



Lessons  
for Life



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We teach Lessons for Life  
because Life is the Test.



## Introduction

Ontario's system of publicly funded education is among the best in the world, with impressive student achievement and sincere efforts to improve equity and inclusivity. Every day, Catholic teachers across Ontario play a vital role in this system. The values-based education we provide encourages students to become active, contributing members of their communities.

Preparing students to meet life's challenges goes beyond teaching math and spelling, science and geography. In all that we do, Catholic teachers promote values like fairness, compassion, respect, and concern for social justice and the environment. These values are embedded into every lesson.

These values also shape our policies and positions as an Association. Catholic teachers take a broad view of our responsibility to make this province a better place to learn and grow, and we advocate for a range of policies that protect and propel Ontarians throughout their lives. From early childhood education and care, to job-training programs for youth, to predictable and adequate retirement incomes, we believe the province will be made healthier and more cohesive when all Ontarians are given the ability to develop their potential, contribute to their communities, and provide for themselves and their families.

This document articulates and explores a number of these positions. Using current evidence, the following pages present a series of "lessons" that support the Association's views in a range of policy areas. Together, these lessons convey the holistic approach that Catholic teachers take toward education and citizenship. These lessons also speak to the unique value and contribution that Catholic education provides to our publicly funded system. In short, this book is about who we are and what we do.

We hope you will take the time to reflect on our positions, then join us in advocating for policies that will help all Ontarians succeed in the ultimate test: life.

# Setting every young learner on the path to success

Twenty years ago, in the throne speech that opened the 36th Parliament of Canada, the federal government signalled a new direction for Canadian social policy, saying, "A country that invests in its children successfully will have a better future. One of our objectives as a country should be to ensure that all Canadian children have the best possible opportunity to develop their full potential. We must equip our children with the capacities they need to be ready to learn and to participate fully in our society."

In a similar vein, the throne speech that opened the 41st Parliament of Ontario in 2014 discussed how the government intended to ensure "that every child in Ontario has the best possible start in life," and strongly asserted that "investments to develop the talent and skills of our people... pay dividends today and tomorrow."

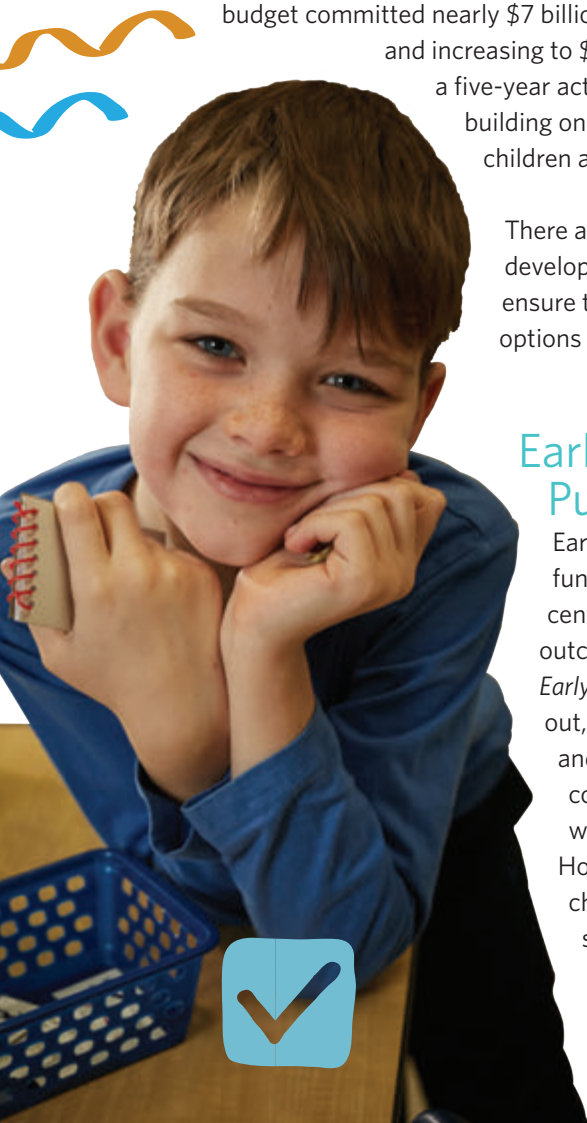
Unfortunately, our actions have not always matched our rhetoric. Although Ontario has made an exemplary investment in four- and five-year-olds with the Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program, there remain significant issues with regard to program design and funding. More broadly, as a country, we still spend only 0.35 per cent of GDP on early childhood education and care (ECEC), which is half the OECD average, and well behind advanced countries such as Denmark and Sweden (OECD, 2016; CCAAC, 2016).

Recently, there have been signs of progress. In June 2017, the federal government took a significant step toward fulfilling its promise from two decades ago, by creating a national framework for child care. The 2017-18 federal budget committed nearly \$7 billion in new child care funding, starting with \$500 million in the 2017-18 fiscal year, and increasing to \$870 million annually by 2026. In 2017, the provincial government announced a five-year action plan to create affordable child care spaces for all parents who want them, building on a previous commitment to create 100,000 new licensed child care spaces, for children aged four and under, by 2022 (Monsebraaten, 2017).

There are clear and measurable benefits to investing in integrated early childhood development. We must continue to advocate for targeted investments in ECEC, and ensure that there are universal, affordable, accessible, and not-for-profit child care options available for children of all ages.

## Early Childhood Education and Care is a Vital Public Investment

Early childhood is a pivotal life stage, during which we develop crucial neurological functions, cognitive abilities, social skills, behaviours, and attitudes. Ninety per cent of a child's brain is developed by age five, and learning, behaviour, and health outcomes are associated with one another (RCPSC, 2014). As the authors of the *Early Years Study* put it, "Later circumstances have an influence on how things turn out, but the trajectories launched in early childhood become part of our biology and carry forward" (McCain, Mustard, and McCuaig, 2011). Parents, families, and communities obviously bear much of the responsibility for providing young children with safe, stimulating environments that will foster their healthy development. However, child care and early learning opportunities, ideally with trained early childhood educators (ECEs), are also essential for exposing children to more formal social interactions and play-based educational activities.





## The Benefits of Early Childhood Education and Care

The benefits of investing in integrated early childhood development are clear, and have proven to increase equity in learning outcomes, reduce poverty, and create a strong foundation for lifelong learning (McCuaig, Bertrand, and Shanker, 2012). Educators, academics, and business leaders agree that targeted investments in early childhood education and care (ECEC) are one of the most effective uses of taxpayer dollars (OECD, 2012). These investments yield both short- and long-term returns for children and society as a whole. A 2012 report from TD Bank's Chief Economist, Craig Alexander, links early childhood development programs to economic benefits, such as reducing labour and skills shortages, and increasing productivity and innovation; the report also credits investment in ECEC with lifelong reductions in social welfare and health care costs (Alexander and Ignjatovic, 2012). A more recent study, published by the Conference Board of Canada, found that every dollar spent expanding enrolment in early childhood education yields close to six dollars in economic benefits (Alexander et al., 2017).

