

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction from the Chairperson	Page 2
2.	Summary of the Address by the Keynote Speaker, The Honourable Greg Sorbara, MPP	Page 3
3.	Investing in Community Safety	Page 5
4.	Investing in Emergency Management	Page 7
5.	Investing in Our Future	Page 12

Renaissance Conference 2007

Investing In People

February 17, 2007

INTRODUCTION

February 17, 2007 marked the 21st. anniversary of the annual Renaissance Conference. It was sponsored by the following Members of Ontario Provincial Parliament across Scarborough - Bas Balkissoon, Lorenzo Berardinetti, Brad Duguid, Mary Anne Chambers and Gerry Phillips.

The theme of this year's highly successful conference was Investing In People. We were fortunate to have the Honourable Greg Sorbara, Minister of Finance, as our Keynote speaker. The morning workshops included presentations by experts in three areas:

- Investing In Community Safety
- Investing in Emergency Management
- Investing in our Future.

The overall theme was very well received and considered highly relevant to issues and concerns facing Ontarians in the 21st Century. There follows a summary of the highlights of the keynote speaker, the Hon. Greg Sorbara's excellent speech, as well as reports on the various workshops.

As Chairperson, I would like to thank all the members of the organizing committee, the presenters, and panellists who so freely gave their time and expertise in making our conference a success. In particular, I would like to thank the Honourable Gerry Phillips for his vision and dedication in hosting the Renaissance Conference for over 20 years. Special thanks as well to MPP's Bas Balkissoon, Brad Duguid, and Mary Anne Chambers for agreeing to chair the morning workshops, and to the Honourable Monte Kwinter and Kathleen Wynne who contributed their knowledge and expertise as guest panellists.

Respectfully Submitted
Murray Johnston,
Conference Chair

KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Honourable Greg Sorbara
Minister of Finance
M.P.P., Vaughan-King-Aurora

Executive Summary of Minister Sorbara's Remarks at the 2007 Renaissance Conference

In his remarks the Minister touched on three areas:

- What the McGuinty Government has achieved to date;
- The importance of a strong investment climate to provide revenues to continue these achievements; and
- The challenges the government faces during the next months and years.

He began by recalling the state of the province in 2003:

- The education system was in chaos with acrimony between government and teachers, millions of student days lost to strikes, and a growing frustration with private schools;
- In health care, poor quality services, long wait times and lack of resources fuelled a debate over the very future of Medicare;
- When people spoke about the environment, they spoke of Walkerton.

Since then:

- A new sense of purpose and respect for public education has emerged. The government's learning to 18 strategy has been implemented and substantial investments in post-secondary education are transforming that crucial sector;
- In health care, the government has created family health teams, reinvested in long-term care, reduced wait times in key areas, and made investments in renewing our hospital infrastructure. It has re-established public faith in public health;
- The greenbelt initiative permanently protects more than 1.8 million acres of prime agricultural and environmentally sensitive land around the Greater Golden Horseshoe and is part of the McGuinty government's commitment to environmental protection.

The Minister spoke of his responsibility to enhance confidence in the province's economy. He compared the NDP era (1990-95) of ballooning deficits and unmanageable spending with the Harris-Eves era (1995-2003) when unsustainable tax cuts compromised the viability of public services. Both approaches undermined confidence in Ontario's investment climate.

"My objective is to maintain a vibrant investment climate so the economy continues to grow and produce the resources that allow us to become an even more caring and compassionate society".

The Minister identified three essentials to a strong investment climate:

- A high level of public services, investments in human resources and leading research and innovation;
- The capacity to deliver a comprehensive public health care system; and
- Investments in infrastructure capable of supporting a globally oriented, technologically driven economy.

In his musing about his budget preparations, the Minister noted:

- The cooler economic climate places special importance on managing expenditures prudently;
- That strengthening Ontario's economic fundamentals will again drive decision making; and
- That, as in all budgets, special provisions must be made for those not capable of caring for themselves.

