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# GRANTS FOR STUDENT NEEDS 2019–20

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## TO THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

December 2018

ONTARIO ENGLISH  
**Catholic  
Teachers**  
ASSOCIATION

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) represents the 45,000 passionate and qualified teachers in Ontario's publicly funded English Catholic schools, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

- 1.01** The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input regarding education funding for the 2019-20 school year and beyond. Evidence from around the world shows that education systems work best when education policy is developed collaboratively, and the co-operative professional relationship between policymakers and teachers in Ontario has been held up as a model for others to follow (Schleicher 2018; OECD 2011). Catholic teachers look forward to building on this process.
- 1.02** Publicly funded education in Ontario is a vital service, and the success of our students and graduates indicates that for the most part resources are being put to good use. There is always room for improvement, but the evidence shows that making our schools the best they can be does not require dramatic upheaval. Instead, school communities across the province have been clear and consistent that the most helpful course of action would be to provide safe, supportive, well-resourced environments for teachers and students to work and learn. As always, Catholic teachers will argue for investments in education that are effective, transparent, and designed to meet the needs of students, schools, and communities across Ontario.

## **2. EFFICIENT PRICE SETTING**

- 2.01** All Ontarians support government efforts to make efficient use of public funds. The better we allocate scarce resources, the more goods and services can be provided to citizens. But we must approach the conversation in the proper context. From an economic perspective, the argument in favour of public education rests first and foremost on grounds of efficiency. As we often see in the case of health care, a private system does a worse job for more money. The same holds true for the education sector, where wide variations in cost, quality, and available information make public financing and provision preferable. While the government has clearly signalled its intention to cut spending, we cannot allow buzzwords or ideology to take the place of well-considered public policy.

- 2.02** With regard to “efficient price setting,” the lack of specificity in the recommendations from the EY Canada report commissioned by the government indicates a limited understanding of education funding in Ontario. In reality, the very concept of per-pupil funding as it is currently practiced is an attempt at efficient pricing – a rough balancing of the resources required to serve the average student and the willingness of the government to fund them. Our concern is that the term is now being used as code for lower price, or for cutting services.
- 2.03** The question we should really be asking is whether the current levels of investment are sufficient to create quality working and learning conditions, and to fully meet students’ diverse needs. While there is no disputing that education funding has increased over the past 15 years, this has still failed to make up for structural shortages that were built into the education funding formula from its beginning (Mackenzie 2018; Mackenzie 2009). Rather than focusing our attention on cost savings, we should be considering how to allocate the appropriate level of resources for special education, mental health services, Indigenous education, and other areas.
- 2.04** It should also be noted that some current attempts at so-called efficient pricing have had negative effects for some students. For example, funding for class size based on board-wide averages inevitably means some students are in classes that are too large. The academic research shows that class size is an important determinant of student outcomes, especially for disadvantaged students and others who might have difficulty transitioning to the school setting (Schanzenbach 2014). Funding based on board-wide averages fails to provide the optimal learning conditions for every student.
- 2.05** Efficiency is an appealing goal, but the government must recognize that the first priority is to provide services that are of sufficient quantity and quality as to enable all students in Ontario’s publicly funded schools to reach their full potential. When it comes to public policy, sometimes less is not more.

### **3.0 OUTCOMES-BASED FUNDING**

- 3.01** Outcomes-based funding holds obvious intellectual appeal, especially for those who already have faith in market mechanisms. But all outcomes-based funding schemes are fraught, and education is an area to which the concept is particularly ill-suited. Most economists and policy experts would agree that education is complex and multifaceted. It can be difficult to determine causality from input to output, due to the number of potential intermediate factors. Moreover, the standard measures of performance – namely achievement tests – are notoriously unreliable.
- 3.02** The government has brought up the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) as a possible area for implementing an outcomes-based funding scheme, but this is exactly the wrong approach. The LOG is about attempting to level the playing field and, as much as possible, providing all students with equal opportunities to thrive in the classroom. Students who might be without certain resources in their homes or neighbourhoods are given access to them through their schools. But it is not reasonable to expect the LOG to overcome the structural and systemic barriers of poverty and social marginalization. Nor is it fair or productive to measure the impact of LOG investments through achievement tests or similar instruments. The positive benefits of the program could be evident in a wide range of areas, such as better nutrition, enhanced social development, increased confidence, or even long-term employment prospects. Even if we could measure these outcomes, it would be difficult to isolate the influence of LOG funding in relation to the positive or negative impact of other social factors, economic conditions, or education reforms.
- 3.03** There is impetus for reforming grants such as the LOG, but it is more important to ensure accountability for how funds are spent. In a 2017 report, Social Planning Toronto noted that the Demographic Allocation in particular, “as one of the very few unprotected grants, appears to continue to be paying for a wide range of general programs and filling in gaps in provincial funding for mandatory core services, despite the long-time recognition of this problem” (Queiser 2017). The report found that the Toronto District School Board alone diverts roughly \$61 million of LOG funding per year. When the provincial education funding formula was first developed in 1997, an expert panel recommended that LOG funding be in the range of \$400 million per year; however, the government of the day allocated only \$158 million

