HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 11TH OISE SURVEY OF EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

Public Attitudes toward Education in Ontario 1996, the report of the 11th OISE/UT Survey of Educational Issues has just been published by the University of Toronto Press. The OISE/UT Survey (formerly the OISE Survey) has charted public attitudes on educational issues since 1978. This biennial survey is the only regular public survey of educational opinion in Canada. The current survey was administered by the Institute for Social Research, York University in October, 1996. Results for the full sample should be accurate to 3-4 percentage points, 95 percent of the time.

- Satisfaction with schools has increased over the first half of the 1990s. In 1996, half were satisfied with the Ontario school system in general compared to only a third in 1988.
- A majority (56 percent) of the Ontario public support an earlier start to formal schooling by making early childhood education available to all children whose parents choose to enroll them. In contrast, the public is about evenly divided over whether to shorten high school by abolishing grade 13.
- There is growing public support for a common curriculum and a common school career for students throughout much of high school. Virtually all Ontarians now want English, math and computer skills to be required for all high school students. There is also strong majority support for requiring both science courses and vocational studies for all students, whether or not they intend to go on to more advanced education. Support for all of these required courses has increased greatly over the past decade.
- Less than a quarter would return to streaming students at grade 9 into distinct programs leading to university, college, or the work force. A large majority (77 percent) think students should have to pass provincial examinations in all compulsory high school subjects in order to graduate.
- Ontarians are also increasingly willing to participate in running their local schools. Two-thirds of those with children in schools and nearly half of those without children in school would now probably be willing to serve on the recently created local school parent councils. As Table 2 shows, only a third of the public was willing to participate in school committees in 1979.
- While the public want to play a more active role in the schools, the majority also support merging school boards in general (60 percent), merging English and French boards (57 percent) and merging public and Catholic boards (55 percent). Support for funding only public school boards is also growing to nearly majority proportions among all religious affiliations except Catholics.
- Support for provincial government influence over what is taught in local schools has dropped since the mid-1980s; less than a third now want the provincial (or federal) government to control curriculum.
- Just over a quarter (28 percent) report taking a continuing education course in the past year, down from over a third in 1992. Over half indicated that they took the courses to help them do their current jobs better (36 percent) or to prepare them for a new job (21 percent).
- On average, respondents spent almost 12 hours a week of informal learning activities either related to work or to their general interests.
The survey report contains major sections on public attitudes toward school reorganization, educational funding, postsecondary reorganization and funding, education and work, further education, computer literacy and libraries.

TO ORDER THE SURVEY REPORT:

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