

Submission to the
Ministry of Education
on Class Size and
Full-day Kindergarten



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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OECTA is prepared to share its views with the government on Regulation 274 and the matter of class size and Full-day Kindergarten. We believe that our participation in this process is in the interest of the students in particular and the education system in general. However, OECTA is firmly of the view that these three issues are issues for collective bargaining under the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act*. In particular, these matters are and have been issues for central bargaining under the Act in which the government is a participant in the collective bargaining process. Our participation in these discussions should not be viewed as a waiver of the rights of OECTA and/or its members to legally challenge any government decisions and/or actions which may result in prejudicing or infringing upon our statutory or constitutional rights. Once again, we urge the government to deal with these three issues in central bargaining, which is to commence this summer. Any government decisions and/or actions resulting from this process which affect OECTA and its members will be viewed as a circumvention of our statutory rights and a violation of our constitutional rights.

CLASS SIZE MATTERS

Experts have reached a consensus on the benefits of smaller class sizes. For example, after a thorough review of the research, Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach (2014) of the US National Education Policy Center concluded, "Class size is one of the most-studied education policies, and an extremely rigorous body of research demonstrates the importance of class size in positively influencing student achievement."

In the most comprehensive and well-known study, the Tennessee STAR project, assessment results consistently favoured those students who had been in small classes, with carryover effects lasting throughout their academic careers (Finn et al. 2001; Krueger and Whitmore 2000; Mosteller 1995). In Ontario, even before the introduction of class size reduction policies in the early 2000s, analysts from Statistics Canada concluded that teachers and public resources aimed at reducing class size could influence student achievement (Tremblay, Ross, and Berthelot 2001). In a more recent meta-analysis of studies from across North America, Europe, and the Antipodes, smaller classes were shown to have a strong impact on student achievement, with the benefits almost always outweighing the costs (Zyngier 2014).

Of course, by now we should all recognize that achievement tests are not the most reliable or consequential measure of education quality or student achievement. Smaller class sizes are perhaps more important for their pedagogical and non-cognitive effects. Smaller classes enable teachers

to spend more time on instruction and less time on classroom management, while students remain on-task and engaged with the teacher, their classmates, and the subject matter (Finn and Achilles 1999).

Reductions in class size have also been associated with improvements in students' psychological engagement with school, more positive reactions to teachers and peers, higher levels of interest and motivation, lower levels of boredom and anxiety, a greater sense of belonging, and more optimism and confidence (Dee and West 2011). While class size reductions are generally targeted toward primary students, these factors also point to the benefits of smaller classes for junior, intermediate, and secondary students, who are often dealing with a range of intellectual, social, and emotional challenges while struggling to develop "the skills of productive citizenry." All students need the time and attention of a dedicated teacher, which can only be guaranteed if class sizes are manageable (Wasley 2002).

Given the current discussion in Ontario about value for money, we should also consider the long-term socio-economic effects of smaller class sizes. Here again, the weight of the evidence suggests significant gains (Fredriksson, Öckert, and Oosterbeek 2011; Krueger 2003). Muennig and Woolf (2007), for example, have found that due to the increased earnings of students who benefit from smaller class sizes, as well as public savings in terms of lower health and welfare costs, reducing class size is a cost-effective policy over the long run. In another project, researchers found that while in some cases the impact of smaller class sizes on test

scores might fade out over time, the non-cognitive gains that influence long-term academic and economic success remain (Chetty et al. 2011).

Smaller Classes in Ontario: Reaching Every Student

The reduction of class sizes in Ontario is a prime example of the considerable progress we have made in strengthening our publicly funded education system over the past 15 years. Research has confirmed that class size reductions have enabled teachers to use a variety of instructional strategies, and created more opportunities for students to develop higher-order thinking, and interact with their teachers and other professionals more frequently. In short, students learn more, are more engaged, and are less disruptive (Bascia 2010a).

