

**STRUGGLING TO HOLD ON:
ONTARIO'S EDUCATION DEFICIT**

**Report of the
Ontario Student Trustees' Association**

Published by OSTA-AECO
Copyright 2003

e-mail: matt.reid@tvdsb.on.ca
steven_goetz@bgcdsb.org

phone: Matthew Reid 1 519 685 6179
Steven Goetz 1 519 396 7079
website: www.osta-aeco.org

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Survey Report would not have been possible without the tremendous efforts of student trustees' from across the province.

Special thanks to the members of the 2002/2003 OSTA-AECO Executive and the 2002/2003 Survey Committee members. Without these people, the idea and reality of surveying the entire province would not have come into fruition.

Thank you also to the following members of the education community who helped us in going about a report of this magnitude and who always gave us the encouragement to work harder:

Sandra Bickford
Annie Kidder
Jeff Sprang
Mary-Lu Brennan

Survey Committee Members

Steven Goetz	Chair, Co-Author and Chief Researcher
Tyler Meredith	Co-Author and Researcher
Deanna Coghlin	Co-Author and Researcher
Heather Adamo	Co-Author
Nancy La Neve	Researcher
Milo Silva	2002/2003 Survey Committee Liaison

Report Conducted By the 2003/2004 OSTA-AECO Executive

Matthew Reid	President
Steven Goetz	1 st Vice-President
Tyler Meredith	2 nd Vice-President
Maddison Wilson	Executive Director
Heather Adamo	Secretary
Sarah Stratford	Bilingual Secretary
Deanna Coghlin	English Public Board Council President
Nancy La Neve	English Catholic Board Council President
Marie Louise Lapointe	French Public Board Council President
Mireille Giroux	French Catholic Board Council President

Contents

Letter From the Committee Chair	7
Executive Summary	8
Struggling To Hold On:	
Ontario's Education Deficit	8
Survey Design	9
Research and Consultation	9
Recommendations In Depth	10
Question 1: What Year Do You Plan to Graduate	11
Question 2: What Do You Plan To Do After High School	14
Question 3: How Will You Be Financing The Majority Of Your Post-secondary Education	16
Question 4: Have You Completed Your Forty Hours Of Community Service?	19
Question 5: How Many Have You Completed Thus Far?	19
Question 6: Do You Feel Safe At School?	22
Question 7: Do You Take The Bus Or Public Transit To School? If Yes, How Long Is Your Average One-way Trip?	28
Question 8: At School, When You Seek Guidance, Which Staff Member Do You Go To See?	31
Question 9: On Average How Much Time Do You Spend On Homework Per Night	34
List Of Recommendations	36
Selected Bibliography	40

Letter from the Committee Chair

Dear Public Education Supporter,

December 9, 2003

I am proud and honored to present to you the findings and recommendations of the first ever Ontario Student Trustees' Association - l'Association des élèves conseillers et conseillères de l'Ontario Survey Report. The information in these pages are meant to give you a better understanding of how the students of Ontario are reacting to our newly renovated education system and to address the growing concern that Ontario is not properly investing into its public education.

Over the last eight years, changes have been made to the very fundamentals of education in this province. The curriculum, funding formula, diploma requirements and school atmosphere have all changed dramatically. Better or worse, these changes have been made and Ontarians are dealing with them.

Eliciting the opinions and experiences of Ontario's 2.2 Million students was an enormous undertaking. It involved numerous people and organizations along the way. Although more than 1,000 high school students responded to our request for input, the raw data we received could not alone provide the necessary background from which many recommendations were reached and the supporting evidence against which many are justified.

Simply put, this report provides a comprehensive analysis of the concerns raised by Ontario's students and situates those concerns within a relevant context of data. Statistics Canada, People for Education, the Education Equality Task Force, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, the Ministry of Education, the Ontario Public School Boards Association, Director's of Education and other members of Ontario's education community were contacted and provided critical support for the survey design, report research and ongoing guidance. Most importantly, student trustees from across the province were consulted in formulating the recommendations in the following pages. Their dedication to their positions is encouraging for the future of our province.

It was our intent in conducting our survey and research to provide you with solid evidence of where Ontario's students stand. We found that Ontario's education system is ready to succeed with the appropriate attention and funding. They are ready, in record numbers, to move into post-secondary institutions. However, many still need the guidance support to succeed in their post-secondary plans and to successfully navigate the four year program. Students need a commitment from the government that tuition will be affordable enough that they will be able to reach their career goals unburdened by overbearing levels of debt. They need to feel safe in their school environments and not be fearful of unmaintained school buildings or dangerous peer pressure. They need to spend less time commuting and more time learning and being involved in their communities. Most importantly, students need a commitment from Ontario that their education system will receive the necessary support to avoid a deficit of lost opportunity for students.

Sincerely,

Steven Goetz
OSTA-AECO Survey Committee Chair
OSTA-AECO 1st Vice-President

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For the first time in the history of Ontario, students' voices are united as one. It is the belief of OSTA-AECO that the education system has been put in place first and foremost for the students and as such the student voice should be heard first above all stakeholders. OSTA-AECO, through consultation and co-operation amongst all student trustees in the province, representing students from all four divisions of publicly funded education in Ontario, works to provide a student vision and a united voice within Ontario's education community.

In order to ensure quality and accountability when representing students as their provincial voice, OSTA-AECO set out to survey the province's secondary school students and to collect empirical data supporting the issues that the student trustees consistently raised.

STRUGGLING TO HOLD ON: ONTARIO'S EDUCATION DEFICIT

Through our nine question survey and research, OSTA-AECO has found that schools are still in need of support in order to find solid ground after the eight years of education reform through which it has pummeled.

Students are struggling to find the guidance they need to plan their course selections and their post-secondary paths. These problems are only heightened by the pressure put on students to make career decisions early in order to enroll in the appropriate course stream; all of this on top of the over-bearing pressures to compete for university placements.

Students are planning on returning to school for additional years in record numbers in order to receive the appropriate credits for university acceptance and to upgrade marks for over competitive university positions.

Students planning to move into the workplace after highschool are not taking advantage of the Workplace stream courses due to low enrollment and unequal support between the three course streams.

Students are burdened by an expensive post-secondary education system, being forced to work part-time jobs or risk carrying huge debt through their post-secondary years.

Students attend class in buildings in which they don't feel safe. The building renewal grants remain dangerously low even after the public made it clear through the Education Equality Task Force that this was unacceptable and immediate action was warranted.

Students are fearful of their peers and the pressure put on them in the hallway. Some are unable to learn in a fear free environment.

Students run the risk of suspensions and expulsions without any diligence since the implementation of 'zero tolerance.' Most shocking is the inability for administrations to recognize that students with disabilities need compassion.

Students are spending more time on the bus and less time with their families, on school work or helping out in their communities due to an underfunded transportation system.

Overall, a hasty implementation has left our new school system underfunded and unsure of itself. The potential deficit of quality student learning is a serious threat to the future of our province.

Survey Design

To construct the survey, the 2002/2003 OSTA-AECO Survey Committee consulted with Ontario's student trustees on what questions they wanted to see appear and which would be most beneficial for which to find the data. After this initial consultation, each board Director was contacted and informed of the survey and given an opportunity to ask any questions in regards to the level of co-operation required and the kinds of questions their students would be asked. With all but one board agreeing to participate, the surveys were mailed to each secondary school in the province.