Quebec, where universal access to low-fee child care was introduced in 1997, offers concrete evidence of the benefits of ECEC investment. In 2008, the program increased the provincial GDP by 1.7 per cent, and together the federal and provincial governments pocketed \$900 million in tax revenues over and above the cost of the program (Mojtehedzadeh, 2014; Fortin, Godbout, and St-Cerny, 2012). Contrast this to the situation in Ontario, where it has been estimated businesses lose \$1.74 billion per year as a result of employee turnover, absenteeism, and health care premiums arising from parents' work-life conflict (Kershaw, 2011).

All children benefit from ECEC, but children from low-income households or who are otherwise disadvantaged stand to gain the most (Heckman and Masterov, 2007). Children from low-income families generally do not receive the same attention or opportunities to develop their abilities as their peers from higher-income households, and they often arrive at school with limited skills in areas such as vocabulary and communication, numeracy, concentration and co-operative play (Isaacs, 2012; Thomas, 2006). Exposing disadvantaged children to more diverse language, communities, and activities will help to prevent some of the vulnerabilities that could hinder their success in school. They will also be able to develop non-cognitive qualities like confidence and conscientiousness, which are less tangible but perhaps even more important for success later in life (Almlund et al., 2011).

Unfortunately, many families in Ontario are unable to access affordable ECEC. Currently, there are licensed ECEC spaces for just 20 per cent of Ontario children under age four; for infants under 18 months old, capacity currently stands at less than five per cent (Macdonald and Klinger, 2015). The provincial and federal governments have made important commitments; however, they must ensure that child care is accessible, affordable, and staffed with qualified, well-compensated professionals.



**Educators, academics, and business leaders agree that targeted investments in early childhood education and care are one of the most effective uses of taxpayer dollars.**

### Quality, Affordable, and Accessible Care

ECEC is an aspirational term, referring to services that blend care, learning, and support for children and families. This has been a challenge within Canada and in many jurisdictions around the world (Senate of Canada, 2009).

Not all ECEC opportunities are equally beneficial. To maximize the returns on our investments, we need to pay close attention to quality, affordability, and accessibility.

There are several things to consider when establishing high quality early childhood education and care. For example, in their *Early Learning and Development Framework*, Canada's ministers of education have called for safe, healthy, and engaging learning spaces, because "beautiful and joyful environments that are rich in opportunities lead to in-depth exploration, play and inquiry, and enhance holistic development and learning, health and well-being" (CMEC, 2014). The OECD (2012) encourages governments to set and enforce standards on, among other things, physical space, staff training levels, and work conditions.



It is also essential that Ontarians be able to afford quality child care. Research from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives indicates that the median monthly cost of full-day care for an infant can be as high as \$1,452 (Macdonald and Friendly, 2017). For many Ontarians, this is tantamount to a second mortgage. Given the social and economic benefits of ECEC, the government has an obligation not only to provide these services, but also to do so in a manner that is affordable for all Ontario families.

### **The Need for Publicly Funded ECEC Spaces**

One of the most significant ways we can increase the likelihood of quality, affordable, and accessible ECEC is to support non-profit providers. Throughout Canada, nearly 30 per cent of centre-based spaces are in the for-profit sector, and 58 per cent of the expansion in child care spaces between 2010 and 2012 was in for-profit centres (Ferns and Friendly, 2014). In Ontario, more than 25 per cent of centre-based spaces are run by for-profit entities (Macdonald and Klinger, 2015). These numbers exclude home daycares, many of which are also operated on a for-profit basis.

The reasons we should be wary of for-profit child care are not difficult to discern. Most for-profit child care operators, especially those run by large corporations, will seek to cut costs wherever possible. They have incentives to hire less qualified staff, offer lower wages and benefits, have larger ratios of children to caregiver, and/or spend less money on materials and equipment. Research indicates that, both in Canada and abroad, for-profit child care models are consistently associated with a lower quality of early childhood education and care (Prentice, 2000; Rigby, Ryan, and Brooks-Gunn, 2007; Cleveland, 2008).

In contrast, a Canadian analysis of four datasets using various scales of measurement shows that non-profits "produce a higher quality of care" and are more likely to help us achieve the goal of an ECEC system that both contributes to child development and encourages parental employment (Cleveland et al., 2007). In light of these studies, even those who are skeptical of publicly funded, universal child care say the public debate should acknowledge that non-profit options are preferred (Geddes, 2013). We owe our children nothing less than to implement the best possible system based on the best available evidence.

Finally, we must also ensure that ECEs are fairly compensated for the important work they do. The median hourly wage for child care workers in Ontario is just \$17 per hour, which fails to recognize the tremendous responsibilities these people undertake, and prevents many qualified, committed people from entering the field at all (Warren, 2016). We hope that public subsidies for child care will enable ECEs to receive pay that is commensurate with their skills and value.



## **Full-Day Kindergarten Builds a Solid Foundation for Every Student**

The discussion about quality ECEC leads us to the Full-Day Early Learning-Kindergarten Program. Although it has faced complaints and criticism from





a number of opponents, this ground-breaking initiative has now been almost completely implemented. And, for the most part, parents, teachers, ECEs, and administrators agree the program is preparing children socially and academically, leading to better outcomes in later years (Alphonso, 2017; Janmohamed, et al. 2014). However, to deliver the program most effectively, it must be designed, funded, and operated appropriately. Although the government has introduced class size caps that restrict FDK classes to no more than 30 students, there remain some critical issues that need to be addressed.

### Ensuring the Continued Success of Full-Day Kindergarten

Kindergarten-Grade 1 combined classrooms have been a concern for several years (Hammer, 2011). In the 2017-18 school year, Ministry of Education data reveal 148 combined Kindergarten-Grade 1 classes in Ontario Catholic elementary schools, alone. This is troubling because a split classroom could have students ranging from four to seven years old, with large gaps in social and cognitive development. Also, there is a marked difference in the curriculum between Kindergarten and Grade 1. Play-based learning is a fundamental principle of the full-day Kindergarten program, while the Grade 1 curriculum is more structured. Split classes limit the time and space available for Kindergarten students to play and explore (Alphonso, 2014a).

In spite of having a teacher and an ECE in the classroom, and even with Ministry directives to cap class sizes, some full-day Kindergarten classes continue to maintain student numbers that are difficult to manage. Ministry of Education documents show that for Catholic elementary schools in the 2017-18 school year, some 249 FDK classes, representing 9 per cent, have 30 or more students. The academic research is very clear that small class sizes are an important determinant of student outcomes, especially for disadvantaged children and others who might have difficulty transitioning to the school setting (Schanzenbach, 2014). Also, when dealing with young children in a play-based environment, reasonable class sizes are essential for ensuring the safety of students and teachers. We cannot allow overcrowding to jeopardize the success of the ambitious full-day Kindergarten program.

Even when class sizes are kept relatively small, the interaction and combined efforts of the teacher and ECE are vital to student success. When the program was developed, the teacher/ECE teams were recommended based on pilot tests in Ontario and elsewhere, in which teams were found to “add to the strengths of the professional preparation and skill sets of both teachers and ECEs” (Pascal, 2009). ECEs bring specialized knowledge about early childhood development, while certified teachers bring high levels of skills and training related to pedagogy and delivery of the curriculum. Research has shown one of the main reasons students are benefitting from the program is that staff teams are “uniting around the mission to support young children and families” (Pelletier, 2014). The proper functioning of the staff teams is upset when school boards manipulate government regulations or staff schedules so that one of the members of the team is taken out of the classroom during the instructional period. We must keep the program true to its original promise and guarantee that the government and school boards will create the conditions for teachers and ECEs to provide the best possible learning environment for every student in every class.