(Mackenzie 2015). With the grant having been severely underfunded from inception, and the funds having been regularly diverted, it is no wonder some observers have doubts about its efficacy. Rather than putting additional pressure on students to justify funding for the grant, the government should first make the necessary investments and ensure that resources are distributed appropriately by school boards.

**3.04** It is also crucial to keep in mind that in addition to efficiency considerations, government funding of education is meant to enhance equity. Publicly funded education promotes common values and boosts social cohesion by ensuring all children can share in the experience, regardless of their socio-economic background or geographic location. It is unclear how an outcomes-based model would fit with this value; instead, it could lead to inequity or even polarization. If some students are continuing to struggle socially or academically, it seems unlikely that cutting funding for services and supports would solve the problem.

**3.05** By almost any measure, Ontario's education system has made great strides over the past 15 years. We have fostered increased literacy and numeracy, advances in early childhood education, and a dramatic reduction in the number of low-performing schools. According to the latest results of the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Ontario remains one of the top-performing jurisdictions in reading, mathematics, and science (CMEC 2016; OECD 2016). We also have relatively small gaps in performance between high- and low-income students, and between Canadian- and foreign-born students. We should all be proud of these outcomes. To build on this success, the government should be providing the necessary resources and working collaboratively with education partners toward our shared priorities, not introducing new forms of competition and measurement.

## **4.0 ACCOUNTABILITY AND VALUE FOR MONEY**

**4.01** 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. For others it

can mean poverty, discrimination, and violence. At the same time, some students face individual health issues or learning difficulties.

**4.02** School is also where students learn how to live in the world; preparing them to meet life's challenges goes beyond teaching reading, writing, and math. While these basics are fundamental building blocks of learning, they are not adequate to prepare students for our rapidly changing economy, the complexities of an ever-changing society, or the rigours and demands of adulthood. 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 together.

**4.03** Going "back to basics" or reforming the education system to focus on "core programming" will not help students develop into productive, engaged, and responsible citizens – which, in the end, is what teachers, parents, and the public all want. Although there are certainly opportunities for inter-ministerial collaboration and innovative forms of service delivery, we must begin with the acknowledgement that it is only when our schools are safe, welcoming, and adequately resourced for all students and teachers that we will get the most out of our investments in publicly funded education.

#### **4.04 Mental Health**

There is broad consensus among teachers, students, parents, and health care professionals that significant investments are needed in mental health supports. The government has said it will spend \$1.9 billion over 10 years on mental health and addictions services, but it is unclear how much of this funding will be directed to children and youth.

**4.05** Up to 70 per cent of mental health issues emerge by adolescence, but young people remain the least likely of any age group to receive adequate care. According to the most recent data, almost 20 per cent of students in Grades 7 to 12 in Ontario report their mental health as fair or poor, but nearly a third of those who wanted to speak to a professional about their mental health issues over the past two years did not know where to turn (Boak et al. 2017). More than 12,000 children and youth are

waiting to access mental health services, many of whom are having to turn to emergency services through clinics and hospitals (CMHO 2018; MHASEF Research Team 2017).

**4.06** Beyond the stress this causes for families and households, not to mention the strain on the health care system, it is also well-established that undiagnosed or untreated mental health issues are a significant impediment to student engagement and achievement. By providing more mental health supports in schools, where children and youth spend much of their time, we can reduce stigma, connect students to their communities, and deliver more responsive, cost-effective service, leading to better health outcomes and improved academic performance. Progress has been made through programs like School Mental Health ASSIST and Mental Health and Addiction Nurses in District School Boards, but we are still 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.

