

# The SCHOOLS WE NEED

Recent Education Policy in Ontario  
& Recommendations for Moving Forward

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Members of the OISE/UT Advisory Board provided feedback on a number of occasions and we give thanks to them as well.

Finally, we realize that making recommendations about good policy is just step one, that, as our conclusion states, implementation is everything. So, we thank in advance all the individuals—teachers, students, and parents—who deserve and will help us arrive at the schools we need.

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## PREFACE

OISE/UT's research is known and used throughout the world as a source of guidance for both educators and policy makers. In 2001, the Atkinson Charitable Foundation and the Walter and Duncan Gordon Foundation invited Michael Fullan, Dean of OISE/UT, Ken Leithwood, Associate Dean of Research, and Nancy Watson, Senior Research Associate to prepare a position paper on the future of education in Ontario.

This is a widely respected and experienced team, its members having worked, individually and together, with schools, districts, governments and other educational agencies around the world for the past 25 years. For example, this team is in the final stages of a government-commissioned four-year evaluation of Britain's strategies for improving literacy and numeracy in 19,000 primary schools.

I hope that OISE/UT's international reputation and experience in helping schools and school systems boost student achievement and maintain staff morale will help instill public confidence in this report and give good educational policy a chance to make a difference in Ontario.

Charles E. Pascal  
 Executive Director  
 Atkinson Charitable Foundation and  
 Former Deputy Minister of Education and Training

## INTRODUCTION

Our Purpose  
 Our Position

### OUR PURPOSE

This report focuses on recent Ontario education policies. It is a policy audit of the present state of the public school system in Ontario and a proposal for provincial education policies that will best serve the students of Ontario. Following the most tumultuous decade in Ontario educational history, and seven years after the release of the report of the Royal Commission on Learning,<sup>1</sup> we believe it is necessary to examine where Ontario education is now and where the province should be headed in the future.

Our project outlines a vision of the “schools we need” in Ontario, providing a policy roadmap for how to reach this vision by highlighting the policies that would significantly improve the performance of schools and the system as a whole. Throughout our report, we ask which of the government’s current policies are helpful, which ones are worth keeping with some refinement, and which should be withdrawn. We also propose new policies that would have a positive impact on teaching and learning in the province.

The project will not be successful, however, if all we do is outline such a vision. A second equally important goal is to engage others with a stake in the future of Ontario’s K-12 education system in dialogue and debate about the position described in this report. Inevitably, such engagement will produce refinements, leading to a vision of the schools we need in Ontario that is both widely known and broadly endorsed. This report serves to launch the dialogue and debate. Following this dialogue, to take place over the next several months, we will issue a second and final report in the spring of 2003.

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As we completed The Schools We Need policy audit, Dr. Mordechai Rozanski issued the Report of The Education Equality Task Force (on December 10, 2002). Dr. Rozanski had been appointed by the government “to review the province’s education funding formula and to make recommendations to be considered for the 2003–04 school year.”<sup>2</sup> Guided by six principles—adequacy, affordability, equity, stability, flexibility, and accountability—he recommended a preliminary increase of \$1.8 billion (about a 15% increase over the present) to revitalize our financially starved system. Rozanski stressed that new allocations should be made for the purpose of developing local school and district capacity to increase student achievement in ways that are transparently accountable to the public and the province. In the final section of this report, we relate our findings to his proposals.

The sources of evidence and ideas for The Schools We Need project include:

- Public opinion studies
- Student achievement data
- Analysis of the education funding formula in Ontario
- Research about policies and practices for improving teaching and learning
- -Our own experience in Canada and internationally, working with partners at the local and governmental levels, to identify and put in place policies and practices that generate high-yield results for schools

#### OUR POSITION

Our primary interest is in identifying what is working, what is not working, and what is needed to improve the system. This is an audit of existing policy—a report card on the current state of affairs. It will take concerted action on the part of the government in order to move forward, because while some of the province’s current policies may be moving the school system in the right direction, essential pieces are missing. Other policies, although they have potential for improving education, are held back by implementation problems, often created by the government, that block progress.

Our primary interest is in identifying what is working, what is not working, and what is needed to improve the system. This is an audit of existing policy—a report card on the current state of affairs.

Our position, in sum, is that creating the schools we need in Ontario depends on seven key conditions being met:

- -Vision: The province needs a strong public school system, one that is capable of producing high levels of excellence in all areas of the curriculum and one that meets the learning needs of a highly diverse student population. A vision, however, will not be sufficient; we also need strong policies and sustained support for implementation.
- -Governance: Discretion needs to be returned to districts and schools in key areas, with the province retaining power to set broad directions and to monitor progress. Such a shift would be consistent with research evidence about how to improve quality and encourage innovation in large organizations.
- -Coherence: The province needs a coherent set of policies that are aligned with its vision for public schooling and capable of achieving that vision. What is needed is a relatively small number of major policies that are coherent and are likely to yield the desired results.
- -Evidence: Growing research evidence shows what improves student learning and which policies are known to yield results for students. Such evidence should inform not only the formulation of policy but also the implementation plan. Wise allocation of resources also means developing and implementing policies that are known to provide value-for-money.
- -Feedback mechanisms: The province needs to take better advantage of the considerable knowledge base about policy implementation. The government should monitor progress in the implementation of its vision and policies, identifying obstacles and figuring out how to overcome these. Mid-course corrections are an inevitable part of large-scale improvement efforts; policy makers need good information about what is going well and what needs adjustment.
- -Support for teachers: You can't get very far without teachers and principals. The province needs to collaborate with educators—they have much to contribute—and provide them with increasing opportunities to learn and act in ways that will enhance the learning of all students. Educators must be genuine partners, not simply recipients of policy developed elsewhere. As well, policy needs to address the need to attract and retain high quality teachers.
- -Adequate and flexible funding: Total levels of provincial funding for schools need to reflect the real current costs being incurred by schools, not 1997 costs. As well, the process for allocating funds should permit considerably more flexibility in the use of these funds at the local level. Schools and districts across the province face significantly different challenges in providing high quality, equitable education for their students; a one-size-fits-all funding formula is blind to such differences. Funding should also be available in support of a small number of policies which promise to make very large contributions to the quality of teaching and learning in the province.

#### SCHOOLS WE NEED DEBATE

To get involved in the  
Schools We Need Debate,  
please visit our website <http://schoolsweneed.oise.utoronto.ca>

According to our assessment, policies that have driven reform in the past several years should be revamped to meet these seven basic conditions for success. Neither the evidence nor the public

call for further radical reform. The province needs a coherent, high impact set of policies, based on a diagnosis of the school system's actual strengths and weaknesses, and guided by the best evidence available about how to accomplish the goal of a higher quality education system. Schools in Ontario need an investment of more funds, but this should be an investment targeted to high yield results, building on the commitment and energies of all stakeholders.

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## 7 CONDITIONS for the Schools We Need

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### Vision:

The province needs a strong public school system, one that is capable of achieving high levels of excellence and equity.

### Governance:

Discretion needs to be returned to districts and schools, with the province retaining power to set broad directions and to monitor progress.

### Coherence:

The province needs a small number of major policies that are coherent, aligned with a vision for a strong public school system, and likely to yield the desired results.

### Evidence:

Research evidence about what improves student learning should inform not only the formulation of policy but also the implementation plan.

### Support for teachers:

The province needs to collaborate with teachers and principals, and not simply hand down policies. Policy makers need to act now to attract and retain high quality teachers.

### Feedback mechanisms:

The government should monitor progress by helping to identify obstacles and how to overcome them, and by providing opportunities for regular mid-course corrections.

### Adequate and flexible funding:

Funding for schools needs to reflect real current costs, not 1997 costs, and there needs to be more flexibility in the use of these funds at the local level.

## THE SCHOOLS WE HAVE

### The Public's View of Schools

The Government's Agenda  
Policy Consequences for  
Students and Their Teachers

THE PUBLIC'S VIEW OF SCHOOLS

Here we summarize findings from a range of polls conducted in Ontario and across the country by newspapers, governments, and other agencies, on the public's view of education issues ranging from the goals of education to funding and accountability.<sup>3</sup> We also refer to the work done by the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning in 1994, the last large-scale inquiry into elementary and secondary education undertaken in the province.

1. Goals of Education. The Royal Commission on Learning distinguished between goals that were the primary responsibility of schools and those that were a shared responsibility, with families or other social institutions in the lead. The primary goal for the school system was learning. The goals to be shared with the others were learning to learn, citizenship, preparation for work, and instilling values. Polling data suggest that the public also believe that schools have responsibility for "training youth for the work world", "creating good citizens", and "creating inquiring minds".

2. Priority of Education. Education was mentioned as an issue of concern by only 5% of Canadians in 1986 but by 2000, that figure had leapt to 29%, making education second only to health care as a national priority. For parents, education crowds out other concerns; according to a September 2002 survey, 39% reported that education is "the most important issue" facing them in regard to raising their children, more than three times the number citing health or health care. Such data reveal considerable anxiety about education and presumably about schools.

3. Satisfaction with Education. Public satisfaction with education has been characterized by ups and downs over the last 30 years, but in general, levels of satisfaction have shown a slow decline. The OISE/UT surveys show a big dip in the early 1990s, coinciding with an economic downturn.<sup>4</sup> The decline has reversed itself to some extent; support for schools is now almost up to 1970s levels; nonetheless only about half are satisfied with the schools' performance. Regardless of jurisdiction, however, parents consistently report a higher level of satisfaction with schools than do the public as a whole.

What the polls say...

The public agrees that the primary goal for schools is learning but they also believe that schools have responsibility for training youth for the world of work and creating good citizens.

The OISE/UT surveys show a big dip in the early 1990s, coinciding with an economic downturn. The decline has reversed itself to some extent; support for schools is now almost up to 1970s levels.

Ontario respondents, compared to their counterparts in other provinces, registered the lowest level of satisfaction with schools, according to a 1999 Canada-wide poll.<sup>5</sup> Such results may reflect the conflict in Ontario between the government and teacher unions, a conflict that resulted in strikes and other disruptions.

Reports of "confidence in institutions" and "trust in occupations" provide another indicator of satisfaction with the education system. Levels of confidence or trust have declined, although

education is holding up well in comparison with other social institutions—and teachers in relation to other occupations. A majority of Canadians, according to a 1999 Gallup poll, have “a great deal” or “quite a lot” of respect and confidence in Canadian public schools. Similarly, the “trust in occupations” data show teachers are the third most trusted occupational group in Canada, topped only by nurses and doctors.

