

PART 4

Healthy Schools, Healthy Communities

How can the linkage between healthy schools and healthy communities be better understood and strengthened? How are Ontario schools reaching beyond their walls to have an impact on their communities and their environment? The articles in this section detail inventive initiatives in schools that inspire students, help build more inclusive communities, and put schools in the lead on social and environmental sustainability issues.

Working Together to Save Energy in Niagara Schools

BRUCE MCLENNAN is with the CUPE Local 4156 Energy Conservation Committee. He began working with the Niagara South Board of Education in the 1970s and has recently retired from the District School Board of Niagara.

> THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

The District School Board of Niagara maintains a consortium of buildings that adds up to more than 6.3 million square feet in 12 municipalities in the region of Niagara. Most are used by 3,800 teachers and support staff to educate 42,000 students in 99 elementary and 22 secondary schools. We have an annual gas bill that reaches nearly \$2.5 million and an electricity bill that exceeds \$3.5 million.

In the fall of 2001 four members of CUPE 4156 met in a coffee shop to talk about what we could do to assist the board in saving money on energy costs. That fall Local 4156 proposed some cost saving initiatives to the district school board designed to reduce energy consumption and the board quickly accepted those ideas.

> JOINT COMMITTEE

The committee, which was formed to investigate and move forward with these initiatives, was made up of four CUPE members, the board's technical services department supervisor, the plant services controller, and the director of education. We met every six weeks to develop a plan containing many ideas and initiatives. After many meetings involving some controversy and discussion, we agreed to a plan that was put into place.

We started with large posters that showed energy saving ideas that could be used in school buildings. The posters were put in conspicuous places within all the buildings.

We also introduced a plan to pay back any school that realized energy savings when compared to the cost of the previous four years of operation. Any school that realized more than \$200 in annual energy savings would be reimbursed 25 per cent of the amount it saved. That money would then be used for the benefit of the students in that particular school. To be fair to all the schools, the calculation was adjusted using the square footage of each particular building.

The principal of each school was asked to set up an in-school energy committee, which would have four members, including members of the teaching and support staff and the student body. A member of the school board committee then met with each school committee to get them started. In most cases a student was designated to monitor the use of lights and computers. Sometimes notes were left when lights or computers were left on, or in some cases fines were levied.

> ENERGY ISSUES

Computers were a big issue. It was not uncommon to see banks of computers left on all weekend. They consume more energy than people realize. Over time, older machines were replaced with new computers that were pre-programmed to shut down at certain times.

Another initiative was to present the leading schools with plaques commemorating their success in the program: one for the leading elementary school and one for the leading secondary school for the most energy saved over the preceding four years. Then we provided another set of plaques to the schools that saved the most electrical energy over

the previous year. The award was called the most improved school award.

As a result of this program, we saw energy savings from \$60,000 to more than \$80,000 each year. In 2004 this program received a commendation from the Ontario Minister of Energy.

The combined expertise of CUPE members, educators, students, and plant department personnel in Niagara schools, resulted in a savings of \$79,100 in energy costs. Close to 50 per cent of the schools have been able to reduce their energy consumption. As a reward, 25 per cent of those savings will be rebated to the 55 schools able to reduce their energy use.

In May 2007 a news release from the District School Board of Niagara stated: “The combined expertise of CUPE Local 4156 members, educators, students, and plant department personnel at the District School Board of Niagara, resulted in a savings of \$79,100 in energy savings at DSBN schools. Close to 50 per cent of DSBN schools have been able to reduce their energy consumption. As a reward, 25 per cent of those savings will be rebated to the 55 schools who were able to reduce their energy use.”

The release added: “In total, DSBN schools across the region saved over 800,000 kilowatt hours of electricity. That’s more than enough energy to power a high school for an entire year or an elementary school for almost four years.”



