



ONTARIO ENGLISH
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GRANTS FOR STUDENT NEEDS 2020-21

TO THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

January 2020

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Teachers**
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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 for the development of the 2020-21 Grants for Student Needs.
- 1.02** The government's approach to education over the past year has been emblematic of the approach to policy and governance as a whole. The agenda is driven by ideology, not evidence. Decisions are made with little thought, foresight, or genuine consultation with Ontarians. In most cases, the only discernable motivation, other than to reverse decisions taken by the previous government, is to cut spending.
- 1.03** Students and families have been left reeling as policies about resources for children with autism, Education Programs – Other funding, Parents Reaching Out grants, revisions to the health and physical education curriculum, and many other areas have been hastily devised and announced. While in many cases there have been partial reversals or other face-saving attempts by the government, the effect has been to create a general atmosphere of chaos and confusion. The consequences for Ontarians, particularly the most vulnerable, have been tremendous.
- 1.04** At the beginning of its term, the government could at least be credited for being upfront about its intentions. There was no secret that the agenda was being guided by a desire to cut at least \$1 billion from the education budget. More recently, however, the government has been less forthright. For example, they have professed an interest in boosting student participation and achievement, particularly in STEM fields and skilled trades, but they have offered few policy proposals that would improve the learning environment in any way.
- 1.05** Since the release of the 2019 provincial budget, the government has repeatedly claimed it is making unprecedented investments in publicly funded education. But again, the reality does not come anywhere close to matching the government's rhetoric. The truth is that in the 2019-20 Grants for Student Needs, the Pupil Foundation Grant, the core per-pupil funding grant for elementary and secondary education, was cut by more than \$600 million. In addition, by eliminating the Local Priorities Fund, the government reduced spending on programs and supports for vulnerable students by \$230 million.

- 1.06** The government touts a \$700 million increase in the education budget this year, but it is important for Ontarians to understand that this is not the result of new investments in the classroom. Instead, nearly \$690 million is for the so-called attrition protection fund, which is a short-term solution meant to mask the loss of teaching positions resulting from the government's proposed class size increases and mandatory e-learning regime. Furthermore, nearly \$400 million is for the government's new child care tax credit, which has nothing to do with elementary and secondary education.
- 1.07** The government's own documents show that the plan is to essentially freeze education spending over the next four years, which means that as costs rise and enrolment grows, government funding will be increasingly inadequate (Ministry of Finance 2019). According to calculations by the independent Financial Accountability Office (2019a), by the end of its term, the Ford government does indeed plan to be underfunding core elementary and secondary education costs by more than \$1 billion per year.
- 1.08** There is no disputing that education funding has increased substantially over the past 15 years. These investments have led to incredible improvements. Although the government is portraying Ontario's world-class education system as failing, the reality is that by almost any measure, Ontario's students and graduates continue to be international leaders. According to the latest results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), among all participating jurisdictions, Ontario's 15-year-olds performed sixth in reading, thirteenth in math, and tenth in science (CMEC 2019). The five-year graduation rate is now at 87.1 per cent, almost 20 percentage points higher than in 2003-04. Along with other Canadian provinces, we have been recognized for our commitment to equity and inclusivity, with relatively low gaps in performance and expectations between high- and low-income students, and foreign- and Canadian-born students (Schleicher 2019).
- 1.09** Still, these investments have not made up for the structural shortages that the Harris Conservative government built into the education funding formula from the beginning (Mackenzie 2018; Mackenzie 2009). Rather than focusing on savings, the Ford Conservative government should be making a genuine effort to understand

what our school communities need, and how it can help provide safe, supportive, well-resourced environments for all teachers and students to work and learn. While we recognize the government's ideological preferences, Catholic teachers will continue to point out the need for investments that will ensure the long-term health and prosperity of all Ontarians.

2. EDUCATION FOR ALL

2.01 Consultation and Collaboration

The successful reform of Ontario's publicly funded education system since 2003 has been due in large part to the way evidence and experience have guided education policymaking, and the important investments that have been made in programs with well-established, long-term benefits. The co-operative professional relationship between policymakers and teachers in Ontario has been held up as a model for others to follow, providing further evidence that education systems work best when education policy is developed collaboratively (Schleicher 2018; OECD 2011).

2.02 As the frontline workers in the field of education, teachers possess firsthand knowledge and experience of how education policy works in the classroom, and which practices and methods are most conducive to student success. Genuine consultations with teacher unions and other education stakeholders could help to guide decisions about education policy in a way that would minimize disruption for students and ensure positive outcomes over the long run.

