

Pre-budget Brief

To the Minister of
Finance

Kevin O'Dwyer
President

Marshall Jarvis
General Secretary

February 2012

www.oecta.on.ca

ONTARIO ENGLISH
Catholic
Teachers
ASSOCIATION

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.01** The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) welcomes the opportunity to present issues that we believe are important, as the Minister of Finance prepares the 2012 provincial budget.
- 1.02** The government has made significant progress in the past eight years, in a broad range of public policy areas. Impressive strides have been made in Ontario's public health care system, by reducing wait times to the shortest in Canada, and doing more than ever to prevent illness. Substantial investments have strengthened infrastructure by building new roads, bridges, community centres and schools – providing jobs in communities across the province.
- 1.03** Ontario has become a leader in the renewable energy industry by replacing coal-fired generation with wind, solar and biomass. This will save on long-term costs to health care and the environment. The poverty rate for children in Ontario declined in 2009, in part because of government investments in children and families. In 2009, 20,000 fewer Ontario children lived in poverty than in 2008.
- 1.04** Since 2003, the government has strengthened the publicly funded education system through sustained investments in education. Elementary and secondary education has been central to this government's achievements. Reduced class sizes in the primary grades are already paying dividends. Improved test scores, the implementation of full-day Kindergarten and improved relations between teachers and government have also been essential contributors to Ontario's internationally-recognized achievements in education.
- 1.05** These accomplishments demonstrate that Ontario is on the right path. Yet, none of the abovementioned jobs are complete. There is still work to do and fiscal cutbacks in these areas would result in a loss of momentum, jeopardizing the progress that has been made. The size of the provincial deficit, combined with growing public concern about the economy, has placed significant pressure on the provincial government to reduce its expenditures. Indeed, Ontario is bracing for a transformation in how public services are delivered.

1.06 OECTA understands the very real pressure to reduce public expenditures. However, bending to that pressure without considering the long-term economic benefits to the province risks significant negative ramifications for Ontario. There is no debating that the education and training of a highly-skilled workforce is essential to Ontario's future in a knowledge-based economy. As such, it is critical that Ontario continue investing to maintain and improve its world-class elementary and secondary education system.

1.07 The Deficit in Perspective

It is important to maintain perspective when it comes to the provincial deficit. Economist Hugh Mackenzie attributed the provincial deficit to a combination of a period of economic contraction and much-needed spending stimulus (Mackenzie, 2011). The greatest risk facing Ontario is not that the deficit will persist at its current level. A more serious risk is that upcoming cutbacks and restraint measures will result in long-term damage to Ontario's front line services, threatening values that are fundamental to our public services – such as equity, accessibility and fairness.

1.08 Global economic uncertainty has led to widespread public commentary about the need for austerity in provincial and federal budgets in Canada. Criticism has stressed the need for governments to act in fiscally prudent manner. However, there must be a careful balance between identifying efficiencies, reducing waste and protecting the quality of front line public services on which Ontarians depend.

2. EDUCATION REFORM

2.01 Since 2003, sustained and increased investments in Ontario's publicly funded education system have helped our province excel in the area of education. Student achievement has increased. Student retention and graduation rates have improved. Parents have become more confident in publicly funded schools, and teacher morale has been boosted dramatically. Ontario is cited in numerous international studies for the great strides that have been made to close the gap between the highest and lowest achieving students.

2.02 The challenge remains to reduce spending without sacrificing the gains that have been realized to date, or compromising the underlying conditions that have enabled progress to be made. Looking specifically at education, OECTA believes

that a more critical lens should be applied to education dollars that are spent on initiatives not directly tied to the classroom. There is a broad consensus that expenditures in education are more cost-effective when they are closely connected to the classroom. Benefits to students are less apparent when spending is further removed from the classroom, such as when funding is directed at the administrative level.

2.03 Growth of Top-Down Driven Initiatives

Levin, Glaze, and Fullan (2008) observed that Ontario's large-scale education reform has succeeded in integrating top-down and bottom-up forces in strong partnerships, while respecting teachers' professional knowledge. Levin (2007) added that Ontario has adopted a collaborative, rather than a top-down, approach to coherence. Levin pointed to the approach of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) to underscore this point, noting that Secretariat staff work cooperatively with school district leaders to ensure alignment of provincial and board strategies.

