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FROM THE PRESIDENT

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Your feedback helps us improve the *Forum*. Please e-mail me [here](#).

Best regards, Malkin Dare

YOUR VOTE IS IMPORTANT TO US

Last month, we polled you to find out whether you believe classroom quality in Ontario has stayed the same, improved, or declined over the past four years. The results are as follows: 5% thought that classroom quality had stayed the same; 26% thought it had improved; 42% thought it had declined, and 26% didn't know.

This month, we survey the old-timers who wrote the Ontario departmental examinations that ended in 1967. Please help us by clicking on [vote](#). After voting, please explain the reasons why you liked or disliked the exams by clicking on [comments](#). Your remarks will help inform our position on exit exams. We will print some of your comments in the mail bag section of the next newsletter.

EVERYONE CAN LEARN MUSIC

Thanks to Joanne Bender for identifying these excellent web-sites that parents can use to enrich their children's experience with and love of music. In some cases, your computer must have RealPlayer installed.

www.creatingmusic.com

This is a children's online creative music environment for children of all ages. It's a great place for kids to compose music, play with musical performance, music games and music puzzles.

www.classicsforkids.com

This site has programs on various classical composers, featuring their music and interesting information about their lives. There are many other features, including some games and information about the instruments of the orchestra.

www.sfskids.org

Sponsored by the San Francisco Orchestra, this site offers instruction on the mechanics of music – tempo, instrumentation, harmony, pitch, and so forth. Children can also listen to the symphony playing kid-oriented music like the Viennese Musical Clock and Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks.

www.myc.com

This site tells about Music for Young Children (MYC), a popular program created to introduce piano to young children in a pleasurable way. MYC is a comprehensive music program that integrates keyboard, singing, ear training, sight reading, creative movement, rhythm, music theory, and music composition for children between the ages of 3 – 11. The web-site includes a teacher finder.

www.kindermusik.com

Designed for older students, this site contains a lot of information about music – from composer bios to tips on how to teach children to read music to opera plots to instructions on how to buy a guitar.

MAIL BAG

Jello Days

You may be interested to know that the Ontario Ministry of Education (I think it's the ministry, anyway) is giving new teachers four "jello" days. Apparently, jello days are days which teachers can take off so they can observe experienced teachers teach. I thought that's what practice teaching was for. Wouldn't it make more sense to give experienced teachers the time off so that they could go into the classrooms of new teachers to correct mistakes? *Toronto, ON*

Education Quality is Staying the Same Overall

You asked whether I believe classroom quality in Ontario has stayed the same, improved, or declined over the past four years. That's an interesting question. In your poll, I answered that I didn't know, but I do have an opinion. In the primary grades, things are better. In the junior and intermediate grades, things are deteriorating. *Belleville, ON*

Education Quality has Declined

We have got so far away from the basics. They are not taught – presumably kids are expected to pick them up later on, maybe when they're ready. Unfortunately, in many cases, this doesn't happen. Especially in mathematics, these children struggle as a result.

Piaget

Engelmann's excerpt ("The Outrage of Project Follow Through) has got it mostly right, but he fails to distinguish between Piaget's views and the views of **some** of his disciples. Piaget as a biologist was interested in identifying stages in how we experience and make meaning of our world in order to make the appropriate adjustments. His ideas on stages are mostly right, but he underestimated what younger children could do and overestimated the onset of abstract thinking in most of us. He was not interested in what he called "the American question" of how you progress from stage to stage. He did think that stages were not static and that, given a "continuum of experiences" (quality practice), students more easily progress from stage to stage. Some of his disciples talk about being ready for the next stage as if it were all up to biology. Piaget never said that, though he thought biology played a huge role in human cognitive development. *Toronto, ON*

How to Lower Drop-Out Rates

In my school board, the Ministry's push to increase success rates is gaining more and more traction. Even up until just before report cards are published, high school students are allowed to drop the courses they are failing and adjust their timetables to courses at different levels to increase their chance of passing. As well, there have been complaints to the OSSTF about principals' overriding marks that teachers have assigned. There are some unfortunate consequences to these practices. For one thing, students are not stupid, and it doesn't take them long to figure out it's not necessary to work hard in order to graduate. And for another, high school graduation diplomas are becoming worth less and less. Soon, no employer or post-secondary institution will put any faith in them at all. *Cambridge, ON*

WEB-SITE OF THE MONTH

This month, we feature the Edmonton school boards' listing of the alternative programs and schools which they make available to parents. Click [here](#) for the public board and [here](#) for the Catholic board.

