

# Leader of the opposition calls for new priorities

by Stuart Smith  
Leader of the  
Official Opposition

With the school year about to come to a close, it's a worthwhile time to reflect on the state of our education system in Ontario. It will come as no surprise to anyone that in numerous cases, parents, teachers, and students alike are agreeing that we just don't seem to be getting our money's worth from the huge investment we've made in education over the last number of years.

One factor which is sometimes cited as proof of this feeling is the steady rise in enrolment in privately funded alternative and independent schools in the last decade; in part, at least, this trend represents a protest against declining

standards of achievement in Ontario's public schools. We certainly cannot overlook the fact that since 1970 enrolment in this Province's privately funded schools has soared by 45 per cent - despite the fees of up to \$3,500 for day students, and despite a 10 per cent decline in overall school enrolment since 1975.

There are, of course, other pointers to a growing sense of dissatisfaction - such as the very high dropout rate of students. In Metro Toronto, for example, two out of every five students leave school before the end of Grade 12!

I believe that these are clear danger signals, and that we need to ask some

serious questions. Why is there a growing demand for private education despite high fees? What will happen to our public system if present trends continue? What can we do to restore public confidence in our elementary and secondary schools?

First of all, why is there a growing disillusionment with Ontario's public school system, which only ten years ago was a source of pride to us all? I believe there are five key reasons:

(1) Despite some recent curriculum improvements, there is a widespread belief that academic standards have fallen.

(2) The academic credit system whereby students can choose 27 credit courses from four

broad areas to earn a Grade 12 diploma is too flexible and does not meet the needs of many pupils. A recent Queen's University study concluded that the credit system is contributing to the dropout problem in our high schools. While the open structure allows each student to "do his own thing", it leaves many of them feeling lost and bewildered.

(3) Students are not being sufficiently trained for available jobs. Clearly, Ontario's school system is out of step with manpower needs and job opportunities. Indeed, we continue to import skilled workers from abroad, while our own young people are unable to find work.

(4) Parents are

worried about lack of mental discipline, lack of moral values, and about drug addiction. They turn to private schools looking for a sense of moral purpose, for religious teaching, for rigorous schooling.

(5) Confrontation and uncertainty are increasing the sense of frustration and unhappiness - within the system as well as among the general public. Since September 1979 a total of 164 days have been lost to Ontario's Education system due to teacher strikes.

Turning to the second question, what will happen if the current loss of confidence continues unchecked?

We cannot dismiss the possibility that Ontario will wind up with two school systems - an elite one for the privileged medium to upper-middle classes; and another for the masses, for the poor, for the troubled. We run the risk of experiencing the same kind of deterioration, and of drifting into the same kind of difficulties as many cities in the United States.

### Hostility

The threat to our public educational system is a serious one, in my view. Already in North York in Metro Toronto, for example,

there are frightening indications of the extent of public and student hostility toward our schools - the rise in vandalism and violence.

Ontario's public school system is not immune to radical change and challenge. If we believe that the existing framework must be preserved while incorporating new ideas, then we must take steps to revamp and revitalize it.

Obviously, there is no single magic remedy. Nevertheless, we need to take action quickly before public confidence in the system is damaged beyond repair. Provincial consensus and action are required on key issues: curriculum, standards, job training, merit criteria for teachers, teacher-board negotiations, and funding.

Three years ago, the Ontario Liberal Party published "New Directions for Education," a policy paper calling for the restoration of structure, substance and province-wide performance standards. We urged that the credit system be reformed by establishing a core academic curriculum and by postponing an optional program until Grade 11 plus. In addition, we advocated a return to province-wide

examinations - to identify those pupils needing remedial help in basic skills in elementary school, and to measure achievement in high school, as well as the introduction of merit as a criterion in teacher selection.

Since 1977, we have on a number of occasions put forward proposals for integrating apprenticeship and other work experience programs into the school system, and putting greater emphasis on teaching job skills.

We have also called for an end to the legal right of teachers to strike, and of school boards to lock out their teachers, with disputes to be settled by arbitration.

As for funding, we have advocated that serious consideration be given to reversing present policy of reducing the provincial share of the education dollar and returning to a higher level of provincial support.