### CONCLUSION

*It should be enough to support early childhood education and care for the simple fact that it makes childhood better. Children take great joy in playing with their friends and engaging in stimulating activities. We should want to give all children the opportunity to take part in these experiences in safe environments with the proper guidance. As governments work to improve the child care system in Ontario, and across Canada, we must ensure that all families have access to quality, affordable care. Doing so will not only allow more parents to join the labour market and grow the economy, but also will lay the foundation for a more fair and prosperous Ontario. Public investments in ECEC is not a luxury, but a necessity.*



## Building safe and inclusive school communities

Schools do not exist in isolation. When students arrive each morning, they bring all of the qualities and challenges that affect their families and communities. For some lucky students, this means a wealth of resources and encouragement. For others it means facing poverty, discrimination, and violence. Some students also face individual health issues or learning difficulties that differentiate them from their peers.

Students who face barriers to learning often struggle to develop the cognitive and non-cognitive abilities that influence academic success. They can quickly fall behind and become discouraged, which further reduces their capacity and willingness to engage with classmates and the curriculum. Our schools should constantly strive to be models of diversity and understanding, where we advocate for social justice, create safe spaces for students and teachers to interact, and provide the necessary supports to suit individual needs and learning styles.

### The Well-Being of Students and Teachers is Paramount

In recent years, the concept of “well-being” has moved beyond its traditional focus on physical health, and has taken on a more comprehensive definition. In May 2016, the Ministry of Education released Ontario’s *Well-Being Strategy for Education Discussion Document*, which defines well-being as “that positive sense of self, spirit and belonging that we feel when our cognitive, emotional, social and physical needs are met.” The document states that supporting well-being is essential for fostering healthy, active, and engaged citizens, and breaks down the concept into four main components: positive mental health; equity and inclusive education; safe and accepting schools; and healthy schools.

#### Student Mental Health and Well-Being

Research has repeatedly verified the clear and identifiable link between children’s mental health and positive educational achievement (Johnston, Propper, Pudney, and Shields, 2011; Cornaglia, Crivellaro, and McNally, 2012; Veldman, Bültmann, Stewart, Ormel, Verhulst, and Reijneveld, 2014). As much as 70 per cent of mental health issues have their onset during childhood or adolescence (Government of Canada, 2006). In Ontario, the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health found that one in six students describe their own mental health as fair or poor (Boak et al., 2015). At the same time, however, young people remain the least likely to receive adequate care; currently, more than 6,500 children and youth in Ontario with significant mental health issues wait more than a year to access treatment (Children’s Mental Health Ontario, 2016; Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2016). In order for elementary and secondary schools to support the many students with emerging or existing mental health needs, they must be adequately funded, prepared, and resourced.

Undiagnosed or untreated mental health issues are a significant impediment to student engagement and achievement. By providing mental health supports in schools, where children and youth spend much of their time, we can reduce stigma, help students with mental health issues feel connected to their communities, and deliver more responsive service.

**Currently, more than 6,500 children and youth in Ontario with significant mental health issues wait more than a year to access treatment.**

Across the country, 87 per cent of teachers have said that lack of staff training is a potential barrier to providing mental health services for students in their schools, and only one-third of teachers report having participated in any professional development to address student mental illness (Froese-Germain and Riel 2012). Teachers want to build safe and welcoming communities, offering the best opportunity for students with mental health issues to succeed in their studies. However, they are not in a position to provide the full range of services and supports required, which is why schools need professional staff with specialized knowledge and skills. Programs like School Mental Health ASSIST and Mental Health and Addiction Nurses in District School Boards are working to help schools recognize and respond to mental health issues. Increased funding for these types of programs, as well as for professionals who can work with students to overcome their mental health issues, will undoubtedly improve student well-being and achievement.

Geography and population present challenges that hinder the effectiveness of certain programs. Northern and rural boards might have fewer students with mental health issues but be too large to be adequately served by a handful of professionals. On the other hand, while travel is not necessarily an issue in urban boards, they are likely to have much higher numbers of students with mental health challenges. This is why the Ministry of Education should work with other ministries to fund and establish services within schools to provide direct supports for students. In addition, existing services supporting families and communities can be delivered from space available in elementary and secondary schools, especially in areas of the province that are underserved.

Through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (2016), the government has updated its bold plan to address the mental health and addictions needs of all Ontarians, especially youth. The Ministry of Education has also implemented some initiatives that help teachers and other staff to raise awareness, reduce the stigma around mental health issues, and address crisis situations (Finlay, 2011). The 2017-18 Grants for Student Needs continues to provide funding for a Mental Health Leader for each school board as well as funding to support education programs for school-aged children and youth in care, treatment centres, or custody (Ministry of Education, 2017). However, we are 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.

### **Bullying in Schools**

Bullying is not a harmless rite of passage. As was recognized in *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, bullying affects individuals at school and throughout their lives (Ministry of Education, 2009). Some groups of students are at especially high risk of being bullied. In a national survey, the majority of students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ)





reported being verbally harassed at school. One in five said they had been physically harassed or assaulted (Taylor et al., 2011). When it comes to cyberbullying, girls are much more likely than boys to be victimized, usually in the form of threatening, aggressive, or hateful comments received by email or instant message, or posted on a website. Most victims are bullied by someone they know, such as a classmate, friend or acquaintance (Juvonen and Graham, 2014).

Catholic teachers are strongly supportive of initiatives that create safe learning environments and enhance social cohesion, such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs), and by most accounts GSAs are working to reduce stigma and build understanding. The Ministry of Education's (2015a; 2015b) revised health and physical education curriculum represents further progress, as it provides relevant information and advice on healthy relationships, consent, and appreciating diversity.

Many policies and programs to make schools safer and more welcoming for students, teachers and education workers could be easily implemented, with minimal financial cost. This is another area where schools, municipalities, and community groups can collaborate to accomplish shared goals (Robinson, 2014). Staff in Ontario's schools need training and tools to implement community-building and anti-violence measures that will prevent conflicts before they arise.

### **Addressing Violence and Harassment Against Teachers**

Over the past few years, there have been growing concerns about students acting out with aggression and violence against their teachers. These incidents have profound impact on teachers' safety and well-being, and they negatively affect the work and learning environment for all staff and students in a school.

We have been raising these issues with the government and school boards since at least 2009, but we have encountered reluctance to acknowledge any problems. There is a tendency to excuse student behaviour, especially among young children who may not be fully in control of their actions. There is also a fear that by exposing the prevalence of violent incidents, we risk casting schools or the education system in a bad light. We know that official reports of violent incidents do not reflect the stories we have been hearing from teachers.

In May 2017, the Association partnered with Pollara Strategic Insights to conduct a comprehensive survey of members' experiences of violence in the classroom; the goal was to better understand the scope and scale of a problem that exists across all systems of publicly funded education in Ontario, and how the education system can help students succeed, and ensure teachers stay safe.

The evidence gathered from the survey paints a troubling picture. For example, almost 90 per cent of respondents said that they have experienced or witnessed some form of violence or harassment by a student during their career. More than a quarter have had to take time off work because of the mental health effects of violence in schools. Eighty-five per cent feel that the incidence





of violence is increasing, while 80 per cent say that incidents are becoming more severe. And despite advocacy by Catholic teachers and others in the education community, 72 per cent of respondents do not believe that students and teachers are protected against violence or harassment in schools, with two-thirds saying they do not believe that school administrators take the matter seriously. These statistics illustrate a widespread crisis that cannot be allowed to persist.

