



## Public Policy Roundup

**Spring 2016**

### **Ministry of Education Consultation on Provincial Demonstration Schools**

This winter/spring the Ministry of Education held a consultation with students, families, staff, education partners and community partners on the English language Demonstration schools (for students with severe learning disabilities), Centre Jules-Leger French language Provincial & Demonstration school, and the Robarts School for the Deaf in London. Survey questions were available on the Ministry website until April 8<sup>th</sup>. Consultations were held with parents of students at the three English language Demonstration schools, Amethyst, Trillium and Sagonaska, and with school boards. In addition, a teleconference consultation was held with LDAO chapter representatives. The Strategic Council, which conducted the consultations, were asked to tabulate and summarize all the information gathered from the various consultations, but it was not in their mandate to make recommendations to the Ministry.

Since applications for admission to the Demonstration schools were put on hold during the consultation, many parents of students at or applying to the Demonstration schools were very concerned that the schools would be closed. There was quite a bit of media coverage and questions asked by opposition MPPs in the Legislature, and on April 14<sup>th</sup> there was a parent demonstration in front of Queen's Park. LDAO's Facebook page had frequent updates and comments on the ongoing consultation process.

On April 14<sup>th</sup> a memo from the Minister of Education announced that the demonstration school admission process for the 2016-17 school year would be resumed. An update on the Ministry website states "The ministry is carefully considering the input and feedback received during the provincial and demonstration schools consultations, and has now resumed the admission process for the 2016-17 school year."

### **Update on the Ontario Ombudsman's Office & Education**

The Ontario Ombudsman's office gained new mandates to investigate complaints about school boards on September 1, 2015 and about universities on January 1, 2016. As of February 25, 2016, 355 complaints relating to school boards had been received and 215 files closed. Although the Ombudsman's office has the right to formally investigate complaints, most complaints go first to the Early Resolution Team which attempts to resolve issues by alternative dispute mechanisms. By February 25, 2016, any complaints about school boards had been handled through the early resolution process and no investigations had taken place.

The most common education complaints were about Special Education, School staff, Transportation/busing, Employee issues, and Student safety and security. The Early Resolution Team usually starts with the Superintendent level, as the complainant must have gone above

the school level before the Ombudsman's office will get involved. If there is no resolution, a formal investigation may be initiated, and the Ombudsman's Act requires respondents to disclose information and documents in the investigation. After an investigation, recommendations are made and the Ombudsman's office advocates for adherence.

The Ombudsman's office tracks complaints to flag recurring issues and underlying systemic issues in order to bring trends to meetings with administration, e.g. Assistant Deputy Ministers, Directors of Education. There is a Special Ombudsman Response Team which deals with high profile, systemic issues affecting large numbers of people. Their Investigation Reports can lead to systemic changes and recommendations for changes to legislation.

The Ombudsman's office will do presentations to groups, school boards, community groups, and parent groups. They will also meet with community organizations that have systemic issues to raise.

For more information on how to make a complaint or request a presentation, go to  
<https://ombudsman.on.ca>.