In keeping with findings from around the world, Ontario's experience has shown that while smaller classes certainly benefit all students, the gains are especially pronounced for those who have traditionally been disadvantaged, including students with special education needs. For example, parents have found that smaller classes enable teachers to more quickly identify learning challenges and create a sense of community, which works to reduce bullying. Similarly, principals have noted the increase in individualized instruction provided to students with special needs who are integrated into regular primary classes, as well as the greater likelihood of identifying special needs. Teachers have reported that in smaller classes, it is more feasible to implement government initiatives and professional learning in, for example, differentiated pedagogy, balanced literacy, and inclusive education (Bascia 2010b).

Since class sizes were reduced in Ontario, student performance has improved, and achievement gaps between students have narrowed or closed. For instance, Ministry of Education (2014) data show that students participating in English as a Second Language programs now perform about as well as the general student population, and the gap between students with special education needs and the general student population has shrunk considerably. International observers have been particularly interested in our success in reducing the influence of socio-economic background on student outcomes. Ministry officials such as Nancy Naylor (2007) have previously said that the class size reduction initiative, in combination with the other major reforms carried out at the time, contributed to improvements in student achievement.

Teachers have long recognized the relationship between class size and our ability to reach every student. In a 2005 survey for the Ontario College of Teachers, 91 per cent of respondents said that smaller classes would do the most to improve student learning (Jamieson 2005). Similarly, Catholic elementary teachers most often suggested reducing class size when asked to identify the most effective means of addressing issues in their classrooms, including the integration of students with special needs (OECTA 2006). A survey by the Canadian Teachers' Federation identified class size and class composition, which considers the diversity of student needs within the classroom, as the top concerns of teachers across the country (Froese-Germain, Riel, and McGahey 2012). In Manitoba, where caps on Kindergarten to Grade 3 class sizes were removed last year, 74 per cent of teachers say they are less able to provide individualized

attention to students, and three-quarters say their effectiveness has been compromised (Turenne 2019).

There is a common criticism that teachers like smaller classes because they decrease teacher workload. The reality is that teachers work just as hard in smaller classes – but we are less stressed, less stretched, and therefore more effective (Haughey, Snart, and da Costa 2001; Achilles 1999). Our advocacy for smaller class sizes – including hard caps rather than manipulable board-wide averages – is based on our experience in the classroom, and our genuine dedication to ensuring that every student has a fair chance to succeed. Together with parents across the province, we will continue to advocate for the resources and learning conditions that will enable us to do our jobs to the best of our ability. (Further perspectives from current classroom teachers are attached to this submission as Appendix A.)

An Essential Ingredient in Quality Education

Critics and advocates of small class sizes are in agreement on one element of the debate: class size reduction is not a magic bullet that will remedy all other issues and significantly raise student achievement on its own. Nobody could argue that smaller classes will be effective without also paying proper attention to the other resources and services being provided to students. However, whereas skeptics suggest that the funds devoted to class size reduction policies could be better spent elsewhere, proponents rightly argue that small class sizes should be a part of any comprehensively designed and supported education system.

Continuing to support smaller class sizes gets to the heart of what Ontarians expect from our policymakers and public investments. In the words of Bruce Biddle and David Berliner (2002), who have been studying class size for decades, when policies are planned and funded adequately, long-term exposure to small classes generates substantial advantages for students, especially those who have traditionally been disadvantaged. Given the obvious benefits, any reluctance to commit to smaller classes basically amounts to an unwillingness to make the necessary investments in students. "Indeed," they have said, "if we are to judge by available evidence, no other education reform has yet been studied that would provide such striking benefits, so debates about reducing class sizes are basically disputes about values."

Critics often point to Asian countries or other jurisdictions, where class sizes are large and test scores are high, as evidence that smaller classes are unnecessary. However, they ignore the other factors that influence student achievement in these places, such as socio-cultural homogeneity, narrow academic focus, or the prevalence of private tutoring (Loveless 2013). We should also note that a number of these same jurisdictions have been introducing their own class size reduction initiatives over the past few years, to help teachers bring about higher-order thinking and collaborative learning (Blatchford 2013).

