

ONTARIO, CANADA – EDUCATION SYSTEM AND SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY (November 2006)

Ontario is the second largest in area of the ten Canadian provinces and is the most populated. In 2006 the population of Ontario was 12.7m with a rich diversity of ethnic origins. North American First Nations represent 2.2% of the population.

Immigration remains strong from the United Kingdom and Europe. More recent sources of immigrants include the Caribbean, South and East Asia, Central and Southern America, Russia, Bosnia, Iran, Somalia and Ghana.

Education System

A significant feature is that Ontario caters for both English and French speaking schools. The provision of public education in Canada is funded and overseen by federal, provincial and local governments; and the education system is the responsibility of each province and territory. There are many variations in all areas of education between the provinces and the territories.

Government funding for public education in 2005/2006 was \$17.2 b (\$ Can.). Independent/private schools receive no public funding and are supported through their tuition fees. In 1990 independent/private schools that include religious schools were removed from the public school system.

Ontario public schools are administered by 72 district school boards and 33 authorities. Unlike the majority of Canadian provinces where education systems divided by religion, have been abolished, Ontario still maintains publicly funded separate district school boards. The *Ministry of Education* 2006 information shows school boards in Ontario as follows:

- 31 English Public
- 29 English Catholic
- 4 French Public
- 8 French Catholic

In 2003/2004 the Ontario *Ministry of Education* statistics showed there were 4010 elementary and 870 secondary schools educating a total of 2.1m students. This data includes both public and catholic schools. Approximately 8% of students are in the independent/private school system.

The 800 independent/private schools in Ontario are involved in a school review process. The *Ontario Federation of Independent Schools* (OFIS) is the body responsible for the independent/private school reviews. Reviews are completed by two trained independent reviewers, after a request from the school. Costs are attached to the review and payable by the school. Prior to the review the school is required to prepare documents. Feedback is then prepared by the reviewers about the documentation received. During the school visit discussion is centred on areas that need attention and advice is offered. The areas reviewed include: positive goals, capable staff, respect for diversity, effective teaching, open disclosure, personnel management, financial accountability, ethical conduct, legal compliance; and cooperative spirit. The school receives a written report within two weeks of the visit. Schools fulfilling the requirements of the review are issued with a certificate, which can subsequently be used in promotional advertising about the school. A timeline is

established for schools in need of improvement to address the recommendations contained in the report; and the certificate is withheld until such time. Schools have the opportunity to appeal the reviewer's findings, through the OFIS Board of Directors.

A number of significant education research reports have been released in recent times that continue to shape Ontario's public education system for the future.

In 2002 the *Education Equality Task Force* (EETF) report was released, recommending at least \$1.8b (\$ Can.) was required to advance continuous improvement in student learning and achievement, phased in over three years.

The brief for the EETF established by the Ontario government was to review benchmark costs, distribution of funding between the different types of school boards, flexibility in local expenditures, school renewal/closures, special education and student transportation.

Dr Mordechai Rozanski (2002, p.1) who led the taskforce, claimed the 33 recommendations in the report 'were aimed at improving equity, fairness, certainty and stability of Ontario's students and schools.'

The Schools We Need - A New Blueprint for Ontario released in 2003, is an action plan for Ontario's schools, co authored by Ken Leithwood, Michael Fullan and Nancy Watson. The action plan was developed after the initial report (based on public response, interrogation of student achievement results, policy research and the authors experience in schools both in Canada and internationally), determined that the 'future for public schools in Ontario was in jeopardy – student achievement had stalled, teachers and principals were demoralised and the funding formula was not working.' (Toye, 2003, p.1).

