

For the Love of Learning

Volume IV: Making It Happen

Chapter 20: Implementing the Reforms

Implementation has been referred to as the Great Barrier Reef the point at which many a good curriculum sinks without a trace.

David Pratt, Curriculum Planning, 1994

Reform asks everyone in the education system to change their roles and responsibilities, not just teachers and students.

Jane David, "Systemic Reform: Creating the Capacity for Change," 1993

This has been a Commission with few illusions - or at least it has tried to be. From the first, we attempted to be sensitive to the atmosphere in which we were operating, to the constraints we knew we were facing, and to the realities of the outside world.

We began our work in a public mood bordering on cynicism. "Another commission? Just what Ontario needs!" Doubtless, that was the way some people greeted the announcement of the Commission's creation. After all, had there not already been a dozen, a hundred, reports on Ontario education? Was this yet another device to stall? Would the province's education system ever be reformed?

We looked at what had happened to all the various reports that had been produced - whether their recommendations had been implemented fully, how many had been implemented half-heartedly, how many ignored completely, and why. We learned that governments have introduced an almost endless series of changes into Ontario schools over the past several decades; some of them emanated directly from studies and reports while others were so changed from the original conception as to be hardly recognizable. We felt it was important to understand the past before we made more recommendations for the future.

Throughout the writing of this report, we tried to pay attention to the lessons learned about the process of change - that is, how change happens in a massive, complex system such as Ontario's. The answer is only with supreme difficulty. The change process, perhaps not surprisingly, has proved to be almost as complex as the institution itself.

Many people would be bitterly disappointed if this report merely collected dust on a shelf; therefore, it may seem paradoxical for us to produce a scenario for a transformed school system that as we are the first to acknowledge - has an almost utopian cast to it. But it is based on quite realistic ideas, solid research, and many success stories. Idealistic? Maybe. But what a target to aim at! What a vision to help guide the next steps!

As we thought about the process of implementing the reforms advocated here, we tried to analyze, with some care, the roles of the various stakeholders in the world of education; the way each has been, and continues to be, capable of facilitating or resisting change; and the involvement each has had in recent education reforms. This chapter makes suggestions, for both the immediate and longer term, for various stakeholder groups as they begin the process of making changes needed to improve schools for all Ontarians.

It is, in fact, the public, as well as all the other stakeholders, who will decide if our recommendations should be pursued. Teachers, parents, students, administrators, citizens all must ask themselves if they are prepared to make the commitment, to take the calculated risk of moving ahead with these reforms. As well, teachers' federations are a vital group in this process. We recognize they will have concerns about some recommendations, but hope they acknowledge the way we value teachers, and the increased responsibility and recognition we give them as a crucial part of the education system.

All the groups have a vital role to play, not only in asking school boards and the Ministry to act, but in acting themselves. Among others, students must make their views known to schools; parents must insist on a stronger role in their children's schooling; and teachers must take a greater degree of collective responsibility for student learning, for their own professional growth, and for the profession.

We are also well aware that this report is being published close to the time of a provincial election. We would be disappointed if it became a political football. It deserves better, as do the Ontario students, teachers, and parents it is meant to serve, and the thousands of people who took the trouble to share their views with us. We challenge all three parties to put the needs of students first, and to commit themselves to action on the major recommendations in this report.

We believe that developing an implementation strategy was inherent in our responsibility as a Commission, and that our task would not be complete without suggestions on making our vision of schools a reality.

Previous reports

Our review of government reports on Ontario education over the last 25 years, since Hall-Dennis in 1968, shows that many recommendations were not actually implemented. It also shows that many of our recommendations are not new; many have appeared in earlier reports, and are still not policy.

Hall-Dennis, for instance, recommended that teachers be moved "from the fringe to the heart of professional decision-making"⁽¹⁾ and proposed that self-government be granted to teachers through a body to be called the College of Teachers of Ontario, which would have the power to license and discipline its members.

In his 1988 report on preventing drop-outs, George Radwanski strongly recommended universal Early Childhood Education programs as fundamental to getting children off to a good start in school.

In neither case was the recommendation adopted or implemented; when Bette Stephenson was Minister of Education she introduced a proposal for a College of Teachers, but ran into resistance from the teachers' federations. Proposals for expansion of Early Childhood Education programs have foundered on issues of cost, and on political and philosophical grounds.

However, a simple tally of the number of recommendations adopted or ignored might give a distorted picture of the impact of inquiries and reports. It could be argued that, even when recommendations are not adopted as their authors intended, such reports have a considerable effect on schools and on educational policy. Ideas that may be slightly ahead of their time, for instance, enter the discourse about education, and may shift beliefs and attitudes; they may be adopted later, when there is a more receptive climate.

Even when government adopts policies and expects school boards and schools to implement changes, the process may not go as smoothly as anticipated. One policy analyst wryly notes that "teachers have the ultimate control over policy when they enter the classroom to teach."⁽²⁾ For example, the Ministry's curriculum documents, designed to provide more focus and substance to elementary-school science programs, had less impact on school programs than expected because teachers did not change their programs to the extent policy makers and curriculum developers intended. We want to avoid a similar fate for our recommendations.