While the survey data detail the scope and scale of the problem, they also point toward potential solutions. Key to addressing violence against teachers is the need to standardize the definition of a violent incident and stipulate the required response, so that everyone knows when an incident should be reported and what should be done about it. In addition, the government must make significant, ongoing investments in professional supports – such as educational assistants, psychologists, social workers, and child and youth workers – as well as develop policies and programs for those students who might need to be removed from the regular classroom for a time. The government must also ensure that school boards are consistently implementing and adhering to all of the required procedures, and that principals are encouraged and supported as they deal with incidents of violence openly and honestly.



**The government must make significant, ongoing investments in professional supports – such as educational assistants, psychologists, social workers, and child and youth workers.**

## Targeted Classroom Funding Can Help Remove Barriers to Learning

The Ministry of Education recognizes that some students are dealing with social and economic disadvantages that affect their ability to engage in the classroom and develop their abilities. This is why funding is provided through mechanisms such as the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) for additional teaching support, tutoring, and other programs to aid struggling students.

### Targeting Money Toward Students' Needs

These programs are only worthwhile if the money is spent appropriately and effectively, and it is not clear that this is currently the case. Over the years, the proportion of the grant that goes to services targeted toward students in need – such as guidance counsellors or nutrition programs – has been dramatically reduced (Brown, 2013). School boards have also reduced, in some cases to zero, the proportion of the LOG that is allocated to classroom teachers. This is not to say that the LOG should be allocated entirely to classroom teachers. However, it is difficult to see how the objectives of the grant – supporting skills acquisition and student success, especially among students at risk – can be met without ongoing investments in the classroom.

Furthermore, faced with an overall education budget that does not match student needs, legal pressure to balance their books, and no real requirement to show money is being spent as intended, school boards have great incentive to use so-called Special Purpose Grants to fill gaps in funding for core programs and expenses (Casey, 2013). For instance, in 2012-13 the Toronto District School Board is reported to have diverted almost 70 per cent of the funds that were intended for targeted initiatives to support at-risk students to other budget areas. The board is said to have diverted almost \$1 billion of such funding since it was introduced in 1998 (Johnston, Queiser, and Clandfield, 2013).



In the latest funding guidelines, the Ministry of Education (2017) indicates that there is “flexibility in how boards may use the individual [LOG] allocations, as long as the total funding is spent on the programs within the envelope.” However, there is still no clear process to determine how allocations from these grants are made, and no disclosure regarding these allocations until after the funding has been distributed. To be useful in holding school boards to account, reporting must be prompt, with real-time transfers of data where possible. This will enable stakeholders to track funding, flag issues as they arise, and ultimately ensure that funds are being used to improve learning opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds.



## Investment in Indigenous Education will Improve Outcomes for All Learners

The 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) report highlighted the serious challenges facing First Nations, Métis, and Inuit populations in Canada. Central to the report, and several of the associated “Calls to Action,” were issues pertaining to youth and education (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). While public attention is often drawn to the plight of students attending on-reserve schools, it is important to note that, in Ontario, 82 per cent of Indigenous students attend a provincially funded school (Ministry of Education, 2013). What is more, far from being concentrated in remote areas, EQAO data show that 92 per cent of elementary, and 96 per cent of secondary schools have Indigenous students (Gallagher-Mackay, Kidder, and Methot, 2013). As such, a comprehensive approach is necessary.

### Redressing Educational Gaps for Indigenous Learners

Since the release of the TRC report, the government has made important progress in areas such as embedding Indigenous education into the school experience. However, there remains significant work to be done. Indigenous students continue to lag behind their non-Indigenous counterparts in literacy and achievement (Ministry of Education, 2014; Statistics Canada, 2016; Gallagher-Mackay, Kidder, and Methot, 2013). These gaps have long-term consequences, as Indigenous Canadians continue to have significantly lower employment rates, among 25-54 year olds (Government of Canada, 2016).

As advocates point out, in order to address the current disparity in outcomes, the government must recognize two persistent gaps in its approach: the knowledge gap, and the resources gap (Dion, 2009). In 2007, the government recognized that all students and educators require greater knowledge of “the rich cultures and histories of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples” (Ministry of Education, 2007). However, nearly a decade later, a pervasive knowledge gap remains. Only 10 per cent of elementary schools, and 30 per cent of high schools offer Indigenous cultural ceremonies. What’s more, a “majority of schools do not offer any Indigenous education activities” (People for Education, 2016).

Since 2014, the government has made progress in several aspects of this policy area. The government has continued to work to embed Indigenous education into the school experience, such as the recent announcement of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Tungasuvvingat Inuit, to provide province-wide Inuit curriculum materials, as well as support programs for Inuit students in Ontario schools (Nunatsiaq Online, 2017). In addition, the government has provided funding to allow all school boards across Ontario to hire a dedicated Indigenous Education Lead to support the implementation of Ontario’s “Indigenous Education Strategy,” with a focus on increasing Indigenous student achievement and well-being (Ministry of Education, 2017).



**“Indigenizing” of education not only helps broaden knowledge for all students, but also has direct and quantifiable benefits for improving outcomes of Indigenous students.**



Continuing to redress the knowledge gap requires substantial investment in professional development. The impact of integrating Indigenous history and culture into daily lessons is well known (Dion, Johnston, and Rice, 2010; Dion, 2014). Professional development will ensure that teachers feel comfortable and empowered to teach this material. The resulting “indigenizing” of education not only helps broaden knowledge for all students, but also has direct and quantifiable benefits for improving outcomes of Indigenous students (OECD, 2017; Higher Education Strategy Associates, 2013).

In addition to investing in the professional development of certified teachers, schools need additional resources to ensure that FNMI students have the proper supports. In the 2016-17 Grants for Student Needs, the government has set aside \$64 million as part of its Indigenous education supplement. Of this, \$1.2 million was allocated in per-pupil funding meant to ensure that all boards have the resources to establish an FNMI Lead, dedicated to supporting implementation of the Ontario First Nations, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework (Ministry of Education, 2016). This is a positive step. However, it will be key for the government to include accountability and transparency measures to ensure that funds are directed in the most impactful way. We also continue to urge the Ministry of Education to work with other Ministries in order to ensure that Indigenous students, their families, and teachers have access to the necessary supports, both in and outside of school.

It is important to acknowledge that gains will not be achieved through stopgap measures like Teach for Canada. Despite good intentions, having a private organization send inexperienced recent graduates to serve one of the highest-needs student populations will do nothing to redress the persistence of these educational gaps, and might even be counterproductive (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2015).

## Additional Resources are Necessary to Support Students with Special Education Needs

On average, 17 per cent of students in each elementary school, along with 27 per cent of students in each high school, receive some form of assistance from the special education department (Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth, 2016; People for Education, 2016).

Ontario is realizing gains from increased funding for special education initiatives over the past decade. According to the 2014-15 Education Quality and Accountability Office provincial report, over the past five years, the percentage of Grade 3 students with special education needs performing at or above the provincial standard has increased by 13 percentage points in reading and by 12 percentage points in writing. These improvements have exceeded those of the Grade 3 population as a whole. Improvements in reading and writing of Grade 6 students with special education needs have also exceeded the improvements of the Grade 6 population as a whole.

