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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

To read the full version of the *SQE Forum* on your monitor, click [here](#). To print out the print-friendly version, click [here](#).

If you like our newsletter and would like to help our work, please consider making a financial donation (any amount is appreciated) by clicking [here](#). We do not receive any government funding, and we are completely reliant on the donations of our supporters. Contributions of any size will generate a tax receipt, along with our heartfelt thanks.

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

Best regards, Malkin

## 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 want to survey the individuals who wrote the old Ontario departmental examinations. 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 opinions 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. Click [here](#) to access the web-site list.

## MAIL BAG

Our readers' comments are always interesting and insightful. Click [here](#) to read some of the feedback we've received since our last newsletter.

## 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](#)

Malkin Dare invites you to choose a car from rather uninviting assortment of old clunkers. Her point is that competition among car manufacturers results in the development of better cars – just as competition among schools results in the development of better schools. [more](#)

### [Well-Schooled](#)

This article looks at the real estate market in Toronto, and shows how the Fraser Institute rankings and the C.D. Howe rankings are affecting house prices. Houses in districts with highly-ranked schools are worth an estimated 25% to 30% more than equivalent houses in districts with less desirable schools. [more](#)

### [Well-Paid Bureaucrats 2006](#)

Here is our annual breakdown by school board of the number of Ontario education officials who earn more than \$100,000. Between 2005 and 2006, the number of well-paid bureaucrats (WPBs) in most of the major English-speaking school boards increased from 2327 to 2779, an increase of 504 WPBs. Ontario student enrolment declined during the same period. There is now one WPB per approximately 700 students. [more](#)

## 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 an interesting excerpt concerning the relationship between modern educational practices and the new understanding of brain plasticity. Click [here](#) for a fascinating TVO interview with Dr. Doidge.

### ***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. 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 mean-

ingful 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. Click [here](#) for an interesting 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.

## **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**

Whenever you think things are totally hopeless and you're tempted to give up, click [here](#) for a chuckle and a shot in the arm.

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