

Brief

OECTA Submission to the Commission on Quality Public Services and Tax Fairness

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January 2012

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ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic
Teachers
ASSOCIATION

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ONTARIO ENGLISH
**Catholic
Teachers**
ASSOCIATION

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) represents 45,000 women and men who have chosen teaching careers in the Catholic schools in Ontario. These teachers are found in the elementary panel from junior kindergarten to Grade eight, in the secondary panel from Grade nine through Grade twelve, and occasional teachers in both panels, in publicly funded schools.

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1. OVERVIEW

- 1.01** The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) supports the Public Services Foundation of Canada and the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union in their objective to seek meaningful input on public sector reform from citizens and stakeholder groups from across the province. OECTA recognizes the importance of maintaining high quality front line services in the midst of government transformation, especially in the area of education, and advocates for taxation fairness, including in corporate tax policy. OECTA is pleased to provide its views on public sector reform to the Commission on Quality Public Services and Tax Fairness.
- 1.02** This brief suggests areas where OECTA supports public sector reform. First, a number of observations and recommendations are made in the area of education. The type of education reform that has occurred in Ontario is described and three aspects of Ontario's system, which point to an education system that has become increasingly top-down, are examined. These three characteristics are a growth of government assessment initiatives, an increase in school board administrators and a burgeoning number of senior Ministry of Education bureaucrats, who have been removed from the classroom for many years.
- 1.03** The importance of small class size is reinforced, with reference to the system-wide improvements that have coincided with the introduction of smaller classes in Ontario. The need to amend the education funding formula, to account for the real resource needs of special education programming, is discussed.
- 1.04** This brief also looks at the need for an expansion of the pan-Canadian public pension plan.
- 1.05** The issue of taxation is discussed, and the need to eliminate planned corporate tax to direct money to front line government services, is outlined.

OECTA makes the following recommendations for public sector reform:

- **Link education funding, as closely as possible, to teacher directed initiatives that support teachers and students in the classroom;**

- **Reduce government funding for assessment tools and materials by 50 per cent of current level;**
- **Adopt a random sampling model for EQAO;**
- **Reduce the size of Ministry of Education senior bureaucracy, and direct savings to front line classroom initiatives;**
- **Maintain current standards for small class sizes in Ontario schools;**
- **Remove the cap on the Special Incidence Portion of special education grants;**
- **Improve funding for special education programs to acknowledge need, not just overall enrolment levels;**
- **Continue to advocate that public goods and services be provided by public agencies and government;**
- **Support a phased-in doubling of benefits for the Canadian Pension Plan;**
- **Put a stop to planned cuts to already low corporate tax rates;**
- **That the provincial government lobby for a taxation system that addresses the massive inequity of income distribution that currently exists in Ontario.**

2. EDUCATION REFORM

2.01 Since 2003, sustained and increased investments in Ontario's publicly funded education system have helped our province excel in the area of education. Student achievement has increased. Student retention and graduation rates have improved. Parents have become more confident in publicly funded schools and teacher morale has boosted dramatically. Ontario is cited in numerous international studies for the great strides that have been made to close the gap between the highest and lowest achieving students. The steps Ontario has taken to address equity issues in the classroom, and to individualize programs to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population, are identified as key factors in its successful reform. Smaller class sizes, the implementation of full-day Kindergarten and improved relations between teachers and government have also been essential contributors to Ontario's achievements. These tangible improvements are requisite considerations in any meaningful review of Ontario's education system.

2.02 The challenge remains to reduce spending without sacrificing the gains that have been realized to date, or compromising the underlying conditions that have enabled progress to be made. Looking specifically at education, OECTA believes that a more critical lens should be applied to education dollars that are spent on initiatives not directly tied to the classroom. There is a broad consensus that expenditures in education are more cost-effective when they are closely connected to the classroom. When spending is removed from the classroom (when funding is directed at the administrative level, for example), the benefits to student learning are less apparent.