2.03 Unfortunately, the government has chosen a much less constructive route. For example, while the government regularly refers to the "largest public consultation on education in the province's history," it was evident to anyone who participated that the discussions were not meant to elicit genuine feedback or rigorous data. The biased, leading questions were focused on only a few topics; online submissions were permitted a limited number of words; the tele-town hall sessions involved only pre-screened comments, with no responses from the Ministry or opportunities for discourse; and there were no checks in place to prevent individuals from participating on multiple occasions. Even if this exercise had been meant to address legitimate concerns or priorities, nobody could place confidence in the validity of the results.

2.04 To make matters worse, it has now been revealed that while the government spent nearly \$1 million of public funds to conduct these consultations, the government has gone out of its way to hide the results, despite having previously promised to share them. Perhaps this is because, despite the government's best efforts to torque the process and get the desired responses to support their pre-determined agenda, the public overwhelmingly rejected the government's preferred positions, such as increasing class sizes (Dhanraj 2019a).

2.05 When the government has met directly with teachers and other education stakeholders, the primary purpose appears to have been to circumvent the collective bargaining process. OECTA and other teacher affiliates have been called to one-sided meetings and presented with questions about possible reforms to class sizes, the fair hiring process, and compensation, despite the fact that all of these are issues for collective bargaining. The government then moved to introduce regulations and legislation prior to the bargaining process even beginning, which provides further evidence that the government's positions on these matters were decided before any input from stakeholders was sought or received.

2.06 **Moving forward, it will be a far better use of everyone's time and resources for the government to engage in regular, open, and constructive dialogue with teachers and education workers, while leaving matters that should be dealt with through collective bargaining at the negotiating table where they belong.**

2.07 Mental Health

There is broad consensus among teachers, students, parents, and health care professionals that significant investments are needed in mental health supports. Unfortunately, whereas the previous government had announced a broad mental health strategy that committed \$2.1 billion over four years, the Ford government's plan only includes \$1.9 billion over ten years. In October 2019, the government announced a \$40 million investment in mental health funding for students, with a majority of that funding dedicated to creating 180 new positions for mental health workers in secondary schools. While investment is always a positive step, this number falls well short of the 400 new positions that had been announced by the previous government.

- 2.08** The previous government had also earmarked funding to hire 450 guidance counsellors for Grade 7 and 8 students, to prepare students for the transition to high school and provide career counselling. These teachers were to be given specific training to identify students experiencing mental health issues and help them access the support they needed. Although the Ford government maintained the funding amount, they lifted the requirement that school boards use these funds for the dedicated hiring of guidance counsellors to the elementary panel. If the Ford government wants to make good on its commitment to support mental health and addiction programming for students, additional funding is required to address persistent systemic issues.
- 2.09** 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 (Government of Canada 2006). The government is aware that, according to recent data, almost 20 per cent of students in Grades 7 to 12 in Ontario report their mental health as fair or poor. In addition, nearly a third of students who wanted to speak to a professional about their mental health issues over the past two years did not know where to turn, and approximately 80 per cent of these students will not receive the treatment they need (MHASEF Research Team 2015; 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).
- 2.10** 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. **Providing more mental health supports in schools, where children and youth spend much of their time, reduces stigma, connects students to their communities, and delivers more responsive, cost-effective service, leading to better health outcomes and improved academic performance.** Progress has been made through programs introduced by the previous government, such as 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.

2.11 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. To ensure the most efficient and effective services, there should be co-ordination between the Ministry of Education and other ministries, further exploration of the community hub model, and regular consultation with frontline workers, which for Catholic teachers would be their duly elected representatives at OECTA.

2.12 Class Size

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." By contrast, no study currently exists that documents advantages for student learning that result from increasing class sizes.

2.13 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). 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). There are also long-term socio-economic benefits associated with smaller class sizes, such as public savings in terms of lower health and welfare costs (Fredriksson, Öckert, and Oosterbeek 2011; Krueger 2003; Muennig and Woolf 2007).

2.14 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).

