

The Giles School

# The Giles Report

## PROPOSALS FOR IMPROVING EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

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# The Advantages of Alternative Schooling

By Malkin Dare

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Most people accept that private schools are on average better than public schools, and the accuracy of their belief is borne out by the research. Even when researchers take into consideration the generally higher socio-economic status of private school students, they do better than their counterparts in conventional public schools.

The same thing goes for charter schools – unconventional public schools which, while free and open to all eligible students, are able to specialize and offer a superior service because they are not under the supervision of a school board. This principle holds true even for home-schoolers, whose children typically achieve at about the 85<sup>th</sup> percentile when compared to students at conventional public schools.

Some Canadian provinces have capitalized on this phenomenon, embracing a wide variety of alternative schools and encouraging parents to choose among them. Five Canadian provinces, for example, partially subsidize tuition at private schools – BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Quebec.

Alberta is the province with the most school choice. Not only does it subsidize private school tuition and home-schoolers, it also is the only province which allows charter schools. As a result of the competition from all of these options, the public school boards also embrace alternatives, funding dozens of specialized schools – like Montessori schools, religious schools, all-girls schools, science schools, and on and on.

Competition turns out to be good for more than just the lucky students who are able to access the alternative schooling. Galvanized by the competition, the public schools also improve their service, leading to improvements in the alternative schools, and so forth.

There is an almost exact correlation between the amount of school choice a province offers and how well its students do academically. Alberta students outperform the rest of Canada by a wide margin, while the students in Atlantic Canada, with the least amount of school choice, do the worst. Ontario students place in about the middle in both categories.

This year, the academic achievement of Ontario students, as measured by provincial tests, stopped its glacial improvement. Student achievement in Ontario is now officially frozen at the same, very mediocre, level as last year. With only 64% of the province's Grade 6 students passing their reading test, an average class of 25 students would yield only 16 students who can read well enough for the work of the next grade. The results are even worse in math, with only 59% of students passing – down 2% from last year.

With the provincial tests frozen at unacceptable levels, it's time to bring more school choice to Ontario.

# The High Price of Political Correctness in Education

By Harry Giles, Headmaster

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In 1890, the Comparative Education Association declared that Ontario had the best educational system in the world. That result had been the work of Egerton Ryerson (1803-1882). He not only sought higher standards of education, he also sought social democracy through the medium of a better education for all. His standards lasted for many years. In 1911, the Grade 4 students in Ontario read George Elliot's *Mill on the Floss*, something too difficult for 80% of our current Grade 12 students.

## Television's Ongoing Negative Impact on Learning and Socialization

Ryerson did not have to compete with TV, where the average child watches 4-6 hours daily, undermining their vocabulary, their values of decency, their morals, their reading, their writing, and their academic potential. TV's basic messages of drugs, sex, violence, envy, and greed are thought appropriate in some quarters, including the CRTC, even if it undermines educational standards and corrupts morality.

## Pre-School Children Are "Learning Sponges"

Today, public Kindergarten education in Ontario involves, in most schools, a half day in Junior Kindergarten and a half day in Kindergarten. The thrust is socialization, not academic learning. Ontario public school educators have not yet realized that young children will absorb as much, and often more, than what we give them. At The Giles School (TGS), they constantly amaze our new teachers and outsiders. For the rest of us at the School, accelerated learning in a fun environment is the norm.

Many educators, like Maria Montessori working with preschool children in the slums of Rome, achieved miracles compared with the Ontario preschool programme. Early reading, numeracy, addition, subtraction, and spelling were all there. Essentially, the Ministry of Education is following the advice of Piaget who deprived his children of any stimulation, and then said that his children were the norm, and, for example, children could not read until they were 6½ years of age. Dr. Burton White of the Centre for Cognitive Studies, Montessori, and the Institute for Human Potential in Philadelphia and others have proven that early stimulation changes the child positively in all areas if done intelligently.

My own work in the 60's has shown that early academic intervention at age 3 increases the operating intelligence of the child by 20-25%. My work was replicated by some 1,500 neurologists in Canada and the US in the 1980's and 90's. In recent years in Ontario, Dr. Fraser Mustard has argued for much earlier academic intervention, a form of which has been practiced successfully since 1989 at TGS in its Nursery (age 2½-3½), JK (age 3½-4½) and SK (age 4½-5½) French Immersion classes.