WORKSHOPS

Investing in Community Safety

Chair **Bas Balkissoon, MPP Scarborough Rouge River,**
Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Community Safety

Panellists **Hon. Monte Kwinter, MPP, York Centre,**
Minister of Community Safety & Correctional Services

Councillor Norm Kelly,
Ward 40, Scarborough-Agincourt

Valerie Plunkett,
Co-chair, Div. 42 Community Police Liaison Committee

Opening Statements

Hon. Monte Kwinter

The minister outlined the responsibilities of the ministry:

- Oversight of policing in Ontario
- Direct responsibility for the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) i.e. policing the “400” series of highways & policing in about 50% of all small municipalities
- Fire Marshall – firefighting in the province
- Chief Coroner (suspicious deaths)
- Forensic Science Unit (DNA Labs & Advance Science)
- Parole Board
- Court Security
- Prisoner transfer
- Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Emergency Management, i.e. SARS, Electrical blackouts, Terrorist Attacks & possible pandemics

He cited the concerns as of 2007

- Gun-related homicides
- Drunken driving is the # 1 cause of criminal deaths
- Domestic violence
- Suicides – one per week
- Not enough attention paid to domestic violence
- Perspective on gun-related homicides:
In 2005 – 80 homicides (53 gun-related)
In 2006 – 69 homicides (29 gun-related)
 - The tracking of gun-related homicides better in 2007. In place now “Toronto Anti-Violence Enforcement Strategy”

One should note the following comparative Homicide Incident Rates

Toronto = 1.8 homicides per 100,000 New York = 10/100,000, Oakland = 13/100,000

Norm Kelly

He made the following observations:

- Scarborough has an “unfair” negative image
- Scarborough is not receiving its fair share from taxes and the city budget
- The population of Scarborough is approximately 644,355 and has a crime rate of 5.77 %, the crime rate for Toronto is 7.64 %
- Norm is pressuring the media to report crime by address or by major intersection and in the last instance by community
- Best method of curbing crime is to know your neighbourhood (reach out) – look out for each other
- There has been a large investment in childcare but are parents living up to their responsibilities?

Valerie Plunkett

Valerie has been a proactive member of the Rosewood Taxpayers Group and a great booster of Scarborough. She noted that our police force is very good at apprehending criminals but wondered: *does the judicial system come down hard enough on the convicted criminals?*

Question, Answer & Comments Session

In the discussion session that followed, the following points were made:

- Perception that gun-related crimes do not receive a severe enough penalty in the court system, “law not tough enough”.
- Mandatory minimum sentences for gun-related crimes are not in place yet (Federal Criminal Code)
- Caledonia land claims (with Aboriginals) have not been settled yet (one year). OPP are caught in the middle. Federal Government has the responsibility but has not accepted responsibility. This settlement (when finally reached) will be a litmus test for future Aboriginal land settlements.
- The “1000 Officers Programme” has made a positive difference – can it be expanded? Within this programme, there needs to be more front line officers in other words remove some of the prescribed criteria. Province provides some but not all funding for policing (municipalities provide the rest). Province has provided additional funding for police in the North
- Court costs are also an issue for municipalities especially since these costs were downloaded in the 1980’s. Either the court costs should be uploaded to the counties or to the province. Security within the courts is a big issue as well.
- What has happened to Neighbourhood Watch? Many have gone dormant.
- Within the GTA, there have been massive police operations with respect to gangs, i.e. Malvern and Galloway. In the future more attention has to be paid to “Police Intelligence”. Additional funding from the Province is directed to “Intelligence”. Scarborough is the home of “The Integrated National Security Enforcement Team”. Criminal Intelligence Services playing a much larger role (wiretaps, surveillance etc)
- Progression of Gangs
 1. Kids’ Gangs – hangout in malls – young at risk
 2. Street Gangs – shoplifting, drugs, most gun crimes committed here
 3. Organized Crime – Mafia, bikers etc.
- 73 % of the guns on the street imported illegally from the USA. Any gun on the street is “illegal”.