2.03 Growth of Top-Down Driven Initiatives

Levin, Glaze, and Fullan (2008) observed that Ontario's large-scale education reform has succeeded in integrating top-down and bottom-up forces in strong partnerships, while respecting teachers and professional knowledge. Levin (2007) added that Ontario has adopted a collaborative, rather than a top-down, approach to coherence. Levin pointed to the approach of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) to underscore this point, noting that Secretariat staff work cooperatively with school district leaders in order to ensure alignment of provincial and board strategies. Despite this characterization, Ontario's education reform has coincided with a growth of government initiatives in assessment and evaluation, and a proliferation of bureaucrats and administrators at the Ministry and school board level. These system features suggest Ontario has gradually developed into a "top-heavy" system.

2.04 A top-down approach to education reform has financial and pedagogical implications. There are economic ramifications because bureaucratic initiatives require significant government resources to administer. There are also pedagogical considerations. Research supports that top-down reform detracts from educators' teaching autonomy, and their ability to exercise their own professional judgement. Education theorists have argued that reform agendas are most successful when they are collaborative, research-based, and respectful of teachers' professional autonomy (Levin and Wiens, 2003; Fullan, Rolheiser and Edge, 2002). This type of change can be contrasted to reform that prescribes changes to schools, and imposes top-down demands on teachers. Research conducted through the Organization for Economic Co-operation and

Development's (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) established that students perform better when schools have greater autonomy over how students are assessed. Similarly, PISA concluded that when schools have responsibility to define their curricula and assessments, the result is system-wide improvement (OECD, 2010).

- 2.05** Education theorist Ann Lieberman (2000) criticized top-down reform in the United States, observing that "experts" play an instrumental role in developing curriculum materials, though they may be out of touch with classroom and teacher realities. Regarding the American context, Lieberman and Miller (2005) emphasized that top-down accountability systems have put pressure on schools to focus on standardized assessment results, leading to decreased attention on student learning. Lieberman has also written specifically on reform in Ontario, praising the Ontario model where teachers are able to choose and design their own professional development opportunities. This is put into practice through the Ministry of Education's Teacher Learning and Leadership Program. The Program is a professional learning opportunity that provides experienced teachers with the opportunity to assume leadership roles in curriculum, instructional practice, or supporting other teachers. The aims of the program are to create and support teacher professional learning, foster teacher leadership, and share exemplary practices (Government of Ontario, 2012). Lieberman praised the model as an example of how researchers, policymakers, and practicing teachers can work together successfully, instead of pursuing conflicting agendas (Lieberman, 2010).
- 2.06** Lieberman and Miller stressed that ideal education reform should enable teachers' practice, rather than prescribe it. Moreover, it must create incentives for teachers to increase their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and offer support for teachers who assume leadership roles in their schools. Lieberman and Wood (2002) expressed support for a "teachers teaching teachers" model of reform, centred on teachers' professional knowledge. Lieberman and Grolnick (2005) indicated that networks composed of teachers, schools, administrators, parents, and communities are optimal vehicles for collaborative, bottom-up reform.

OECTA Recommendation

Link education funding, as closely as possible, to teacher directed initiatives that support teachers and students in the classroom.

2.07 EQAO and the Increase in Assessment and Evaluation

The current government has increased its focus on results generated by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). EQAO results have become the key factor in the development of government policies and programs. This is in contrast to the intended objective of the EQAO, which was to provide evidence to help inform professional practice, assessments and focused interventions. EQAO results should add to current knowledge about student learning, building on the existing knowledge of educators and school boards.

2.08 There has been a burgeoning of personnel, in school boards and in the Ministry, whose positions can be characterized as a response to the province's demand for the generation and analysis of student achievement data. At the school level, principals and teachers are spending more of their time on tasks and initiatives related to testing. At a broader level, increased emphasis on the EQAO has contributed to a pervasive, assessment-driven culture across the school system, exacerbated by international pressure that emphasizes test scores as a measure of improvement. Yet, the reality is that these tests have little value for students, teachers, and parents.

