ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic Teachers
ASSOCIATION

WHEN YOU SPEAK FOR CHILDREN...

Second Edition
2015

INTRODUCTION

The second edition of "When you Speak for Children…" furthers our mission to strengthen Ontario's publicly funded education system and enhance the common good. Using current evidence, and with new focus on some emerging issues, the papers articulate and support the Association's positions in a range of policy areas.

Ontario's teachers are proud of the role we play in preparing students to be active members of a prosperous and caring society. Our publicly funded education system is among the best in the world, with impressive student achievement and sincere efforts to improve equity and inclusivity. However, some students are still not being adequately supported, and the province has been unsteady in its implementation of the tools and practices that have been shown to create welcoming, productive learning environments. We believe that by giving our schools the resources they need, we can remove barriers to learning and take our education system beyond the basics.

We also argue for policies that protect and propel citizens throughout their lives. From early childhood education and care, to job-training programs for youth, to predictable and adequate retirement incomes, we believe the province will be made healthier and more cohesive when all Ontarians are given the ability to develop their potential, contribute to their communities, and provide for themselves and their families. These positions build on our long-standing commitment to social and economic justice.

These papers show that the members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association take a broad view of our responsibility to make this province a better place. Ontario has the capacity to build a society in which everyone has genuine opportunities to participate and succeed, but achieving this goal will require shifts in attitudes and bold investments in infrastructure, public services, and citizens.

We hope you will take the time to reflect on our positions, then join us in bringing our core message to Ontario's political leaders: **When you speak for children… we ALL benefit**.

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we ALL benefit

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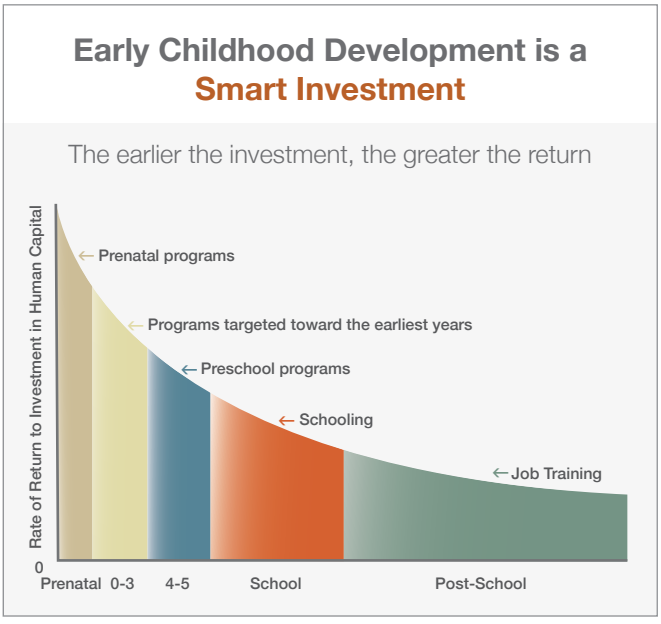
For all of its laudable and enviable qualities, Canada is remarkably lacking in forward-looking child-and family-focused policies. Most notably, as was pointed out more than a decade ago, "Canada does not have an adequate – let alone good – child care system" (Battle and Torjman 2002). Not enough has changed in the interim, while the need has become ever more pressing. Established welfare states like Canada have had to consider how to recast our social policies to meet the demands of our globalized, post-industrial society, reconcile our social and economic goals, and prepare citizens for an uncertain future (Morel et al. 2012). There is growing consensus that "the fundamental life phase is in childhood," and investments in services for children and families are "*sine qua non* for a sustainable, efficient, and competitive knowledge -based production system" (Esping-Anderson 2002).

Canadian governments seem to agree. For example, in the throne speech that opened the 36th Parliament of Canada in 1997, the federal government signalled a new direction for Canadian social policy, saying, "A country that invests in its children successfully will have a better future. One of our objectives as a country should be to ensure that all Canadian children have the best possible opportunity to develop their full potential. We must equip our children with the capacities they need to be ready to learn and to participate fully in our society." In a similar vein, the throne speech that opened the 41st Parliament of Ontario in 2014 discussed how the government is "ensuring that every child in Ontario has the best possible start in life," and strongly asserted that "investments to develop the talent and skills of our people…pay dividends today and tomorrow."

Unfortunately, our actions have not always matched our rhetoric. Some progress has been made during the past decade, but as a country we still spend only 0.6 per cent of GDP on early childhood education and care (ECEC), which is below the OECD average and well behind advanced countries such as Denmark and Sweden (Akbari and McCuaig 2014). A national program with sufficient, sustained funding from the federal government would be the desired solution. But in the absence of such action, Ontario cannot afford to wait. We have made an exemplary investment in four- and five-year-olds with the Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program, but there are still significant issues with regard to program design and funding. We also need to broaden our scope to include universal, affordable, accessible, not-for-profit child care options for children of all ages.

Early childhood education and care is a vital public investment

Early childhood is a pivotal life stage, during which we develop crucial neurological functions, cognitive abilities, social skills, behaviours and attitudes. Ninety per cent of a child's brain is developed by age five, and learning, behaviour and health outcomes are associated with one another (RCPSC 2014). As the authors of the Early Years Study put it, "Later circumstances have an influence on how things turn out, but the trajectories launched in early childhood become part of our biology and carry forward" (McCain, Mustard and McCuaig 2011). Parents, families and communities obviously bear much of the responsibility for providing young children with safe, stimulating environments that will foster their healthy development. However, child care and early learning opportunities, ideally with trained early childhood educators (ECEs), are also essential for exposing children to more formal social interactions and play-based educational activities.



SOURCE: James Heckman, Nobel Laureate in Economics

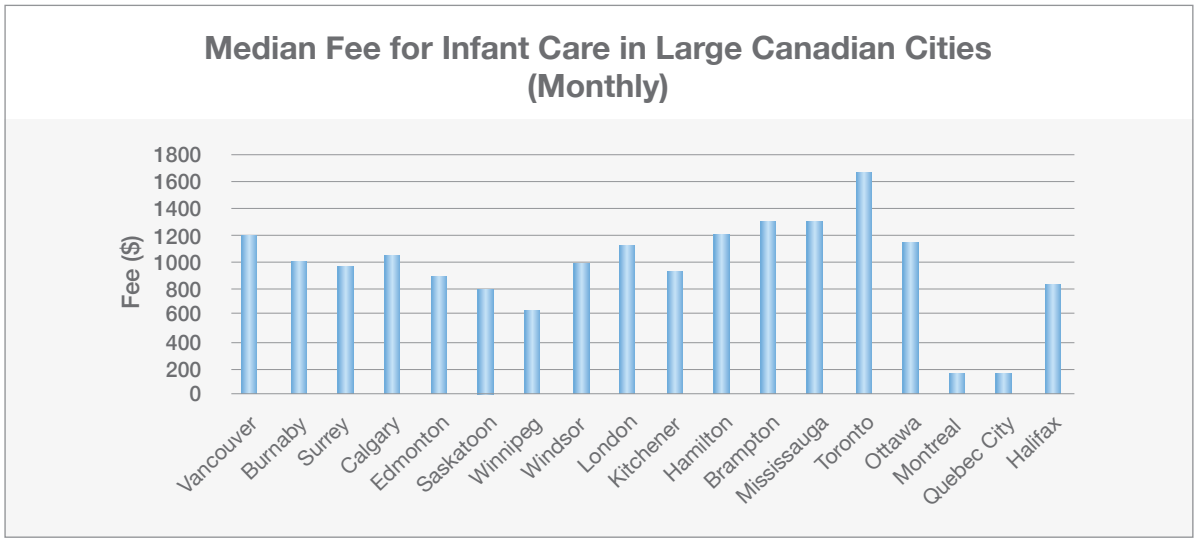
All children benefit from ECEC, but children from low-income households or who are otherwise disadvantaged stand to gain the most (Heckman and Masterov 2007). Children from low-income families generally do not receive the same attention or opportunities to develop their abilities as their peers from high -income households, and they often arrive at school with limited skills in areas such as vocabulary and communication, numeracy, concentration and co-operative play (Isaacs 2012; Thomas 2006). Exposing disadvantaged children to more diverse language, communities, and activities will help to prevent some of the vulnerabilities that could hinder their success in school. They will also be able to develop non-cognitive qualities like confidence and conscientiousness, which are less tangible but perhaps even more important for success later in life (Almlund et al. 2011).

Investments that help children build on their potential will improve the long-term health and prosperity of individuals and society. Children who have access to high-quality ECEC will be better prepared to succeed at school and participate in a competitive, knowledge-based economy. They will also be less likely to engage in risky behaviours, and more likely to be civically and socially active. These individual benefits have spill-over effects for the broader society. With a healthier, more productive population, we will realize long-term savings through reduced health care and criminal justice costs, social assistance payments, and special education needs (Karoly, Kilburn and Cannon 2005).

Convenient, affordable child care also benefits society and the economy by enabling parents, especially women, to work or attend school. They can gain new skills or take on more hours, which helps them to provide for their families, buy goods and services, and contribute tax dollars. If an adequate number of safe, low-cost child care spaces are not available, parents who want or need to work are forced to stay out of the labour market. The dilemma is particularly difficult for single-parent families, and it is one of the main reasons child poverty rates remain frustratingly high (Senate of Canada 2009a).

Comprehensive ECEC programs are expensive to develop and maintain. When former Prime Minister Paul Martin proposed a national system in 2004, he pledged $5 billion over five years (Delacourt 2010). Even so, the benefits far outweigh the costs. In their seminal study, Cleveland and Krashinsky (1998) concluded that a child care program for two- to five-year-olds would yield two dollars of benefits for every one dollar invested. Based on an exhaustive literature review, Fairholm (2009) estimated a benefit-cost ratio of 2.54:1, thanks to increased employment in the ECEC sector, reduced long-term social costs, and increased productivity and tax revenues. Even fiscally conservative voices have agreed that an efficient, high-quality ECEC program would benefit children, parents and the broader economy (Alexander and Ignjatovic 2012).

Evidence can also be found by looking at the experience in Quebec, where universal access to low-fee child care was introduced in 1997. In 2008, the program increased the provincial GDP by 1.7 per cent, and together the federal and provincial governments pocketed $900 million in tax revenues over and above the cost of the program (Mojtehedzadeh 2014; Fortin, Godbout and St-Cerny 2012). Contrast this to the current situation in Ontario, where it has been estimated businesses lose $1.74 billion per year as a result of employee turnover, absenteeism, and health care premiums arising from parents' work-life conflict (Kershaw 2011).



SOURCE: Macdonald and Friendly (2014)

Unfortunately, many families in Ontario are unable to access affordable ECEC. There are regulated child care spaces for only 20.8 per cent of children in Ontario up to age five, and 15.4 per cent up to age 12 (Ferns and Friendly 2014). Annual fees for infant and toddler care are more than university tuition. Of the five least affordable cities in Canada in terms of child care costs relative to a woman's income, four are in Ontario (Macdonald and Friendly 2014). This is an unacceptable and unsustainable situation. If we want to maintain our reputation as a compassionate society with a strong, dynamic economy, we need to help children and parents by dramatically expanding the availability and accessibility of child care spaces.

Integration and quality are essential

Not all ECEC opportunities are equally beneficial. To maximize the returns on our investments, we need to pay close attention to quality. ECEC is really an aspirational term, referring to services that blend care, learning, and support for children and families. This has been a challenge within Canada and in many jurisdictions around the world (Senate of Canada 2009b).

There are several things to consider when establishing high-quality early childhood education and care. For example, in their *Early Learning and Development Framework*, Canada's ministers of education have called for safe, healthy and engaging learning spaces, because "beautiful and joyful environments that are rich in opportunities lead to in-depth exploration, play and inquiry, and enhance holistic development and learning, health and well-being" (CMEC 2014). The OECD (2012) encourages governments to set and enforce standards on, among other things, physical space, staff training levels, and work conditions. In the lead up to the ChildCare2020 national conference in 2014, researchers and advocates from across the country released a discussion document outlining some guiding principles for a comprehensive public approach to ECEC. There should be broad curriculum and funding frameworks, along with public input and local planning that recognizes the distinct features and needs of different communities. All early childhood educators should be well-trained, given opportunities for regular professional development, and paid a decent wage. Overall, ECEC should be based on a "system of linked elements," including ideas, governance, infrastructure, planning and policy development, financing, human resources, physical environments, and research.

One of the most significant ways we can increase the likelihood of quality in ECEC is to support non-profit providers. Throughout Canada, nearly 30 per cent of centre-based spaces are in the for-profit sector, and 58 per cent of the expansion in child care spaces between 2010 and 2012 was in for-profit centres (Ferns and Friendly 2014). In Ontario, roughly 25 per cent of centre -based spaces are run by for-profit entities (Friendly et al. 2014). These numbers exclude home daycares, many of which are also operated on a for-profit basis.