Each question asked was done so with a particular issue in mind. The issues ranged from transportation to post-secondary paths to the degree of safety students feel in their school environment.

Directions were given with each bundle of five surveys directing the schools to pick a student from each grade to fill out the survey. Schools were asked to pick a wide variety of student types in order to ensure that the survey was representative of the entire student body.

Eventually, the 2002/2003 OSTA-AECO Survey Committee received over 1 000 surveys from all across the province.

Research and Consultation

After the data was gathered and formulated, it was handed over to the 2003/2004 Executive to analyze and write the report with its findings. The 2003/2004 OSTA-AECO Survey Committee was thus formed. Research and analysis began in September of this year.

Using resources provided by various stakeholder partnerships, the committee was able to prepare a draft of the report with recommendations to be presented to the entire OSTA-AECO membership at the Fall General Meeting in Toronto on November 8, 2003. Student trustees from across the province gave their opinions and viewpoints to shape what is found in these pages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Eliciting the opinions and experiences of Ontario's 2.2 Million students was an enormous undertaking. It involved numerous people and organizations along the way. Although more than 1,000 high schools responded to our request for input, the raw data we received could not alone provide the necessary background from which many recommendations were reached and supporting evidence against which many are justified.

Simply put, this report provides a comprehensive analysis of the concerns raised by Ontario's students and situates those concerns within a relevant context of data. Statistics Canada, People for Education, the Education Equality Task Force, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, the Ministry of Education, the Ontario Public School Boards Association and other organizations were contacted and provided critical support for research and ongoing guidance. Most importantly, student trustees from across the province were consulted in formulating the recommendations in the following pages. Their dedication to their positions is encouraging for the future of our province.

The message received from Ontario students is clear: more must be done to re-invest in schools and in turn re-position our province as a leader in education and a leader in providing skills and opportunity for the Ontario of tomorrow.

The report has been divided into nine fundamental sections. Each section is divided into three subsections; first, the background, or the context in which we asked the question and viewed the data collected; second, the results, or what we found in the surveys returned to us; and last, the recommendations which are supported by the information found in the background and results.

QUESTION 1: WHAT YEAR DO YOU PLAN TO GRADUATE

Background:

The first question of the survey asked students when they planned on graduating from their secondary school career. The number of years in which students attend the new four year OSSD program is a measurement of student success in the new curriculum as well as an indication of the trailing effects of the 'double cohort'. We asked students which year they planned on completing their secondary education. We then took the year and acknowledged it in relation to the current grade of the student. This gave us the number of years to which the student plans on completing their secondary school career.

The Ontario education system has recently implemented the new OSSD curriculum and diploma across the entire school system. Students were switched to the new curriculum, having studied in the old curriculum for as many as eight years. A way to measure their success and adjustment within the new diploma and its requirements is to see how long it is taking students to graduate from secondary education.

With the implementation of the OSSD came increased requirements and challenges for students. They are now required to complete 40 hours of community service and to successfully pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test. There is also an increased pressure put on students to discover their post-secondary goals before the end of grade 10 in order to enter the appropriate course stream in grade 11. The risks of entering the wrong stream include not having the pre requisites for university acceptance which could result in a student having to return to a grade 11 course in order to be able to complete the pre requisite grade 12 course. This puts a huge amount of pressure on students to make potentially life altering choices at the age of 15.

To help students make these decisions early, they are required to complete a half credit in career planning in their tenth year. They are also supposed to create an annual education plan, which includes making course selection choices, with their Teacher Advisor Group/Program (TAG/TAP) advisor. The TAG/TAP advisor is meant to act as a liaison to the guidance office and to do as much as they can to help the student with post-secondary and high school planning. In the event that the TAG/TAP advisor could not help or the student needed additional advice, they are supposed to be referred back to the guidance office. It has been found that the TAG/TAP has not been successfully implemented in most Ontario high schools and that many have ceased to use it. In the eighth question of the survey, we found that students are using the TAG/TAP program less and less and that schools appear to be refocusing their student advisement programs. There was an unforeseen offloading of work and leadership for the TAG/TAP program onto guidance counselors. This has created a vacuum that has left many students without the proper guidance expected of the program. It is possible that this has had an effect on

students course selection and post-secondary plans. The success of either the guidance or TAG/TAP program can be measured by the success of students completing the OSSD in four years. Students who have failed to set an appropriate course plan or who are unsure of what they wish to do after high school could have benefitted from a stronger implementation of either program.

The acceleration of entrance marks to university are an overwhelming concern for students. One option for students is to remain a fifth year in order to earn higher marks in pre requisite programs. According to McMaster's University, the final cut-off marks have increased 3% with 78% required for admission for an arts degree and 84% for engineering or science. Queen's University reports that minimum entrance marks have increased about 2% from last year's acceptance marks of 82.2% for arts and 85.2% for science. Such a trend is apparent amongst most of Ontario's universities. Undue pressure is placed on Ontario's students to aggressively compete for university positions.

The cause of students failing to complete the OSSD in four years has given rise to several negative outcomes. Students are unaware of what they would like to do after high school. The increased competition for top university positions are forcing students to remain within the system in order to upgrade marks for acceptance. They find themselves faced with the challenge of changing from the applied to academic stream or find themselves in the inappropriate stream for their post-secondary destination. These negative outcomes were meant to be sidelined by the TAG/TAP program; students are being left behind.

Results:

Grade 9		Grade 10	
4 years	75%	3 years	5%
5 years	17%	4 years	85%
6 years	7%	5 years	9%

Grade 11		Grade 12	
4 years	85%	4 years	91%
5 years	15%	5 years	7%
6 years	2%	6 years	2%

OAC	
5 years	96%
6 years	4%

The results of our survey show that a majority of students are planning on finishing high school in four years. There are, however, a large number of students who are planning on attending a fifth and/or sixth year. This trend starts in grade 9 and continues right into grade 12. This implies that many students were ill prepared

for the demands of the new curriculum or the pressures of early course selection. Many are also planning on staying behind in order to ensure that they have the required marks and course credits to attend a university of their choice.

Recommendations:

The implementation of the Teacher Advisor Group/Teacher Advisor Program (TAG/TAP) has been unsuccessful in drawing students to their designated advisor for school and career related advice. This failure has left many students unsure of how to charter their high school career, as well as placing an unfair expectation on guidance counselors to alleviate the growing divide. Significant time, effort and financial resources were dedicated to the promise of fundamental changes to the Ontario curriculum. Having recently witnessed the graduation of the first class to experience these changes, an inordinate number of students returned for a fifth year. Mechanisms must exist that support students to complete their OSSD to be adequately prepared for post-secondary education and to have done this within four years. Workplace bound students have had the disadvantage of being unable to take advantage of the Workplace stream courses due to their vast minority in our school communities. In our communities, there is a huge focus on the need to attend a post-secondary institution. Students need to be aware of the opportunities available in the workplace and through alternate accreditation and the workplace stream. Therefore, the following is recommended;

- 1 That the TAG/TAP program implementation is re-evaluated through consultation with students, teachers and guidance officials so that the impediment to its implementation can be alleviated. Action must be taken immediately in order to ensure that the problem does not persist further than this school year. School guidance departments, along with TAG/TAP need to work together in order to provide students with the appropriate guidance so they are prepared for course stream selection and to proceed into post-secondary and workplace positions after four years.**

QUESTION 2: WHAT DO YOU PLAN TO DO AFTER SECONDARY SCHOOL

Background:

The second question of the survey asked students what they planned on doing after graduation from high school. The results allow for public policy authors to anticipate and prepare for students upon their successful completion of the OSSD. The increase in student applications for universities does not appear to be a trend solely attributable to the 'double cohort'. A rising number of students will be applying to universities at the end of their secondary education.