The change process: How educational change happens

Educational change is technically simple and socially complex.⁽³⁾

In the 1960s, in the midst of affluence, money was not an issue, and many people thought educational change was a simple matter of developing new programs, curricula, materials, or teaching methods, and then disseminating them (often in a form described as "teacher proof") to teachers and schools, who were expected to implement the new ways of doing things. The results of this approach were quite disappointing: teachers rarely changed their practices.

Since then, educators have learned much about the adoption and implementation of educational policy, and about the process of educational change in general. In the words of Professor Milbrey McLaughlin of Stanford University,

Perhaps the overarching, obvious conclusion running through empirical research on policy implementation is that it is incredibly hard to make something happen, most especially across layers of government and institutions.⁽⁴⁾

Whether educational change actually occurs in practice depends largely on will and skill⁽⁵⁾: the extent to which people believe change is desirable, and the extent to which they have the necessary skill and knowledge to make the changes. Although neither is easily or directly controlled by policy makers, the issue of will or motivation is particularly difficult. Teachers, for instance, may be interested in improvement, but if changes are unilaterally imposed by policy makers and administrators, or if proposed changes do not make sense to them, it is hardly surprising if they resist.

Studies of successful and unsuccessful educational-change projects have led to some remarkably consistent findings about what factors make the difference. They amount to creating an atmosphere and conditions of pressure and support necessary to move a complex system forward. The critical factors seem to be:

- combining "top-down" and "bottom-up" strategies
- developing capacity and skill through training and assistance
- leadership at all levels that clarifies priorities and encourages others

- teacher participation and commitment
- a significant but manageable scope of change
- open sharing of information
- monitoring progress and solving problems.

Our suggestions for implementing change take these into account. Although it is important to create a mandate for change and to monitor progress, policy makers who rely solely on these two approaches will be disappointed if they hope for significantly improved schools. The Ministry must communicate the rationale for change and the direction in which schools are expected to move. It must support school boards, schools, and educators in developing a clear understanding of the new goals, and in building the capacity to achieve these goals in each community.(6)

What about the Commission? What do we hope our work will achieve?

Our recommendations are focused on four key changes that, we believe, will generate further improvements. The four strategies we are suggesting will foster both the will and skill.

Based on the evidence available, we believe the Ontario school system does some things very well, and many things fairly well. But our analysis suggests that most students could learn more, and learn better. We have pointed to the need for a more focused and more engaging education system to take us into the 21st century. We have noted the demographic shifts, the changing social fabric, new knowledge about learning and teaching, and the importance of new technologies. We have suggested that schools need to change to address these new conditions.

We believe that it is possible to get beyond "fairly well," to a system in which many more students graduate, and graduate with more knowledge and with better skills as thinkers and as doers. In such a system, students would be better prepared for work, for post-secondary education, and for lives as fully contributing members of their communities. Although education reform is not a substitute for societal reform, we argue that schools can do a great deal to improve the lives of their students, and we believe our recommendations can help.

People in and outside the system expressed concern about lack of focus, teacher overload, student learning, and standards. We believe our statement of purpose is the foundation of a system characterized by focus, quality, openness, fairness, and efficiency. In opting for change, we are concerned not only about specific recommendations, but even more about the overall vision of schooling we are proposing.

To avoid piecemeal solutions to isolated problems, we have tried to identify key directions, based on our vision of what schools could be, and on an understanding of how change actually takes place in schools. Students have changed, teachers have changed, families have changed, technology has changed, society has changed. How can schools not change? They must now be redesigned for the new era. This task begins with our report.

Before we move to our key recommendations and the intervention strategies for moving the system in the direction of reform, we believe it is necessary to describe our approach to reform. It can be summarized as follows:

- We articulate the purposes of schools, and situate them in relation to other social institutions; doing so means focusing primarily on learning and teaching, with the development of intellectual competence being the top priority. By "intellectual competence" we mean more than traditional academic skills, and we include imagining, creating, synthesizing, comparing, and analyzing. Schools, like families and other institutions, have other purposes as well: teaching values, fostering social development, and preparing young people for employment and participation in democratic life. We argue, however, that the community must assume greater responsibility for important non-academic needs.
- We take account of research and exemplary practice relating to learning, teaching, and human development.
- We pay attention to the culture of schools, and to creating and sustaining the conditions that will maximize student learning.
- We argue throughout for an equitable system: in funding, in opportunity, in recognition, and in participation, with the expectation of greater achievement for all students.
- We urge a new and more appropriate balance of power and influence, with a system that is open to new ideas and to participation by parents and the community.
- We want to ensure that there is systematic feedback and monitoring, at both the classroom and system levels, so that plans and attempts at improvement are continually re-focused and adjusted in response to problems and successes.

Engines or levers for change

Throughout this report, we have made recommendations related to the most vital areas of education reform. These must be

- a more challenging curriculum and improved student learning
- improved assessment and accountability
- power, authority, and equity.

These recommendations - there are more than one hundred - cover both general and specific issues, involve both large and small changes, and suggest new directions, but also reinforce initiatives already under way. We have discussed fully many of the issues facing schools, and have concluded with major recommendations and some specific suggestions. The recommendations focus on our vision of the school system and on major strategies designed to put the vision into practice.

The education system, like other large institutions, is slow to change and difficult to redirect. This quality is a strength, in that it provides stability, and a problem, in that it discourages renewal. We need ways of overcoming the inertia of a large and often cumbersome system to stimulate and sustain major change.

