, whether Canadian-born or immigrant, is that more children today live in two-income families. Twenty years ago, only 30 percent of families with children under 19 years had two wage earners. By 1991, the number of dual-earner families had increased to 70 percent.

Just as the school year, with its long summer vacation, was shaped to Canada's agrarian economy, the school day was set up on the basis that a parent, almost always the mother, would be available as a full-time caregiver before and after school and, of course, during school holidays. The need of today's working parents for high-quality care is creating pressures for schools to expand their role, either directly or in partnership with community groups.

Emotional well-being

Many child advocates, mental health professionals, and educators observe that an unprecedented number of children have problems in their home lives, which makes coping at school more difficult.(33)

Fertility rates

Because the most accurate predictor of future school needs is the number of babies born each year, the fact that we have gone from a "baby boom" to "baby bust" has had a considerable impact on our education system. The total fertility rate (the number of children a woman would have during her lifetime if she were to follow contemporary fertility patterns) dropped from 3.9 children in 1960 to a low of 1.65 in 1987 (although figures show that there has been a slight increase since, to 1.8 in 1990).

One reason for the decrease is that in the 1990s, Canadian women tend to wait longer to start their families: in 1961, the average age for a first-time mother was 23.5 years; in 1990 it was 26.4 years.(34)

Immigration

Immigration is the second important factor affecting school enrolment: in 1991, 55 percent of Canadian immigrants (118,693 people) settled in Ontario. Of these, 72 percent settled in the Greater Toronto Area.(35)

Immigration patterns have significantly changed the nature of the student population, especially in Toronto, the Ottawa-Carleton region, and generally in urban southern Ontario.

In 1972, nearly half of Ontario's immigrants came from Europe. However, by 1992, nearly 80 percent came from Asia, Africa, and Latin America. By 1991, almost 25 percent of Ontario's population, and almost 40 percent of those living in Metropolitan Toronto, were born outside Canada. (In the rest of the country, 16 percent of the population is foreign-born.)(36)

Native peoples

There is a very different demographic pattern for aboriginal peoples living in Ontario, which has the greatest number of Native Canadians of any province or territory. In 1991, 12 percent were in the under-4 age group, compared with some 5.6 percent of Ontario's non-Native population. According to the 1991 Census of Canada, the aboriginal population of Ontario was 244,000.

The 128 First Nations and Bands profiled in the report Akwesasne to Wunnumin Lake have about 53 percent of the province's total aboriginal population, and 98 percent of the population living on reserves or on Crown land (as defined by the 1989 Indian Register); the majority of these have fewer than 500 residents.(37)

Visible minorities

Statistics Canada estimates that in 1992, Ontario's population included 1,297,605 members of visible minority groups (13 percent of the provincial population).(38) This accounts for more than half of all those people in Canada who are members of visible minorities, and it is both the highest percentage and largest number of any jurisdiction in the country. The population of visible minorities is highest in Toronto, accounting for a quarter of the people in Metropolitan Toronto and for more than three-quarters of all members of visible minorities in Ontario.(39)

Roman Catholic and francophone families

There are two other significant demographic groups that have an impact on the way schooling is organized: those Ontarians who identify themselves as Roman Catholics and/or francophones.

Approximately 5 percent of the people in this province identify themselves as francophone, and 5 percent of Ontario students are enrolled in French-language schools. Of these, four out of five are in Roman Catholic French schools; the rest are in public French schools. Some increase in the enrolment in French-language schools may reflect a growth in the number of parents who are exercising their constitutional right to have children educated in French at both elementary and secondary levels. Because the Charter extends the right to French-language education only to Canadian citizens, French-speaking immigrants and refugees who wish to educate their children in the French system must make application to admissions committees established under the Education Act.

Of the approximately 500,000 francophones in Ontario:

- two of three (66 percent) were born in Ontario (the same percentage as anglophones);
- one of four (25 percent) were born in Quebec, and five percent were born in another province (10 percent of anglophones were born in another province);
- 4 percent of francophones were born outside the country (25 percent of Ontario's population was born outside Canada).

Approximately 30 percent of people in Ontario identify themselves as Roman Catholic, a substantial increase in the past 10 or 15 years, due largely to immigration, initially from Mediterranean countries and, more recently, from Latin America and the Philippines; however, Roman Catholic immigration appears to have peaked, with more recent immigrants arriving from countries where other religions are more common.

Values and knowledge

One of the hallmarks of our post-industrial society is a fraying of any consensus about moral values, as well as about the relationship between values and education. In the last Canadian census, for example, the proportion of people who identified themselves as having no religious affiliation was 12.4 percent, a rise of more than five points since 1981.⁽⁴⁰⁾

As a result of our changing demographics and our decreased attachment to traditional social institutions, governments can no longer make assumptions about people's views on issues that, in the past, might have been expected to yield a measure of consensus.