FEATURE ARTICLES

Trabants, Wartburgs, and Model T's

By Malkin Dare

In Ontario, most parents have no choice but to send their children to the neighbourhood school that has been assigned by their school board. To understand the implications of this fact, it is useful to reflect on the situation in East and West Germany between the years 1945 and 1989.

Both countries started off at essentially the same economic level after World War II, which (thanks to Allied bombers) was literally ground level. In 1945, at the end of the war, the country of Germany was divided

into two parts, with the eastern half being controlled by the Communists, and the western half enjoying a democratic government and a capitalist economy. In 1961, a wall was built between the two countries and, from then on, East Germans literally could not travel into the West, and vice versa.

The differences between the two countries became more and more obvious during the 44 years that the division existed. West Germany quickly developed a booming economy and great prosperity, while East Germany remained poor, dirty, and stagnant. It is instructive to compare East and West German cars as a kind of a metaphor for the differences between the two economies.

During the Communist era in East Germany, one of the few cars available to East Germans was a car called a Trabant, which was built by a government-run monopoly. The Trabant was a car so dirty and dangerous it achieved cult status before disappearing from East German roads soon after the wall came down in 1989. Trabants were powered by an anemic and smoky two-stroke engine, and it took 21 seconds to go from 0 to 100 kilometres per hour. Even so, East Germans were considered lucky if they could get their hands on a Trabant.



In contrast to East Germany, the West German car industry was characterized by fierce competition among numerous German and other European car companies. Unlike the Trabant, a West German BMW was one of the most advanced and well-made cars in the world. Even the lowest car made in West Germany, for example an Opel or a German Ford, had excellent comfort, performance, and reliability.

Ontario's government-run school system is the educational equivalent of the East German car industry.

It's a funny thing. Most people understand that competition is a good thing when it comes to businesses, and even quasi-governmental institutions like the post office or the LCBO. Everyone knows that monopolies are unresponsive, inefficient, and expensive. We like the competition

among grocery stores, car dealerships, dentists, manufacturers, and so forth, because it means we get excellent service in these sectors.

However, for some reason, most people think that, even though it's bad to have a monopoly if you're providing groceries or banking services, it's okay to have a monopoly if you're providing education services. But there isn't really any reason to think that the education sector is exempt from the forces that apply to the other sectors of the economy.

An education monopoly behaves just like any other monopoly. In an education monopoly, public schools have a guaranteed stream of students and the funding that they generate. It doesn't matter whether a school is doing a good job or a poor job – all schools receive the same amount of funding regardless of their level of service. Even schools that are doing a horrible job can and do continue to shortchange their students indefinitely. They can do this because they have a monopoly.

However, things can change dramatically when competition is introduced to the education sector. Other countries, like the Netherlands and Sweden, have more competition than Ontario, and their student achievement is better. Even within Canada, there are differences in the amount of educational competition.

Back in the late eighties and then again in the mid-nineties, the province of Alberta introduced legislation designed to increase the amount of education competition. At first, the Calgary school board chose to turn its back on the changed educational landscape and tried to carry on with business as usual. As a result, Calgary parents started withdrawing their children from the public schools and sending them to the various alternatives that had now become available. In spite of the fact that the city of Calgary was growing, the Calgary school board began to hemorrhage students and was forced to close one school after the other.