Overall, the polls show there is rising concern about education, especially on the part of parents, along with relatively stable levels of satisfaction. What might be behind these trends?

Changed expectations may be one factor accounting for this picture; education is increasingly seen as critical for success, both for individuals and for society. The public is aware that education levels that would have been sufficient for earlier times are inadequate today. People are anxious about what the future may bring and see education as providing protection against economic and social uncertainties. As Bricker and Greenspon suggest in a recent book about Canadian public opinion in the 1990s, people are searching for certainty to allay their anxieties about what lies ahead.<sup>6</sup> In Ontario, as in Canada as a whole, therefore, the public is concerned about schools and how well they are doing but continues to express general support for public schooling. Although people see a strong need for improvement, they do not see the system as broken or in crisis.

4. **FUNDING.** One of the main causes of anxiety about the future of public schools is a belief that schools do not have adequate funds. Evidence suggests that the public is concerned not only about levels of funding but also about how funds are allocated—whether money is going where it will make the most difference. There are high levels of support for increased taxation as a means for providing these funds, as evidenced, for example, in a recent poll where 80% of respondents supported increased funding for public education. Such a finding reinforces the perception of public schools as vital social institutions that cannot carry out their role without adequate resources. Across Canada, education spending typically eclipses tax cuts as a priority in the public view and is topped only by health care spending. OISE/UT’s soon-to-be released 2002 survey found more than 70% of respondents were prepared to increase their taxes “somewhat” or “greatly” to support K-12 education.

What the polls say...

There’s rising concern about education, especially on the part of parents, along with relatively stable levels of satisfaction. What might be behind these trends?

5. **Accountability.** There is no question about the public’s strong interest in accountability. With increased anxiety comes a concern about how to ensure that schools are doing a good job. For the public, the answer is clear. Past OISE/UT surveys, along with other polling data, show a long-standing and overwhelming support for student testing. Bricker and Greenspon suggest that “the time is well past when parents accepted as an article of faith that their children were on the receiving end of a good education and that teachers and schools were equipping them for the challenges of the future.”<sup>7</sup> Province-wide tests for all students are seen as providing what was long needed—independent and objective information. An overwhelming majority of Ontarians support provincial student testing. But parents also want good effective classroom testing and clear information on report cards about how their children are doing.

What the polls say...

Although people see a strong need for improvement, they do not see the system as broken or in crisis.

Another accountability mechanism strongly supported by the public is teacher testing and regulation. For example, 86% of Ontario parents and 87% of the general public approve of province-wide testing for teachers to obtain and maintain a teaching certificate. The provincial government has implemented a hastily designed initial teacher testing program and requirements for mandatory professional development. Still, interpreting the public view with regard to this issue may be difficult—perhaps it is not so much support for teacher testing as an expression of concern about the quality of teachers or schools, along with uncertainty about how best to allay this concern.

6. Other Issues. Polling data provide information about a number of other issues that are of particular concern to the public. Perceptions of decreased discipline and increased bullying or violence trouble the public and parents, with the majority of respondents seeing schools as “not strict enough.” Safety in schools is an issue of growing concern for parents

What the polls say...

One of the main causes of anxiety about the future of public schools is a belief that schools do not have adequate funds.

SUMMARY. The main findings from our analysis of public opinion data can be summarized as follows:

- -Public support for schools has rebounded somewhat after a dip in the early 1990s and is nearly as high now as in the 1970s.
- -Considerable anxiety exists about schools, particularly on the part of parents. The concerns focus on inadequate resources and issues of accountability. Schools need to demonstrate that they are doing a good job—the public believes that objective information from testing programs provides a good way of doing this.
- -Trust—in teachers as a profession and schools as institutions—has declined somewhat over the past two or three decades, a decline that is true of all professions and institutions. Trust in teachers and schools, however, remains higher than in most other employment groups and institutions.
- -The public has no taste for radical school reform but is concerned about needed improvement of the existing system of public schooling.
- -The public supports increased funding for elementary and secondary education, to ensure quality.

What the polls say...

Over 70% of Ontarians are prepared to increase their taxes “somewhat” or “greatly” to support K-12 education.



These results lead us to recommend that:

1. Further efforts to improve the school system should proceed in a measured and incremental fashion, taking care to build on the trust the public already has in teachers and schools.
2. When such improvements require additional resources for schools, governments should assume the public will support reasonable increases in taxes for that purpose.

The public does not believe, at this point, that less money leads to increased quality in the public school system; they believe that “less means less.”

#### THE GOVERNMENT’S AGENDA FOR SCHOOLS

The current government, elected in 1995 on their “Common Sense Revolution” platform, reversed many of the policies of the previous government, often just as schools had been coming to terms with new practices and requirements. Much of the agenda is similar to that followed in the early 1990s in other jurisdictions such as England, Alberta, and New Zealand, with increasing centralization and a focus on deficit cutting.

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The provincial ministry took over more of the decision-making powers and rationalized expenditures for schooling. In a series of rapid reforms, the government cut the number of school boards from 129 to 72 and transferred many powers from school boards to the Ministry. The most significant and controversial legislation, the Education Quality Improvement Act, included provisions addressing funding, governance, class size, teaching loads and collective bargaining. The new funding formula centralized funding, shifting authority from local school boards to the government and removing the local ability to levy education taxes, which had been an important source of additional funding for many school boards. The legislation also removed principals and vice-principals from teacher unions, reduced preparation time for teachers, and set out restrictive terms within which boards must negotiate contracts with teachers. School councils were established, with parents, community members and members of the business community.

Further legislation in the spring of 2000 continued the restructuring process with the passing of the Education Accountability Act and another onslaught of changes. The Act increased the number of courses taught by high school teachers and made it mandatory for teachers to participate in extra-curricular activities. Teachers did not welcome this legislation; in many school districts they declined to participate in any extra-curricular activities until the government introduced some flexibility into the policy.

In addition to governance and funding reforms, Ontario has seen substantial changes in curriculum and assessment. Such changes are comparable to developments in many other jurisdictions—the introduction of a standard centrally defined curriculum with student achievement assessed through externally developed province-wide testing. Schools across the province now use a standard report card, rather than each school or school board developing their own reporting instruments. One policy with far-reaching implications has been the elimination of the fifth year of secondary school, a change that brought Ontario into alignment with most other jurisdictions but has also created a “double cohort” of students for universities and colleges for 2003.

New arms length agencies have been set up to support these reforms. The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) is responsible for the development, administration, and analysis of provincial testing programs, now in reading and writing and mathematics at Grades 3, 6 and 9, as

well as a literacy test for Grade 10 students. The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) was established as the governing body for the teaching profession, responsible for licensing, discipline and the development and maintenance of professional standards. OCT was directed by the province to develop and administer a licensing test for graduates of teacher education programs. Prospective teachers will have to pass this test before being granted Ontario teaching qualifications, a requirement that has been controversial, both in conception and execution. In addition to this entry requirement, practicing teachers will also be subject to mandatory professional development (a "professional learning program") that is to be managed by the Ontario College of Teachers. The government initially proposed that practicing teachers would have to pass, at regular intervals, a provincially administered teacher test, but after some negotiation this proposal was modified to require that teachers complete a certain number of officially recognized and approved courses. All practicing teachers must meet this requirement to maintain certification with the Ontario College of Teachers.

Considerable evidence suggests that pressure from accountability measures may well direct educators' attention to priority areas. Evidence also indicates that, on its own, such pressure is unlikely to lead to substantial positive change, especially in the face of scarce resources and hasty implementation.

Overall, the government's strategy for educational reform in Ontario over the past seven years has combined greater accountability, at all levels of the system, with fiscal restraint. The underlying assumption seems to be that with greater accountability and a new curriculum, teaching and learning would improve, even with fewer resources. Presumably the argument would be that increased efficiency would compensate for any reductions in funding and other resources. Considerable evidence suggests that pressure from accountability measures may well direct educators' attention to priority areas. Evidence also indicates that, on its own, such pressure is unlikely to lead to substantial positive change, especially in the face of scarce resources and hasty implementation. The implementation of many of these changes has been highly problematic, reducing any potential benefit that might otherwise result.

### THREE POLICY CONSEQUENCES

1. -The school system is becoming a harsh environment for less advantaged and diverse student populations.
2. •-Teachers feel demoralized and demeaned, especially in secondary schools, and see few benefits to most of the changes.
3. -The restrictive definition of "classroom" has resulted in the reduction or loss of many of the supports that schools and teachers need to keep up to date and provide quality programs to their students.

### POLICY CONSEQUENCES FOR STUDENTS AND THEIR TEACHERS

Ontario, like other jurisdictions where accountability, fiscal restraint, and rapid implementation have directed reform, has encountered unintended negative consequences of implementing this approach to reform.

First, the school system is becoming a harsh environment for less advantaged and diverse student populations, particularly special needs and ESL students. The high failure rate in the Grade 10 literacy test, particularly for students in the applied program, was unanticipated, or at any rate, there was no plan to address the problem and avoid discouraged students from dropping out of school. Second, the impact on teachers has been one of the most problematic

consequences of the government's education reforms. Teachers feel demoralized and demeaned, especially in secondary schools, and see few benefits to most of the changes. Third, the restrictive definition of "classroom" has resulted in the reduction or loss of many of the supports that schools and teachers need to keep up to date and provide quality programs to their students.

Many of these changes were aimed at restructuring the system and achieving greater efficiencies, but presumably they were also intended to educate children better.

This is not to say that all of the policies enacted over the past few years have been in the wrong general direction—for instance, the establishment of the Educational Quality and Accountability Office, the creation of the Ontario College of Teachers, the launching of province-wide student testing programs, and the new curriculum initiatives are all good strategies on paper to improve the school system. Our point is that the net impact on Ontario schools has been negative. Schools are experiencing low teacher morale, cuts in programs, and little evidence of improved student learning. There are at least four reasons for this disappointing state of affairs:

- -the sheer volume of policies
- -the distracting or inconsequential nature of some of these policies
- -poor policy implementation
- -gaps in existing policies

We discuss each of these in further detail below.