- 2.15** The Ford government has pointed to jurisdictions in Canada with higher class size averages than Ontario as counterevidence to the benefits of smaller class sizes. However, it is important to note that collective agreements in British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec offset higher class size averages by ensuring additional supports/educators based on class composition. The fact is, reductions in class size since 2003 have resulted in Ontario achieving the highest four- and five-year graduation rates in the province's history, and Ontario's system of publicly funded education routinely ranks among the best in Canada and the world.
- 2.16** The increase to class size averages announced in March 2019 will have significant detrimental effects on the classroom environment – it will diminish teachers' ability to provide individualized instruction to students, and will leave teachers less able to identify students who may be at-risk or have special education needs. **The government must immediately restore class size averages to their 2018 levels, and should work toward lowering class size averages in Kindergarten through Grade 12 in Ontario's publicly funded schools.**
- 2.17 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 2018-19 it was 47 per cent. For Grade 6 students with special education needs, the percentage of students at or above the provincial standard increased from 34 per cent in 2009-10 to 53 per cent in 2018-19 (EQAO 2019a). Despite this, the Ford government has cut vital resources for students with special education needs, and has mismanaged the autism file to the detriment of students.
- 2.18** 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 (McQuigge 2018; 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 38:1 in elementary school and 77:1 in secondary school (People for Education 2019). School boards require sufficient resources to provide services for all students with special education needs, as well as proper resources and guidance around class size and class composition to facilitate integration into the classroom (Froese-Germain and Riel 2012).

2.19 Catholic teachers were particularly disappointed by the government's decision to cancel the planned increase to the Special Incidence Portion (SIP), which was capped for two decades at \$27,000, and has been increased recently by less than \$700 (Ontario 2019). This amount falls well below the salary grid for educational assistants and is not nearly enough to cover the increasing costs of specialized staff and necessary materials. In response to advocacy from OECTA and others, the previous government had finally planned to increase the SIP by \$30 million, which would have enabled schools to hire an additional 500 educational assistants to support students with special education needs, improving the learning environment for everyone. Instead, the Ford government cut \$2 million from the original announcement and reallocated the remaining \$28 million to the Special Education Per-Pupil Amount Allocation, with no mechanism for hiring any new educational assistants. While Catholic teachers recommend a variety of investments in special education, **at the very least the planned increase in dedicated SIP funding that students, families, and schools were counting on should be immediately restored.**

2.20 The government has also taken a problematic approach to autism funding, which has threatened to put additional strain on students and publicly funded schools. When initial changes to the Ontario Autism Program were announced in February 2019, they were met with widespread condemnation from parents and health advocates (Sharkey 2019). OECTA and other education stakeholders noted that by providing a fixed amount of money for children with autism, based only on income and age, many families would no longer be able to afford specialized services. The result would be more students with autism attending publicly funded schools, despite the fact the government provided no ongoing funding for student supports (CBC 2019). Although the government walked back this plan and announced its intention to adopt

a needs-based program, the recent decision to delay implementation has left many families feeling betrayed (Rushowy 2019). **Catholic teachers urge the government to immediately implement and properly fund a needs-based autism program, and include education funding to ensure publicly funded schools can provide the necessary resources and supports for students with autism.**

2.21 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 2017 survey of classroom teachers, 85 per cent of respondents said the incidence of violence against teachers 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).

2.22 In recent months, we have also seen renewed attention on bullying. However, the government's response leaves a great deal to be desired. Bullying is a complex issue that requires a multi-faceted, proactive response. Rather than tinkering around the edges with measures such as reviewing the definition, the government should be encouraging collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Education and other ministries, such as the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children, Community, and Social Services to address the issue.

2.23 Some progress has been made over the past few years in terms of standardizing and enforcing reporting procedures for violent incidents, but there is still a long way to go to fully implement the solutions outlined in our *Safer Schools for All* platform (OECTA 2017b). For example, full implementation of the online reporting tool remains an ongoing issue, as a number of school boards remain non-compliant with implementation requirements mandated by the previous government. Most importantly, **more child and youth workers, social workers, psychologists, and other professional services are required to help students deal with their social, emotional, and behavioural needs.** These investments will help students

manage their behaviours and achieve academic success in the short and long term, while enabling teachers and the rest of the school community to focus on making learning happen in a safe and secure environment.

2.24 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 resources away from supports for delivering curriculum and toward test preparation materials.

2.25 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.

2.26 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 is necessary to provide 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. We use the results of these assessments to modify our instruction and provide individual attention, as well as to complete provincial report cards (OTF 2017).

2.27 The previous government appointed a set of advisors to undertake a comprehensive study of Ontario's assessment regime. The advisors made a slew of recommendations, including phasing out the EQAO test in Grade 3 (Campbell et al. 2018). This report should have been the starting point for a wide-ranging discussion

about how to move forward. Unfortunately, the Ford government appears to have discarded this advice, in favour of an ideology that views standardized testing as inherently useful. Where once the Chair of the EQAO was a part-time position, the government has created a full-time job and appointed a defeated Progressive Conservative election candidate to the role. This is on top of the costly bureaucracy at the Ministry of Education that exists to deal with EQAO initiatives. The government has also expanded the mandate of the agency to conduct hastily devised, poorly considered assessments for pre-service teachers, despite the fact that the EQAO itself found that “the fundamental goal of these tests – to improve student learning – is often not met” (EQAO 2019b; Alphonso 2019).