Minority and marginalized groups are no longer willing to sit silently on society's lower rungs. Voices once missing or unheard now are being listened to - women, students, youth, people with disabilities, those with different sexual orientations, as well as minority religious, linguistic, racial, ethnic, and cultural groups.

The change in social attitudes and values has its parallel in swiftly evolving technology and communications. At a time when "the information superhighway" has become society's newest cliché, it may be useful to remember that only ten years ago, the microcomputer was a primitive and costly toy for a limited number of hobbyists. The speed of change since then is, itself, a cause of increased unease

about the future, particularly on the part of young people and their families. Our society is seen by some as having lost its sense of certainty amid increasing doubts about the possibility of absolute values and universal truths. A great deal of "knowledge" is now treated, from a post-modern perspective, as uncertain, tentative, and changeable, rather than as definite, given, and permanent.⁽⁴¹⁾

Indeed, the very quantity of new information - the frequently referred-to knowledge explosion - is itself bewildering and destabilizing. We were told by the Ontario Library Association that every issue of the Sunday New York Times contains more information than was available to Shakespeare in his lifetime, and although it's not entirely clear who actually did the tallying, scale is the issue. When the amount of new information doubles every 20 minutes, or two years, or whatever, the criteria for being a literate or knowledgeable citizen are not self-evident. Nor, for that matter, is it easy to decide which few bits of this bottomless pit of information our children should have learned by the time they finish high school.

Educational statistics for Ontario

More than two million students (2,015,468), approximately 40 percent of Canada's total school population, were enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in Ontario in 1992-93.⁽⁴²⁾

The elementary and secondary system encompasses both public secular and Roman Catholic school boards. As well, there is a parallel French-language education segment (both public and Roman Catholic). As of July 1, 1994, the number of public, separate, and French-language school boards is as follows: English-speaking public, 106; English-speaking Roman Catholic, 58; French-speaking public, 2; French-speaking Roman Catholic, 2.

Ontario's students are accommodated in more than five thousand schools, 3,958 elementary and 796 secondary, as well as in 397 education programs in care or correctional facilities and in nine schools operated by the Ministry of Education and Training. They are taught by 119,706 full-time teachers. The total cost of education is currently \$14.542 billion, of which 77 percent is for salaries and benefits.

Of the more than two million students, 65 percent are in elementary school (from junior kindergarten to Grade 8), while 35 percent are enrolled in secondary schools (Grades 9 to 12/OAC). About 8 percent of the province's students are classified as in need of special education.

In 1992-93, there were 98,423 adult students in day schools, of whom 50,104 were between the ages of 19 and 21, while the rest were older. The province's adult education sector is expanding: the number of adult students (aged 19 or more) enrolled in day school has increased dramatically in the last decade. In 1980-81, there were 19,360 such learners; in 1991-92, the number was 85,706. In addition to adults returning to secondary school programs in 1992-93, approximately 105,000 Ontarians were enrolled in the Independent Learning Centre (correspondence) courses, 16,000 in adult literacy programs, and another 19,000 in the Ontario Basic Skills programs.

Continuing education courses are an important dimension of the publicly funded system, serving a student population that includes many adults. In 1992-3, for instance, there were approximately one million enrolments in these courses, most of which are given in the evening or during the summer.

As shown in Figure 1, the majority (69 percent) of Ontario students are enrolled in public English-language schools, while 26 percent are in Roman Catholic English schools. As previously noted, the remaining 5 percent are in French-language schools - 4 percent in Roman Catholic schools, and 1

percent in public French schools. Most French-language schools are currently governed by three or more trustees who form a French-language section within the larger boards. In most cases, these trustees are in the minority, but in eight Roman Catholic boards they form the majority. In nine boards with very low numbers of French-language students, French-language advisory committees still advise English-language board members on French-language programs for their students.

Table 1 shows the changes in enrolment in both Catholic and public secondary schools between 1985 and 1992 (the public funding of Roman Catholic schools beyond Grade 10 having begun in 1985).

Table 1: Enrolment in Public and Roman Catholic (English and French) Secondary Schools in Ontario, 1985-92			
Year	Roman Catholic Secondary Enrolment	Public Secondary Enrolment	Total Number of Students
1985	66,840	535,964	602,804
1986	89,187	527,238	616,425
1987	111,862	520,165	632,027
1988	122,775	518,791	614,566
1989	137,000	511,000	648,000
1990	146,800	513,000	660,000
1991	155,700	524,500	681,200
1992	164,409	537,391	701,800

In the mid- to late-1980s, after a rather long period of declining enrolment, the number of students in Ontario's school system began to increase slowly. Now that the constitutional right of Franco-Ontarians to education in the French language has been recognized, there has been a marginal increase in the number of students in the Franco-Ontarian schools to 97,677 (see Table 2). In its analysis of demographic trends, the Ministry expects small increases in total enrolment to continue in elementary and secondary education.