#### 1. THE SHEER VOLUME OF NEW INITIATIVES BLUNTS THE IMPACT OF EACH

The total number of major new initiatives over the past six years has been extraordinarily high. (See Appendix A.) Consider the implications of a partial list of these initiatives affecting teachers—a more demanding curriculum, provincial testing initiatives, reduced resources, increased class sizes, less support for special education students or those learning English and the need to meet regular provincial recertification requirements.

Many of these changes were aimed at restructuring the system and achieving greater efficiencies, but presumably they were also intended to educate children better. There is little evidence of this, however, and we argue that with the current set of policies, such improvement is unlikely.

#### 2. DISTRACTING OR INCONSEQUENTIAL POLICIES

Several policy initiatives that have been introduced have inconsequential or even negative effects on public schools or on student learning. The tax credit for parents sending their children to independent schools has been a double blow for public schools; first, by allocating money to non-public schools and second, by suggesting through this action that the public school system is not a high priority for the government.

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Other policies are distracting or unlikely to generate high yields. For example, the blunt instrument of teacher testing, the increased size of school districts, school councils that are unconnected with other forms of parent involvement—all these initiatives have consumed enormous political energy

and other resources. Not only are such policies highly unlikely to have any positive influence on teaching or learning, the added administrative burdens distract educators from actions that would have a more direct impact on student learning.

### 3. POOR POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

Even good policies that are not well implemented will have only limited effects on improving education. Many of the recent curriculum and assessment initiatives are in this category. By and large teachers and parents support many of the curriculum reforms—it is poor implementation that is the problem. Little support was provided for teachers to learn what was entailed in the reforms and to develop any new expertise that was required. Research has shown over and over again that without such sustained learning opportunities, any change is likely to be superficial. Considerable research evidence exists about improving literacy and mathematics at the elementary level, for instance, but implementation of such knowledge is uneven in schools, a situation that should receive policy and implementation attention at the provincial level.

Assessment of student learning is another policy area where government initiatives were in the right direction and made sense as far as they went. The public wants and has a right to receive understandable information on the performance of children, schools and the system as a whole. The improved report cards and the regular EQAO testing programs now provide such information. But testing, on its own, cannot improve student learning, and there has been no sustained provincial initiative to build “assessment literacy”—teachers’ ability to interpret the assessment results and to address in their teaching the problems revealed in the testing. Provincial testing and international assessment initiatives are here to stay—the challenge is to work toward becoming more sophisticated in interpreting and using assessment results, both at the provincial and local level.

But testing, on its own, cannot improve student learning, and there has been no sustained provincial initiative to build “assessment literacy”—teachers’ ability to interpret the assessment results and to address in their teaching the problems revealed in the testing.

Beyond specific implementation inadequacies, a more general problem has limited the potential impact of education policies. Recent studies show that many teachers perceive the effects of most of the province’s recent policies—curriculum policies being the exception—to be negative. The problem for teachers is twofold; they believe that many policies are not intended to improve teaching and learning, and they are affected by the ongoing conflict between government and teacher federations. Such evidence shows how a government approaches policy development and implementation inevitably influences how well policies are implemented in schools.

### 4. POLICY GAPS

An examination of the education policy initiatives in Ontario over the last seven years reveals some serious policy gaps, especially pertaining to areas where the evidence from elsewhere shows that policies have a strong effect on learning. In Ontario, there are at least three glaring gaps; there is an absence of policies providing good early childhood education, support for beginning teachers, and programs to develop the kind of administrative leaders needed to address current and future challenges. A fourth undeveloped area might include parent education, housing and other kinds of community development, since evidence shows that policies that address these areas would do more for improving teaching and learning than will some of the policies that have been enacted.

In summary, we believe that the government has some of the policies right, but that much of the reform agenda is highly problematic. There is a growing public consensus around the need for

clearer standards, better curriculum, a focus on outcomes, and a high quality teaching profession. Although several of the government's education policies focus on those areas, the policies have had little positive impact. Funding cuts, lack of sustained opportunities for teachers and principals to develop the necessary understanding and expertise and the ongoing conflict between the government and educators—all these factors have interfered with implementation.

In contrast to the disappointing results of this high pressure/low support approach to educational reform, we argue that schools are most likely to improve on a large scale in response to a “high pressure/high support” approach.

#### FOUR -REASONS WHY REFORM HAS STALLED

##### 1. Sheer volume of new initiatives

- more demanding curriculum
- new provincial testing initiatives
- reduced resources
- increased class sizes
- -less support for special education and ESL students
- new recertification requirements

##### 2. -Distracting and inconsequential policies

- -tax credit for independent schools
- teacher testing
- increased size of school districts
- -school councils unconnected with other forms of parent involvement

##### 3. Poor policy implementation

- -little support, including time, for teachers to learn new curriculum
- -no sustained initiative to build teachers' “assessment literacy”
- -ongoing conflict between government and teacher federations

##### 4. Policy gaps

- early childhood education
- support for beginning teachers
- 3 programs for administrative leaders
- -parent education, housing and other community development initiatives

The ONTARIO School System

- -There are approximately 2 million students; 4,800 schools; 72 school boards; 118,400 teachers; and an annual expenditure of \$14.3 billion.
- -76% of elementary and 51% of secondary teachers are women; 52% of principals and vice-principals are women.
- -Canadian performance in recent international assessments of reading, writing, and mathematics (15 year olds) was high in relation to 31 other countries. Ontario performed close to the Canadian average but was behind Alberta (Canada's top performer) in all subjects.
- -Scores on provincial Grade 3 and 6 assessments of reading and writing and mathematics have levelled off; however, large percentages of students continue to achieve below the provincial standard. There are also persistent discrepancies between boys' and girls' achievement in all subjects and in their attitudes toward the subjects, with girls outperforming boys consistently.

## THE SCHOOLS WE NEED

1. Vision
2. Governance
3. Coherence
4. Evidence
5. Support for teachers
6. Feedback mechanisms
7. Adequate and flexible funding

At the beginning of this report, we proposed seven conditions that need to be in place if we are to develop the schools we need. Here we examine more closely each of these conditions, first summarizing their current status in Ontario and then offering a series of recommendations for moving forward.

### 1 Vision

#### Current Status

Successful large-scale reforms in education are almost always guided by a vision, with goals that are broadly shared by those playing various roles in the system. The current government has provided no explicit vision for education in Ontario, although an implicit vision can be discerned in recent policies and the way they have been implemented; it is a vision dominated by fiscal restraint, with accountability and high standards mentioned as part of the package.

#### Our Position

We propose an explicit and significantly different vision for the schools we need. This vision has three central components. The schools we need must:

- -meet the aspirations of all children
- -address a broad range of goals for both students and the larger community
- -produce high levels of both equity and excellence in the achievement of these goals

### A Strong Public School System

The best case for public education has always been that it is a common good. Everyone, ultimately, has a stake in the calibre of schools and education is everyone's business. The quality of the public education system contributes directly to the quality of life that people enjoy, whether

as parents, employers, or citizens; we all live with everyone else's children. As The Learning Partnership points out, a strong public education system is the cornerstone of a civil, prosperous, and democratic society.

In England, Michael Barber points to the danger of a loss of trust in the public system:

*...this sense of urgency is reinforced not just by the belief that every passing day when a child's education is less than optimal is another day lost, but also the belief that time is running out for public education to prove its worth. The danger is that, as the economies of developed countries grow, more and more people will see private education for their children as a rational lifestyle option. If this were to occur, they would become correspondingly less willing to pay taxes to fund public education which, over time, would become—in the devastating phrase of the sociologist Richard Titmuss a generation ago—a poor service for poor people.<sup>8</sup>*

Barber goes on to describe how such a flight to private schooling would erode social cohesion and lead to ever-growing inequality from one generation to another. Only if public education delivers—and is seen to deliver—real quality, can such a prospect be avoided.

Similarly, in Canada, Bricker and Greenspon observe that although the public's confidence in the educational system of the 1990s was shaken, "they never abandoned the principles of the public system... And as the decade closed, it became evident that the public continued to view schools as critical agents of social cohesion, the common glue that binds society together."<sup>9</sup>

In short, a high quality public school system is essential, not only for parents who send their children to these schools, but also for the public good as a whole. We recommend that:

3. Future efforts to provide greater choice of educational alternatives in the province be focused on increasing the range of choices within the public system rather than weakening the public system by funding more private alternatives.

#### A Broad Range of Publicly Valued Goals

What should be the goals of a publicly funded education system? This is a question of public values, one that was given considerable attention in the report of the Royal Commission on Learning. The Commission dealt with the multiplicity of possible goals by distinguishing between those for which the school system should take primary responsibility and those for which the responsibility was shared, with families or other social institutions taking the leading role. For the school system, the primary goal had to do with learning, with the Commission proclaiming "we see the first priority of schools to be the intellectual nurturing of students." Other purposes, equally important but shared with others in the community, include learning to learn, citizenship, preparation for work and instilling values.

Many believe public schools must include citizenship and what some people call character education. As one commentator observes, there is a low correlation between scores on academic achievement tests, and honesty, civility, and civic responsibility.<sup>10</sup>

#### EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

Equity and excellence in the schools we propose for the province are complementary rather than competing aspirations. There is nothing helpful to be gained by proposing a one-dimensional concept of excellence for a multi-dimensional world. Therefore we propose to:

- •-increase the range of choices for students in the public system

- -expand curriculum and assessment targets to include a broader range of goals from critical thinking to citizenship and parental roles
- •-focus on “raising the bar” and “closing the gap” for low-achieving students

Polling data suggest broad public support for all of the goals that we have mentioned here. But the two dominant goals emerging from many such polls are preparing students for the world of work and preparing them for citizenship. Goals awarded highest priority by those polled in the soon-to-be released 2002 OISE/UT survey include, in order:

- -ability to make ethical and moral judgements (19.2% of respondents)
- -preparation for the world of work (19.1% of respondents)
- -developing responsible citizens and parents (16.6% of respondents)
- -ability to lead healthy, well adjusted lives (14.1% of respondents)
- -preparation for post secondary education (13.7% of respondents)
- -developing creative and critical thinking skills (11.8% of respondents)

An important implication of this polling evidence is that literacy and numeracy, those goals receiving the bulk of policy makers’ attention these days, are basic expectations for the K-12 system; they clearly serve much more complex outcomes. Schools are expected to—and themselves expect to—do a great deal more and this is reflected in the current curriculum. This prompts us to recommend that:

4. Provincial assessments, and the standards on which they are based, should be extended significantly beyond their current focus to reflect the capacities students need to develop in order to work and to participate in an increasingly complex, knowledge driven world.