We identified critical intervention points in the system, with the idea of initiating change within these areas. These changes can act as engines or levers, moving the system in the direction of reform. The engines are:

- early childhood education
- teacher professionalization and development
- information technology

- community-education alliances.

Early childhood education

Our first intervention strategy involves an earlier and more comprehensive start to formal education. By providing better learning opportunities for very young children - at three years instead of four, and full time instead of half time - schools can positively affect what comes after. An earlier and stronger start leads to better preparation for basic literacy and numeracy, and the prospect of building on that head start throughout the school years.

The responsibilities parents and schools have for children of three and four are very much intertwined; both influence affective and intellectual development. Just as schools or other institutions also have an important nurturing role, parents also teach. This interconnectedness opens the possibilities of low-cost but highly effective community interventions, providing "parent development," which will significantly pay off in children's later intellectual development. (See Volume II, Chapter 7.)

Community-education alliances

We are recommending stronger links between schools and other sectors of government and the community in order to strengthen and support schools, while ensuring that other important social and personal needs are met. If we are to meet changing societal needs and support learning, new ways must be found to strengthen those who want to raise healthy, competent children.

The recommendations related to community partnerships are intended to free up teachers so they can better focus on their students' learning, helping students to learn the social skills they require to work in a group, and to complete the school's core curriculum. The certified teacher who has chosen and been trained to help students learn to read and write, or to learn academic subjects, should not be expected to have the public-health worker's expertise in drug or sex education, or the trained social worker's ability to lead students through a curriculum in decision-making or conflict resolution.

Moreover, it makes good sense for such community resources to be more readily available to schools. When health- and community-service personnel provide recreation, health, and social-development programs, or practising artists offer arts programs, teachers will have more time in the day and week to spend on activities essential to improving learning for students: planning and evaluating the program they deliver individually and collaboratively, working together to improve their assessment skills, and connecting more often and more effectively with parents.

Such community links can also open up the school, and situate it at the nexus of a local community and its various resources, all of which exist to support the people who live there - in this case, the young people.

The role of principal will also change as the school becomes more integrally linked to the community beyond its walls. School/community councils have a vital contribution to make in helping to draw in and co-ordinate community partners. The necessary interdependence between teaching professionals and other people is in itself a lesson for youth about how society works. The fact that some members of the community work as volunteers is another valuable lesson about the way society operates, and what we should expect of ourselves and of others.

If community partnerships are to work, the way departments of government work - largely in isolation

and sometimes in competition - must change. Unless government ensures that responsibility is shared centrally and locally, by the appropriate sectors, the presence of community members in the school will, in itself, create significant demands on educators' time. Various government departments must focus more on co-ordination and collaboration across the usual bureaucratic boundaries, bringing together policies to support the healthy development of children. Such policies will reward collaborative action at the local level, making it easier for different groups to work together. Funding provisions will also have to be changed, to ensure that co-operation, rather than isolation, is the norm. The government, for instance, might decide to fund only those proposals in which various sectors are working together on a project. (See Volume IV, Chapter 14.)

Teacher development and professionalization

Professional responsibility, autonomy, and accountability are essential to the teaching force we envision. We recommend that teachers have more collective responsibility for their profession, with control being shifted from the Ministry to an independent College of Teachers. It would have authority for teaching standards, as well as for accreditation of teacher-education programs, and for setting standards of professional development. This shift would recognize that teaching should be acknowledged as a profession whose members are capable of setting their own standards of professional practice. It is essential to evaluate the performance of all educators, and we stress the need to follow through effectively when performance is unsatisfactory.

Teacher development, both before and after certification, is an essential vehicle for implementing the other proposed reforms. No school system is better than its teachers, and no amount of legislation and regulation of policy and practice will affect student learning unless there are well-educated and dedicated teachers who are clear about their goals.

If reforms are to be implemented, teachers must understand what is expected, believe that the reforms make sense, and know how to get started. Schools must be places where teachers and principals work together to set priorities, agree on plans for action, and keep track of progress. Because they must do all this while continuing to operate the school, there will be a tension between the need for stability and for continuity on the one hand, and for change on the other.

Although we recommend lengthening and strengthening the teacher preparation program, no such program would be enough to educate teachers for a career in which there is always more to be learned, honed, and practised than can be squeezed into a one- or two-year program. Teachers must continue to learn throughout their careers, and one of the best possible venues is the school itself. Research shows that the development of teacher collaboration that focuses on continuously improving teaching and monitoring results is the most effective route to success. Such "collaborative cultures" embrace the involvement of students and parents in the education enterprise. This results in a co-ordinated program that is effective and that pays attention to student progress. Schools must be learning organizations for teachers if they are to be effective learning organizations for students. (See Volume III.)

Information technology

Computer hardware and software combine to become a powerful new tool for learning, making the road smoother and faster for students and teachers. It is genuinely motivating for students a fascinating way to learn more, and to learn quite different things. It makes routine tasks for students and teachers more pleasant and efficient, but more significantly, it opens up the world to learning in a way that is brand

new, and that can set a pattern for lifelong learning.

Instruction can be more easily tailored to student needs, enabling students to move at their own pace. Of even greater importance is that through electronic technology students can move beyond dependence on their teachers for access to knowledge: through communications software and access to data banks, CD-ROMs, and libraries, they can become more independent learners. Moreover, information technology offers the potential for developing problem-solving and reasoning abilities. With that new technology, teachers become more, not less, important as they work with students to accommodate and integrate complex knowledge bases.