Students were asked what they planned to do after secondary school. They were prompted with the option of choosing either university, college, workplace or uncertain.

Depending on the amount of students planning on attending university or college, a reaction will be necessary from post-secondary institutions. Spaces must be ensured so that every willing and qualified Ontario student finds a spot.

For those students who indicate a desire to enter the workforce after high school, opportunities for transition towards successful employment need to be provided. Should enrollment be insufficient to warrant Workplace stream courses, alternative accreditation must be provided for the purpose of students obtaining experience and qualification for employment. Alternative accreditation will be increasingly important with the rise of the mandatory education age to 18.

Results:

		Grade 10	
Grade 9		University	70%
University	81%	College	25%
College	17%	Workplace	3%
Workplace	2%	Uncertain	2%
		Grade 11	
Grade 11		Grade 12	
University	77%	University	79%
College	22%	College	19%
Workplace	1%	Workplace	1%
		Uncertain	1%
		OAC	
University	93%		
College	6%		
Workplace	1%		

A majority of students are planning on attending a university after their secondary education. Between 70 and 80% of students in all grades are planning on attending university. About 20% of students have plans for college while only a percentage point of students see an immediate future in the workplace.

A sizable development in students wishing to attend university over numbers of the past decade has been found. A continuing need for growing university opportunities will be recognized over the next five years so that all qualified students who are willing to attend university will be able to.

Recommendations:

The implementation of the Teacher Advisor Group/Teacher Advisor Program (TAG/TAP) has been unsuccessful in drawing students to their designated advisor for school and career related advice. This failure has left many students unsure of how to charter their high school career, as well as placing an unfair expectation on guidance counselors to alleviate the growing divide. Significant time, effort and financial resources were dedicated to the promise of fundamental changes to the Ontario curriculum. Having recently witnessed the graduation of the first class to experience these changes, an inordinate number of students returned for a fifth year. Mechanisms must exist that support students to complete their OSSD to be adequately prepared for post-secondary education and to have done this within four years. Workplace bound students have had the disadvantage of being unable to take advantage of the Workplace stream courses due to their minority in our school communities. In our communities, there is a huge focus on the need to attend a post-secondary institution. Students need to be aware of the opportunities available in the workplace and through alternate accreditation and the workplace stream. Therefore, the following is recommended;

- 1 That the TAG/TAP program implementation be re-evaluated through consultation with students, teachers and guidance officials so that the impediment to its implementation can be alleviated. Action must be taken immediately in order to ensure that the problem does not persist further than this school year. School guidance departments, along with TAG/TAP need to work together in order to provide students with the appropriate guidance so they are prepared for course stream selection and to proceed into post-secondary and workplace positions after four years.**

QUESTION 3: HOW WILL YOU BE FINANCING THE MAJORITY OF YOUR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION?

Background:

The third question of the survey asked students how they planned on financing the majority of their post-secondary experience. Recently, tuition costs for post-secondary education have been brought to the forefront of the common challenges facing students across the province of Ontario. Tuition for attending most of Ontario's universities is currently well-above the national average.

Respondents were offered several common methods for financing their post-secondary education, those being: parents/relatives, personal savings, bursaries/scholarships, loans/OSAP or if it was unknown. It is important to note that the question asked how students planned to pay for the *majority* of their education which allows for the assumption that students are probably using a combination of sources to cover their post-secondary bill.

Canada is a leading nation in the world for quality of education in post-secondary institutions. Many young Canadians are answering the call of opportunity. Record numbers of students are expected to apply over the next ten years to Canadian universities with the majority of them to apply here in Ontario.

In the previous question, it was discovered that a majority of students indicate that they wish to attend university. The costs of post-secondary education will have a huge financial impact on hundreds of thousands of Ontario families in the next few years alone.

The average cost for a university education is well in the range of \$12,000 - \$15,000 per year, accounting for living expenses, books and tuition. According to the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance, over the past decade, the average student debt loan upon graduation has increased by \$11, 821 with debts often reaching over \$20,000.

Similarly, People for Education reported that operating grants adjusted for inflation have dropped 25% in the last decade. Between 1996 and 2001, tuition fees have increased more than 60% for regulated programs. Within de-regulated programs, where universities can set whatever tuition fees they wish, some programs have increased as much as 521%.

According to Stats Canada, the tuition for the average undergraduate for the 2003-2004 academic year was \$4,923 which is the second highest in Canada and 22% above the national average. A decade ago, Ontario was only slightly ahead of the national average of \$2,023 with an average tuition of \$2,076.

The Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) has a mandate to provide, according to their website, "...equality of opportunity for post-secondary studies by providing financial assistance for educational costs and basic living expenses." In 1998/1999, OSAP issued approximately 67,000 loans designated for University bound students and approximately 27,000 loans issued for College bound students. The organization states that, "The object of student financial assistance is to help

students from lower income families to meet the costs of post-secondary education. The purpose is to supplement, not to replace, the financial resources that students are expected to contribute.” Although this method has been successfully used by students to assist the financing of their post-secondary career, many students are left with unreasonable outstanding debts after graduation. OSTA-AECO believes strongly that an increase in student loans is not the answer for a more accessible post-secondary education system. If the goal is to provide affordable education to every determined and qualified student, a permanent, rather than a temporary, solution to student debt must be provided. The government must realize that post-secondary education is of unparalleled importance to the prosperity and vitality of Ontario, necessitating in the need for students to have unfettered access such institutions. More specifically, this requires the Ontario government to intervene and provide immediate measures that redress the cost of tuition for students enrolled in Ontario Universities and Colleges to a livable and national standard.

It is not in the interest of any student to be denied access to a program that they are willing and qualified to attend. Education should be the primary concern of the student. Students must not be impeded by the cost of post-secondary education with the need to work a part time job, which detracts from their ability to develop as a student and engage as an effective citizen. Students should learn to work, not work to learn.

Results:

Grade 9		Grade 10	
Relatives/Parents	42%	Relatives/Parents	37%
Personal Savings	23%	Personal Savings	23%
Scholarships and Bursaries	19%	Loans/OSAP	17%
Loans/OSAP	10%	Scholarships and Bursaries	14%
Unknown	4%	Unknown	9%
Grade 11		Grade 12	
Relatives/Parents	44%	Relatives/Parents	50%
Loans/OSAP	19%	Loans/OSAP	17%
Personal Savings	16%	Personal Savings	16%
Scholarships and Bursaries	12%	Scholarships and Bursaries	9%
Unknown	9%	Unknown	8%

OAC

Relatives/Parents	38%
Loans/OSAP	30%
Personal Savings	21%
Unknown	6%
Scholarships and Bursaries	5%

A majority of students are planning on using their parents as their primary financial support for post-secondary education. Loans/OSAP and personal savings are found to be used almost as often as one another. Both of these methods of payment have a potentially negative effect on a student. The use of personal savings as a chief method of payment for post-secondary education implies that these students have had to work during their high school years. This can distract from both studies and family/community support time. Assuming that prudent increases in tuition continue, the sustained use of OSAP and loans to pay for post-secondary education will contribute to a concurrent rise in student related debt remaining after university. Students will be arrested by their debt and unable to discover employment and life planning opportunities with full freedom.