## Turning "Average" Children into Gifted Students

Years ago, when I was helping the Ontario Ministry of Education to establish student learning standards, I gave them a set of our Grade 1 final exams in our French Immersion school where the average class mark was 97%. I did not give them the rest of the class results in our Grade 1 students' other core languages: Japanese, Mandarin, and English. The Ministry said that our students were all "very gifted" and were functioning at a Grade 4 level. But we do not select our children on the basis of I.Q. tests, or any other selective procedure. We accept students on a first-come, first-served basis. It was and is our view, that all children, if properly taught, using good methods, can reach at least current Grade 3 standards while in Grade 1.

### **Anti-Boredom Teaching**

Our children at TGS are constantly stimulated intellectually with games, songs, dance, and art so they are not bored. They are taught using phonetic techniques which help them to think and to learn exclusively in French (Dienes, Hull, Montessori, French Immersion, and Adler). Phonetics is a key part of the programme; it was not actually taught in Teachers College, and no phonetic books are on the approved list of texts for use in Ontario in the public system.

### **The Crucial Role of Phonics in Learning**

The global, whole language or sight system, is one in which the child memorizes the shape of the word. That is the only way to learn some simple words in English such as "and," "but," "is," "of," "for," and there are about 400 such common words in both English and French. Unhappily, you can learn only so many words that way, so children were discouraged from reading in the public schools.

By teaching children to basically read phonetically in French, there is a transfer to English of the phonemes which facilitates reading in English, but creates spelling difficulties because the languages are different. Then, the cognitive dissonance between the two languages makes the children better spellers in both English and French in the long term.

### **India**

By Grade 4, children using the global system can have perhaps 2-3,000 words; whereas a phonics-educated child can read up to 24,000 words at the same grade level. Since children in Grade 2—that is, children aged 7—in Ontario are asked to do what 3 year olds must do to be admitted to private schools in India, it is self-evident that what we are doing in the public schools is stupid. Indians may ask too much of 3-year-old children but Ontario asks too little.

### **Here in Ontario**

Further, so far as we know, mere memory work does not increase the neural pathways, so in that sense, because phonics makes children think, it is clearly the better method for teaching reading. In some societies, teaching children to think is what education is all about, but not in Ontario. Because Ontario standards are low, children are often bored, and then they are more likely to become problem children. After some years, the Ministry recognized that "whole language"—a literacy teaching method that focuses on meaning—was not adequate, and consultants began to give professional development days around the Province on phonics, and in most areas phonics is now in general use, even though no approved texts in phonics have as yet been approved by the Ministry.

### **Does the Absence of Phonics Increase Bullying in Ontario's Public Schools?**

Dan Olweus in Sweden has shown that vandalism, theft, drunkenness, and truancy, apart from classroom behaviour, are all related to bullying. As Olweus found, at least 60% of those who are characterized as bullies in Grades 6-9, had at least one criminal conviction by the age of 24. Given that boredom can lead to misbehaviour in the classroom, the use of sight methods of reading with the resultant boredom, could well lead to serious criminal problems and, hence, be contributing to our serious discipline problems in the schools. At the very least, it is contributing to poorer reading standards. All in all, the continued support of sight reading to the exclusion of phonics is a betrayal of our children.

### **United Kingdom**

In 1959, a former Education inspector by the name of Morris in the United Kingdom wrote that 75% of all UK children read fluently before the age of 5, and wrote well in addition. Of course, they used phonics. Now in Grade 10, 35% of Ontario students are inadequate in writing, which is ultimately based upon reading. In some societies, like Finnish and Russian, children learn to read by Christmas of their first year. The two languages are nearly perfectly phonetic.

### **The Pacific Rim**

In most Asian countries, education starts early, and continues seriously from the very beginning. In China, primary education generally goes for 8 hours per day, five days a week, while Ontario education goes for 4½ hours per day, also for five days per week. In high school, Chinese students get 11½ hours per day, five days a week while we continue with 4½ hours a day, 5 days a week. They get 69 hours a week and we get 22½ hours. However, even this data is misleading as Chinese students attend primary and secondary school for 11 months, ours for 10.

The Japanese programme is more rigorous than that of the Chinese, has higher standards and is oriented towards thinking rather than just memorization. The South Korean programme is similar to the Japanese and the Taiwanese.