2.28 Teachers are assessing students for, as, and of learning every day, and communicating these results to school boards and parents. Standardized testing is not a good use of education resources. Given how far EQAO has strayed from its original mandate, Charles Pascal, a former Deputy Minister of Education and Chair of EQAO, recently argued that the government should suspend EQAO testing (CBC 2020). **If the government still believes some sort of province-wide testing is necessary, they should at least move toward a random sampling model, as is used by PISA and others.** This would produce statistically valid 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.

2.29 Full-day Kindergarten

Parents, teachers, early childhood educators (ECEs), administrators, and researchers agree that Ontario’s full-day Kindergarten (FDK) program is preparing children socially and academically, leading to better outcomes in later years (Alphonso 2017; Janmohamed 2014). New longitudinal research provides more evidence of self-regulatory and academic gains, with benefits being apparent in all academic areas at the end of Kindergarten and remaining significantly greater to the end of the primary division (Pelletier and Corter 2019).

2.30 However, there are still some issues that are keeping the program from being fully effective for all students. For example, although the previous government took some action to address the problem, more still needs to be done to reduce the number of large and/or split classes.

- 2.31** It is also imperative that we continue to respect and support the functioning of the teacher/ECE teams. When the FDK 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, which proves valuable for fostering emotional regulation and social skills. Meanwhile, certified teachers bring high levels of skills and training related to teaching methods, planning, and assessment. We are able to structure the play-based curriculum in a way that optimizes learning, and to individualize instruction when necessary. We understand the whole child and are best equipped to prepare students and integrate them into the next stages of their learning.
- 2.32** Research has shown that Ontario’s FDK staff teams are uniting around the mission to support children and families (Pelletier 2014). Moreover, the current dynamic enables 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” (McCuaig 2019). Rather than disrupting this effective dynamic, the government should provide sufficient resources to ensure that a certified teacher and an ECE are present in all FDK classrooms at all times during the instructional day.
- 2.33** Ontario’s FDK program is a ground-breaking, world-leading initiative. The investment will continue to pay dividends long into the future for students, families, the economy, and society. **The government should continue to support and strengthen the FDK program so it can honour its original promise.**
- 2.34 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).

- 2.35** By now, most Ontarians recognize the importance of integrating Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum. This year, 81 per cent of elementary schools and 95 per cent of secondary schools report having offered at least one Indigenous learning opportunity, a substantial increase from 2014 (People for Education 2019). However, Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators still need support and resources to ensure they are properly reflecting Indigenous histories 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 abruptly pause planned curriculum resource writing sessions.
- 2.36** 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 resource gaps must be overcome if we are going to address the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.** The previous government was making significant steps 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, especially as the need will only become more urgent, given that Indigenous children are the fastest-growing child population segment in Canada (UNICEF Canada 2018). 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).
- 2.37** In the years prior to the current government taking office, the Indigenous Education Grant had increased substantially, in response to a nationwide call for a renewed effort toward reconciliation. But this government has shown time and again that this is not an area of priority. After having been cut in the revised Grants for Student Needs for 2018-19, the grant received only a modest increase for 2019-20. Indigenous education is also an area that has been affected by the government's failure to recommit to the Local Priorities Fund. Reconciliation with Indigenous peoples is one of the most urgent and fundamental issues for Ontarians. Rather than looking for areas to trim and save costs, the government should be actively supporting progress.

2.38 E-learning

The government's proposal to introduce mandatory e-learning raises a number of issues with respect to student learning, access and equity, as well as how the platform will be administered. In one recent and comprehensive research study on the topic, Beyhan Farhadi (2019) argues that e-learning will have a disproportionate negative impact on students who are already struggling. Farhadi's research concludes that "online learning, as an emerging method of course delivery at the secondary level, is producing new geographies of inequality" in which only a minority of students succeed using this platform.

2.39 For high-achieving students, Farhadi explains that e-learning offers an efficient means to accreditation, but this efficiency comes at the cost of collaboration and student-teacher interaction. Furthermore, mandatory e-learning will result in hundreds of fewer hours of face-to-face interaction with teachers, and at a proposed class size average of 35:1, teachers will be less able to identify students who may need additional supports.