Finally, things got so bad that the Calgary school board did a complete about-face and introduced dramatic improvements, creating new schools to compete with the rival schools. Not surprisingly, many of its newly-created schools resembled the competition. For example, to compete with a rival all-girls school, the Calgary public board started up an all-girls school of its own. The board also started a special science school similar to one that was siphoning off a lot of its students and fully five schools that used the very popular traditional approach used at the competing Foundations for the Future Charter School. These days, no surprise, the Calgary board is boasting that its enrolment is climbing.

In Alberta, the school boards' monopoly was diminished by the introduction of competing schools. The power of competition is so obvious that we actually use the word "competitive" to mean "better" or "superior", as in "Our hotel is proud to offer a competitive service".

Alberta students outperform the rest of Canada by a wide margin on comparisons of student achievement. BC and Quebec don't have as much educational competition as Alberta, but they do have more than the remaining provinces – and their students tend to come second and third after Alberta. The Atlantic provinces have the least amount of educational competition in Canada, and their students tend to do worst.

It is important to note, however, that even in Alberta, there are still severe limitations and restrictions on the extent of the competition. Alberta has by no means a wide-open market for schools. In fact, no wide-open market system of education exists anywhere in the world today. Even in countries with relatively more educational competition, like Sweden and Chile and New Zealand and Denmark, the government still plays a very prominent role.

The problems with East Germany's Trabant were obvious because of the contrast with West German cars. But the problems with Canadian education are not as obvious, because there is no modern country with a wide-open competitive approach to schooling that we can contrast with Canadian schools. Of course, jurisdictions with more consumer choice among schools tend to get slightly better educational results. But the differences are relatively slight. It's like saying that the East German Wartburg was a better car than the East German Trabant. This may be true; however, neither was very good.

Education has not improved because it has been sheltered under the protective wings of a monopoly for many years. Henry Ford, too, had a monopoly of a sort, and so for a while he was able to get away with offering Model-T Fords in any colour people wanted, as long as it was black. But before long, competition caught up with Henry, and now consumers can have a lilac-tinted convertible BMW if they want. Education is much more important than cars, and we have put up with "all-black Model-T" schools for far too long. It's high time we exposed schools to the dynamic forces of competition and found out what the educational equivalent of a BMW is.



Well-Schooled

By Shelly Sanders-Greer

As principal of one of the most sought-after high schools in Toronto, Bev Ohashi has grown accustomed to seeing families in tears when they discover the house they bought is not in its catchment area. Earl Haig Secondary School, just north of Sheppard Avenue and east of Yonge Street, attracts people from as far away as Asia to its doors every year. But the school's full capacity and stringent boundaries leave many students "locked out", unable to become part of its successful population.

"A lot of parents don't have the right address so they try anything to get in here," says Ms Ohashi. "I had one family say they moved to the area because they wanted their kids to come to Earl Haig." Ms Ohashi told them they needed a notarized lease or purchase of sale to prove they lived in the area. A day later, a woman called Ms Ohashi and told her that a strange lady came to her house asking for a phone bill with the address on it. "We put the connection together and figured it was the family I had seen," recalls Ms Ohashi.

Earl Haig is one of many high-performing schools in the northeast quadrant of Toronto, drawing interest from all over the world as well as helping to increase resale home prices by 30%. Based on the 2005/2006 Fraser Report Card, an independent ranking of schools based on grades 3, 6, and 10 for standardized tests, Denlow Public School, Kennedy Public School, Seneca Hill Public School, Highland Junior High School, and Zion Heights Junior High school also perform consistently above the provincial average.

When Nira Rajaratnam and her husband Aravindhan began reviewing the annual Fraser Report Card a few years ago, they decided to move from their Scarborough home to North York because of the schools. Now their children, aged seven and four, will attend Cresthaven Public School and move on to Zion Heights Junior High and A.Y. Jackson Secondary School.

"We loved where we lived in Scarborough, except for the schools," says Ms Rajaratnam. "We ended up at Leslie and Finch and spent \$250,000 more than we spent on our Scarborough home, even though our new house is a bit smaller. But all three schools our children will attend are good, and we really like our new area."