In short, information technology is becoming essential to teachers' continuing ability to do their jobs well, and to students' future success in a world where computer literacy is becoming as universal and essential as print literacy.

Throughout our report we talk about the fundamental purpose of schools as building literacy - going beyond basic literacy to the higher literacies that are expected of the well educated. People can not remain well educated if they stop reading, or stop talking with others who can challenge their thinking. Increasingly, reading and discussion happen on-screen. The access that the computer brings to knowledge, through print, sound, and graphics, as well as through discussion, cannot be gained in any other way.

Computerized networks of professionals, such as the Ontario Teachers' Federation network "The Culture of Change," have already shown themselves to be more powerful than many conventional means of building and updating teacher knowledge and professionalism, and are likely to have the same impact on other kinds of work. Increasingly, students, on their own, are acquiring knowledge of what computers can do. At school that familiarity must be made universal, so that computers facilitate equal opportunities and equal outcomes in a learning environment, and so that their potential as educational tools for life, not only as entertainment, is realized.

Computers are used as working tools by writers, mathematicians, scientists, artists and designers. They can be used in schools to become libraries and learning circles, tied into global networks dedicated to building and sharing knowledge and understanding. (See Volume IV, Chapter 13.)

By itself, each of these four engines offers significant benefits; combined, their power increases substantially. While all our engines for change focus on the school and the classroom, they also reach out to change other systems: the teacher-education and child-care systems, as well as government policies and programs designed to support children and families. Operating schools, like educating the youth within them, becomes more of a community issue, with joint responsibility. Meeting the needs of young people effectively and efficiently will mean some redefinition of who works in schools, with whom, and with what kind of funding, support, and co-ordination. That is why some of our recommendations go beyond the education system per se, and involve government and community players.

What actions are needed?

All stakeholders must take action and responsibility for implementation of our recommendations, or else change will not take place. Politicians, we know, are unlikely to move in bold new directions unless they perceive that there is a public demand for them to do so. Therefore, the first important step in implementation is for parents, students, taxpayers, and other groups and associations to express their

support for ideas in the report. If the general orientation and recommendations of this report represent good public policy in the eyes of Ontarians; if they meet public expectations of what the educational policy should be; the public should say so, individually and as members of groups, through the various channels available.

That said, we must stress that simplistic solutions do not work for complicated problems. Better ideas or more money do not guarantee better schools; there are no quick fixes. Co-ordinated action on many fronts is needed, and the system must acknowledge that, at the beginning of the reform process, not all the answers are known. Inevitably, the situation will change even as people begin to act, making it impossible to set out a detailed implementation plan that would provide a complete guide to schools and others.

Implementation is not just a question of doing a series of tasks or steps that have been set out sequentially. Rather, above all else, it is a question of people understanding what reforms mean in concrete and practical terms. The Ministry of Education and Training must adopt an implementation strategy that, first and foremost, helps to clarify the precise requirements for each of the key directions for reform.

Time lines are important, but implementation of complex reforms means more than working through the list of tasks and actions to be taken. Because the unexpected always happens, schedules will have to be adjusted and new issues will have to be considered.

With these cautions in mind, we have developed the beginning of an implementation plan. Implementation involves changes in practice, and because we believe quick action is necessary, we have identified actions that all stakeholders can take to move schools and the school system in the desired directions.

Although many meaningful changes can be implemented locally without Ministry sanction, we look first at the actions required at the provincial level, because these set the direction for all of Ontario. We then suggest actions to be taken by others, including school boards, schools, and parents.

An implementation commission

Government has responsibility for introducing and following political agendas, and for the daily management of ministries. These do not easily permit the re-adjustments needed to also accommodate changing directions in a large system such as education. We, therefore, believe that a special mechanism is needed to oversee implementation of the reforms recommended in this report.

Recommendation 167

**We recommend the establishment of an Implementation Commission to over see the implementation of the recommendations made by the Royal Commission on Learning.*

In our view, an Implementation Commission would be the best vehicle for overseeing the progress of reforms. The Implementation Commission would report to the Legislature through the Minister of Education and Training, and would be required to publish a report every six months.

The Commission should be established for a three-year term, with a small secretariat to support its work. The Chief Commissioner should be someone who is credible to educators and the public.

We assume there would be a committee structure, with members drawn from the field, from faculties of education, and from federations. Participants would focus on implementation of recommendations in specific areas, such as Early Childhood Education, information technology, teacher development, and so on. However, the Implementation Commission would continue to stress the inter-relationship of the recommendations for reform, to guard against the danger of fragmentation and work done at cross-purposes.

As implementation gets under way, the Commission would provide information to be used by all those involved in education as the basis for further improvement. Data from pilot projects would be widely shared, and information from student learning assessments would be used to improve programs and instruction.

The Implementation Commission would also keep educational reform on the public agenda. Its working committee structure would give it a high profile, through links with educators and communities around the province, regular annual reports to the Minister and to the Premier's Office, and regular (at least twice yearly) informal reports to the general public, similar in format to the Royal Commission's *Spotlight on Learning* newsletters.

Finally, the Implementation Commission could monitor and assess whether reforms were having the intended effect, and what changes needed to be made.