Fewer students are relying on scholarships and bursaries and are instead facing the costs of university on their own or with the help of their parents. The effect that the reliance of monetary support for post-secondary education retrieved especially from family members or personal savings is potentially massive for Ontario families and threatens to worsen if tuition rates continue to rise. Students should not be impeded by the income level of their families when applying for post-secondary education and should not have to be followed out of post-secondary education with a cumbersome debt.

Recommendations:

_____ Access to post-secondary education should be blinded by income and solely based on merit. Students from different family incomes must not be limited in their future. With education, the future of a student should only be based on willingness and ability. The simple increase in OSAP support, as well as Bursaries and Scholarships, do not make post-secondary education accessible to all, nor does it help solve the threat of increasing debt after post-secondary graduation. Therefore, the following is recommended;

- 2 That an action plan be formed and followed with strict goals and time lines for tuition deflation, with the ultimate goal being the lowering of tuition rates in Ontario to the national average so all students from different family incomes are not limited in their future.**

QUESTION 4: HAVE YOU COMPLETED YOUR FORTY HOURS OF COMMUNITY SERVICE?

QUESTION 5: HOW MANY HOURS HAVE YOU COMPLETED THUS FAR (IF APPLICABLE)?

Background:

The fourth and fifth questions of the survey asked students whether or not they had successfully completed their forty hours of community service required for the successful completion of the OSSD. In order for the numbers generated by Question 5 to be representative of students in the new curriculum, we asked for only students who needed to complete the hours to respond. The need for and acceptance of this new diploma requirement has been debated since its implementation.

Since 1995, the Ministry of Education has fundamentally altered its qualifications for the successful completion of an OSSD. Chief among these changes has been the re-prioritization of community involvement. Today, all students must complete a minimum of 40 hours of unpaid community involvement activities before graduating from high school. This requirement is additional to the 30 credits needed for a high school diploma. Students are able to choose their own community involvement activities, within guidelines that are established by their corresponding school board. Students are responsible for fulfilling these requirements on their own time, and for keeping a record of their activities on a form supplied by their school.

The purpose of the community involvement requirement is to encourage students to develop awareness and understanding of civic responsibility and of the contributions they can make in supporting and strengthening their communities. In many schools across the province, this requirement was already found in certain course curriculums.

In its 1998 study of the status of community involvement, 'Caring Canadians, Involved Canadians', Statistics Canada found that today's youth, aged 15-24, are most likely among all demographics to provide voluntary services to community organizations or causes. The participation rate of volunteers as well as the number of hours donated rose attributively with the level of education. Moreover, community involvement benefitted the employability of both those employed and unemployed. Noted the report:

Some people looking for work consider participating as a volunteer to be a step along the path to paid employment. Results from the NSGVP reveal that for young adult Canadians especially, volunteer work is seen to be an activity that can aid in moving them to paid employment and to the acquisition of work place experience and new skills.

Sixty five percent (65%) of young volunteers, aged 15-24, believed that their community involvement increased their chances of finding employment. Indeed these beliefs are not misplaced. The survey results show that approximately 14% of individuals aged 15 to 64 who had taken part in volunteer activities stated that their volunteer activities helped them to obtain employment. A much larger proportion of individuals (24%) in the 15–24 demographic reported these sentiments than respondents in any other age category. Students are benefitting from volunteer opportunities.

Statistics Canada. Caring Canadians. 1997. p.32

Results:

Question 4 (Percentage is representative of number of students who have successfully completed their 40 hours of community service)

Grade 9	14%
Grade 10	38%
Grade 11	64%
Grade 12	88%

Question 5

Grade 9		Grade 11	
0 hours	19%	0 hours	6%
under 10 hours	21%	under 10 hours	5%
11 to 20 hours	25%	11 to 20 hours	7%
21 to 30 hours	11%	21 to 30 hours	8%
31 to 39 hours	10%	31 to 39 hours	10%
Over 40 hours	14%	Over 40 hours	64%
Grade 10		Grade 12	
0 hours	9%	0 hours	1%
under 10 hours	10%	under 10 hours	5%
11 to 20 hours	21%	11 to 20 hours	3%
21 to 30 hours	13%	21 to 30 hours	11%
31 to 39 hours	10%	31 to 39 hours	4%
Over 40 hours	38%	Over 40 hours	88%

While many students in their final year of high school reported having completed their forty hours, a noticeably high number did not. Comparisons made between grades, debunk the common thought that a majority of students delay their community involvement until their final year of high school and indicate that a progressive number of students are completing their hours before their final year. Students are meeting the expectations of the community involvement requirement as laid out in the Ministry of Education's Policy/Program Memorandum No. 124a.

In the past students have questioned the validity and purpose of the program. However, several years removed from the changes to the OSSD, results suggest that students have accepted the need to participate in the program. Many students respect the intent of the initiative and are taking a more active role in their communities even after completion of their required 40 hours of community service.

Recommendations:

Even though guidelines outlining what activities qualify for community service do exist within every board, the methodology, standards and framework surrounding these guidelines vary considerably. Criteria for acceptable community involvement hours differ between school boards effectively making the completion of the OSSD different for students across the province. If an Ontario Secondary School Diploma is to be given equally to those qualified, the qualifications for an OSSD must be valued equally. It should not be up to individual school boards to set these standards, but rather the responsibility of the Ministry to create criteria equally applicable across the province. An OSSD must be attained with the same requirements, whether a student is in attendance at a rural, urban, public, Catholic, French or English board of education. With such standards in place, organizations and groups looking for volunteer support will know that students in all schools will benefit from helping their cause, making it easier for them to advertise for support and for students to find community posts most beneficial to them. It is therefore recommended that:

- 3 That qualifications for the community involvement component of an Ontario Secondary School Diploma be updated into a provincial standard for all Ontario students so that there is no debate as to what is an acceptable form of involvement or what a successful completion of the OSSD means.**

QUESTION 6: DO YOU FEEL SAFE AT SCHOOL?

Background:

The sixth question of the survey asked students whether or not they felt safe at school. If respondents answered 'no' then they were asked why they didn't feel safe. They were given a number of selections including peer pressure, building conditions, school location and other. It is necessary for a student to feel safe if they are to participate fully and freely in their school environment.

In 2000, the Ontario Legislature passed Bill 81 as a comprehensive effort to modernize provincial education procedures. Entitled the Safe Schools Act, the protocol was aimed at fulfilling the government's commitment of "promoting respect, responsibility and civility; setting clear, consistent province-wide standards of behaviour; and setting clear consequences for not meeting those standards."

