

NEW REPORT CALLS FOR COHERENCE AND CAUTION IN EDUCATION CHANGES

Annual report on Ontario’s schools focuses on need for education “eco-system”

For immediate release

TORONTO (June 17, 2019) – In its 2019 Annual Report on Schools, People for Education cautions that in a time of rapid social and economic change, well-resourced schools are more important than ever. The report raises concerns about the potential impact of the province’s plans to “modernize” education while at the same time it is reducing funding for the teachers and other supports that play key roles in schools.

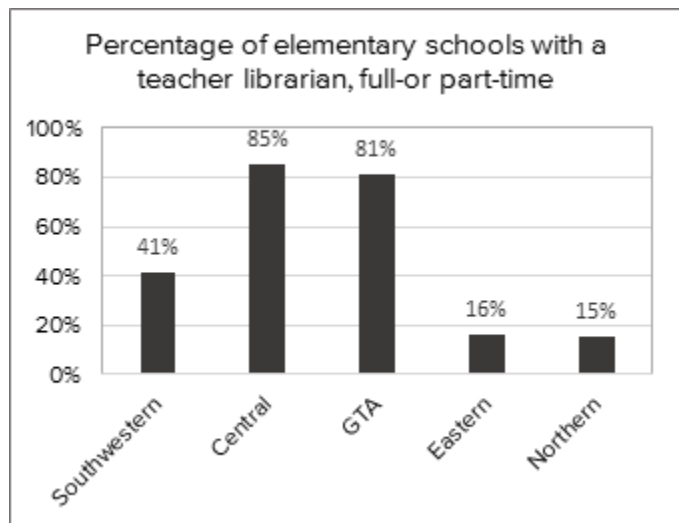
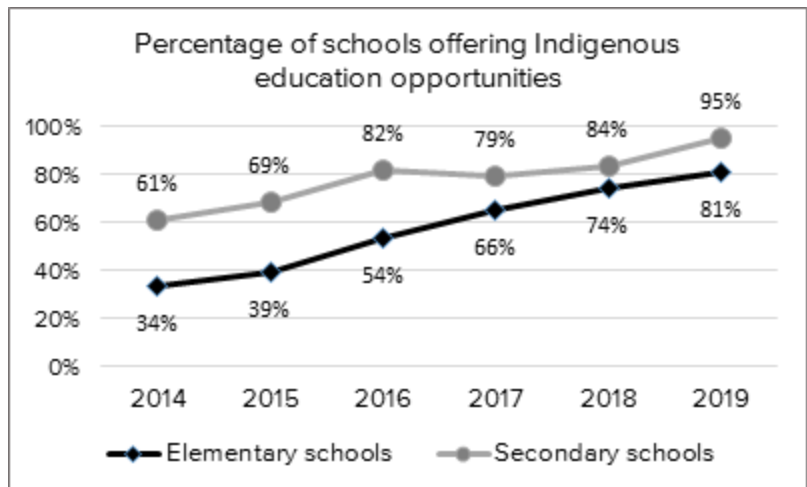
The report – titled *What Makes a School?* – says that effective schools operate like ecosystems, and that students’ success depends on a combination of multiple adults in the school, and access to a range of programs and learning opportunities. The authors point out that effective policy implementation requires evidence, coherent strategy, and targeted resources.

The data in this year’s report – based on responses from 1254 schools across Ontario – show the positive impact when policy change is accompanied by resources and coherent strategies. The report points to Indigenous education in particular, where, after years of funding increases and clear policy direction, the proportion of schools with Indigenous education programs has approximately doubled.

However, the report also points out that the province’s vague fundraising policy has failed to address the impact of family income on schools’ capacity to raise money for things like technology, libraries and classroom supplies.

