

POVERTY AND INEQUALITY

Every year, People for Education conducts a survey of Ontario's 4900 publicly funded schools.

The survey asks principals for information on resources and programs in the school and about the school's connection with its community.

In 2013, 1122 schools responded to the survey. This report is an excerpt from the 2013 Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools.

OVERCOMING INEQUALITY

Public schools, at their finest, give all students the opportunity to do well and overcome inter-generational cycles of poverty.

While the gap in academic achievement between high and low income students is relatively low in Ontario by international standards,³ students' socio-economic status continues to affect their chances for success.⁴

Currently, one in seven Ontario children (383,000) live in families with incomes below Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure (LIM).⁵ One in ten live in households that cannot afford items such as dental care, daily fruit and vegetables, or hobby and leisure activities.⁶ These children are more likely to be Aboriginal, racialized, recent immigrants, have disabilities, or be living in a female-led, lone-parent family.⁷

The opportunities offered by schools—rich curriculum, high-quality instruction, access to enrichment and appropriate services, and diverse peer groups—can contribute to students' positive outcomes and close academic achievement gaps.⁸

People for Education looked at several factors to see if there were significant differences between schools, based on family income. Our results show some significant gaps—and some areas where schools and communities are working together to bridge them. (See also [The Trouble with Applied Courses](#))

QUICK FACTS FOR 2012/13

- 25% of elementary students in low income schools receive special education support, compared to 13% of students in high income schools.
- Students in high income schools are more likely to be identified as gifted.
- High income schools fundraise five times more per year, on average, than low income schools.
- Students in high income school are much more likely to have the chance to participate in a choir, orchestra or band.

FAMILY INCOME

People for Education obtained average per-school demographic data based on the 2006 census from the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). We compared elementary schools by average family incomes, looking at the 10% with the highest incomes and the 10% with the lowest incomes.

In low income schools:

- the average family income is \$44,455, compared to \$152,773 in high income schools;
- 14% of parents do not have a high school diploma, compared to 2% of parents in high income schools;
- parents are half as likely to have a university degree;
- students are more than twice as likely to be living in lone-parent households; and
- students are four times more likely to be recent immigrants, and five times more likely to be of Aboriginal identity.

SPECIAL EDUCATION

There are also differences between overall rates of special education services, based on school-level income factors.

- High income schools are significantly more likely to have a gifted education program.
- 25% of students in low income elementary schools are classified⁹ as having special education needs, compared to 13% of those in high income schools.

A recent study by the Toronto District School Board used detailed administrative records and school- and individual-level demographic data to show other worrying trends in special education.⁴⁰

- Students in schools with higher family incomes were much more likely to be identified as gifted, learning disabled or autistic.
- Students in schools with lower family incomes were more likely to be identified with Language Impairment, Developmental Disability, Mild Intellectual Disability, or Behavioural issues.
- Students in schools with lower family incomes were also somewhat less likely to be formally identified (which entitles them to services under the *Education Act*).

The research also pointed to racialized patterns in identification.⁴¹ Based on these findings, TDSB researchers recommended a review of assessment and identification processes.

FRENCH IMMERSION

Only 7% of low income schools have French Immersion programs—the most common type of specialized program in Ontario—compared to 26% of high income schools.

FEES AND FUNDRAISING

Average family incomes also make a difference when it comes to fees and fundraising.

Secondary schools are almost twice as likely to charge course or athletic fees in the highest income schools compared to the lowest; and the richest schools fundraise at five times the rate of the schools with lowest family incomes. These private funds pay for enrichment for students who often have access to a range of out-of-school enrichment as well.

DEMOGRAPHICS OF ONTARIO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS ¹			
	Low income schools ²	Ontario Average	High income schools
Family income	\$44,455	\$82,054	\$152,773
Students in low income (LICO) families	39%	17%	9%
Parents with university degrees	21%	30%	54%
Parents without a high school diploma	14%	7%	2%
Lone-parent households	31%	19%	12%
Recent immigrants (5 years or less)	12%	5%	3%
Aboriginals	5%	3%	1%
Percentage of students with special educational needs	25%	19%	13%
English Language Learners	10%	7%	4%
First Language other than English or French	35%	19%	13%

ARTS

Schools with higher family incomes are much more likely to offer the opportunity to participate in a choir, orchestra or band—even though those schools are, on average, smaller.

Interestingly, schools where a high percentage of students live in poverty are more likely to report that their students see performances through the year. This outcome may reflect effective use of grants such as the Learning Opportunities Grant, or grants some boards provide to schools with a high proportion of low income students.

LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES GRANT

There is some provincial funding provided to boards that is partly based on student characteristics such as family income, lone-parent status, and parental education. But the funding—known as the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG)—was cut substantially in 2006, and its focus diluted so that it is now intended to fund a number of programs for all students, including a variety of literacy and numeracy programs, and the province’s Student Success Strategy.

There is no requirement in Ontario’s education policy that school boards spend the LOG funding on measures that have been shown to ameliorate some of the impacts of socio-economics. In addition, the province has not acted upon long-standing recommendations to strengthen the grant and measure the effectiveness of the programs it funds.¹²



People for Education is a registered charity that works to support public education in Ontario’s English, French and Catholic schools.

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NOTES

- 1 Source: Education Quality and Accountability Office. Demographic data from 2006 Census, analyzed by school.
- 2 “Low income schools” are defined as the 10% of schools with the lowest average family incomes, and “high income schools” are defined as the 10% of schools with the highest average family incomes.
- 3 See e.g. Education Quality and Accountability Office. (2010) PISA, 2009: Highlights of Ontario student results. Retrieved May 1, 2013 from http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/10/2009_PISA_Highlights_en.pdf.
- 4 See e.g. Willms, J. D. (Ed.). (2002). *Vulnerable Children: findings from Canada’s National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth*. Edmonton: University of Alberta Press.
- 5 Campaign 2000. (2013) *Strengthening families for Ontario’s future: 2012 Report Card on Child Poverty—Ontario*. Retrieved May 8, 2013, from <http://www.campaign2000.ca/Ontario/reportcards/2013ReportCardOnChildPovertyOntario.pdf>. Please note that Statistics Canada—and this report—use multiple measures of low income. Low-income cut-off (LICO, which is the measure used by EQAO in its demographic analyses) and the Low Income Measure (LIM, which is the measure used by the Government of Ontario in its Poverty Reduction Strategy) are both widely used. The LIM is a fixed percentage (50%) of median adjusted household income, where “adjusted” indicates that household needs are taken into account. Statistics Canada has been producing the LIMs since 1991 and they are aligned with latest international standard.
- 6 Campaign 2000, see note 5.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 See e.g. National Research Council Institute of Medicine (U.S.). (2004). *Engaging schools: Fostering high school students’ motivation to learn*. Washington: National Academies Press; Thrupp, M. (1999). *Schools Making a Difference: Let’s Be Realistic*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press; Levin, B. (2007). *Schools, Poverty, and the Achievement Gap*. Phi Delta Kappan, 89(1), 75-76.
- 9 EQAO classifies students as having special education needs depending on whether they receive special education services. See EQAO. (2009) *Guide for accommodations, special provisions, deferrals and exemptions*. Toronto: author. http://www.eqao.com/pdf_e/09/Sacg_Xe_0409_web.pdf.
- 10 G. Parekh and R. Brown. (2010). *Special education: Structural overview and student demographics*. Toronto: Toronto DSB. Retrieved May 8, 2013, from http://www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/about_us/external_research_application/docs/SpecEdStructuralOverviewStudentDemo.pdf.
- 11 Toronto District School Board. (2012). *Grade 9 Cohort 2006-2011: Special education fact sheet No. 4*. Toronto: Toronto DSB. Retrieved May 8, 2013, from http://www.tdsb.on.ca/wwwdocuments/about_us/external_research_application/docs/Gr9CohortFactSheet4SpecialEducation.pdf.
- 12 Education Equality Task Force & Rozanski, M. (2002). *Investing in public education: Advancing the goal of continuous improvement in student learning and achievement (Review)*. Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Education.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Students’ socio-economic status has an impact on their chances for success, and public schools at their finest help all students achieve. Currently, in Ontario there is evidence that family income has an impact on the resources and programs available in schools.

People for Education recommends that the province:

- develop a new policy framework and a new special-purpose grant—the Equity in Education grant—focused specifically on programs and supports that have been proven effective to mitigate socio-economic and ethno-racial factors affecting disadvantaged students;
- protect the funding in the new Equity in Education Grant and require school boards to report annually on the programs and services funded by the Grant;
- conduct annual evaluations to ensure the programs funded under the Grant are achieving their goals; and
- collect data on students’ ethnicity, race and socio-economic status, to assess and report on schools’ effectiveness at ensuring that all students—across income and racial backgrounds—have equal learning opportunities and experiences across the curriculum, including the arts, special education and access to specialized programs.