The reasons we should be wary of for-profit child care are not difficult to discern. Most for-profit child care operators, especially those run by large corporations, will seek to cut costs wherever possible. They have incentives to hire less qualified staff, offer lower wages and benefits, have larger ratios of children to caregiver, and/or spend less money on materials and equipment. These concerns are supported by evidence from several jurisdictions. A Canadian analysis of four datasets using various scales of measurement shows non-profits "produce a higher quality of care" and are more likely to help us achieve the goal of an ECEC system that both contributes to child development and encourages parental employment (Cleveland et al. 2007). Research

examining the shift toward for-profit child and elderly care in Sweden, Australia and the United Kingdom finds "mounting evidence" that quality is higher in non-profit than for-profit services, especially in the child care sector. Moreover, these experiences show that marketization exacerbates existing inequalities, because those with lower incomes or less knowledge of the system have limited capacity to exercise real "choice" (Brennan et al. 2012). In light of these studies, even those who are skeptical of publicly funded, universal child care say the public debate should acknowledge that non-profit options are preferred (Geddes 2013). We owe our children nothing less than to implement the best possible system based on the best available evidence.

Ensuring the success of the full–day kindergarten program

The discussion about quality ECEC leads us to the Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program. Although it has faced complaints and criticism from a number of opponents, this ground-breaking initiative has now been almost completely implemented. And, for the most part, parents, teachers, ECEs and administrators agree the program is preparing children socially and academically, leading to better outcomes in later years (Janmohamed et al. 2014). However, to deliver the program most effectively, it must be designed, funded and operated appropriately. Reports in the news and from classrooms across the province have identified some critical issues that need to be addressed.

Kindergarten-Grade 1 combined classrooms have been a concern for several years (Hammer 2011). Media reports show that 261 classrooms in the 2013-14 academic year had a split Kindergarten-Grade 1 class. This is troubling because a split classroom could have students ranging from four to seven years old, with large gaps in social and cognitive development. Also, there is a marked difference in the curriculum between Kindergarten and Grade 1. Play-based learning is a fundamental principle of the full-day Kindergarten program, while the Grade 1 curriculum is more structured. Split classes limit the time and space available for Kindergarten students to play and explore (Alphonso 2014a).

Furthermore, in spite of having a teacher and an ECE in the classroom, some full-day Kindergarten classes are growing to sizes that are difficult to manage. Ministry of Education documents show that in 2013-14 some 640 Kindergarten classrooms, or eight per cent of those that had introduced the program, had more than 30 children (Alphonso 2014b). In some regions, such as Peel, more than a third of classrooms exceed the 26 -student average set by the Ministry of Education (Belgrave 2014). The academic research is very clear that small class sizes are an important determinant of student outcomes, especially for disadvantaged children and others who might have difficulty transitioning to the school setting (Schanzenbach 2014). Also, when dealing with young children in a play-based environment, reasonable class sizes are essential for ensuring the safety of students and teachers. We cannot allow overcrowding to jeopardize the success of our ambitious full-day Kindergarten program.

Even when class sizes are kept relatively small, the interaction and combined efforts of the teacher and ECE are vital to student success. When the program was developed, the teacher/ECE teams were recommended based on experiments in Ontario and elsewhere, in which teams were found to "add to the strengths of the professional preparation and skill sets of both teachers and ECEs" (Pascal 2009). ECEs bring specialized knowledge about early childhood development, while certified teachers bring high levels of skills and training related to pedagogy and delivery of the curriculum. Research has shown one of the main reasons students are benefiting from the program is that staff teams are "uniting around the mission to support young children and families" (Pelletier 2014). The proper functioning of the staff teams is upset when school boards manipulate government regulations or staff schedules so that one of the members of the team is taken out of the classroom during the instructional period. We must keep the program true to its original promise and guarantee that the government and school boards will create the conditions for teachers and ECEs to provide the best possible learning environment for every student in every class.

Conclusion

It should be enough to support early childhood education and care simply because it makes childhood better. Children take great joy in playing with their friends and engaging in stimulating activities. We should want to give all children the opportunity to take part in these experiences in safe environments with the proper guidance. But when we consider the long-term social and economic benefits, it becomes unfathomable that a comprehensive, publicly funded and regulated ECEC system does not enjoy more widespread support. Access to affordable child care would enable more parents to join the labour market and grow the economy, while high-quality early childhood education would lay the foundation for a more fair and prosperous Ontario. It is past time to start looking at public investments in ECEC as a necessity rather than a luxury.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in universal, accessible, regulated, publicly funded, not-for-profit child care spaces in Ontario.
- Eliminate Kindergarten–Grade 1 combined classes.
- Ensure there is a certified teacher and an early childhood educator in all Kindergarten classrooms at all times during the instructional period.

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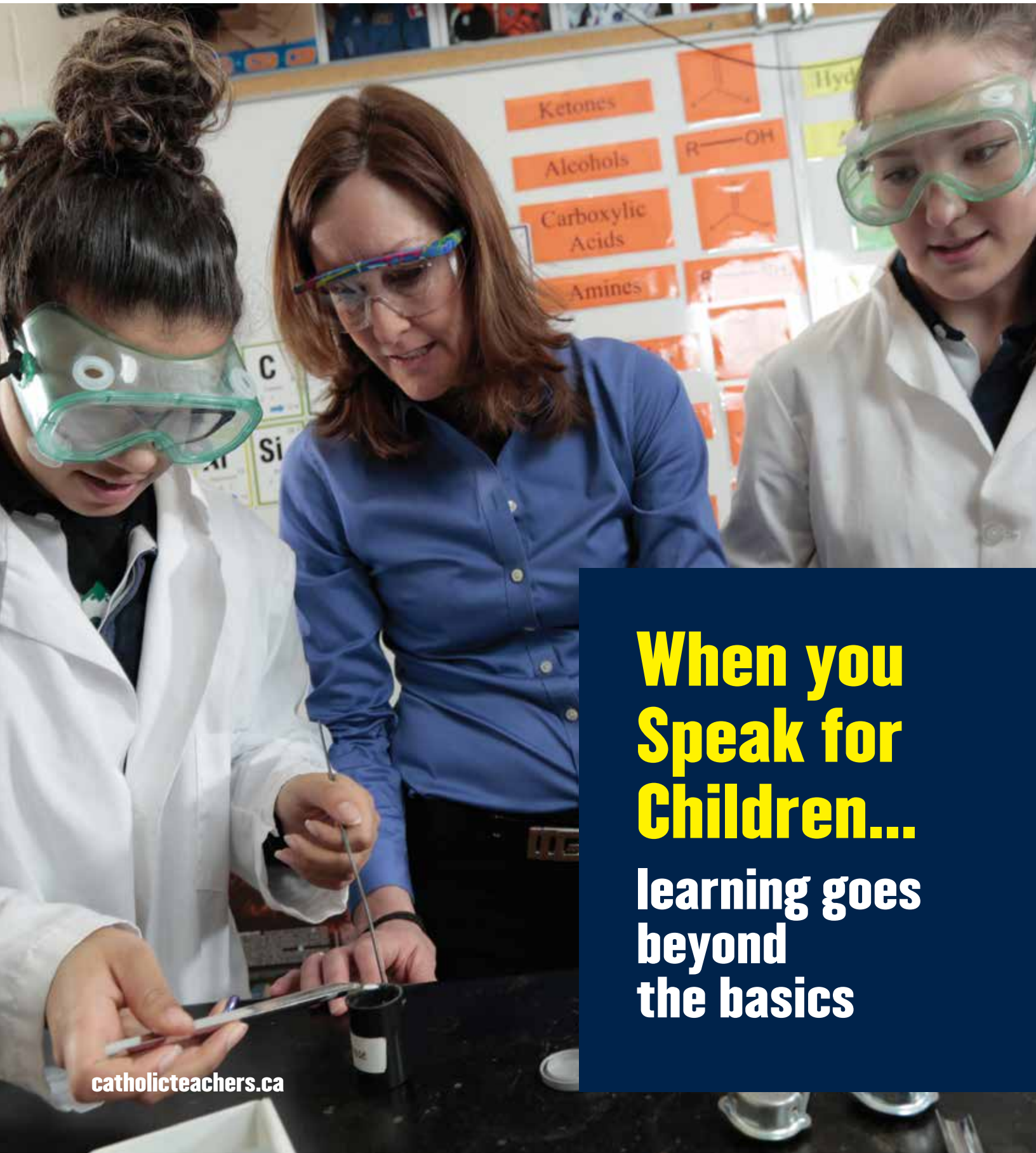

When you Speak for Children...

learning goes beyond the basics

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When you Speak for Children...
learning goes beyond the basics

School is where our children learn how to live in the world, and teachers take great pride in their responsibility to nurture caring, mindful citizens. Globalization and advances in technology have made the world more fast-paced and interconnected than ever before, which makes it all the more vital that we graduate students who can appreciate diverse opinions and work constructively to arrive at mutually acceptable solutions. It is only by going beyond the basics that we can maintain a prosperous, peaceful, sustainable society.

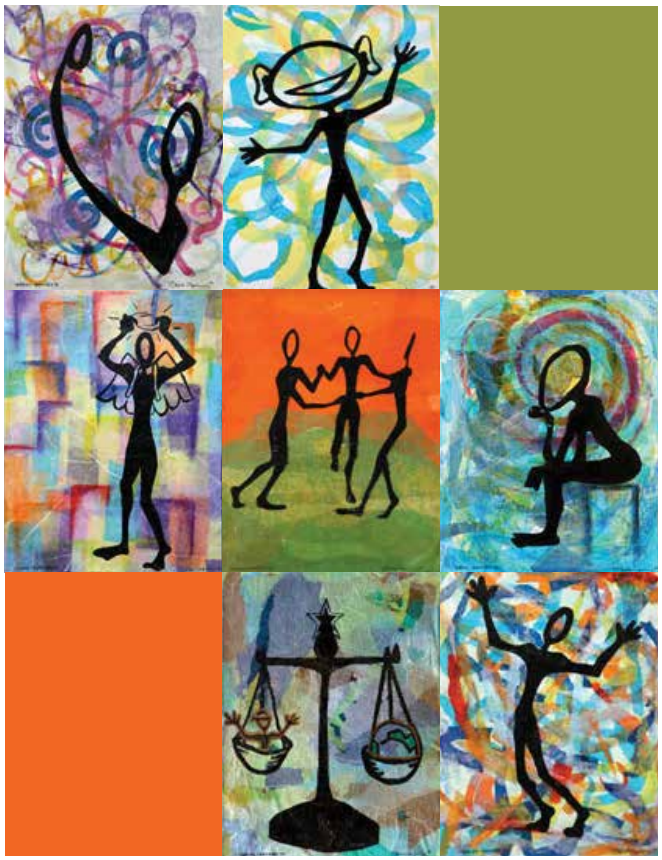
In *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, the Ministry of Education (2014a) has put forth an ambitious agenda for 21st century learning. While acknowledging the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy skills, the government has also stressed the need to develop healthy, well-rounded students who are prepared to be critical thinkers, innovative problem solvers, and effective communicators and collaborators. To reach these goals, we will need to consider how well our schools, teachers and students are equipped.

Catholic schools are looking forward

Publicly funded Catholic schools have made remarkable contributions to the overall excellence of Ontario's world-renowned education system. Moreover, our Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations, which are integral to our pedagogy, offer a perfect road map for teaching the skills and attitudes the 21st century demands. We are developing students' character and commitment to the common good, encouraging them to be discerning believers, effective communicators, creative and holistic thinkers, self-directed learners, collaborative contributors, caring family members, and responsible citizens (ICE 2011). Our graduates, who are active in all fields of modern society, say the education they received in Ontario's publicly funded Catholic schools taught them values of tolerance and empathy, gave them a sense of community, and fostered an awareness and understanding of social justice (Herbert and Childs 2013).

The unique approach to education offered by Ontario's Catholic schools is rooted in our province's history and culture. The system continues to enjoy widespread support inside and outside of the Catholic community. There are almost 650,000 students in Ontario's Catholic schools, including many non-Catholic students whose parents have chosen to send their children to Catholic high schools, in recognition of the system's high standards and holistic methods.

Some critics argue that in a period of declining enrollment we should dismantle the publicly funded Catholic education system. However, it bears repeating that the report of the Ministry of Education's Declining Enrollment Working Group (2009) clearly stated, "Actions taken to address declining enrollment should ensure that students have fair access to education programs and services based on their needs and circumstances. All measures must also respect the constitutional and statutory framework for education in Ontario, which



includes English-language public, English-language Catholic, French-language public, and French-language Catholic school boards."

Closing Catholic schools would strike at the foundation of our education system and create unwanted and unnecessary disruption within communities. This is especially true in the rural and northern areas of the province, where there might only be one school in a community in any of the four publicly funded systems. Moving school boundaries and closing schools eliminates the range of opportunities available for families, while forcing students to move away from their friends and teachers. It is not just Catholic families that would feel the consequences of upheaval– merging systems would inevitably see students in the public system shifted among boards and schools.

