

Ontario Parent Council Annual Report

November 1993 – July 1994

March 9, 1995

The Honourable Dave Cooke
Minister of Education and Training
Dear Mr. Cooke:

I respectfully submit the first annual report of the Ontario Parent Council for the period November 30, 1993 to July 31, 1994.

This report highlights the major activities of the Council during this time, notably its many outreach activities and the release of the Report on the Establishment of School Parent Councils in Ontario.

I would like to express the appreciation of Council members to the former Chair, Jacqueline Latter, for her work and her commitment to meaningful parental involvement in education.

I would also like to thank the many parents across Ontario who have made their views known to the Council. We look forward to serving their interests in the year ahead.

Sincerely,
Peter Farlinger
Chair

Background and History

Almost all parents are involved in their children's education in some way, whether it is helping them with their homework, attending school events, volunteering in the classroom, or participating in parent organizations.

However, many parents feel that this is not enough, and that they should have a greater say in decisions that affect their children's education.

In the fall of 1993 the Minister of Education and Training, Dave Cooke, introduced an amendment to the Education Act which established the Ontario Parent Council. Bill 125 sets out the number of Council members, the criteria for membership, and the term of office.

"It is very important that parents in Ontario have a say in how their children are educated," the Minister stated in his announcement. "Through the Council, parents will be able to tell us directly how they view the education system. The Ontario Parent Council will be a valuable resource to me and my ministry in planning future programs and policies."

The Associate Minister of Education and Training is responsible for liaising with the Council and ensuring that it fulfils its mandate. During the reporting period, this position was held by Mike Farnan.

Parents were encouraged to apply for membership on the Council and an intensive selection process took place. Mr. Cooke announced the appointments to the Council on November 29, 1993. The first meeting of the Council was held on November 30, in Toronto.

Mandate of the Council

The mandate of the Ontario Parent Council is set out in Bill 125 and in the Council's bylaws.

The Council's main role is to advise the Minister on issues related to elementary and secondary school education and to suggest ways that parents can become more involved in their children's schooling.

In carrying out its responsibilities the Council may conduct research, establish liaison committees, organize regional assemblies, and develop strategies for educating parents and improving communications between schools and parents.

Mission and goals

The mission and goals statement was developed by the Council early in 1994 and was sent to major stakeholders.

Mission Statement

To provide the best advice they can to the Minister of Education and Training by representing the perspective of the parents of Ontario on educational issues, and to increase and improve the participation of parents in elementary and secondary education.

Objectives

Communication goals

1. To advise the Minister of Education and Training on behalf of Ontario parents
2. To build and maintain a co-operative and positive relationship between the Parent Council and Ontario parents
3. To listen to and collaborate with parents interested in education
4. To acknowledge and communicate the value of parent participation in their children's educational success
5. To increase awareness about the reciprocal relationship between home and school

Goals to support parents

6. To inform parents on the work of the Council
 7. To promote the recognition of the importance of parents in the education of their children
 8. To increase parent confidence in participating in their children's education
 9. To promote opportunities for local, regional, and provincial involvement in education
 10. To monitor and evaluate the success of our mission
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Membership of the Council

The Ontario Parent Council has 18 members who are appointed by the Minister of Education and Training.

Appointments are for a period of two years, with half of the members being replaced each year.

In its composition the Council reflects the diversity of Ontario's population, including the Aboriginal community. Six members are recommended to the Minister by regional committees representing teachers, parents, school and school board administrators, trustees, and ministry staff. One member is recommended by each of the three main parent organizations: the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations, the Federation of Catholic Parent-Teacher Associations of Ontario, and the Fédération des associations de parents francophones de l'Ontario. The remaining nine members are chosen by the Minister of Education and Training.

Eligibility

All the members of the Ontario Parent Council have children in elementary or secondary schools at the time of their appointments and have demonstrated an interest or involvement in education and community issues.

Employees of the Ministry of Education and Training and school boards are not eligible for membership on the Council.