Dennis Paradis, a sales representative with Re/Max Hallmark Realty Limited Brokerage, helped the Rajaratnams not only find a new home, but also guided them in their quest for a good school district. Motivated by the large number of clients with schools as a top priority, Mr. Paradis has researched the link between education and home prices and found U.S. data pointing to a 25% to 30% increase in resale values for homes in good

school districts. Mr. Paradis decided to create his own set of school reports, which he says are “a *Reader’s Digest* version of the Fraser Report Card.” His charts show how schools perform over five years, where “sweet spots” with high-performing elementary, middle and high schools are found, and they’re grouped into real estate boundaries so that purchasers can see exactly how schools in a particular neighbourhood compare with other areas. Overall, Mr. Paradis says that one out of every ten neighbourhoods in the GTA has a sweet spot.

Mr. Paradis also discovered that North York has more sweet spots than other parts of the city, which explains the high demand from both families and builders. Harvey Frankel, a sales representative with The Real Estate Centre 2000 Inc., serving North York, says, “Prices have all gone up in the area and schools are a major reason. It costs at least \$600,000 or \$700,000 to get into a family home here, and a lot of builders are paying top dollar just for lots to build million-dollar homes.”

There is no question that the Fraser Report Card is garnering attention and influencing home-purchasing decisions. Approximately 330,000 copies of the Report Card were downloaded from the Institute’s web-site last year. While Peter Cowley, director of school performance studies at the Fraser Institute, says the Report Card brings objective information to parents, he cautions potential home-buyers from focusing solely on numbers when making a decision. “Don’t rely on any one source,” he says. “You should ask important questions, talk to the principal, students and parents to see if you get consistent information.”

A big irony in this whole school process, says Mr. Cowley, is that when a school is perceived as being good, all of a sudden it is closed to attendance from students out of the area. “In any other sector, a business wouldn’t turn customers away,” he says. “You wouldn’t see Whole Foods closing its doors to a long line-up.”

This is exactly what’s happened at Denlow Public School, south of the 401 and east of Leslie Street. Principal Terry McIsaac says this has always been a high-performing school but, once the Fraser Report Card was made public, the school became more crowded and has been closed to optional attendance (which allows non-area students to attend) for the last two years. “More often we say no to people who want to come here but don’t live in the district.”

Echoing this problem is Dale Clayden, principal of Highland Junior High School at Don Mills Road and Steeles Avenue. “We get calls from outside our boundary and overseas from people who have read the Fraser Report Card. A lot of families come here from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Korea, and they do their homework. They pick an area of the city where they want their kids to go to school, so they move into the catchment area because that’s the only way to gain access to this school.”

This activity is taking place in other school districts as well. Brian Lumsden, a sales representative with Re/Max Hallmark Realty in the Beach, says that after the Fraser report was published last year, he received “tons of calls from people looking for homes in this school district”. Two of the schools in demand are Balmy Beach Public School and Courcellette Public School.

The Beach, along with Leaside and Forest Hill, are interesting areas because their real estate values are among the highest in Toronto, with Leaside topping the city with an average resale price of \$1,028,000. Yet schools in these areas are not consistently among the top performers. They do well but are not standouts. In these areas, the location has more influence on home prices than anything else, and Mr. Paradis cautions buyers to realize that paying top dollar for a house does not guarantee the best schools.

“The Beach has, according to the Education Quality and Accountability test results, many schools on the low end,” he says. “You can’t buy a house in a great neighbourhood and expect great schools.”

Since rankings from The Fraser Institute and the more recent C.D. Howe Institute’s report offer the most objective and thorough information, it seems safe to conclude these findings will continue to guide parents in choosing schools. Schools such as Earl Haig are like magnets, attracting students from all over the world, helping to raise property values and drastically changing the demographics.

Ms Ohashi says that 15 to 20 years ago, Earl Haig did not have the stellar reputation it enjoys today, but now she sees real estate ads highlighting the fact that a home is in this school’s district.

“I would say we’re middle- to upper-middle class, with 95% of our population with university education,” she says. “We even attract people who have left private schools to attend Earl Haig.”