Large regional disparities for school libraries

The traditional school library is evolving into a diversified – and essential – learning space, where teachers and students not only access books, but also engage with a wide range of technology and resources, and develop collaborative cross-curricular projects. But, according to the report, northern and rural



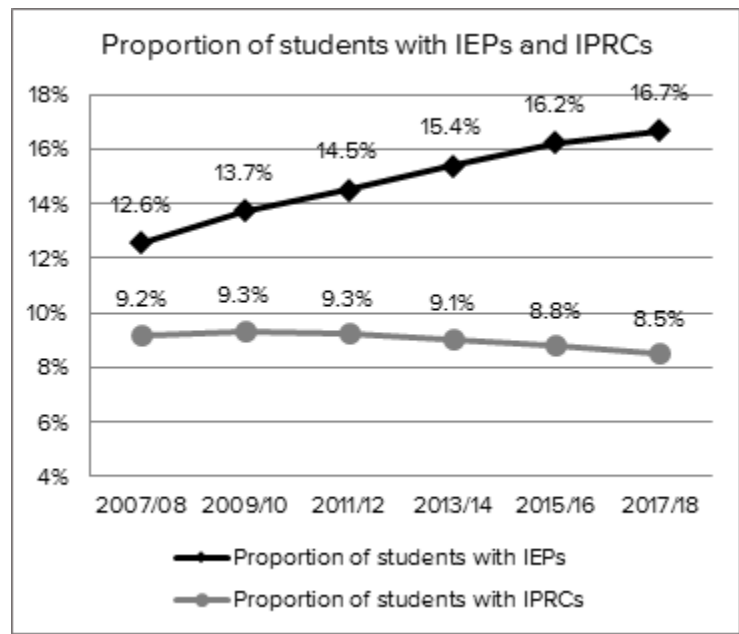
elementary schools are much less likely to have staff in their libraries. Among the findings in the report:

- The proportion of elementary schools with a teacher-librarian, full- or part-time has declined from 80% in 1998, to 54% in 2019.
- 9% of Ontario elementary schools have neither a teacher-librarian nor a library technician.

Special education continues to be a challenge

Despite years of adjustments to policy and funding for special education, principals continue to report special education as one of their greatest areas of strain. The proportion of students requiring/receiving special education support has increased steadily over the last two decades, however over one third of the funding for special education is based on demographic data from 2006. Among the findings in the report:

- 60% of elementary and 53% of secondary schools report that there are restrictions on the number of students who can be assessed for special education each year. However the vast majority report that students waiting for an assessment are receiving some special education support.
- The average ratio per school of special education students to special education teachers is 38 to 1 in elementary and 77 to 1 in secondary schools.



Fundraising

According to the report “Experiences outside of the classroom help students develop competencies and skills that are foundational for success in today’s economy and complex world. When schools rely on fundraising to provide these opportunities, it can create inequities. If public education in Ontario is to provide every child with an equitable chance for success, all students must have access to the programs, resources, and activities that foster competencies for long-term success.”

Among the findings for this year:

- School boards’ audited financial statements show that Ontario schools raised a total of over \$583 million through school-generated funds.
- 26% of elementary schools report raising \$20,000 or more, up from 7% in 2001, and 16% in 2015.
- In elementary schools, the top 10% of fundraising schools raised 33 times the amount raised by the bottom 10%, with some schools raising as much as \$100,000.
- In secondary schools, the top 5% of schools raised as much as the bottom 82% combined, with some schools reporting raising \$220,000.

Impact on students should remain the focus

At the press conference to release the report, People for Education’s Research Director, Eloise Tan cautioned the province to implement changes with care.

Grade 11 student, Cicely Campbell also raised concerns, saying, *“The person who made the biggest impact in my academic career is Maria Greco, a CYW who changed my life. My high school journey has been an uphill battle, and I would have never been able to make it without Maria. There are many Marias in the education system—it is not only teachers who support students. I’m worried that because of the cuts, other students won’t have a Maria to help them out. People like Maria are fundamental to students like me.”*

Read the full report: www.peopleforeducation.ca

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