



OECD-Ontario Seminar on Improving Equity in Education
Father Madden Hall, St. Michael's College, University of Toronto
100 St. Joseph Street, Toronto, Canada
Tuesday, 26 October 2010

Program

Introduction

The *OECD-Ontario Seminar on Improving Equity in Education* is jointly organised by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). It is designed to bring together Ontario participants and OECD expertise to actively discuss Ontario's policies and strategies to improve equity in education in an international comparative perspective.

OECD context

The OECD project on "Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work" builds on the conceptual framework developed in the OECD's *No More Failures: Ten Steps to Equity in Education*. Equity in education includes two dimensions that are closely linked: equity as fairness and equity as inclusion. Fairness implies ensuring that personal and social circumstances should not be an obstacle to educational success, and inclusion implies ensuring a minimum standard of education for all. Consequently, equity in education demands that students' expected learning outcomes should depend only on their own effort and capacity, and not on considerations over which they have no influence (gender, ethnic origin, family's socio-economic level). The concept of equity in education goes hand in hand with the concept of equality of opportunities. It is not only desirable from an economic and social point of view, but also constitutes a human rights imperative.

Equity in education is fundamental because education plays a role in changing patterns of inequality. Education is a powerful tool to act upon the problems of poverty and income disparities. Education systems that allow equitable outcomes are key for both economic prosperity and social cohesion. There is also evidence that education is one of the major drivers of intergenerational social and income mobility.

[OECD, Overcoming School Failure: Policies that Work – Project Description, April 2010, p. 9, www.oecd.org/edu/equity]

Ontario context

Since 2003, the province of Ontario has undertaken a large-scale education strategy with efforts sharply focused on three core priorities:

High levels of student achievement

- Going deeper and wider on literacy and numeracy, including reaching the targets of 75 per cent of students achieving at the provincial standard in Grade 6
- Continuing innovation in secondary schools in reaching the 85 per cent graduation rate.

Reduced gaps in student achievement

- Reducing the gap in achievement for those groups of students who, for whatever reason, need extra help.

Increased public confidence in publicly funded education

- Fostering greater two-way engagement with the public to inform the implementation of the mandate and to foster public confidence
- Strengthening the role of schools as the heart of communities
- Recognizing the pivotal role of schools in developing the workforce and citizens of tomorrow.

[*Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education, p. 4*]

Ontario's education priorities correspond closely to the OECD definition of equity in education, where high levels of student achievement correspond to the *inclusiveness* dimension, and reduced gaps in student achievement correspond to the *fairness* dimension.

A background report will provide information on the Ontario education strategy. It will describe policy processes and challenges faced in the implementation of system-wide initiatives designed to reach every student and improve equity in education.

Seminar objectives

The seminar is focused on analysing and discussing Ontario's policies and strategies to improve equity in education in an OECD comparative framework. By combining international expertise and national dialogue the seminar aims to:

- raise awareness on the need to implement policies to reach every student to improve equity in education;
- encourage discussion among participants;
- develop a set of preliminary conclusions of effective policies to attain and sustain high levels of student achievement and narrow the achievement gaps.

Seminar format

The format of the seminar is designed to foster opportunities for meaningful discussion and dialogue among participants. This is why we encourage participants to take an active role in the seminar, especially during the question-answer period and the small-group discussions.

The parallel small-group discussions aim to stimulate participants to discuss different strategies to promote greater equity in education and develop a set of preliminary conclusions to be presented in a session that follows. With the assistance of an OECD resource-person, each small group will discuss one of three sets of issues crucial for equity in education: 1) education design for improving equity in education; 2) in-school practices for improving equity in education; 3) resourcing and funding for equity in education. Participants at each table will be asked to reflect and discuss on the relevance and results of the policies and practices in place, focusing on the following questions:

- Reasons why these policies have worked or not and under what conditions
- Challenges in implementation
- Outcomes of the policies
- Planned future strategies or alternatives

To encourage discussion, the small-group sessions will have the following structure:

- A short OECD presentation to frame the key sets of issues to be discussed
- A short presentation by Ontario
- Participants from different provinces, school boards and organisations can contribute with their own experiences and reflections.
- Rapporteurs will summarise the salient points and key conclusions that emerged from the discussions to the plenary.

A final session will wrap up on some conclusions.

One month after the seminar, the OECD team of experts will provide a report to Ontario, based on comparative analysis and the results of the Seminar, which will be distributed to all registered participants.

Public Forum

Interested participants are invited to attend *Achieving Equity in Education: What Can Schools Do?* a public forum hosted by the Canadian Education Association (CEA) and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) in Toronto, Tuesday, 26 October 2010 • 7:00-9:00 p.m.
[See attached announcement for details]



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PROGRAM

Seminar Moderator:

Dr. Ben Levin, Professor and Canada Research Chair in Education Leadership and Policy, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto

8:00-8:30 Registration

8:30-8:45 ***Opening session: Welcoming remarks***

Dr. Raymond Théberge, Assistant Deputy Minister, Ontario Ministry of Education
Mr. Simon Field, Senior Policy Analyst, Directorate for Education, OECD

8:45-9:10 ***OECD presentation: Equity in education - Ontario in a comparative perspective***

Mr. Simon Field, Senior Policy Analyst, Directorate for Education, OECD

9:10-9:20 Questions and discussion

9:20-10:30 ***Ontario's policies to reach every student and narrow achievement gaps: an overview***
(various presenters from the Ontario Ministry of Education):

- Reach Every Student: Ontario's education strategy
- Ontario's large-scale initiatives to increase student achievement and narrow achievement gaps
- Working with students who need extra help
- Flexible pathway choices and multiple options for graduating from high school
- Systematic use of evidence and data to improve student outcomes
- Equitable funding model: Ontario's Grants for Student Needs
- Early learning opportunities for all 4 and 5 year-olds

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-11:15 Questions and discussion on Ontario's overview

11:15-12:00 ***The OECD's Ten Steps to Equity in Education: Ontario's Policies and Strategies***

Mr. Richard Teese, Centre for Lifelong Learning, University of Melbourne, Australia

12:00-12:30 Questions and discussion

12:30-13:30 Lunch

13:30-14:45 Small-group discussions

The discussions in smaller groups will aim to stimulate participants to discuss different strategies to promote greater equity in education and develop a set of preliminary conclusions to be presented in the session that follows.

| <i>Theme 1: Design for improving equity in education</i> | <i>Theme 2: In-school practices for improving equity in education</i> | <i>Theme 3: Resourcing and funding for equity in education</i> |
|--|---|---|
| How can differentiation mechanisms and education structures (academic selection/school choice) impact on equity? How can secondary education structures and pathways contribute to more equitable opportunities by removing barriers and providing second chances? | How can school practices support successful learning for all students within schools? How can reaching out to the homes of students at risk improve the out-of school learning environment? | How can outcome measures, such as clearly-defined and measurable policy goals, improve equity? How can resources be focussed to promote equity? |

14:45-15:00 Break

15:00-15:30 Plenary: Conclusions to the parallel working sessions and discussion

15:30-16:00 Presentation: Equitable outcomes: A Canadian Perspective
Penny Milton, Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Education Association

16:00-16:30 Questions and discussion

16:30-17:00 Wrap up, Simon Field, OECD
Closing remarks, Raymond Théberge, Ontario

19:00 PUBLIC FORUM - *Achieving Equity In Education: What Can Schools Do?*

A public forum hosted by the Canadian Education Association (CEA) and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) – ***See attached announcement for details.***