Responsibilities of Council Members

Each Council member has the opportunity and responsibility to participate fully in the business of the Council. Members are committed to working together in an atmosphere of trust, mutual respect, co-operation, open communication, and shared leadership and decision-making.

Council activities

Report on the Establishment of School Parent Councils in Ontario

In February 1994, Mike Farnan, the Associate Minister of Education and Training, asked the Council to investigate the establishment of school parent councils in Ontario.

Mr. Farnan noted that parental involvement in education varies greatly from one community to another. The level of involvement depends largely on the attitudes of school boards and the strength of local parent associations.

Council members examined models of parent involvement in the provinces of British Columbia, Quebec, and Prince Edward Island, as well as in England, the United States, and New Zealand, and they made recommendations for a model for Ontario. In addition, a consulting firm was hired to research parents' involvement in Ontario schools and determine how parents would like to be involved.

The consulting firm interviewed Council members for their views on parent involvement in the province. This was followed by a review of the literature on parent involvement in Ontario and elsewhere.

A survey was mailed to 1,985 parents of children in elementary and secondary schools. More than 550 questionnaires were returned, representing a return rate of almost 28 per cent. The firm also conducted telephone interviews with representatives of 21 parent groups.

The *Report on the Establishment of School Parent Councils in Ontario* was submitted to the Minister of Education and Training and released to the public in July 1994.

Major Research Findings

From the responses to the survey the consulting firm found that:

- many parents want to be involved in making decisions in their children's schools;
- Ontario does not have a uniform system for enabling parents to become involved in their children's education. As a result, many parents are not as involved as they would like to be;
- a positive attitude on the part of the principal and staff is one of the most important factors in successful parent involvement;
- many school boards do not have a policy of involving parents. Most boards that do have such a policy strictly limit parent involvement to an advisory role, and the major decisions are made by administrators, principals, and trustees.

Recommendations

The research findings support the Council's position that parents should have a stronger and more meaningful voice in educational matters.

In its report to the Minister of Education and Training, the Council recommended that he introduce an amendment to the Education Act requiring each school in the province to have a parent council.

The amendment would define the make-up of the councils, and their mandate and goals.

Local parent councils would be able to participate in:

- major decisions regarding the school year;
- curriculum and program development;
- hiring and performance reviews of teachers, principals, vice-principals, and other staff;
- approval of budgets for schools and school boards;
- development of school policies.

Furthermore, the Council recommended that every parent have an opportunity to vote on school issues. Since the report was made public, several groups have expressed their support for school parent councils. A copy of the report was sent to the Royal Commission on Learning, for consideration. The Commission will report to the Minister of Education and Training early in 1995. It is expected to make recommendations about parental involvement in education.

Meetings and Representation

Council Meetings

The Council is required to meet at least five times a year. During the reporting period, the Council met eight times, in Toronto.

Various groups were invited to attend Council meetings and to give presentations. They included the Ontario Teachers' Federation, the Parent Involvement Committee of the Toronto Board of Education, the Ontario School Board Reform Network, and the Ontario Multi-Faith Coalition for Equity in Education.

Minutes of Council meetings are provided to members of the public who request them.

Curriculum and Standards

The Ontario Parent Council is represented on the ministry's Implementation Committee on the Common Curriculum, and on the French and English Language Standards Committees.

Council members were asked by the Ministry of Education and Training to comment on *The Common Curriculum, Grades 1--9*. In its report to the Minister of June 20, the Council brought forward a number of issues and concerns about the document. The Council stated its view that provincial standards and outcomes should be established for each core area of study. In addition, the Council stressed that appropriate standards, measurements, and reporting systems are needed to successfully implement *The Common Curriculum*.

Some members of the Council also took part in a Mathematics Action Symposium held by the Ministry of Education and Training in Toronto in May. Recommendations from conference participants were forwarded to the Minister.

Franco-Ontarian Education and Training Council

The Council is represented by one of its members on this body, which advises the Minister on matters related to French-language education in Ontario.