We should also remember that the vast majority of operational costs associated with delivering education in Ontario's four publicly funded systems will continue to be driven by student enrollment. Creating fewer, larger boards will not generate significant savings. Even administrative efficiencies would be scant. School boards' administration and governance expenditures also rise along with enrollment, and it is well known that Ontario's largest boards continue to grapple with high spending and other issues, which some trustees and observers blame primarily on the size of the boards (Rushowy, Brown and Brennan 2014). If there are efficiencies to be found, school boards should be able to identify them within their existing budgets. Public education advocates agree there is no financial justification for merging boards or systems. Instead, we can use provincially funded buildings in smarter, more collaborative ways (Heartfield 2012). Schools can play key roles as community hubs, and the loss of a school removes this important resource (Clandfield 2010). Increasing community partnerships is the best way to make efficient use of school space while meeting the needs of students and communities, many of whom are strongly committed to our publicly funded Catholic education system.

Testing is not the answer

Results of province-wide, standardized tests designed by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) were intended to contribute to current

knowledge about student learning and assessment, build on the existing knowledge of educators and school boards, and inform professional practice and focused interventions. But school boards and schools already know where further attention is required, and teachers know better than anyone which of their students are struggling.

Concentrating on achievement tests and standardized measurements leads to a narrow focus on the types of learning and knowledge that lend themselves to being measured (Kohn 2012). We fail to appreciate the full spectrum of abilities and qualities that will make students active, productive citizens. As was stressed in a recent OECD paper examining the importance of developing both cognitive and non-cognitive skills from an early age, achievement tests "do not adequately capture non-cognitive skills such as perseverance ('grit'), conscientiousness, self-control, trust, attentiveness, self-esteem and self-efficacy, resilience to adversity, openness to experience, empathy, humility, tolerance of diverse opinions and the ability to engage productively in society, which are valued in the labour market, in school, and in society at large" (Kautz et al. 2014). And because standardized testing examines "crystallized intelligence, or the application of memorized routines to familiar problems," it is possible to raise test scores without really improving students' overall ability to think critically or adapt to new situations (Kamenetz 2015).

This runs counter to the holistic conceptualization of education proposed in *Achieving Excellence*. Moreover, OECTA members report the high stakes approach to EQAO testing leads some schools to shift provincial funds that are intended for other purposes toward testing tools and materials. Although EQAO tests are not meant to be used to rank or compare schools, administrators feel anxious about how they measure up, and they pressure schools to improve their scores (Giese and Alphonso 2013). It is difficult to quantify the actual amounts in question, but the assessment-driven culture clearly results in less money being available for resources that might actually benefit students, such as school events, physical education equipment, music and art supplies, science equipment, text books, or information and communications technology.

At this point, it might be unrealistic to expect the government to abandon the idea of standardized testing. But we can still improve the way we do things. The current approach tests every student, which is burdensome and expensive. A random sampling model would produce accurate results at a fraction of the cost, while reducing the level of student anxiety and allowing most teachers and students to remain focused on genuine learning activities and more meaningful classroom assessments (Segool et al. 2013). When the tests were introduced, random sampling was rejected because boards wanted more data to undertake "local reflection and focused intervention" (EQAO 2012). But the data generated from random sample testing, combined with existing knowledge from teachers and schools, would yield the information necessary for boards and the government to make thoughtful decisions about education programming and funding. In 2009, Ontario's Auditor General found that in fewer than four per cent of cases did EQAO data vary from a student's report card marks by more than one grade level. This supports our belief that schools and boards can effectively assess student learning and provide accurate input as to what resources are needed and where.

Breaking down the digital divide

In *Achieving Excellence*, the Ministry of Education says students "will benefit from a wide array of opportunities both inside and outside of school that are compelling and contribute to their success, including the opportunity to benefit from the effective and appropriate use of technology in the classroom." OECTA recognizes the need to help students develop the skills required in a technology-driven world. However, we are concerned that the available resources are insufficient to provide meaningful instruction and opportunities in this area.

In 2009-10, the Classroom Computers component of the Pupil Foundation Grant was reduced by $25 million. The reduction was only supposed to be in place for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years; to date, the funding has not been restored. The Textbook and Learning Materials component was also permanently reduced by $25 million per year (Ministry of Education 2009).

The government has announced it plans to invest $150 million over three years for tools such as tablets, cameras and software, as well as professional learning for teachers in using these technologies (Ministry of Education 2014b). However, given previous reductions in funding for computers and learning materials, this amount is not sufficient to make real progress in the provision of technology in schools. Instead, we will just be making up for lost time.

The reality is that the need for infrastructure and hardware in schools is beyond what funding provides, and school boards are not able to keep pace with technological innovation. This has resulted in inequality between boards, as well as the proliferation of "bring your own device" policies, which have the potential to widen the

"digital divide" between students who have access to personal technologies and those who do not (Rushowy 2014). As the curriculum, and the delivery of the curriculum, becomes increasingly dependent on technology, we must ensure there are no gaps among schools, or among students. Otherwise, the technology gap will lead to gaps in student achievement.

Successful use of technology in education also requires teachers who are equipped with adequate technological competency and well-designed learning objectives (Jacobsen 2010). It is popular to speak of our students, and even younger teachers, as "digital natives" who already use information and communications technology in their daily lives (Della-Mattia 2014). However, it cannot be assumed that students are necessarily prepared to use these tools for productive ends, or that teachers are automatically proficient in translating their personal fluency with technology into learning practice. For example, teachers need time and training to develop the specialized skill of selecting appropriate online resources (People for Education 2014). To achieve the best results, all teachers will continue to need expanded pre-service and in-service training to make productive use of technology in their classrooms.

Beyond the basics of professional development

Ontario's teachers are well-trained professionals who have intimate knowledge of their students' needs. They are also enthusiastic learners who are eager to consider new methods and improve their practice. Each year, tens of thousands of teachers spend their own time and money expanding their horizons through Additional Qualifications courses (OCT 2013). To really move our publicly funded education system beyond the basics, we need to give teachers more opportunities to undertake meaningful professional development, as well the autonomy to organize and contribute to these programs according to their professional judgement (CEA 2015).

Traditional models of professional development often have little to do with teachers' real needs. Every year sees the introduction of new ministry- or school-directed initiatives and one-off, one-size-fits-all workshops that are planned and implemented with no consultation with teachers. In many cases, teachers are taken out of the classroom, denied input on the content of the activities, and treated as passive participants in their own learning. Such experiences are patently unproductive.
Twenty years ago, renowned scholars Linda Darling-Hammond and Milbrey McGlaughlin (1995) identified essential features of effective professional development that will provide occasion for teachers to reflect critically and "fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners." Among other things, they recommended that professional learning be participant-driven and give teachers the opportunity to inquire, experiment, and collaborate. Overall, it should be an authentic experience that "allow[s] teachers to share what they know and what they want to learn and to connect their learning to the contexts of their teaching."

These considerations have come to define what is known as "job-embedded professional development," which is as relevant today as ever (Croft et al. 2010). As communities and student needs evolve, teachers must be empowered to develop professional learning that suits their specific interests and requirements. Ontario's teachers are already demonstrating their capacity in this regard. For example, the Teacher Learner and Leadership Program supports experienced teachers to undertake "self-directed advanced professional development for improving their practices and supporting students' learning." Individuals or groups design and lead projects in areas such as differentiated instruction, literacy, and technology. Teachers report that the initiative has enhanced collaborative professional learning and improved knowledge, understanding and instructional practices (Campbell, Lieberman and Yashkina 2013). It is in everyone's interest to expand the time and esources available for this type of ongoing, classroom -focused, teacher-directed inquiry.

The collaborative element is particularly noteworthy. Input from outside researchers and specialists is certainly welcome, but teachers are the real experts in the field of education, and it has been shown that "teachers make and sustain valued changes to their practice when they collaboratively construct, monitor and adapt context-specific approaches to address their goals" (Schnellert and Butler 2015). Collaborative approaches have been found to foster collegial, supportive atmospheres over the long term, enabling teachers to encourage and learn from one another, which ultimately improves outcomes in entire schools or districts (Wei et al. 2009). Collaborative professional learning is also an excellent model for our students, for whom understanding and teamwork will be essential to success inside and outside the classroom.

Making room for innovation

Some successful school systems have long recognized that broadening the curriculum demands students and teachers be given greater freedom to move beyond rigid desk-based methods and pursue non-conventional ideas and assignments. To create the physical space and intellectual environment

appropriate for these activities, there must be fewer students in the classroom. For example, in Finland, primary and middle school classes are capped below 22 students, which enables students to undertake a variety of projects while nurturing "critical co-operative skills" (Abrams 2011). This accords with evidence from the United States, where teachers of Grade 8 math and science classes have reported that in smaller classes they use more hands-on activities, small group projects, and whole class discussions (Deutsch 2003). Experts have also agreed that the use of technology and online learning is only valuable if it is part of a broadly redesigned curriculum and pedagogy that supports deeper and more sustained student engagement, meaningful learning tasks, as well as additional opportunities for collaboration (Means et al. 2009). Smaller classes are necessary to facilitate these refinements.

The benefits of the innovative learning that can take place in smaller classes are immediately noticeable. They also persist over the long term. In their study of national data on Grade 8 students in the United States, Dee and West (2011) found class size reductions led to statistically significant improvements in psychological factors such as attentiveness and attitudes about learning. These non-cognitive skills stick with graduates throughout their lives and yield considerable labour market benefits, which means maintaining reasonable class sizes is likely to be cost-effective in the long run (Chetty et al. 2011; Muennig and Woolf 2007).

Furthermore, as societies become more diverse, and the world grows more interdependent, the citizen-building elements of the educational experience are becoming increasingly significant. Schools and teachers have an integral role to play in helping students to value differences among participants and learn the "basic skills of productive citizenry" (Wasley 2002). Smaller classes enable teachers to engage students in meaningful discussions that advance this sort of learning.

Skeptics often point to jurisdictions such as Japan and South Korea – where class sizes are large and test scores are high – as evidence that small classes are not necessary. However, they ignore the consequences of these large classes, such as lack of student engagement and social skills (Haimson 2011). Many of these same systems are now looking to reduce class sizes in order to better develop communication skills, higher order thinking, and collaborative learning (Blatchford 2013; Harfitt 2012).

Conclusion

There is a popular misconception that broadening the curriculum or focusing on soft skills interferes with the basic knowledge acquisition the public expects from the education system. This is not so. Reading, writing and arithmetic are as crucial today as ever, and teachers spend a great deal of time instilling this knowledge in their students.

But at their best, publicly funded schools can be about so much more. We give our children the fullest opportunity to grow by paying attention to character education and socialization. We develop well-rounded thinkers by incorporating technology and valuing a range of skills. And we give our teachers and students freedom to explore by directing our scarce resources toward professional development and classroom improvements, rather than administrative funding and oversight. In doing so, we enable our graduates, and our province, to reach untold heights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Continue full funding of publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario.
- Adopt a random sampling model for EQAO testing.
- Give teachers the professional autonomy to determine the type and frequency of student assessments.
- Invest in information and communications technology.
- Facilitate teacher-directed, job-embedded professional development opportunities.

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ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic Teachers
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When you Speak for Children...

barriers to learning disappear

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When you Speak for Children...
barriers to learning disappear

Schools do not exist in isolation. When students arrive each morning, they bring all of the qualities and challenges that affect their families and communities. For some lucky students, this means a wealth of resources and encouragement. But for others it means poverty, discrimination and violence. Some students also face individual health issues or learning difficulties that differentiate them from their peers.

Students who face barriers to learning often struggle to develop the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities that influence academic success. They can quickly fall behind and become discouraged, which further reduces their capacity and willingness to engage with classmates and the curriculum. Our schools should constantly strive to be models of diversity and understanding, where we advocate for social justice, create safe spaces for students to interact, and provide the necessary supports to suit individual needs and learning styles.

Poverty is unacceptable

There have been some debates about measurement, but there can be no dispute that poverty blights our province. The government says 13.6 per cent of Ontario's children are living in poverty, but studies from other organizations show the rate could be as high as one in five for the province as a whole (Khanna 2014), and one in three for cities like Toronto (Polyani et al. 2014).

Families with insufficient income are forced to make enormous sacrifices and live under stressful conditions that seriously affect their physical and mental health (OAFB 2014; Block 2013; CMA 2013). More than 130,000 Ontario children used food banks last year (FBC 2014), and more than 54,000 families are on wait lists for affordable housing (ONPHA 2015). Teachers see the effects every day, as children arrive at school tired, hungry and unprepared. Research shows that children from low-income families have fewer opportunities to develop their skills, and that socioeconomic status can have significant influence over student achievement (Ferguson, Bovaird and Mueller 2007; Brownell, Roos and Fransoo 2006). Over the long term, poverty and inequality carry direct and indirect costs for all of society, in the form of increased health and criminal justice costs, increased social assistance payments, lost productivity, lower tax revenues, and less civic participation (NCW 2011).