2.09 As a result of the heightened focus on increasing student test scores, school boards are spending more of their Ministry-allocated funding to purchase assessment programs, resources, and tools. In addition to EQAO tests, school boards generate preliminary tests to gauge student readiness for EQAO tests. It is difficult to quantify the amount school boards actually spend in this area, because every school allocates money for these materials out of its school budget, drawing on Ministry funding that flows through various programs. The pressure to succeed on province-wide standardized tests leads some schools to use provincial monies allocated for purposes other than assessment, towards testing tools and materials. The result of spending precious school budget dollars on assessment materials is that students lose out in other areas: such as physical education or science equipment, musical instruments, and school events.

2.10 The government's current assessment approach, EQAO, tests every student. This is burdensome and expensive. Research shows that using large-scale, standards-based test results to compare and rank students and school boards does not

improve learning in the classroom (Leithwood, 2001). Meanwhile, parents have bought into an assessment-driven culture. Often, parents place too much importance on EQAO numbers as the primary factor of a school's success. Parents are driven to choose schools based solely on EQAO test scores and relocate to neighborhoods where schools have higher EQAO results. An EQAO test represents a snapshot of students' performance on a single day. It is not a comprehensive measure of student ability. The resources used to create, administer, and mark these standardized tests would be better deployed to support teachers and student learning in the classroom.

- 2.11** The Ministry's objective in relying heavily on standardized test data is to provide assistance in the areas of the system that need it most. Yet, schools and school boards already know where further attention is required. Teachers know better than anyone which of their students are struggling, and where more support is needed. In a review of the LNS 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 speaks to the ability of schools and boards to effectively assess student learning and provide accurate input as to what resources are needed, and where.

OECTA Recommendations

Reduce government funding for assessment tools and materials by 50 per cent of current level.

Adopt a random sampling model for EQAO.

2.12 Increase in School Board Administrators

The increase in senior administrators at the school board level (e.g., supervisory officers, directors of education) as evidenced over the last number of years, reinforces that Ontario has moved towards a top-down approach to education administration.

- 2.13** The provincial government made a tepid attempt to rein in senior administrative spending in previous budgets. The 2010 Ontario Budget asked boards to reduce spending on senior administration by 10 per cent (Government of Ontario, 2010).

In reality, these expenditures have continued to increase. Many school boards have maintained their spending on senior administrative salaries by accessing funding from other budget lines and accessing monies available to boards for student success initiatives.

2.14 The money that the Ministry currently uses to fund administration positions for the implementation of Ministry initiatives would be better spent in the classroom, to be used by teachers and for teachers. Linking education expenditures to the classroom allows funds to go further, as confirmed by sound pedagogical research.

2.15 Increase in Senior Bureaucratic Positions

There has been a significant increase in Ministry of Education bureaucrats, which is linked to a continually increasing number of provincial education initiatives. Many bureaucrats hold positions and job titles that did not exist in previous years. The majority of these individuals do not have recent classroom teaching experience. This trend is problematic because it points to a detachment between on-the-ground classroom realities and “expert” bureaucratic opinions. A lack of previous recent, relevant experience in front line teaching roles leads to more detached, impractical perspectives in curriculum and assessment materials. Hiring people with more recent classroom experience would infuse a relevant, first-hand approach to the development of curriculum and assessment materials.

OECTA Recommendation

Reduce the size of Ministry of Education senior bureaucracy, and direct savings to front line classroom initiatives.

3. CLASS SIZES

3.01 In Ontario, smaller class sizes have been phased in since 2003. A handful of economists, journalists and right-wing think tanks have questioned whether smaller class sizes are a wise investment, given the current economic situation facing Ontario. Those who say that class size is not a key determinant of student achievement are looking at education in economic terms. However, education is not a profit-driven business, and not all benefits to the system can be quantified. The real experts - students, teachers, and parents - will tell you that class sizes do matter. Smaller classes allow for individualized instruction, and increased

opportunities for valid student assessment and evaluation. Smaller class sizes give teachers more time to engage students and parents on an individual basis.