In contrast, Ontario's classrooms have incredible social, economic, linguistic, and behavioural diversity, and Ontarians place high value on a publicly funded education system that reaches every student and provides equal opportunity for everyone to realize their full potential. The province

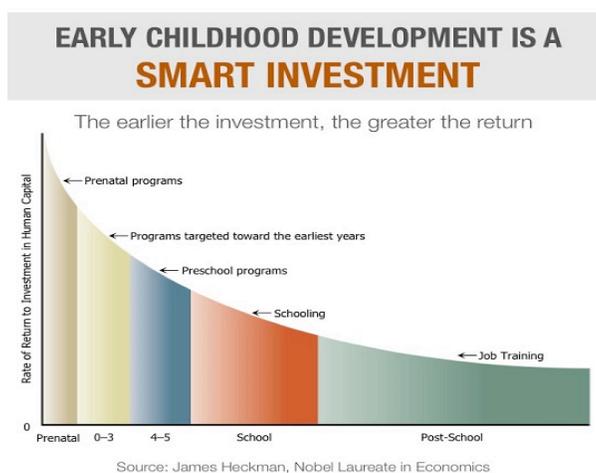
has qualified, certified teachers who are eager to put our world-class training to work, but we must be given the time and space to manage behaviour, differentiate our instruction, and provide individual attention. This will be increasingly necessary as we continue to move toward 21st century learning.

It might be tempting to look at the short-term costs of smaller class sizes and deem they are beyond our means, but our cost-benefit analysis cannot be so myopic. Our goal should be to continue developing a publicly funded education system that gives every student the opportunity to reach their full potential and appropriately prepares our young citizens for the challenges of the future. Education is the best investment a society can make, but only if we provide the best possible infrastructure and learning conditions.

FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN: A SMART PUBLIC INVESTMENT

Ontario's full-day Kindergarten (FDK) program was developed based on evidence from Canada and around the world that highlighted the importance and benefits of high quality, inclusive early learning programs. Science has clearly shown that the early years, from birth to age five, are a crucial stage of cognitive, behavioural, and social development. Furthermore, decades of research have amply demonstrated the long-term social and economic benefits of giving all children access to early learning opportunities (McCain, Mustard, and McCuaig 2011).

As Charles Pascal (2009) noted in his study and recommendations laying the groundwork for FDK in Ontario, such programs are essential for some, but beneficial for all. For children from low-income families or who are otherwise socio-economically disadvantaged, early childhood education is necessary to bridge gaps that might hinder success in the school environment. But universal access enables children from all backgrounds to play and learn together, while helping to ensure that all children receive early interventions for possible vulnerabilities.



Ensuring Quality

The early signs from teachers, early childhood educators (ECEs), administrators, researchers, and families indicate that Ontario's current FDK model is working. For example, survey results show parents believe FDK and the extended early learning program are preparing children to succeed at school, while administrators report improved outcomes for students (Janmohamed et al. 2014). Recently published longitudinal

research has found clear, long-term self-regulatory and academic gains from FDK, as compared to the previous half-day Kindergarten program. Contrary to claims that these benefits tend to fade out as students move through school, the evidence shows that in most areas, gains are apparent in Ontario's FDK graduates throughout the primary years (Pelletier and Corter 2019).

A major reason for the success of this "well-planned, evidence-based strategic investment" is the teaching model, which sees most classes being taught by teacher-ECE teams (McCuaig 2019). When experts were developing Ontario's FDK program, the teams were recommended because they "add to the strengths of the professional preparation and skill sets of both teachers and ECEs" (Pascal 2009). Although implementing this new model has required some hard work and creative thinking, both teachers and ECEs report that they are experiencing professional benefits from working in teams, and that school communities are uniting around the mission of supporting students and families (Pelletier 2014). (Perspectives on the existing two-educator model from current classroom teachers are attached to this submission as Appendix B.)