In 1989, the House of Commons passed an all-party resolution committing to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Twenty-five years later, students from across the country came together to urge Canada's political leaders to "keep the promise" (Bielfeld and Leddy 2014). In its second Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Government of Ontario (2014) stuck to a more modest hope, asking for patience from the public and help from the federal government, while recommitting to its goal of reducing child poverty by 25 per cent compared to 2008 levels. However, the lack of specifics make it doubtful that even this will be achievable. Co-operation among levels of government is certainly necessary, but a variety of organizations have put forward concrete proposals as to what the provincial government can do. Ideas include increasing the Ontario Child Benefit, raising rates for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Payment, allowing social assistance recipients to keep more of their income when they gain employment, and making substantial investments in affordable housing. Ontario has taken incremental steps in some of these areas during the past few years, but a strategy to meaningfully address child poverty will need much more ambitious funding and deadlines.

Special education needs attention

Ontario is realizing gains from increased funding for special education initiatives over the past decade. According the 2014 EQAO provincial report, over the past five years, the percentage of Grade 3 students with special education needs performing at or above the provincial standard has increased by 13 percentage points in reading and by 12 percentage points in writing. These improvements have exceeded those of the Grade 3 population as a whole. The improvements in reading and writing of Grade 6 students with special education needs have also exceeded the improvements of the Grade 6 population as a whole.

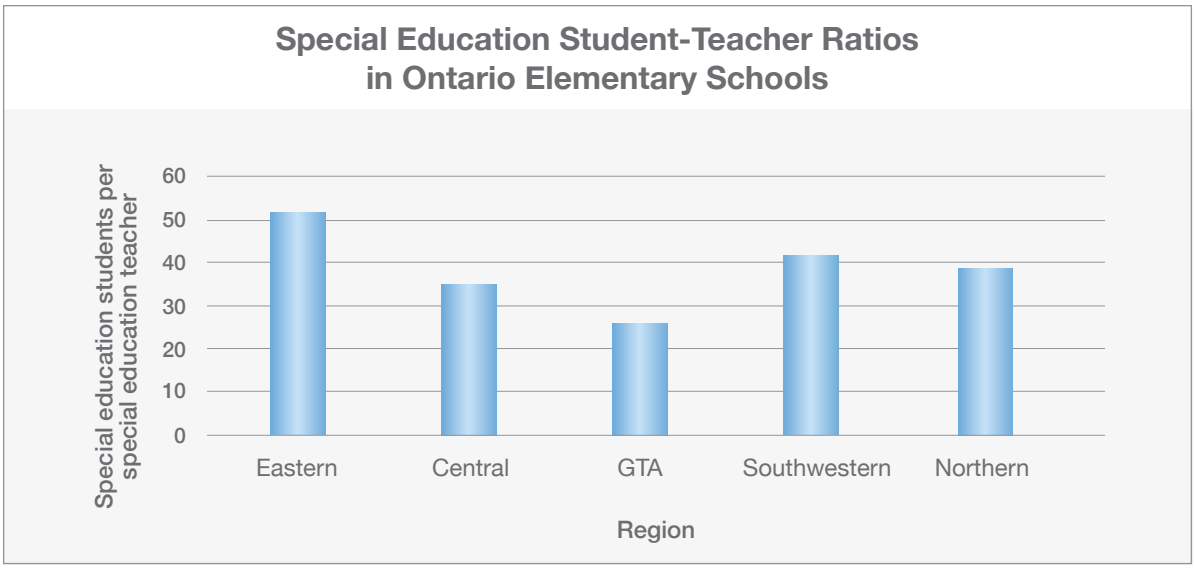
However, there are still issues with respect to staffing and classroom composition that are limiting our ability to serve students with special education needs. For example, although the ratio of students to special education teachers has been fairly steady for the past few years, it is still much higher than it was before 2010 (People for Education 2014). With the reduction in dedicated special education teachers, classroom teachers are now responsible for much of the reporting, assessment and paperwork (such as Individual Education Plans) that previously fell under the purview of specialized staff. The result is additional demands on classroom teachers and less specialized, skilled intervention for students.

Research has shown that smaller classes enable teachers to more effectively address the unique learning needs of special education students, while building safe, integrated classroom communities (Bascia 2010). This is also true when the class has partially integrated special education students, and especially true when there are several students with special education needs, or students with multiple exceptionalities. We can help provide the best possible learning environment for students with special education needs by establishing clear benchmarks for the case loads of special education teachers, and ensuring schools follow the lowest class size maximums set out in the *Education Act*.

There are many factors that can influence how students with special education needs adapt to the classroom, but it is undeniable that our publicly funded schools need more resources to deal with these issues. Special education funding grants have been reformed to make them somewhat more needs-based and equitable, but the funding formula is still largely enrollment-based, which does not necessarily reflect the number of students in respective schools with special education needs. Furthermore, the Special Incidence Portion, which is used to fund support for students with extraordinarily high needs, is still capped at $27,000 per full-time student, as it has been since 1998 (Ministry of Education 2014). This amount is below the provincial salary grid for educational assistants and not nearly enough to cover the cost of specialized staff and necessary materials, especially given that inflation is constantly eroding the real-dollar value of the grant. As a result of these shortcomings, almost 80 per cent of school boards spend more on special education than they are allotted by the government. And as boards across the province struggle to manage their ever-tightening budgets, special education programs and staff are being eliminated rather than expanded (Rushowy 2015; Rushowy and Ferguson 2015).

Mental health should be top of mind

It is imperative that elementary and secondary schools be given resources to address emerging mental health issues at the earliest possible opportunity. Children and adolescents are more likely to experience mental health or addiction disorders than any other age group, with more than half of all lifetime cases of mental illness beginning by the mid-teens (Government of Canada 2006; Kessler et al. 2005). In Ontario, 15 to 20 per cent of children and youth have a mental health need, but they are less likely than adults to receive adequate care (CAMH 2014; OPACYO 2011). Roughly 6,000



SOURCE: Adapted from People for Education (2015)

children are waiting one year or more for treatment, and this number could double by 2016 (CMHO 2015).

Undiagnosed or untreated mental health issues are a significant impediment to student engagement and achievement. By providing mental health supports in schools, where children and youth spend much of their time, we can reduce stigma, help students with mental health issues feel connected to their communities, and deliver more responsive service.

Through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (2011), the government has put together a bold plan to address the mental health and addictions needs of all Ontarians, especially youth. The Ministry of Education has also implemented some initiatives which help teachers and other staff to raise awareness, reduce the stigma around mental health issues, and address crisis situations (Finlay 2011). The 2015-16 Grants for Student Needs includes $8.6 million for a Mental Health Leader for each school board as well as funding to support education programs for school-aged children and youth in care, treatment centres, or custody (Ministry of Education 2015). However, we are not moving fast enough in developing a comprehensive, adequately resourced approach that strikes an appropriate balance between prevention and intervention, especially early and ongoing intervention.

The Ministry of Education's (2013) guide for educators lists the wide variety of mental health issues students might be dealing with, including problems with anxiety, mood, attention and hyperactivity, behaviour, eating, substance use, gambling, and self-harm and suicide. Clearly, there is much that teachers need to understand if they are going to offer meaningful assistance. Across the country, 87 per cent of teachers have said that lack of staff training is a potential barrier to providing mental health services for students in their school, and only one-third of teachers report having participated in any professional development to address student mental illness (Froese-Germain and Riel 2012). In Ontario, school boards might allot some time during professional activity days to concentrate on mental health issues. Boards also received $20,000 in 2011-12 to fund release time for professional learning opportunities. However, considering the scope and scale of the issues, a key element of any strategy will be expanded, focused, and ongoing training and in-service for teachers.

Teachers want to build safe and welcoming communities, offering the best opportunity for students with mental health issues to succeed in their studies. However, they are not in a position to provide the full range of services and supports required in some cases, which is why schools need professional staff with specialized knowledge and skills. Programs like School Mental Health ASSIST and Mental Health and Addiction Nurses in District School Boards are working to help schools recognize and respond to mental health issues. Increased funding for these types of programs, as well as for professionals who can work with students to overcome their mental health issues, will undoubtedly improve student well-being and achievement.

Geography and population present challenges that might hinder the effectiveness of certain programs. Northern and rural boards might have fewer students with mental health issues but be too large to be adequately served by a handful of professionals. On the other hand, while travel is not necessarily an issue in urban boards, they are likely to have much higher numbers of students with mental health problems. This is why the Ministry of Education should work with other ministries to fund and establish services within schools to provide direct supports for students. In addition, existing services supporting families and communities can be delivered from space available in elementary and secondary schools, especially in areas of the province that are underserved.

Making schools safe and inclusive

Bullying is not a harmless rite of passage. As was recognized in *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, bullying affects individuals at school and throughout their lives (Ministry of Education 2009). Students who are bullied can become withdrawn and anti-social, and may be reluctant to attend school or participate in lessons and activities. Victims of bullying are at increased risk of issues that last into adulthood, such as depression, anxiety, or suicidality (Copeland et al. 2013). The need for action has become more urgent with the introduction of cyberbullying and other forms of hate spread over the Internet. Recent events in British Columbia and Nova Scotia have made clear the tragic consequences of complacency.

Some groups of students are at especially high risk of being bullied. In a national survey, the majority of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ) reported being verbally harassed at school. One in five said they had been physically harassed or assaulted (Taylor et al. 2011). When it comes to cyberbullying, girls are much more likely than boys to be victimized, usually in the form of threatening, aggressive or hateful comments received by email or instant message or posted on a website. Most victims are bullied by someone they know, such as a classmate, friend or acquaintance (Perreault 2011).

10,272 students

in **Grades 7-12** participated in CAMH's 2013 **O**ntario **S**tudent **D**rug **U**se & **H**ealth **S**urvey (OSDUHS). Highlights from the *Mental Health and Well-Being* report include:

1 in 4 did **NOT** know who to talk to about a **MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEM**. Females were twice as likely as males to report an unmet need for mental health support.

1 in 7 rated their **MENTAL HEALTH** as **FAIR/POOR**. Females were twice as likely as males to do so.

1 in 4 experienced **PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS**. Females were about twice as likely as males to do so.

1 in 8 seriously **CONTEMPLATED SUICIDE** in the past year. Females were more likely than males to do so.

1 in 5 visited a **MENTAL HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL** at least once in the past year. Females were more likely than males to do so.

1 in 15 reported having 3 or 4 of the following **COEXISTING PROBLEMS**: psychological distress, antisocial behaviour, hazardous/ harmful drinking, or a drug use problem.*

*Among grades 9-12 only (6,159 Ontario students)

The good news...

A MAJORITY of Ontario Students:

- ✓ Rated both their physical and mental health as excellent or very good;
- ✓ Got along well with their parents; and
- ✓ Reported a positive school climate.

Since 2007, reports of suicide attempts and any gambling remained stable.

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Boak, A., Hamilton, H.A., Adlaf, E.M., Beitchmanm, J.H., Wolfe, D., & Mann, R.E. (2014). *The mental health and well-being of Ontario students, 1991-2013: Detailed OSDUHS findings (CAMH Research Document Series No. 38).* Toronto, ON: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

camh OSDUHS Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey

camh HPRC Health Promotion Resource Centre

EEnet

The Ontario government has introduced policies and practices to combat bullying, and there are signs that student attitudes and school cultures are evolving. For example, between 2003 and 2013, the percentage of Ontario students who reported bullying others at school dropped from 30 per cent to 16 per cent (Boak et al. 2013). The suspension rate has also been steadily declining, down from seven per cent of students in 2004-05 to 3.6 per cent in 2011-12, the latest year for which data are available (Ministry of Education 2012). OECTA members are strongly supportive of initiatives that create safe learning environments and enhance social cohesion, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), and by most accounts GSAs are working to reduce stigma and build understanding. In a survey of GSA advisors in Ontario, 85 per cent reported the presence of GSAs has had a positive impact on school climate for LGBTQ students (Kitchen and Bellini 2013). The Ministry of Education's (2015a; 2015b) revised health and physical education curriculum represents further progress, as it will provide relevant information and advice on healthy relationships, consent, and appreciating diversity.

But the public still perceives an ongoing problem. In a recent survey, 46 per cent of parents said their child had been bullied at school; this likely understates the actual incidence because it is estimated that only half of students will report bullying to their parents. Nearly 90 per cent of parents said that, in general, bullying is a serious or very serious problem in Canadian schools (Goodyear 2015). Clearly, we need to persist in our efforts to make sure every student is valued and respected.

In the most extreme cases, some schools in urban areas are dealing with shocking incidents of violence and abuse (Welsh and Bailey 2014). Of course, not all of the remedies for violence in schools can be achieved through the education system. Among other things, we need to reduce poverty and offer support and counseling for troubled families and students. However, many policies and programs to make schools safer and more welcoming for students, teachers and education workers could be easily implemented, with minimal financial cost. This is another area where schools, municipalities and community groups can collaborate to accomplish shared goals (Robinson 2014). Ontario's schools need training and tools to implement community-building and anti-violence measures that will prevent conflicts before they arise.

Schools as community hubs

A common thread in the discussion about barriers to learning is the need to conceptualize the school as a centre of the community – a hub around which a variety of empowering and community-building activities are organized. In the most basic sense, the idea involves moving certain social services to school buildings and integrating them more fully into students' lives, thereby lowering costs and making more efficient use of public assets while reducing isolation and improving outcomes. Examples of services that could be offered in school buildings include fitness and recreation programs, family counseling, paediatric services, and mental health supports. In the ideal scenario, "children's learning activities within the school contribute to community development, and… community activities contribute to and enrich children's learning within the school" (Clandfield 2010).