Meeting With the Royal Commission on Learning

The Executive Committee of the Council met in March with the Commissioners and senior staff of the Royal Commission on Learning. The Commissioners agreed to share with the Council any briefs and other material relating to parental involvement.

Work Group on Violence Prevention

As a member of the Minister's Work Group on Violence Prevention, the Chair of the Council, Jacqueline Latter, helped develop the provincial violence-free schools policy.

The draft policy was circulated to Council members for their comments. Some members also attended the summits on violence-prevention held across Ontario between March and May.

Members of the Council are following the development of violence-prevention policies by school boards to ensure that parents are involved.

Communications and Outreach

Community outreach is one of the most important activities of the Council. Council members responded to enquiries from parents and attended and took part in meetings, forums, workshops, and conferences throughout the province. Their many outreach activities during the reporting period included presentations to the Trustees Leadership Assembly, the Schools Expo held in Toronto, and the Windsor Women's Business and Professional Group. Workshops on parent involvement were given at conferences held by Canadian Parents for French and the Association francophone des conseils scolaires de l'Ontario.

Members met with principals and parents involved in home schooling, chairs and directors of school boards, and the Ontario Public School Boards Association, among many others. Some members attended the National Conference on Education held in Montreal in May. The Chair and other members also participated in an education forum organized by TVOntario.

Parent groups raised many issues of concern, such as teacher training, destreaming, academic standards, cuts in programs for children with disabilities, bus safety, equity issues, and communications with parents who are functionally illiterate.

Members were interviewed by The Globe and Mail, The Toronto Star, The Toronto Sun, Le Droit, and Radio Canada, CBC Radio and Television, and by the local press, radio and television across Ontario.

An article on the Council appeared in the February issue of the *Report to Parents* published by the ministry.

Members

Gisèle Acheson is an occupational therapist from Navan. She is immediate past president of the Regroupement des associations des parents des écoles catholiques – Ottawa-Carleton. Gisèle has children in both the elementary and secondary school systems. She has long been involved in l'Association parent-enseignant de l'école Saint-Hugues, of which she was president for two years, and is also involved with the Association parent-enseignant de l'école secondaire Garneau.

Cecilia Bruno, of Sault Ste. Marie, is a financial analyst with the Ontario Lottery Corporation. She is active in the St. Paul School Catholic Parent Teacher Association and is a member of the Sault College Accounting Advisory Committee. She has also served as treasurer for the Sault Community and Career Information Centre, the Big Sister Association, and the Sault Ste. Marie Chamber of Commerce. She has one child in the elementary school system.

Richard Burke is a businessman in London and was president of the Federation of Catholic Parent-Teacher Associations of Ontario (FCPTAO). He has been involved in the St. Paul School Catholic Parent Teacher Association since his two boys started school in 1984 and is currently treasurer. He has also served as president of the London and Middlesex County Regional Council of the FCPTAO.

Norma Coleman is a free-lance writer in Tecumseh and has long been active in the Windsor-Essex County community. Among her many commitments, she is a member of the Special Education Advisory Committee of the Essex County Roman Catholic Separate School Board, and president of the Windsor Infant and Family Program. She has children in the elementary school system.

Peter Farlinger is from Desboro. He is director of a computer software company and a member of the Sullivan Community School Parent Advisory Committee and the Assembly of Parent Groups. He volunteers at Sullivan Community School two half-days a week and coaches local baseball and hockey teams. He has two children in the elementary school system.

Carole Lamoureux is from Chelmsford and has been active in many parent-teacher committees. She is also a member of the board of the Service Familial de Sudbury. Much of her volunteer work has involved community development and educational resources. Carole is co-ordinator of the seniors' promotion and awareness campaign sponsored by the Canadian Mental Health Association. Four of her five children are in the elementary and secondary school systems.