2.04 Despite this characterization, Ontario's education reform has coincided with a growth of government initiatives in assessment and evaluation, and a proliferation of bureaucrats and administrators at the Ministry and school board level. These system features suggest Ontario has gradually developed into a "top-heavy" system.

2.05 A top-down approach to education reform has financial and pedagogical implications. There are economic ramifications because bureaucratic initiatives require significant government resources to administer. There are also pedagogical considerations, as research supports that top-down reform detracts from educators' teaching autonomy and their ability to exercise professional judgment. Education theorists confirm that reform agendas are most successful when they are collaborative, research-based, and respectful of teachers' professional autonomy (Levin and Wiens, 2003; Fullan, Rolheiser and Edge, 2002).

2.06 This type of change can be contrasted to reform that prescribes changes to schools and imposes top-down demands on teachers. Research conducted

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

- 2.07** Education theorist Ann Lieberman (2000) criticized top-down reform in the United States, observing that "experts" play an instrumental role in developing curriculum materials, though they may be out of touch with classroom and teacher realities. Regarding the American context, Lieberman and Miller (2005) emphasized that top-down accountability systems have put pressure on schools to focus on standardized assessment results, leading to decreased attention on student learning. Lieberman and Wood (2002) expressed support for a "teachers teaching teachers" model of reform, centred on teachers' professional knowledge.
- 2.08** Accordingly, Lieberman has praised the Ontario model, which enables teachers to choose and design their own professional development opportunities. This is put into practice through the Ministry of Education's Teacher Learning and Leadership Program, which gives experienced teachers the chance to assume leadership roles in curriculum, instructional practice, or supporting other teachers. Lieberman praised the model as an example of how researchers, policymakers, and practicing teachers can work together successfully, instead of pursuing conflicting agendas (Lieberman, 2010).

OECTA Recommendation

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

2.09 Increase in School Board Administrators

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

administrative spending in previous budgets. The 2010 Ontario Budget asked boards to reduce spending on senior administration by 10 per cent (Government of Ontario, 2010).

- 2.10** In reality, these expenditures have continued to increase. Many school boards have maintained their spending on senior administrative salaries, by accessing funding from other budget lines and drawing on monies available to boards for student success initiatives. If government were to initiate and enforce a spending cut, there would be significant savings across the province. For example, a reduction of spending on senior administration by 25 per cent would yield \$150 million dollars in annual savings.
- 2.11** The money that the Ministry currently uses to fund administration positions for the implementation of Ministry initiatives would be better spent in the classroom, used by teachers and for teachers. Linking education expenditures to the classroom allows funds to go further, as confirmed by sound pedagogical research.

OECTA Recommendation

That the government introduce and enforce a real spending reduction on senior administrators to save \$150 million.

2.12 Increase in Senior Bureaucratic Positions

There has been a significant increase in Ministry of Education senior bureaucrats, which is linked to a continually increasing number of provincial education initiatives. Many bureaucrats hold positions and job titles that did not exist in previous years. The majority of these individuals do not have recent classroom teaching experience. This trend is problematic because it points to a detachment between on-the-ground classroom realities and “expert” bureaucratic opinions.

- 2.13** A lack of recent, relevant experience in front line teaching roles leads to more detached, impractical perspectives in the development of curriculum and assessment materials. Hiring people with more recent classroom experience would infuse a relevant, first-hand approach to curriculum and assessment. Moreover, it would save money that is currently spent on bureaucracy salaries.

Ministry of Education staff with experience as administrators, consultants, coordinators and principals are paid salaries that are higher than teachers.

OECTA Recommendations

That the government reduce the size of Ministry of Education senior bureaucracy linked to assessment initiatives, to direct savings to front line classroom initiatives.

That the government consider short-term (five-year) rotating contracts for Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat staff to ensure that Secretariat staff have recent teaching experience.