The notion of integrating services and supports for students in schools is based on an extensive body of research that recognizes the importance of health and safety, socio-emotional development, and relationships to academic success (Moore and Emig 2014). Studies of the impacts of these schools show they raise grades, reduce dropout rates, and improve work habits and behaviours (CCS and IEL 2013). For example, an examination of community schools in the Redwood City School District, a diverse community near San Francisco, found the supplemental programs were used by the majority of students, and gains were realized in areas such as language skills and positive attitudes about school (Castrechini and London 2012).

In an era of declining enrollment, the community hub model could also serve as a way to address pressures to close schools, consolidate boards, or merge systems. It is an inescapable fact that some schools in Ontario are not being used to their full capacity. However, particularly in rural and remote areas, the closing of a school can be highly disruptive to students and the community. Finding innovative uses for school buildings could ensure that smaller communities do not lose vital resources because they currently have fewer children. Furthermore, groups such as the Regional Planning Commissioners of Ontario have urged the government to consider how school closures weaken communities and preclude the regeneration of neighbourhoods, because once a school is lost, it is very difficult to replace. Removing schools from neighbourhoods and forcing students to travel long distances by bus also has consequences for students' health and well-being because, for example, they lose valuable green space as well as opportunities to walk and play before and after school (Dubinski 2015).

Ontario's Community Use of Schools program aims to provide community groups with low-cost access to school buildings, especially in "priority" schools in low-income neighbourhoods (Giroux and Naylor

2006). However, there is no comprehensive policy for connecting schools to community services, or for integrating these services and activities into students' lives. For the most part, the existing arrangements involve public health agencies and children's aid societies, which have legal mandates to be involved with schools, or other groups using school space outside of school hours (People for Education 2012).

The idea of schools as community hubs is gaining some momentum in Canada. In 2003, Alberta's Commission on Learning found there is "much to be said" for the school becoming a sort of social centre, function as "the single point of contact for a range of essential services for children including personal counseling and diagnostic assessments, health services and children's mental health supports, social work and children's services, justice programs and programs for children at risk." More recently, Nova Scotia's School Review Process Study listed the "hub school model" as a way to prevent school closures (Fowler 2014). The Ontario Liberal Party's 2014 campaign platform pledged to "develop and support school-community hubs to promote efficient use of public assets, build ties between schools and municipalities and other community organizations, and ensure that more viable schools are able to remain open."

Co-ordinating services across ministries and agencies would change the way programs have traditionally been delivered, and would involve communication and sharing of responsibilities that might prove difficult. Since the election, the Premier of Ontario has tasked the ministers of education, health, and municipal affairs with investigating the workability of such arrangements, and has also appointed a Community Hub Framework Advisory Group. To break down the existing silos and more fully integrate community services into students' lives, stakeholders need to continue pushing the government to formulate a substantial, comprehensive strategy.

Funding belongs in the classroom

The Ministry of Education recognizes that some students are dealing with social and economic disadvantages that affect their ability to engage in the classroom and develop their abilities. This is why funding is provided through mechanisms such as the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) for additional

teaching support, tutoring, and other programs to aid struggling students.

But these programs are only worthwhile if the money is spent appropriately and effectively, and it is not clear that this is currently the case. Over the years, the proportion of the grant that goes to services targeted toward students in need – such as guidance counselors or nutrition programs – has been dramatically reduced (Brown 2013). School boards have also reduced, in some cases to zero, the proportion of the LOG that is allocated to classroom teachers. This is not to say that the LOG should be allocated entirely to classroom teachers. However, it is difficult to see how the objectives of the grant – supporting skills acquisition and student success, especially among students at risk – can be met without ongoing investments in the classroom. Furthermore, with an overall education budget that does not match student needs, legal pressure to balance their books, and no real requirement to show money is being spent as intended, school boards have great incentive to use so-called Special Purpose Grants to fill gaps in funding for core programs and expenses (Casey 2013). For instance, in 2012-13 the Toronto District School Board is reported to have diverted almost 70 per cent of the funds that were intended for targeted initiatives to support at-risk students. The board is said to have diverted almost $1 billion of such funding since it was introduced in 1998 (Johnston, Queiser and Clandfield 2013).

In the latest funding guidelines, the Ministry of Education (2015c) says it will require school boards to report that they have spent all of the funding received through the LOG on "programs and services associated with improving student achievement through these initiatives." However, there is still no clear process to determine how allocations from these grants are made, and no disclosure regarding these allocations until after the funding has been distributed. To be useful in holding school boards to account, reporting must be prompt, with real-time transfers of data where possible. This will enable stakeholders to track funding, flag issues as they arise, and ultimately ensure that funds are being used to improve learning opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Conclusion

International observers have commended Ontario for our success in removing barriers to learning The province is visited regularly by delegations from around the world, because foreign ministers of education recognize Ontario as one of the few jurisdictions that demonstrates a small gap in performance between high- and low-income students (O'Dowd 2013). The OECD (2011) cites Ontario as a jurisdiction that has carried out comprehensive, professionally driven reform with a commitment to universal high achievement and system coherence. In the United States, the National Center on Education and the Economy has focused on the supportive, co-operative nature of our reforms, in which the government has paid close attention to what teachers have to say about what works to improve student achievement (Tucker 2011).

Still, there is much to be done. Our members report the challenges faced by students and their families continue to be reflected in the classroom. Addressing the root causes of poverty, eliminating discrimination and violence, and implementing comprehensive strategies for special education and mental health needs should be core concerns for any caring society. And while additional funding is required in some areas, we can go a long way by simply changing attitudes or using existing resources more efficiently. By doing so, will give all children the opportunity to realize their full potential.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Accelerate action to eliminate child poverty in Ontario.
- Revise the special education funding formula to better acknowledge need and remove the cap on the Special Incidence Portion.
- Invest in teacher training and professional staff to support students with mental health issues.
- Continue to implement policies that prevent violence and encourage respect for diversity.
- Operate schools as community hubs, integrating services and supports into students' daily lives.

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ONTARIO ENGLISH
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When you Speak for Children...

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When you Speak for Children...
you support lifelong learning

Quality early learning puts children on the right path, and our elementary and secondary schools develop creative, adaptable problem solvers. But our education system cannot end there. As teachers show every day through our own professional development efforts, Ontarians can only reach their full potential by constantly updating their knowledge and skills.

Lifelong learning has always been a noble goal, but now it is a necessity. Our economy has moved into a post-industrial age, and traditional social and economic arrangements have evolved. These shifts have introduced "new social risks," including unpredictable career paths and the likelihood that industries and skills will quickly become obsolete (Jenson and Saint-Martin 2006; Taylor-Gooby 2004). Since the 1990s, Canadian federal and provincial governments have talked a lot about ensuring that all citizens have a solid base of knowledge as well as opportunities to gain experience and upgrade abilities to meet the shifting demands of the labour market (Hicks 2008). Progress has been made, but there are several fundamental and peripheral issues still in need of attention.

Opening doors to higher education

Canada leads the OECD in attainment of post-secondary education, and Ontario is tops in the country. Twenty-eight per cent of Ontarians aged 25 to 64 have a college diploma and another 30 per cent have a university degree (Statistics Canada 2014). However, post-secondary education remains inaccessible for many citizens, and threatens to become more so. Ontario has the highest tuition and mandatory university fees in the country, and by 2017 they are expected to be triple what they were in 1994 (Shaker and Macdonald 2014). Since the 1990s, college tuition fees have outpaced inflation by 435 per cent, while university undergraduate tuition fees have outpaced inflation by 601 per cent (CFS-O 2013). Although bursaries and grants, such as the Ontario government's self-vaunted 30% Off Tuition Fee Grant, reduce the up-front cost for many young people and their families, students who live independent of their parents and those who are in professional programs still pay extraordinary amounts (Usher, Lambert and Mirzazadeh 2014). Despite the soaring fees, students are not getting the quality of education they might expect. At 28:1, Ontario has the highest student-to-faculty ratio of any province. Student enrollment at Ontario universities increased by 68 per cent between 2000-01 and 2012-13, but full-time faculty increased by only 31 per cent. Furthermore, between 2000 and 2012, the percentage of classes in Ontario universities being taught by contract faculty increased by almost 90 per cent (OCUFA 2015). At York University, for example, 64 per cent of undergraduate courses are now taught by contract faculty (Brown 2015).

Contract faculty are qualified and dedicated, but they receive lower pay and fewer benefits and pensions than their full-time counterparts. They often have to balance several different jobs at once, and they do not have access to the institutional resources – time, academic freedom, office space, research assistants – necessary to be fully functional researchers and teachers. As contract faculty struggle with the demands and stresses of job insecurity, undergraduate education suffers. The limited prospects for full-time employment in academia also helps explain why we are graduating so few PhDs. According to data compiled by the Conference Board of Canada (2015), Ontario is ahead of most provinces, but still trails peer OECD countries by a wide margin. This means our long-term knowledge production and innovation capacity are limited.

Ontario provides its universities and colleges with the lowest per-student funding of any province (King 2015). Operations grants to post-secondary institutions have increased considerably over the past decade, but have been insufficient to match increased enrollment. This is short-sighted, because investments in post-secondary education are integral to the continued competitiveness of our economy. Expenditures at Canadian colleges and universities yield a gross economic benefit of roughly $55 billion dollars per year, and through innovation, productivity, economic growth and tax revenues, public investments in university degree holders generate a 36 to 46 per cent return over high school graduates (M. Grant 2014). Statistics Canada data show that even during

the recession, most post-secondary degree holders earned relatively high wages, and some actually saw their salaries increase (Ferguson and Wang 2014).

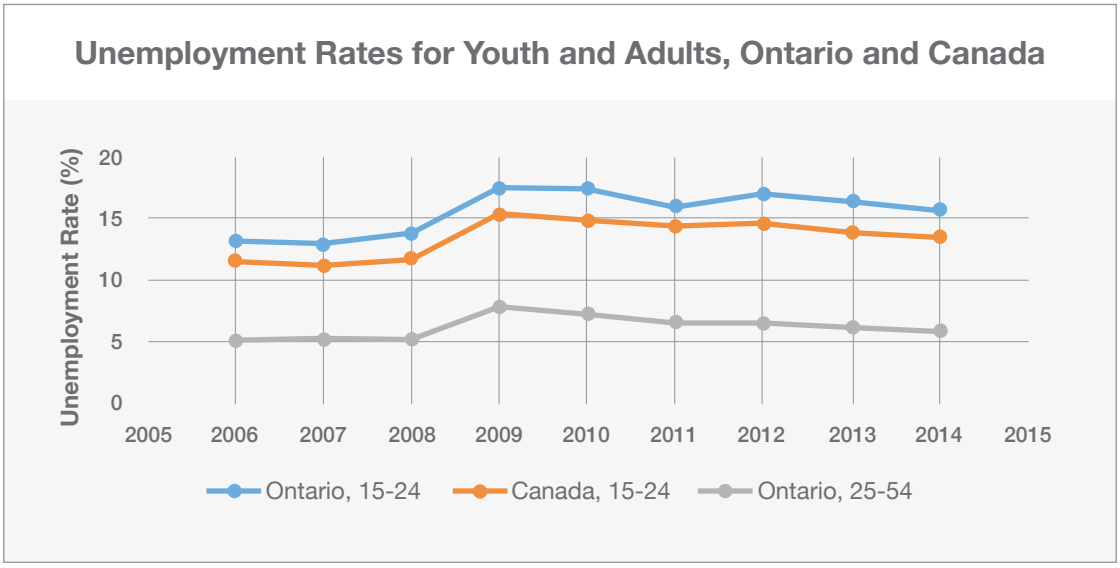
It is no secret that the bulk of the financial benefits from higher education are driven by a handful of high-wage, professional occupations, such as law, medicine and engineering. Other fields in the social sciences and humanities undoubtedly contribute to the health of our civil society and democracy, but studies in these fields will not necessarily provide all graduates with rewarding career paths. So, while public investment in universities is an essential element of our approach to lifelong learning, we should also be further developing our college system and making it clear to young people that there are other routes through which they can maximize their potential. Many of the jobs created in the coming years will require extensive post-secondary training, but not necessarily through universities. Examples of occupations that will be in high demand include early childhood educators, paralegals, dental hygienists, electricians, and plumbers. We can be immensely helpful to our students by providing better information and by changing attitudes about the types of training and work that are valued by society.

Workplace training is an investment, not a cost

Our investments in publicly funded elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education will be futile unless we help young Ontarians make successful transitions from school to work. Unemployment ates have historically been higher for youth than adults, but since 2008 the gap has widened to levels not seen since the 1970s (Bernard 2013). Moreover, Ontario's youth unemployment rate has consistently been higher than the national average.

