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The Honourable Dalton McGuinty
Room 281, Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1

The Honourable Kathleen Wynne
Ministry of Education, 22nd Floor, Mowat Block
900 Bay Street
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1L2

May 11, 2009

Dear Premier McGuinty and Minister Wynne,

I am writing to follow up on our letter of April 7th expressing concerns about the *School Information Finder* on the Ministry of Education website.

Since we posted the letter, 1,475 individuals from 214 cities and towns in Ontario, have signed on in agreement. Over 600 signatories added comments. The people raising concerns about the website identified themselves as parents, teachers, principals, school councils, parent groups, university students, university professors, trustees, and members of municipal organizations.

We were happy to receive a response from the Minister about our concerns, though we are disappointed that the *School Information Finder* remains on the Ministry website. We are glad to hear that your government is committed to holding discussions to determine how to improve the finder and make it more useful to parents.

We are looking forward to an extensive consultation that allows parents and citizens to have input into the types of information that they expect the province to provide about Ontario's publicly-funded schools.

As the "finder" is still functioning on the Ministry of Education website, we hope the consultations will be well underway before the end of the school year.

I am including in this letter a very small sample of the concerns the signatories raised. I am forwarding all of the comments and the names of the signatories electronically.

Thank you for your timely attention to this matter, and we hope to be able to let the signatories know soon about how and where they can have input into the revised site.

Yours truly,

Annie Kidder
Executive Director

A selection of comments from People for Education's open letter about the Ministry of Education School Information Finder

I am profoundly surprised and disappointed by this website. I have found this government's commitment to public education positive and encouraging... [But] what is most depressing about this move is that the government does not seem to have noticed what has happened in other systems. We...have seen in England and the U.S. how this philosophy of pitting schools against each other has hugely contributed to an overall erosion in the quality and support of public education. We should be learning from these errors, and working to make schools equal in their resources and their capacity to offer all children a rich and equitable education in the public system of Ontario.

Parent, Toronto

Hard to imagine what necessary or useful good this site can promote. Easy to understand the harm it can cause.

Parent, Waterloo

I believe that the Ministry and the government may unwittingly be promoting the comparison of schools by school shopping parents based on ethnicity and socio-economic class. This can act to encourage the sort of social siloing which is contrary to the precepts of public education. It may be that the government means this additional data as a service so that EQAO scores can be seen in context. However, this is not necessarily how it will be primarily used by most parents. I have to ask what public goal is served by the government's publication of such data and promotion of its use. I ask the Minister and the government to reconsider

Ottawa, trustee, former chair

...the School Information Finder portion of the Ministry of Education website... sends the message that the Ministry of Education condones and even encourages comparison of schools according to immigration, income and education backgrounds. This contradicts statements by the current and former Ministers of Education and it undermines the values that a public education system is expected to uphold. Please remove the School Information Finder site immediately.

Teacher, Toronto

The SIF is not fulfilling the function for which it was originally designed, namely, to allow teachers and principals to share ideas and best practices. When it was first demonstrated over two years ago the intention was to let the staffs of schools with similar demographics compare the approaches they used with students. Perhaps there are other links and access points not visible to the public. If not, it certainly appears that the tool, as I have seen it, provides rankable data that is already published in some newspapers and journals.

Retired principal, Toronto

I am thoroughly discouraged that someone at the Ministry did not foresee the potential for abuse and misuse of this information. We do not want parents "shopping" for the "best" school! We want all schools to offer programs and curriculum to meet the needs of all students. PLEASE revise and think long and hard about the damage that will be done by this kind of information!!!!!!

Parent, Brampton

I am very concerned about WHY we are spending money creating this site - what problem is it meant to solve? What is it supposed to be used for? Instead of comparing schools and creating competition, how about we work on helping ALL schools improve and excel? I am very concerned about us creating a public school system where parents try to get their kids into the "best schools" - and especially if this "best" might be related to perceived advantages and disadvantages of having your children interact with children from specific social and cultural groups. Please remove this website, at least until consultation is completed.

Teacher, Kingston

A selection of comments from People for Education's open letter about the Ministry of Education School Information Finder

I fail to see how this site is doing a service to public education or my school. The site's demographic information showing our higher than provincial average poverty levels and lower than provincial average parental education levels could really serve to ghettoize schools like ours. And realistically we accomplish SO much at our small rural school: we have 4 concert bands, regular community performances, guitar club, sports teams, environmental leadership - how disheartening to have our "school achievement" boiled down to only our grade 3 and 6 EQAO results by the Ministry - we "achieve" so much more than that here- is there any opportunity for our real achievements as a school community to be reflected on the site?

Teacher, Ameliasburgh

I fail to see what naming the ethnic component, or economic class of those who make up a majority of the school population can do to help parents in their choice of school, other than to entrench class and ethnic differences in our society. Every parent who buys into prevailing stereotypes can now act on them with ease. It betrays the spirit of Public Education and indeed, the spirit of a tolerant Canadian society. Frankly, it betrays the Liberal ideology espoused by your government, as well. I join with many others in urging you to retreat from this position.

School council, Toronto

It is outrageous that the province is suggesting that schools be judged by such a narrow set of standards. Even more outrageous is the implication that these are the most important standards...

Citizen, Lansdowne

Making this selection of school data publicly available does more for real estate values than educational values.

Faculty member, York University

Nothing in this list for parents will improve the education or assist student learning in any way

Grandparent, Bright's Cove

The government should be supporting public education by reminding people that public schools were not set up to provide children with service as customers, but to support the idea of equality of opportunity that is fundamental to our values. The Charter guarantees of equal rights are meaningless in a society where only some have access to quality education. Rather than encouraging people to shop around...you should be doing everything you can to ensure that all schools provide a quality education. This would include of course putting resources into the communities around our schools. It would be part of a strategy to build a society where opportunities are truly equal.

Citizen, Mississauga