3. FOCUS ON THE CLASSROOM

- 3.01** In an era of constrained public resources, it is critical that new initiatives be focused on the key ingredient in a successful education system – the interaction between a properly supported student and a skilled and motivated teacher.
- 3.02** Notwithstanding the rhetoric, Ontario’s much-touted Student Achievement (LNS) initiatives have increased overhead costs in the province’s education system with little real impact on the classroom. OECTA believes that funding for these programs should either be eliminated or reduced, and initiatives should instead be focused specifically on teacher-student interaction.
- 3.03** Similarly, the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) testing regime requires a great deal of government funding to operate, yet has little significant impact at the classroom level. The current government has increased its focus on results generated by the EQAO. EQAO results have become the key factor in the development of government policies and programs.
- 3.04** The Ministry’s objective in using standardized test data is to provide assistance in areas of the system that need it most. EQAO test results were intended to contribute to current knowledge about student learning and assessment, building on the existing knowledge of educators and school boards. EQAO results were to help inform professional practice, assessments, and focused interventions. Yet school boards and schools already know as to where further attention is required.

Teachers know better than anyone which students are struggling and where more support is necessary.

- 3.05** There has been a burgeoning of personnel, in school boards and in the Ministry, whose positions can be characterized as a response to the province's demand for the generation and analysis of student achievement data. At the school level, principals and teachers are spending more of their time on tasks and initiatives related to testing. At a broader level, increased emphasis on the EQAO has contributed to a pervasive, assessment-driven culture across the school system, exacerbated by international pressure that emphasizes test scores as a measure of improvement.
- 3.06** As a result of the heightened focus on improving student test scores, school boards are spending more of their Ministry-allocated funding to purchase assessment programs, resources, and tools. In addition to EQAO tests, school boards generate preliminary tests to gauge student readiness for EQAO tests.
- 3.07** It is difficult to quantify the amount school boards actually spend in this area, because every school allocates money for these materials out of its school budget, drawing on Ministry funding that flows through various programs.
- 3.08** The pressure to succeed on province-wide standardized tests leads some schools to access provincial monies allocated for purposes other than assessment, towards testing tools and materials. The result of spending precious school budget dollars on assessment materials is that students lose out in other areas: such as physical education equipment, music instruments, science equipment or school events.
- 3.09** The reality is that EQAO tests have little value for students, teachers, and parents. The government's current assessment approach, EQAO, tests every student. This is burdensome and expensive. Moreover, research shows that using large-scale, standards-based test results to compare and rank students and school boards does not improve learning in the classroom (Leithwood, 2001).

- 3.10** OECTA believes that universal EQAO testing should be replaced by a system based on random sampling of Ontario students. This would support statistically valid conclusions about the strength of the Ontario education system while freeing up valuable dollars that could be redirected into the classroom.
- 3.11** The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) recently released the results of its random sample tests administered in 75 jurisdictions around the globe, which show that Ontario's 15-year-old students are among the best readers in the world.
- 3.12** The Minister of Education stated in 2010 that:
"PISA today recognized Ontario as one of the few jurisdictions in the world where 92 per cent of the students are performing above the benchmark regardless of socio-economic background or first language. That certainly speaks very well of everyone in our school system.
- 3.13** PISA recognizes this achievement as part of our commitment to both excellence and equity, a distinction that few other countries in the world have achieved."
(Hansard, Official records of Ontario's Legislative Assembly, Student Achievement, Dec. 10, 2010.)
- 3.14** The government has acknowledged the validity of the results achieved through PISA's highly regarded random sample tests. The province would achieve considerable savings by shifting to this methodology for EQAO tests.

OECTA Recommendations

That resources currently being allocated to fund Student Achievement initiatives be reallocated to the classroom to directly support student achievement on a day-to-day basis.

That the government direct the Education Quality and Accountability Office to move to a random sample student assessment model.

