

McGuinty Education Report Card

By Malkin Dare

When they ran for office back in 2003, the Ontario Liberals made 25 education promises. Since Premier Dalton McGuinty regards education as so important that he wants to be known as the “education premier”, and since his team will be seeking re-election next summer, this seemed to us a good time to issue a report card on the Liberals’ progress in keeping their education promises.

Promise	Grade	Comments
We will build a strong public education system that supports student success and raises student achievement.	C	We weren’t sure how to assess whether the Ontario education system has become better at supporting student achievement, and so we awarded this grade solely on the basis of results on the provincial tests. On the one hand, scores have improved by approximately six percentage points over the last three years, but on the other hand, the tests have become much easier.
We will promote excellence in learning for all Ontario students and cancel tax breaks for exclusive private schools.	A+	The McGuinty team is definitely promoting the concept of excellence in learning for all students. As well, it did keep its promise of cancelling tax breaks for exclusive private schools. It also cancelled tax breaks for non-exclusive private schools, and furthermore, it did so retroactively and as one of its very first acts.
We will bring peace and stability to our schools.	A	We decided to define peace and stability as freedom from teachers’ strikes. It seems likely that there will be no teachers’ strikes for the next three years, due to the huge salary increases conceded by the government in return for a four-year contract.
Our Excellence for All Plan guarantees that within our first mandate, 75% of our students meet or exceed the provincial standard on province-wide tests.	F	With approximately 63% of students currently meeting or exceeding the standard (an increase of about six percentage points since the Liberals took office), there is no chance that this promise can be kept – no matter how much more the tests are dumbed down.
We will put in place a real cap of 20 students per class in the all-important early grades.	C	In 2006, approximately half of Kindergarten to Grade 3 classes were at or under the government’s planned cap of 20 students or fewer.

We will make reading, writing and math mandatory in each teaching day.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area.
We will give teachers the tools and the training for excellence.	F	It is still either very difficult or impossible for teachers to receive training in research-based methods. There are few, if any, research-based textbooks on the Trillium List, the government's list of approved texts.
We will make high quality childcare and education available for our younger learners.	F	In awarding this grade, we chose to define "high quality" to mean research-based, especially programs known to improve the academic prospects of lower socio-economic students. In any case, we are not aware of any initiatives to increase the amount of childcare of any kind, high quality or otherwise.
We will enhance the quality of childcare in Ontario by raising professional standards and ensuring that they are met.		We decided not to award a grade for this promise, since we didn't understand it. In any case, we are not aware of any initiatives in this area.
We will help the children who need the most help – those with special needs.	F	It's just about unanimous in Ontario that special-needs students are still being badly short-changed.
We will create a meaningful high school diploma program that combines academic achievement and work preparation for students in danger of dropping out.	B	There are pilot programs in 27 school boards whereby students can earn up to two high school credits for such things as building homes with Habitat for Humanity. There are also 159 Student Success Lighthouse projects designed to offer "increased support, extra guidance, and unique learning opportunities".
We will make learning mandatory to age 18.	B	A new law requires students to stay in school until age 18. We awarded a B instead of an A for this promise because there are no consequences for students who leave school before age 18 – except for the tiny percentage of students who end up in truancy court.
We will make sure schools are safe so students can concentrate on learning.	D	The Liberals have funded a number of bullying prevention programs, but it is not clear that anything has changed as a result.

We will help our schools develop good citizens through character education.	D	The Liberals have announced \$2 million in funding “to support character building in schools and inspire students to become caring and contributing citizens”.
We believe learning goes beyond the basics (and must include music, art, drama, sports and extra-curricular activities).		We decided not to award a grade for this, since it isn’t exactly a promise. However, we are not aware of any initiatives in this area.
We will create a Lighthouse program so successful school programs can be shared.	C	The Liberals are in the very early stages of a project called Schools on the Move. So far, 23 schools have been identified that have showed substantial gains over the past three years, but there hasn’t been any sharing yet.
We will not allow any school to fail our kids ... We will monitor school performance to be sure they are making the grade ...	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area.
We will offer public school choice, so parents can decide which public school is right for their children.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area.
We will treat our teachers with the professional respect they deserve.		We decided not to award a grade for this promise, since we didn’t know how to evaluate its fulfillment. We are not aware of any initiatives in this area, unless the Liberals are referring to their cancellation of mandatory professional development for teachers.
We will turn the Ontario College of Teachers into a professional body that sets the highest standards for the profession and earns the respect of teachers and parents.	F	The only action in this area of which we are aware is an increase in the percentage of union representatives on the college, such that the teachers’ unions are now in control of the Ontario College of Teachers.
We will not let schools fail because of a flawed funding formula. We will create a fair model to reflect the local needs of diverse communities.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area

We will ensure that school boards provide strong local accountability and decision-making.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area
We will ensure there is transparency in public education.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area
An Ontario Liberal government will ensure that three-year funding can actually be achieved.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area
We will establish an independent Curriculum Council to plan and prepare for curriculum changes.	F	We are not aware of any initiatives in this area