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> THE COMMITTEE

Over time, more representatives joined the board's energy committee, giving us more representation across the board. The committee's members include:

- A maintenance electrician
- The board's technical services supervisor
- The board's plant services controller
- The president of CUPE local 4156
- Elementary school principals representative
- Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation representative
- School waste reduction coordinator
- Secondary school principals representative
- A caretaker representative
- A science consultant
- Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario representative
- Ex Officio – board director of education

> OTHER INITIATIVES

What else have we done? We have initiated what we call a green bookcase, which is a dedicated workstation in every school library stocked with information about energy conservation, recycling, and environmental issues.

We have a school conservation energy package, which is available in PDF format to all teachers and interested individuals. It is full of energy saving tips and procedures for any building. We've developed a power conservation manual for teachers and another manual for caretakers. We also make regular use of email to remind people to shut things off before each vacation period.

EcoSchools in Waterloo

CATHERINE FIFE is a trustee with the Waterloo Region District School Board. She was first elected in 2003 and re-elected in 2006. Catherine is chair of the board's Environmental Advisory Committee. As a long-time activist in progressive causes, she is also active in many educational and child care organizations.

> THE WATERLOO WAY

When I was first elected to the Waterloo board in 2003, we did not have an environmental advisory committee. We talked about the “Waterloo Way” and our tradition of being environmentally aware, but we didn’t have an action plan in place. I learned that during the painful years of amalgamation, the environment committee got pushed off to one side, then lost altogether at the Waterloo Region District School Board.

I was determined to act on this matter because it is difficult to hold a school board accountable for things they talk about but actually don’t act upon. I believe that links between healthy schools and healthy communities are vital but not well understood.

To be honest, I had to be creative about bringing the environment back to the board table, but I was motivated because I am a parent who is concerned about the growing disconnect I see between this generation of children, the natural habitat and the environment.

> ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

I am worried about future generations not understanding the importance of the environment and I have seen a growing disconnect with previous generations. Public education is a place where you can positively effect social change.

Changing the culture of how we treat our Earth, how we manage our natural resources and how we understand our environmental footprint is so important. When we teach our children these issues, they take them home and they can change living patterns in their own homes. This is how recycling happened and how the anti-smoking campaign gained momentum. We know how to change negative or damaging behaviour through education.

The board's Environmental Advisory Committee looked at EcoSchools as a program to help us find direction and focus. EcoSchools provides teachers with environmental education resource units, it promotes taking individual action, and it aligns what is taught in classrooms with the operation of the school itself. School boards can save money through conservation efforts such as EcoSchools. Most importantly, this program also encourages opportunities for learning outside the classroom to reinforce the curriculum. Clearly not all learning should take place within the walls of the classroom; outdoor education is a vital piece of absorbing the concepts of ecological literacy and requires stable funding. In Waterloo Region, outdoor education is constantly at risk of being cut because it is still thought to be an "enhancement."