Table 2: Enrolment in French-language Units, 1980-81 to 1992-93 (selected years)				
	1980-91	1990-91	1991-92	1992-93
Elementary	67,298	70,627	69,790	69,283
Secondary	28,959	26,473	27,043	28,394
Total	96,257	97,100	96,833	97,677

In addition to those in the publicly funded system, 3.4 percent⁽⁴³⁾ of Ontario's students were enrolled in independent schools, compared with 4.8 percent of all Canadian students in such schools.⁽⁴⁴⁾

Ontario has 119,706 full-time teachers, including educators not filling classroom teaching positions. Seven percent of these educators are principals or vice-principals; another 7 percent are unit heads; and 7 percent are guidance teachers or school librarians. In addition to the certificated teachers, approximately 50,000 other people support school programs; this includes psychologists, social workers, teaching assistants, bus drivers, secretaries, bookkeepers, and custodial staff.

Table 3 shows the distribution in 1992 of full-time teachers in Ontario.

Table 3: Full-time Teachers in Schools, 1992-93 (includes English language and French language)			
Number of Teachers	Elementary	Secondary	Total
Public School Boards	50,216	35,476	85,692
<i>Male</i>	13,976	20,943	34,919
<i>Female</i>	36,240	14,533	50,773
R.C. School Boards	23,570	10,444	34,014
<i>Male</i>	5,290	5,583	10,873
<i>Female</i>	18,280	4,861	23,141
Totals	73,786	45,920	119,706

Our teachers are, in the main, middle-aged (hardly surprising in a population that is itself greying); in fact, in 1992-93, about half the full-time teachers in Ontario had more than 16 years' teaching experience. However, that trend may have been modified recently by offers of attractive early-retirement packages; eligibility for such programs is usually based on a combination of age and years of experience.

Working on the assumption that today's teachers make retirement decisions similar to those made by their colleagues in the recent past, the Teachers' Pension Plan Board projects that approximately 16,000 teachers (about 13 percent of the teaching force) will retire over the next five years. This could change, of course, if such factors as retirement eligibility rules were altered.

The majority (74 percent) of elementary teachers (Grades JK to 8) are female. Current projections, based on the high percentage of women now entering the elementary teaching (especially for kindergarten to Grade 6 levels)(45) suggest that the existing ratio of women to men is unlikely to change substantially in the next decade. In spite of efforts to encourage more men to enter elementary school teaching, their presence is declining. In secondary schools, women now make up 42 percent of the teaching force, compared with only 30 percent a decade ago.

National data on teachers aged 30 and younger and on current enrolment in faculties of education(46) show a continuing increase in the proportion of women in both elementary and secondary programs. There is still a vast gap between the presence of women in teaching and in education's managerial ranks: the majority (68.9 percent) of principals and vice-principals are male. Hoping to change that situation, the Ministry in 1989 set a management positions target of 50 percent female by the year 2000.(47)

Although gender-related data are available, there is no consistent information of the proportion of teachers from minority ethnic, racial, or disabled groups. While such information is gathered by several individual school boards, it does not yet exist province-wide. Based on reported data, however, it is almost certain that disabled and minority persons are not represented among teachers and administrators according to their proportion in our larger society.

Some indicators of how we are doing

There are any number of ways in which to measure and describe school systems. These include the percentage of students who graduate; student performance on provincial, national, and international tests; participation rates (i.e., mean years of schooling) as compared with that in other countries; parent, student, and community "satisfaction"; the education level of teachers; comparative curricula; physical resources; educational and financial equity; and other factors.

Opinion surveys

While parents have some reservations about the governance of schools and about this country's ability to compete globally, they are generally satisfied with the education their children are receiving. According to surveys carried out by the polling company Environics in 1993, parent satisfaction in Ontario and in the rest of Canada increased from approximately 7 out of 10 (in 1990) to approximately 8 out of 10 (in 1993).(48)

However, when the *Ninth OISE Survey 1992*(49) asked parents what they thought about the overall quality of education in the past 10 years, 30 percent (an increase of 1 percent over 1990) said it had improved at the elementary level but, significantly, 42 percent thought it had deteriorated.

People tend to have slightly more favourable perceptions about elementary school education than about secondary education. Parents and the general public appeared to be satisfied with methods of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic. In 1993, Environics found slightly more than four in ten Ontarians were "somewhat satisfied" and almost three in ten were "very satisfied" with the way students were being taught those basic skills.