### Equity and Excellence

Equity and excellence, in the vision of schools we propose for the province, are complementary rather than competing aspirations. There is nothing helpful to be gained by proposing a one-dimensional concept of excellence for a multi-dimensional world.

The publicly funded K-12 school system in Ontario includes both secular and Roman Catholic school boards, with small French language systems, one public and one Roman Catholic. This system must address the needs of some 12 million people, more than a third of Canada’s population. The province is characterized by its sprawling geography and the diversity of its population, with large numbers of immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America joining the more established populations with European roots, as well as aboriginal people. In 2001, 59% of immigrants to Canada settled in Ontario, the vast majority of these in the Toronto area.

As the main institution for fostering social cohesion in an increasingly diverse society, publicly funded schools must serve all children, not simply those with the loudest or most powerful advocates. This means addressing the cognitive and social needs of every child, with an emphasis on including those who may not have been well served in the past. For instance, a focus on academic achievement, such as improving literacy and mathematics, must include a commitment to narrowing the gap between high and low achieving children.



Our student population is arguably the most diverse to be found anywhere in the world. Yet our curriculum, as well as the expectations and understandings of some of our staffs, has yet to catch up with this reality; more specifically, the secondary school curriculum does not adequately address the needs of the non-university or college-bound student. As a consequence, far too small

a proportion of the student population is achieving the levels of education we and they need to prosper in the future.

We know that some students are capable of high levels of achievement but require more time than their peers to reach the same goal. And the research on early childhood education indicates that some children begin school much less ready for the school curriculum than others, but that with the right help, are able to catch up, at least to some extent.<sup>11</sup> Based on this evidence:

5. Significant investments should be made in early childhood programs, the expansion of junior kindergarten programs (especially for families who are otherwise unable to provide such opportunities), and full-day senior kindergarten.

Families and communities vary enormously in the “social capital” they provide to their children, social capital being the access children have to resources of many sorts, and the networks of relationships available to support them as they grow up. Because students with weak family and community resources have considerable difficulty taking advantage of the learning opportunities available through the school curriculum, schools need the freedom and resources to supplement the student’s social capital. This strongly suggests that:

6. Significant investments should be made in developing the capacities of families to provide their children with the physical, social, and intellectual resources they need to succeed in school. This should be an integrated initiative of the government in cooperation with school districts.

Furthermore, if our school system is to contribute significantly to the levels of human capital on which our future welfare depends, it will need to actually “exploit” the potential our diverse student population presents us with, rather than viewing such diversity as a hurdle to be overcome. Such potential can be found, for example, in our students’ range of linguistic skills, cultural sensitivities and networks of relationships.

Judgements about “excellence” typically are based on test scores. In Ontario, such evidence is available from international testing programs,<sup>12</sup> as well as from Ontario’s own province-wide assessments in reading, writing and mathematics undertaken by the Educational Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO).

This evidence is not a source of unambiguous conclusions about the achievement of Ontario students. Interpretations of international tests results, for example, need to be sensitive to such well-known problems as inconsistencies in the groups of students in each country that are being compared, uneven rigor in how countries go about selecting the students to include in the tests, and differences across countries in the opportunities students have to learn the material included in the tests. Nevertheless, we conclude from this evidence that by international standards, Ontario students have achieved fairly well historically, and that by these same standards today’s students continue to achieve fairly well. Such standards appear not to have changed much over the past seven years.<sup>13</sup>

#### HOW WELL ARE ONTARIO STUDENTS ACHIEVING?

By international standards:

Ontario students have achieved fairly well historically

By these same standards:

Today’s students continue to achieve fairly well

By the government's own tests:  
Ontario students' achievement has stalled

By the government's own standards:  
Improvements in achievement have stalled at too low a level

Implementing our recommendations would significantly advance Ontario's achievement in its own right and by international standards. Literacy and mathematics are crucial foundation skills but they are only a partial reflection of what would best prepare our children for the highly fluid competitive global context in which they will live and work.

Within Ontario, student performance has been levelling off since 1997; results of the government's own tests (aligned with the provincial curriculum) indicate that improvements in achievement have stalled over the past three years, as is evident in Tables 1 and 2.

TABLE 1: GRADE 3: PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS AT ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL 3 AND ABOVE

	1997 – 1998	1998 – 1999	1999 – 2000	2000 - 2001	2001 - 2002
Reading	46%	45%	49%	49%	50%
Writing	49%	52%	52%	52%	55%
Mathematics	43%	56%	57%	61%	58%

TABLE 2: GRADE 6: PERCENTAGES OF STUDENTS AT ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL 3 AND ABOVE

	1998 – 1999	1999 – 2000	2000 - 2001	2001 - 2002
Reading	48%	50%	55%	55%
Writing	48%	48%	53%	53%
Mathematics	46%	51%	54%	54%

We believe that the current stagnation in the system, especially in reading and writing, is a result of inadequate policy focus and a failure to invest in developing local capacities for "raising the bar" of achievement, and "closing the gap" between high and low performers. Therefore we recommend:

7. Improvements should be made in the standards of achievement in literacy and mathematics by both "raising the bar" and "closing the gap" for those currently not experiencing success.

We also recommend:

8. Strategies and resources should take into account the extent of challenge faced in each local context. Schools should be judged not just on their level of achievement, but also on the progress being made from year to year. This "value-added" measure of success represents a truer and more fair indicator of progress.

Implementing our recommendations would significantly advance Ontario's achievement in its own right and by international standards. Literacy and mathematics are crucial foundation skills but they are only a partial reflection of what would best prepare our children for the highly fluid,

competitive global context in which they will live and work. So the challenge in moving forward is not only to set and achieve improvement targets in literacy and mathematics but also to expand educational goals to encompass a fuller range of essential goals. With respect to these wider goals, the 2002 OISE/UT Survey, reported above, has found that the Ontario public gives as much priority to such “soft learning outcomes” as preparation to exercise creativity and critical thinking and preparation for the responsibilities of parenting or citizenship roles as it does to such “hard outcomes” as preparation for work or postsecondary education. Thus our recommendation is:

9. The province should expand its standards to better represent the full range of educational goals as central criteria in decisions about the resources to be allocated to schools, the capacities to be developed for professional educators, and the research to be carried out in support of the system’s improvement.

## 2 Governance

### Current Status

Ontario has one of the most centralized education systems in North America. Such centralization manifests itself in the inflexible and prescriptive nature of the funding formula, as well as centralized processes for curriculum development and student assessment. Also controlled from the centre are requirements for school councils, teacher recertification, initial teacher licensure, mechanisms for reporting to parents, procedures for assessing practicing teachers, and allocating resources to special needs students. These are just a few examples from a much longer list.

Additionally, and to ensure that such central control is not compromised, the government has severely impaired the ability of school districts to act with discretion. It did this by doubling their size without parallel additions to their administrative strength, and by dramatically bounding the roles and responsibilities of local trustees. Such centralized control places enormous responsibility on the centre to know what problems need to be solved, and to figure out what are the best solutions for all of the children and schools in the province. There is no reason to think that those at the centre will be able to do this effectively; the most likely result is increased bureaucracy with little or no improvement in performance.

#### CONTROLLED FROM THE CENTRE

- funding formula
- -processes for curriculum development and student assessment
- school councils
- teacher recertification
- initial teacher licensure
- -mechanisms for reporting to parents
- -procedures for assessing practicing teachers
- -allocating resources to special needs students

An overly centralized regime dramatically lowers the collective problem-solving capacity of the education system, losing the insights those at the local level have about the needs of their clients and communities and cutting off their contributions to addressing challenges.

### Our position

Effective educational governance requires a judicious balance of central and local authority, with the centre providing a clear sense of priorities but districts having scope for adapting policies to suit local contexts. Results of the soon-to-be-released OISE/UT Survey indicate that the public does not feel it has sufficient influence on school decisions.

In a helpful metaphor, Gareth Morgan has talked of organizations having “brains.”<sup>14</sup> In inflexible and hierarchical organizations, the brains are located at the top, thinking on behalf of those in the trenches. But the brains of an agile and responsive organization are distributed broadly among its members, all of whom have a commitment to achieving the organization’s goals the best way they know how. We believe that the distributed brains (in districts and schools) need more scope and autonomy to do their best, bearing in mind the need to ensure that they also need the capacity to carry out their responsibilities well.

An overly centralized regime dramatically lowers the collective problem-solving capacity of the education system, losing the insights those at the local level have about the needs of their clients and communities and cutting off their contributions to addressing challenges. This is especially the case for organizations whose members are highly trained and strongly committed to the mission of the organization as are the province’s teachers and administrators. All that potential brainpower is either squandered or diverted to dealing with the problems created by flawed thinking at the centre.

In sum, the degree to which the education system has been centralized flies in the face of most evidence about how to improve quality and encourage innovation in large, complex organizations. For this reason we recommend that:

10. The province should establish the educational priorities for Ontario, using provincial standards to make decisions about allocation of resources, curriculum and learning objectives, and research to support the system’s improvement.

The next section of the report adds several additional policy areas to this small set of priorities. Beyond authority for this small set, much more discretion needs to be returned to districts and schools in other key areas:

11. School boards and schools should be responsible for implementing the provincial priorities, with flexibility to determine how best to meet the provincial standards.

The task for boards and schools is to mobilize the commitment and capacity of teachers and administrators, while instilling greater public confidence and investment in the public school system. Although there are tensions in such a social contract, this approach of “reciprocal accountability” is essential.

### 3 Coherence

Policies are coherent if they fit together without conflicts or inconsistencies and if they reflect a common set of priorities. From the policy development perspective, it is important, for instance, that assessment and curriculum policies are coherent; a broad curriculum, for instance, can be undermined if mandated tests focus on a narrow range of skills, leaving much of the curriculum untested.

From the perspective of those who have to implement policies, however, coherence may be elusive. Teachers and principals who are overwhelmed with new initiatives will find it difficult to see any connections among them, experiencing a sense of overload and fragmentation because of what seems to be a never-ending stream of directives from above, with little opportunity to see how they might be linked.

## Current status

During the past six years, the provincial government, taking advantage of its headlock on power, has enacted a flood of new policies. With two exceptions, there is little evidence of any coherence. One exception is the government's overriding concern for accountability, a concern explicit in many of its policies although largely unrelated to the improvement of learning. A second exception is the coherence among the content of EQAO's achievement tests, the goals and standards on which the provincial curriculum is based, and the standards included in the provincial report card.