In its recent study of the status of school buildings, 'Crumbling and Aging: Ontario's School Buildings,' People for Education found that an inordinate number of Ontario's schools are going without needed repairs, renovation and maintenance. A majority of Ontario's schools are more than 40 years old; in total more than 1,700 require annual and general upgrades to floors, roofs, painting, furnace, carpet and furniture. School boards do not have the financial resources available to respond. A provincial government School Facilities Survey in 2001 found that many schools in the province operate in a "substandard condition." At that time, former Education Minister Janet Ecker told cabinet that alleviating the provincial deficit for school repairs would cost \$6.8 Billion over five years. No additional funding has been delivered.

The ineffectiveness of the current funding formula for adapting to the need for building modernization is a problem stretched over time. Building costs are built into the funding formula by associating grant funding with per-square foot operating space. Over time, the building and repairs deficit has developed since the operating grant has not followed associated rises in the Consumer Price Index or the core inflation rate.

The government appointed Education Equality Task Force, chaired by Dr. Mordechai Rozanski, found that school boards across the province are dealing with a massive backlog in school maintenance. The Rozanski report recommended an annual increase of \$250 million for school renewal and deferred maintenance as well as \$440 Million in annual funding to address this problem:

I am recommending that the Ministry of Education allocate \$50 million for boards to use to address their most pressing school renewal needs.... Secondly, I am recommending that, as part of the initiative to access school renewal needs... the ministry provide an annual allocation of \$200 million

for boards to use to pay the principal and interest costs they would incur in financing the substantial capital borrowings they would need to begin addressing their deferred maintenance needs... The annual allocation of \$200 million would be a deferred maintenance amortization fund,” which I estimate that boards could use to leverage \$2 billion worth of financing for renewal work.”

*Dr Mordechai Rozanski
December 10, 2002
Report of the Education Equality Task Force*

In accordance with the outcomes of the Rozanski Report and an ongoing commitment set within an “objective and systematic” fashion, the government is addressing some of the needs for school repair with two different grants. The building renewal grants provide funding for schools that are too costly to repair while another portion assists upgrades and renovations. Still, a flood of capital infrastructure and immediate funding is needed. The recent enhancement to the salary element of the operating grant is a hard-won gain, though not enough. Now totaling five dollars and forty-four cents per square foot, the building operating grant is still six cents per square foot short of the benchmark recommended six years ago by the Ministry’s Expert Panel on funding and doesn’t address the 28.9% rise in operational costs since 1997 as identified by the Rozanski Report. Primarily, school boards are themselves expected to burden the cost of building renewal and particular school repairs. Appended to this, the provincial governments dual layered program that identifies schools in need of immediate attention for which no financial resources have yet been allocated. Each year school boards are asked to submit schools for inspection by provincial officials. Two hundred and seventy-three were submitted for the 2003-2004 operating year. Of these schools, 34 were approved for provincial assistance.

Immediately following the inspections, \$25 Million was announced as a top up to the legislative grants for building operations. A quantitative review of the grants released to school boards suggests that only \$18.3 Million of that money has been apportioned accordingly.

Nearly two years removed from the comprehensive study of Ontario’s school buildings commissioned by the Ministry of Education, little ground has been recovered. The building deficit for school renovations, repairs and maintenance is growing. The Ministry and the government are complicit in their inaction; the health and safety of Ontario’s students, teachers and administrative officials is now constantly at risk. Currently, our deficit is expanding and our buildings are crumbling. The government must work towards a future where our deficit is crumbling and our buildings expanding.

The adoption of the Safe Schools Act has fundamentally changed the expectations of student behavior. At the heart of these changes has been the philosophy of “zero tolerance,” an idea that has established a foothold in the legislation of several provinces and states. Under the new statutory scheme, students are to be suspended or expelled for a range of infractions, except where “mitigating factors” exist. In particular, Regulation 106/01 outlined that if any one or a combination of the following is recognized then a suspension is not mandatory.

- (a) The pupil does not have the ability to control his or her behaviour;
- (b) The pupil does not have the ability to understand the foreseeable consequences of his or her behaviour; or
- ©) The pupil's continuing presence in the school does not create an unacceptable risk to the safety of any person.

Disability, though, and the accommodations attached to it from either an Individual Education Plan or an Identification, Placement and Review Committee is not considered one of these “mitigating factors.”

In its submission to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's consultation on the right of education, Justice for Children and Youth, a non-profit organization that provides legal representation to low-income children and youth in the Toronto area, observed the following:

Since the implementation of the Safe Schools Act...[there has been] an increase in the number of parents of students, and students reporting suspensions and expulsions to our offices. More specifically, there has been an increase in the number of reported cases of suspensions and expulsions by students identified by their particular boards of education as ‘exceptional’. Quite often students are expelled or suspended for the very behavior which makes them exceptional. For example, in two recent cases parents of students with Tourettes Syndrome reported to us that their children were being disciplined for swearing..., a behaviour which is beyond their control. In both of these cases, the student had been identified as exceptional.

The Opportunity to Succeed, Achieving Barrier Free Education for Students with Disabilities, Ontario Human Rights Commission, October 2003

Results (the results following the percentage who answered ‘yes’ and ‘no’ are a breakdown of the reasons given by those who answered ‘no’)

Grade 9	Yes	96%	Grade 11	Yes	94%
	No	4%		No	6%
	Peer Pressure	25%		Peer Pressure	42%
	Building Conditions	63%		Building Conditions	8%
	School Location	12%		School Location	0%
	Other	0%		Other	25%
Grade 10	Yes	94%	Grade 12	Yes	93%
	No	6%		No	7%
	Peer Pressure	13%		Peer Pressure	25%
	Building Conditions	33%		Building Conditions	45%
	School Location	0%		School Location	5%
	Other	29%		Other	25%
OAC	Yes	97%			
	No	3%			
	Peer Pressure	0%			
	Building Conditions	100%			
	School Location	0%			
	Other	0%			

Impressively, ninety-six percent (96%) of grade nine students reported feeling safe in their learning environments and school setting; this suggests that many grade nine students feel welcomed in their school communities and are not as pervasive a target for hazing and indecent assault from senior students as recent media reports have claimed. As responses from each grade are correlated, trends intimate that as students move into senior grades, safety concerns resulting from building conditions and peer pressure are more apparent.

While many students conveyed feeling quite safe, an average of five percent (5%) confessed they did not share the confidence of their peers in the education systems ability to provide an environment removed from discrimination, peer pressure, and health and safety concerns that arise from the condition of school buildings. This number, though not seemingly large, represents nearly 40 000 students. A sense of urgency must prevail.

Across all contributing factors, the state of school maintenance and the livability of learning environments dominated the reasons students gave for not feeling safe. These findings are similar to the conclusions reached by a number of other stakeholder representatives, including the Education Equality Task Force and People for Education. There appears to be a consensus: students need a safer learning environment and as such school boards require adequate funding levels for building renewal.

Also of identifiable interest to the Survey Report were the number of students who connected their feeling of insecurity with peer pressure and behavioural related issues. Concern of this nature was sustained considerably throughout all grades, though in varying degrees.

Recommendations:

Almost 5% of students do not feel safe in their school environment, meaning that 40 000 students feel as though they are at risk. This number is comprised of students who feel unsafe due to the threat of unsatisfactory building conditions, school location and peer pressure.