Statistical analyses

According to the Organization for Economic and Co-operative Development (OECD) report, *Education in OECD Countries*,(50) in 1989-90, Canada had the highest percentage of 16-year-olds still in school (the mean level of education for Canadians is 12.3 years). Furthermore, Canada has a greater percentage of its population in higher education than any country other than the United States.

The OECD reported that more women than men were enrolled in universities in Canada in 1989-90, a figure supported by *Education in Canada*, published by Statistics Canada, which reported that 53 percent of undergraduates enrolled in Canadian universities in 1991-92 were women.(51)

Keith Newton(52) reported in 1992 that Canadian students are more likely to go on to post-secondary studies (45 to 50 percent) than young people in most other countries. Just over 13 percent of Ontarians hold university degrees, a higher percentage than in any other jurisdiction in Canada.(53)

In 1990-91, 77 percent of Ontario's 18-year-olds graduated from secondary school. However, these figures may still overestimate the drop-out rate, since they do not take into account difficulties in tracking students who transfer from board to board (and province to province), enrol at different times of the year, or re-enrol after a period of absence.(54)

Equity concerns

Jerry Paquette of the University of Western Ontario argues that Canada fails in educational fairness

because children of low socio-economic status are less likely than others to succeed in courses and programs that may lead to employment in today's difficult labour market.(55)

There is no meaningful assessment of whether educational policies deal fairly with children of different racial and ethno-cultural backgrounds: only a few school boards systematically gather data on program participation by various groups; students' results are infrequently categorized by race or ethno-cultural origins. We have Toronto data, however, to indicate that some ethnic groups are not thriving in the system. It's too early to judge if certain policies - including employment equity and destreaming are correcting inequities.

Testing and assessment

An Environics 1993 survey found that 7 out of 10 Canadians want nation-wide testing, although roughly half of all those questioned feel that such tests are unfair to children from non-Canadian backgrounds.

According to *The Ninth OISE Survey*, 59 percent of people in Ontario in 1990 and 73 percent in 1992 believe that province-wide tests should be used to assess individual performance; the percentages were higher in relation to secondary school students.

Among Canadian jurisdictions, Ontario was noted, until recently, for placing less emphasis on province-wide assessments of student learning. While other provinces, particularly in the Canadian west, used Grade 12 subject examinations and other standardized assessments, Ontario relied almost completely on individual teacher assessments.

Under a policy instituted by the Ministry and begun in the 1993-94 school year, every student is now tested in Grade 9 for reading and writing; results in the reviews and the tests are reported in terms of percentages of students reaching certain levels, defined as "inadequate," "satisfactory," or "superior."

There seems to be no clear understanding yet, particularly by the media or the public, of the way these standards should be interpreted and judged. For instance, when the results of the Grade 9 reading and writing tests were announced on June 30, 1994, readers of the *Globe and Mail* discovered that "Ontario students fail to shine," while those of the *Toronto Star* learned that "Students make the grade."

In the absence of systematic and long-term provincial data, many people look to national and international achievement tests as a key indicator of how well the school system works. Most such tests focus on mathematics and science, primarily because these are easier than other subjects to assess across different cultures and languages. While it may disappoint those searching for clear-cut performance indicators, even these data are not as easily interpreted as many believe. For instance, in its 1992 report, *A Lot to Learn: Education and Training in Canada*(56) the now-defunct Economic Council of Canada claimed that international test results showed Canada's educational system in serious trouble. Many educational researchers disagree with this interpretation. Philip Nagy, of the Department of Measurement and Evaluation of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education,(57) disputes many of the Council's claims, and gives several reasons why what he calls "horse-race" comparisons should be treated cautiously.

Costs of education

While the Royal Commission's primary mandate did not include financial issues, they cannot be ignored, particularly as they relate to accountability, excellence, and equity.

Any discussion of educational costs is controversial. For example, a strong area of contention between many critics and defenders of the system is Ontario's ranking in comparisons of educational costs. As is often the case, the answer depends on how the figures are calculated.

According to the Ministry, total education expenditures for elementary and secondary education totalled \$14.542 billion in the 1992 calendar year. As shown in Figure 2, a little more than 50 percent of that was raised through municipal property taxes, while 43 percent was provincially funded. The small remaining amount came from such other sources as fees and federal payments.

Education expenditures

Salaries and benefits are the largest educational expenditure in Ontario (as they are in other jurisdictions), with salaries accounting for 77 percent of the total elementary and secondary budget. The other 23 percent is divided among capital expenditures (7 percent), supplies (6 percent), and student transportation (5 percent). The remaining 5 percent includes contributions to the Teachers' Pension Fund. Figure 3 shows this distribution of costs.