The most visible sources of incoherence in the province have to do with the conditions for policy implementation—a prevailing sense of overload and fragmentation from the perspective of schools. There are a remarkably large number of examples of incoherence in this area in the province. For example, the new curriculum has increased the complexity of the content to be covered in most grades and in most subjects. But this curriculum assumes a level of prior knowledge on the part of students beyond the first grade that many have not had a chance to acquire (hence the flood of students to summer school). Additionally, the new curriculum presses teachers not only to substantially revise how they teach, what they teach, and how fast they teach it, but also to do this in the context of an overwhelming number of other changes, including provincial testing initiatives and the new standards-based provincial report card.

Teachers have seen increases in teaching loads, class sizes and in some cases, school size, combined with decreases in resources and support for special needs students. Changes have also taken place in requirements for advising students and relations with principals (who are no longer part of the teacher federations). Leaving aside the potential contribution of these policies to teaching and learning for the moment, it is clear that teachers face very steep learning curves. But they are being asked to develop significant new capacities with less time for individual and collective learning than they have ever had before. And they are expected to find the time while also, for example, completing new professional certification requirements unlikely to make more than marginal contributions to the capacities they actually need.

School administrators face much the same incoherent and overwhelming policy environment as teachers do. Recently, for example, the province mandated a teacher evaluation policy requiring school administrators to evaluate all new teachers and a third of all experienced teachers in their schools twice a year. The guidelines for such evaluation include over 160 criteria against which teachers are to be assessed. Such a requirement fosters incoherence, not least because to implement this policy as intended would increase administrators' already heavy workload by about 20 percent. Such an increase comes at the same time as the total amount of administrator time available to schools is being reduced through the elimination of vice principal positions. Why would we invest so much of the scarce and valuable time of school administrators on an activity unlikely to earn us even marginal returns on the quality of teaching and learning?

What was this barrage of new provincial policies intended to accomplish? Some have to do with restructuring the system and achieving greater efficiencies. Others are clearly intended to provide at least a veneer of greater accountability. One would like to think educating children better was also a goal. But data indicate that learning in Ontario schools has not improved substantially since 1994. At best, some of the preconditions may have been set for more effective action, but such improvement will not occur without much more attention to the kind of coherence we have discussed here.

## Our position

In our discussion of governance, we recommended that the province be responsible and accountable only for those relatively small number of policies focused on educational goals, assessing their achievement, and providing the resources needed for such achievement (see Recommendation 10). This limited focus would add considerable coherence to the provincial policy context. Current versions of these policies are already aligned with each other, but need further refinement to address two types of problems.

One shortcoming of the existing curriculum is its lack of serious attention to the needs of non-university bound students. Attaining a vision of equity and excellence is impossible without curriculum and testing changes to better address the needs of such students. A second shortcoming is its excessive volume; this requires that the government “not alter the curriculum or redesign it, but sharpen its focus, streamline it, cut out the clutter.”<sup>15</sup> We recommend that:

12. Provincial policies should be framed around a defensible and explicit vision for public schooling.

In addition to the curriculum, testing, and reporting policies that we recommend the government be responsible for, we urge the adoption of a small number of policies in areas known to have powerful effects on student learning. These policies are difficult to decentralize to other levels of the education system:

- -Policies aimed at increasing access to high quality child care and education in the early years. As we have already pointed out, such care and education is an excellent investment in terms of future outcomes for children and youth.
- -Policies directed at developing and supporting educators, particularly teachers in their first three years.
- -Policies directed to develop capacities for continuous improvement at school and district levels.
- -Policies that may be outside education, as usually defined, but that address areas known to have a substantial impact on student learning and achievement. These would include areas such as prenatal health care and housing for low-income families. Improvements in these areas may do more for student learning than many current classroom and school-oriented policies.

In combination with refined versions of the current provincial curriculum, testing and reporting policies, these additional policies would begin to approximate the full set for which the government ought to be directly responsible. This would be consistent with our position on the adoption of a much more decentralized form of educational governance in the province.

#### A BLIZZARD OF CHANGE

For students:

the new curriculum assumes a level of prior knowledge that many have not had a chance to acquire

For teachers:

the new curriculum presses teachers to substantially revise how they teach, what they teach, and how fast they teach it

For school administrators:

the new teacher evaluation policy has 160 criteria, increasing administrators' already heavy workload by 20%

Another shortcoming of the existing curriculum is its lack of serious attention to the needs of non-university bound students.

Attaining a vision of excellence and equity is impossible without curriculum and testing changes to better address the needs of such students. The government needs “not to alter the curriculum or redesign it, but to sharpen its focus, streamline it, cut out the clutter.”

#### 4 Evidence

Policy is necessarily influenced by many factors beyond research evidence, including public opinion and the political philosophies of those in government. However, to a greater extent than is now the case, education policies should also be informed by empirical evidence about their likely effects.

#### Current status

The provincial education policies introduced over the past six years were developed and enacted without much demonstrable attention to empirical evidence about what would improve teaching and learning. For instance, the tax credit for parents sending their children to independent schools is part of a bundle of “choice” policies that have been experimented with around the world. Such policies have been found to produce, at best, tiny increments of achievement for some students at the expense of greatly exacerbated inequities for the most needy students.

Other examples of policies with little likelihood of improving learning include, for instance, teacher testing, larger school districts and the closure of many small schools. Equally unproductive would be the implementation of school councils when this is unconnected to other forms of parent involvement and the new policy on teacher supervision.

These initiatives have been costly in terms of professional time and other resources. Many have been politically contentious and exacted a considerable toll on the energies and commitments of educators; their influence on teaching and learning will be negligible or negative, since they diverted attention from more beneficial options.

#### UNPRODUCTIVE POLICIES

The tax credit for parents sending their children to independent schools is part of a bundle of “choice” policies that have been experimented with around the world. Such policies have been found to produce, at best, tiny increments of achievement for some students at the expense of greatly exacerbated inequities for the most needy students. Other examples of policies with little likelihood of improving learning include, for instance, teacher testing, larger school districts, and the closure of many small schools. Equally unproductive would be the implementation of school councils when this is unconnected to other forms of parent involvement and the new policy on teacher supervision.

These initiatives have been costly in terms of professional time and other resources. Many have been politically contentious and exacted a considerable toll on the energies and commitments of educators; their influence on teaching and learning will be negligible or negative, since they diverted attention from more beneficial options.

## Our position

We are not naïve about the difficulties in interpreting research or about the many influences on policy formulation and the issues that need to be considered. Nor do we believe that education policies are designed only to improve the learning of students, although, like most, we hope that is usually the main goal. Rather, our position is that the best available evidence about the consequences of policy alternatives should be a central consideration. We recommend that:

13. Provincial education policies should be more explicitly and more systematically “evidence-informed.”

This position might be dismissed based on claims that the available evidence is “inconsistent in its implications for policy” or that “the evidence can be used to justify whatever is your preferred policy.” While there is some truth to both these claims, this is much less the case now than even a decade ago. Available evidence indicates that teaching and learning are likely to improve in response to such classroom policies and practices as small class sizes for primary children, active instruction by teachers, heterogeneous grouping of students, social promotion of students through the elementary grades, and careful and ongoing monitoring of student learning. At the school level, teaching and learning improve, for example, in response to small school size, strong school leadership, and collaborative professional cultures.

Evidence now available through research relevant to education policy is of a quality and volume that dismissing it as a guide to social policy and action should be considered bad politics if not unethical. We do not use the term “unethical” lightly. Formulating policies that on the basis of substantial evidence have no chance of accomplishing the most desired goals, at best, wastes scarce public resources and, at worst, does unnecessary harm.

Policy makers are now in a much better position to take advantage of systematic research because there is more of it and it is of better quality. Techniques are now available for reliably synthesizing the results of many studies aiming to answer similar questions. Such techniques are being used to strengthen the use of evidence-informed policy in the federal government as well as internationally. In the light of such developments, it makes sense for the Ontario government, as well as educators at the district and school levels to make greater use of relevant research as a guide to both policy and practice.

## 5 Feedback Mechanisms

Since policy is unlikely to be perfect when first formulated, unanticipated and unintended consequences are bound to arise as implementation proceeds. Accepting this inevitability, governments are wise to set up channels for monitoring policy implementation and using such information to modify and refine policies as needed. In decentralized systems, districts and schools face similar challenges.

### WE NEED A BROAD RANGE OF DATA

One of the most impressive features of the British approach is the extent to which mechanisms have been developed to provide feedback about the implementation and to make adjustments on the basis of such feedback. Such mechanisms included, for example, the establishment of an external evaluation team to act as a “critical friend” and internal evaluation through inspections and test data.

In Ontario about the only systematic feedback we have available is EQAO testing. But beyond educational process and student



assessment data, a broad range of other information is relevant for assessing policy and its implementation.

#### Current status

At present, about the only systematic feedback available to the province concerning the health of the school system, the effects of existing educational policies, and the adequacy of policy implementation is information about student achievement provided by EQAO. Even if this information was always accurate, it represents only a small fraction of the issues about which the province needs feedback if it is to engage in continuous improvement. In the absence of such information, along with the government's apparent belief in the rightness of its policies, negative effects of policy or its implementation have had to reach crisis proportions before refinements have been considered. The education system, as a result, always seems to be in state of crisis.

#### Our position

Improving schools on a large scale is a complex business and one that cannot be guided by an inflexible plan that is not adjusted as implementation proceeds. Sometimes, for instance, policies and practices that in theory seem promising turn out to be disappointing when implemented (e.g., teacher advisory groups). Sometimes the policies themselves are appropriate but the means by which they are initiated and implemented is weak or misguided (e.g., the new elementary school curriculum). Sometimes completely unpredictable events occur that demand previously unanticipated responses (e.g., public information available about the content of the Grade 10 literacy test prior to its administration). This suggests that:

14. The province ought to implement a systematic, ongoing data collection process to monitor progress in achieving the province's goals of education. This would be a process for tracking success by school district and by school not only in achieving the goals of education established by the government but also in carrying out implementation strategies.