**4.07** Naturally, the mental health needs of students, and the accessibility of services, varies in accordance with the population and geography of our school communities. We must ensure that rural schools and/or schools with lower student populations are not disadvantaged in terms of access to services. This is an area where co-ordination between the Ministry of Education and other ministries, and further exploration of the community hub model, could be effective.

#### **4.08 Safer Schools for All**

For several years, our Association has been discussing the increasing frequency and severity of violence and harassment against teachers, especially at the elementary level. In our recent survey of classroom teachers, 85 per cent of respondents said the incidence of violence is increasing, while 80 per cent said incidents are becoming more severe. This has repercussions for everyone in the school community. More than three-quarters of respondents said violence in schools makes teaching more difficult, and more than a quarter have had to take time away from work due to the physical or mental toll of a violent incident (OECTA 2017a).

**4.09** Some progress has been made over the past few years in terms of standardizing and enforcing reporting procedures, but there is still a long way to go to fully implement the solutions outlined in our *Safer Schools for All* platform (OECTA 2017b). Most importantly, more professional services, such as child and youth workers, social workers, and psychologists, are required to help students deal with their social, emotional, and behavioural needs. These investments will help students manage their behaviour and achieve academic success in the short and long term, enabling teachers and the rest of the school community to focus on making learning happen in a safe and secure environment.

#### **4.10 Special Education**

Increased funding for special education over the past decade has paid dividends. For example, according to EQAO data, in 2009-10, 27 per cent of Grade 3 students with special education needs were at or above the provincial standard in reading; in 2017-18 it was 46 per cent. For Grade 6 students with special education needs, the percentage at or above the provincial standard increased from 34 per cent in 2009-10 to 54 per cent in 2017-18.

**4.11** Still, schools across the province are having difficulty providing for all students' special education needs. It has been reported that more than 80 per cent of school boards are spending more on special education than they are allotted by the province, and some students are being asked to stay home because their school is not able to provide appropriate services and supports on a daily basis (Rushowy and Ferguson 2015). Only 72 per cent of rural elementary schools report having a full-time special education teacher, and the average ratio of students receiving special education support to special education teachers is 36:1 in elementary school and 74:1 in secondary school (People for Education 2018).

**4.12** Catholic teachers were particularly disappointed by the government's decision to cancel the planned increase to the Special Incidence Portion (SIP), which has been capped at \$27,000 since 1998. This amount is well below the salary grid for educational assistants and is not nearly enough to cover the increasing costs of specialized staff and necessary materials. The planned increase to SIP would have enabled schools to hire additional staff to support students with special education

needs, which would have improved the learning environment for everyone. While Catholic teachers recommend a variety of investments in special education, at the very least the planned increase in funding that students, families, and schools were counting on should be immediately restored.

#### **4.13 Education Quality and Accountability Office**

There are serious and well-founded concerns about the stress that high-stakes testing causes for students, teachers, and administrators (Kempf 2016). Although EQAO tests are supposedly not meant to be used to rank schools, we know they are often employed as a basis for comparison. Trustees and superintendents feel nervous about how their schools will measure up, which leads to pressure being exerted on principals, who pass it on to teachers, who then have to spend weeks focusing on the specific types of questions and answers that will be found on the tests. If results in one year are deemed unsatisfactory, the anxiety is only heightened the following year. We also know that some boards and schools are diverting funds toward test preparation materials.

**4.14** Students most especially feel the pressure to perform well on EQAO tests – and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test is a requirement to graduate. The stress and anxiety exacerbates learning challenges, mental health issues, or other issues that students are experiencing, and often negatively affects their performance.

**4.15** To make matters worse, province-wide standardized testing does not give an accurate reflection of student ability, because it only captures a moment in time and fails to account for the range of skills and factors that affect achievement. While some argue that standardized testing provides essential information to improve student achievement and ensure the education system is accountable to taxpayers, the reality is that teachers already use our professional judgment to conduct assessments for, as, and of learning, which we then use to modify our instruction and provide individual attention, as well as to complete provincial report cards (OTF 2017).

**4.16** Clearly, standardized testing is not a good use of education resources. If the government still believes that some sort of province-wide testing is necessary, they should at least move toward a random sampling model. This would produce accurate

results at a fraction of the current costs, 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.