Ontarians have long recognized the need to have trained, knowledgeable, skilled, and respected professionals delivering quality early learning based on high standards and expectations (EPQHR 2007). This is in keeping with past research. For example, the most comprehensive longitudinal study of early learning, the Perry Preschool Program in Ypsilanti, Michigan, illustrates the benefits of a well-resourced, well-designed program delivered by well-trained, certified teachers. The program was implemented in 1961,

and by 1996, the long-term social and economic benefits resulted in a more than 7:1 return on investment. By 2004, the return on investment had jumped to 11:1 (Kirp 2007). This reinforces research undertaken in four Canadian provinces, in which the presence of trained staff was found to be "the most important predictor of quality," and parents were found to be strongly in favour of programs operated by teachers, or teams of teachers and ECEs (Johnson and Mathien 1998).

It is imperative that the government continue to support the current model for Ontario's ground-breaking, world-leading FDK program. As one expert puts it, the current model allows the teacher and ECE "to capitalize on children's individual needs and inquiries. They have the time to know their students very well and to identify problems and intervene early before a child becomes too frustrated and discouraged to try." Furthermore, full-day Kindergarten's "rich and secure environments are essential for the deep play where children learn to negotiate, consider the feelings of others and contribute to the group" (McCuaig 2019).

This well-rounded approach benefits all students. ECEs have specialized knowledge in childhood development, which is helpful for encouraging self-regulation and social skills, while the training and skills of certified teachers enable us to provide an enriched learning environment. We can gauge each student's interests, abilities, and potential, and we are trained to individualize programs, teaching methods, assessments, and planning. We can also structure the play-based curriculum to ensure that learning is optimized and children are adequately prepared for the next stages of

school (OECTA 2008). Parents and the public expect that the government will provide the best possible learning opportunities for all four- and five-year-olds, and the evidence is clear that such opportunities must involve qualified, certified teachers.

Building Up, Not Tearing Down

The evidence demonstrating the success of the FDK program should give the government pause before moving backward. At the same time, we must also acknowledge that we will never be able to fully study and appreciate the potential benefits of the program until it is properly implemented and funded.

The government's own research, while finding that the program is working to reduce developmental vulnerabilities among students, still notes that there were "significant challenges" when the program first became available in schools (Government of Ontario 2013). To support students and families, and provide the most value for our public investments, the government should address these and other challenges.

Since the Kindergarten program's inception, high demand among parents has forced some schools to introduce Kindergarten-Grade 1 split classes, which former OECTA President James Ryan likened to "combining the hockey team with the swim team" (Hammer 2011). There can be considerable differences in age, cognitive development, and social skills in these classes, with students beginning the school year aged anywhere

three to six years old. There are also significant differences between the play-based Kindergarten curriculum and the more desk-based Grade 1 curriculum. The result is a suboptimal learning environment for everyone. Providing the proper infrastructure and resources to avoid these split classes would enable all Kindergarten students to gain the full benefits of the program.

Large class sizes have also been a persistent problem. Prior to the implementation of the 29-student cap, it was common to see classes with 30 or more students (Alphonso 2014). While we appreciate the previous government's efforts to partially address this issue, any teacher, ECE, administrator, or parent who has been in a classroom recognizes that even 29 students is far too many to allow for meaningful interaction and learning. As we aim to introduce students to the school environment and ensure their safety throughout the school day, it is imperative that FDK class sizes be made smaller, not larger.

Despite the large class sizes, some school boards have been attempting to save funds by manipulating supervision schedules in such a way that the early childhood educator is often removed from the Kindergarten classroom during class time. This threatens students' safety and learning conditions, and increases the likelihood of incidents of violence against teachers. For the FDK program to fully live up to its original promise, the government must force school boards to ensure that a teacher and an ECE are present in the classroom at all times during the instructional day.

Ontarians from across the political spectrum, including the business community, recognize the value of public investments in early learning (Alexander et al. 2017), and researchers and observers have held up Ontario's FDK program as a model for others to follow (Pelletier 2017). But the returns on our investments will only be maximized when the program is properly designed, implemented, and operated. Rather than recklessly tearing down the progress that has been made over the past decade, the government has an opportunity to serve the needs and interests of all Ontarians by committing to a robust, adequately supported full-day Kindergarten program.