However, there are still issues with respect to staffing and classroom composition that are limiting our ability to serve students with special education needs. For example, although the ratio of students to special education teachers has been fairly steady for the past few years, it is still much higher than it was before 2010 (People for Education, 2017). With the reduction in dedicated special education teachers, classroom teachers are now responsible for 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 demand placed on classroom teachers and less specialized, skilled intervention for students.

Research has shown that smaller classes enable teachers to more effectively address the unique learning needs of special education students while building safe, integrated classroom communities (Froese-Germain, Riel, and McGahey, 2012; Bascia, 2010). This is also true when the class has partially integrated special education students, and especially true when there are several students with special education needs, or students with multiple exceptionalities. Research from the Canadian Teachers' Federation found that 28 per cent of the nearly 10,000 classes surveyed had five or more students with special education needs, a percentage that has more than doubled in some jurisdictions since the early 2000s (CTF, 2011). Teacher surveys now highlight "class composition as the biggest obstacle to professional satisfaction" (Bennett, 2016). The government must commit to developing provincial class size and composition guidelines that will help teachers to provide the best possible learning environment for all students.



There are many factors that can influence how students with special education needs adapt to the classroom, but it is undeniable that our publicly funded schools need more resources to deal with these issues. Special education funding grants have been reformed to make them somewhat more needs-based and equitable, but the funding formula is still largely enrolment-based, which does not necessarily reflect the number of students in respective schools with special education needs. Furthermore, the Special Incidence Portion, which is used to fund support for students with extraordinarily high needs, is still capped at \$27,000 per full-time student, as it has been since 1998 (Ministry of Education, 2017). This amount falls below the provincial salary grid for educational assistants and is not nearly enough to cover the cost of specialized staff and necessary materials, especially given that inflation is constantly eroding the real-dollar value of the grant. As a result of these shortcomings, almost 80 per cent of school boards spend more on special education than they are allotted by the government. And as boards across the province struggle to manage their ever-tightening budgets, special education programs and staff are being reduced rather than expanded (Rushowy, 2015; Rushowy and Ferguson, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

*International observers have commended Ontario for our success in removing barriers to learning. The province is visited regularly by delegations from around the world, because foreign ministers of education recognize Ontario as a jurisdiction that can boast a small gap in performance between high- and low-income students (O'Dowd, 2013). The OECD (2016) cites Ontario as a jurisdiction that has carried out comprehensive, professionally driven reform with a commitment to universal high achievement and system coherence. In the United States, the National Center on Education and the Economy has focused on the supportive, co-operative nature of our reforms, in which the government has paid close attention to what teachers have to say about what works to improve student achievement (Tucker, 2011).*

*Still, there is much to be done. The challenges faced by students and their families continue to be reflected in the classroom. Addressing the root causes of poverty, eliminating discrimination and violence, both inside and outside of schools, and implementing comprehensive strategies for special education and mental health needs is a key lesson for life, and should be a core concern for any caring society. And while additional funding is required in some areas, much can be gained by simply changing attitudes or using existing resources more efficiently. By doing so, we will give all children the opportunity to realize their full potential.*



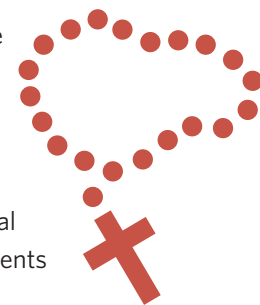


# ● Going beyond the basics of learning



School is where children learn how to live in the world, and Catholic teachers take special pride in our responsibility to nurture caring, mindful citizens. Globalization and advances in technology have made the world more fast-paced and interconnected than ever before, which makes it all the more vital that we graduate students who can appreciate diverse opinions and work constructively together.

In *Achieving Excellence: A Renewed Vision for Education in Ontario*, the Ministry of Education (2014a) set an ambitious agenda for 21<sup>st</sup> century learning. While acknowledging the importance of foundational literacy and numeracy skills, the government has also stressed the need to develop well-rounded students who are prepared to be critical thinkers, innovative problem solvers, and effective communicators and collaborators. To reach these goals, we will need to consider how well our schools, teachers, and students are equipped.



## Catholic Education Provides Unique and Important Value

Publicly funded Catholic schools have made remarkable contributions to the overall excellence of Ontario's world-renowned education system. Moreover, our Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations, which are integral to our pedagogy, offer a perfect road map for teaching the skills and attitudes the 21<sup>st</sup> century demands. 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 (ICE, 2011). Our graduates, who are active in all fields of modern society, say the education they received in Ontario's publicly funded Catholic schools taught them values of tolerance and empathy, gave them a sense of community, and fostered an awareness and understanding of social justice (Herbert and Childs, 2013).

The unique approach to education offered by Ontario's Catholic schools is rooted in our province's history and culture. The system continues to enjoy widespread support inside and outside of the Catholic community. There are almost 650,000 students in Ontario's Catholic schools, including many non-Catholic students whose parents have chosen to send their children to Catholic schools, in recognition of the system's high standards and holistic methods.

### **Confronting Myths about Publicly Funded Catholic Education**

Critics have suggested that consolidating systems could save more than \$1 billion, annually (Phillips, 2012). However, scholarship suggests the opposite is true. In their report on school board consolidation, Duncombe and Yinger (2001) found that over a 12-year period, consolidation generated almost zero long-term savings for boards that have more than 1,500 students (in Ontario, Catholic boards enrol an average of 19,000 students) (Ministry of Education, 2016). One of the main reasons consolidation fails to generate substantial savings is that the majority of education funding is per-pupil, and tied to enrolment (Ministry of Education, 2016). Without a significant change in the number of students enrolled, this approach would have little impact on government expenditure (Gillis, 2014). In short, the funding follows the student.

Public education is the great leveler of social inequality; in reality, the only way to achieve significant savings would be to have thousands of students move to the private education system, and to close hundreds of publicly funded schools. Such massive upheaval would disrupt the entire system of public education, especially in rural and northern areas of the province. Consolidation could also leave Ontario taxpayers on the hook for billions of



dollars in transition costs, as was the case when school boards were amalgamated in 1997 (Fraser Institute, 2015; OPSBA, 2016).



Instead of disrupting the entire system of public education, we can use provincially funded buildings in smarter, more collaborative ways (Heartfield, 2012). One option is to consider shared facilities, specifically for co-terminous boards. In its 2014-15 Pre-Budget Consultation Summary, the 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. However, research out of the United States suggests that this approach can reap considerable savings (PSBA, 2011; New York State, 2011).



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. Shared facilities can be helpful in maximizing cost efficiency, specifically in rural areas where enrolment declines have raised the spectre of school closures.

In addition to co-location, Ontarians can also benefit from shared services agreements (Ontario Education Services Corporation, 2016). A case study feasibility analysis of 11 Ontario school boards revealed that shared services in areas such as energy and transportation could produce ongoing annual savings of \$3-8 million per year, which would represent a 13-28 per cent savings on these boards’ annual total expenditures (Deloitte, 2012). Ultimately, exploring options for shared services agreements and co-locating schools are far more effective approaches than board amalgamation.

