

PEOPLE FOR EDUCATION NEWSLETTER



BECAUSE EDUCATION MATTERS MOST

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SCHOOL FEES ON THE RISE

New report shows that many school fees are being used to cover “essential” costs

According to data from People for Education’s *2011 Annual School Survey*, school fees are on the rise.

SOME FEES CONTRAVENE ONTARIO’S EDUCATION ACT

In September, the Ministry of Education sent [a memo to school board directors](#) reminding them of which fees contravene Ontario’s *Education Act*, including mandatory flat fees for courses that lead to graduation.

Despite these rules, People for Education’s data indicate that many high schools charge fees for these courses. The fees are very small in some schools, but in others, students can pay as much as \$150 per year in course fees. Some schools report raising over \$90,000 per year through course fees.

Percentage of high schools charging fees for courses

- Art – 52%
- Phys Ed – 41%
- Design and Technology – 32%
- Family Studies – 28%
- Music – 26%
- Science – 14%
- Moderns – 17%
- Computer – 8%
- Business – 8%
- Math – 6%
- English – 6%
- History – 4%
- Geography – 2%

STUDENT ACTIVITY FEES INCREASING

While things like registration fees are forbidden under the *Education Act*, Student Activity Fees, which cover the cost of everything from yearbooks to student councils, are acceptable. The average

Student Activity Fee has increased by 75% since 2000/01, and in some schools, students must pay the fee before they can receive their class timetables.

Many students also pay fees to play extra-curricular sports. The top fee in Ontario: \$1,800. These fees have also increased steadily over the last 10 years.

WHICH COSTS ARE ESSENTIAL?

Schools have come to rely on the millions of dollars collected in fees every year. And while nearly every secondary school reported that they provide subsidies for those who cannot pay, some students may be stigmatized when they apply.

The fees issue leads to many questions:

- What is essential to students’ education, and who should cover the costs?
- Should all students be able to take courses such as art and design and technology?
- Given increasing concerns about young people’s physical health, should fees for physical education courses be banned?
- Should there be a provincial cap on student activity fees?
- Do extra-curricular athletics fees exclude students from low-income families?

At the time of publication, Ontario is still without guidelines for fees in schools.

To find out more about school fees in Ontario, go to www.peopleforeducation.com/feesreport2011.pdf.

TELLING TALES

CELEBRATE 15 YEARS WITH US!



People for Education is celebrating its 15th year of advocacy, research and love for public education.

We’ll be marking this milestone at our annual fundraising event, *Telling Tales Out of School*, in June.

Who will be there? You (obviously!), Booker Prize-winning author [Michael Ondaatje](#), critically acclaimed filmmaker [Atom Egoyan](#), Giller Prize-winning [Johanna Skibsrud](#), musicians, actors and many others who share our vision of strong publicly funded schools.

Telling Tales Out of School
Sunday, June 5th, 6:30 p.m.
Young Centre for the Performing Arts
Distillery District, Toronto

To buy your tickets, call People for Education at 416-534-0100 or email us at info@peopleforeducation.com.

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From the desk of Annie Kidder



SPECIAL EDUCATION: MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

Across Ontario and across the country, schools and Ministries of Education continue

to debate the best ways to serve students with special needs.

Our research shows that across the province, the number of students on special education waiting lists has declined from a high of 48,000 in 2003/04, to a low of approximately 31,000 this year. But this still represents a huge number of children waiting to be assessed or to receive appropriate identification or support.

Because assessments must be conducted by a limited number of school board psychologists, many boards and schools report they must ration their assessments or only put those students in the highest need on waiting lists.

But there's more to the debate than the number of students waiting for support. Recent Ministry of Education consultations (which are discussed in more detail on page 3) raised a number of other questions:

- How can the Ministry develop a method of funding special education that reflects the actual needs of students?
- How can and should the Ministry define and measure success in special education programs? Are EQAO tests a valid way to measure effectiveness?
- How can the Ministry and school boards ensure that all students who need special

education support receive it in a timely and equitable fashion?

- How can the Ministry ensure consistency from board to board, so that parents and kids don't have to go through multiple special education processes if they move?

All of these questions need answers. And they all feed into the biggest question of all: How should we define success overall in our education system, and how can we ensure that all students in all boards have access to the broad range of programs, curriculum and support they need to succeed, not only in school, but in their lives?