Unemployment does not only affect youth in the short term. A considerable body of research shows that "scarring effects" can hamper individuals throughout their years, with a period of unemployment in youth increasing the likelihood of future unemployment, reducing lifetime earnings, and inflicting various other social and psychological difficulties (Bell and Blanchflower 2011; Kahn 2010). There are also societal costs in the form of lost productivity and poorer health (Schwerdtfeger 2013). Furthermore, if young people are unable to find satisfying work, and their incomes continue to lag significantly behind those of older generations, this could lead to social tensions and loss of trust in our political and economic institutions (Gill, Knowles and Stewart-Patterson 2014; ILO 2013).

For some youth, the problem is not so much unemployment as *underemployment*. They are able to find work in precarious, low-skill occupations, but these jobs do not match their level of education or fulfill their career ambitions. These youths might be better off than their unemployed counterparts, but there are still significant short- and long-term consequences to underemployment. In addition to the obvious outcome of lower wages and earnings, young people who are underemployed often find that their skills deteriorate and they become ever less attractive to potential employers in their desired field. Again, the broader society and economy also suffer, as public investments in education are squandered and potential productivity is lost (CGA 2012). Observers have been warning for several years about a scenario



SOURCE: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey

in which unemployed workers will be unable to fill a growing number of job vacancies because they do not possess the proper skills and qualifications (Miner 2010). Already, while large numbers of young Ontarians scramble to find decent work, certain trades and industries are having difficulty attracting a sufficient number of individuals who are able to step into the positions that are available (Burleton et al. 2013). This so-called skills gap, or skills mismatch, has been estimated to cost Ontario as much as $24 billion per year in forgone economic activity (Stuckey and Munro 2013).

We should be careful not to exaggerate the discussion about a skills mismatch. The hard evidence indicates there is no national emergency, and regions such as Ontario have plenty of people, particularly youth, who are capable and eager to work (Bartlett and Lao 2014). But we should also consider how to address the problems that do exist, beginning with the fundamental issue of workplace training. In many cases, employers have become narrowly focused on a specific skill set or level of experience, which shuts young workers out of the competition (Sandell 2012a). Canadian businesses invest few resources in workplace training, and they appear increasingly reluctant to hire young people for their basic technical skills and critical thinking abilities while allowing them to learn job-specific requirements on the job (Sorensen 2014). What is described as a skills gap is in most cases simply an experience gap (CLC 2014).

If we are going to address the crisis of youth unemployment and ensure Ontario has a viable, competitive workforce and economy for the future, we need Ontario's business community to acknowledge their responsibility to create training opportunities for young workers, with the

Six Conditions for Unpaid Internships in Ontario

1	The training is similar to that which is given in a vocational school.
2	The training is for the benefit of the intern. The intern receives some benefit from the training, such as new knowledge or skills.
3	The employer derives little, if any, benefit from the activity of the intern while he or she is being trained.
4	The training does not take someone else's job.
5	The employer has not promised the intern a job at the end of the training.
6	The intern has been told they will not be paid for their time.

SOURCE: Ministry of Labour (2011)

recognition that workplace training is an investment rather than a cost (Jackson 2014). Some business leaders are coming to the realization that young people are the economy's biggest resource, and proper education and training programs will be to everyone's benefit (T. Grant 2014). We need strategies and programs that will engage more employers and show them how meaningful workplace training can positively impact their sales and productivity, the quality of their products and services, and the satisfaction of their employees and customers (Zizys 2014).

Unions can be valuable partners in this endeavour, as they definitely share an interest in improving on-the-job training to enhance the skills and value of their members. And educational institutions have a crucial role to play. The Council of Ontario Universities (2014) reports that graduates who participate in co-op programs (also known as experiential learning or work-integrated learning) earn more than their peers, have higher employment and full-time employment rates, and are more likely to have paid off debt two years after graduation. Ontario's colleges have also been pushing for greater access to, and promotion of, the career-specific training they offer (West-Moynes 2014).

Unpaid internships are grossly unfair

Ontario's youth certainly see the benefit of well-designed experiential learning programs, which help them sharpen skills and develop networks to secure future employment (OUSA 2013). However, not all training opportunities are equally legitimate or accommodating. In a survey carried out for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *lack of payment* was the top-rated challenge for students completing work-integration programs, mentioned by more than half of the respondents (Sattler and Peters 2013). This points to a broader trend that has become a major concern for Ontario's youth: the proliferation of unpaid internships.

Although data is lacking, it is estimated there are hundreds of thousands of unpaid interns in Ontario, many of whom are not connected to a university or college program (McKnight 2013). Proponents say unpaid internships, like other forms of temporary work, enable young people to try out different industries, pick up technical skills, and gain some knowledge of the inner workings of various organizations (Coyne 2013; Tucker 2010). However, stories abound of unpaid interns carrying out tasks that have little to do with the ostensible purpose of the internship. While these menial tasks are of limited value to the intern, they are usually of value to the employer. This suggests the interns should really be classified as employees and entitled to receive at least the minimum wage.

Even if some young people are deriving tangible non-monetary benefits from their internships, unpaid work carries a number of possible consequences for both individuals and society. Young people who work in temporary jobs without pay can quickly find

themselves in a cycle of precarious employment, which limits their ability to utilize their education, reduces their long-term earning potential, and causes them to delay major life events. Unpaid interns also do not contribute income taxes or qualify for vital programs like the Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, or workers' compensation (Langille and Mandryk 2013). Moreover, by creating a pool of free labour, unpaid interns displace paid employees and depress wages for everyone (Cowan 2014).

There are also serious equity issues. A recent, first-of-its-kind survey found that 73 per cent of "underpaid" interns in Ontario (those receiving less than the minimum wage) are women (Attfield and Couture 2014). This accords with previous research from the United States, which found that 77 per cent of unpaid interns are female (Gardner 2011). Furthermore, low-income youth are often unable to enjoy whatever benefits unpaid internships might provide. These young people, who already face barriers to education and the labour market, either cannot afford to take unpaid work or must accumulate debt in order to do so, both of which can hurt them in the long run. This is especially concerning given that the fields in which unpaid internships are most common – journalism, arts and culture, politics and public policy – are important for a healthy, democratic society, and would gain from a greater diversity of voices (Perlin 2011).

Perhaps the most troubling fact about the prevalence and persistence of unpaid internships is that many of them do not comply with existing Ontario law covering workplace standards. Under the Employment Standards Act, an individual who is not performing work for a school credit can only work as an intern without pay if their position meets six clear criteria. Most notably, the position should exist solely for the purposes of training, and the employer should derive little, if any, benefit. Otherwise, the intern should be treated as an employee and paid at least the minimum wage (Ministry of Labour 2011).

This problem must be addressed through public policy and proactive enforcement of the law. Although it might seem reasonable to put the onus on young people to steer clear of unpaid internships or report law-breaking employers, this places an unfair burden on people whose options can be incredibly limited. Some young people see no alternative but to submit to unpaid work, viewing it as the only way to gain experience and break into their field of choice. And they are often reluctant to report employers who are offering illegal unpaid internships, for fear of damaging their own reputation and risking their chances at future, paid


HOSPITALITY

employment (Krashinsky 2014). The just solution is for the provincial government to actively enforce its own standards.

There have been welcome signals that our political leaders intend to protect the interests of young people as well as those employers who are offering legitimate, worthwhile internships. An inspection blitz carried out in the Toronto area found that 42 per cent of businesses with internships were breaking the law (Oved 2014). The Ministry of Labour also issued compliance orders to several employers in Ontario's publishing industry (McKnight and Nursall 2014). Furthermore, the Ontario government has recently launched a review of the province's employment legislation that will examine issues such as the rise of "non-standard working relationships" (Ministry of Labour 2015), and bills have been introduced at both the provincial and federal levels that aim to educate youth and employers about interns' rights and extend legal protections, such as health and safety standards, to those who are working in unpaid positions (Brennan 2014; Pedwell 2014). We must seize this momentum and continue advocating fair, legal and rewarding work and training for our young people.

Public training programs should provide real value

In co-operation with educational institutions, employers, labour unions, and young people themselves, governments can implement measures to help young people get the knowledge and training they need. Ideally, the federal government would take on the responsibility of bringing stakeholders together and providing necessary funding for a national youth employment strategy (Broadbent Institute 2014). Unfortunately, the current government has shown little appetite for leadership in this field, but rather has underfunded existing programs and eliminated institutions that provided research and policy co-ordination (Beeby 2015; Sandell 2012b). In the absence of federal ambition, it is incumbent upon provincial governments to do what they can to provide constructive training opportunities for youth.

To its credit, Ontario's government has taken some significant steps toward helping young people break into the labour market and gain on-the-job experience. The Youth Jobs Strategy aims to help young Ontarians find work, build job skills, or start a business. The government claims that nearly 30,000 young people have come into contact with the program. In 2012-13, roughly 35 per cent of Employment Ontario's clients were aged 29 or under (Ministry of Finance 2014). The most recent provincial budget renewed the Youth Jobs Strategy for another two years, with the hope of reaching up to 150,000 clients (Ministry of Finance 2015).

So-called "active labour market policies," which help people integrate or reintegrate into the labour market, are notoriously tricky to design and evaluate (Martin and Grubb 2001). Without intense longitudinal monitoring, it can be difficult to anticipate which kinds of services and training are needed, or determine which have been most effective. But certain attributes should obviously be considered. For example, we should be wary of an approach that merely seeks to move youths into temporary positions where they will have limited opportunity for meaningful training, permanent employment, or advancement. We should also be concerned about an over-reliance on entrepreneurship. There is no doubt that Ontario will benefit from a new generation of innovative risk-takers who can bring exciting, useful products and services to market. However, self-employment is fraught with uncertainty, and it is not really a comprehensive, sustainable strategy to address the youth employment crisis. By putting the bulk of the responsibility on youth to create their own markets, there is a definite risk of exacerbating precarity and insecurity (Geobey 2013).

Currency and flexibility for older workers

Education and training are needed to help young people gain a foothold in the labour market, but in the modern economy this will not be enough. Given global competition, rapid advances in knowledge and technology, and employers' increasing desire for flexibility, many adults will have to upgrade their skills or retrain entirely to remain employable. This is already happening, as Canadians in manufacturing industries and declining resource sectors are seeing what might once have been temporary layoffs now turning into permanent disruptions in their careers (Galley 2015). Ontario has several initiatives in place to deal with these issues, such as the Rapid Re-employment and Training Service, and the Second Career program. Even as the provincial economy comes out of recession, we should consider these programs as permanent parts of our social policy architecture.

Some adults who are already employed choose to return to school to improve their skills, seek a promotion, or prepare themselves for a new career. Especially in an era of increasing instability in the labour market, these efforts should be supported, as they have the potential to increase productivity in the short term and reduce durations of unemployment in the event of job loss. However, unless they are already unemployed, adult learners

generally cannot count on financial support from governments. They are also less likely than younger students to receive assistance from parents or other family members. Instead, they must depend on savings, part-time employment, or – in rare cases – support from their employer (Senate of Canada 2011). As the demands of the knowledge-based economy and the realities of new social risks become more evident, it would be prudent to examine ways to help adult learners undertake proactive education and training.

No Ontarian should be left behind

We should not think of lifelong learning only in terms of highly educated people getting more education. For various reasons, millions of Canadians do not successfully complete high school. Helping these individuals increase their knowledge and skills would improve their quality of life while boosting our productivity and economic growth (Myers and de Broucker 2006).

The Ontario government has talked a lot about raising graduation rates, but it is doing little to help learners over the age of 21. Adult and Continuing Education credit programs are funded at less than two-thirds the level of regular day school credit programs (Ministry of Education 2015). In the last academic year, adult education was underfunded by a total of $112 million (Mackenzie 2015). Furthermore, in many cases these programs are being delivered to adult students who are new immigrants, or students who were marginalized from the regular day school program in prior years. These students have special education, language and other needs that require support. However, allocations in the Special Purpose Grants – which fund programs and supports for students who face socio-economic disadvantages – are directed only toward students in the regular day school program.

Students in Adult and Continuing Education programs are too often expected to learn in conditions that would not be tolerated in the regular day school program. Large class sizes, sometimes in excess of 40 students, as well as different courses being delivered at the same time in one classroom, are commonplace features. Teachers, especially those in day school adult education programs, are employed from contract to contract with substandard salaries, working conditions and rights. Some school boards have been moving courses that were previously delivered by day school teachers to the Continuing Education system, where teachers are paid at an hourly rate, legislated and negotiated class size limits are circumvented, and other contractual obligations are ignored. This is clearly an effort to reduce costs by undermining teachers' salaries and working conditions. However, delivery of the curriculum also suffers. For example, a four week summer school course does not offer the same opportunity for instruction and learning as the regular 110 hour day school course.

Proper funding and design of adult learning programs would result in long-term cost savings for the province. For example, intensive support to raise the literacy rates of the least-skilled Ontarians would yield dramatic increases in employment and wage rates, significantly reducing the number of adults living in poverty (McCracken and Murray 2010). Furthermore, by improving basic language proficiency, fostering notions of citizenship and social engagement, and encouraging healthier lifestyles and relationships, we can reduce the need for later interventions in these areas and enhance the well-being of our democracy and society.