#### **4.17 Full-day Kindergarten**

The long-term benefits of public investments in early childhood education have been recognized by groups such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD 2012), TD Bank (Alexander and Ignjatovic 2012), and the Conference Board of Canada (Alexander et al. 2017). In Ontario, parents, teachers, early childhood educators (ECEs), administrators, and researchers agree that the FDK program is preparing children socially and academically, leading to better outcomes in later years (Alphonso 2017; Janmohamed 2014).

**4.18** When the program was developed, the teacher/ECE teams were recommended based on pilot tests in Ontario and elsewhere, in which teams were found to add to the professional preparation and skillset of each team member (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 benefitting from the program is that the staff teams are uniting around the mission to support children and families (Pelletier 2014). It is imperative that a teacher and ECE be present in the classroom at all times during the instructional day.

**4.19** Ontario's FDK program is a ground-breaking, world-leading initiative. The investment will continue to pay dividends long into the future, for individuals, families, the economy, and society. We should continue to support and improve the FDK program so it can honour its original promise.

#### **4.20 Indigenous Education**

The 2015 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission drew attention to a number of issues pertaining to Indigenous youth and education. While much of the focus has been on students attending on-reserve schools, it is important to note that in Ontario the majority of Indigenous students attend a provincially funded school. In fact, there are Indigenous students in almost every community: 92 per cent of

elementary schools and 96 per cent of secondary schools have at least some Indigenous students (Gallagher-Mackay et al. 2013).

**4.21** By now, most Ontarians recognize the importance of integrating the curriculum with Indigenous perspectives. This year, 74 per cent of elementary schools and 84 per cent of secondary schools report having offered at least one Indigenous learning opportunity, a substantial increase from 2014 (People for Education 2018). However, Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators still need support and resources to ensure they are properly integrating Indigenous history and knowledge in the classroom. This is why Catholic teachers and others across Ontario were so disappointed that one of the government's first actions upon taking office was to cancel planned curriculum writing sessions. We strongly urge the government to reconvene these sessions at the earliest opportunity.

**4.22** There are also significant resource gaps in schools with high proportions of Indigenous students compared to other schools in the province, including lower than average access to guidance teachers, teacher-librarians, and music and physical education programs (Gallagher-Mackay et al. 2013). These gaps must be overcome if we are going to address the well-known achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. Significant steps were being made in this regard – increasing funding and collecting data on a voluntary basis in order to provide appropriate programs and supports. The new government should not turn its back on these efforts. Integrating Indigenous students into their school communities and enabling them to realize their full potential will reduce marginalization and pay significant social and economic dividends over the long term (Sharpe and Arsenault 2010).

#### **4.23 English Language Learners**

Currently, funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) programs is based on census data and immigration statistics. While these figures provide an estimate, they do not accurately reflect English Language Learners' needs based on actual proficiency. This problem was noted 15 years ago by the Education Equality Task Force, which also condemned the inadequacy of the duration of supports, a sentiment echoed more recently by the Auditor General of Ontario (2017). The current funding formula also "fails

to recognize the additional costs associated with higher densities of ESL needs in areas with high levels of immigration,” while a lack of oversight and transparency mechanisms means some school boards might not be spending the funds on programming for students who need support (Mackenzie 2017).

- 4.24** English Language Learners often require additional supports to acclimate to a new school and culture, especially those who have recently arrived to Canada. These resources help English Language Learners connect to their schools and communities, which in turn contributes to their academic success. Investing more in English language supports, including properly trained teachers, will ensure students are able to interact with their peers, achieve academic success, and ultimately contribute in our society.

#### **4.25 Adult and Continuing Education**

Adult and continuing education programs are funded at roughly two-thirds the level of regular day school credit programs, which has previously been calculated to result in annual underfunding of \$112 million (Mackenzie 2015). In June 2017, the government announced \$185 million in funding over four years, as part of Ontario’s Lifelong Learning and Skills plan, but this still is not enough to close the gap. At the same time, funding allocations from Special Purpose Grants are directed only toward students in the regular day school program, even though in many cases adult and continuing education programs are being delivered to new immigrants or students who have been marginalized from the regular day school credit program. As result, students who have significant needs are often dealing with large class sizes, different classes being delivered in the same room, and a lack of early intervention processes, while teachers are often employed from contract to contract, with substandard salaries, working conditions, and rights. Funding is required so that school boards can provide the necessary supports to improve language skill assessment. At the same time, adult learners require additional and specific mental health supports to improve chances for successful completion of their respective programs.