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TEAM TEACHING IN PARRY SOUND

Innovative project shows promising results in students' achievement and social skills

Armed with a body of research that supports cross-curricular learning, Parry Sound High School is piloting a project. To close achievement gaps among students, the school has scheduled two groups of grade 9 students into one combined Geography and English course. The course is taught over two periods by two teachers and so far, it has had compelling results.

GEOGRAPHY + ENGLISH = SUCCESS

Since September 2010, Ina Greenwood and Meagan Hall's students have been studying Canadian geography by engaging in reading and writing tasks. The flexibility of the blended class has allowed the teachers to tailor their instruction and use project-based learning.

"We [also] have the time to [teach]... learning and social skills" such as "organization, collaboration, problem solving and interpersonal relationships," says Greenwood.

"In one short semester, we have seen enhanced academic performance and improved social skills with peers and adults," says Hall. Greenwood adds that the benefits "far exceed anything that can be measured by formal testing."

STUDENTS APPRECIATE EXTRA SUPPORT, VARIETY

The students are giving the course positive reviews. One student said, "I like that we had two teachers so we could do two things at once and there was more help available." Another noted that "I like that it was not all about English or geography. It changed."

The two-year pilot project will bring the same students together next year in a Career Studies/Civics and English class.

To find out more about Parry Sound High School's team teaching project, please contact Ina Greenwood at GREENWOOLN@nearnorthschools.ca.

BRIGHT IDEA

What if reading could generate as much excitement as a hockey game?

The Kids' Lit Quiz is an international event in which students aged 10 to 13 compete to answer 100 questions about everything from Dr. Seuss to Shakespeare.

On February 24th, 13 teams from the Greater Toronto Area participated in the first Canadian Kids' Lit Quiz. [The first-place team from Summit Heights Public School](#) in North York will travel to New Zealand in July to compete in the World Finals.

Students train by reading voraciously and answering a battery of practice questions. Traffic in school libraries increases, team spirit grows and students (both those who compete and those in the audience) get passionate about reading. Boys in particular love the Kids' Lit Quiz.

For more information about Kids' Lit Quiz, go to www.kidslitquiz.com. To find out how to get your school involved in Canadian Kids' Lit Quiz, email Nancy Davidson, National Coordinator, at kidslitquizcanada@gmail.com.

SKIP THE CAR: WALK, CYCLE, ROLLERBLADE OR SKATEBOARD!

New report shows huge drop in percentage of kids walking to school

According to [a report by Green Communities Canada](#), a national association of nonprofit organizations focused on environmental solutions for communities, the proportion of children in Canada who regularly walk to school has decreased by 50% since 1985. However, [a recent study](#) shows that parents are ready for a change. In fact, some Ontario schools, with Green Communities' help, are trying to change that by implementing active transportation programs with great success.

WALK AND ROLL

Green Communities is spearheading the School Travel Plan. The plan includes the implementation of walking school buses (walkers travel in a group and pick up or drop off other walkers) and cycling workshops for students, and carpooling for teachers.

In the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area, Metrolinx has partnered with Green

Communities to pilot a project called Stepping It Up. As of winter 2011, the project has prompted twenty schools to develop their own School Travel Plans.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION INCREASES ACADEMIC SUCCESS

When students walk, cycle, rollerblade, or skateboard to and from school, this daily physical activity increases their overall health and reduces the likelihood of obesity-related diseases, such as heart disease and diabetes. Research has shown that physical activity can also increase academic performance and decrease stress. And when a school implements an active transportation program for its students, the entire community benefits from improved

local air quality and traffic safety measures.

GET MOVING!

To find out how to start an active transportation program at your school, go to Green Communities' Active & Safe Routes to School website www.saferoutestoschool.ca. For more information about Stepping It Up and to read their active transportation study, go to www.metrolinx.com/mx/schooltravel.

What steps has your school taken to encourage active school travel? Share your experience and opinions in our online community in the "Walk On!" discussion <http://schools-at-the-centre.ning.com/forum/topics/walk-on-or-bike-or-blade-or>.



SPECIAL EDUCATION—THE ONGOING DEBATE

As needs increase, government funding is reviewed

Over 300,000 Ontario students receive some form of special education support, ranging from intensive medical support to a little extra help in a regular classroom.

