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Where do we draw the line?

Over half a billion dollars—that's the total amount boards reported raising through "school-generated funds" in 2006.

School boards are now required to report on the amount of money they receive through fundraising and other "school-generated" funds. These school-generated funds can include anything from sales of chocolate-covered almonds to proceeds from vending machines and boards' charitable foundations.

In their audited financial statements for 2005/06, boards reported fundraising **\$567,040,304!**

Information from People for Education's surveys shows a wide range in the amounts schools raise, but it also shows that a very small proportion of schools raised a large proportion of the provincial total.

Fundraising for schools – **Where do we draw the line?**

- ◆ choir shirts
- ◆ team uniforms
- ◆ free milk
- ◆ art supplies
- ◆ soccer balls
- ◆ field trips
- ◆ library books
- ◆ computers
- ◆ classroom supplies
- ◆ textbooks
- ◆ education assistants
- ◆ art instruction
- ◆ programs for students
- ◆ a new library
- ◆ portables
- ◆ a new gym
- ◆ science labs
- ◆ building renovation
- ◆ school buildings
- ◆ teachers



New policies raise the stakes

In April, the Peel District School Board introduced a new fundraising policy which allows parents to raise funds for things like science labs, libraries and even new additions to school buildings.

Local fundraising for capital projects introduces the possibility of a two-tier system—where boards in wealthier communities and in communities with large corporations can raise more money than boards in less well-off areas.

Is relying on fundraising fair?

Fundraising for "extras" can be an effective activity for engaging parents. But augmenting school budgets with fundraising, corporate donations, sponsorships or fees may lead to widening inequities among schools.

Schools adept at garnering sponsorships, advertising and grants may have significantly better resources than other schools. Schools in high-income communities can raise sometimes hundreds of thousands of dollars to improve their arts and phys ed programs, stock their libraries and pay for school trips and enrichment activities. Even the costs of programs for students-at-risk are sometimes now covered through philanthropy rather than as integral parts of public education budgets.

Private money in public schools

Fees, fundraising and philanthropy are providing support in schools across the province. But it may be time for a new conversation about how far we want this type of support to go if the fundamental premise of equity is to be maintained in the public education system.

Tell us what you think. Answer our poll at www.peopleforeducation.com.

The 10th Annual Report on Ontario's Schools

The good news: there are more phys ed teachers, fewer students on waiting lists for special education and smaller class sizes in Ontario schools this year.

The bad news: fewer ESL students are getting needed support, school libraries continue to go without needed staff and arts programs haven't rebounded from years of cuts.

People for Education's *2007 Annual Report on Schools* shows that Ontario schools are thriving in some areas and that most Ontario students are doing very well academically compared to previous years, and compared to students in other countries.

Ten years of keeping track

People for Education has been keeping track of programs and resources in Ontario schools since 1997. Every year, surveys have been sent to school councils and principals in each of the province's 4,800 French, English and Catholic publicly-funded schools, covering everything from class sizes to fundraising.

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Flexibility needed in class size policy

Cap on primary class sizes difficult for many boards to meet

Class sizes are down this year in most parts of the province.

People for Education data shows that overall class sizes in Ontario's elementary schools have declined fairly consistently over the last ten years, with an acceleration in the decline since 2004/05.

In elementary schools:

- 58% of kindergarten to grade 3 classes had 20 students or fewer, a substantial improvement since 2004/05;
- 51% of grade 4 to 8 classes had 25 students or fewer, also an improvement since 2004/05; and
- 8% of grade 4 to 8 classes had 31 students or more.

Primary class size

In 2005, the province introduced a cap on class sizes in the primary grades stipulating that 90% of a school board's Kindergarten to Grade 3 classes have no more than 20 students, and the remaining 10% no more than 23.

The new class size policy has cost just over \$270 million, and while it has been

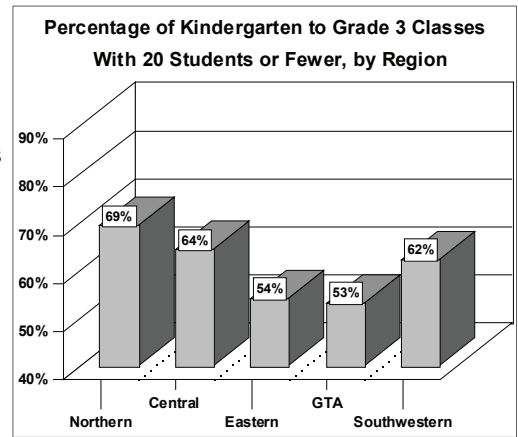
successful in bringing down class sizes, the reorganization necessary to implement such a massive system change in such a short period of time has been a challenge for many boards and schools.