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APPENDIX A

Below are some perspectives from current classroom teachers on how an increase in class size would affect their working conditions and students' learning conditions.

"Today's elementary classrooms are filled with students with diverse profiles. It is my job, as their teacher, to meet their emotional, social and academic needs, wherever they may be on the learning continuum. In my current Grade 2/3 classroom, I am responsible for delivering a differentiated curriculum for two grades. On top of that, my class profile consists of students with diagnosed behaviour issues, mental health concerns and several students who have IEPs with academic modifications, which means that I deliver, instruct, assess and report at many grade levels. While I work 1:1 or in small groups with students who have learning gaps and require my direct support for success, I must also monitor the progress, behaviours and work habits of the other students while they work individually or in small groups. An increase in class size would mean less attention for each student. I know this for a fact because I was a teacher before primary class caps. As it stands, with a cap on primary class size, I am stretched thin. I am only one person. There is a bottom to every well."

"Working in a junior classroom with 25 students proves challenging with all the various needs. Increasing class sizes has a negative effect on student learning. We need lower class sizes so that students can get the

individualized support they deserve. We need to look into decreasing class size in junior and intermediate classrooms as well to ensure student success."

"Larger class sizes would mean less time to provide focused interventions and individualized instruction/planning for students and their learning needs. Classroom management/interactions between students would become more difficult. It would be more difficult to build positive relationships and 'check in' with students in larger classes."

"There would be less time for one-to-one support, less time for frequent verbal feedback, and students will wait longer for assessments to be returned. Students need timely, meaningful and frequent feedback in order to learn. I would be concerned about safety as my classroom is already full; this also makes small group work extremely difficult logistically. Parent-teacher communication will suffer, as I already find it difficult to call parents as much as I would like with my current workload."

"Currently in our Grade 9 applied classes, we have a gap-closing teacher, in addition to the classroom teacher. Losing the gap-closing teacher (as is projected based on cuts to support programs and resources that we see being made) *and* having increased class sizes would result in a significant reduction to the supports we currently provide to students: daily checkpoint quizzes to assess student progress, small group remediation and differentiated pacing based on student needs. We have worked so hard to develop effective strategies and activities to engage and empower

students to see themselves as competent math learners and to start to develop their math confidence. More students with less support for them will lead to a return in behaviour problems, emotional struggles, apathy and hopelessness as students become frustrated when they can't get the help they need to be and feel successful.

Not being able to meet student needs and help them reach their potential is devastating for us as teachers. The stakes are too high to risk. Our children are our greatest potential for positive change and growth in our society and they deserve the investment of our resources to ensure that they have every opportunity to be safe and successful."

"It is extremely difficult to teach, service, counsel, advocate, and all the other things we do when we have an extreme number of students in the class. I taught when we had large class sizes and it was very hard to work one-on-one with students. When class sizes were reduced, I could work with more students individually. Also, communication with parents becomes a difficult task. I don't have the time to contact parents regularly when I have too many students."

"An increase in class size would minimize the amount of attention I could give to each student. As there are more and more needs within the classroom, a smaller class size would mean that I could devote more time and resources to students with different needs. Whether it be a student with a learning disability, a student with behavioural outbursts, or even the

A+ student that needs extra work and stimulation so that they are challenged."

"As of right now in the Kindergarten classes I teach in, there is not enough room for the students to work or move around without bumping into one another. There are days when I go home and wonder if I have given enough of my time to all of my students. I find students thrive when they are in a smaller class because there are not as many distractions and they can have some of that one-on-one time with the educator if they need it."

"Increased class sizes means less time to work with students to ensure understanding. Less time to help individual students overcome challenges and understand that they are capable of succeeding. It means more time marking and less time to plan engaging lessons and activities to reach the needs of all learners. It increases chances of behavioural issues and decreases opportunities to develop caring communities in which each child feels safe and valued. Most importantly, it means less time to build relationships with our students. Less time for them to know someone is there to help them, someone cares about them, that someone wants them to succeed and is willing to put in the time and effort to make sure that they do so. Increased class sizes, in short, take away our students' rights to be seen as individuals and not numbers."