Leithwood, Fullan and Watson (2002) concluded in the final report that an effective education policy for Ontario public schools must reach five conditions:

- Vision
- Governance
- Evidence
- Support for teachers
- Adequate and flexible funding

Seventeen recommendations were also put forward which covered all aspects of education. Accountability was not a stand alone recommendation, but is evident in recommendation 1: 'Make a much stronger and less ambiguous commitment to strengthening the public school system in Ontario, emphasising excellence and equity;' and recommendation 6: 'Improve the province-wide standards of achievement in literacy and mathematics, with a new commitment to raising the competencies of low achieving students.' Accountability is also reflected in recommendation 9: 'Develop education policies that are more explicitly and more systematically evidence informed;' and recommendation 10: 'Introduce an ongoing process of data collection for monitoring the implementation and the effects of provincial policy, to allow modifications or correction of policy initiatives.' (p.12 - 20).

The Ministry of Education

Education in Ontario is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities.

Government policy determines the criteria for diplomas and certificates, curriculum planning and direction at all levels of public education, standards for student achievement, evaluating and approving learning materials for use in schools, and distributing funding to public and separate school boards, are the responsibility of the education ministry. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999).

The 1996 Education Improvement Act, Bill 160 resulted in the Ministry of Education implementing several reforms including the introduction of a new common curriculum for grades 1–9, testing in grades 3, 6, 9 and 10; and standardised report cards. (Scoppio, 2002, p.136).

Best Start – Ontario’s Plan for Early Learning and Childcare initiative was launched in 2005 by the *Ministry of Children and Youth Services* as an outcome of recommendation five contained in the final report *The Schools We Need: A New Blue Print for Ontario (2003)*. The aim of the program is to support families with their children from birth to grade one in areas such as quality childcare, health, parenting programs and helping children to be successful at school. One strategy of the initiative is the development of an assessment tool, the *Early Development Instrument*, administered to all preschool children to determine their readiness for formal learning. It is proposed that the results of the testing will impact upon funding and resourcing for school children in the early years.

School grades in Ontario are: elementary – junior kindergarten, kindergarten, grade 1-8; Secondary – grade 9-12. (Ministry of Education, 2006, p.1)

Ontario is the only province to offer junior kindergarten. Children commence grade one at six years of age and are required to attend school until the age of 16. Access to public funding for education is available up to grade 12, 18 years of age.

Due to constraints of demographics and school building capacity in parts of Ontario, some senior public schools accommodate grades 6–8. High school commences in grade 9. Streaming of students was reintroduced in 1999. Two streams are offered to students – academic or applied; and students decide on the choice of stream in grades 9 and 10. The option for students to study a selection of courses from either of the streams is available.

The secondary school program is based on a credit system and to obtain a high school diploma students must earn a total of 30 credits. Eighteen of the credits are earned from compulsory courses. The 12 optional credits are available to students through courses offered by the school.

Students in grade 10 must pass the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT), introduced in 2000, to receive the high school diploma. The test has two components – reading and writing. A feature of assessing the writing component of this test is the use of analytic rubrics developed by the *Education Quality Accountability Office*. Canada was ranked third in reading literacy, behind Finland and South Korea, on the 2003 PISA testing and second behind Finland on the 2000 PISA testing.

Up until the 2002/2003 school year Ontario had a grade 13 however this was abandoned in order to cut costs. Grade 13 used to be the year in which students completed the Ontario Academic Credit. As a result of this move the curriculum is condensed, with students now completing secondary school in grade 12. To graduate students must also complete 40 hours of community service.

Generally students take eight credits each year and complete secondary school in four years. Students can choose to take fewer courses each year, therefore

extending their schooling and completing high school in five years. Students can continue in regular secondary school until they are 21 and in the 2003/2004 school year 7714 students aged 21 or over were enrolled in secondary schools.

Post secondary education in Ontario is the responsibility of the province and is a choice between college or university; and then graduate school. Ontario has 18 universities, 25 colleges of applied arts and technology; and colleges for training in agriculture, health and science, art and design, the military and registered private career colleges (Government of Ontario, 2006, p.1). One in seven Canadians have a university degree, however this statistic is changing due to increasing demand from the labour market.