### **Ontario**

Ontario is pitiful in its attainments in curriculum in comparison with all of these foreign countries, and others. Singapore offers outstanding programmes in English, and as a reflection of their overall competence, their students stand first every year in mathematics and science in the TIMMS test. About 50% of Singapore students take six British "A" level examinations successfully every year.

A typical example of a third world student coming to Toronto is a young Sri Lankan-Tamil student arriving in Grade 10 in Mississauga. He found the Grade 6 mathematics previously taught him in war-torn Sri Lanka—where the Sinhalese majority has a policy of genocide towards the Tamil minority—to be at about the same level as that taught in his Grade 10 Ontario math class.

### **Other Countries**

Lots of other jurisdictions have higher standards than Ontario beyond those cited earlier. These include Malaysia, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Bulgaria, Poland, Turkey, Russia, and its former republics, and others. So for people to pretend that we have a good academic system in Ontario is nonsense. Yes, it is better than education in the United States but that is still nothing to brag about.

### **Inflated Marks, Inflated Egos**

Ontario marks are vastly inflated. Students from one school might get 98% in a subject, when in another school the grade might be 62%. In Ontario, students who graduate with 80% get a provincial gift of \$100.00. Scholarships are often awarded to undeserving students. We used to have Grade 13 exams, but in 1968, these were abolished leaving each school to set its own standards. Both the Hope Commission of 1950 and the Hall Dennis Report significantly undermined standards as well.

To redress the problems created by inflated marks, I once spoke to a fellow student who would later become the President of McMaster University. I proposed a University Scholarship Examinations Board, for the 5 centres of University excellence, which I would run, but the universities would approve the questions. By chance, an Ontario Ministry of Education official heard of this and said that if the centres of excellence proceeded they would lose their extra funding. Why the Ministry would do such a thing is beyond understanding, except that the need for such a board would reveal to the ignorant public how bad things actually were. Today, low standards in our universities, undermined by low standards in the public school system, provides students—who do well on the International Baccalaureate exam—with first year university standing.

### **Illiterate University Students**

Some universities are actually teaching reading in first and second years, at the universities, and these programmes are being offered to the graduates of Ontario secondary schools. Or as one university professor put it, “When they arrive at university they can’t write a correct sentence. So I don’t start them with commas until the second year.”

### **Anomalies within the Ontario Education System**

Within the Ontario system there are some terrible anomalies. For example, if a student who later becomes a teacher, dropped chemistry, physics, biology, mathematics, or computer science in Grade 10, he can be called upon under union rules to teach those subjects in Grade 12 even if he is totally incompetent. To make it worse, we are still passing children on the basis of age regardless of competence—Ontario’s version of the equally unworkable and unsupportable American “no child left-behind” law. That cheats the child and hurts the teacher. It is probably part of the reason why 25% of the new teachers burn out within 2 years. Believe it or not, it also burns out many of the better Trustees. All of this is part of Ontario’s so-called educational system.

If Egerton Ryerson, who said that one of our goals was to pass on our culture to the next generation, were alive today he would probably be shocked to see what our culture and educational system have become. He had assumed that we would have some culture to pass along. This no longer seems to be the case.

Generally, we are 2-3 years behind the better international educational systems—academically.

Since the early 1950s, many European, and all Ontario governments have undermined educational standards.

The work of Egerton Ryerson has been thrown out for the votes of the less informed. Robert Hutchins, the former President of the University of Chicago, once said that the Baccalaureate français had a higher standard than 90% of the US universities. That, of course was before Mitterrand lowered the standards. Before Mitterrand, 60% of the French children passed the Baccalaureate français. After his changes, now 83% pass but the additional 23% go on to fail in their first year of university.

## **Examples of the Political Correctness “Education Virus” Worldwide**

As the President of the Sorbonne University in Paris recently said, the Baccalaureate now is “not worth a fart.” Blair in the UK wanted at least 50% of the students to go to university, so he changed the whole marking system; what was formerly a “D” effectively became a “B” or even an “A.” When I learned of their goal, I said, start properly at the bottom, and do what I do, and you can’t miss. They started a programme called “Sure Start”, but in its application it ignored virtually everything I said, so it too is nearly worthless. It is like a failed American head-start programme.

Germany, under the social democrats, softened their approach too. The result was weaker Abitur results. Switzerland kept their rigidities and their standards.

Ontario kept the Grade 13 exams until 1968 but after that marks started increasing and the educational standards began to decline and then plummet.