- 4.26** Across Canada, one in five working age adults lack basic literacy and numeracy skills (Drewes and Meredith 2015). Research has shown that raising literacy skill levels would yield an annual rate of return of 251 per cent, with savings of \$542 million across the country on social assistance alone (Murray and Shillington 2011).

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. Proper funding for adult and continuing education programs will undoubtedly provide value for money in the short and long term.

#### **4.27 Professional Development**

Teachers are dedicated lifelong learners, who continually upgrade our knowledge and skills, often on our own time and at our own expense, to ensure that we keep abreast of what is current and effective in our classrooms. Thousands of teachers have taken advantage of opportunities over the past few years to upgrade and refine our skills in math and technology (OCT 2017). The government has recently moved to implement a math test for incoming teachers, but a more fruitful method would be to ensure that teachers have the resources and supports necessary to deliver math content in the classroom.

**4.28** A prime example of this type of professional learning is the Teacher Learning and Leadership Program (TLLP). In the final report on the 2017-18 program, a group of respected education researchers once again found that “by providing the conditions (funding, training, and ongoing support) for a self-selected and self-directed professional development effort, the TLLP facilitates active, collaborative learning that is embedded in teachers’ work, informed by evidence, and provides opportunities for authentic leadership experiences.” The benefits of this learning are enjoyed not only by the teams involved, but by the whole school community. “TLLP projects have a positive effect on students’ engagement, attitude, and learning experience” the researchers found, and “some TLLP projects help develop better connections with parents and local communities as well” (Campbell et al. 2018).

**4.29** With any curriculum changes that are made, it is imperative that more resources are provided for this type of teacher-led, teacher-directed professional development – the most efficient and effective form of professional learning. This will ensure that our knowledge is relevant and up-to-date, based on the current, job-embedded experiences of our colleagues, and designed to address the needs of our students (CEA 2015; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1995).

#### **4.30 Holding School Boards to Account**

While we believe our students and schools deserve additional investments, teachers are also concerned about how resources are allocated, and whether school boards are held accountable for their decisions. For example, our Association has for many years been raising the issue of how school boards are using Special Purpose Grants, such as the Learning Opportunities Grant or funds for English as a Second Language programs. Since they were first implemented, the proportion of these grants that goes to services targeted toward students in need has been dramatically reduced, because with an overall education budget that does not match student needs, and legal pressure to balance their books, school boards must use these grants to fill gaps in funding for core programs and expenses (Brown 2013; Casey 2013). The Toronto District School Board attracts most of the media attention in this regard, but Catholic teachers report similar problems elsewhere in the province.

**4.31** It is imperative that new funds for mental health services, special education programs, professional services and supports, and other initiatives are spent as intended. Rather than scaling back reporting requirements, we should be strengthening the process by which funds are distributed and allocated. In many cases, there is still no clear process to determine how allocations are made until after funding has been distributed. To hold school boards to account, there should be an annual process of consultation with teacher representatives at each school board regarding locally determined expenditures, as well as prompt reporting with real-time transfers of data where possible.

**4.32** Occasional teacher funding is another area of concern. There have been several media reports in recent months pointing to a shortage of occasional teachers available to fill vacancies. The data we have seen show that, in some cases, as many as 40 per cent of vacancies are not being covered. This appears to be an issue in all publicly funded education systems in Ontario. There are legitimate reasons why there might be fewer occasional teachers available than in past years. Some teachers who had previously been seeking permanent positions may have moved on to other work, while reduced enrolment in teacher education programs is resulting in fewer graduates. However, it is also possible that school boards are deciding not to fill absences as a means of saving money. In some cases, teachers are being pulled from other classrooms or specialized programs, which creates

shortages in coverage elsewhere in the school and undermines program delivery. It is imperative that the government ensure school boards are filling teacher absences appropriately. For every absence that goes unfilled, the strain on other teachers and staff in the school is increased, and students are denied a day of quality learning.