Boards with growing enrolment have found it difficult to provide the physical space for the new classes, and boards with lower enrolments report an increase in split classes with three or more grades.

Split classes

One of the unintended consequences of hard caps on class size has been an increase in the number of split grades. This is particularly true in small schools and in schools with specialized programs, such as French Immersion.

- Province-wide, the percentage of classes with 3 or more grades has risen from 5% in 2006, to 8% this year.
- In northern schools, on average much smaller than schools in the rest of the province, the percentage of split classes with 3 or more grades has nearly doubled – from 12% in 2006,



to 23% this year.

This spring, the Ministry of Education announced that some exceptions to the primary class size cap would be allowed, particularly in cases where boards are struggling to provide the physical space for new classrooms. It appears that the Ministry will deal with boards on a case-by-case basis.

The full class size report is available at www.peopleforeducation.com.

Education kudos for Canada!

An international report has ranked Canada the second highest country in the world for children's educational well-being. The UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre recently released *An overview of child well-being in rich countries*.

In the educational assessment of 24 advanced industrial nations, three factors were examined: international test results for 15-year-olds in the areas of reading, mathematics, and science; the percentage of adolescents aged 15-19 remaining in edu-

cation; and the percentage of 15- to 19-year-olds not in education, training or employment, or who are expecting to find low-skilled work.

Canada ranked just below Belgium. The United Kingdom and the United States were in the bottom half of the rankings.

The report can be seen at www.unicef-icdc.org/publications/pdf/rc7_eng.pdf.



the conference: People for Education's 11th annual conference is on Nov. 3 at York University, and the line-up is looking great! Author John Ralston Saul will deliver the keynote address, and some wonderful expert speakers will be discussing topics like:

- Is homework hurting our kids?
- How you can support your child's education
- How to get parent involvement funding
- Keeping Ontario's small schools open
- School council challenges
- Helping boys do better in school
- Special education issues and solutions.

You can register now. Just email jan@peopleforeducation.com. Look on our website for conference updates.

'Report', continued from p. 1

This year's *Annual Report on Schools* includes survey results from nearly 1,000 schools and information from Ontario's Ministry of Education, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) and Statistics Canada.

The challenge

There are no recommendations in this year's report, but it raises a number of questions:

- Ontario's current policy focus is on targets for test scores and graduation rates—Are there other ways we could measure success?
- How should we define public education in the 21st century?
- If we were to imagine the perfect school, what would it look like and what kinds of resources and programs would it have in it?

Over the course of the next year, we will invite parents and the general public to be part of a "new conversation" about public education, where we can explore these topics and more.

A one-page "snapshot" synopsising the report will be sent to schools across the province. The full report is available on the People for Education website at www.peopleforeducation.com.

Highlights from the 2007 Annual Report on Schools

Test scores

- 90% of elementary students passed their Grade 3 and 6 EQAO tests.
- In international reading tests, Canadian 15-year-olds place 3rd compared to 70 other countries. Ontario students are above the Canadian average.

Class size

- 58% of primary classes had 20 students or fewer, and 98% had 25 students or fewer, a substantial improvement since 2004/05.
- 20% of Kindergarten to Grade 3 classes in Northern Ontario were combined classes with three or more grades, up from 12% last year.

English as a second language

- There has been a 29% increase since 2000 in the percentage of elementary schools with ESL students. Over the same period the percentage of schools with ESL teachers declined 23%.

Specialist teachers

- 41% of elementary schools have a physical education teacher, a return to 1997 levels when the funding formula was implemented.
- 46% of elementary schools have a

music teacher, continuing an upward trend over the last three years, but still below 1997 when 58% of schools had music teachers.

- The average ratio of students to guidance counsellors is 394 to 1 in secondary school.

Libraries

- Only 57% of Ontario elementary schools have a teacher-librarian, compared to 80% in 1997/98.
- 73% of secondary schools have a teacher-librarian, compared to 78% in 2000/01.

Special education

- The average ratio of special education students to special education teachers is 30.4 to 1 in elementary schools, an improvement since last year, but much higher than in 2000/01, when the ratio was 22.4 to 1.
- In secondary school, the ratio of special ed students to teachers is 51.2 to 1.
- There are approximately 36,000 elementary students on waiting lists for special education services, a decline from last year.