- Programmes in place to “take kids off the street” during the summer provides a job, a paycheque and a reference for the next job. There will be permanent funding for these programmes with the objective of diverting youth from a life of crime
- Internet Crime is a generational problem – the young are not being properly supervised – parents must take more responsibility. Project P (Pornography) an important initiative. Cyber conversations lead to telephone calls and eventually to face to face meetings (highly dangerous). Chat rooms need to be monitored. Cybercops, a grade 7/8 education programme is meeting with success. It is interactive and addresses the dangers of the internet. The biggest challenge is educating our youth with respect to the dangers of the internet.
- There needs to be “non-traditional” approaches to solving the problems of Malvern. Some of the inter-Toronto Solutions: (1) Target faith-based communities (parents); (2) Change the ethnic makeup of the police force; (3) Police Services more reflective of the face of Toronto; (4) Visible minorities to play a larger role in policing and (5) Provide Provincial money to church organizations to address “youth at risk” rather than religious programmes
- The United Way has identified 13 neighbourhoods that are “at risk” in Toronto. Employment programmes provided by Mary Anne Chambers’ ministry to meet this challenge. Youth Challenge Fund, headed by Pinball Clemons, matches public and private funds (approximately \$30 Million)

In conclusion, there is always a difficulty approaching those at risk – they usually don’t come forward.

Investing in Emergency Management

Chair: **Brad Duguid, MPP Scarborough-Centre**
Parliamentary Assistant to Minister of Municipal affairs and Housing

Panellists: **Louise LeBlanc**
Patient Care Director, Emergency and Urgent Care, The Scarborough Hospital

Allison Stuart
Director, Emergency Management Unit, Ministry of Health & Long Term Care

Opening Remarks

Brad Duguid

In his introductions, Brad Duguid talked of the importance of this topic and noted that Renaissance Conferences were intended to provide a venue for open discussion of public policy in a non-partisan way. Brad told of how he was Chair of the Works committee on Toronto City Council and responsible for community emergency management when SARS hit Toronto. He said his sister was a SARS nurse during the crisis and her experience profoundly affected him as a representative of the public.

Brad introduced the two panellists – Louise Leblanc from Scarborough Hospital and Allison Stuart – and said they had planned a joint presentation but they welcomed input from all attendees.

Allison Stuart

Allison provided an extensive overview of the Pandemic Planning process that Ontario has established and undertaken in the wake of the SARS crisis. Allison indicated that we are the only Province with a pandemic plan in place

Allison's slide presentation opened with the definition of a "pandemic". It requires the following characteristics:

- Introduction of a novel (new) influenza virus
- The virus can cause serious illness and/or death (high mortality rates)
- Highly contagious from human to human transmission
- Lack of immunity within the general human population

Historically, pandemics occur three times each century and have an international impact. They often start in southeast Asia.

The World Health Organization has defined six phases of pandemics but it must be noted that not all pandemics go through each and every phase. Phases are sometimes skipped or gone through quickly. One can use the phasing simply to describe the degree of risk and a relative idea of its progression. According to the WHO the world is currently at Phase 3 in the progression of the next pandemic (Avian Flu?) – there are human infections within a new subtype but there is no current human-to-human spread.

In the heightened risk of Phase 6 (pandemic period), Allison noted that it would take no more than a maximum of three months (although it could happen within days) for any pandemic to impact the entire planet.

The next slide noted the differences in influenza types (seasonal, avian and pandemic)

- Seasonal influenza occurs within the seasonal cycle – is subject to infection control and can be managed through the flu shot and proper personal hygiene
- Avian influenza hits animals (birds) and is cyclical
- A pandemic influenza would strike humans – occur roughly three times per century and the ability to develop a vaccine would be dependent upon identification of a particular strain and the ability to isolate the virus

In the next slide, a particularly important point was stressed. An influenza pandemic was not the seasonal flu, not SARS and not the avian influenza – however, there are important lessons to learn from each occurrence.