Clearly, new priorities must be identified, and new initiatives taken, to restore some much-needed confidence in our education system, and to make it a more relevant source of research and development for an everchanging world.

## Super Star Contest set for July

by Cindy Lockhart

Congratulations to Mr. and Mrs. Darrel Truax on the arrival of their daughter Amy Lynn on Wednesday, June 4.

On Saturday, the children's craft course ended their 8 week course with games and an indoor picnic because of rain. Also that day the children's dance class ended their sessions with a recital for parents and friends. Amanda Stewart and Debra-Anne Lockhart presented their teachers, Mrs. Cindy Daniels and Carrie Dove with corsages.

## Waverley news

At this point I would like to thank Marg Armstrong and Sandra Reynolds for their help with the children's craft class. We had a really big group this time and I appreciated the help.

On Sunday the Waverley United Church held their 112th anniversary service.

Mr. and Mrs. Bill Armstrong and girls visited with Mr. and Mrs. Roy Truax on Sunday.

A baby shower was held on Monday afternoon in honour of Leanne Eakley, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Gord Eakley in the home of Cindy Lockhart. Many useful and lovely gifts were received by mother and daughter.

Also on Sunday at St. John's Anglican Church, the guest speaker was Mrs. Marjorie Evans from Orange, Florida cousin

of Mr. Morris Darby. Attention all those persons interested in entering an Ordinary Super Star Contest.

The dates - July 5 and 6; Place - Waverley Park; Sponsor Waverley Recreation. Details - this tournament will include relay races, softball throw, obstacle course etc.

To enter the course in group A, you must be 15-19 years of age. For group B you must be 20-39 years of age and group C - 40 years and over.

The tournament is open to male or female participants of any of the age groups with a \$5 fee being charged per person to enter.

Any person interested please call Doug Truax 322-1636; Ken Lockhart 322-3172; Gord Eakley 322-2254 or Eric Reynolds 322-2939.

Please call now so you can enter.

## Conference reports given

by Peggy Pain

The June meeting of the Allenwood Women's Institute was held at the home of Mrs. Carl Trace. The program was on Citizenship and World Affairs.

The meeting opened with the Ode, Mary Stewart Collect and the Lord's Prayer. The motto was 'Let's go hand in hand, not our separate ways.'

Our president welcomed 18 members and one visitor and the

## Allenwood

Roll Call was 'Name a citizen's duty.'

Mrs. Lawrence Bell gave her report of the FWIO Officers Conference held at Waterloo. Mrs. Allan Drinkill was the guest speaker for the evening and she informed us of her trip to the FWIC held in Saskatchewan last year. Also she

showed a few pictures she had.

Mrs. William Perkins read a couple of articles clipped from old magazines.

The meeting was then adjourned and a cup of tea was enjoyed by all.

The next meeting of the Allenwood group will be held August 6 at the home of Mrs. Wm. Perkins.

## Wyebridge WI meets at Curry home, 19 attend

The May meeting of the Institute was held at the home of Mrs. Ruth Curry with 18 members and one visitor attending.

The roll call was tell how you have helped a handicapped person in the past year.

It was decided that four voting delegates would attend the District Annual on May 8 in Waverley. They were, Mrs. Ruth Curry, Mrs. Muriel Reynolds, Mrs. Verna McClung and Mrs. Lorna Dorion.

Ruth Curry introduced her aunt, Eleanor Edwards who was the special guest speaker for the meeting.

Eleanor who has been blind since birth gave us many valuable suggestions on how to help a visually handicapped person.

Eleanor also demonstrated how she reads and writes in braille. She is very active in her community and even does her own laundry with a spin washer and dryer.

Eleanor inspired everyone with her happy attitude and the ability she has in living such an active and useful life with her handicap. Gladys Ried thanked Eleanor for taking the time to come

and speak to the ladies.

We were very pleased to have three new members join our Institute, Mrs. Pauline Reynolds, Bonnie Reynolds and Mrs. Mary Hargrave. President Merza McConnell closed the meeting with everyone singing "O Canada."

A delicious lunch and social time ended the lovely evening. Bonnie Reynolds and the Institute held a successful showing of pictures and slides depicting the History of Wyebridge on May 13 in the "Church of the Good Shepherd" in Wyebridge.

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