Cost comparisons

Although critics often suggest that Canada's educational system is too costly, comparisons with other industrialized countries show that it is neither the most nor the least expensive. While exact parallels are difficult because of the variety of calculations used, Canada spent, in total, 6.2 percent of its GDP on education in 1989,(58) which is less than Denmark (7 percent), Norway (7.4 percent), and Sweden (7.1 percent); the same as the Netherlands (6.2 percent); and more than the United Kingdom (4.7 percent), the United States (5.4 percent), Japan (4.7 percent, according to 1988 figures), and France (5.3 percent).

In 1989-90, among the ten provinces, Ontario had the highest level of per-pupil expenditures in Canada.(59) Table 4 shows the impact of our relative wealth in calculating various measures of educational costs: although Ontario spent more per capita than other provinces, education costs represented a lower proportion of GDP and of personal income than in most other provinces.

Table 4: Total expenditures on education, by province, in relation to gross domestic product (GDP) and personal income (PI) and as dollars per capita, 1990()

Province	Expenditures on education \$'000	GDP	PI	Dollars per capita
Newfoundland	\$ 1,038,327	11.8%	11.0%	\$1,813
P.E.I.	\$ 193,792	9.8%	9.0%	\$1,483
Nova Scotia	\$ 1,474,766	8.7%	9.0%	\$1,648
New Brunswick	\$ 1,206,467	9.2%	9.7%	\$1,670
Quebec	\$11,967,672	7.8%	8.5%	\$1,768
Ontario	\$18,480,496	6.8%	7.7%	\$1,896
Manitoba	\$ 1,961,427	8.3%	9.2%	\$1,801

Saskatchewan	\$ 1,726,390	8.6%	9.6%	\$1,768
Alberta	\$ 4,589,466	6.4%	8.3%	\$1,856
British Columbia	\$ 5,253,321	6.5%	7.3%	\$1,677

Surveys of public attitudes, carried out in 1992, showed that 28 percent of Ontarians favour increasing education expenditures at all levels, while 41 percent believe that, at the very least, funding should keep up with inflation.⁽⁶¹⁾ Asked specifically about elementary and secondary education, 55 percent wanted to see more money spent, while 35 percent felt that expenditures should keep up with inflation. In the 1993 Environics survey, slightly more than half of all Canadians felt that not enough was being spent on education, while three in ten felt that the spending level was "just enough."

Salaries

Over the last 30 years, teacher salaries have improved greatly. While traditionally very meagre, they increased rapidly in Ontario in the 1970s and '80s, and slowly thereafter. By 1990-91, teachers' salaries in Ontario averaged \$51,735, about 10 percent above the Canadian teacher average of \$46,810.⁽⁶²⁾

Ontario's 1993 social contract legislation froze teachers' salaries (along with those of other public service employees) and reduced funding; some school boards closed on days for which employees were not paid.

Pupil-educator ratio

Another significant factor in calculating education costs is the ratio of pupils to teachers. While many would argue that having more teachers teaching fewer students is highly desirable, it is also more expensive. Because of uncertainty about the definition of a "teacher," Statistics Canada, rather than basing the figure on class size, now uses the term "pupil-educator ratio" (PER): the ratio of full-time pupils to all certified educators. (To be included, the "educator" must have a teaching certificate. Thus any board-level employee with a teaching certificate, including superintendents and consultants, would be included in PER.)

Today, there are slightly fewer pupils per educator in Ontario than the average for Canada as a whole. The ratio dropped from 18.3:1 in the 1980s to today's 15.3:1, compared with the Canadian average of 15.7 pupils per educator.⁽⁶³⁾ Most of the recent PER changes resulted from the provincial government's decision to lower Grades 1 and 2 class sizes to a maximum of 20 pupils. Other factors include expansion of special education programs and an increase in the number of administrators and consultants serving school boards. Recent social contract and funding cutbacks are changing this picture somewhat. Not only is the number of administrators and consultants being reduced, but the phasing in of class-size reductions in Grades 1 and 2 has also been slowed.

Language programs

ESL/ESD: English-language schools

The cost of programs that teach English as a second language or English skill development (ESL/ESD) affects educational expenditures; this is especially true in Ontario, because of the high percentage of newcomers who settle here, particularly in urban areas. The Carleton Board of Education reports that 46 percent of immigrants intending to settle in the Ottawa-Carleton region have no facility in either of Canada's official languages.⁽⁶⁴⁾ In 1991, public and Roman Catholic boards in Metro Toronto spent just over \$70 million on ESL/ESD classes.

Programs equivalent to ESL/ESD - Actualisation linguistique en français (ALF) and Perfectionnement du français (PDF) - are for those who have no competence in French but are entitled, under the Charter of Rights, to French-language education, or are admitted by admissions committees. These programs are being offered for the first time in the 1994-95 school year.