Allison Stuart explained that under no circumstances could a pandemic influenza be prevented from striking Ontario or Canada. There is no absolute protection from a global pandemic influenza. She also noted that there is no way to protect against such a strain because the virus first has to appear and become isolated before a vaccine could be developed. Typically, such a vaccine takes in the order of 6-9 months to develop.

She noted that pandemic influenza strikes in multiple waves as follows:

- First Wave - Hits for about 8 weeks, then will likely subside but then after a lull, returns in vigour again. At this stage, the objective must be to learn as much as possible about the virus - to develop a vaccine - but the public must be educated about the propensity of the virus to re-appear and re-assert itself after it subsides in the first wave. Panic must be avoided.

- Lull - After about 8 weeks, people become tired and cease to adopt the same level of pre-cautionary activities as when the pandemic first strikes. This is a critical stage and Allison noted that Leadership is key in advising people of the risks of the second wave.
- Second and further waves

Allison said a pandemic requires an absentee rate of about 35% (defined as anyone sick enough to be away for more than ½ a day). She then talked about the economic and social impact of a pandemic. A major component is managing absenteeism during the pandemic and notes historical absentee averages of 20-25% is not uncommon. Another major topic of discussion was the issue of vaccine stockpiling and the ethical issues of distributing the vaccine.

A vaccine cannot be prepared ahead of time – not until there is an outbreak to determine the type of virus to treat. Stockpiling medications has its pros and cons as well as its costs.

Concern re constraints on municipalities

One of the attendees noted that the implementation of any public health initiative ultimately comes from the municipal level. In fact, subject to provincial directive, the local public health organizations have a limited ability to respond.

Louise Leblanc

The second speaker was Louise Leblanc, the Patient Care Director Emergency and Urgent Care, The Scarborough Hospital. She has been a representative of Emergency Nurses provincial, nationally and internationally.

Louise Leblanc made her presentation with the express purpose of outlining:

- Community Emergency Preparedness at the hospital level and how it works
- Where are we today

She noted that planning does not happen in isolation and that The Scarborough Hospital consists of two campuses - Grace and General with a total of 600 beds. The Scarborough Hospital is a primary ambulatory care centre and there are 100,000 visits to emergency per year.

Distribution of emergency visits is roughly equal among the following age groups:

- 0-19 yrs
- 19-39 yrs
- 39-65 yrs
- Over 65 yrs

Louise explained how pandemic planning is done at the local hospital level. The Scarborough Hospital, for example, has an emergency plan and holds a planning exercise. She noted that any planning exercise involves the same concepts as military planning through coordination at a "Command Centre".

Louise said that through Systems Planning, there is a coordinated Steering Committee that meets every two weeks and its membership consists of the many of the hospital executive at the VP level. She further noted that regardless of any pandemic – the hospital emergency function must continue to operate – particularly for certain types of ongoing care (births continue to occur – accidents continue to happen). All plans need to be brought from each area and "operationalized" through the Steering Committee – such as what surgeries do we continue to perform and what can be postponed (eg elective surgeries). She noted that these decisions should be made well in advance of any actual crisis – to ensure consistency using basic checklists as opposed to being managed in crisis mode.

For example – she noted that if we were to have another SARS crisis or a pandemic – it might be necessary to institute a completely separate isolated emergency department just to handle the pandemic. She also discussed the importance that through the Command Centre – communications must be coordinated.

Another key component is the management of human resources – how does one deploy resources in the face of likely high absenteeism? What is staff preparation for such an event? Are their labour or other considerations that should be addressed in advance of such an event? A further consideration goes through the Logistics Committee. She noted that as required by the province, hospitals are to maintain a stockpile of 4 weeks of emergency supplies for a pandemic. However, while this is available, it is important not to waste supplies so that they are gradually added into general inventory and used and replaced.

Finally, she noted that any pandemic plan must be publicly accessible so as to keep the public informed and reassured.

Question & Answer Period

How can the public be engaged through an awareness campaign?