School Accountability

The Education Quality and Accountability Office

The *Education Quality and Accountability Office* (EQAO), established in 1996 as a recommendation from the Royal Commission on Learning (1994), is an advisory board and an independent agency of the Ontario government. The EQAO is governed by a board of directors appointed by the cabinet and is broadly responsible for province wide testing and school improvement planning. The EQAO evaluates and reports on the quality of education in public funded schools and has a \$15m (\$ Can.) annual budget to conduct its operations.

In 2002, the EQAO was reviewed by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto. The 2004 review report recommended the EQAO 'refine its assessment program to provide a clearer, more helpful and less burdensome accountability framework.' (EQAO, 2004, p.1). The recommendations assist schools with demonstrating accountability and continuously improving.

The specific role of the EQAO (2004) includes:

- Developing tests for both English and French speaking students
- Administering the tests, in cooperation with school boards
- Evaluating test results
- Managing Ontario's participation in national and international tests
- Assessing the effectiveness of the system via qualitative and quantitative measurement
- Making recommendations to the government of Ontario to improve education quality
- Reporting aggregate test results and system practices to the public.

Volante (2004) states that 'the EQAO has ensured that teachers are mainly responsible for the development, administration and scoring of the annual curriculum based assessments.'

The Ministry of Education and school boards require schools to develop school improvement plans. School self assessment is described as one of the five steps toward improvement. The EQAO has provided documents to support these processes *Working Together for Student Success A School Improvement Planning Guide* (2005) online at http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/05/05p043e.pdf and *EQAO Guide to School and Board Improvement Planning A Handbook for School and Board Leaders* (2005) online at http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/05/05P011e.pdf

The EQAO (2004) issues annually province wide curriculum based tests for students in:

- Grade 3: reading, writing and mathematics
- Grade 6: reading, writing and mathematics
- Grade 9: mathematics
- Grade 10: reading and writing testing (OSSLT)

The EQAO places previous test items for grades 3, 6 and 9 on their website for teachers to download and prepare their students for the testing season. (Volante, 2004, p.2).

Detailed school accountability/performance report cards are provided to parents; the school; school board; the public - through annual assessment results published in local newspapers by external agencies (eg: Fraser Institute) that rank schools from highest to lowest on the basis of grades 3, 6, 9 and 10 results; school district staff and the government. Volante (2004) supports the EQAO with its request not to rank schools, citing the information as misleading and not contributing to the well being of students. The ranking of schools also serves as an unnecessary distraction for teachers.

The Fraser Institute (2006, p.1) claims the report card 'assists parents when they are choosing a school for their children and encourages and assists all those seeking to improve their schools. Anyone can analyse and compare the performance of individual schools.'

The EQAO in the document *Ensuring Quality Assessments: Enhancements to EQAO's Assessment Program The Move Forward (2004)* online at http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/04/04p027e.pdf describes assessments as its centrepiece of the accountability framework. The purposes of the accountability framework are:

1. measuring and reporting on the performance of individual students, schools and school boards based on the provincial standards as outlined in the Ontario Curriculum.
2. raising student achievement
3. improving classroom instruction
4. Providing information to teachers, schools and school boards that contributes to improvement planning and improved student achievement. (EQAO, 2004, p.14).

Volante (2004, p.2) states that curriculum based testing is not the only assessment option occurring in Ontario. The *Working Together For Student Success School Improvement Planning Guide* (2005, p. 8 and 9) explains that data can be gathered from a broad and rich variety of sources. Data sources are organised in to four categories: context, inputs, processes and results; and include collections such as:

- School and board data including report card information, attendance and suspension data, behaviour incident data.
- Classroom data such as rates of homework completion by individual students or the number of books read.
- Contextual data - students language background, demographics and socio economic status.

The planning guide also includes a self evaluation best practise checklist; and an improvement planning toolkit and template.

In August 2006 the EQAO released the results of the 2005/2006 assessment results in reading, writing and mathematics for years 3 and 6; and mathematics for year 9,

citing improvements in student performance across the board. The chair of the EQAO reported ‘a culture of using data as a decision–making tool has taken root across the province....The EQAO has seen continued growth in student achievement in all assessments since provincial tests were first introduced.’ (Pascal, 2006, p.1).