Students are not alone in their feeling of insecurity for the condition of their learning environments. Teachers, parents and school administrators have very clearly identified that building renewal is a matter of immediate importance. It is therefore recommended;

- 4 Building renewal grants be updated in accordance with the recommendations found in the Education Equality Task Force's report on the Funding Formula.**
- 5 The \$25 Million announced for the 2003-2004 operating year by the Ministry of Education for building renewal be fully allocated as was intended.**
- 6 The Ministry of Education endorse the recommendations reached by the Expert Panel on funding for building renewal and implement them over a three-year period.**

Every student comes from an equally different background in terms of language, ethnicity, social factors, socio-economic factors, culture, and values. Students should not feel segregated as a result of these differences, and therefore put in a position to be the target of violence or bullying. A community where differences are celebrated should be fostered through educational means. Students must be held responsible for their actions in accordance with provincial standards for conduct,

though framework must also exist that recognizes, appreciates and develops strategies for minimizing the negative effects of punishment without diligence. This framework must include the opportunity for early resolution of conflict arising from a suspension or expulsion. Alternative dispute measures must exist that recognize the exceptional circumstances of students and work co-operatively to a successful resolution. The following is therefore recommended:

- 7 The Ministry of Education adopt an anti-oppression protocol, through consultation with students, teachers, school administration and parents, in order to provide protectorates against, but not limited to, racism, classism, sexism, abilism, and homophobia, in order to foster a community free of violence and bullying.**
- 8 The Ministry of Education develop a strategy through consultation with students, parents and school administrations, that presents mechanisms for alternative dispute resolution to be offered to students, parents and board administrative officials, as a substitute for suspension or expulsion.**

Identification, Placement and Review Committee's (IPRC) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have been established for a specific purpose: to accommodate students with special needs and disciplines within a liberal framework of the education system; IEPs and IPRCs must be offered the opportunity to work towards this goal within the Safe Schools Act. Students with unavoidable behavioural characteristics must be given diligence when being punished under the Safe Schools Act. The behavioural expectations of students must be valued equally. Students who have been identified as exception under the Education Act and who are in contravention of the Safe Schools Act must first be accommodated in accordance with their applicable IEP and/or IPRC. The following is therefore recommended:

- 9 Special education students need to be dealt with due diligence under the Safe Schools Act.**
 - a. School boards must accommodate their identified needs first and then, should they continue to present risks to the health and well-being of the learning environment, follow with an evaluation of the risk(s) and action taken thereto.**
 - b. School boards conduct annual reviews of those special education students having been suspended or expelled throughout the year in order to ensure that flexibility is being given within current board practice.**

QUESTION 7: DO YOU TAKE THE BUS OR PUBLIC TRANSIT TO SCHOOL? IF YES, HOW LONG IS YOUR AVERAGE ONE-WAY TRIP?

Background:

The seventh question of the survey asked students whether or not they relied on a mode of transportation other than their own to travel to school. If they did rely on public or school organized transit, then they were asked to provide us with the length of time they are forced to commute. The length of time required to travel to and from school has been a growing concern for students and school administrators.

The amount of time spent on the bus is time that could be spent participating in other arenas. Students could be focusing that time on their studies, extracurricular activities, community involvement and/or at home with their families. It is important that students spend as little time as possible commuting and maximum time living their lives.

Students are required to be in school for approximately six hours. In Question 9 of the survey, we found that many students are spending upwards of one to two hours on homework per night. Altogether, students work approximately seven to eight hours long, not including commuting times.

The Ontario Employment Standards Act sets a maximum work day at 8 hours. Employers can only ask for more hours when both parties have agreed. Students need enough free time to be able to live their lives freely and to be able to be involved in all activities they are willing and able to.

In the People For Education's 2003 Secondary School Tracking Report, it is noted that long bus rides are detrimental to students health and well-being and that credible funding has dropped significantly since 1993:

Long bus rides cause a number of problems. There is evidence that hours spent on buses have a detrimental effect on homework, marks, sleep patterns, study habits, and fitness levels. There are some cases where long bus rides cannot be avoided, but in many cases they are a result of cost-cutting measures.

Province-wide, transportation costs approximately \$575 million. According to the provincial auditor, funding for transportation declined 7% between 1993 and 1999. In the same period the number of students increased significantly, as did the costs of fuel, maintenance and insurance. The effect has been a dramatic decline in real funding for transportation.

People for Education, 2003 School Tracking Report, p. 47

The lack of adequate funding for transportation, resulting in increased bussing times, has varying negative effects on a student's education, health and social life. School boards have also identified this as a pressing concern; many school boards are forced to spread minimal funding over a range of transportation services. The continuum of transportation services includes special needs student transportation, which comes out of the transportation budget and not the budget for special needs students. This need to fund for special needs students out of the regular grant draws money away from the desperately under-funded transportation grant and fails to take into account the expense of special transportation for boards with a large number of special needs students.

In many school boards across the province, co-operation between co-terminus boards has resulted in a very cost-effective approach to transportation funding. Dr. Rozanski reported the following:

I am impressed with the many co-operative transportation arrangements school boards have developed over the past few years. Regional consortia and other co-operative measures demonstrate a high level of cost-effectiveness in the spending of education funds. I believe that school boards and the Ministry of Education should work together to develop a province-wide system of regional transportation consortia.

*Dr Mordechai Rozanski
December 10, 2002
Report of the Education Equality Task Force*

The co-operation between co-terminus school boards does not only result in a savings of funds but quite often in shorter bus rides. A co-operation between school boards in the same region could potentially improve students education, health and ability to spend time freely.

Results:

Northern Ontario		Golden Horseshoe	
Under 15 minutes	36.8%	Under 15 minutes	32.6%
16-30 minutes	41.0%	16-30 minutes	40.4%
30-60 minutes	22.2%	30-60 minutes	22.6%
Over 60 minutes	0.0%	Over 60 minutes	4.4%
Southwestern		Eastern Ontario	
Under 15 minutes	29.6%	Under 15 minutes	40.2%
16-30 minutes	37.4%	16-30 minutes	30.8%
30-60 minutes	26.8%	30-60 minutes	20.0%
Over 60 minutes	2.2%	Over 60minutes	9.2%

The results of the survey show that an unacceptable number of students are finding themselves commuting for hours in any given school day. Across the province, bus rides are long. No geographical area seems to be able to provide refuge from the tremendous bussing times. In Northern Ontario, where bussing distances are potentially larger, bussing times are kept under an hour with the majority of students finding themselves with 30 to 60 minute trips each way. Southwestern Ontario seems to have polar bus trip times with the largest majority of students on the bus for under 15 minutes while also containing the highest percentage of bus rides over an hour in length each way.

