

A Short Guide to Writing Letters to Elected Politicians

When a letter is written and sent to the Premier or a minister, the following usually happens.

1. The letter is forwarded to the correspondence unit which notes the topic and forwards it to the appropriate ministry. A letter to the Premier about education, for example, will be tallied and then sent to the Office of the Minister of Education.
2. In the Minister's Office, the content of the letter will be noted and then forwarded to the appropriate branch of the Ministry. A letter about the restructuring of education will be sent to the Learning Programs Secretariat; a letter about reading will be sent to the Curriculum Branch; a letter about benchmarks will go to the Learning Assessment Branch.
3. In the appropriate branch, an education officer will draft a letter. This letter will then be reviewed by the director of the branch, sent to the Minister's office and on to the Premier's Office.
4. In the Premier's Office, someone may read the letter, and then the Premier will sign it. Every letter will receive a response. If the letters are all the same, then a standard response will be provided. For this reason, it is important to individualize the letter. It is also important to ask specific questions about an issue. A standard question will receive a standard reply. Even a postcard will receive a response if it requests an action, e.g. please let me know how my board did in the recent provincial review of mathematics). Some topics to be addressed could include:
 1. Recent poor results of Ontario students on international science and mathematics comparisons (ask for copies of the reports);
 2. The Ministry's planned curriculum legislation "The Common Curriculum" (ask for a copy).
 3. The Ministry's "benchmarks" program (ask for a copy of the draft mathematics guidelines);
 4. The Ministry's policy on teaching beginning reading (ask for a copy of Circular 14 which contains no phonetic readers);
 5. Destreaming grade nine (ask for a copy of the Ministry's guidelines to boards);
 6. The Ministry's plan to monitor student achievement (is there one?); and
 7. The Cabinet document on education which recently made headlines (what is its status?).

These are just a few possibilities. The thing to remember is that letter-writing is a very important tool in influencing Ministry policy and political will.

There are no clear and fast guidelines concerning whom to write. A letter to the Premier probably makes the biggest splash. A letter to the Minister will probably receive quicker attention. It is probably best to vary letters. A letter to one should be copied to the other, and both should be copied to your own MPP. The important thing is to write.

It is also a great way to find out current government thinking (this is how the news about the withdrawal from the National Indicators testing program became public). So....get writing!!