**Shared facilities can be helpful in maximizing cost efficiency, specifically in rural areas where enrolment declines have raised the spectre of school closures.**

## Class Size Matters

Some successful school systems have long recognized that broadening the curriculum demands students and teachers be given greater freedom to move beyond rigid desk-based methods and pursue non-conventional ideas and assignments. To create the physical space and intellectual environment appropriate for these activities, there must be fewer students in the classroom. For example, in Finland, primary and middle school classes are capped below 22 students, which enables students to undertake a variety of projects while nurturing “critical co-operative skills” (Abrams, 2011). This accords with evidence from the United States, where studies have demonstrated the impact class size has on student achievement and in narrowing the achievement gap (Mathis, 2016; Zyngier, 2014; Schanzenbach, 2014). Experts have also agreed that the use of technology and online learning is only valuable if it is part of a broadly redesigned curriculum and pedagogy that supports deeper and more sustained student engagement, meaningful learning tasks, as well as additional opportunities for collaboration (Means et al., 2009). Smaller classes are necessary to facilitate these refinements.



## Benefits of Smaller Class Size

The benefits of the innovative learning that can take place in smaller classes are immediately noticeable. They also persist over the long term. In their study of national data on Grade 8 students in the United States, Dee and West (2011) found class size reductions led to statistically significant improvements in psychological factors such as attentiveness and attitudes about learning. A similar conclusion was reached by researchers in Sweden, who found that smaller classes in the last three years of primary school (age 10 to 13) is beneficial for cognitive and non-cognitive test scores at age 13; for cognitive test scores at age 16 and 18; and for completed education and wages at age 27 to 42 (Fredriksson, Öckert, and Oosterbeek, 2013).

Research has also shown that smaller classes enable teachers to more effectively address the unique learning needs of special education students while building safe, integrated classroom communities (Froese-Germain, Riel, and McGahey, 2012; Bascia, 2010). This is also true when the class has partially integrated special education students, and especially true when there are several students with special education needs, or students with multiple exceptionalities. Research from the Canadian Teachers' Federation found that 28 per cent of the nearly 10,000 classes surveyed had five or more students with special education needs, a percentage that has more than doubled in some jurisdictions over the past 10 years (CTF, 2011). Teacher surveys now highlight "class composition as the biggest obstacle to professional satisfaction" (Bennett, 2016). The government must commit to developing provincial class size and composition guidelines, which will help teachers to provide the best possible learning environment for all students.

Given that non-cognitive skills stick with graduates throughout their lives, and yield considerable labour market benefits, it stands to reason that maintaining reasonable class sizes is likely to be cost-effective in the long run (Chetty et al., 2011; Muennig and Woolf, 2007). Furthermore, as societies become more diverse, and the world grows more interdependent, the citizen-building elements of the educational experience are becoming increasingly significant. Schools and teachers have an integral role to play in helping students to value differences among participants and learn the "basic skills of productive citizenry" (Wasley, 2002). Smaller classes enable teachers to engage students in meaningful discussions that advance this sort of learning.

Skeptics often point to jurisdictions such as Japan and South Korea - where class sizes are large and test scores are high - as evidence that small classes are not necessary. However, they ignore the consequences of these large classes, such as lack of student engagement and social skills (Haimson, 2011). Many of these same systems have announced plans to reduce class sizes in order to better develop communication skills, higher order thinking, and collaborative learning (Yonhap, 2016; Blatchford, 2013; Harfitt, 2012).

## We Need to Rethink Standardized Testing

Results of province-wide, standardized tests designed by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) were intended to contribute to current knowledge about student learning and assessment, build on the existing knowledge of educators and school



boards, and inform professional practice and focused interventions. School boards and schools already know where further attention is required, and teachers know better than anyone who among their students is struggling.

Concentrating on achievement tests and standardized measurements leads to a narrow focus on the types of learning and knowledge that lend themselves to being measured (Mulholland, 2015; Kohn, 2012). We fail to appreciate the full spectrum of abilities and qualities that will make students active, productive citizens. As was stressed in a recent OECD paper examining the importance of developing both cognitive and non-cognitive skills from an early age, achievement tests “do not adequately capture non-cognitive skills such as perseverance (‘grit’), conscientiousness, self-control, trust, attentiveness, self-esteem and self-efficacy, resilience to adversity, openness to experience, empathy, humility, tolerance of diverse opinions and the ability to engage productively in society, which are valued in the labour market, in school, and in society at large” (Kautz et al., 2014). Furthermore, because standardized testing examines “crystallized intelligence, or the application of memorized routines to familiar problems,” it is possible to raise test scores without really improving students’ overall ability to think critically or adapt to new situations (Kamenetz, 2015).

This runs counter to the holistic conceptualization of education proposed in *Achieving Excellence*. Moreover, Catholic teachers report the high-stakes approach to EQAO testing leads some schools to shift provincial funds that are intended for other purposes toward testing tools and materials. Although EQAO tests are not meant to be used to rank or compare schools, administrators feel anxious about how they measure up, and pressure their school to improve its scores. It is difficult to quantify the actual amounts in question, but the assessment-driven culture clearly results in less money being available for resources that might actually benefit students, such as school events, physical education equipment, music and art supplies, science equipment, text books, or information and communications technology.

### **Improving Standardized Assessment**

Recently, the government announced that it will undertake a review of EQAO assessment. This is welcome news, and something we have been advocating for some time. We hope that all options will be on the table, including eliminating high-stakes standardized testing entirely. At the very least, a random sampling model would produce accurate results at a fraction of the cost, 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 (Segool et al., 2013).

When the tests were introduced, random sampling was rejected because boards wanted more data to undertake “local reflection and focused intervention” (EQAO, 2012). However, the data generated from random sample testing, combined with existing knowledge from teachers and schools, would yield the information necessary for boards and the government to make thoughtful decisions about education programming and funding. This supports our belief that schools and boards can effectively assess student learning and provide accurate input as to what resources are needed and where.

## **Proper Investment in Technology Will Allow Students to Harness the Digital Age**

In *Achieving Excellence*, the Ministry of Education says students “will benefit from a wide array of opportunities both inside and outside of school that are compelling and contribute to their success, including the opportunity to benefit from the effective and appropriate use of technology in the classroom.” Catholic teachers recognize the need to help students develop the skills required in a technology-driven world. However, we are concerned that the available resources are insufficient to provide meaningful instruction and opportunities in this area.



### Investing in Classroom Technology

In 2009-10, the Classroom Computers component of the Pupil Foundation Grant was reduced by \$25 million. The reduction was only supposed to be in place for the 2009-10 and 2010-11 school years; to date, the funding has not been restored. The Textbook and Learning Materials component was also permanently reduced by \$25 million per year (Ministry of Education, 2009). Ontario's Auditor General (2017) has cited this as an example of the government using "out of date" benchmarks to determine education funding.

The government has completed an investment of \$150 million for tools such as tablets, cameras, and software, as well as professional learning for teachers in using these technologies (Ministry of Education 2014b). Recently, another \$50 million investment was announced, to improve access to high-speed broadband connectivity in schools across Ontario. However, given previous reductions in funding for computers and learning materials, this amount is not sufficient to make real progress in the provision of technology in schools. Instead, we have just been making up for lost time.