## **In Conclusion**

Some years ago I was approached by Diane Cunningham, the London MPP who was the educational critic for the Conservatives. She asked me if I would be willing to become Deputy Minister of Education if the Conservatives won and she became Minister of Education. I said “yes” because one of my reasons for being in education was to upgrade the standards in the public system. I qualified my acceptance by saying that I would want to remain Headmaster of my model school so that I could see what standards were possible and, therefore, could be attained by the public sector.

My plan then and now would involve the following radical changes in both schools and in private life involve the implementation of the following twenty-four recommendations:

- 1) I would ask parents to limit their children’s exposure to TV and video games to two hours a week in order to reduce the incidence of theft, violence, greed, malicious property damage, bad vocabulary, and little vocabulary. Many years ago, I taped several CBS auditory programmes on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Later, I spent many weeks counting the vocabulary. It turned out that on the day of the recording, the vocabulary used totaled 5,822 words, or the passive vocabulary level of a middle class 5 year old. Since we think with our vocabulary, this low level effectively prohibited higher order thinking. If a child watches 4-6 hours of TV or electronic games each day, there is no time for reading, but much time for sex, violence, theft, or orientation towards gangs. Since our vocabulary, our sentence structure, our use of punctuation and language, and the like, are all built upon reading, the loss of reading time has a terrible effect on educational standards.
- 2) As a first step, I would have created all day sensorial academic kindergartens, with early reading, sentences, more French, more French Immersion, longer school days, academic teaching of letters, reading, and addition and subtraction facts to at least 50.
- 3) I would approve for use in the Ontario schools all texts approved for use in Singapore;
- 4) Texts used for reading in Ontario would include good phonic readers;
- 5) I would increase the high school standards, by steps, leading to Grades 11 and 12 covering first and second year university;
- 6) Children would be passed on attainment, not age, and special programmes would be developed so that repeating a grade would not be just taking the same texts all over again;
- 7) It would become an offence for Principals to use people in advanced subjects who had no senior school and university training;
- 8) I would change the faculties of education in many ways but, firstly, I would have the teachers in training spend more classroom time with master teachers. When I was training French nationals to become regular certified teachers in the French cadre of primary school teachers, that was a central component, along with writing précis on the best educational research, and then examining the teachers on them, and making detailed lesson plans with each master teacher. All

of my candidates received outstanding grades from the French examiners both on the theoretical, as well as the practical side, when they were finally certified.

- 9) I would reexamine the need for B.Ed.'s at any level. In England, if you have a good degree, you do not need a teaching diploma, and can teach at any level. Given the shortage of teachers of mathematics and science, and computer science, I would accept teachers fluent in English in those areas with graduate degrees from Russia, the Ukraine, the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Bulgaria, Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, amongst others;
- 10) I would require all younger high school teachers to become requalified by taking university-level academic course in their area(s) of specialization for an additional two years of study with the courses to be paid for by the Ministry. The universities do the best they can with the often unprepared students that they get;
- 11) When parents send ill-mannered, ill-educated, inattentive, undisciplined children to school, often without their homework done, who waste the time of their classmates and their teachers, I would have a system that would assess the situation and, if appropriate, then charge the cost of the education time as baby sitting to the parents, if they were living at home. It is well known that 25% of all new teachers burn out because of the impossible situations in the classrooms;
- 12) Good specialist teachers, who are in short supply, would be given interim bonuses so as to attract additional specialists to ensure that children are adequately taught;
- 13) Teachers who perform their tasks poorly—such as resisting hall duty and the like—do not genuinely like children or teaching; these teachers will be encouraged to retire early and be compensated for doing so;
- 14) If teachers' unions try to sabotage the implementation of this programme they would be decertified for 5 years and any illegal strikes would not only be actionable but would also result in penalties against union funds of \$50,000,000, and the union leaders would be jointly and severably liable for that penalty;
- 15) Teachers would be required to respond to the needs of young children, including showing them physical affection. Teachers who abused their role by going beyond reasonable limits, would be sent to jail and flogged—if this penalty were ever reinstated;
- 16) Day care institutions would be obliged to teach to the same minimum levels as the public schools;
- 17) Children with ADD, ADHD and Autism would be identified early, and helped, possibly with biofeedback;
- 18) One key to all learning is high levels of reading. Ways must be found to get children to read and read regularly. Areas of reading to enhance their general knowledge should go well beyond the official school programmes. Since we expect our children to be part of the global village, they will need not only additional languages, but also a historical background on such areas as China, Japan, India, England, France, Spain, Russia, Germany, Poland, Iran, Australia, Singapore, Austria Hungary, and Malaysia. The courses can include historical fiction but will lead to extensive essay writing.
- 19) While classes will cover 6 hours per day in kindergarten, Grade 1, and 2, they will increase to 7 hours per day in Grades 3, 4, 5, and 6. In Grade 8 and up, classes will increase to 8 hours per day, with the final hour being for cooking, sewing, and home improvement. As matters currently stand, 20% of all middle school children are already committing crimes because they are wandering the streets in gangs. At least 1 hour per day would be allocated to French teaching in The English schools, and one hour per day given to English in French schools. Additional specialist teachers in science, mathematics, computer science, and other languages would be available in Grades 3 and up. The 8th hour would be offered by lay people. By keeping children off the streets, we would reduce drug use and crime.
- 20) I believe in early academic intervention and in the need to get children to think. This can be through French Immersion and can start as early as age 3. We are looking at starting earlier in our Model school, The Giles School, under the influence of Dr. Fraser Mustard.
- 21) I believe that monopolies are always dangerous to the consumer—and given the steady decline in standards in public education—any monopoly must be curtailed. Charter Schools, publicly funded independent schools, Model schools, perhaps the elimination of Boards of Education with each school operating independently, should all be considered; the Ministry would have inspectors for all schools, including primary schools, and also for ensuring the teaching of tolerance. Insofar as independent schools are concerned, I would have them receive 50% of the