- 4.33** OECTA members believe that as much as possible, school boards should be directing funding toward the fundamental ingredient in a successful education system: the interaction between a well-trained teacher and a well-supported student. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. We are particularly troubled that a number of school boards are turning to organizations such as School Boards' Co-operative Inc. (SCBI), to advise them on issues of worker's compensation, health and safety, and attendance management, despite the fact that boards already employ staff for these purposes in schools and central offices. Companies such as SBCI hide their data and methodology from the public, making it impossible to verify findings. This is especially problematic given that SBCI profits by promoting these unverified findings and selling one-size-fits-all solutions. This is a poor use of education funding, which is not in the interests of students or school communities.

## **5.0 OTHER EDUCATION FUNDING EFFICIENCIES**

- 5.01** Publicly funded Catholic schools have made significant contributions to the overall excellence of Ontario's world-renowned education system. In addition to teaching literacy, math, science, and other skills, we are developing students' character and commitment to the common good, encouraging them to be discerning believers, creative and holistic thinkers, self-directed learners, caring family members, and responsible citizens. There are almost 650,000 students attending publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario, including many non-Catholic students whose parents have chosen the system's high standards and well-rounded methods for their children.
- 5.02** There is a common misconception that merging Ontario's school systems could save a significant amount of money, but history and scholarship suggests the opposite is true. Dr. John Wiens, former Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba, put the matter succinctly: "If it's about money, I think there is actually no evidence to show at all that anybody has saved money by [consolidating boards]"

(CBC 2016). In Alberta, a study of the restructuring of the school system in the late 1990s found that the implementation costs associated with the mergers exceeded any resulting savings (Pysyk 2000). Ontario's experience with school board amalgamation in the late 1990s led to hundreds of millions of dollars in costs for transition and restructuring. Even conservative organizations like the Fraser Institute have found that amalgamating large organizations almost always results in high transition costs and limited long-term savings (Miljan and Spicer 2015).

- 5.03** At the same time, there are opportunities to make more efficient use of education resources, by using provincially funded buildings in more collaborative ways and incentivizing inter-ministerial and municipal co-operation. One potential avenue is shared facilities, specifically for coterminus boards. In its 2014-15 Pre-Budget Consultation Summary, the government noted that "co-locating the schools of coterminus boards in the same facility was an idea with fairly broad support" (Ministry of Education 2014). Naturally, this would have to be done while protecting each school system's unique framework and structures, but there are significant opportunities to make efficient use of resources while ensuring that more communities have access to important public services.
- 5.04** There are several successful examples of such arrangements in Ontario. The Humberwood Centre houses Holy Child Catholic School, Humberwood Downs public school, a branch of the Toronto Public Library, the Humberwood Community Centre, as well as the 280-space Macaulay Child Development Centre. In Brantford, St. Basil's Catholic Elementary School and Walter Gretzky Elementary School each have a wing in the 90,000-square-foot shared facility. These sorts of shared facilities can be helpful in maximizing cost efficiency, especially in rural areas where enrolment declines have raised the specter of school closures. In addition to co-location, Ontarians can also benefit from shared services agreements. A case study feasibility analysis of 11 Ontario school boards revealed that shared services in areas such as energy and transportation could produce ongoing annual savings of \$3 to 8 million per year, which would represent a 13 to 28 per cent savings on these boards' annual total expenditures (Deloitte 2012). Ultimately, exploring options for shared services agreements and co-locating schools is a far more effective approach than board amalgamation, not only in meeting the needs of students and communities, but also in making efficient use of school space.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

- 6.01** There is a widespread belief that public spending in Ontario is excessive. In reality, Ontario has the lowest per capita spending on public programs of any province (Ministry of Finance 2018). Even in the area of elementary and secondary education, per capita spending in Ontario is among the lowest in the country (Statistics Canada 2018).
- 6.02** A four per cent cut to the education budget would have devastating effects on student well-being and achievement. It would also undermine the government's stated goal to make Ontario "open for business." As we have shown, spending on education is one of the smartest long-term investments a government can make in social cohesion and economic prosperity.
- 6.03** Providing proper resources for publicly funded education is the right thing to do. To help students learn how to live and work together, develop the necessary knowledge and skills, and grow into engaged, caring, and responsible members of the community, we have to provide them with appropriate learning environments. Teachers, parents, and the broader public are counting on the government to keep this in mind, and to work with others in the education community to provide the necessary conditions for students to succeed at school and in life.

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