Stuart responded that such campaigns are difficult. The Ministry's website has the information – but that for the broader public to be engaged – it must be timed to cyclical events that allow people to care (such as at the start of flu season). The Ministry has also tried other campaigns on issues like hand hygiene to improve individual health and reduce the prospect of transmission. Leblanc talked about the hospital setting and that even in the case of trained professionals – matters like the proper wearing of masks and proper hygiene needs to be constantly reinforced AND policed.

How can society deal with workers who have no benefits?

Stuart said this was a lesson learned from SARS and related how Sheila Basrur dealt with one email during the crisis from a woman who had an exactly timed instance of required workdays in order to qualify for EI maternity benefits and that any loss time due to quarantine would disqualify her. She said that in working with the federal government – quarantine time was counted towards the total of working days. She notes that there is a fine balance between how to get social compliance against the inability for government to compensate everyone.

A member of the audience noted the relationship between facilities such as long-term rehab care centres and hospitals. He said the faster patients are taken out of the hospital setting – through inter-facility cooperation – the greater the efficacy in dealing with these kinds of problems.

Concluding Remarks – What can we do?

Allison Stuart covered “What Can We Do” as individuals. She emphasized we must all adopt a measure of personal responsibility for personal preparedness. The key message to all - stay personally healthy. Take the annual flu shot to increase your protection. Maximize hand hygiene. Carry hand sanitizer. Sneeze into your sleeve and avoid airborne transmission as much as possible. Note that viruses live easily on hard surfaces.

Allison talked about the balance between how to manage during a pandemic. Should we avoid crowds? Again, it all depends upon the nature of the virus. However, she noted that we continue to be social beings and isolation is not necessarily wise or appropriate.

We must all create personal emergency plans to cope with any disruption in routine. Are there small children you have to look after? Elderly parents? What is your emergency plan? Ensure that you have things like fuel in your tank (never let your tank fall below half a tank – such as what happened during the blackout and people couldn't get gas). And don't forget to check on your neighbours.

Allison pointed out that on the first day of the pandemic – there is usually a rush for emergency supplies – people try to buy the cure (even though there isn't one).

Also keep available some medicine to control temperature and cough management.

Have an emergency kit and gradually build it – but get started.

For those who need systems support – the Ministry has a 1-800 number for professionals and those caring for individuals with special needs (long-term care, disabled, homeless)

Brad Duguid then raised the ethical question of who gets vaccines first (like Tamiflu)? There was some discussion about health care professions. Another attendee suggested that the ideal approach is an attack based on "containment" (others called it "blocking the vectors"). That would obviously mean covering "first responders" and those most susceptible to spreading disease. Allison Stuart agreed with this approach, noting that recent CDC reports talk about "interrupting the chain". Louise Leblanc also talked about identifying skills sets and training. Who has those skill sets to manage crisis? This consideration must be broader than just doctors and nurses – but can include those involved in any health care profession (like vets, etc.).

Finally, Stuart noted that the Ministry's planning for PPE's includes a pending expenditure of \$100M to build up the supplies in place in case of pandemic.

Summary

All participants came away from this workshop much better informed about the preparation for dealing with pandemics that has been done and still has to be done, both on an official and personal level. Attendees were impressed with the knowledge and work of people like Allison Stuart and Louise Leblanc, not to mention the countless other professionals in the health care field and elsewhere.

We learned that Ontario has learned from past experience with SARS and is in much better shape to cope with the arrival of a serious infectious disease or pandemic. Much has still to be done to prepare and inform the public about what to expect and what can be done by everyone in advance of and during any such pandemic.