School council solutions

When school council members get together, they often focus on the perennial problems for school councils: "The same five people come to meetings," "Our principal doesn't listen to us," "In high school, parents stop being involved," and so on.

At a conference in South Porcupine hosted by the Ontario North East DSB, parents focused instead on the solutions. Among the long list of ideas:

- In September, hold a meeting with the principal and the school council members to go over everyone's expectations – who writes the agenda, who has final say about it, what can be discussed at meetings, what kinds of materials can go home from the school council, who decides how the fund-

raised money is spent, etc.

- Provide a "welcome to the school" package to all incoming parents at the beginning of the year.
- Establish a buddy system matching parents new to the school with parents who were new last year.
- Remember that school council meetings are not the most important part of parent involvement.
- Instead of worrying about how many people come to meetings (it will always be the same 5 or 10, no matter what you do), concentrate on getting information out to parents – by email, newsletters, or even by mail.



- Stagger the meeting days so the meeting doesn't always fall on someone's soccer night or art class.

- Stagger the meeting times so that at least once a year the meeting is right after school to accommodate parents who need to be home at bed time.
- Provide baby-sitting, food, translators, etc.
- Try to have a class rep in each class who is responsible for letting the other parents in the class know what's going on in the school.
- Start a parent email list (collect the email addresses at the first school concert or first parent teacher night) as an effective way to keep lines of communication open between school and home.

Imagine a school...

Last year, Kathleen Gould Lundy, a teacher and consultant for over 30 years, asked 27 high school students: *What could high schools look like if we got it right?* Then she asked them to make a film.

Most of the students were in grade 12, living in either Halifax, Toronto or Vancouver. They were a racially, ethnically, economically and academically diverse group. In the film, each student tells the story of a critical moment in their school experience. They use these

“critical moments” to imagine a new way schools could work. They created a 10-point list and they hope the list will inspire educators to re-imagine our schools for the future. The students said:

1. Teach us.
2. Allow us to make mistakes.
3. Don't overwhelm us.
4. Extra-curricular activities are important.



5. Respect us.
6. Make evaluation procedures transparent.
7. Don't make assumptions about us without getting to know us.
8. We are vulnerable.
9. Teachers make all of the difference.
10. We want to succeed.

You can read the full article at: www.cea-ace.ca/media/Imagine_School_Fall06.pdf. The DVD is available from the Canadian Education Association: www.cea-ace.ca.

The month of April provided a wealth of learning opportunities for parents across the province. Parents went to conferences in South Porcupine, Ottawa, Merrickville, Lindsay, Toronto, and Niagara Falls, to name a few.



Inner-City School Conference, a three-day conference for parents and educators. With an inspiring opening speech by Stephen Lewis, participants had the opportunity to share best practices and learn more about the challenges facing inner-city schools at a wide variety of workshops. One of the outcomes from this conference was the creation of a national action plan for inner-city education, which will be announced in the near future.

The **Ottawa Catholic School Parents' Association** had a very successful forum, with more than 300 parents, principals, vice-principals, superintendents and trustees participating. Organiser Joanne MacEwan said, “Everyone agreed that it was a very worthwhile workshop and we are already discussing doing a similar event for next year. It was truly a great team builder with tons of great ideas for councils.”

At the end of the month, school council members, principals, and superintendents from many school boards attended a School Council Symposium hosted by the **Thames Valley District School Council**. Kathleen Wynne, the Minister of Edu-

cation, delivered the keynote address, then participants shared their achievements and ideas for promoting parent involvement.

Parents in **South Porcupine, Lindsay, Merrickville, and Niagara Falls** also organized workshops and forums for local parents. Many of these events were supported with funding from the Ministry's Parents Reaching Out grants, and Joanne MacEwan may have put it best when she said, “Parent engagement money well spent!”

Congratulations to all of the organizers and co-ordinators who spent many long hours planning these informative and engaging workshops. Keep up the great work – making sure that parents have access to the information they need to be actively involved in their children's education.

Become a member of People for Education! Together, we can make public education in Ontario great!

When you become a member you will:

- receive a subscription to the People for Education Newsletter (5 issues), and first notice of People for Education events.
- receive information about Ontario's publicly funded schools, new education policy, and the latest education research.
- join a dynamic organization with ten years experience advocating for strong public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.
- help bring parents' voices to government education policy tables.

annual membership rates

individuals

- Individual \$25
- Sustaining \$50
- Benefactor \$100
- Lifetime \$1000
- Basic (seniors, unwaged) \$10

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