We specifically expect the Implementation Commission to establish criteria by which each of the reforms would be evaluated, and to contract, perhaps through the Office of Learning Accountability and Assessment, for evaluations of pilot projects and early reform initiatives. The results of such evaluations would be widely available, to be used to improve future implementation efforts.

Several briefs, including the first one at our public hearings, called for a kind of "on-going Royal Commission on Education" to which special problems and ideas for reforms could be addressed. We understand the intent of the idea, but consider that once the push towards the implementation of the report has been given by the Implementation Commission, it is best to direct future demands directly to the Ministry, where they belong.

Other support for implementation

Change takes many different, often parallel, paths, and the actions of different players at different levels are needed to achieve the final goal of reforming a system. Of course, the Minister and the Ministry are expected to play a key role in bringing about change. But by themselves they cannot do much. Stakeholders, as well as individuals in the system, can and must initiate change in their fields.

Beyond the Implementation Commission, there is the Ministry (and to some extent, school boards), which can use various strategies in moving ahead with reform. The Ministry of Education and Training must first establish a clear direction and expectations, in terms of such factors as student learning, regular assessment, and parental involvement, by setting policy guidelines to ensure desired outcomes.

The Ministry must balance central direction setting and monitoring with local flexibility about the way to achieve desired results. Here, too, we see the importance of firm principles, but flexibility in applying them. Policy implementation in the province should shift from "control" to "service."⁽⁷⁾ Provincial

authorities must set clear expectations related to student learning, and then help school boards meet them, while school boards do the same in relation to schools.

Although we can't mandate everything that matters, mandates can be effective in kick-starting systems, by providing clarity about goals and information about progress. The danger is in relying solely on such regulatory approaches, because important changes are difficult, and require skill, motivation, commitment, and judgment from those who must make the changes work.

The Ministry and school boards can also provide incentives to encourage schools and teachers to move into new areas. Incentive grants encourage school boards, individual schools, and consortia to set up pilot programs. Such concrete local initiatives can then be used as models for others.

Changing organizational structures is another way of stimulating reform. For instance, the Office of Learning Assessment and Accountability is intended to deal more effectively with assessment and accountability issues, while school/community councils would co-ordinate community resources more effectively, and give the community a stronger voice in the school.

None of these approaches, however, will work unless schools and those involved with them have the necessary skills and resources. Teachers need professional development and curriculum support materials. Parents, community representatives, and school staff need preparation and support so they can get school/community councils operating effectively.

The reforms we are suggesting are not simple, and in many cases there are few working models to follow. Moreover, the context for educators and students is constantly in flux, and what might make sense today could be unworkable next year. Therefore, implementation plans are more like road maps than blueprints: they cannot specify every detail in advance.

Provincial actions

There must also be clear expressions of support for reform from the provincial government, accompanied by wide dissemination of this report, in both its full and brief versions. Discussion of the key ideas of the report must be encouraged, in both the education and the broader communities, to increase the understanding of the principles guiding the proposed reforms. There must then be a statement, from the Minister of Education or the Premier, or both, on what the government plans to do in response to our report: whether they support the key directions we have identified, and what implementation plan, with time lines, has been developed. The first step, of course, is to establish the Implementation Commission, with clear and broad authority to oversee the process.

The province must be clear and firm about principles, and about the directions in which schools should be moving. But it is equally important to be flexible about the means that schools and school boards adopt to move in the desired directions. One such principle is that schools must increase the involvement of parents in ways that benefit student learning. However, there should be considerable flexibility about how schools and school boards increase parent involvement. The Ministry and school boards should, therefore, support diversity in local arrangements, as long as that diversity supports and is consistent with the general principles.

If the government is serious about its response to our report, it may choose to use the following list of suggested actions as a starting point. Appendix 1 to this chapter provides examples of further actions that

could be taken by the provincial government and the Ministry in each of the next three years, as well as indications of what might be put in place over the next five to ten years.

Time lines are critical to any implementation plan, although some flexibility must be built in. Although 1995 is an election year a somewhat disruptive time for implementing major new public policies - we think the recommended actions constitute an appropriate agenda for all parties, regardless of which one forms the government.

Suggested short-term actions for the provincial government and for the Ministry: 1995-96

The framework for reform

- the government and the MET respond to the RCOL report, indicating their support and plans for implementation, with time lines
- set up Implementation Commission through the MET
- prepare enabling legislation as necessary to implement RCOL recommendations prepare
- enabling legislation for the College of Teachers
- set up the Office of Learning Assessment and Accountability
- create a central body to co-ordinate information technology
- set up a council at the Premier's level to consider how to strengthen inter-ministerial work, and co-ordinate services for children, with the designation of a senior minister responsible for such co-ordination in addition to his or her regular portfolio
- plan changes in funding structures
- plan changes in French-language governance
- the MET changes its structures and functions as recommended by the RCOL
- sponsor and encourage working conferences to discuss and begin to implement key recommendations of the RCOL

Curriculum

- develop an action plan for curriculum development and provincial reviews
- continue implementing The Common Curriculum, with a clearer focus on a few clear outcomes
- bring together schools and other interested groups concerning Grade 12 outcomes and new specialized curriculum

Assessment and accountability

- the MET and Office of Learning Assessment and Accountability begin planning Grade 3 and 11 assessments
- provide target funding to OISE and/or other graduate faculties of education and/or 1-2 consortia involving boards and faculties of education to establish centres of expertise re assessment of student learning and program evaluation.