INVESTING IN OUR FUTURE

Chair: **Hon. Mary Anne Chambers, MPP**
Minister of Children and Youth

Panellists: **Hon. Kathleen Wynne, MPP**
Minister of Education

Winsley Belille
Principal, Galloway Road Public School

Kevin Malcolm
Best Start Program Co-coordinator, TCDSB

Doug Patterson
Principal, Sir Robert L. Borden BTI

Tim Wallner
School Advisory Council Chair – St. Brendan's Catholic School

Opening Remarks

Winsley Belille, Principal of the most improved school from 2001 – 2005, stated that success motivated student and community support. Regardless of background, he believed that students can do well. Winsley said the keys to success are the passion and commitment of the administration and staff, recognizing that the majority of students are eager and willing to learn, and the participation of a strong and supportive community.

Kevin Malcolm noted that the original Best Start or early learning program was designed to provide childcare for the nation's preschool age children as part of a \$10 billion commitment from the federal government. This programme was cancelled by the federal Conservative government after the last election. The Ontario Liberal Government stepped in to support the programme in this province through the Ministry of Children and Youth under Mary Ann Chambers, Minister of Children and Youth as it recognized its value to early childhood education.

"Best Start" attempts to establish a seamless child care programme that works closely with kindergarten programmes at the school. Kevin said we want the best for Ontario's babies and children. That means making sure they get the best possible start in life.

There are 37 new centres across the Toronto Catholic District School Board. The programme is aimed at students aged four and five. It is based on long standing research that shows that early intervention increases the likelihood for student success. The goal is to provide a quality academic, social, physical and emotional programme for the students.

Doug Paterson, Principal of Sir Robert Business and Technical Institute (BTI), stressed that to invest in the future it is important to invest in people, having the right people doing the right things in our schools. He believes that all students can learn; even those exhibiting academic and social difficulties. It is important that school programmes be designed to meet the needs of these students. He encouraged greater funding for literacy and math programmes. In addition school must offer programmes that give non-academic students an opportunity for success in other more hands-on programmes. He called for greater funding in vocational education and partnerships with trades and skills programmes. We should look at employability skills and

economic demand. We need to target remediation and resources to keep kids in an educational environment and recognize that success improves with literacy and math skills.

The Ontario Literacy course has helped large numbers of students reach graduation and the literacy pass rate has dramatically improved from 2% up to 30%. Doug also recognised that resources need to be focussed on “early years”.

Tim Wallner, Coop Student Advisory Council Chair, St. Brendan’s Catholic School, said that parents are generally impressed with the commitment of school staff. He urged schools to create more synergy between parents and the system.

Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Education, said much progress had been made in the last few years but it is important for the government to stay on track in its commitment to education. She noted that the Funding Formula needs to be better understood by the public. The funding formula targets resources and programmes and rationalizes our activities and has been modified to better reflect the way money flows to rural and small schools.

Ms. Wynne said the government has targeted resources where they will have the most impact to ensure equality of access. Infrastructure is slowly being rebuilt. The government is rebuilding capacity and resources from the elementary to high school years. This includes the Best Start Programme, class size caps from Kindergarten to grade three and encouraging students to stay in school until 18.

Research shows that in smaller classes of no more than 20, children have more time to interact with the teachers, are happier and learn to read earlier. Ms Wynne said we have been building confidence in the educational system and there is an increased retention rate of new teachers in their first 3-5 years of teaching

Minister Wynne noted that the focus now was on having programmes and resources available to enable students to stay in school or other educational facilities until the age of 18 to assist the government in its desire to create a more educated workforce ready to meet the challenge of the modern competitive world. In fact, she said education can’t be focussed solely on an academic track and greater opportunities should be provided in technical and trade education.

A council has been set up to review the school curriculum. The curriculum has too much content to be covered properly. Schools need to prioritize their use of time and resources. We are developing programmes that will lead to greater student success and will reduce the drop out rate. These include credit recovery for students in grades eight, nine and ten. Greater emphasis will be placed on non-traditional ways of achieving credits and better preparation for the world of work.

The Ministry is also providing funding for a long overdue massive infrastructure renewal. At present 6700 capital projects are taking place in the province. Schools need to remain the hub of communities. Ontario’s commitment to education will exceed the \$2.7 billion amount advocated in the Rozanski report.

