

The Essential School – A Model for Public Education in Ontario Developed by the Parents' Working Group on Education Finance

From the Minutes of Toronto Board of Education, Thursday, February 27, 1997

*P. 150, Item 2. **Essential Schools Document (Elementary)** (Page 162; See also Page 114)*

Your Committee heard a presentation from Kathleen Wynne and Shelley Laskin concerning the Essential School document developed by the Education Finance Sub-Group of the Parent Involvement Committee. The deputants outlined the extent of the consultation and community involvement process which went into the development of this "positive school model", and urged the Board to endorse the Essential School document.

Our Committee recommends that:

- I. The recommendation of the Parent Involvement Committee to endorse the Essential School document be approved;*
- II. The Essential School document be forwarded to Chairs of all school boards in Ontario, requesting their endorsement of the document;*
- III. A copy of the document also be forwarded to the Premier of Ontario and the Minister of Education and Training for their information;*
- IV. The Board express its appreciation to the members of the Education Finance Subgroup of the Parent Involvement committee, and particularly to Kathleen Wynne and Shelley Laskin, for their work in developing the document.*

THE ESSENTIAL SCHOOL – A MODEL FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

Forward

This document specifies a list of essential programs and services which should be provided in a given school, if the school community determines that these components are necessary for the education of its students.

This document recognizes that beyond the essential components described within, any given school must provide such additional programs and services as are necessary to meet the particular social and emotional needs of students who come to school disadvantaged and unprepared to learn. These schools must be provided with additional resources to address these needs.

The provision of transportation for students who participate in specialized programs, and/or who live far away from the school, as in many rural areas, is a critical component of education in Ontario.

This document also affirms that knowledgeable, creative and caring teachers combined with supportive and accountable leadership by administrators and trustees, are critical to the achievement of successful outcomes for students.

The production of this document (The Essential School) was initiated by the Parents' Working Group on Education Finance, and supported by the Parent Involvement Committee of the Toronto Board of Education.

*Project Co-ordinators – Kathleen Wynne & Shelley Laskin
1997*

COMPONENTS OF THE ESSENTIAL SCHOOL

A. A STRONG AND RELEVANT INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAM FOR ALL STUDENTS DELIVERED BY QUALIFIED TEACHERS

- **Junior Kindergarten**

Early childhood education provides students with a secure, stimulating environment that supports and encourages the growth of self-confident, creative individuals. In junior kindergarten, teachers provide a structured program where children can learn through play, and through interaction with materials and with other people.

- **A Common Curriculum**

The Common Curriculum sets out by subject and grade what students are expected to achieve as a result of their school experiences to grade 9, including benchmarks/standards for determining how well students are performing. Subjects to be taught fall under the following program areas: The Arts, Languages, Math/Science/Technology, and Personal and Social Studies. Teachers must be given the training and resources necessary to support the delivery of this curriculum.

- **High Quality Secondary School Programs**

Students in secondary school require a sound and broad curriculum that will prepare them for post-secondary education, productive careers, responsible citizenship and a variety of fulfilling personal interests.

- **Regular Class Sizes of No More than 20 Students (Primary), 25 (Junior and Intermediate) and 30 (Senior)**

Teachers are required to deliver more and more complex curriculum and to report to parents in increasing detail. The experience in Ontario schools is that numbers higher than these create difficulties for most teachers and most students. Educational assistants must be provided in all kindergarten classes, special education programs, and in all elementary school classes over 25 students.

- **Teacher-Librarians**

Our information age and the focus on new technologies in the classroom require that trained teacher-librarians have the skills necessary to guide our students and to assist classroom teachers to become full curricular "Partners in Action" (Ministry of Education Curriculum Resource Guide, 1982.)

- **Physical Education**

The need to instil in children a love of movement and activity is self-evident. There is a critical need, if we are to maintain a healthy citizenry, to give all students physical alternatives to leading inactive lives.