The Ministry of Education is trying to find a way to fund special education programs and services more effectively. In a recent consultation, ably led by Yasir Naqvi, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education, the complexity of the problem was made abundantly clear:

- The province provides over \$2 billion in funding for special education, but many school boards report that they spend more on special education than the province provides.
- Ontario does not provide special education funding to school boards according to actual need. Instead, boards receive funding based primarily on the number of students in the board and the number of students previously reported

as needing intensive support.

- There has been a large increase over the last few years in the percentage of students requiring special education support.
- While funding for special education is protected, there is no consistency as to how boards define "special education" or what they include in budget lines for "special education supports and services." This may explain why some boards report as many as 25% of their students receive special education services, while others report as few as 5%.
- A parent and child can go through an Identification Placement Review Committee (IPRC) process in one board, and have to repeat this costly process if they move because neither IPRCs, nor Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are transferable from board to board.

NEXT STEPS

This spring, the Ministry will conduct audits of some boards' special education programs—in particular the boards reporting very high percentages of special education students. The Ministry is also working with J. Douglas Willms of the Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy at the University of New Brunswick to create a formula to predict students' special education needs in Ontario. The goal is to create a special education funding formula that can respond more effectively to current needs.

To join the discussion about special education policies and programs, go to our online community's special education group <http://schools-at-the-centre.ning.com/group/specialeducation>.



SHANNEN'S DREAM

Shannen's Dream is a campaign for "safe and comfy" schools, and quality, culturally

based education for First Nations children. It is named in memory of Shannen Koostachin, a young student from the Attawapiskat First Nation who advocated for better schools for her community.

To learn more about the campaign and to add your name to the growing list of supporters, go to <http://www.fnfcfs.com/shannensdream>.

HEALTHY SMILES

[Healthy Smiles Ontario](#) is a new province-wide program for children aged 17 and under who do not have access to dental coverage. Eligible children and youth can receive basic dental care, such as cleaning, x-rays and fillings, at no cost.

For more information, please contact your [Public Health Unit](#).

OSAP UPDATE

The provincial government announced several changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). Students may now apply for OSAP as early as February, rather than May, and there is now a free OSAP mobile app (application).

For details, visit www.ontario.ca/OSAP.

NEW RESOURCE GUIDE FOR PARENTS

The Council of Ontario Directors of Education (CODE) has created a booklet called *Planning Parent Engagement: A Toolkit for Parents and Schools*, which provides exercises and techniques that enable parents to become more involved in their children's schooling.

To access the booklet and CODE's *Parent Tool Kit* (which the booklet accompanies), go to www.ontariodirectors.ca/ParentEngagement/ParentEngagement.html.

STORIES AND PANCAKES

Last month, Front of Yonge Elementary School in Mallorytown hosted a Family Literacy and Pancake Day. The students were joined by their parents, grandparents, guardians and other special guests for pancakes and then reading time. The third annual event, which was part of the school's Winter Wake-Up Week, was a smashing success.

To find out more about the event, go to <http://www.ucdsb.on.ca/News/Current+News/Spotlight/FOY+parents.htm>.

HEALTHY, RESILIENT SCHOOLS

Registration is now open for the Ontario Healthy Schools Coalition's 10th annual forum. This year's event, "Resiliency and the School Community," will take place May 12th and 13th in Sudbury.

For more information, go to www.sdhu.com/content/news/details.asp?n=970.

GOT NEWS?

Do you have news or an event that you'd like to share? Send an email to lindsay@peopleforeducation.com.

FREE WORKSHOPS

Grab a coffee, have a seat in front of your computer and participate in People for Education's lively workshops from the comfort of your home!

March 24th: Ask a School Council Chair

How can a school council engage more parents? What activities should the school council be involved in? Join two experienced school council chairs from Toronto and Pembroke to ask your questions and share your ideas!

March 30th: Dr. Stuart Shanker

[Dr. Shanker](#) is an expert on kids' brain development and how teachers and parents can best help students succeed. Last year's conference participants loved his presentation, so here is your opportunity to participate online in this encore session!

April 13th: Digital Learners: Is the Gap Between the Outside World and the School World Widening?

Are students tuning out in class? Canadian author/teacher [Karen Hume](#) shares ideas, research and solutions on how to re-engage students. Bring your questions!

To register for one of these workshops, go to www.peopleforeducation.com/webinars.



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You can also find us on [Facebook](#) and [Flickr](#)!

[People for Education](#) is an independent research and advocacy organization that works to support public education in Ontario's English, French and Catholic schools.

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