The British government has, over the past four years, orchestrated a sophisticated and ambitious initiative to improve literacy and numeracy in all elementary schools in the country. One of the most impressive features of the British approach is the extent to which mechanisms have been developed to provide feedback about the implementation and to make adjustments on the basis of such feedback. Such mechanisms included, for example, the establishment of an external evaluation team to act as a "critical friend" and internal evaluation through inspections and test data.<sup>16</sup>

As well, advisory staff carry out regular monitoring through meetings with supervisory staff in school districts and observe classrooms to gauge the extent of change in teaching practices. The government has also attended to research being carried out about the initiatives by independent university groups and others. Those responsible for the literacy and numeracy initiatives have transformed themselves into a prototype "learning organization," driven by evidence about what is and what is not working.

If our recommendations to decentralize educational governance in the province were acted on, we would also recommend that:

15. School districts and schools should implement systematic, ongoing data collection and feedback processes of their own aimed at improving the actions they take to accomplish the goals of education established by the province. This would include data about effects of the educational processes they use to improve student achievement.

Provincial testing and international assessment initiatives are here to stay—the challenge is to work toward becoming more sophisticated in interpreting and using assessment results, both at the provincial and local levels, avoiding the unsophisticated use of test data now common. For example, ranking schools on the basis of student test scores without, in some way, taking into account the effects of family background, community economic level or other conditions outside the control of the school is unfair and misleading. We need, instead, value-added measures that demonstrate the progress or lack of progress of specific schools. At present, there is too much testing for its own sake rather than as part of a coherent plan to point the way to more effective learning for all students.

Even schools that score well may be under-serving particular groups within the school. We need also to focus on “closing the gap” between high and low performing schools or groups—boys versus girls, schools in poor communities versus those in more affluent communities, for example. We need policies that focus resources and interventions on groups of children who are not performing well in the current school environment, to raise their achievement and thus their chances for success.

There is considerable evidence that strategies and training to increase “assessment literacy” on the part of teachers and principals produces high-yield results in student learning. Assessment literacy is designed to help schools access reliable data on student learning, critically interpret the data to discern how students are performing, and design improvement plans to improve results. Assessment literacy, once embedded, provides schools with the capacity to monitor how they can continually “raise the bar and close the gap” of student achievement—a key aspect of the vision for a strong and accountable public school system. For this reason:

16. More sophisticated use should be made of provincial achievement data inside classrooms, as well as by schools, districts, and the province.

Beyond educational process and student assessment data, a broad range of other information is relevant for assessing policy and its implementation. For example, we referred earlier to two recent studies carried out with teachers and administrators in a small number of Ontario secondary schools which looked at teachers’ perceptions of recent provincial policy changes. Both studies found that teachers had negative perceptions about recent policy changes, seeing them as largely unrelated to improving teaching and learning, the major source of job satisfaction for teachers. Such evidence shows how policy outcomes are shaped by the context for implementation as well as by the policies themselves.

Both of these studies were quite critical of the government’s initiatives but both provided complementary evidence that the government might use to adjust a number of policies. And both are rich sources of information about how future policy initiatives might be better implemented. None of this information can be gleaned from student achievement data, the main if not only source of evidence available to the government at this time. For these reasons:

17. The province should increase its support for independent research, evaluation, and feedback, as well as make more systematic use of the evidence from such independent sources.

## 6 Support for Teachers

High quality teaching is the most critical feature of the schools we need. Many education reform efforts, in Ontario and elsewhere, have tried to do without it—and they have failed badly. Such efforts have assumed, for example, that targeting areas such as curriculum, assessment, and graduation requirements will carry the day. But without attention to the development of teaching capacity none of these efforts makes much difference.

### Current status

The government has devoted considerable direct and indirect attention to teachers and teaching in Ontario. But the particular nature of this attention stands little likelihood of improving teaching. The Professional Learning Plan (PLP) and the initial teacher licensure exam are the most obvious examples of the government's direct attention to teaching. A mandatory professional development program has some promise, in principle. But the specific plan advocated for Ontario is very unlikely to maintain and improve teaching quality; its emphasis is more on record keeping and administration than it is on providing teachers with high quality professional learning experiences. Similarly, the initial teacher licensure test is not only redundant for new teachers just graduating from faculties of education, but "hard evidence" about the value of such tests in other jurisdictions tells us they are a waste of scarce resources.<sup>17</sup>

The government's indirect attention to teachers and teaching has taken the form of increased pressure and accountability with no corresponding increase in support or resources to meet higher standards. Such attention has been accompanied by an escalating atmosphere of conflict and rancor between the government and teacher unions and their members. In the short run, this kind of "attention" has been almost uniformly debilitating for teachers' professional commitments and levels of stress; it has left them feeling demeaned and demoralized.<sup>18</sup>

In the long run, the government's disposition toward teachers has seriously eroded the attractiveness of the profession to both present and potential future teachers, creating predictable recruitment and retention problems downstream. These days, for example, we almost never encounter a mature Ontario teacher recommending the profession to his or her own children—a significant form of recruitment in the past.

### Our position

The high pressure/high support approach that we advocate assumes that supporting teachers and improving teaching is one of the most powerful ways of improving student learning. Such pressure and support should be viewed over the entire cycle of a teacher's professional life, including recruitment into the profession, initial preservice training, induction and mentoring into professional practice, and ongoing professional learning.

More specifically, we recommend that:

18. The government should acknowledge the critical role of the teaching profession in the implementation of the government's own education policies. As a beginning, it should adopt a more respectful and collaborative relationship with those who work in schools and districts.

Evidence recently collected in the province by independent researchers indicates that when teachers believe the government's motivations for introducing new policies is unrelated to their own motivations for their work, the chances of their making sure those policies have useful outcomes are substantially diminished. This evidence indicates that, while teachers are most concerned about improving teaching and learning, they view the government's motives as primarily "political," a view greatly encouraged by the hostility the government has directed toward them.<sup>19</sup> The relationship between the government and teacher unions is currently acrimonious.

Certainly teachers' organizations play important and powerful roles in the educational system. At best, they are a source of information about what teachers and schools need, a way of accessing teachers' professional expertise, and a hotbed for program innovation; at worst, they can stall improvement efforts and help perpetuate some of the dysfunctions of the status quo. Teacher unions must get clear on the positive and unique leadership role they can play (as simultaneous insiders and outsiders) in educational improvement. Other educational players must get clear on the important role teacher unions play in educational improvement.

We believe that the government has the initial responsibility to break this impasse by embracing the central importance of teachers, and by investing greater resources in capacity building. Union leaders, in turn, have the corresponding responsibility to focus on performance of the system, and to commit themselves to the improvement of all teachers.

#### THE MOST CRITICAL FACTOR: HIGH QUALITY TEACHING

These days we almost never encounter a mature Ontario teacher recommending the profession to his or her own children—a significant form of recruitment in the past.

The relationship between the government and teacher unions is currently acrimonious. We believe that the government has the initial responsibility to break this impasse by embracing the central importance of teachers, and by investing greater resources in capacity building.

Union leaders in turn have the corresponding responsibility to focus on performance of the system.

19. Teacher leaders must do their part to help develop and implement a provincial policy framework in support of the schools we need.

Additionally:

20. The government should redesign the current version of its professional learning plan. In collaboration with professional associations and faculties of education, an alternative strategy or plan should be developed, one that will actually stimulate the ongoing professional learning of teachers in the province.

A defensible alternative to the current PLP would direct teachers' attention to areas of high provincial priority and help teachers increase their capacity for addressing student learning needs. At present, for example, one such area for capacity development would be "assessment literacy." Teachers need to be able to interpret assessment results and to address student problems or confusions revealed in the assessments. There has been no sustained provincial initiative to build teachers' capacity for using assessment information. At the local level, although districts and some schools have focused on helping teachers better understand test data and other assessment information, funding and program cuts have made such capacity building efforts more difficult.

21. The government should review and redesign the current version of its initial teacher test. In collaboration with professional associations and faculties of education, the government should review, and revise as needed, the exit standards and means of assessing those standards currently used in the preservice teacher training programs of faculties of education.

The evidence is quite clear that initial teacher tests contribute little or no value to the improvement of teaching and learning and cost a good deal to administer. However, if the need for greater accountability in this area demands that something be done, the most cost-effective alternative would be to revise existing sets of practices managed by the faculties to better meet these accountability concerns, and to help support new teachers.

22. The government, in collaboration with the Ontario College of Teachers, should review policies affecting the teaching profession, to address features that may have a negative impact on the recruitment and retention of high calibre candidates with the professional and personal attributes necessary for the system to achieve the vision of equity and excellence. The province, in cooperation with the Ontario College of Teachers, should establish a substantial induction program to support new teachers in the first three years of teaching.

Considerable evidence now suggests that high quality induction will improve the calibre of teaching.

## 7 Adequate and Flexible Funding

### Current Status

The new funding formula for education equalized grants across the province, making the determination of any specific local needs a matter for provincial rather than local decisions. Local school boards are no longer able to raise any local taxes. Funding is now done entirely by the province, rather than the combination of provincial and municipal funding, as had been the case previously. The formula was put forward as a way to restore funding equity, getting rid of the distortions caused by differences in property tax base across different communities. It was also part of a strong government agenda to cut costs and reduce deficits. An analysis of funding in relation to costs concluded that school boards had to significantly cut programs.<sup>20</sup> The formula, which has proven to be complex and difficult for school district staffs to understand, sets out firm rules about how money is to be spent. In a paper prepared for our project, Dan Lang showed that there is little or no flexibility for districts to shape the allocation of resources to best fit local needs.<sup>21</sup>

The most accessible data about the consequences of the new funding formula for current school resource and program levels comes from People for Education, a parent organization with members from public and separate schools working to support publicly funded education in Ontario. Using survey data, this organization, in cooperation with other parent groups, has tracked the “effects of funding and policy changes on Ontario’s public education system” since the funding formula was introduced in 1997. The survey asks parents, through school councils and with the assistance of principals, to take yearly inventories in their schools, counting class sizes, portable classrooms, computers, educational assistants, and so on. Secondary schools were included in the survey beginning in 2000.