Recommendations:

Students are spending upwards of two hours commuting to and from school. This interruption in their day has been proven to have countless negative effects on a student's marks, sleep patterns, study habits, and fitness levels. It is important that students spend as little time as possible commuting and maximum time earning OSSD requirements and focusing themselves to productive initiatives in their communities. Therefore, the following is recommended:

- 10 That the government follow through with the recommendations found within the Rozanski Report and commit \$80 million in increased transportation spending. The use of geographic co-operation between school boards must be encouraged by the government in order to make the transportation funds as effective as possible.**

It is not the government's sole responsibility to provide students with quick, reliable transportation to and from the regular school day. Extra-curricular activities are a vital aspect of a complete education. Support from the province is necessary in ensuring that students have the opportunity to take part in these important programs. Students are unlikely to be given the support to participate due to the inability of boards to provide transportation from school for events taking place outside the hours of the regular school day. Transportation should not be a factor in their ability to participate in school activities. Therefore, the following is recommended:

- 11 That on top of the \$80 million increase in transportation funding, the government consult with school boards in order to provide allocations for additional funding to provide late busing services.**

QUESTION 8: AT SCHOOL, WHEN YOU SEEK GUIDANCE, WHICH STAFF MEMBER DO YOU GO TO SEE?**Background:**

The eighth question of the survey asked students from whom they seek guidance from in their school environment. Respondents were given the option of choosing from the following; guidance counselor, teacher, TAG/TAP teacher, principal or other. The number of students who seek guidance from their designated TAG/TAP teacher can measure recent implementation of the TAG/TAP program and its success.

Included in the education reforms of the last eight years, the responsibility of providing guidance for students has switched from guidance counselors' hands into those of teachers. In Grade 10, students receive assistance in course planning from teachers through the mandatory half credit career-planning course. They are also expected to create an annual education plan, which includes making course selection choices with their TAG/TAP advisor. The TAG/TAP advisor is meant to act as a liaison to the guidance office and to do as much as they can to help the student with post-secondary and high school planning. In the event that the TAG/TAP advisor could not help or the student needs additional advice, they are supposed to be referred back to the guidance office.

The success of either the guidance or TAG/TAP program can be measured by the success of students completing the OSSD in four years. Students who have failed to set an appropriate course plan or who are unsure of what they wish to do after high school could have benefitted from a stronger implementation of either program.

In the first question of the survey, it was determined that a large number of students plan on attending a fifth and/or sixth year of high school. Indeed, this is a sign of a lack of guidance and preparation in making the all important course selections for grade 11 where students must select the appropriate course stream in order to fit university requirements. The cause of students failing to complete the OSSD in four years has given rise to several negative outcomes. Students are unaware of what they would like to do after high school. The increased competition for university positions is forcing students to remain within the system with the goal being to upgrade marks for acceptance. They find themselves faced with the challenge of changing from the applied to academic stream or find themselves in the inappropriate stream for their post-secondary destination. These negative outcomes are intended to be sidelined by the TAG/TAP program.

Results:

Grade 9		Grade 10	
Guidance Counselor	59%	Guidance Counselor	67%
Teacher	30%	Teacher	30%
TAG/TAP Teacher	4%	TAG/TAP Teacher	1%
Principal	4%	Principal	1%
Other	3%	Other	1%
Grade 11		Grade 12	
Guidance Counselor	52%	Guidance Counselor	45%
Teacher	42%	Teacher	45%
TAG/TAP Teacher	2%	TAG/TAP Teacher	4%
Principal	1%	Principal	1%
Other	3%	Other	9%
OAC			
Guidance Counselor	34%		
Teacher	49%		
TAG/TAP Teacher	5%		
Principal	7%		
Other	6%		

It has been found that the TAG/TAP program has not been successfully implemented in most Ontario high schools and that many have ceased to use it. We have found that students are using the TAG/TAP program less and less and that schools appear to be refocusing their student advisement programs. There was an unforeseen offloading of work and leadership for the TAG/TAP program onto guidance counselors. This has created a vacuum that has left many students without the proper guidance expected of the program and an offloading of unforeseen work onto the laps of guidance counselors.

Recommendations

The implementation of the Teacher Advisor Group/Teacher Advisor Program (TAG/TAP) has been unsuccessful in drawing students to their designated advisor for school and career related advice. This failure has left many students unsure of how to charter their high school career, as well as placing an unfair expectation on guidance counselors to alleviate the growing divide. Significant time, effort and financial resources were dedicated to the promise of fundamental changes to the Ontario curriculum. Having recently witnessed the graduation of the first class to experience these changes, an inordinate number of students returned for a fifth year. Mechanisms must exist that support students to complete their OSSD to be adequately prepared for post-secondary education and to have done this within four

years. Workplace bound students have had the disadvantage of being unable to take advantage of the Workplace stream courses due to their vast minority in our school communities. In our communities, there is a huge focus on the need to attend a post-secondary institution. Students need to be aware of the opportunities available in the workplace and through alternate accreditation and the workplace stream. Therefore, the following is recommended;

- 1 That the TAG/TAP program implementation is re-evaluated through consultation with students, teachers and guidance officials so that the impediment to its implementation can be alleviated. Action must be taken immediately in order to ensure that the problem does not persist further than this school year. School guidance departments, along with TAG/TAP need to work together in order to provide students with the appropriate guidance so they are prepared for course stream selection and to proceed into post-secondary and workplace positions after four years.**

QUESTION 9: ON AVERAGE HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU SPEND ON HOMEWORK PER NIGHT?

Background:

The ninth question of the survey asked students how much time they spend on homework per night. The amount of time students spend on homework is indicative of their ability to handle the curriculum as well as the intensity of the courses in which they are enrolled.

Many school boards have begun to conceive appropriate durations for homework per evening, varying between grades. According to the Toronto District School Board's 'Homework Foundation Statement,' students in grades 7 to 9 should expect between 45 and 90 minutes of homework per night while students in grade 10 to 12 should expect 60 to 120 minutes per night. These numbers are based on their interpretation of the OSSD curriculum.

Students are required to be in school for approximately six hours. In question seven of the survey, we found that many students are spending upwards of 30 to 60 minutes commuting to school each way per day. That creates a day approximately seven to eight hours long for students, not including time spent on homework.

The Ontario Employment Standards Act sets a maximum work day at 8 hours. Employers can only ask for more hours when both parties have agreed. Students need enough free time to be able to live their lives freely and to be able to be involved in all activities in which they are willing and able to participate.

Results:

Grade 9		Grade 10	
0 to 30 minutes	15%	0 to 30 minutes	13%
30 to 60 minutes	27%	30 to 60 minutes	26%
60 to 120 minutes	32%	60 to 120 minutes	34%
120 to 180 minutes	21%	120 to 180 minutes	15%
180 minutes or more	5%	180 minutes or more	12%
Grade 11		Grade 12	
0 to 30 minutes	14%	0 to 30 minutes	12%
30 to 60 minutes	36%	30 to 60 minutes	24%
60 to 120 minutes	32%	60 to 120 minutes	37%
120 to 180 minutes	16%	120 to 180 minutes	12%
180 minutes or more	16%	180 minutes or more	5%

OAC

0 to 30 minutes	14%
30 to 60 minutes	25%
60 to 120 minutes	29%
120 to 180 minutes	18%
180 minutes or more	6%

The results are consistent across all grades. It appears that students are spending similar amounts of time on homework as others in different grades with different curriculum requirements. The majority of students spend at least an hour on homework. Comparing these results to the standard work week, while keeping in mind the large commuting times for most students to and from school, many students are potentially working more than 40 hours on school work between Monday and Friday; this does not include homework done on weekends.

This consistency in the results implies that in any given student population, there are a comparable number of students capable of completing their homework in the allotted times.

Recommendations

The implementation of standards for homework assigned per night is ill conceived in that students' abilities differ tremendously. A good grade is measurable of both a student's ability and their commitment to their studies. As such, a standard allotment for homework hours per night would fail to take into account students individual learning pace and skills.