Open Discussion

A wide range of issues and concerns were discussed as follows:

1. Importance of Early Years

The Ministry was commended on recognizing the importance of the early years. However, although there are 15,000 new day care spaces in the province, this meets only 20% of demand.

It was suggested that new income tests for day care subsidies will allow more parents to access daycare as new spaces become available. This will assist with seamless adjustment to school.

2. Middle years

Rather than funding caps for grades 4-8, the Minister would prefer to see more robust hands-on programs for students such as family studies and outdoor education. Concern was raised that middle level education has cutback or is not providing courses in so called non-academic subjects. These include:

- Design and Technology
- Family Studies
- Instrumental and Vocal Music
- Art
- Physical Education
- Outdoor Education
- Climate Change

It was suggested that ways be found to fund these programmes and/or hire specialist teachers to deliver them to students.

3. Secondary Education

The high school programme has had some success with regard to student retention. There are now 6000 more students graduating each year than in the recent past. The Ministry goal was to have an 85% graduation rate by 2010. In order to do this the ministry and school boards are examining more relevant programmes for the non-academic student, more counselling and student/staff advisory programmes as well as increased partnerships with the world of work.

It was recognized that there is a need for broad and flexible education to keep up with changes in society. Students are being helped to identify their skills; e.g. – “success for all” programs, Skilled Trades Campaigns, Future-Building Career Fair, Ontario Youth Apprenticeship programme.

Most jobs require some post-secondary education so it is essential that all students finish high school. There is still a gap between what parents expect (child will go to university) versus the reality. We need to change perceptions of what is success and what is right for each child while avoiding streaming too soon. There is an important role for principals in educating parents.

4. Funding Formula

Significant progress has been made. More money is getting into the classroom and equity issues in small schools have been addressed. The Ministry allocates the funds; the Boards spend the money. School Boards need flexibility so the government is looking at how to include that in the funding formula and has been asking boards where the gaps and problems are. We need to continue the discussions and review funding as we go.

Other needs and concerns were raised:

- Need to address changing demographics, declining enrolment and the need to provide a full range of programming and supports for such needs as breakfast programmes and after school sports and activities.
- Concern about need to spend the balance of individual budgets at school year’s end. Individual school budgets have not increased but funding is available to address specific needs and resources available from support staff and superintendents.

- Need to look at alternative delivery models as schools are expected to provide a vast range of services and activities from breakfast programs to after-school sports. Collaboration across ministries and the community is required to ensure that services are delivered directly to our children.

Mary Anne Chambers noted that Ontario Learning Bonds and RESPs are available to help parents save for post-secondary education but the percentage of those taking advantage of it is low. Tuition grants were reintroduced and first year students can apply for up to \$6,000 their first year and \$3,000 the second year. Repayment schedule for student loans has been changed to make it easier to repay over a longer time. Tax credits are available to employers for work opportunities under the “school to 18 programme”.

5. Music and the Arts and Physical Education

In today’s Information Age there needs to be strong support for creativity which is encouraged through the arts and music, The Ontario Government has placed an emphasis on arts education through supports for curriculum and resources as well as performance opportunities and exposure through programs such as *Learning through the Arts*.

Government has also provided more funding for specialist teachers in the arts and physical education through collective agreements including additional prep time. The Minister noted that the 20 minutes per day of mandated Daily Physical Activity (DPA) is meeting with success from teachers who have been provided with resources and the confidence to deliver the program. Ministry of Education is considering making Health and Physical Education mandatory in grade 10 but some ask if it will make our children more active?

6. Other Issues, concerns and ideas

We need to look at ways to recognize the value of and encourage parent involvement without putting too much stress on teaching staff. We have to take into account competing demands of a jam-packed curriculum and the potential for increased stress. Assessment and testing of students has become increasingly complex and time-consuming particularly in the month of June when many school activities take place.

Conclusion

Overall, it was evident and most crucial that there is a promise of hope and opportunity, which can be contrasted with the anxiety and despair a few years ago.