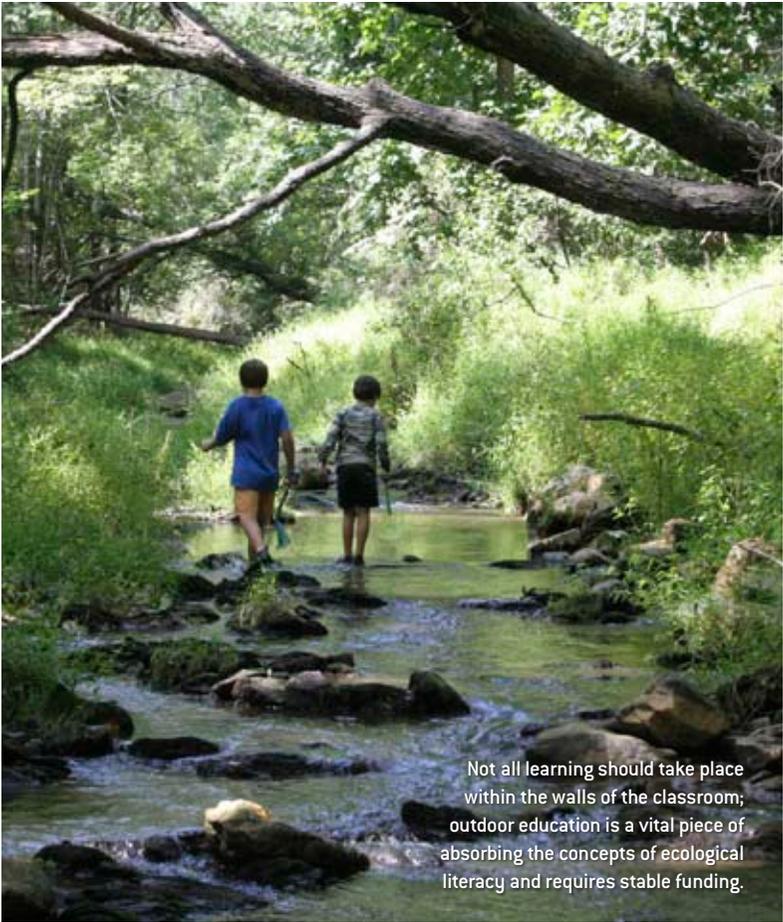
When we teach our children these issues, they take them home and they can change living patterns in their own homes.

> ECOSCHOOLS

We got the Environmental Advisory Committee to sign on and recommend EcoSchools through the minutes at a Committee of Whole meeting and then to Board. Before we knew it, we had agreed to be an EcoSchool board which was finalized with a signed contract. Once we signed on, we had to demonstrate that we were going to do something, we had committed to taking action on environmental reform.

We became an EcoSchool board May 2006 and since then our goal has been to get certification for conservation, waste minimization, and schoolyard greening. Our schoolyards need to be outdoor classrooms. When schoolyards are covered in asphalt and there's no shade, they draw heat to the school and increase cooling costs for the school and nearby residences. We have to look at how portables are placed, because we have learned that their placement affects the environment.

We don't want to download this program to the schools because we know that they are already overloaded. We need to find and foster environmental champions in our school system and in our communities. Unfortunately, the progress has been slow. Out of 115 schools in the board, five schools have become certified. It is a start and large bureaucracies take time to move forward, but it is important to be vigilant.



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The EcoSchools Program

JODY SOEHNER is a consultant with the Waterloo Region District School Board who has responsibility for the EcoSchools program in the board.

> GOALS

The goal of EcoSchools is to provide curriculum support for teachers to give guidance on actual actions to reduce greenhouse gases, to align what happens with the teacher and student to what happens in the rest of the building, and to save money and reduce environmental impacts. Boards are encouraged to develop their own guidelines for waste and for energy conservation.

Schools have to develop a team to determine at what stage the school is at and develop an action plan. The EcoSchools program not a one-off deal, it's not an Earth Day. It starts in the fall, goes through the year, and in April, each school is asked to re-evaluate and document their work, and submit a portfolio of what they've done over the year. That portfolio gives the work in the school a lot of credibility.

EcoSchools Ontario looks at the portfolio and looks at the school and then decides on certification. This certification is based on a points scale. To become certified at the bronze level is not very difficult if the school has adopted many energy conservation habits and some recycling and schoolyard greening. There are also the silver and gold levels of certification that are more challenging. This certification must be renewed every year.

EcoSchools operated only in Toronto during its first couple of years. By 2007 we had 16 boards with at least one certified school and a total of 251 certified schools around the province.

> CHALLENGES

I have to admit that I was disappointed at first with how EcoSchools operated in our board, until I looked at some of the other schools. More than 400 schools have taken on the EcoSchools program and are working toward certification. Of those, 150 didn't quite get to the level of being certified, but they can try again next year.

Toronto is the champion of EcoSchools. The Toronto School Board began the program and now have more schools certified than all the other boards in Ontario put together. Toronto has been instrumental in creating the resources and donating these resources to Ontario EcoSchools.