- 3.02** There is minimal research that has quantified the benefits of class size on students and teachers. However, what has occurred in Ontario's education system since the implementation of smaller classes is easily discernible. Student achievement has improved. Student retention and graduation rates have increased. Parents have become more confident in the publicly funded education system, and teacher morale has risen dramatically. These are tangible improvements that cannot be left off the balance sheet.
- 3.03** Ontario has been praised in international research for the progress that has been made in reducing the gap between highest and lowest achieving students. Ontario has worked on improving issues of equity in the classroom and individualizing programs to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Smaller classes have created a learning environment that enabled teachers and students to realize these gains. Moreover, smaller classes have facilitated successful implementation for the influx of new programs and initiatives introduced at the provincial level.
- 3.04** Today's classrooms are not the heterogeneous environments of days gone by. Teachers require sufficient time to meet the individual needs of every student, in order to sustain and improve upon the gains made in recent years. Smaller class sizes make it easier for teachers to identify students when they require further academic attention, and address students' psychological, social, behavioural, language and mental health needs. Common sense and several studies (Biddle and Berliner, 2002) support the need for smaller classes, especially in the primary grades.
- 3.05** Lowered classroom sizes have resulted in better learning environments, ample opportunities for meaningful assessment and evaluation, and more opportunity for professional dialogue and parent communication. There is certainly no credible evidence that shows that smaller classes do *not* benefit students. It does not make sense to consider reversing the progress that has been made in this

area, when class size has been inextricably linked to Ontario's successful education reform.

OECTA Recommendation

Maintain current standards for small class sizes in Ontario schools.

4. SPECIAL EDUCATION

- 4.01** The provincial government has been clear in its commitment to move all Ontario students forward. OECTA stands firmly behind this objective, but recognizes that targeting resources is the best way to serve the needs of students who require special programming. The current funding model in Ontario does not adequately address the diverse needs of students. An adequate funding formula will help to create a safe classroom environment, characterized by manageable class sizes and teachers who have the expertise required to address the needs of their students.
- 4.02** The current funding formula does not provide adequate funding for special education programming and other special needs, such as language. Specifically, the Learning Opportunities Grant, (designed to provide special programming for students from economically and socially challenging backgrounds, special education, and English or French as a second language), has never been funded at a level necessary to accomplish its intended objectives. Funding for the Learning Opportunities Grant should be increased, and linked to specific program expectations. The \$27,000 cap in the Special Incidence Portion of the Special Education Grant has not been altered, since the system was introduced in 1998.
- 4.03** More generally, the shift from needs-based to enrolment-based funding for special education programs has created funding inadequacies. The current approach leaves many boards underfunded, because there is no direct correlation between overall levels of enrolment and actual funding requirements for special education services. The student population varies from one school board to another. Accordingly, a per-student funding model is not an accurate measurement of student need.

4.04 The Ministry of Education is aware of the difficulties associated with the current funding model for special education, but reform has been slow in coming. The Ministry of Education need not be the only government source of funding for special education. Ministry collaboration is required to meet the varied physical, social, behavioural and mental health needs of students. This includes ensuring that students have access to a wide range of qualified personnel and appropriate facilities that they require. The support of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services are critical in the success of special education initiatives. Despite much discussion on the subject, progress has been slow to carry out inter-ministerial collaboration to meet special education needs. It is unrealistic to expect school boards to fund special education programs and services independently, without adequate support from government ministries.

4.05 With the reduction of dedicated special education teachers in some boards, classroom teachers have been charged with 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 and skilled intervention for students. There are areas where efficiencies can be realized in terms of resource allocation. For example, a portion of the money currently directed towards the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and other data-driven branches of the Ministry could be redirected to support special education programs.

OECTA Recommendations

Remove the cap on the Special Incidence Portion of special education grants.

Improve funding for special education programs to acknowledge need, not just overall enrolment levels.