"Since I teach in Tech, increasing class size is definitely a safety concern. This topic is one that we in our department continually discuss, as we've never had an official cap size, something that seems to be common with

other boards. There are a lot of potential hazards and very dangerous equipment where students can injure themselves as well as others. The increase of class size definitely increases the possibility or chances of something happening in our shops."

"For example, I teach math for 60 minutes daily. Fifteen to 20 of that goes to math starters and lessons. That leaves me 40-45 minutes of class time, which works out to about two minutes of time to work with each student. If a student is struggling, that means more time with them, which means I am not helping someone else. Increasing class sizes will only make this worse."

"It is dangerous in a science lab. Try lighting Bunsen burners with 31 Grade 9s. Also, we often don't have enough gas jets or equipment for that many students. If I am teaching chemistry, students don't ask for help as often because they are intimidated in front of a large group of people. I don't have as much time to devote to the struggling students."

"I teach at the intermediate level. With every additional student, my ability to provide support to the students in my class decreases. This is especially true when trying to serve those students in my class who are most at need. Despite my good classroom management skills, more students often equates to more discipline problems as well."

"Class size is the single most important factor in the quality of learning that will take place in any class or semester. When I have 32 essays to

conference with students about, to grade, to follow up on to make sure students are clear about why their mark is their mark, we are just going to get less done. Then there's the unlikelihood of being able to get to know and reach every student; many feel lost in those bigger classes and are afraid to use their voices."

APPENDIX B

Below are some perspectives from current classroom teachers on the benefits of full-day Kindergarten and the existing teaching model.

"The teacher and ECE each have a unique background, education, and skill set which complement each other. As a team, they effectively plan and deliver quality programming for students."

"The students have all their needs met. The teacher has a background in education and the ECE has a background in emotional and social development. All of which are critical at this age in developing and helping a child grow and prepare for the rest of their school career and life in general. With two educators in one classroom the students receive more one-on-one time, support, individualized learning and enrichment, and focused goals for their learning."

"I have found that having two educators in the classroom allows for great reflection and documentation. Often when we are teaching 'in the moment' there are many things that we may not see or hear in our students' learning. Having another educator there helps us to realize and document the learning and decide on intentional teaching and next steps."

"These children go through so much change, adjustment and new routines that they most likely would not receive at home! I personally have seen so much positive change and a big difference in even the most troubled child

from the day they start JK to the last day of SK. I can't imagine them being prepared mentally, socially and physically for Grade 1 without this program!"

"The current two-educator model is beneficial all parties: students, teachers, and parents. It is through this model that the needs of all students are met and maintained with regards to their learning styles, learning environment, and individual social, emotional, physical, and mental requirements. As a Kindergarten teacher, having the support of an ECE has greatly helped me in developing the inquiry-based learning environment in our class."

"Since FDK classroom sizes have increased substantially over recent years it would not be possible to safely provide instruction to that many students without two educators in the classroom. For this reason, I feel that having the ECE work in partnership with the classroom teacher is necessary. Also, ECEs assist with supervision responsibilities so that classroom teachers can conference with smaller groups of children for assessment purposes knowing that the remainder of the students are being supervised and assisted by the ECE. ECEs also provide invaluable expertise in the area of early childhood education, understanding the intricate notion of child development prior to attending school at the FDK stage of learning."

"I believe that full-day Kindergarten is a great opportunity for young children to learn and socialize in a safe environment. The students need the ECE to bridge the gap from the home or daycare setting to the classroom

setting. They need a teacher as well to help achieve the curriculum and prepare them for the next grade."

"We know that full-day Kindergarten has lasting benefits for students. In addition, families rely on full-day Kindergarten to ensure their children learn in a safe and nurturing environment. Our Kindergarten teachers are trained to teach across the grades and across the continuum of learning."

"We usually have around 30 students and many unidentified students with needs. We work together and bring our own expertise and professional knowledge to provide a program in which students can grow and develop personally, socially and academically."