Power, influence, and equity

- prepare legislative changes for short-term action, e.g., voting student trustees, status of aboriginal

band-operated schools

- repeal of Section 136 regarding preferential hiring of Roman Catholic teachers
- provide targeting incentive funding at both the provincial and board level, to begin phasing in school/community councils
- develop and begin to apply funding formulas that will encourage more co-operative service arrangements between school boards
- develop students' and parents' Charters of Rights and Responsibilities

Early childhood education

- set up a joint college/faculty of education committee to discuss short-term and long-term arrangements for preparation and certification of staff
- develop policy to guide program development, relationships to current child-care providers, certification and preparation of staff and organization
- begin establishing learning outcomes for ECE programs
- survey space needs for ECE
- plan pilot project for phasing in ECE programs in schools
- establish models for integrated daycare and ECE programs

Teacher professionalization and development

- plan with key groups the composition and authority of the College of Teachers
- set up review/evaluation teams for principal preparation courses and supervisory officer qualification programs, and begin evaluations
- fund and establish a pilot project concerning the two-year preservice preparation program, with a full evaluation
- encourage faculties of education to introduce programs requested by Catholic school systems

Information technology

- seek out partnership agreements with computer firms
- plan development and licensing of more Canadian educational software, where appropriate
- negotiate agreements between the MET and businesses to give discarded computers to schools

Community-education alliances

- identify the inter-government and inter-Ministry initiatives necessary to remove barriers to community-education alliances; for instance, changes in legislation to provide for a common age of consent (the age at which a young person is considered adult) to facilitate service delivery to older adolescents
- develop guidelines for programs to be provided in schools by arts, health, social service and recreation agencies, in collaboration with other ministries
- prepare (or contract for preparation of) a directory of community/education partnership initiatives, categorized for easy access, as well as empirically based guidelines for the development of such initiatives

Actions by other stakeholders

The Ministry of Education and Training and the provincial government must act. So, too, must educators and community members. Parents, students, teachers, faculties of education, and others can make a big difference at the local level, and can also put pressure on the Ministry and the government. Appendix 2 to this chapter provides examples of actions that these groups can take immediately, without waiting for changes at the provincial level.

Once the government has enacted enabling legislation and clarified the overall rationale for the reforms, all those involved in Ontario education will have to act simultaneously in a number of areas. For instance, changes in curricula will have to be accompanied by changes in assessment that, in turn, are not possible without on-going teacher development. All these actions will need to be closely co-ordinated so they reinforce each other.

Although all parties, from the provincial government to students, have a role to play in changing the education system, there are three groups whose initial responses and actions will be crucial. The first is the provincial government - particularly, but by no means only, the Ministry of Education and Training. As the major regulatory and policy-making bodies, ministries set the direction for the province. Second are the school boards, which translate Ministry policy at the local level, and have considerable power to set local priorities within provincial guidelines. And third are the Ontario Teachers' Federation and its five affiliates, who represent 120,000 teachers, and are a major force on the province's educational scene. Their support will be decisive in achieving the gains we anticipate.

We stress, however, that many of the most significant changes can be made by teachers and principals in schools, without waiting for governments or boards to act. As Jennifer Lewington and Graham Orpwood observed in their recent book, *Overdue Assignment*:

Schools will not flourish if teachers and others in the system hunker down in hopes of waiting out the storm. Instead, ... those who work in [the system] must develop a strong capacity for self-renewal.(8)

Cost issues

Cost issues are critical, particularly in light of Ontario's continuing budgetary difficulties. Educational change cannot wait until we have more money, and in any case, we do not believe that more money is necessarily the answer. Instead, reform must now be achieved by shifting the focus of the system, allocating the same pot of money in different ways. There is no avoiding the fact that many choices will be painful. Setting priorities is difficult, not only within the education system, but also between education and other societal needs.

Given the complexity and uncertainty of specific cost projections, as well as our time frame and limited resources, we cannot provide detailed cost estimates. These will need to be done by the Ministry. In the end, choices must be governed by the cost of providing adequate programs to students across the province, the amount of money available for education, and the priorities that are set.

We recognize that many of our recommendations have cost implications, and in most cases, we have made suggestions about redirecting funds within the system, with little or no new money required. Equalization of funding across the province, for instance, should involve redistribution rather than

additional resources.

Budgetary constraints have become a long-term feature of the system. It is therefore critical that funds are targeted to the areas where they will have the most impact. That is why we recommend, for instance, Early Childhood Education programs, because investments in quality programs for very young children will pay off later in reduced need for remedial programs and other social supports. Such an approach might be compared to preventive health care, with the assumption that money spent on early prevention initiatives will, in the long run, reduce costs. Since we are recommending that students graduate from secondary school after 12 years in the system, rather than the 13 years many of them now take, we anticipate significant savings at the level of senior secondary school.

We also point out that the initial costs of school-based Early Childhood Education programs should be partially offset by reduced costs for subsidized daycare.

Costs for large-scale assessments and for increased monitoring should also produce favourable cost/benefit results, as long as the information is used for improving the system and targeting efforts more accurately. Costs of developing and administering challenge exams and General Education Diploma exams, as recommended in Chapter 10, will be partially offset by less time spent in school by students. (They won't have to take courses if they already know the material and demonstrate their knowledge in these exams.)