5. PRIVATIZATION

5.01 In the midst of public sector reform, there is often discussion that emerges regarding evolving towards a privatized model of delivering certain services. Indeed, supporters of privatizing services tout its purported advantages,

including reduced cost and greater efficiency in service delivery - especially pertinent concerns in a context of public spending restraint.

- 5.02** However, studies show these advantages are not realized when public services are transitioned to privatized models. Private companies are in business to make money - the welfare of citizens and the broader community and economy are not of primary interest to them.
- 5.03** In their 2009 report, the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) found that public-private partnerships (P3s) can have a significant downside, contrary to the public interest. Decision-makers and the public often look to P3s as a way to deliver infrastructure and services at the lowest cost. In reality, P3s can end up costing governments more in the long term. Money borrowed by the private sector is more expensive than money borrowed by governments, and these costs are passed on to the public. Moreover, the lengthy, complex and costly procurement process can often outweigh the potential benefits of P3s (CUPE, 2009).
- 5.04** This process also lacks accountability, as Value for Money reports are usually only released to the public after P3 contracts have been signed and finalized (CUPE, 2009). Examples in the Ontario context evidence how "cost-effective" P3s have been. In December 2008, Ontario's auditor general found that Ontario's P3 hospital in Brampton cost the public \$200 million more than if the province had financed the project itself (Auditor General of Ontario, 2008).
- 5.05** When it comes to opening public services to the private sector - such as health and education - the risks are wide-ranging. Health system experts have debunked the myth that privatizing the health system leads to reduced government expenditures. A 2004 OECD policy brief observed that countries with significant private health insurance options tend to be those with the highest spending levels. The United States provides a useful example of this trend. Privatization increases the profits of private businesses - while resulting in job losses and a weaker social safety net for everyday Ontarians.

OECTA Recommendation

Continue to advocate that public goods and services be provided by public agencies and government.

6. PENSIONS

- 6.01** Adding to the public uncertainty about the economy is the looming impact of the baby-boomer demographic that is approaching retirement. Only 37.5 per cent of Ontario workers belong to an employer pension plan (Ontario Federation of Labour, 2009). Many Canadians have lost well-paying jobs, or their pensions have been put at risk, and are fearful that they may end up retiring without adequate pension income.
- 6.02** Aging Canadians are now faced with the prospect of working longer because they are not, or will not be financially ready to retire come age 65. OECTA believes that Canadians should not be left to “fend for themselves” in retirement. After a lifetime of working and contributing to the system, all Canadians deserve security and dignity when they retire.
- 6.03** In a climate of economic uncertainty, there is an increased need for a strong, public pension program. The 2008 economic recession evidenced the serious risks of private savings plans. Countless private pension plans took severe hits as a result of low interest rates, market volatility, and employer bankruptcies. Canadians share an interest in preserving their retirement future through national pension plans, because they enhance the economic system, while providing collective and individual security.
- 6.04** Many employees lost large portions of their savings that were held in Registered Retirement Savings Plans (RRSPs). In addition to market uncertainty, the excessively high management fees charged by the financial industry on investment products have further impacted RRSP returns for individuals. Management fees for retail equity mutual funds, of the kind which are commonly held in RRSPs, average 2.5 per cent to 3 per cent or higher, compared to the management expenses of one half of one percent for the Canada Pension Plan. RRSPs have failed to offset the decline in defined benefit pension plan coverage (Ontario Federation of Labour, 2011). Moreover, as noted in OECTA’s consultation

paper on the subject, the large majority of Canadians do not contribute to RRSPs and when they do contribute to RRPS, few make the maximum allowed contributions.

6.05 OECTA supports a defined benefit pension plan, which provides a pre-determined level of pension income (usually based on previous earnings), as an ideal model to provide long-term retirement income stability. Strengthening the current system would entail doubling benefits for the Canada Pension Plan (CPP). Expansion of the CPP would require a national discussion, and collaboration between the federal government and the provinces – but it would provide the pan-Canadian solution necessary to address this national issue. The CPP covers 93 per cent of employed Canadian workers, and is financed exclusively by workers and their employers. It is safe and secure, has very low overhead costs, and it can be carried from one job to another.