2.40 There are also questions as to how the government will deliver e-learning from an infrastructure perspective. Reliable broadband access remains uneven across the province, with northern and rural areas facing significant gaps in service. As well, many families in Ontario cannot afford high speed internet, or the technology required to access e-learning courses (CBC 2019b). Adopting mandatory e-learning, without providing funding to ensure equitable access, will have a negative impact on the student learning experience.

2.41 E-learning is an established part of Ontario's publicly funded education system, as an option for students in certain circumstances. However, under the current structure for the delivery of e-learning, a great deal of care is paid to the needs of students, their aptitude, and likelihood for success. Courses are delivered through school boards, and a school-based guidance counsellor is available to each student as a resource while they engage in learning outside of the classroom. Despite these added supports, student success in e-learning remains low. Furthermore, much time and attention is paid to the delivery of the courses to ensure that a credit earned online is equal to a credit earned in a classroom. **Given the concerns outlined in research about implementing mandatory e-learning, the government should suspend its plans to introduce mandatory e-learning.**

2.42 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).

- 2.43** 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). For instance, 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.**

2.44 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 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.

- 2.45** As a 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.

2.46 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.

2.47 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.

2.48 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 also by the broader 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).

2.49 Teachers across the province were greatly disappointed to learn of the government’s decision to cancel funding for TLLP projects for the 2018-19 school year. We are still awaiting news about the continuation of the program. **Especially given the changes that are being made to curriculum, it is imperative that more resources be provided for teacher-led, teacher-directed professional development – the most efficient and effective form of professional learning.** This will ensure that teachers’ knowledge remains 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).

2.50 Holding School Boards to Account

While we believe our students and schools deserve greater 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. With an overall education budget that does not match student needs, and legal pressure to balance their books, school boards are compelled to use these grants to fill gaps in funding for core programs and expenses (Queiser 2017; 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.

2.51 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.**

2.52 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. (SBCI) 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. SBCI hides its 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.

2.53 Fair Compensation

Contrary to widespread misconceptions held by the government and some members of the public, wages for public sector workers in Ontario, including teachers, have not been keeping up with the cost of living. According to data from the Ministry of Labour, private sector wage increases have outpaced those in the public sector in all but one year since 2010. Over the same period, public sector wage increases have lagged below the annual rate of inflation in all but one year. As was recently confirmed by the independent Financial Accountability Office (2019a), the average annual growth rate of teacher salaries since 2010 has been half of that in the private sector.

2.54 With Bill 124, the government has tried to interfere in public sector workers' constitutional rights to engage in free and fair collective bargaining over the issue of compensation. But Ontarians understand the importance of protecting everyone's fundamental rights and freedoms. **The government should deal with this issue where it belongs, at the bargaining table, while recognizing that building and maintaining world-class public services requires providing fair compensation for public sector workers.**

2.55 Publicly Funded Catholic Education

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.

2.56 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).

2.57 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 co-terminus boards. In its 2014-15 Pre-Budget Consultation Summary, the previous government noted that "co-locating the schools of coterminous 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.

2.58 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, specifically in rural areas where enrolment declines have raised the specter of school closures.

2.59 In addition to co-location, Ontarians can also benefit from shared services agreements. A feasibility study 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.**

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.01** The government has tried to justify its drastic cuts to education by claiming Ontario's finances are in crisis. However, it has been revealed that from the beginning, the government has been misleading Ontarians by wildly inflating the provincial deficit. In 2018-19, the official, recorded deficit was about half what the government originally claimed (Dhanraj 2019b). Furthermore, had the government continued to use widely accepted practices regarding the accounting of pension assets, the deficit number would have been significantly lower (Cohn 2019). Meanwhile, despite the government's rhetoric and misrepresentations about out-of-control spending, Ontario continues to spend more than \$2,000 less per capita than the national average on government programs, while remaining the lowest per capita collector of revenue of any province (FAO 2019b).
- 3.02** Publicly funded education is the most efficient, effective, and equitable means of ensuring children and youth have the knowledge and skills to navigate our rapidly changing economy, the complexities of an ever-changing society, and the rigours and demands of adulthood.
- 3.03** The government's plans for education will have devastating consequences for generations of students. Thousands of teaching positions will be eliminated and tens of thousands of course options will be lost. Students will go without vital programs and supports to help them realize their full potential, and graduates will have reduced options for post-secondary work or study. The government did not campaign on this agenda, and it has no mandate from Ontarians to make these destructive changes. It is not too late to do the right thing and commit to the investments our students need to succeed.

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