(Reprinted with permission from “Post Homes”, an April 2007 special advertising supplement to the National Post)

More Well-Paid Bureaucrats

Every year, the Ontario government publishes the names of its provincial civil servants who earned over \$100,000. The complete list is [here](#). We list below the number of well-paid bureaucrats (WPBs) in most of Ontario’s major English-speaking school boards in 2005 and 2006. Not counting the four boards for which data were not available, there was a net increase of 504 WPBs between 2005 and 2006.

The right-hand column contains the increase/decrease in student enrolment for each school board between 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 (the latest year for which data are available). There was a net decrease of 6,252

students. Ontario enrolment continued to decline between 2004-2005 and 2005-2006, but we are not able to access exact numbers.

Most school boards increased the number of their WPBs even as their enrolment declined (most notably the Toronto District School Board which had lost 6018 students the previous year but nevertheless felt the need to add 82 WPBs this year on top of last year's increase of 73 WPBs). In 1998, there was one WPB for per approximately 5500 students. Last year, it was one per approximately 850 students. This year, it is one per approximately 700 students.

School Board	WPBs 2005	WPBs 2006	WPBs Inc/ Dec	Enrol +/- 2003-4 to 2004-5
Brant/Hald/Nor CDSB	10	No data	?	+81
Grand Erie DSB	23	No data	?	-250
Kenora CDSB	2	No data	?	-11
Niagara Catholic DSB	17	No data	?	-754
Toronto DSB	504	586	+82	-6018
Ottawa/Car CDSB	30	75	+45	-155
Greater Essex DSB	23	61	+38	-297
Halton DSB	36	73	+37	+1091
Toronto CDSB	175	204	+29	-1508
York Region DSB	142	171	+29	+3411
Simcoe/Musk CDSB	27	54	+27	+107
York CDSB	104	123	+19	+988
Waterloo CDSB	19	37	+18	+200
Ham/Went DSB	41	57	+16	-502
Peel DSB	192	208	+16	+4454
Rainbow DSB	12	28	+16	+60
Keewatin/Pat DSB	8	22	+14	-139
Thames Valley DSB	41	55	+14	-1267
Ottawa-Carleton DSB	69	79	+10	-1122
Durham DSB	96	105	+9	+938
Ham/Went CDSB	16	25	+9	-269
Kawartha/PineR DSB	26	35	+9	-1205
Pet/Vic/Nor/Cla CDSB	13	22	+9	+173
Near North DSB	0	8	+8	-266
Northwest Catholic DSB	0	8	+8	+13
Superior/Green DSB	3	11	+8	-138
Halton CDSB	19	26	+7	+821
Wellington CDSB	12	19	+7	+163
Avon Maitland DSB	7	13	+6	-340

Upper Grand DSB	23	29	+6	+98
Niagara DSB	35	40	+5	-754
Simcoe County DSB	26	31	+5	+191
Lakehead DSB	13	16	+3	-593
Lamb/Kent DSB	22	25	+3	-733
Nipissing/PS CDSB	3	6	+3	-74
Northeastern CDSB	0	3	+3	-66
Bluewater DSB	20	22	+2	-535
Huron-Superior CDSB	4	6	+2	-185
Rainy River DSB	6	8	+2	-126
Renfrew County DSB	7	9	+2	-334
Thunder Bay CDSB	6	8	+2	+69
Upper Canada DSB	33	35	+2	-387
Algonquin/Lake CDSB	14	15	+1	-89
Dufferin-Peel CDSB	155	156	+1	+951
Renfrew CDSB	5	6	+1	-29
Sudbury CDSB	6	7	+1	-297
Superior North CDSB	2	3	+1	-63
Bruce-Grey CDSB	8	8	0	-87
Eastern Ontario CDSB	18	18	0	-4
Huron-Perth CDSB	6	6	0	-62
London CDSB	17	17	0	+213
St. Clair CSB	13	13	0	-437
Limestone DSB	18	17	-1	-443
Trillium/Lake DSB	18	17	-1	-502
Algoma DSB	19	16	-3	-330
Hast/PrinceEd DSB	18	15	-3	-319
Waterloo Region DSB	39	34	-5	+187
Durham CDSB	55	47	-8	+175
Windsor-Essex CDSB	51	41	-10	+54
PROVINCE	2327	2779	+504	-6252

WHAT'S NEW?

