

CANADA

People for Education and Measuring What Matters: A case study in civic engagement in public education policy in Canada

People for Education (PFE) is one of a small number of Canadian NGOs focused on public education. It is engaged in the civic endeavor of supporting, advocating for, and providing research and evidence to strengthen public education as a core element of Canada's democratic and social structure. Over the course of 2 decades, PFE has evolved from its grassroots origins into an organization that engages key education stakeholders in evidence-based dialogue about how to ensure that public education achieves its broadest societal mission. In 2013, PFE launched its largest project to date: Measuring What Matters (MWM). MWM was a 5 year initiative to create a "proof of concept" for a set of ideas about what competencies matter in education in the 21st century, and about how assessment of these competencies could function as a lever of positive change in the public education system. MWM has generated important insights with potentially significant implications for education policy. At the same time, our engagement relationships with key stakeholder groups have become increasingly complex and nuanced, but with greater potential for long-term impact. PFE today is a hybrid of different civic engagement approaches and structures: neither a grassroots advocacy group, nor a typical "think tank", though with elements of both. It is a civil society organization engaged in an essential conversation with Canadian society about what matters in public education. In this article we outline and reflect on Measuring What Matters as civic engagement, and on its place in the overall history and evolution of PFE's participation as a civic actor in the public education sphere. These reflections are shared from our own subjective position inside that history.