### Successful Use of Classroom Technology

The reality is that the need for infrastructure and hardware in schools is beyond what funding provides, and school boards are not able to keep pace with technological innovation. A study of 500 Canadian teachers found that "a lack of money, up-to-date technology and professional development were the top three barriers to integrating technology into the classroom" (National Post, 2014). The result has been inequality between boards, as well as the proliferation of "bring your own device" policies, which has widened the "digital divide" between students who have access to personal technologies and those who do not (Rushowy, 2014). As the curriculum, and the delivery of the curriculum, become increasingly dependent on technology, we must ensure there are no gaps among schools, or among students. Otherwise, the technology gap will lead to gaps in student achievement.

Successful use of technology in education also requires teachers who are equipped with adequate technological competency and well-designed learning objectives (Jacobsen, 2010). It is popular to speak of our students, and even younger teachers, as "digital natives" who already use information and communications technology in their daily lives (Della-Mattia, 2014). However, it cannot be assumed that students are necessarily prepared to use these tools for productive ends, or that teachers are automatically proficient in translating their personal fluency with technology into learning practice. For example, teachers need time and training to develop the specialized skill of selecting appropriate online resources (Peterson, 2016; People for Education, 2014). To achieve the best results, all teachers will continue to need expanded pre-service and in-service training to make productive use of technology to deliver curriculum.

## Professional Development Should be *for* Teachers, *by* Teachers

Ontario's teachers are well-trained professionals who have detailed knowledge of their students' needs. They are also enthusiastic learners who are eager to consider new methods and improve their practice. Each year, tens of thousands of teachers spend their own time and money expanding their horizons through Additional Qualifications courses (OCT, 2016). To really move our publicly funded education system beyond the basics, we need to give teachers more opportunities to undertake meaningful professional development, as well the autonomy to organize and contribute to these programs according to their professional judgement (CEA, 2015).

## Barriers to Successful Professional Development

Traditional models of professional development often have little to do with teachers' real needs. Every year sees the introduction of new ministry- or school-directed initiatives and one-off, one-size-fits-all workshops that are planned and implemented with no consultation with teachers. In many cases, teachers are taken out of the classroom, denied input on the content of the activities, and treated as passive participants in their own learning. Such experiences are patently unproductive.

## Successful Teacher-Led Professional Development

More than 20 years ago, renowned scholars Linda Darling-Hammond and Milbrey McGlaughlin (1995) identified essential features of effective professional development that will provide occasion for teachers to reflect critically and "fashion new knowledge and beliefs about content, pedagogy, and learners." Among other things, they recommended that professional learning be participant-driven and give teachers the opportunity to inquire, experiment, and collaborate. Overall, it should be an authentic experience that "allow[s] teachers to share what they know and what they want to learn and to connect their learning to the contexts of their teaching."

These considerations have come to define what is known as "job-embedded professional development," which is as relevant today as ever (Croft et al., 2010; Hall, 2016). As communities and student needs evolve, teachers must be empowered to develop professional learning that suits their specific interests and requirements. Ontario's teachers are already demonstrating their capacity in this regard. For example, the Teacher Learner and Leadership Program supports experienced teachers to undertake "self-directed advanced professional development for improving their practices and supporting students' learning." Individuals or groups design and lead projects in areas such as differentiated instruction, literacy, and technology. Teachers report that the initiative has enhanced collaborative professional learning and improved knowledge, understanding, and instructional practices (Campbell, Lieberman, and Yashkina, 2013). It is in everyone's interest to expand the time and resources available for this type of ongoing, classroom-focused, teacher-directed inquiry.

The collaborative element is particularly noteworthy. Input from outside researchers and specialists is certainly welcome, but teachers are the real experts in the field of education, and it has been shown that "teachers make and sustain valued changes to their practice when they collaboratively construct, monitor and adapt context-specific approaches to address their goals" (Schnellert and Butler, 2015). Collaborative approaches have been found to foster collegial, supportive atmospheres over the long term, enabling teachers to encourage and learn from one another, which ultimately improves outcomes in entire schools or districts (Wei et al., 2009). Collaborative professional learning is also an excellent model for our students, for whom understanding and teamwork will be essential to success inside and outside the classroom.

## CONCLUSION

*There is a popular misconception that broadening the curriculum or focusing on soft skills interferes with the basic knowledge acquisition the public expects from the education system. This is not so. Reading, writing, and arithmetic are as crucial today as ever, and teachers spend a great deal of time instilling this knowledge in their students.*

*At their best, publicly funded schools can be about so much more. We give our children the fullest opportunity to grow by fostering the development of values and citizenship. We develop well-rounded thinkers by incorporating technology and valuing a range of cognitive and non-cognitive skills. As well, we give our teachers and students freedom to explore by directing our scarce resources toward professional development and classroom improvements, rather than administrative funding and oversight. These lessons for life are essential for the success of our graduates, and the health of our province.*



# Engaging in lifelong learning



Quality early learning puts children on the right path, and our elementary and secondary schools develop creative, adaptable problem solvers. However, our education system cannot end there. As teachers show every day through our own professional development efforts, Ontarians can only reach their full potential by constantly updating their knowledge and skills.

Lifelong learning has always been a noble goal, but now it is a necessity. Our economy has moved into a post-industrial age, and traditional social and economic arrangements have evolved. These shifts have introduced “new social risks,” including unpredictable career paths and the likelihood that industries and skills will quickly become obsolete (Jenson and Saint-Martin, 2006; Taylor-Gooby, 2004). According to one popular estimate, as many as 65 per cent of students entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in a new job types that do not yet exist (WEF, 2016).

Since the 1990s, Canadian federal and provincial governments have talked a lot about ensuring that all citizens have a solid base of knowledge as well as opportunities to gain experience and upgrade abilities to meet the shifting demands of the labour market (Hicks, 2008). Progress has been made, but there are several fundamental and peripheral issues still in need of attention.

## Affordable and Accessible Post-Secondary Education is a Right

Canada leads the OECD in attainment of post-secondary education, and Ontario is tops in the country. Twenty-six per cent of Ontarians aged 25 to 64 have attained a college qualification, 34 per cent have a university degree, and 28 per cent have a certificate or diploma from a vocational school or apprenticeship training (Statistics Canada, 2017). However, for too many citizens, post-secondary education remains inaccessible. At an average of more than \$8,000 per year, Ontario has the highest tuition and mandatory university fees in the country (Statistics Canada, 2017). Since the 1990s, college tuition fees have outpaced inflation by 318 per cent, while university undergraduate tuition fees have outpaced inflation by 572 per cent (CFS-O, 2016).

Recent changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program are a step in the right direction. The government’s decision to repackage various existing financial assistance grants into one, up-front grant available at the time tuition is due has already created a windfall in students accessing financial assistance. In the first year of the OSAP revamp, there was a 15 per cent increase in the number of applications, with more than 185,000 students receiving financial assistance that is greater than or equal to their tuition fees (Jones, 2017). Other changes, such as improving financial assistance for mature learners and increasing the repayment threshold (Ministry of Education, 2017) send positive signals that the government is serious about improving the affordability of post-secondary education.



### **The Need for Adequate Post-Secondary Education Funding**

Ontario provides its universities and colleges with the lowest per-student funding of any province (King, 2015). Operations grants to post-secondary institutions have increased by 31 per cent in the past two decades; however, with student enrolment increasing by 54 per cent during that same period, there has been a net decrease in per-student funding (Financial Accountability Office, 2016). Further, in real dollars, Ontario has seen a four per cent decrease in provincial transfers to post-secondary institutions since 2011-12 (Usher, 2017).