Teachers need to have the time to carry out the program. They need time to evaluate the school, draw up a plan, and put it into action. Many schools don't have the expertise, but EcoSchools has put up documents on its website to help teachers along.

The Ministry of Education is focusing heavily on numeracy and literacy and I have heard from many principals that they have EcoSchools in their sights for the near future. The EcoSchools program is not necessarily a priority in a lot of places but I have hope that this will change.

> NEXT STEPS

The Ministry of Education has released a document called *Shaping our Schools, Shaping our Future*. It's a report put out by an environmental committee headed by Dr. Roberta Bondar, and the government has promised to implement that document. It is calling for the environment to be brought into all curriculum areas.

> RESOURCES

Ontario EcoSchools website: www.yorku.ca/ecoschl

Shaping our Schools, Shaping our Future: www.edu.gov.on.ca/curriculumcouncil/shapingSchools.html

Model Inner City Schools

A New Frame for Equity and Social Justice

JEFF KUGLER is the Executive Director of the Centre for Urban Schooling at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto. He has worked for many years as an educator in the Regent Park neighbourhood in Toronto.

ELIZABETH SCHAEFER is a Model School lead teacher from the Nelson Mandela Park Public School, which is located in the Regent Park neighbourhood. She serves on a variety of school and neighbourhood communities.

> FIRST SINCE 1995

The Model Inner City Schools initiative, which is now in place in Toronto at an early stage, is the first attempt to look at inner city schools in a proactive way since 1995. There were many initiatives geared at supporting inner city schools before 1995, but despite funding and staffing they all ended in 1995. This is our first attempt to rebuild some of that in the amalgamated school board.

When we say inner city, we no longer mean a specific place in that inner city. It's clear that the inner city is now all over the City of Toronto and all over the suburbs. I'm sure that the problems I am talking about affect people all around Ontario and so the statistics I use here refer to Ontario.

> CHILD POVERTY IN ONTARIO

In 1989, the House of Commons unanimously voted to reach the goal of eliminating child poverty by the year 2000. But child poverty has remained stuck at between 15 and 17 per cent since 2000, despite strong economic growth. About 443,000 children – one in six – live in poverty. The average low-income family lives far below the poverty line. Low-income, single-mother families live on average \$9,400 below the poverty line. The percentage of poor children living in working families has doubled in the last 10 years. 34 per cent of low-income children live in families where the parents work full-time, full-year. This is up from 27 per cent in 1993. Poverty rates for children in Aboriginal, visible minority and immigrant families are double the average rate.

> MODEL INNER CITY SCHOOLS

These realities form the context for the need to do work geared toward inner city children and communities, and in response there is a new initiative called the Model Inner City School. Doing this work really does mean questioning the way everything is done in our schools. It doesn't necessarily mean changing everything, but it does mean necessarily questioning why we do the things we do and what impact those practices have for students, families, and communities.

> STATISTICS FROM THE 2006 REPORT CARD ON CHILD POVERTY RELEASED BY CAMPAIGN 2000

The richest 10 per cent of families saw a 41 per cent increase in income over the past 10 years, compared to a 4 per cent increase for the poorest 10 per cent.

Child poverty rates:

- 18 per cent – all children
- 40 per cent – Aboriginal children
- 27 per cent – children with disabilities
- 34 per cent – racialized children
- 40 per cent – total immigrant children
- 49 per cent – recent immigrant children.

Fundamental to the change in model schools is a change in the power dynamics imposed by a huge school system such as the Toronto District School Board or any other huge system. Inner City Model Schools do not belong to the educators alone. They belong to the students, parents, and the communities in which they exist. The changes that will develop in the work over the next few years must involve all the players.