4. EDUCATION – THE FOUNDATION FOR ONTARIO’S FUTURE

- 4.01** Given the importance of sustaining Ontario’s knowledge-based economy, it is critical that Ontario continue to invest in what is already a world-class elementary and secondary education system.
- 4.02** Elementary and secondary education has been at the centre of this government’s achievements. Reduced class sizes in the primary grades and the provision of additional resources at the secondary level have led to improved student achievement and higher graduation rates. The Early Learning program is a significant investment in Ontario’s future.
- 4.03** Full-day Kindergarten – though only in the second year of its roll-out – is already a major success. While it would be wonderful for more young students to benefit sooner from the program by making it universally available, the reality is that the program continues to be refined and improved as more information is learned about the challenges associated with its implementation.
- 4.04** Given the current fiscal climate, OECTA acknowledges that funding the program will take longer than would be ideal, and encourages the government to maintain the commitment made in its 2011 election platform to fully implement full-day Kindergarten by the end of the 2014 year.
- 4.05** The introductory year of the program demonstrated that the government must consider being more prescriptive about the class size and classroom resource aspects of the program. Not all school boards have heeded Ministry of Education guidelines relating to these issues and will likely fail to do so in the future unless policy statements from the Ministry are more directive. Unfortunately, providing boards with local flexibility does not necessarily translate into effective program implementation.
- 4.06** The major concern of teachers has been large class sizes in many school boards. In some cases these are left unchanged, while in others, classes are re-arranged to avoid hiring an early childhood educator (ECE). For instance, in some school boards, large classes have been split into groups of 27 and 12. In such a

situation, the board hires one teacher and one ECE to staff the class of 27, while the smaller class is staffed by only a teacher.

- 4.07** There are two ways to address this issue. One option would be capping full-day Kindergarten class sizes at 20 pupils. This would provide pupils with more individual attention. An alternative approach would be to increase the class size threshold at which an ECE would be assigned to a class. This would provide necessary flexibility, enabling school boards to address scenarios where there are significant class size discrepancies within a particular school.

OECTA Recommendation

That the government provide funding for a cap of 20 full-day Kindergarten pupils per class.

- 4.08** The Ministry allocated funding for school boards to provide resources and materials to create appropriate play-based learning experience for four-and-five-year-olds. In many cases, this funding never made it to the classroom. Some boards or principals diverted the funding to other program areas, leaving full-day Kindergarten classrooms woefully short on materials, equipment and other resources that are essential to the program's success.

OECTA Recommendation

That the government provide adequate funding for classroom resources and hands-on learning materials as part of the implementation of the full-day Kindergarten program.

5. CLASS SIZES

- 5.01** In Ontario, smaller class sizes have been phased in since 2003. In 2010-11, 90 per cent of primary classes (excluding full-day Kindergarten classes) had 20 or fewer students, as compared to 31 per cent in 2003-04.
- 5.02** A handful of economists, journalists and right-wing think tanks have questioned whether smaller class sizes are a wise investment, given the current economic situation facing Ontario. Those who say that class size is not a key determinant of student achievement are looking at education in economic terms. However,

education is not a profit-driven business, and not all benefits to the system can be quantified.

- 5.03** The real experts - students, teachers, and parents - will tell you that class sizes do matter. Smaller classes allow for individualized instruction and increased opportunities for valid student assessment and evaluation. Smaller class sizes give teachers more time to engage students and parents on an individual basis.

- 5.04** There is minimal research that has quantified the benefits of class size on students and teachers. However, what has occurred in Ontario's education system since the implementation of smaller classes is easily discernible. In terms of test scores, student achievement has improved. More Ontario secondary students are staying in school and graduating. Parents have become increasingly confident in the publicly funded education system, and teacher morale has improved significantly. These are tangible improvements that cannot be left off the balance sheet.

- 5.05** International research has praised Ontario for the progress that has been made in reducing the gap between highest and lowest achieving students. Ontario has worked on improving issues of equity in the classroom and individualizing programs to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. Smaller classes have created a learning environment that has enabled teachers and students to realize these gains. Moreover, smaller classes have facilitated successful implementation of the influx of new programs and initiatives introduced at the provincial level.