We also expect costs of some reforms to be offset by savings from improved efficiencies in other parts of the delivery system. We suggest, for example, that clarification of the roles of trustees and supervisory officers, as well as some shifts of responsibility to schools and the Ministry, should lead to savings as fewer central-office staff will be required.

We also suggest increased sharing of resources and services between boards and other local agencies; greater and more effective use of various staffing formulas and community resources in schools; and centralized curriculum development, to avoid duplication of effort among school boards.

It is difficult to estimate the cost implications of greater co-ordination of government services and increased community alliances, particularly because these involve ministries other than the Ministry of Education and Training. But we anticipate that, after the initial start-up, better co-ordination of services will result not only in improved services but in a more streamlined system with significant reductions in duplication of effort and administration.

An important consideration in costing is that many of our recommendations incorporate a rethought use of time and other resources. Done imaginatively and effectively, this is a low-cost strategy for making other things happen. In particular, we have identified a variety of ways in which flexibility can be built into teachers' working lives at little cost. For example, throughout the report we recommend the use of volunteers, peer tutors, and cross-age tutors, which benefits those tutoring and those being tutored.

We also recommend that, in their second year of preservice preparation, student teachers work in schools as interns, significantly adding to the staff resources, and potentially freeing teachers for collaborative curriculum work. School/community councils would act to bring additional resources into schools, while more flexible groupings of some students could free time for teachers to provide more intensive remedial or enrichment opportunities to others. The creative use of technology is another time-freeing strategy.

Although savings from such shifts in the way time and other assets are perceived and utilized are difficult

to calculate, they are a low-cost way of substantially adding to existing resources.

Although there will undoubtedly be costs attached to implementing our recommendations - as there are for any changes - we expect these to be offset by savings in the longer term. However, it is crucial that funding choices be made deliberately, on the basis of educational priorities.

A call to action

We believe that our recommendations and intervention strategies provide powerful directions and tools for reform. We want our recommendations to be implemented; we want the school system of Ontario to become more responsive, open, and flexible; we want higher levels of student learning; we want well-prepared, highly motivated teachers taking greater collective responsibility for professional issues. But we are not naive. We realize that there are constraints and barriers. These must not, however, stop stakeholders from moving forward.

We are under no illusions that hurdles are easy to overcome, or that our suggestions will always be successful. We believe, however, that the journey must begin. Schools and their communities need a reasonably clear vision of the destination, the will to overcome or work around the constraints, and a commitment to imaginative problem-solving. If there was ever a time for a massive call to action, that time is now. We suggest ways of overcoming some of the key barriers to change.

Inertia

Having already acknowledged the difficulty in getting a large and complicated system to change course, we stress the importance of having the government give clear direction and a well-articulated sense of the overall goals, as well as incentives for change. We also underline that, through the public hearing process, we were strongly reminded that pressures for change are mounting, and cannot be resisted.

Support for innovative initiatives that operate outside the usual organizational and bureaucratic constraints can help overcome inertia. Highly visible projects can provide the incentive for others to develop their own innovations.

Power issues

Although it is rarely acknowledged openly, concerns about protecting influence often get in the way of change. No group wants to lose power. Those who have more, at whatever level of the hierarchy, may resist efforts to decrease their spheres of influence, or to democratize organizational decision-making processes. Educators, however, like others in contemporary society, are aware that times have changed, and that the education system must become more responsive to parent and community concerns. We stress that the goals of increased student learning and the opening up of a closed education system should guide the decisions of all stakeholders on the best way to organize schooling.

Collective bargaining issues

Specific provisions of collective agreements must not prevent changes that will improve student learning. There must be more flexibility in the use of staff and in the way time is allocated and accounted for. Teachers' federations have been tireless and effective in their roles as advocates for teachers, and have also positively addressed many professional issues. However, the rigidities of collective agreements may not always work to the benefit of students and schools. More flexible approaches to collective bargaining

seem to be appropriate if schools are to change with changing social circumstances.

In this report, we have repeatedly acknowledged the inestimable value and contributions of teachers, and have recommended a variety of measures to support them in their very challenging work. We expect, in turn, that federations will be flexible on issues where the interests of students and teachers may, to some extent, conflict.

Overload

We often heard that schools and the people in them are overloaded, and find it difficult - if not impossible - to take on more responsibilities. We acknowledge these concerns, and although we have no magic solution to alleviate them, we do think our recommendations address the problems. Most important, the report takes a stand in clarifying the purpose of schools, stressing that schools exist first and foremost for the intellectual and academic nurturing of students. This clearer focus and direction should help ameliorate the overload problem.

The truth, however, is that the overload will worsen if people do not take action. Will and skill, although not magic solutions, can be effective antidotes to overload. We believe that an essential (but difficult) first step is for teachers, schools, and boards to critically review what they are now doing and to set priorities. Educators must identify tasks that may no longer be important, or that are better done by others, in a difficult process that has been termed "organized abandonment."