- **Visual and Performing Arts (Art, Music, Drama, Dance)**

Art, music, drama and dance are critical to cognitive development, and all students must have regular exposure to these programs, under the direction of qualified teachers. In the same way that students need physical alternatives to being spectators, they also need to develop aesthetic appreciation.

- **Computer Technology**

Children need to begin to develop computer literacy in the same way that they must develop literacy and numeracy skills before they reach secondary school. All students need to develop a comfort with technology through hands-on experience, and teachers must be given the technical support required for the development of their own expertise and comfort level.

- **Special Education Programs and Services**

Special Education resources and services are directed to students with differing abilities and exceptionalities in order to provide equitable, challenging opportunities and to ensure productive futures for students with a wide range of abilities. Special Education legislation gives these students the right to an appropriate educational program in our public schools, including classroom support where necessary.

- **English as a Second Language**

Instruction and support in English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or English Skills Development (ESD) allows students to achieve confidence and academic success as they integrate into the regular school program. Such support also allows students to become successfully oriented to a new society and environment.

- **A Variety of French Language Program Options**

Our commitment to the teaching of French is an important feature of our Canadian cultural identity and gives students the opportunity to be fuller participants in our bilingual nation. French language programs must be accessible to all students and should remain a core subject.

- **International and Native Languages**

All students must have the opportunity to develop their proficiency in a second or third language. In addition to intellectual and educational benefits, studying languages offers insights into, and knowledge of, the cultural diversity of our city, our country, and the world.

- **An Inclusive Curriculum**

Inclusive Curriculum incorporates the diversity of our society into the learning experience of all students. This approach values differences in gender, race, language, culture, socio-economic status, religious faith, sexual orientation, age and ability/disability. These differences are seen as opportunities for learning and for building healthy human relationships.

- **Whole School Guidance**

All teachers and support staff contribute to the guidance of students. However, fully qualified guidance teachers are required to provide educational, personal and career counselling and to support whole school programs such as advisory/mentoring, peer mediation and conflict resolution.

- **Psychological and Social Support Services**

We know that prevention is less expensive in the long run than treatment. Early identification of potential problems as well as timely support are critical to helping students to lead stable, productive lives throughout their school careers and beyond. Qualified support staff are necessary to provide psychological and social work services where needed.

- **Child Care and Nutritional Programs**

A high quality child care program offered in co-operation with the school provides a valuable continuum of care and learning for children, and promotes their healthy growth and development. Likewise, the provisions of breakfast and lunch programs for students who require additional nutritional support are critical to their readiness to learn and to their future success in school.

- **Opportunities for Student Leadership**

All students, but particularly students in the intermediate and senior grades (7-OAC), require meaningful opportunities to demonstrate leadership among their peers and to participate in school decision-making.

B. A HEALTHY AND SAFE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

- **Safe School Buildings and Facilities**

Staff and students do not need state-of-the-art-facilities, but they do need secure and well maintained schools that are capable of housing their numbers.

- **Positive School Environment**

Staff, students, parents/guardians and community members require the commitment and resources to promote and maintain a school environment conducive to student learning and positive interpersonal relationships among students and between students and staff.

- **Indoor and Outdoor Recreation Space**

Adequate facilities for physical recreation as well as social and cultural activities are critical to a well-rounded school experience.

C. SCHOOL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

- **Parent Involvement**

A successful school values the contribution that all parents/guardians can make to student learning and to school improvements. A successful school will establish a climate that encourages parent involvement in a variety of forms, including parent-teacher partnerships and parent participation in an inclusive and accountable School Community Council. Schools must be provided with adequate resources to promote effective parent and community involvement and home/school communication.

- **Adult Education**

It is important that parents are supported in their efforts to participate in their children's education and in the life of the school. Parent education programs such as parenting centres/classes, adult basic literacy, adult credit courses and adult English as a Second Language programs are important in providing adults with the skills and the confidence to allow them to participate fully in the school.

- **Community Use of the School**

Schools are a valuable public resource and as such should be used efficiently as public space. Use of schools by the community also promotes partnerships with individuals, agencies and organizations which can benefit both school and community members.