funding normally given to public schools. Their programmes of 6+ hours of instruction per day would follow the new, more intensive academic programmes, and be in a combined English and French approach. They would not need certified Ontario teachers, because the certification is meaningless. Such schools might be charter schools, and might have an after 6 hour component of free time which might be used for extra languages, and even religion;

- 22) In the long run, I would be planning to do away with school boards entirely, and have each school compete with the other with teachers giving students extra needed time to give the help needed, in order to protect their jobs. In this context, schools might be Catholic, non-denominational, or otherwise. Such schools would be run by the Principal, aided by a Council of key teachers and parents.
- 23) We would continue to have schools offering non-academic courses such as plumbing, construction, auto repair, and electrician training to deal with current and prospective demand, as well as job training to assist industries to adapt to needed changes to increase productivity;
- 24) I would bring in the University Scholarship Exams Board to protect the universities.

All of this will cost a great deal of money but if we are going to have a first-class educational system, we will have to pay for it first and reap the benefits later. Success requires not only money; it requires leadership, intelligence and courage. The money will follow.

# Illiteracy Costs Canada

By Harry Giles, Headmaster

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Canada is blessed with many natural advantages. It is also cursed with many problems.

Our public educational system gets failing grades; it is, for the most part, mediocre to poor. Those schools which are relatively good are in catchment areas where parents are university educated, have home libraries for their children's use, take their children to public libraries regularly, give them music lessons, and place them in extracurricular courses and learning camps.

The Ontario Ministry of Education thinks that such private or independent schools are the norm and they are, indeed, the best we have, but they largely succeed because of what the parents do for their children. In any case, their standards are well below the best schools internationally.

According to a recent T-D Bank report, "40% of youth lack literacy skills and roughly half of adults have inadequate literacy and numeracy." Craig Alexander, T-D's chief economist, says ""we've seen a steady deterioration of Canada's trend rate of productivity growth." "An increase of 1% in literacy, would mean a \$32 billion increase in national income." (*National Post*, September 6, 2007). Yet the Ministry of Education continues to push "whole language" while de-emphasizing phonics. Approved reading texts in Ontario include no books for teaching phonics. In England, before they adopted whole language, 75% of all English students read fluently. After whole language was introduced there, standards collapsed. In Russia, and Finland, their languages are more perfectly phonetic and children learn to read fluently in three months. Our more complex language requires additional thinking, and increased neural pathways, but children can read fluently if they are not wasting their time watching mindless, destructive, TV or avoiding phonics.

All of this is worrying given the prospect of a decline in the US economy where 80% of our exports go and upon which our standard of living depends. This is why we are so fanatical about standards—emotional and educational. We wish the Ontario Ministry of Education was equally concerned.