- 5.06** Today's classrooms are not the heterogeneous environments of days gone by. Teachers require sufficient time to meet the individual needs of every student, to sustain and improve upon the gains made in recent years. Smaller class sizes make it easier for teachers to identify students when they require further academic attention, and to address students' psychological, social, behavioural, mental health, and language needs. Common sense and several studies (Biddle and Berliner, 2002) support the need for smaller classes, especially in the primary grades.

- 5.07** Lowered classroom sizes have resulted in better learning environments, ample opportunities for meaningful assessment and evaluation, and more opportunity for professional dialogue and parent communication. There is certainly no credible evidence that shows that smaller classes do *not* benefit students. It does not make sense to consider reversing the progress that has been made in this area, when class size has been inextricably linked to Ontario's successful education reform.

OECTA Recommendation

That the government maintain current standards for small class sizes in Ontario schools.

6. THE EDUCATION FUNDING FORMULA

- 6.01** As teachers in the system, we have identified two particular areas of funding to be addressed.
- 6.02** First, the funding system must appropriately acknowledge adult secondary education students. Adults studying towards a secondary graduation certificate are funded at half the rate of students under the age of 21 who are taking the same courses and working towards the same goal. This approach short-changes these students, and jeopardizes their ability to upgrade the skills and education that everyone agrees are essential as our economy continues to evolve and grow.
- 6.03** Providing opportunities for displaced workers to retrain to re-enter the workforce is of paramount importance. Reallocating resources could allow for new programs that would deliver social benefits and long-term cost-savings to the province. In addition to teaching basic language proficiency, literacy, diploma acquisition and citizenship, programs that foster a healthy lifestyle and social and cultural integration will reduce the need for later interventions.

OECTA Recommendations

That adult education credit courses be funded at the same level as under age 21 credit courses.

That the government expand existing, and develop new re-training programs, to assist displaced workers in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully re-enter the job market.

6.04 Special Education Funding

The provincial government has been clear in its commitment to move all Ontario students forward. OECTA stands firmly behind this objective, but recognizes that targeting resources is the best way to serve the needs of students who require special programming. The current funding model in Ontario does not adequately address the diverse needs of students.

6.05 There is a need to revise the education funding formula to address the varied requirements of students and provide staff with the necessary material and staff supports to meet student needs. In OECTA surveys conducted in 2008 and 2006, elementary and secondary teachers consistently identified supports as valuable remedies for relieving stress and overworking, when dealing with an increasing number of students with exceptionalities, especially behavior (Bennett and Gallagher, 2009)

6.06 In particular, itinerant teachers (e.g., English as a Second Language, French as a Second Language, teacher-librarians) and beginning teachers named supports as a high priority. The study confirmed that teachers need to be provided with a wide range of supports and services to assist them and students with exceptionalities. These supports include professional learning opportunities, increased trained personnel at the board and school level to support classroom teachers, increased material resources (e.g., assistive technology), and a reduction in class size in relation to the number of students with exceptionalities (Bennett and Gallagher, 2009).

6.07 An adequate funding formula will help to create a safe classroom environment, characterized by manageable class sizes and populated by teachers who have the expertise required to address the needs of their students.

6.08 Special education funding is subject to ongoing challenges, because funding has not been modified to reflect current need. The \$27,000 cap in the Special

Incidence Portion of the Special Education Grant has not been altered since the system was introduced in 1998. While the cost of providing special education has risen, the funding to provide these services has stagnated.