[Knowledge is Power](#)

A huge \$65 million grant from some of the US's foremost donors, including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, will add 42 more Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) charter schools in Houston, Texas. About 85% of KIPP students are low-income, and almost all are black or Hispanic. KIPP schools take many students who are two years behind in grade 5 and bring them up to grade level by grade 8. [more](#)

[BC Registry for Disciplined Teachers](#)

Under Bill 21, the British Columbia College of Teachers is now required to make public the name of the person who has been disciplined and the status of the person's certificate, a record of any suspensions or cancellations of the person's certification, and a record of disciplinary action when the discipline relates to physical, sexual or emotional harm to a student. [more](#)

[Poor Behaviour Linked to Time in Day Care](#)

A study by the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development has found that keeping a preschooler in a day care centre for a year or more slightly increased the likelihood that the child would become disruptive in class, and that the effect would persist through grade 6. [more](#)

[Trends in Provincial Drop-Out Rates](#)

Defining high school drop-outs as 20-24-year-olds without a high school diploma and not in school, Statistics Canada reports that Canada's drop-out rate has declined steadily since 1990, from approximately 17% to less than 10% in 2004-2005. Ontario is among the most improved, having a drop-out rate of approximately 9%. [more](#)

BOOK REVIEWS

The Brain that Changes Itself: Stories of personal triumph from the frontiers of brain science. Norman Doidge.

Of this book, Oliver Sacks writes: "Only a few decades ago, scientists considered the brain to be fixed or 'hard-wired' and considered most forms of brain damage, therefore, to be incurable. Dr. Doidge, an eminent psychiatrist and researcher, was struck by how his patients' own transformation belied this, and set out to explore the new science of neuroplasticity by interviewing both scientific pioneers in neuroscience and patients who have benefited from neuro-rehabilitation. Here he describes in fascinating personal narratives how the brain, far from being fixed, has remarkable powers of changing its own structure and compensating for even the most challenging neurological conditions. Doidge's book is a remarkable and hopeful portrait of the endless adaptability of the human brain." Since the entire book deals with learning of one kind or another, there is much that is relevant to educators. Click [here](#) for a fascinating TVO interview with Dr. Doidge. The excerpt discusses the relationship between modern educational practices and the new understanding of brain plasticity.

Excerpt (pages 41-42)

"The irony of this new discovery is that for hundreds of years educators did seem to sense that children's brains had to be built up through exercises of increasing difficulty that strengthened brain functions. Up through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a classical education

often included rote memorization of long poems in foreign languages, which strengthened the auditory memory (hence thinking in language) and an almost fanatical attention to handwriting, which probably helped strengthen motor capacities and thus not only helped handwriting but added speed and fluency to reading and speaking. Often a great deal of attention was paid to exact elocution and to perfecting the pronunciation of words. Then in the 1960s, educators dropped such traditional exercises from the curriculum, because they were too rigid, boring, and ‘not relevant’. But the loss of these drills has been costly; they may have been the only opportunity that many students had to systematically exercise the brain function that gives us fluency and grace with symbols. For the rest of us, their disappearance may have contributed to the general decline of eloquence, which requires memory and a level of auditory brain power unfamiliar to us now. In the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 the debaters would comfortably speak for an hour or more without notes, in extended memorized paragraphs; today many of the most learned among us, raised in our most élite schools since the 1960s, prefer the omnipresent PowerPoint presentation – the ultimate compensation for a weak premotor cortex.”

The War Against Hope: How teachers’ unions hurt children, hinder teachers, and endanger public education. Rod Paige.