Jacqueline Latter, chair of the Ontario Parent Council from November 1993 to July 1994, is a self-employed research consultant living in Toronto. She has been a community activist for many years and is a member of the Toronto Board of Education Race Relations Committee, the Parental Involvement Committee, and the Bias in the

Curriculum Advisory Council, and is the co-chair of the International Languages Committee. She is also the chair of the Advisory Council of the Hillcrest Community Centre. Her daughter is in junior high and her son is in elementary school.

Leslie Linklater is from Moose Factory and works at the Moose River Broadcasting Association doing many jobs. She is currently involved in establishing the first home and school association in her community. She is active on the Ministik School Peer Mediation Committee, which deals with violence prevention. She has three children in the elementary school system.

Norma McGuire lives in Etobicoke and has been involved in Home and School Associations for 20 years. She is a former president of the Ontario Federation of Home and School Associations and vice-chair of the Etobicoke Board of Health. She has also been a member of a number of advisory committees of the Ministry of Education and Training. As a volunteer, she is involved in many youth-related health and social issues at the local, provincial, and national levels.

Glenn Meadows lives in North Bay and is a vocational rehabilitation counsellor. He has a Master's degree in Education from the University of Toronto and is the chair of a local school's parent committee. Glenn is involved in various community activities and has two children in the elementary and secondary school systems.

Valerie Mills-Daly is a registered nurse in Kenora and has three school-age children. She has long been active in the Pine Grove Parents' Committee and more recently in the Lakewood Intermediate School Parents' Committee. She recently participated in a presentation to the Royal Commission on Learning. Valerie is the past chair of the Kenora Children's Concert Series and is on the Board of Elders at Knox United Church.

Malcolm Ng lives in Richmond Hill and is director of the pharmacy at Humber Memorial Hospital. He is chair of the homework policy committee for the Parents in Education Group at Bayview Hill Elementary School. He is also past chair of the Parents' Trustee Board of the Hamilton Chinese Heritage Language School. He has three children in elementary school.

Spiros Papathanasakis, of Toronto, is director of the Cabbagetown Youth Centre and a founding member of the Inner City East End Focus Group, which works to improve communication between the community and the school board. He recently received the Canada 125 medal and the local Business Improvement Area award for community service. He has five children, four of whom are in elementary and secondary schools, and is active in their home and school associations.

Francesca Piredda is a communications adviser in Ottawa. She is president of the Fédération des associations de parents francophones de l'Ontario. She was president of the Association des parents et enseignants de l'école francojeunesse, and vice-president of the Regroupement des associations de parents des écoles publiques d'Ottawa-Carleton. Her son is in the elementary school system.

Barbara Smith lives in Markham and is the founder of the Quality Education Network. She is a member of the York Region Task Force on Speech and Language Services, and secretary of Scouts Canada, York Rouge District. In addition, she is public relations director of the Learning Disabilities Association of York Region. She has three children in the elementary school system.

John Storm, of St. Catharines, is human resources manager at The St. Catharines Standard. He is a member of the Lincoln County Board of Education's Benchmark Committee and the Transition Year Committee. He is past president of the St. Catharines and District United Way and a board member of a Battered Women Counselling Centre – Design for a New Tomorrow. He has two children in the elementary school system.

Mervis White is from Scarborough and is a registered nursing assistant at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. She is chair of the Scarborough Community Legal Services, a member of the Black Business and Professionals Association, and was involved in the Harry Jerome Awards. She is also a volunteer probation officer. She has one child in the elementary school system.

Richard Zelinka, of London, is an urban and regional planning consultant with three children in the elementary and secondary school systems. He is chair of the Banting Home and School Association and past president of the Lord Roberts Parent Teacher Association. He was a volunteer ESL teacher for two years and PTA liaison person for the London Board of Education for seven years.

Financial Report

Financial report for the period November 30, 1993 to March 31, 1994

Budget		\$291,600
Expenditures*		
Salaries and wages	\$ 2,119	
Transport and communications	32,637	
Services and rentals	19,857	
Supplies and equipment	2,924	
<i>Total Expenditures</i>		\$57,537
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Balance		\$234,063
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* Statement of expenditures was provided by the Ministry of Education and Training.