Conclusion

Of course, individuals must acknowledge their responsibility to do what they can to develop the skills and attitudes that will best place them to succeed in a competitive world. However, we also need information and policies that will help people make wise decisions about education and give them access to fruitful training opportunities.

This is in everyone's interest. Giving young people access to higher education and job training means they will be able to grow the economy and support our public services as the population ages. Helping adults boost their literacy and upgrade their job skills improves employability and productivity, enabling them to better care for themselves and their families. And overall, fostering a more informed, engaged citizenry makes for robust public discourse and more responsive politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Increase funding for Ontario's post-secondary institutions.
- Encourage employers to provide meaningful workplace training opportunities for young people.
- Enhance and enforce the provisions of the Employment Standards Act pertaining to unpaid internships.
- Improve funding and learning conditions for adult education and training programs.

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ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic Teachers
ASSOCIATION

When you Speak for Children...

you protect the common good

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When you Speak for Children...
you protect the common good

While OECTA members recommend our public policy framework be largely concerned with future-oriented initiatives that support children and families, this is predicated on continued commitment to our existing obligations. There has been a common, but mistaken, belief among governments in advanced economies that investments in education and skills negate the need for investments and protections in other areas, because people will be able to fend for themselves (Vandenbroucke and Vleminckx 2011; Banting 2005). On the contrary, jurisdictions that have implemented successful "social investment" systems have recognized the need for a mix of policies to ensure social protection in the short term while promoting human capital development over the long term. Especially given that poverty and inequality affect so many Ontarians, our approach needs to be fair, progressive and productive, acknowledging Ontarians' overarching goal of promoting the common good. We cannot get where we want to go if we are only focused on scaling back.

Income inequality hurts everyone

Between 1981 and 2010, Ontario experienced the largest percentage change in income inequality of any Canadian province (ICP 2013a; Osberg and Sharpe 2011). Although the distribution of income has improved slightly, in 2012 the top 10 per cent of Ontario's tax filers still received more than 37 per cent of the income (Statistics Canada 2014).

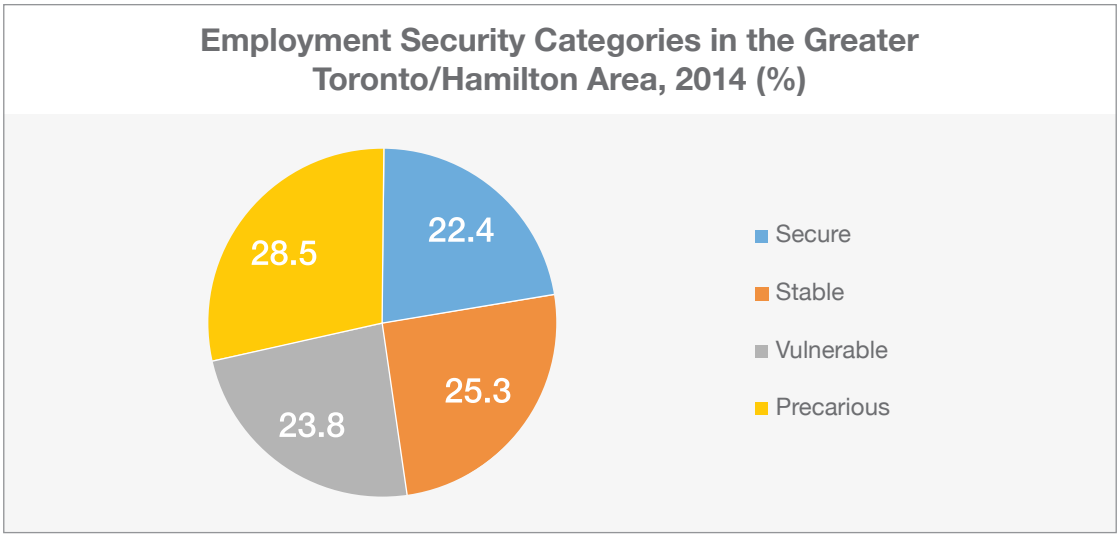
Growing income inequality reveals a fundamentally unfair and inefficient economic system. While many high-income earners bring impressive skills and experiences to the table, it is impossible to argue that their ballooning levels of compensation are commensurate with their actual contribution to the economy and society (Mackenzie 2014). Furthermore, when money moves from the bottom and middle of the income scale to the top, there is a reduction in consumer demand, because higher-income individuals tend to spend a smaller proportion of their income. This hurts everyone in the long run (Stiglitz 2011). Research also shows that inequality is associated with a range of social problems. Societies with lower levels of inequality experience better physical and mental health, as well as lower rates of crime, addiction, and teen pregnancy. They have better child well-being, better educational outcomes, greater social mobility, and higher levels of trust among citizens (Wilkinson and Pickett 2009).

Even conservative, market-oriented voices are becoming concerned about the consequences of inequality. The most recent report from the World Economic Forum (2015) states that unequal societies lack common values and social cohesion, which makes them harder to govern and increases the risk of "prolonged economic stagnation." Researchers at the International Monetary Fund have found lower inequality is "robustly correlated with faster and more durable [economic] growth," and only in extreme cases does redistribution have a negative impact on the economy (Ostry, Berg and Tsangarides 2014). TD Economics has cautioned that income inequality threatens social mobility and long-term prosperity (Alexander and Fong 2014). The Ministry of Finance (2014b) has acknowledged inequality is one of the "key risks" to Ontario's long-term economic outlook.

There is a tendency to believe inequality is a natural, inevitable feature of a market economy. However, the vast majority of citizens recognize that pronounced inequality threatens the fabric of society. Seven in ten Canadians believe the income gap is growing and this is making Canada a less fair country (Northrup and Jacobs 2014). While the public actually underestimates the magnitude of the wealth gap, more than 80 per cent believe political leaders should enact progressive policies to address the problem (Broadbent Institute 2014). Governments must act urgently on their mandate to restore fairness and opportunity to our economic system.

Ontarians need better jobs and wages

Too many Ontarians are being left behind by a weakened labour market and stagnant wages. Employment rates have still not returned to pre-recession levels. When jobs are available, they are too often of lower quality than the employment opportunities available to Ontarians in the past. Structural shifts have created what is known as an "hourglass economy": there are a good number of



SOURCE: Lewchuk et al. (2015)

high-paying jobs in technology and financial services at the top, but a growing proportion of the jobs are in retail and hospitality industries at the bottom (Zizys 2011). Unlike the manufacturing sector jobs that used to form the foundation of Ontario's labour market, these service sector positions tend to be low-skill, low-paying, temporary and/or part-time (Tiessen 2014). Adjusted for inflation, the median employment wage in Ontario decreased by 1.7 per cent between 2006 and 2012 (Mojtehedzadeh 2015).

More than one-fifth of workers in Ontario are now in "precarious" jobs, which are described as "having low wages and at least two or three other features: no pension, no union and/or small firm size" (LCO 2012). Employers get the benefits of flexibility and lower labour costs, but workers have to take on the risks and costs of insecurity and lack of protection (Gellatly 2015). Certain groups are more susceptible to precarious work, such as women, racial minorities, immigrants, Aboriginals, and persons with disabilities (Block et al. 2014). People working in precarious sales and service positions are more likely to be among the working poor (Stapleton, Murphy and Xing 2012). The limited income and unsteady schedules that come with these jobs can, among other things, lead to: poor health, tensions in the home, difficulty maintaining relationships, and limited engagement in the community (Lewchuk et al. 2015). Workers can be heartened that the government has recently launched a review of the province's workplace standards, with the intention of instituting reforms to reflect "the realities of the modern economy" (Ministry of Labour 2015a). However, we also need co-operation among stakeholders to support growth in industries that demand skilled labour and offer full-time, well paying employment. The prevalence of precarious, service sector work might not be so troubling if the minimum wage provided sufficient income. Unfortunately, even the recent increase of the minimum wage does not meet the needs of Ontario's lowest-paid workers. Using Statistics Canada's Low Income Measure, full-time workers will still be living 16 per cent below the poverty line. And it is not just teenagers who live with their parents that earn the minimum wage; there are also many adults who are trying to support themselves and their families. Among the provinces, Ontario is second only to Prince Edward Island in terms of the proportion of employees working for the minimum wage (Suprovich 2015). Sixty per cent of the Ontarians who earn less than $14.25 per hour are over 25 years of age (Block 2013). Forty per cent of the children living in poverty in Ontario are in a family with full-time, full-year employment (Khanna 2014).

We have all heard the scaremongering from business interests about the impact of minimum wage increases on the availability of jobs. Small businesses, in particular, are said to be highly vulnerable to rising labour costs. But nearly 50 per cent of minimum wage earners in Ontario work for large businesses with more than 500 employees (Edmonds and Sidhu 2014), and recent large-scale research has found almost no evidence of minimum wage increases leading to job losses (Brennan and Stanford 2014). As some business leaders acknowledge, higher minimum wages can help the economy over the long term by reducing turnover, boosting productivity, and increasing consumer demand (Schmitt 2013).

It is a welcome development that future minimum wage increases will be based on the rate of inflation. This mechanism has been supported by advocates on both sides of the debate (Hennessy, Tiessen and Yalnizyan 2013; McGuinty and Schwenger 2013). However, without an immediate, substantial increase, we will be leaving minimum wage earners in a perpetual state of need.

“While the earnings of a minority are growing exponentially, so too is the gap separating the majority from the prosperity enjoyed by those happy few.”

- Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium, Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Fathers Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today’s World* (Vatican City: Vatican Press, 2013), p.47.

Unions are still relevant

For more than two centuries, unions have fought for better wages, benefits and working conditions. Things many Ontarians and Canadians take for granted – such as health and safety legislation, weekends, paid vacation time, and parental leave – would not have been possible without an organized labour movement and a legal structure that permitted free and fair collective bargaining (OFL 2013a). Although much has already been achieved, unions are as necessary today as ever. As the Supreme Court of Canada (2015) put it, "Individual employees typically lack the power to bargain and pursue workplace goals with their more powerful employers. Only by banding together in collective bargaining associations, thus strengthening their bargaining power with their employer, can they meaningfully pursue their workplace goals."

The labour movement also contributes to the overall political culture. Unions are democratic, and their members tend to be more engaged with, and committed to, democratic processes. Canadian data indicate that higher union densities are associated with higher voter turnout (Sran et al. 2013). This is especially important because unions generally organize and advocate in favour of fairness, inclusivity, equity, and strong public services (Wilkinson and Pickett 2014).

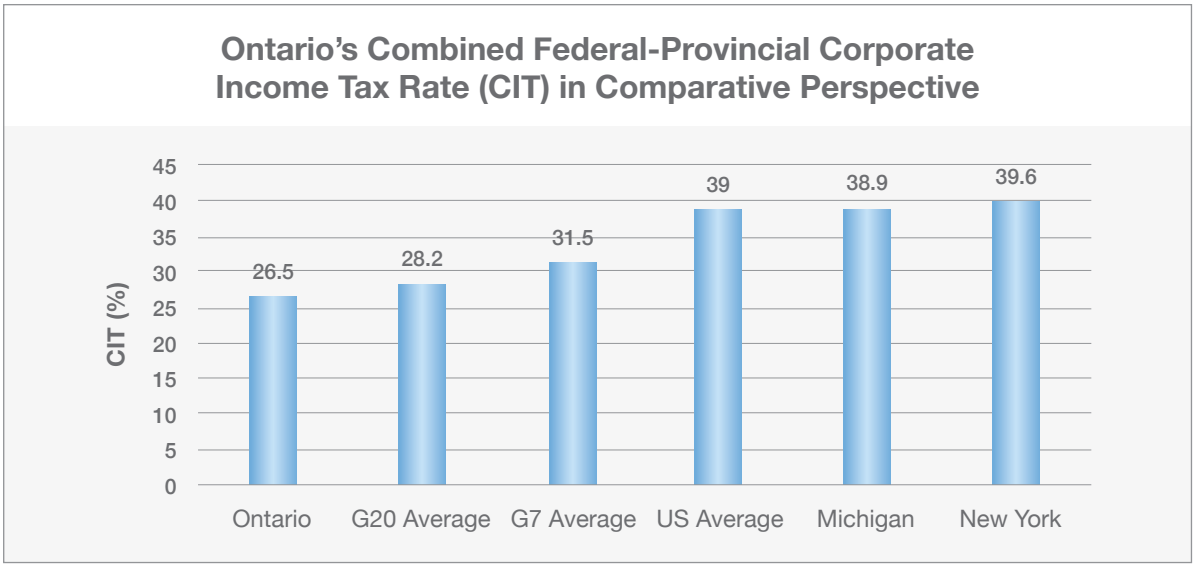
Despite these widespread benefits, unions have come under harsh criticism over the past 30 years. They are seen as inflexible and self-serving, and have been blamed for government debts, plant closures, and slow economic growth. Ontario voters recently rejected an agenda to dramatically scale back the province's labour laws, but federal and provincial governments have used legislation to interfere in the collective bargaining process in public and private workplaces. The federal government is also implementing new laws that will make it harder to form a union, and will impose overbearing financial reporting obligations that do not exist for other organizations (Nerenberg 2014; Gutstein 2014).