A national and international context for educational reform

Major educational reform is in the air, not just in Ontario but across the country and around the world. Clearly, the many powerful factors that have coalesced to put educational change so high on Ontario's political agenda - economic and technological change, employment uncertainty, changing family structures - have had the same impact in every part of the developed world.

In the past few years, virtually all provinces have conducted major reviews of elementary and secondary schooling, and such countries as Britain and New Zealand, as well as many American states, have instituted changes, some of them quite radical, in the operations and governance of their educational systems.

Perhaps it is not surprising that the issues that have gained such currency and created such divisiveness in Ontario have remarkably similar parallels elsewhere. In many places, notably Alberta, the United States, and England, there is increasing tension between the forces of centralization at the national level and of decentralization favouring the individual school.⁽⁶⁵⁾

The trend towards decentralized governance in Edmonton has favoured "school-based" or "school-site management" administration, which means less control at the board or government level and more at the school level. Even there, however, situations vary: in Edmonton, which was a pioneer in school-based management, principals make decisions that elsewhere in Canada are usually made by school boards. However, control of such broad policy matters as budgets, province-wide testing, and curriculum remain in the hands of the provincial government, while hiring, special services, and budget allocations are the responsibility of a reduced number of boards of education. Alberta Premier Klein's 1994 restructuring initiatives centralized Ministry control, while creating the option of parent councils.

In Dade County, Florida, the principal and teachers wield power previously available only to senior board administrators. In Chicago, England, New Zealand, and a few Australian states, parent or school councils - some elected, some appointed - make decisions at the school level. At the moment, parents in New Zealand, where there are no boards of education or local education authorities, appear to exercise the strongest and most direct control. However, it is important to note that these reforms have been relatively recent, most having been put in place within the last ten years, and the long-term effects on a range of educational indicators has yet to be assessed. But it would be fair to say that, so far, all of these initiatives have received distinctly mixed reviews.

In Canada in recent years, education policy-making has been most concerned with excellence and equity. On the other hand, shrinking education budgets and recessionary times have engendered a demand for accountability in delivering educational services. Because of these issues, combined with the anxiety of Canadians to stay competitive in today's globalized information-age economy, a number of provinces have commissioned studies on shaping education to deal with an uncertain future.

Both the New Brunswick Royal Commission on Education (1993) and the one in Newfoundland (1990)(66) questioned the wisdom of an "undiscriminating pursuit of training" when future employment opportunities are largely unknown.

Across the country, demands for standardization are apparently meant to ensure more readily measurable accountability. A number of provinces are developing indicator systems, while the Council of Ministers of Education of Canada (CMEC) is increasingly active in this area. The CMEC, for instance, has developed a national School Achievement Indicators Program (SAIP), to assess how well 13- and 16-year-old students across Canada perform in mathematics, languages, and science.

The CMEC also plans to form study groups to examine the possibility of harmonizing curricula across Canada, while the various regions have begun curricula comparisons. The ministerial group has also initiated a project to describe and research policy issues related to distance education and open learning in Canada.

As reported by the CMEC,(67) the major provincial initiatives for elementary and secondary education in 1994 appear to be governance, accountability, student achievement and assessment measures, professional development, technology, student services, restructuring, curriculum, fiscal restraint, leadership and partnership, vocational and technical education, educational equity, violence prevention, destreaming, parental involvement, efficiency, Indian and Metis education, and charter schools. This, by any criteria, is a remarkable list, reflecting the intense focus on education across Canada. Indeed, it is hard to see which areas are not being scrutinized. The most commonly cited initiatives are governance, accountability, student achievement and assessment, curriculum, and technical education. Violence-prevention measures were mentioned only by Ontario.

Despite all the studies, all the changes, all the reports, at least some of the items on each of those lists would be familiar to Bishop Strachan and Egerton Ryerson. But the longevity of Ontario's education concerns is not the issue: our ability to cope with the purposes and delivery of education, in terms appropriate to our own time, is what matters.

Endnotes (Chapter 2)

1. Rebecca Coulter, "An Introduction to Aspects of the History of Public Schooling in Ontario, 1840-1990," p. 1. Background paper written for the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, 1994.
2. Examples of histories written by French-language historians include:
 - Arthur Godbout, *L'origine des ecoles francaises dans l'Ontario* (Ottawa: Editions de l'Universite d'Ottawa, 1977).
 - Angeline Martel, *Les droits scolaires des minorites de langue officielle au Canada: De l'instruction a la gestion* (Ottawa, 1991). Study commissioned by the Official Languages Commission.
 - R. Mougeon and M. Heller, "The Social and Historical Context of Minority French-language Schooling in Ontario," *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 7, no. 2 and 3 (1985).
3. Willard Brehaut, "Trends in the History of Ontario Education," in Hugh Oliver, Mark Holmes, and