Lack of resources

We recognize the serious financial constraints affecting both provincial and local governments, constraints shared by most public institutions in the 1990s. Expansionary times have long gone, and society is becoming aware that complaints do nothing to ease fiscal difficulties. Although constraints are real, they should not be seen as an insurmountable barrier. In some cases, low-cost options are highly effective; we have already pointed to peer tutoring as a low-cost program with benefits to students. In our opinion, volunteers are another under-used and low-cost resource. In other cases, educators and the public should be prepared to argue for re-allocation of funds to ensure that essential and high-priority services and programs are available.

Achieving the kind of school system we envisage will be difficult, but it is a worthy ideal. We have not shied away from difficult issues, even when we cannot offer clear or guaranteed solutions.

Will our recommendations be implemented faithfully? That will be decided by the government, school boards, schools, teachers, parents, students, and others with a stake in education in Ontario. If the Commission's vision is to be realized, these people and organizations must move forward without waiting for others to take the first step.

We began our report by highlighting the dramatically altered context in which schools now operate. Profound social, economic, demographic, and technological changes have made the old forms of schooling outmoded. We went on to suggest that changes in the education system, important as they are, are not enough. People must rethink how schools relate to the community, and how the education system relates to the rest of government and to other societal institutions.

We want real change in the lives of students and teachers. We are not interested in political rhetoric about education. We have indicated what is required in terms of the government's response and

implementation plan, but if substantial changes are to occur, more than provincial policy changes are needed.

School boards, faculties of education, principals, teachers, parents, and students can and must act. They need not - and, indeed, should not - wait for governments. Local actions will produce improvements in classrooms and schools, and will also put pressure on decision-makers to follow through with necessary supports.

In other words, everybody has to take responsibility for making schools increasingly better. A 1994 implementation guide published by the British Columbia Ministry of Education sets out how each stakeholder contributes to reform. Because we found it to be an excellent summary of responsibilities, we reproduce it here:

Implementation responsibilities

- *Ministry provides leadership and implementation support*
- *School boards organize planning and allocation of financial, human and learning resources in support of implementation*
- *Teachers and school administrators participate in [board] and school-based planning for implementation of new policies, and implement policies according to provincial guidelines*
- *Students work to take advantage of learning opportunities offered by provincial and local programs*
- *Parents help children to develop clear values and self-discipline, and to apply themselves to their schoolwork*
- *Provincial and professional organizations [teachers' federations] plan, and assist members to understand, adapt and implement new policies and programs*
- *College of Teachers reviews requirements for certification and teacher education in relation to the new programs*
- *Business and labour work with local school boards and schools to develop partnerships in and outside of schools to assist in the implementation of new programs, especially in the area of work experience and career development(9)*

We would add to this list the need for parents and other community members to work with schools to establish school/community councils, and to look for ways to link school, home, and community more effectively, while students are responsible for organizing their systematic input to schools.

The actions that people take in schools, in the community, and in government, will have a cumulative effect in moving reform forward. They will:

- build commitment to the necessary reforms, and encourage action by all stakeholders, at the local and provincial levels
- develop capacity and skill among educators, parents, students, and others, to implement the changes
- create organizational cultures supportive of changes, and provide necessary resources for schools,

school boards, the Ministry, and community groups

- provide relevant feedback to schools and to the public, about how the process is proceeding and about early outcomes, and ensure that such feedback is used to improve future implementation.

We end our report by suggesting actions for all those who care about Ontario's schools. Through thousands of such actions, guided by the goal of improved learning for all students, our schools will rise to the challenge of preparing children and adolescents for the 21st century.

Together, those with the biggest stake in Ontario education can work to make our recommendations a reality. They can also insist that the government act promptly to implement the report. "Systems ... don't change by themselves; people change systems." The report of the Royal Commission on Learning is now in the hands of the people of Ontario. Its future is up to you.

Endnotes (Chapter 20)

1. Ontario, Provincial Committee on Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario, *Living and Learning* (Toronto: Newton Publishing, 1968), p. 134.
2. Allan R. Odden, "New Patterns of Education Policy Implementation and Challenges for the 1990s," in *Education Policy Implementation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991), p. 326.
3. Michael G. Fullan with Suzanne Stiegelbauer, *The New Meaning of Educational Change* (Toronto: OISE Press, 1991), p. 65.
4. Milbrey W. McLaughlin, "Learning from Experience: Lessons from Policy Implementation," in Odden, *Education Policy Implementation*, p. 187.
5. Matthew Miles, "Practical Guidelines for School Administrators: How to Get There" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, 1987).
6. Two recent articles point to the challenge of helping a large and diverse educational community understand highly complex and difficult changes, and the danger that people will rely on oversimplified interpretations of new policies. See:
Roland Case, "Our Crude Handling of Educational Reforms: The Case of Curricular Integration," *Canadian Journal of Education* 19, no. 1 (1994): 80- 93.
Walter Werner, "Defining Curriculum Policy through Slogans," *Journal of Education Policy* 6, no. 2 (1991): 225-38.
7. Kenneth Leithwood and Byron Dart, "Guidelines for Implementing Educational Policy in British Columbia," p. 7. Draft paper prepared for the British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1994.
8. G. Orpwood and J. Lewington, *Overdue Assignment: Taking Responsibility for Canada's Schools* (Rexdale, ON: John Wiley, 1993), p. 182.
9. British Columbia, Ministry of Education, *Putting Policies into Practice: Implementation Guide* (Victoria, 1994), p. 2-3.

[Home Page](#)

[Search](#)