6.06 An additional 5.5 per cent of employment earnings in CPP contributions, with equal contributions from workers and employers, could finance a doubling of CPP benefits from 25 per cent to 50 per cent of insured earnings (Canadian Labour Congress, 2009). A doubling of CPP benefits should be phased in over time - over seven to ten years.

OECTA Recommendation

Support a phased-in doubling of benefits for the Canadian Pension Plan.

7. TAXATION

7.01 The issue of income inequality – the growing gap between high and low income earners – has become increasingly prevalent in Canadian society. “Occupy” movements from the previous year highlight the discontent among the large majority of individuals in Canada and worldwide with ever increasing income inequality.

7.02 A recent CCPA study identified Canada’s “CEO Elite 100” – an elite group of the highest paid CEOs, as listed in the TSX Index. These business figures earned an average compensation of \$8.38 million in 2010 – a 27 per cent increase from their average salary in the previous year. The report concludes, based on a

review of the available data, that soaring executive salaries have played an instrumental role in exacerbating income inequality in Canada (CCPA, 2012).

7.03 This data reinforces that importance of enhanced fairness in Canada's taxation system – a goal that will require national discussion. Provincial governments should play an instrumental role in advocating for taxation reform at the federal level, which addresses the growing inequality of society.

7.04 Corporate Tax Cuts

Various reports have commented that the province can no longer afford to pay for current levels of public services. OECTA believes that what Ontario cannot afford is the corporate tax cuts planned by the provincial government. Provincially mandated Corporate Income Tax (CIT) cuts have saved corporations more than \$2.4 billion per year (Robinson, 2011; "Drummond's dire message," 2011). Meanwhile, corporate tax cuts have failed to deliver their purported benefits to Canadians. A 2011 study by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) concluded that the beneficiaries of corporate tax cuts from 2000 to 2009 failed to create promised jobs for Canadians.

7.05 The working conditions, job security, and wages of front line staff have not increased, yet CEO salaries have continued to rise. Corporations are sitting on the extra profit they make off tax cuts – they're not creating jobs. Meanwhile, if these companies had paid the same tax rate as in 2000, federal and provincial governments would have collected an additional \$12 billion in revenue in 2009 (CCPA, 2011).

7.06 A 2011 Globe and Mail analysis of Statistics Canada figures showed that the rate of investment in machinery and equipment has declined, despite repeated reductions in corporate tax rates over the past decade. Businesses were expected to use extra money from repeated tax cuts to build offices and factories and purchase machinery and equipment. The Globe's analysis revealed, however, that investment in equipment and machinery has actually decreased (Howlett, 2011). Non-financial corporations that have enjoyed repeated tax cuts have amassed vast sums of cash, are paying out dividends, and are not reinvesting.

- 7.07** Noted economist Hugh Mackenzie (2010) supported that corporate income taxes are pointless in an economic sense and counterproductive fiscally. He notes that business tax cuts since the 1990s have contributed to Ontario's deficit, while failing to achieve their purported objectives. In a December 12, 2011 speech, Bank of Canada Governor Mark Carney delivered a warning that business must use their healthy profits to increase investments and productivity, which will result in higher wages, greater profits, and higher government revenues. His speech reinforced that repeated corporate tax cuts have left large corporations with increases in their revenues – but the pay-off has not been realized in the real investment rate. Even noted economist Don Drummond acknowledged that public policy changes such as cuts to corporate taxes have actually deteriorated productivity growth (Drummond, 2011).
- 7.08** Economist Jim Stanford further remarked that there is a lack of clear, empirical evidence in the literature that supports that business tax cuts will stimulate significant investments. Part of the issue, he observed, is that the research rarely takes into consideration the full range of key determinants of firm investment behavior. Stanford uses historical evidence to demonstrate that business tax cuts do not boost the economy. Moreover, they contribute to income inequality, since most of the income on capital benefits the wealthiest in society. Repeated corporate tax cuts have contributed to Ontario's increasingly regressive taxation system. These cuts put more money in the pockets of corporations, while decreasing government revenues and making life less affordable for Ontario families.
- 7.09** Given the skepticism surrounding their effectiveness, it is not the time to continue with the planned corporate tax cuts. Ontario can no longer afford the corporate tax cuts from the last ten years. Accordingly, OECTA supports a cancellation of government's previously stated plan to lower the general statutory CIT to 10 per cent by 2013. Corporate income tax levels in Ontario are already competitive when compared to other US and Canadian jurisdictions.
- 7.10** Lowering corporate taxes deprives the province of revenues that they desperately need, undermining the deficit reduction strategy. Scrapping the government's planned corporate tax cuts would result in an additional \$800 million in