- 6.09** More generally, the shift from needs-based to enrolment-based funding for special education programs has created funding inadequacies. There is not a direct correlation between overall levels of enrolment and actual funding requirements for special education services. The student population varies from one school board to another. Accordingly, a per-student funding model is not an accurate measurement of student need.
- 6.10** This model leads to a growing gulf between funding and need, leading many boards underfunded in this critical grant line. The Ministry of Education is aware of the difficulties associated with the current funding model for special education, but reform has been slow in coming. The model currently proposed will be based on board (2007-08) and census data (2006) that is years old.
- 6.11** The Ministry of Education need not be the only government source of funding for special education. Ministry collaboration is required to meet the varied physical, social, behavioural, mental health, and language needs of students. This includes ensuring that students have access to a wide range of qualified personnel and appropriate facilities that they require.
- 6.12** The support of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services is a precondition to the success of certain special education initiatives. Despite much discussion on the subject, progress has been slow to carry out inter-ministerial collaboration to meet special education needs. It is unrealistic to expect school boards to fund special education programs and services independently, without adequate support from government ministries.
- 6.13** With the reduction of dedicated special education teachers in some school boards, classroom teachers have been charged with much of the reporting, assessment and paperwork (such as Individual Education Plans), that previously fell under the purview of specialized staff. The result is additional demands on classroom teachers and less specialized, skilled intervention for students. There

are areas where efficiencies can be realized in terms of resource allocation. For example, a portion of the money currently directed towards the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat and other data-driven branches of the Ministry could be redirected to support special education programs.

OECTA Recommendations

That the government remove the cap on the Special Incidence Portion of special education grants.

That the government improve funding for special education programs to acknowledge need, rather than just overall enrolment levels.

6.14 Funding for Learning Differences

The current education funding formula has succeeded in establishing uniform financial norms for education across the province, but it has been unsatisfactory in how it allocates funding for differences. In addition to Special Education, the funding formula does not provide adequate funding for individualized student needs such as language.

6.15 For example, the Learning Opportunities Grant was designed to provide special programming for students from economically and socially challenging backgrounds, special education, and English or French as a second language. Yet, this grant has never been funded at a level necessary to accomplish its intended objectives. Accordingly, funding for the Learning Opportunities Grant should be increased, and linked to specific program expectations.

6.16 Funding for English language learners does not match actual need, as indicated by current immigration trends. The federal government's actions with respect to immigrant settlement services will only increase the pressure on the school system, heightening the need for increased provincial funding.

7. SAFER SCHOOLS

7.01 As community hubs, schools are an integral part of today's communities. The health and viability of our schools is an essential precondition for every student to reach his or her potential. Schools must be safe and healthy to provide every student, teacher, and employee with an enriched learning environment.

- 7.02** There is no magic solution to creating a safe school. However, One key component is to address bullying in a more coherent and effective way. It is critical that the government continue to provide funding for bullying prevention training for teachers, students and parents. It is essential that these anti-bullying programs and strategies consider all targeted groups.

OECTA Recommendation

That the government continue to provide funding for bullying prevention training and programs.

8. STABILITY

- 8.01** A significant achievement of the past eight years has been the stabilization of Ontario's education system. The current labour relations framework has established the basis for productive, long-term collective agreements between teachers' unions and the school boards.

- 8.02** We understand the motivation behind the government's desire to see restraint in future wage and salary increases in the public sector. We appreciate the government's commitment to the collective bargaining process in general, and to the framework it has established in the education sector in particular. And we are confident that, as has been the case in the past, collective bargaining settlements in the public sector will continue to reflect economic circumstances.

- 8.03** There is no need for extraordinary intervention in the process. Indeed, historical evidence shows that such intervention would be extremely counterproductive.

OECTA Recommendation

That the government continue to meet its commitment to the collective bargaining process and fully fund local collective agreements.

9. THE STRENGTHENED SOCIAL SAFETY NET

- 9.01** One of the most significant initiatives of the provincial government in recent years has been its commitment to a 25 per cent reduction in child poverty within

five years. Since the economic downturn, momentum towards this objective has stalled.