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of the Teacher Advisor Group/Teacher Advisor Program (TAG/TAP) has been unsuccessful in drawing students to their designated advisor for school and career related advice. This failure has left many students unsure of how to charter their high school career, as well as placing an unfair expectation on guidance counselors to alleviate the growing divide. Significant time, effort and financial resources were dedicated to the promise of fundamental changes to the Ontario curriculum. Having recently witnessed the graduation of the first class to experience these changes, an inordinate number of students returned for a fifth year. Mechanisms must exist that support students to complete their OSSD to be adequately prepared for post-secondary education and to have done this within four years. Workplace bound students have had the disadvantage of being unable to take advantage of the Workplace stream courses due to their vast minority in our school communities. In our communities, there is a huge focus on the need to attend a post-secondary institution. Students need to be aware of the opportunities available in the workplace and through alternate accreditation and the workplace stream. Therefore, the following is recommended;

- 1 That the TAG/TAP program implementation be re-evaluated through consultation with students, teachers and guidance officials so that the impediment to its implementation can be alleviated. Action must be taken immediately in order to ensure that the problem does not persist further than this school year. School guidance departments, along with TAG/TAP need to work together in order to provide students with the appropriate guidance so they are prepared for course stream selection and to proceed into post-secondary and workplace positions after four years.**

_____ Access to post-secondary education should be blinded by income and solely based on merit. Students from different family incomes must not be limited in their future. With education, the future of a student should only be based on willingness and ability. The simple increase in OSAP support, as well as Bursaries and Scholarships, do not make post-secondary education accessible to all, nor does it help solve the threat of increasing debt after post-secondary graduation. Therefore, the following is recommended;

- 2 That an action plan be formed and followed with strict goals and time lines for tuition deflation, with the ultimate goal being the lowering of tuition rates in Ontario to the national average so all students from different family incomes are not limited in their future.**

Even though guidelines outlining what activities qualify for community service do exist within every board, the methodology, standards and framework surrounding these guidelines vary considerably. Criteria for acceptable community involvement hours differ between school boards effectively making the completion of the OSSD different for students across the province. If an Ontario Secondary School Diploma is to be given equally to those qualified, the qualifications for an OSSD must be valued equally. It should not be up to individual school boards to set these standards, but rather the responsibility of the Ministry to create criteria equally applicable across the province. An OSSD must be attained with the same requirements, whether a student is in attendance at a rural, urban, public, Catholic, French or English board of education. With such standards in place, organizations and groups looking for volunteer support will know that students in all schools will benefit from helping their cause, making it easier for them to advertise for support and for students to find community posts most beneficial to them. It is therefore recommended that:

- 3 That qualifications for the community involvement component of an Ontario Secondary School Diploma be updated into a provincial standard for all Ontario students so that there is no debate as to what is an acceptable form of involvement or what a successful completion of the OSSD means.**

Almost 5% of students do not feel safe in their school environment, meaning that 40 000 students feel as though they are at risk. This number is comprised of students who feel unsafe due to the threat of unsatisfactory building conditions, school location and peer pressure.

Students are not alone in their feeling of insecurity for the condition of their learning environments. Teachers, parents and school administrators have very clearly identified that building renewal is a matter of immediate importance. It is therefore recommended;

- 4 Building renewal grants be updated in accordance with the recommendations found in the Education Equality Task Force's report on the Funding Formula.**
- 5 The \$25 Million announced for the 2003-2004 operating year by the Ministry of Education for building renewal be fully allocated as was intended.**
- 6 The Ministry of Education endorse the recommendations reached by the Expert Panel on funding for building renewal and implement them over a three-year period.**

Every student comes from an equally different background in terms of language, ethnicity, social factors, socio-economic factors, culture, and values. Students should not feel segregated as a result of these differences, and therefore put in a position to be the target of violence or bullying. A community where differences are celebrated should be fostered through educational means. Students must be held responsible for their actions in accordance with provincial standards for conduct, though framework must also exist that recognizes, appreciates and develops strategies for minimizing the negative effects of punishment without diligence. This framework must include the opportunity for early resolution of conflict arising from a suspension or expulsion. Alternative dispute measures must exist that recognize the exceptional circumstances of students and work co-operatively to a successful resolution. The following is therefore recommended:

- 7 The Ministry of Education adopt an anti-oppression protocol, through consultation with students, teachers, school administration and parents, in order to provide protectorates against, but not limited to, racism, classism, sexism, abilism, and homophobia, in order to foster a community free of violence and bullying.**
- 8 The Ministry of Education develop a strategy through consultation with students, parents and school administrations, that presents mechanisms for alternative dispute resolution to be offered to students, parents and board administrative officials, as a substitute for suspension or expulsion.**

Identification, Placement and Review Committee's (IPRC) and Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have been established for a specific purpose: to accommodate students with special needs and disciplines within a liberal framework of the education system; IEPs and IPRCs must be offered the opportunity to work towards this goal within the Safe Schools Act. Students with unavoidable behavioural characteristics must be given diligence when being punished under the Safe Schools Act. The behavioural expectations of students must be valued equally. Students who have been identified as exception under the Education Act and who are in contravention of the Safe Schools Act must first be accommodated in accordance with their applicable IEP and/or IPRC. The following is therefore recommended:

- 9 Special education students need to be dealt with due diligence under the Safe Schools Act.**
 - a. School boards must accommodate their identified needs first and then, should they continue to present risks to the health and well-being of the learning environment, follow with an evaluation of the risk(s) and action taken thereto.**

- b. School boards conduct annual reviews of those special education students having been suspended or expelled throughout the year in order to ensure that flexibility is being given within current board practice.**

Students are spending upwards of two hours commuting to and from school. This interruption in their day has been proven to have countless negative effects on a students marks, sleep patterns, study habits, and fitness levels. It is important that students spend as little time as possible commuting and maximum time earning OSSD requirements and focusing themselves to productive initiatives in their communities. Therefore, the following is recommended:

- 10 That the government follow through with the recommendations found within the Rozanski Report and commit \$80 million in increased transportation spending. The use of geographic co-operation between school boards must be encouraged by the government in order to make the transportation funds as effective as possible.**

It is not the governments sole responsibility to provide students with quick, reliable transportation to and from the regular school day. Extra-curricular activities are a vital aspect of a complete education. Support from the province is necessary in ensuring that students have the opportunity to take part in these important programs. Students are unlikely to be given the support to participate due to the inability of boards to provide transportation from school for events taking place outside the hours of the regular school day. Transportation should not be a factor in their ability to participate in school activities. Therefore, the following is recommended:

- 11 That on top of the \$80 million increase in transportation funding, the government consult with school boards in order to provide allocations for additional funding to provide late busing services.**

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Statistics Canada Caring Canadians. 1997. p.32 (Question 4/5:effects of community involvement)

Crumbling and Aging: Ontario's School Buildings, People for Education (Question 6: school building conditions)

Education Equality Task Force, Final Report: 2002, page 22 (Question 6: Building conditions)

The Right to Succeed: Achieving a Barrier-Free Education for Students with Disabilities, Ontario Human Rights Commission: October 2003, page 22-23. (Question 6: Safe Schools Act, presentation from Justice for Children)

2003 Secondary School Tracking Report, People for Education

*All other references noted accordingly throughout report