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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

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

Highlights in this month's newsletter include a list of resources for **enlarging vocabulary**, a web-site about **teaching your kids to play bridge**, the **solution to the problems of special education students**, and a review of a book that explains that **anyone can excel at anything**.

If you know of an interesting article or book, please tell me about it by clicking [here](#). I am always on the lookout for good stuff. Regards, Malkin

## YOUR VOTE IS IMPORTANT TO US

Last month, we wanted to know what you thought of our free reading program Stairway to Reading. We got a very poor response to this question and so, in an effort to generate more participation, this month we're tackling an extremely contentious topic – namely, the question of whether Ontario should fund faith-based schools. Do you think public support for faith-based schools is likely to generate religious friction and divisiveness? Perhaps you are more concerned about the fairness of the present policy of funding Catholic schools but those of no other religion?

You can weigh in on this controversial question by clicking on [vote](#). We will print some of your comments in the next newsletter.

## SQE ACTIVITIES

- SQE is currently planning a visit from Dr. Howard Fuller, a former school superintendent in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Dr. Fuller is expected to visit Ontario in January 2008.
- SQE recently published a quick study on the similarities between Russian department stores and Ontario's centrally-planned schools. [more](#)
- In June, 2007 SQE provided funding for a C.D. Howe Institute policy seminar on school choice. The Institute expects to publish its report on the day's proceedings in late September or early October.

## EVERYONE CAN HAVE A GOOD VOCABULARY

More and more, researchers are coming to realize the importance of a good vocabulary. After good reading ability, vocabulary is one of the most important determinants of educational success! For more information and some web-based resources, click [here](#).

## MAIL BAG

Our readers' comments are always interesting and insightful. Here is some of the feedback we've received on funding faith-based schools, asking Aunt Malkin, the importance of ideas, teaching reading, and [more](#).

## WEB-SITE OF THE MONTH

This month, we feature an Ontario web-site called [Parents for Educational Choice](#). This organization is composed of parents and others who believe in government-supported school choice. At the moment, the site is focusing on the controversy over John Tory's promise to fund the province's religious schools. The "Take Action" section includes a number of easy things people can do to show their support. Of particular interest is the information on Mr. Tory's respect and understanding for the unique identity of faith-based schools.

## ASK AUNT MALKIN

A veteran of the school wars herself, with the scars to prove it, Malkin Dare has all kinds of advice to offer. If you would like some been-there-done-that advice from Aunt Malkin, call her at 519-884-3166 or [e-mail](#) her. This month, Aunt Malkin answers Sheila's question on whether her children are being challenged in school. [more](#)

## FEATURE ARTICLES

### Miss Winifred Banks

By Don Cropp

This whimsical narrative by a retired Ontario science teacher captures the "Gradgrind" quality of his World-War II schooling in England. Miss Winifred was a very effective teacher, but there were drawbacks to her educational approach! [more](#)

### The Special Education Dilemma: *Solving it with fluency*

By Carl Binder, Elizabeth Haughton, and Barbara Bateman

This excellent article pinpoints the reason why most students go off the rails – their lack of fluency. The excerpt explains why fluency is the key to effective learning, and it points the way to a longer article which tells how to measure fluency and how to help students to achieve it. [more](#)

## **A Depressing English Curriculum**

**By Jason Toporowski**

This newspaper column by a high school student laments the gruesome content of his grade 12 English course – *Hamlet*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Animal Farm*, and *A Brave New World*. The young man makes an excellent case for some inspirational literature. [more](#)

### **WHAT'S NEW?**

#### [Charter Schools on a Roll – In Alberta](#)

Alberta Education is currently sitting on a report that compares how well the province's charter school students do with how well public school students do, as tested by provincial exams. It turns out that more charter school students achieve "acceptable" (91%) and "excellent" (33%) status than public school students (76% and 19%). Moreover, the charter school students are increasing their lead every year. [more](#)

#### [Charter School Students on a Roll – In New York](#)

A federally-funded, multi-year Harvard study of New York's charter schools has released its preliminary results. For every year a student spends in an NYC charter school, his math scores improve 12% more than those of his public school peers, while his reading scores improve by 3.5% more. [more](#)

#### [What a Difference a J Makes](#)

Dalton J. McGuinty, the father of Ontario's premier, was strongly in favour of public funding for private schools. In a 1984 submission to the Shapiro Commission, he wrote, "My father worked at a lumber mill, and he worked hard and long to raise his six children. He served his country well and loved it – a lot more uncritically than I do. You know about what his salary was. But he worked extra hard and long to pay our fees through an independent alternative high school. We helped him all we could – knowing full well that he was in a sense paying double taxes for our schooling – that he was a second-class citizen not permitted by law to direct his taxes to the school of his choice....In a free and just society, the rights of all are diminished if the rights of any one are infringed." [more](#)

#### [Business Case against Universal Preschool](#)

A recent study by economist Robert Lynch for the Economic Policy Institute, *an organization advocating universal preschool*, found real costs and questionable benefits for universal preschool. Among his findings specifically for Virginia: universal preschool would cost \$6,000 per child, to a total of \$847 million in 2008. Furthermore, it would take 11 years for the program to start paying for itself in societal benefits, and it would take 24 years for the program to pay for itself in budget benefits alone. [more](#)

## [Ontario Test Scores Flat-Lined](#)

Ontario's "independent" testing body, the Education Quality and Accountability Office, has chosen to describe the results of this year's provincial tests as "sustaining improvement". That's one way to put it. Another would be to admit that, after years of slower and slower progress, the province's test scores have come to a full stop. With grade 6 reading scores frozen at a 64% pass rate, there is no chance that the Liberal government will be able to keep their promise that 75% of Ontario grade 6 students would pass the provincial tests by the end of their mandate. [more](#)

## [Getting the Fox Out of the Schoolhouse](#)

A new report from the Atlantic Institute for Market Studies examines the role that the teachers' unions play in education. The report finds that the interests of teachers diverge from the interests of students in several areas – for example, strikes, seniority provisions, the instructional day, salary schedules, and class size restrictions – and that at present, provincial governments tend to favour the interests of the teachers over the interests of the students. The authors make a number of recommendations designed to bring about a better balance of power, by means of "reform initiatives that help to make schools more productive, teachers more professional, and the academic achievement of students more evident". [more](#)

## **BOOK REVIEWS**

### ***The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance*** Edited by K. Anders Ericsson et al

This book review advances the revolutionary idea that almost anyone can be an elite performer in almost any field, if he or she is willing to invest the huge amount of painstaking work required. The fascinating excerpt debunks the notion that Mozart was a child prodigy. [more](#)

### ***Getting Choice Right***

by Julian R. Betts and Tom Loveless, editors

This book accepts that school choice is here to stay, and tries to tease out which school choice policies will yield the best results. The interesting excerpt explores one of the possible reasons for charter and private schools' superior outcomes in terms of their graduates' civic values. [more](#)

## **AND NOW FOR SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT**

Click [here](#) for an excellent web-site that will show you how to teach children to play bridge. This card game is an excellent way to motivate and engage children, providing them with social, emotional, and intellectual growth.

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