- 9.02** It is premature to determine the impact of the poverty reduction strategy adopted in 2008. Income-based indicators from Statistics Canada are only available for the first year after the strategy's implementation. Yet, the available data shows that progress has been made – with 20,000 less children living in poverty in 2009, as compared to in 2008.
- 9.03** At this point, any weakening of the government's commitment with respect to child poverty is potentially devastating. It is never a good time to back away from a commitment to address issues facing our most disadvantaged citizens – the worst time to do it is during a climate of significant economic uncertainty.
- 9.04** As social inequality becomes increasingly prevalent in Canadian society, families experiencing economic insecurity rely on sustained public investments to lift them out of poverty. It makes sense to plan for poverty reduction in periods of economic uncertainty, because inaction leads to higher long-term costs.
- 9.05** Ontario's families are under greater stress today than at any time since the Great Depression. The data clearly indicates that our economic safety net – employment insurance and social assistance – were inadequate during the 2008 recession. Canada stands alone in its failure to enhance support for its unemployed and low-income citizens during the recession.
- 9.06** Some economists claim that the recession has passed and recovery is underway, yet many children and families continue to live in economic uncertainty. The labour market is not yet restored to pre-recession levels, household debt is at an all-time high in Canada, and the unemployment rate remained high (7.3 per cent) as of July 2011 (Canadian Labour Congress, 2011).
- 9.07** Ontario cannot act alone to strengthen the social safety net. However, it must do what it can. Ontario cannot, under any circumstances, justify backing away from its formal legislative commitment to reduce child poverty.

- 9.08** It is critical that Ontario’s anti-poverty initiatives move forward, and that current programs and initiatives designed to assist the neediest are evaluated to ensure that they are achieving their intended goals. In instances where they are not, new strategies must be developed to help all Ontarians maximize their potential.
- 9.09** The report from the Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario, initiated by the government in January 2011, is long overdue. Its recommendations will be instrumental in developing an action plan to enhance social assistance. This plan must make the social assistance system more effective at helping people get jobs and easier to navigate. It will help our system become better aligned with other federal, provincial and municipal income security programs, such as Employment Insurance, and become more accountable and fiscally responsible. The responsibility is on the government to continue to take actions in the meantime, to ensure that poverty reduction remains a priority.

OECTA Recommendations

That the 2012 budget include support for low-income families, to achieve the goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

That the 2012 budget provide sufficient funding to maintain existing levels of child care service.

10. CORPORATE TAX CUTS

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

same tax rate as in 2000, federal and provincial governments would have collected an additional \$12 billion in revenue in 2009 (CCPA, 2011).

- 10.03** Accordingly, OECTA supports a cancellation of government's previously stated plan to lower the general statutory CIT to 10 per cent by 2013. This plan deprives the province of revenues that it desperately needs, undermining the deficit reduction strategy. Scrapping the government's planned corporate tax cuts would result in an additional \$800 million in government revenues (Benzie, 2011). This money is desperately needed to protect vital front line government services – not to put more money in the hands of some of Canada's largest corporations.
- 10.04** A 2011 Globe and Mail analysis of Statistics Canada figures showed that the rate of investment in machinery and equipment has declined, despite repeated reductions in corporate tax rates over the past decade. Businesses were expected to use extra money from repeated tax cuts to build offices and factories and purchase machinery and equipment, but the Globe's analysis revealed that investment in equipment and machinery has actually decreased (Howlett, 2011). Non-financial corporations that have enjoyed repeated tax cuts have amassed vast sums of cash, are paying out dividends, and are not reinvesting.
- 10.05** Noted economist Hugh Mackenzie (2010) supported that corporate income taxes are pointless in an economic sense and counterproductive fiscally. He notes that business tax cuts since the 1990s have contributed to Ontario's deficit, while failing to achieve their purported objectives. In a December 12, 2011 speech, Bank of Canada Governor Mark Carney delivered a warning that businesses must use their healthy profits to increase investments and productivity, which will result in higher wages, greater profits, and higher government revenues.
- 10.06** Carney's speech reinforced that repeated corporate tax cuts have left large corporations with increases in their revenues – but the pay-off has not been realized in the real investment rate. Even Don Drummond acknowledged that public policy changes such as cuts to corporate taxes have actually deteriorated productivity growth (Drummond, 2011).

10.07 Economist Jim Stanford remarked that there is a lack of clear, empirical evidence in the literature that supports that business tax cuts will stimulate significant investments. Part of the issue, he observed, is that the research rarely takes into consideration the full range of key determinants of firm investment behavior. Stanford argued that historical evidence has demonstrated that business tax cuts are economically ineffective, and that most of the income on capital benefits the wealthiest in society.