government revenues (Benzie, 2011). This money is desperately needed to protect vital front line government services – not to put more money in the hands of some of Canada’s largest corporations.

OECTA Recommendations

Put a stop to planned cuts to already low corporate tax rates.

That the provincial government lobby for a taxation system that addresses the massive inequity of income distribution that currently exists in Ontario.

8. CONCLUSION

- 8.01** Since 2003, ongoing investment in Ontario's publicly funded education system has resulted in system-wide improvement, as indicated by international recognition and greater public satisfaction with the system. It is problematic to view the education system as akin to a business environment. Certain gains in our education system are more intangible and cannot be quantified by outputs and results. Gains such as lower classroom sizes have had intrinsic benefits. Lower classroom sizes enable teachers to address the varied academic needs of students and identify students' psychological, social, behavioural, mental health and language needs. Furthermore, they have resulted in better learning environments, opportunities for meaningful assessment and evaluation, and more time for professional dialogue and parent communication.
- 8.02** OECTA believes that we need to continue on the path we are on in Ontario, while simultaneously looking at areas where reform is prudent. When it comes to education, excellent outcomes result from maximizing education dollars that are tied closely to the classroom. Accordingly, government spending reductions should come from the bureaucracy and administration, not from the classroom. Reform efforts and assessment initiatives should be more closely linked to front line teachers.
- 8.03** With the plethora of administrators and bureaucrats at the Ministry and school board level, reform is becoming increasingly top-down. There is a need for government, school boards and education stakeholders to shift attitudes, so that education reform movements begin at the grassroots level. This approach is consistent with sound pedagogical research, respects teachers' knowledge and skills, and is a more fiscally prudent approach to education administration.
- 8.04** More broadly, reform to Ontario's public services must respect our shared values, which are intrinsic to our public services – values such as fairness, accessibility, and equity. Moving to privatize public services is not the answer. Historical evidence and sound research demonstrate that privatization often drives up costs over time, while compromising the quality of public services. OECTA believes that the government must continue to strive to address the relevant and serious issue of income inequality, by continuing to provide high-quality, stable public services. Government services that are accessible to all Ontarians – such as health care and education – help to reduce the gap between high and low income earners, giving every Ontarian an equal chance to succeed.

9. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.01** Link education funding, as closely as possible, to teacher directed initiatives that support teachers and students in the classroom.

- 9.02** Reduce government funding for assessment tools and materials by 50 per cent of current level.

- 9.03** Adopt a random sampling model for EQAO.

- 9.04** Reduce the size of Ministry of Education senior bureaucracy, and direct savings to front line classroom initiatives.

- 9.05** Maintain current standards for small class sizes in Ontario schools.

- 9.06** Remove the cap on the Special Incidence Portion of special education grants.

- 9.07** Improve funding for special education programs to acknowledge need, not just overall enrolment levels.

- 9.08** Continue to advocate that public goods and services be provided by public agencies and government.

- 9.09** Support a phased-in doubling of benefits for the Canadian Pension Plan.

- 9.10** Put a stop to planned cuts to already low corporate tax rates.

- 9.11** That the provincial government lobby for a taxation system that addresses the massive inequity of income distribution that currently exists in Ontario.

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