The curriculum–assessment regime has received criticism from teachers with claims made about teaching to the test causing a narrowing of the curriculum. (Volante, 2004, p1 and p.2).

Teacher Accountability

The *Foundations of Professional Practice* (2006) revised recently by the Ontario College of Teachers is a three part document focusing on ethical standards, standards of practice and the professional learning framework. Teachers and principals are involved in a continuous professional learning model. The requirements for staff are legislated and opportunities for professional growth are available through a variety of sources.

Inexperienced (two years in to the teaching profession) and experienced teachers are involved in an explicit, transparent and comprehensive province wide teacher performance appraisal process. The *Supporting Teacher Excellence* (2002) document, developed by the Ministry of Education and available online at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/teacher/manual/pdf>, guides experienced teachers through the appraisal process. The framework includes: standards for the teaching profession, sixteen competencies, “Look Fors” and levels of performance rated against a four point scale – exemplary, good, satisfactory and unsatisfactory. All teachers develop an annual learning plan. Legislation requires experienced teachers are evaluated every three years and during the evaluation year a teacher must be evaluated twice. The evaluation is conducted by the principal, though in some circumstances this task can be delegated to the deputy principal, and includes the following steps:

- Notification to the teacher
- Pre observation meeting
- Class room observation
- Post observation meeting
- Summative report which includes the rating as described in the rubric.

Parents of students and the students of the teacher being evaluated complete a survey related to the teacher’s performance. The teacher is involved in the development of the survey.

An unsatisfactory report requires a learning plan developed and implemented by the teacher in consultation with the principal, and a follow up appraisal undertaken within 120 days of the teacher receiving the report. Following the second appraisal if the teacher is still deemed to be unsatisfactory, the teacher is placed on review status. If after the third visit within 120 days of the last rating being received there is no improvement, the teacher is recommended for termination. If after this visit the teacher receives a satisfactory rating, the teacher ceases to be on review status. In the non evaluation years the conducting of the review is a decision made between the principal and the teacher. Templates are available for all aspects covered in the teacher performance appraisal process.

The *New Teacher Induction Program – Manual for Performance Appraisal for New Teachers* (2006) found online at <http://tpfr.edu.gov.on.ca/ntip/TPA%20ENG%20-%20Final.pdf> includes a framework similar to that for experienced teachers:

standards for the teaching profession, sixteen competency statements, appraisal meetings and a summative report. Previous to June, 2006, trainee teachers were required to pass the Ontario Teaching Qualifying Test as a condition of teacher certification.

The differences for new teachers in the framework is the frequency of performance meetings, two in the first year and then follow up in the form of contact and coaching. Also, new teachers are judged on a two point rating scale, either satisfactory or development needed. If the teacher receives a development needed performance rating in the previous appraisal meeting, then a scale of either satisfactory or unsatisfactory is used in subsequent meetings.

Following a fourth appraisal resulting in an unsatisfactory rating, a recommendation for termination is enacted. Overall the process is very similar to that for experienced teachers, the main difference being the closer monitoring of new teachers and the support provided through the induction program.

Excellence in Teaching is rewarded through the Premier's Awards. The ten categories of the award are open to all staff in the public education system.

Superintendent of Education

The Superintendent of Education has numerous responsibilities. The emphasis on their work is related to the supervision of assigned families of schools (elementary or secondary); directing support services and resources to schools to ensure their quality and commitment to continuous improvement; and working closely with other Superintendents in the field office to ensure the effective management of the office's staff and resources. Specific responsibilities of the Superintendent of Education include:

- Direction and support to schools in the development of achievable school improvement plans.
- The supervision and evaluation of the principals and vice-principals
- The supervision of all matters related to students, including evaluation, student programs, placement and support, discipline; and suspensions and expulsions.

The Superintendent of Education does not have a role in any formal review/evaluation process of schools; their role is in a supportive/ coaching capacity. (Peel District School Board, 2006, p.1 and 2).

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