The author is a former US secretary of education, and he really doesn’t like the teachers’ unions. Mr. Paige ought to know what he’s talking about. Among many other things, he was a trustee and then superintendent (director) of the Houston Independent School District, the United States’ seventh-largest school district. According to Mr. Paige, the biggest impediment to meaningful school reform is the enormous, self-aggrandizing power wielded by the teachers’ unions. It is therefore critically important to distinguish between rank-and-file teachers and the unions that purport to represent them. Although the teachers’ unions profess to be on the side of the teachers (and of the students), they are in fact acting in their own best interests – even when those interests conflict with the welfare of classroom teachers and students. The excerpt that elaborates on this point and at the same time brings a message of hope to education reformers. Mr. Paige, in case you don’t know, is African-American.

Excerpt (pages 174-175)

“In the fall of 2004, I traveled to bring President Bush’s message of hope and reform directly to the mostly-black residents of our nation’s public housing. In particular, I remember one stop in Seattle, appearing before an animated crowd where it seemed more than one-third of the audience had (teachers’ union) buttons on. As I discussed in the last chapter, the state of Washington has one of the most active and partisan branches of this union. The Washington Education Association, for more than a decade,
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has stopped or slowed almost every meaningful education reform in the Evergreen State.

“There I was in Seattle’s Holly Park Community Center, in front of one of the toughest groups of union activists in the country. Or so I thought. I spoke briefly about the president’s hopes for further reform and his efforts to build a society where black families had their own homes, college savings, and investments. Then I switched over to the subject of education and what the president had done. At first, the audience was restless. They obviously disagreed with the idea that the president was working to improve education. So, at that point I decided to dispense with the pleasantries. I took off my jacket, walked away from the podium, and walked right into the audience to take their questions.

“In the course of the next hour, I saw firsthand exactly which myths and which propaganda claims had made their way from Washington DC to this local community in Seattle, Washington. I had heard it all before: The president was not spending enough. He was shortchanging education. He was forcing testing on the states. And so on. And in that hour of discussion, I addressed every one of the teachers’ questions. I described the record spending on education and the president’s belief that every child can learn. I discussed the importance of specific measures and accountability. As the dialogue continued, the questions became less antagonistic and began to take on an air of earnest respect. I realized that these teachers had never heard the truth. They were so busy working hard to teach their students that they never had the time to stop and think; they believed their union was open and honest about the education debate raging in America. What they eventually came to realize that day was that the president’s reforms and the No Child Left Behind Act were in fact sincere, moderate, and well thought out.

“At the end of this simple question-and-answer session, I gave my closing remarks – thanking them for doing the real work of education and thanking them for their role in improving education. As soon as I was done, I was mobbed. These teachers, wearing giant union buttons, were hugging and thanking *me*. They were elated for the direct presentation of the facts. And more than one apologized for not looking more closely at the law and instead relying on their union bulletins for information about the law.

“It was then and there, after four years of seeing the power of the teachers’ unions undermine reform, that I saw the most compelling evidence that we will win. I realized there was good reason to hope that we can improve our nation’s schools. Time is on the side of reformers, because as our message and the facts get out, teachers will realize that teachers’ unions do not stand for teachers or for schools. They stand for themselves and for their own control of the education system.”

SQE ACTIVITIES

- Executive Director Doretta Wilson will be discussing homework on a live on-line broadcast of the TVO parent show *Your Voice*, on Tuesday, May 8 at 1:00 pm. [view](#)
- On May 10 at 1:30 pm, Professors Deani Van Pelt and Patricia Allison will be discussing their SQE-sponsored report, “Ontario's Private Schools: Who Chooses Them and Why”, at a symposium at Redeemer University College in Ancaster. Click [here](#) for more information. Noting that Ontario publicly-funded schools are losing market share to the province’s independent schools, the authors will outline the reasons parents give for choosing independent schools – feedback that publicly-funded schools would be wise to heed if they wish to reclaim their lost students. Professor Van Pelt’s report was released by the Fraser Institute on May 3, 2007. Click [here](#) to access the full report.
- From time to time, SQE needs the advice and help of a graphic arts designer. If you have these skills and would be willing to donate a few hours of your time, please contact [Doretta Wilson](#).

AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT

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