- Ian Winchester, eds., *The House That Ryerson Built* (Toronto: OISE Press, 1984), p. 9.
4. A more complete account of the history of the Roman Catholic school system is given in Chapter 14 of this report.
 5. Brehaut, "History of Ontario Education," p. 11.
 6. W.G. Fleming, *Supporting Institutions and Services*, vol. 5 of Ontario's Educative Society (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), p. 22.
 7. Coulter, "History of Public Schooling," p. 31.
 8. Brian Crittenden, "Slogans - Handle with Care," in *Means and Ends in Education: Comments on Living and Learning*, OISE Occasional Papers, no. 2 (Toronto: OISE Press, 1969), p. 26.
 9. Douglas Myers, "From Hope to Hall-Dennis: The Official Report as an Instrument of Education Reform," in Crittenden, *Means and Ends in Education*, p. 13.
 10. Ontario, Department of Education, *Curriculum P1, J1: Interim Revision, Introduction and Guide* (Toronto, 1967), p. 4.
 11. Ontario, Ministry of Education, *The Formative Years* (Toronto, 1975), p. 4.
 12. Andy Hargreaves and others, *Context and Summary*, vol. 1 of *Years of Transition: Times for Change* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993), p. 12.
 13. Ontario, Ministry of Education, *Ontario Study of the Relevance of Education, and the Issue of Dropouts* (Toronto, 1987). Prepared by George Radwanski.
 14. Ontario, Ministry of Finance, "Demographics Presentation to the Ministry of Education and Training" (Toronto, 1993). This internal document cites sources from Ontario's Ministry of Finance, Statistics Canada, and Employment and Immigration Canada.
 15. OISE, Department of Educational Administration, "Innovative Practices in the Sharing of Administrative, Operational and Transportation Services Between School Boards." Report prepared by John Davis and Joyce Scane for the Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993.
 16. The reports are:
 - *First Report of the Select Committee on Education* (Toronto, 1988). Chairperson: Dianne Poole.
 - *Second Report of the Select Committee on Education: Modifications to the School Day and the School Year* (Toronto, 1989). Chairperson: Dianne Poole.
 - *Third Report of the Select Committee on Education: Education Finance* (Toronto, 1990). Chairperson: Dianne Poole.
 - *Fourth Report of the Select Committee on Education: Early Childhood Education* (Toronto, 1990). Chairperson: Sterling Campbell.
 17. Ontario, Ministry of Education, *Report of the Commission on Private Schools in Ontario* (Toronto, 1985). Prepared by Bernard Shapiro.
 18. *Adler v. Ontario* (1994), 19 O.R. (3d) 1.
 19. Ontario, Ministry of Education, "Demographics and Trends" (Toronto, 1992), unpaginated. Report prepared by the Ministry's Policy Analysis and Research Branch. This report cites provincial and federal sources.

20. Ontario, Ministry of Education, "Demographics and Trends."
21. Statistics Canada, Survey of Consumer Finances, unpublished data, 1992, based on 1986 "Low Income Cut-offs" (LICOs). LICOs have been used by Statistics Canada for over twenty years. Statistics Canada does not define these as poverty lines, though they are often used this way by media and academia.
22. Canadian Institute of Child Health, *The Health of Canada's Children: A CICH Profile*, 2nd edition (Ottawa: Canadian Institute of Child Health, 1994), p. 122.
23. Benjamin Levin, "Education Looks at Poverty: Conceptions and Misconceptions" (paper presented at the conference Education and Community: The Collaborative Solution, OISE, Toronto, March 1994), p. 1.
24. Economic Council of Canada, *A Lot to Learn: Education and Training in Canada* (Ottawa: Canada Communication Group, 1992); and Prosperity Secretariat, *Learning Well - Living Well* (Ottawa: Prosperity Secretariat, Correspondence Unit, 1991).
25. Henry M. Levin, "Education and Jobs: A Proactive View," in *Education and Work*, vol. 1, ed. D. Corson and S. Lawton (Toronto: OISE Press, 1993).
26. Jerry Paquette, "Major Trends in Recent Educational Policy-making in Canada: Refocusing and Renewing in Challenging Times," p. 2. Paper prepared for the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, 1993.
27. Ontario, Ministry of Education, "Demographics and Trends."
28. Andy Hargreaves and Ivor Goodson, "Schools of the Future: A Canadian Vision," p. 15. Paper prepared for Department of Employment and Immigration, 1992.
29. Noah M. Meltz, "The Changing Structure of Employment in Canada: Future Labour Market Implications" (paper prepared for the annual meeting of the National Consultation on Career Development, Ottawa, January 1994), p. 5.
30. Levin, "Education and Jobs."
31. Levin, "Education and Jobs," p. 63.
32. Vanier Institute of the Family, *Profiling Canada's Families* (Ottawa: Vanier Institute of the Family, 1994). All data on the family are from this source, unless otherwise noted.
33. D. Offord, M. Boyle, and Y. Racine, *Ontario Child Health Study: Children at Risk* (Toronto: Queen's Printer, 1989).
34. Vanier Institute of the Family, *Profiling Canada's Families*, p. 57.
35. Ontario, Ministry of Finance, "Demographics Presentation."
36. Ontario, Ministry of Finance, "Demographics Presentation."
37. Ontario, Native Affairs Secretariat and Ministry of Citizenship, *Akwesasne to Wunnumin Lake: Profiles of Aboriginal Communities in Ontario* (Toronto, 1992).
38. For the purposes of the Employment Equity Act, Statistics Canada defined "visible minority" as including "Blacks, Indo-Pakistanis, Chinese, Koreans, Japanese, South East Asians, Filipinos, other Pacific Islanders, West Asians and Arabs, Latin Americans, and a multiple visible minority group for those who reported multiple ethnic origins, one or more of which was recognized as having visible minority status."
39. 1991 census data, quoted in Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology,