The fifth annual report noted that core funding for classroom teachers has for the most part been maintained.<sup>22</sup> However, a comparison of responses over the five years shows the level of services, programs and staffing to be declining. For instance, the number of schools with part-time principals has doubled, while the number of schools with a teacher-librarian has dropped 26%. Every year since 1997, the number of schools with specialist teachers—physical education, music, guidance, English as a Second Language—has declined. Parent fundraising has increased, with a record \$37 million raised in 2001-2002. In the past four years, 176 elementary and 20 high schools have closed—many of them small schools. According to the funding formula, schools need an enrolment of 364 students to generate funding for a full-time principal; the effect of such policies is to make it more difficult to keep small schools open and fully staffed. More schools now report having a part-time principal or keeping the library open only part-time. In special education, waiting lists have increased, while access to support services of psychologists, social workers, and speech language pathologists has decreased sharply over the last five years.

Physical facilities and resources have also been affected by budget reductions, according to People for Education. One-third of the schools in the 2001-2002 sample reported that general upgrades—roof, furnace, paint, etc.—were required but not approved, while shortages of textbooks mean that students share books or use texts that are worn or outdated. Schools are

also looking to other sources of funding—the number of schools reporting user fees for community use increased, as did the number charging students for lab or materials fees. An increasing minority of schools report raising money for educational costs such as textbooks, computers or musical instruments.

### Our position

Our own policy audit and Dr. Mordechai Rozanski's Report of the Education Equality Task Force converge on the need for immediate action. Rozanski calls for a strong public school system. He finds that the system needs more money—\$1.8 billion at least—but he argues that it is not just the money; above all, it is the use of the money that counts. He calls for, as we do, a clear developmental focus on linking the trinity of capacity building, student achievement, and continuous improvement within a transparent and reciprocal accountability framework:

*In my view education, while centered in the classroom, is influenced by what occurs in the whole school. Schools and the principals, teachers, and support staff who are at the core of our education system must receive sufficient resources, including the resources needed to build capacity through professional development, to do their job. At the same time, they have an obligation to spend all resources in a cost-effective and appropriate manner and to demonstrate that their expenditures are leading to continuous improvement in student learning and achievement.<sup>23</sup>*

Most commissions and task forces, even when they get the direction right, fail when it comes to implementation and rarely realize their promise. In this respect, the Rozanski recommendations are much at risk. One aim of our policy audit is to ensure that there is maximum focus on implementing the ideas necessary to improve substantially the current system. Rozanski, himself, calls his report a prerequisite, or context, for reform.

There is a crucial distinction between his report and ours. Rozanski's report contains no reform strategy; he is aware that he has not provided mechanisms or strategies, per se, in his report, that would help realize his best intentions. Strategies for implementation were beyond his mandate; his charge was to review and "fix" the funding formula. He shapes the direction but leaves others to implement it. We recommend three policy investments which are likely to obtain high yields:

1. leadership development;
2. early childhood education;
3. teacher induction

These are fundamental policy levers designed for high return on investment—value for money as measured by improvements in teaching and learning.

### IT'S NOT JUST THE MONEY

Rozanski finds that the system needs more money—\$1.8 billion at least—but he argues, that it is not just the money, but above all the use of the money that counts.

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investments which are likely to obtain high yields. They are fundamental policy levers designed for high return on investment—value for money as measured by improvements in teaching and learning.

Three of Rozanski's 33 recommendations refer to immediate investment in 2002-2003:

ROZANSKI RECOMMENDATION 2: to foster stability in the education sector, the Ministry of Education [should] allocate funds to school boards on the current school year (2002-03) for the current round of collective bargaining with teaching and support staff.

ROZANSKI RECOMMENDATION 24: to foster stability in the education sector, the Ministry of Education [should] allocate \$130 million to school boards in the current school year (2002-03) to fill all claims approved up to the end of cycle 3 of the comprehensive review of Intensive Support Amount Funding for Special Education.

ROZANSKI RECOMMENDATION 29: to foster stability in the education sector, the Ministry of Education [should] allocate the \$20 million increase in funding for school transportation that was announced in the government's 2002 budget to school boards.

The government responded within four days of the tabling of Rozanski's report with an allocation of \$610 million (\$340 million for collective bargaining); \$250 million (not just \$130 million) for special education; and \$20 million for transportation.

The second category of new money concerns benchmarking the Basic Foundation Grant, the Special Purpose Grants, and the Pupil Accommodation Grant. Here, we differentiate this category to single out three high leverage investments.

A core part of our vision, and Rozanski's, involves increasing the local capacity of principals/schools and communities, and Directors of Education to engage in continuous improvement for better student achievement. Rozanski sets the direction, but there is nothing in his report that addresses the question of how local districts, schools, and communities can go about developing the capacity to do this. Capacity consists of motivation (commitment), skills (competencies), and resources to act effectively. There is nothing in his report that makes it likely that local capacity will in fact develop.

We acknowledge that the amount of the Basic Foundation Grant (currently \$7,479 million) should be used to strengthen basic local capacity. In addition, we target three policy levers which should be used to further increase local capacity. These involve: leadership development, early school readiness, and a teacher induction program.

There are two categories in the funding formula which provide flexible monies, which will increase if Rozanski's recommendations are followed. These are the Local Priorities Amount (LPA) (currently \$401 million) which represents additional monies beyond the basic grant, and the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) (currently \$293 million). These amounts are intended to increase even further with the LPA being recommended to stabilize at 5% of the Basic Foundation Grant. Our first recommendation is that:

23. The Local Priorities Amount (LPA) and Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) should be pooled, as they can be at the local level, to focus especially on local capacity building. Local districts should deliberately use flexible new money to increase local capacity for increasing student achievement and building in mechanisms for continuous improvement (this recommendation assumes that there will be enough money provided to boards and schools through the formula to cover regular operating costs and that the money available through this pool can actually be used to address local capacity building).



We are already involved in this kind of work with several districts, for example, to increase early literacy learning—to raise the bar of literacy achievement while closing the gap between high- and low-performing students and schools.

Rozanski's recommendations 8 through 10 are compatible with our recommendation to increase local capacity. Recommendation 8 addresses the need for remedial work in literacy and mathematics programs for students in Grades 7 through 10. Recommendation 9 refers to using the LOG to address the performance gap between high and low achievers (we have suggested that the LOG and LPA be pooled at the district level to focus on capacity building in an integrated fashion). Recommendation 10 focuses on English as a Second Language.

Local districts can go only so far in developing capacity on their own. So, as part of our high-leverage approach, we recommend that:

24. A Leadership Institute be established, reporting directly to the Deputy Minister. Its purpose should be to help develop those leadership capacities of principals, district administrators, and teachers needed to achieve high levels of equity and excellence among students in their schools.

There are already some models for what this would entail, one of them being the National College of School Leadership in England.

Early readiness for school is a second focus of the Rozanski report ("readiness to learn") that we believe offers considerable leverage for improving the achievement of Ontario children in the long run. Accordingly, we have recommended that an integrated set of strategies and programs be developed by the government, in cooperation with districts, to address the learning needs of all preschool children. (Please see our Recommendation 5.)

More money is needed for this recommendation to be implemented, as Rozanski has indicated, but so is better integration of existing programs and agencies. Part of this recommendation entails a greater focus on building the capacities of parents and families, who need and want such assistance, to provide an educational culture for children in the home that is conducive to learning in school. Much of the groundwork in this area has been done by McCain and Mustard.<sup>24</sup> The kind of integrated early years education and development ideas envisioned by McCain and Mustard is currently being tested in pilots in the Toronto District School Board, with support provided by the City and other funders. This work will provide valuable implementation ideas.

The third area raised by the Rozanski report that offers high leverage for improvement is increased attention to development of the teaching profession. The schools we need depend critically on a high quality, engaged, committed teaching profession, as we argued earlier in our report. Rozanski raises the problem of recruiting and retaining teachers<sup>25</sup> but provides only a partial, structural, recommendation: "the credit-load factor" in determining teachers' workload should be adjusted in light of the new secondary school curriculum.

The province needs to go much beyond this. Strategies, investments, and programs are needed which will make the public school system an attractive and fulfilling place to teach. For starters, we have recommended that the province, in cooperation with the Ontario College of Teachers and districts, establish a substantial induction program to support new teachers in their first three years of teaching. Investing in the development of a corps of mentor teachers to work with new teachers will help re-establish morale and promote teaching effectiveness. Better preservice teacher education, and effective continuous professional development are also part and parcel of improving the teaching profession. (Please see our Recommendation 22.)

Of course, our recommendations are intended to work together. Improving local capacity, increasing readiness to learn, and strengthening the teaching profession are interrelated. The key here is that local authorities must integrate their efforts, and be helped to do so by the infusion of resources, direct assistance in capacity building, and transparent accountability for the impact of their efforts.

## CONCLUSION

Implementation Is Everything  
How to Get Involved

### IMPLEMENTATION IS EVERYTHING

In the seven years since the release of the report of Ontario's Royal Commission on Learning, the province has experienced a blizzard of education policy initiatives. Some of these, as we have acknowledged, made sense and moved the school system in the right direction. The end result, however, has not been positive; teachers are demoralized, student achievement has stalled, and schools and school districts report great difficulty in meeting local needs.

Such a disappointing outcome is not surprising given what we know now about large-scale reform and policy implementation.<sup>26</sup> First, enacting policies without giving attention to the implementation process is bound

to lead to less successful outcomes. Second, education policy needs to be guided by a strong and coherent vision. Third, high pressure/low support approaches of the sort used in Ontario over the past seven years, have a growing record of failure in other jurisdictions; the evidence does not support continuing with such an approach.

This report provides a policy audit and proposes a distinctly different, "high pressure, high support" approach to improving our schools in the future. We have argued that the social cohesion which is so critical to the quality of life and economic welfare of our highly diverse province depends fundamentally on a strong public school system. This school system must be capable of achieving both equity and excellence. Our approach to the future improvement of the system aims for high standards of achievement and provides the resources and support necessary to meet such standards.

Our purpose in writing this report is to stimulate debate and action, in the next several months, about the kinds of schools Ontario needs. We will take the results of this debate and present a second, final report in the spring of 2003. In the meantime, we urge that action be taken by both local authorities, and government, and that these actions not be piecemeal, but be conceptualized and implemented with a broader plan in mind—one that includes a fundamental commitment to strengthening the capacity and performance of the public school system. The public school system in Ontario has languished for too long. The time for concerted action is now.

This report provides a policy audit and proposes a distinctly different, "high pressure, high support" approach to improving our schools in the future. We have argued that the social cohesion which is so critical to the quality of life and economic welfare of our highly diverse province depends fundamentally on a strong public school system. This school system must be capable of achieving both equity and excellence.