> INCLUSIVE VISION

The vision and practice of each school must be a vision that's inclusive of all the players. For the change to work, there must be an authentic move to validate the voice of every member of the Inner City Model School community. The goals of the Inner City Model School are to achieve fairness and equity, establish the school as the heart of the community, develop an inclusive culture in the school, and ensure that there are high educational expectations for the students.

Each of these schools is located in different parts of the city and each of these schools is in what we call a cluster. The model schools have the responsibility of sharing what they are doing and learning with the other schools in that cluster.

> TASK FORCE

The Toronto District School Board established a task force in November 2004 to look at the possibilities for inner city initiatives and it included a wide range of people from inside and outside the school system. The task force's report was approved in May 2005 by the school board.

Schools began to apply to be Model Inner City Schools in the fall of 2005 and there was a large process involved in looking into all those schools. The first three schools were approved in the spring of 2006 and they opened in September 2006 as Model Inner City Schools. The Toronto District School Board has been forced into this from the beginning and it is a miracle that the first three schools were funded.

Funding of these schools is a huge issue. In this program, each of these schools received \$1 million a year. In school districts around Ontario, large amounts of money are earmarked for projects aimed at dealing with the impacts of poverty, but most of the money is not spent on that purpose. In fact, most of the money earmarked to deal with impoverished communities is in fact diverted to cover wage increases or the cost of heating buildings. People need to take a stand on this funding issue.

> THE NELSON MANDELA PARK MODEL SCHOOL

The Nelson Mandela Park Model School in South Regent Park has the largest social housing project in Canada. It is one of the poorest census tracts, with an average income of \$12,500. It's one of the oldest schools in Toronto and it has a very diverse school community.

> NEW APPROACHES

At this school teachers are working together collaboratively in teams and planning their curriculum delivery based on school-wide assessments that they use to decide where they need to go with the students. Everything in the school starts with the students, the goal being that every student should leave the school reaching his/her full capacity.

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There are also a large number of after school programs. The programs are open to all schools in our neighbourhood and we facilitate them through partnerships.

We provide the space and a lot of our community agencies come in and supply the programs. Regent Park Focus runs break dancing and photography programs. There are also grassroots organizations like Bengali Women and Families that runs a homework club. Dixon Hall runs a girls' group, a homework program,

> FIVE COMPONENTS

Model Schools have five components, according to the task force on these schools set up by the Toronto District School Board:

- Innovation in teaching and learning practices and in the school structure
- Support services to meet the social, emotional, and physical needs of students
- The school as the heart of the community
- Research, review and evaluation
- A commitment to share successful practices.

and a cricket program. We work collaboratively with our local police force, which runs a football program and a basketball program.

> OFFSITE PROGRAMS

We have offsite after school programs through Manulife and Upper Canada College. There are students involved in activities that they are interested in, are experiential, are hands on and involve teachers working collaboratively in teams sharing information with each other. Before this model school project began, there were professional development sessions but they didn't address the needs of inner city students dealing with poverty.

Now we have the opportunity to share successful strategies with other schools and other teachers. It allows teachers to be leaders. We have an organization committee at our school that's open to all teachers and staff members and that's where we try to do our planning in a collaborative fashion. We find that teachers like myself are on board and willing to go the extra mile.

> PARENTS ARE KEY

We can't do anything without parent support and we have a very strong parent council. We provide translation and interpretation so that everyone can communicate with each other and we provide child care so parents can take part in meetings. We listen to our parent council and we work really hard to help them.

Parents have their own learning needs and so we have joined up with George Brown College to provide academic upgrading for parents in one of our classrooms. I can't tell you how exciting it has been for our school to have the mothers drop their children off and go to class. These are people who have had generations of welfare and bad experiences. They admit to being non-readers and they want to make a change.

Among our various parent groups, we have groups that have a social focus. Others concentrate on teaching parenting skills. These groups have grown into a successful part of our school.

We provide a welcoming and respectful school climate. We connect with agencies and we work with other schools in our cluster. We have translated into various languages signs that are used by all schools, such as the "Please visit the office first" signs.