- "Environmental Scan" (Toronto, 1994).
40. Vanier Institute of the Family, *Profiling Canada's Families*, p. 26.
 41. Hargreaves and Goodson, "Schools of the Future."
 42. Unless otherwise noted, the statistics in this section are taken from Ontario, Ministry of Education and Training, *Key Statistics, Elementary and Secondary Education, 1992-1993* (Toronto, in press).
 43. Tim Sale, *An Analysis of School Funding Across Canada* (Vancouver: EduServ, 1993), p. 153.
 44. Statistics Canada, *Education in Canada: A Statistical Review for 1991-92*, no. 81-229 (Ottawa, 1993), p. 117.
 45. A.J. King and M.J. Peart, *Teachers in Canada: Their Work and Quality of Life* (Ottawa: Canadian Teachers' Federation, 1992), p. 20.
 46. King and Peart, *Teachers in Canada*, p. 21.
 47. Ontario, Ministry of Education, Policy/Program Memorandum no. 111, Employment Equity for Women in School Boards, February 2, 1990.
 48. Environics Research Group, *Focus Canada Report 1993 - 3* (Toronto, 1994), p. 75. This report is the source of all references to Environics survey data.
 49. D. Livingstone, D. Hart, and L. Davie, *Ninth OISE Survey 1992* (Toronto: OISE Press, 1993). This report is the source of all OISE survey data given.
 50. OECD, *Education in OECD Countries: A Compendium of Statistical Information, 1988/89, 1989/90* (Paris: OECD, 1993), p. 94.
 51. Statistics Canada, *Education in Canada*, p. 51.
 52. Keith Newton and others, *Education and Training in Canada* (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1992), p. 109.
 53. Statistics Canada, *Education in Canada*, p. 243.
 54. G.A. Mori and B. Burke, *Educational Attainment of Canadians: 1986 Census of Canada*, no. 98-134 (Ottawa: Ministry of Supply and Services, 1989).
 55. Paquette, "Recent Educational Policy-making," p. 32.
 56. Economic Council of Canada, *A Lot to Learn*.
 57. Philip Nagy, "National and International Comparisons of Student Achievement: Implications for Ontario." Report written for the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning, 1994.
 58. OECD, *Education in OECD Countries*, p. 111, Table 6.1.
 59. Sale, *School Funding Across Canada*, p. 79.
 60. Statistics Canada, *Education in Canada*, p. 234. These data include costs of post-secondary education.
 61. Livingstone, Hart, and Davie, *Ninth OISE Survey*, p. 7.
 62. King and Peart, *Teachers in Canada*, p. 14.
 63. Sale, *School Funding Across Canada*, p. 119.
 64. Carleton Board of Education, *We are the World: Multiculturalism in Schools*, p. 20. Report prepared by Corporate Services, Research and Planning, 1992.
 65. Norman Henchey, "Our Common Vision: An Education of Quality" (keynote address to the First

National Consultation on Education, Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, Montreal, May 1994).

66. The Commission on Excellence in Education, *To Live and Learn: The Challenge of Education and Training* (Fredericton: The Committee on Excellence in Education, 1993); and Newfoundland, Ministry of Education, *Shaping Our Future: A Five-Year Strategic Plan for Post-secondary Education in Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's, 1990).
67. Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, "Quality of Education," p. E-1-E-41. Material prepared for the First National Consultation on Education, Montreal, May 1994.

ISBN 0-7778-3577-0

©Copyright 1994, Queens Printer for Ontario

[Home Page](#)

[Search](#)