The attack on unions is already leading to consequences for Canadian society. Since the mid-1980s, the increase in the income share going to the top one per cent of earners, as well as the rise in Canada's Gini coefficient (a key measure of inequality), have mirrored the falling rate of unionization (Jackson 2013). There have been other factors at play, but Canadian economists have estimated the decline in unionization

contributed about 15 per cent of the rise in male wage inequality in the 1980s and 1990s (Fortin et al. 2012). This is in line with research from the International Monetary Fund examining advanced economies around the world, including Canada, which shows that declining union density has been a key contributor to the rise of top income shares (Jaumotte and Buitron 2015).

The facts also undermine the argument that unions are a burden on the economy. For example, researchers at the World Bank examined empirical studies on the macroeconomic effects of collective bargaining and found that higher union density does not hamper economic performance (Aidt and Tzannatos 2002). In so-called "right-to-work" jurisdictions in the United States, where unions have been weakened by laws permitting employees to opt out of paying union dues, declining unionization rates have failed to produce the economic growth and job creation that proponents would have anticipated. In most cases, wages have fallen and workplaces have become less safe and less productive,which has actually damaged these economies (OFL 2013b; Gould and Shierholz 2011). In Ontario, union members have negotiated an average of $6.42 per hour above the average wage for non-unionized workers, giving them an extra $366.2 million per week to spend in the economy (CLC 2013). This is why some seemingly unlikely sources, like former Conservative senator Hugh Segal, have become vocal critics of regressive reforms to our country's labour laws, insisting that free collective bargaining and fair wages are as important to economic growth as capital investment and profits (Thompson 2013).

There is certainly room for the labour movement to adapt to shifting economic and demographic conditions. Growth is occurring in industries and job types that have not traditionally been unionized. Meanwhile, young people are entering the workforce with more individualistic attitudes and some skepticism about the value of the labour movement in the modern context. This does not mean unions should abandon the major principles that have guided them over the years – solidarity, respect for seniority, and so on. However, it does mean they will need to find creative ways to reach out to workers on the margins of the labour market (Mackey 2013), and to train and encourage young people to take on leadership roles, so their voices can be heard at the bargaining table and beyond (Loreto 2013). When combined with governments' and employers' renewed respect for the collective bargaining process and the role of unions in our



SOURCE: Ministry of Finance (2015)

democracy, a refreshed union movement can continue acting as one of society's chief bulwarks against austerity and inequality.

Retirement security should be a priority

One of the most significant advances unions have pushed for over the years has been meaningful pension plans for retired workers. Ensuring financial security for citizens in retirement is a hallmark of a caring society and a necessary condition for maintaining a robust, sustainable economy. Unfortunately, Canada Pension Plan benefits are not sufficient, and the majority of Ontarians do not have a workplace pension plan to supplement their retirement income. This leaves too many people relying on private savings, or having no savings at all. It has been heartening to see pension security rise near the top of the political agenda in Ontario. However, we must be sure we are approaching the issue from the proper angle.

The public discourse around pensions is often clouded by rhetoric about unfairness or unsustainability, especially with regard to the defined benefit plans enjoyed by many public sector employees. But the evidence shows the advantages of the defined benefit pension model are unparalleled. Rather than tearing these plans down, we should aim to give more Ontarians quality of life and peace of mind in retirement (Lorinc 2013).

As Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan CEO Ron Mock (2014) has remarked, "By almost any measure, our defined benefit pensions are the most cost-effective retirement savings system in the country." Unlike individual savings arrangements, these plans can: pool longevity and asset mix risks; make large-scale investments in illiquid assets such as real estate and infrastructure; afford professional, in-house investment advisors; and keep administrative costs down. Furthermore, everyone in society shares in the benefits. Although the prevailing myth says these "gold-plated" plans are financed by tax dollars, the reality is that they derive most of their funds from investments, which spurs economic growth. And by giving recipients financial security, these plans relieve the government of potential cash transfers, health care payments, and other costs that would result from retirees not having enough income. A steady source of income also enables retirees to continue spending money in the economy and contributing tax dollars (Hatanka et al. 2013).

Under the guise of reducing costs and giving people more "choice," some commentators, advisors and politicians have recommended shifting from defined benefit pensions to defined contribution plans or "target benefit" arrangements (Nguyen 2014; Ovsey 2013). Neither of these routes is advisable. Defined contribution pensions are essentially individual savings plans, which expose workers to the whims of the market and cannot guarantee financial security in retirement. Furthermore, experience and modeling shows that converting a healthy defined benefit pension plan to individual-account defined contribution arrangements would actually increase the ongoing costs of the plan by 77 per cent, and reduce the proportion of the final benefit coming from investment returns from 75 to 45 per cent (Brown and McInnes 2014). Target benefit plans, which include fixed contribution rates but allow for reductions in benefits in the event of funding shortfalls, also provide no legal right to a predictable income. These arrangements fail to respect the fact that pension plans are "deferred earnings that exchange current compensation for a future pension

promise" (CLC 2014). Workers should be able to expect and depend on secure pension benefits when they retire.

Reducing poverty among senior citizens has been one of Canada's most remarkable policy achievements over the past few decades. Programs like the Guaranteed Income Supplement and Old Age Security set an income floor below which no senior citizen is allowed to fall. However, as the population ages, we need to think about how to provide stable, predictable, and adequate sources of income for all retirees. With wages stagnant and the cost of living rising, Ontarians are struggling to put aside funds for retirement. This is especially true for young workers who cannot find decent, full-time jobs. Statistics Canada data confirm that families with workplace pension plans are better off, and that those without employer pensions are not compensating through increased savings in other assets (Messacar and Morissette 2015). The government should set a clear example by demonstrating its commitment to the defined benefit pension model, and encouraging employers to follow suit.

Public services are valuable

The criticism of quality pensions for public employees is part of a broader assault on the value of the public sector. The neo-liberal policies promoted in Europe and North America since the 1970s have portrayed public services and public sector workers as inefficient, uncompetitive, and overly expensive. The sentiment was epitomized in former US President Ronald Reagan's first inaugural address in 1981, when he claimed that "government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem." Since the onset of the recession in 2008, the public sector has faced new challenges. Governments of all stripes have become enamoured of the idea that reducing their spending is necessary to avoid debt and restore confidence in the market (Blyth 2013). Ideas about the overextended public sector and the danger of deficits have become so pervasive that even socially conscious political leaders find it necessary to talk the language of austerity. The current Ontario government often touts its record as the lowest per capita spender on programs of any province in Canada, but this is a dubious distinction. Public services ensure the majority of citizens enjoy an enhanced quality of life (Mackenzie

and Shillington 2009). Clean drinking water, safe food, universal health care, public transportation and publicly funded education are just a few of the things we all enjoy because governments take the responsibility to provide them. In most cases, these goods and services must be offered by government because for-profit businesses will not produce them with the level of quality or equitable access we need. Public spending is also necessary to provide transfers and programs that help ameliorate poverty and inequality. Cutting funding or failing to keep up with necessary investments or maintenance costs might look good on a balance sheet, but these actions come with real consequences. And despite what political leaders usually claim, it is impossible to make such cuts without affecting frontline services (Macdonald and Hatt 2014).

Government expenditure is also an economic imperative. It has been shown that public spending has greater direct and indirect impact on GDP growth than spending by businesses or households (Somerville 2012). As is detailed in the Ministry of Finance's (2014c) *Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review*, reduced spending by the government is expected to hamper Ontario's GDP growth in the 2014-17 period.

Our investment in public services must include equitable, appropriate compensation for public sector workers. The only groups that enjoy a significant pay premium in the public sector are those that are paid remarkably low wages in the private sector: women, visible minorities, and those in low-skill occupations (McInturff and Tulloch 2014; Sanger 2011). In general, public employees working in high-skill, professional occupations are actually paid less than their private sector counterparts (ICP 2014). These people have been falling even further behind as a result of the government's austerity agenda. In 2013, collectively bargained agreements in the public sector included much smaller average annual wage increases than those in the private sector. The trend continued in 2014 and 2015 (Ministry of Labour 2015b). In many cases this has been the result of a policy of public sector wage freezes, which not only subverts the collective bargaining process but also undermines consumer demand and limits economic growth and tax revenues (Hennessy and Stanford 2013).

Progressive taxation supports the common good

The revenue problem is especially important. Tax cuts implemented from the 1990s onward have created a structural revenue problem for Ontario (Mackenzie 2012). As was acknowledged in the latest provincial budget, Ontario now trails all other provinces in revenue per capita. In order to finance a robust public sector, we need to think about expanding the tax base We also need to address the progressivity of the system, because there has been a steady shift of the tax burden away from businesses and high-income earners toward less affluent Ontarians.

The combined federal-provincial corporate income tax rate in Ontario is 26.5 per cent. This is among the lowest rates in Canada, below the average for both the G7 and G20, and significantly lower than the average for US states (Ministry of Finance 2015). It is reasonable to suggest that business activity should not be taxed excessively, as this could potentially discourage businesses from spending and growing. However, the recent experience in Ontario and throughout Canada has shown that reducing corporate tax rates to extraordinarily low levels is effective for increasing corporate profits, but not particularly helpful for attracting new companies or encouraging business expenditures on equipment, research and development, wage increases, or new employees (CLC 2014). When it comes to business decisions, other factors – like local infrastructure and the quality of the labour supply – are equally, if not more, important (Stanford 2014).

Similarly, Ontario's top personal income tax rates are among the lowest in the country. And the maximum threshold is $220,001, so the extremely wealthy (including the 118,000 millionaires living in Toronto alone) get to keep a much greater percentage of their income than other citizens (Goar 2015). Progressivity is further undermined by the fact that some forms of income, such as capital gains and inheritances, are taxed at lower rates than wages and salaries, or not taxed at all. These sources tend to make up a larger proportion of richer citizens' income, which "reinforces widening income inequalities and reduces the revenue collection capacity of the tax system" (Lee and Ivanova 2014). There are also a slew of boutique federal tax credits for things like children's fitness activities and home renovations that are overwhelmingly claimed by middle- and high-income earners (ICP 2013b). High-income citizens depend on public services and infrastructure – roads and bridges to move goods, police and courts to enforce laws and contracts, publicly funded education to nurture the labour force – to grow their businesses and increase their wealth. It is only fair that they should make a proportionate contribution to the public purse.
In addition to re-examining tax rates for corporations and high-income earners, the provincial government could pursue new (or, in some cases, old) sources of revenue. For example, as was done in Nova Scotia, Ontario could use the tax room that was vacated when the federal government cut the GST. Each additional point of HST would

raise more than $2.6 billion in revenue. Other possibilities include raising gas taxes, implementing carbon taxes, and/or removing employer health tax exemptions (Mackenzie and Hennessy 2013).

When governments are not collecting enough revenues to balance their budgets, the resulting misperception is that the public sector is bloated and spending needs to be dramatically reduced. However, while everyone wants to be sure that tax dollars are being spent efficiently and effectively, we also need to have a serious dialogue about what is required to fund the programs we all desire. Only with new revenues can the province address its short-term deficit while continuing to make the necessary investments in infrastructure and public services that will support Ontario's long-term health and prosperity (Ragan 2014). There can be honest discussions about the impact of taxes on work incentives or the efficient operation of the market, but we must start with the recognition that dogma about the economic benefits of low taxes is not supported by the evidence, while the significance of public spending in the lives of Ontarians is incontestable.

Conclusion

In the 2014 provincial election, Ontarians clearly demonstrated their distaste for austerity-focused policies that threaten public services and demonize public sector workers. Still, the provincial deficit continues to dominate the political discussion. The 2015 provincial budget makes impressive investments in infrastructure and public transportation, but does not provide sufficient funding to sustain our public services. And the government says it remains committed to balancing the budget by 2017-18.

It is certainly desirable to balance the budget over the long term. When governments borrow money, some tax revenues must be used to pay interest on what we owe. If credit rating agencies doubt that loans can be repaid, the cost of borrowing increases. But it is unwise to become preoccupied with the short-term deficit, and particularly foolish to imagine that the government's fiscal situation is analogous to that of a household (Krugman 2012). Governments have a range of means to access necessary resources. Furthermore, especially when the market is struggling, public spending is crucial for facilitating economic activity and protecting citizens. Cost-cutting measures that slash public services and lay off public sector workers lead to higher long-term social and economic costs.

In the recently released *Report of the Commission on Inclusive Prosperity*, an international group of politicians, academics and labour leaders exhorted societies like ours to move quickly in restoring notions of fairness and opportunity to our socio-economic systems. "We offer this report on the urgency of achieving inclusive prosperity because we believe democracy must serve this common good, the cause of social justice and the aspirations of parents for their children," said the authors. "For democracies to thrive, rising prosperity must be within reach of all of our citizens" (Summers and Balls 2015).

The members of the Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association could not agree more.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Support growth in industries that demand skilled labour and offer well-paid, full-time employment.
- Promote predictable, adequate sources of retirement income for all Ontarians.
- Invest in public services, including fair compensation for public sector employees.
- Improve the progressivity of the tax system, to increase revenues and reduce inequality.

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