### HOW TO GET INVOLVED

We invite you to get involved in the Schools We Need debate. Please visit our website at <http://schoolsweneed.oise.utoronto.ca>.

The public school system in Ontario has languished for too long.  
The time for concerted action is now.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

### WHAT THE PUBLIC SAYS...

1. Further efforts to improve the school system should proceed in a measured and incremental fashion, taking care to build on the trust the public already has in teachers and schools.
2. When such improvements require additional resources for schools, governments should assume the public will support reasonable increases in taxes for that purpose.

### Vision...

The province needs a strong public school system, one that is capable of achieving high levels of excellence and equity.

3. Future efforts to provide greater choice of educational alternatives in the province should be focused on increasing the range of choices within the public system rather than weakening the public system by funding more private alternatives.
4. Provincial assessments, and the standards on which they are based, should be extended significantly beyond their current focus on literacy and numeracy to reflect the capacities students need to develop in order to work and to participate in an increasingly complex, knowledge driven world.
5. Significant investments should be made in early childhood programs, the expansion of junior kindergarten programs, especially for families who would otherwise be unable to give their children such opportunities, and full-day senior kindergarten.
6. Significant investments should be made in developing the capacities of families to provide their children with the physical, social, and intellectual resources they need to succeed in school. This should be an integrated initiative of the government in cooperation with school districts.
7. Improvements should be made in the standards of achievement in literacy and mathematics by both "raising the bar" and "closing the gap" for those currently not experiencing success.
8. STRATEGIES AND RESOURCES NEED TO TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE EXTENT OF CHALLENGE FACED IN EACH LOCAL CONTEXT. SCHOOLS SHOULD BE JUDGED NOT JUST ON THEIR LEVEL OF ACHIEVEMENT, BUT ALSO ON THE PROGRESS BEING MADE FROM YEAR TO YEAR. THIS VALUE-ADDED MEASURE OF SUCCESS REPRESENTS A TRUER AND MORE FAIR INDICATOR OF PROGRESS.

### Governance...

Discretion needs to be returned to districts and schools, with the province retaining power to set broad directions and to monitor progress.

9. The province should expand its standards to better represent the full range of educational goals as central criteria in decisions about the resources to be allocated to schools, the capacities to be developed for professional educators, and the research to be carried out in support of the system's improvement.
10. The province should establish the educational priorities for Ontario, using provincial standards to make decisions about allocation of resources, curriculum and learning objectives, and research to support the system's improvement.

11. School districts and schools should be responsible for implementing the provincial priorities, with flexibility to determine how best to meet the provincial standards.

Coherence...

The province needs a small number of major policies that are coherent, aligned with a vision for a strong public school system, and likely to yield the desired results.

12. Provincial policies should be framed around a defensible and explicit vision for public schooling.

Evidence...

Research evidence about what improves student learning should inform not only the formulation of policy but also the implementation plan.

13. Provincial education policies should be more explicitly and more systematically “evidence-informed.”

Feedback Mechanisms...

The government should monitor progress by helping to identify obstacles and how to overcome them, and by providing opportunities for regular mid-course corrections.

14. The province ought to implement a systematic, ongoing data collection process to monitor progress in achieving the province’s goals of education. This would be a process for tracking success by school district and by school, not only in achieving the goals of education established by the government but also in carrying out implementation strategies.

15. School districts and schools should implement systematic, ongoing data collection and feedback processes of their own aimed at improving the actions they take to accomplish the goals of education established by the province. This would include data about effects of the educational processes they use to improve student achievement.

16. More sophisticated use should be made of provincial achievement data inside classrooms, as well as by schools, districts, and the province.

17. The province should increase its support for independent research, evaluation, and feedback, as well as make more systematic use of the evidence from such independent sources.

Support for Teachers...

The province needs to collaborate with teachers and principals, and not simply hand down policies. Policy makers need to act now to attract and retain high quality teachers.

18. The government should acknowledge the critical role of the teaching profession in the implementation of the government’s own education policies. As a beginning, it should adopt a more respectful and collaborative relationship with those who work in schools and districts.

19. Teacher leaders must do their part to help develop and implement a provincial policy framework in support of the schools we need.

20. The government should redesign the current version of its professional learning plan. In collaboration with professional associations and faculties of education, an alternative strategy or plan should be developed, one that will actually stimulate the ongoing professional learning of teachers in the province.

21. The government should review and redesign the current version of its initial teacher test. In collaboration with professional associations and faculties of education, the government should review, and revise as needed, the exit standards and means of assessing those standards currently used in the preservice teacher training programs of faculties of education.

22. The government, in collaboration with the Ontario College of Teachers, should review policies affecting the teaching profession, to address features that may have a negative impact on the recruitment and retention of high calibre candidates with the professional and personal attributes necessary for the system to achieve the vision of equity and excellence. The province, in cooperation with the Ontario College of Teachers and districts, should establish a substantial induction program to support new teachers in their first three years of teaching.

#### Adequate and Flexible Funding...

Funding for schools needs to reflect real current costs, not 1997 costs, and there needs to be more flexibility in the use of these funds at the local level.

23. The Local Priorities Amount (LPA) and Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) should be pooled, as they can be at the local level, to focus especially on local capacity building. Local districts should deliberately use flexible new money to increase local capacity for increasing student achievement and building in mechanisms for continuous improvement (this recommendation assumes that there will be enough money provided to boards and schools through the formula to cover regular operating costs and that the money available through this pool can actually be used to address local capacity building).

24. A Leadership Institute should be established, reporting directly to the Deputy Minister. Its purpose should be to help develop those leadership capacities of principals, district administrators, and teachers needed to achieve high levels of equity and excellence among students in their schools.

#### APPENDIX A

##### Checklist of Recent Initiatives

- The number of school boards was cut from 129 to 72.
- -A new formula centralized funding, shifting authority from local school boards to the government and removing the local ability to levy education taxes.
- -School councils were established, with parents, community members, and members of the business community.
- -New labour laws were introduced removing principals and vice-principals from teacher unions and establishing more restrictive terms within which boards must negotiate contracts with teachers.
- -A centrally defined curriculum was introduced with student achievement assessed through externally developed province-wide testing and a new standard report card.
- -The number of courses taught by high school teachers has increased and it has become mandatory for teachers to participate in extra-curricular activities.
- -The fifth year of secondary school was eliminated, bringing Ontario into alignment with most other jurisdictions, but also creating a "double cohort" of students for universities and colleges for 2003.
- -The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was formed with responsibility for the development, administration, and analysis of provincial testing programs, now in reading and writing and mathematics at Grades 3, 6, and 9, as well as a literacy test for Grade 10 students.

- -The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) was established as the governing body for the teaching profession, responsible for licensing, discipline, and the development and maintenance of professional standards.
- -New teacher accountability measures were introduced with the OCT being directed to develop and administer a licensing test for graduates of teacher education programs and set up a “professional learning program” for practising teachers.

Two pieces of legislation—the Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997 (Bill 160) and the Education Accountability Act, 2000 (Bill 74)—enabled the Conservative government to carry out its “Common Sense Revolution” in education. Their approach to reform followed the lead of other jurisdictions like England, Alberta, and New Zealand, with increased centralization of power at the provincial level and a focus on deficit cutting.

## NOTES

- 1 - Royal Commission on Learning (1994).
- 2 - Rozanski (2002, p.5).
- 3 - This section is based in large part on a paper, “Public Perspectives on Schooling: An Overview and Analysis of Public Opinion Polling on Education” prepared for The Schools We Need by Reuben Roth.
- 4 - The OISE/UT surveys, which began in 1978, are the only regular, publicly disseminated surveys of public attitudes toward educational policy options in Canada. The survey is unique in assessing the educational views of both the general public and one of the most powerful social groups, corporate executives. Most of the prior surveys have been published and distributed by the former OISE Press. They are as follows: D.W. Livingstone, *Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario* (1978); Livingstone and D. Hart, *Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario* (1979 and 1980); Livingstone, Hart, and L.D. McLean, *Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario* (1982); Livingstone, Hart, and L.E. Davie, *Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario* (1984, 1986, 1988, 1990, 1992, and 1994). The 1996 and 1998 surveys were published by University of Toronto Press: see Livingstone, Hart, and Davie, *Public Attitudes Toward Education in Ontario* (1996, 1998). The 2000 survey was published as an *Orbit* Magazine monograph. The OISE/UT survey website: [www.oise.utoronto.ca/OISE-Survey](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/OISE-Survey).
- 5 - Angus Reid poll sponsored by the Ministry of Education and Training and released to the Legislative Library, summer 2000.
- 6 - Bricker & Greenspon (2001).
- 7 - Bricker & Greenspon (2001).
- 8 - Barber (2002).
- 9 - Bricker & Greenspon (2001).
- 10 - Goodlad, J. (2002).
- 11 - McCain & Mustard (1999).
- 12 - See, for example, results of IEA studies of science (Postlethwaite & Wiley, 1992) and math (Robitaille & Garden, 1989).

- 13 The Ontario report for the Program for International Student Achievement (PISA) was released at the end of 2001. Sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), PISA provides indicators of the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in 32 countries. Canadian performance, according to PISA, was very high in relation to other countries—for example, Canada’s achievement was near the top in all three subject areas (reading, science, and mathematics). Ontario performed at the Canadian average in reading but at a slightly lower level in mathematics. The Third International Mathematics and Science Study Repeat Project (TIMSS-R), a project of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA), compared teaching and learning of mathematics and science in a 1999 study of Grade 8 students in 38 countries. Ontario students scored significantly higher than the international average in both mathematics and science. As well, they scored significantly higher than their Grade 4 cohort on the 1995 TIMSS.
- 14 -Morgan, G. (1986).
- 15 -Hargreaves, A., & Moore, S. (2002).
- 16 -See, for example, Earl, L., Levin, B., Leithwood, K., Fullan, M., & Watson, N. (2001).
- 17 See, for example, Ballou & Podgursky (2000).
- 18 -See Leithwood, K., Steinbach, R., & Jantzi, D. (2002) & Hargreaves, A., Moore, S. (2002).
- 19 Leithwood, K., Steinbach, R., & Jantzi, D. (2002).
- 20 Mackenzie, H. (2002).
- 21 Lang, D. (2002).
- 22 People for Education (2002).
- 23 Rozanski (2002, pp. 16–17).
- 24 McCain & Mustard (1999).
- 25 Rozanski (2002, p.5).
- 26 Fullan (2003).

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