10.08 Consequently, repeated corporate tax cuts have contributed to Ontario's increasingly regressive taxation system. These cuts put more money in the pockets of corporations, while decreasing government revenues and making life less affordable for Ontario families. Given the skepticism surrounding their effectiveness, it is not the time to continue with the planned corporate tax cuts. Ontario can no longer afford the corporate tax cuts from the last 10 years.

OECTA Recommendation

That the government implement no further corporate tax cuts.

11. CONCLUSION

11.01 Since 2003, ongoing investment in Ontario's publicly funded education system has resulted in system-wide improvement, as indicated by international recognition and greater public satisfaction with the system. It is problematic to view the education system as akin to a business environment. Certain gains in our education system are more intangible and cannot be quantified by outputs and results.

11.02 Gains such as lower classroom sizes have had intrinsic benefits. Lower classroom sizes enable teachers to address the varied academic needs of students, and to identify students' psychological, social, behavioural, mental health, and language needs. Lowered classroom sizes have resulted in better learning environments, opportunities for meaningful assessment and evaluation, and more time for professional dialogue and parent communication.

11.03 OECTA believes that we need to continue on the path we are on in Ontario, while simultaneously looking at areas where reform is prudent. When it comes to

education, excellent outcomes result from maximizing education dollars that are tied closely to the classroom. Accordingly, government spending reductions should come from the bureaucracy and administration, not from the classroom. Reform efforts and assessment initiatives should be more closely linked to front line teachers.

11.04 There is a need for government, school boards and education stakeholders to shift attitudes, so that education reform movements begin at the grassroots level. This approach is consistent with sound pedagogical research, respects teachers' knowledge and skills, and is a more fiscally prudent approach to education administration.

11.05 More broadly, reform to Ontario's public services must respect our shared values, which are intrinsic to our public services – values such as fairness, accessibility, and equity. Moving to privatize public services is not the answer. Historical evidence and sound research demonstrate that privatization often drives up costs over time, while compromising the quality of public services.

11.06 OECTA believes that the government must continue to strive to address the relevant and serious issue of income inequality, by continuing to provide high-quality, stable public services. Government services that are accessible to all Ontarians – such as health care and education – help to reduce the gap between high and low income earners, giving every Ontarian an equal chance to succeed.

12. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 12.01** That the government link education funding, as closely as possible, to teacher directed initiatives that support teachers and students in the classroom.
- 12.02** That the government introduce and enforce a real spending reduction on senior administrators to save \$150 million.
- 12.03** That the government reduce the size of Ministry of Education senior bureaucracy linked to assessment initiatives, to direct savings to front line classroom initiatives.
- 12.04** That the government consider short-term (five-year) rotating contracts for Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat staff to ensure that Secretariat staff have recent teaching experience.
- 12.05** That resources currently being allocated to fund Student Achievement initiatives be reallocated to the classroom to directly support student achievement on a day-to-day basis.
- 12.06** That the government direct the Education Quality and Accountability Office to move to a random sample student assessment model.
- 12.07** That the government provide funding for a cap of 20 full-day Kindergarten pupils per class.
- 12.08** That the government provide adequate funding for classroom resources and hands-on learning materials as part of the implementation of the full-day Kindergarten program.
- 12.09** That the government maintain current standards for small class sizes in Ontario schools.
- 12.10** That adult education credit courses be funded at the same level as under-21 credit courses.

- 12.11** That the government expand existing, and develop new re-training programs to assist displaced workers in acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully re-enter the job market.
- 12.12** That the government remove the cap on the Special Incidence Portion of special education grants.
- 12.13** That the government improve funding for special education programs to acknowledge need, rather than just overall enrolment levels.
- 12.14** That the government continue to provide funding for bullying prevention training and programs.
- 12.15** That the government continue to meet its commitment to the collective bargaining process and fully fund local collective agreements.
- 12.16** That the 2012 budget include support for low-income families, to achieve the goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- 12.17** That the government provide sufficient funding to maintain existing levels of child care service.
- 12.18** That the government implement no further corporate tax cuts.

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