This is short-sighted, because investments in post-secondary education are integral to the continued competitiveness of our economy. Expenditures at Canadian colleges and universities yield a gross economic benefit of roughly \$55 billion dollars per year, and through innovation, productivity, economic growth, and tax revenues, public investments in university degree holders generate a 36 to 46 per cent return over high school graduates (M. Grant, 2014). Statistics Canada data show that even during the last recession, most post-secondary degree holders earned relatively high wages, and some actually saw their salaries increase (Ferguson and Wang, 2014).

It is no secret that the bulk of the financial benefits from higher education are driven by a handful of high-wage, professional occupations, such as law, medicine, and engineering. Other fields in the social sciences and humanities undoubtedly contribute to the health of our civil society and democracy, but studies in these fields will not necessarily provide all graduates with rewarding career paths. So, while public investment in universities is an essential element of our approach to lifelong learning, we should also be further developing our college system and making it clear to young people that there are other routes through which they can maximize their potential. Many of the jobs created in the coming years will require extensive post-secondary training, but not necessarily through universities. Examples of occupations that will be in high demand include early childhood educators, paralegals, dental hygienists, electricians, and plumbers. We can be immensely helpful to our students by providing better information and by changing attitudes about the types of training and work that are valued by society.





**Expenditures at Canadian colleges and universities yield a gross economic benefit of roughly \$55 billion dollars per year.**

### **Equal Pay for Equal Work**

Despite improvements to student financial assistance, students are still not getting the quality of education they might expect. At 31:1, Ontario has the highest student-to-faculty ratio of any province (OCUFA, 2017). While student enrolment at Ontario universities increased by 22 per cent over the past decade, full-time faculty has increased by only four per cent. In fact, since 2006 the rate of increase in student enrolment has been more than five times that of faculty hiring. Furthermore, between 2000 and 2012, the percentage of classes in Ontario universities being taught by contract faculty has doubled (OCUFA, 2017). At York University, for example, 64 per cent of undergraduate courses are now taught by contract faculty, as opposed to full-time faculty (Brown, 2015).

Contract faculty are qualified and dedicated, but they receive lower pay and fewer benefits and pensions than their full-time counterparts. They often have to balance several different jobs at once, and they do not have access to the institutional resources – time, academic freedom, office space, research assistants – necessary to be fully functional researchers and teachers. As contract faculty struggle with the demands and stresses of job insecurity, undergraduate education suffers. The limited prospects for full-time employment in academia also helps explain why we are graduating so few PhDs. According to data compiled by the Conference Board of Canada (2015), Ontario is ahead of most provinces, but still trails peer OECD countries by a wide margin. This means our long-term knowledge production and innovation capacity are limited.

### **Adult Learners Deserve Quality Education**

We should not think of lifelong learning only in terms of highly educated people getting more education. For various reasons, millions of Canadians do not successfully complete high school. Helping these individuals increase their knowledge and skills would improve their quality of life while boosting our productivity and economic growth (Myers and de Broucker, 2006).

The Ontario government has talked a lot about raising graduation rates, but it is doing little to help learners over the age of 21. Adult and Continuing Education credit programs are funded at less than two-thirds the level of regular day school credit programs (Ministry of Education, 2015). In 2014, adult education was underfunded by a total of \$112 million (Mackenzie, 2015). Furthermore, in many cases these programs are being delivered to adult students who are new immigrants, or students who were marginalized from the regular day school program in prior years. These students have special education, language and other needs that require support. However, allocations in the Special Purpose Grants – which fund programs and supports for students who face socio-economic disadvantages – are directed only toward younger learners in the regular day school program.

A 2010 report conducted by Deloitte and commissioned by the Ministry of Education noted the lack of resources and supports available to adult learners. The report also found that “[school boards’] ability to meet current and future needs for viable adult and continuing education programs requires a cultural shift away from a concern with delivering adult and continuing education at ‘no cost to the board,’ towards putting students first in a fiscally responsible way” (Deloitte, 2010). Following this, in 2014 the Ministry of Education sought feedback from education stakeholders on how to best implement an Adult Education Strategy for Ontario (Ministry of Education, 2014). However, very little by way of comprehensive policy has resulted from this consultation process.

## Funding Adult Education

The government continues to underfund adult and continuing education programs. In particular, adult and continuing education students do not have access to the same breadth of resources available to younger learners in traditional day school programs. This includes a lack of early intervention processes, which would allow educators to proactively identify and target the necessary supports for adult learners. This often results in adult learners with a wide range of English language skills, and a variety of learner needs, being grouped together in the same class, and taught at the same level and pace.

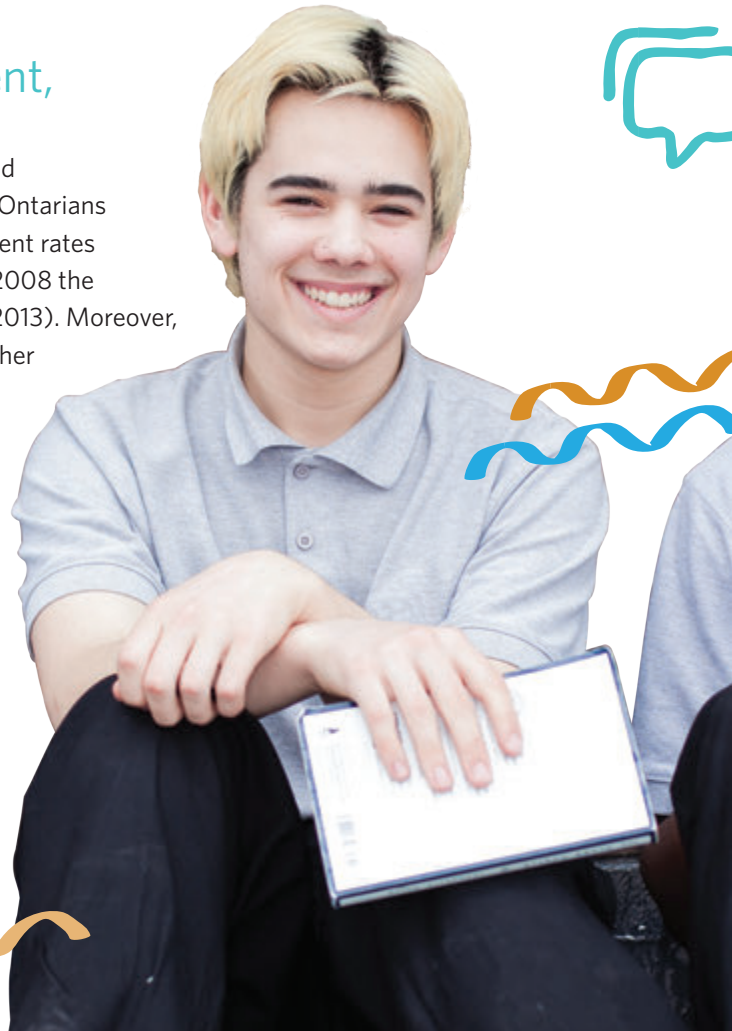
Students in Adult and Continuing Education programs are too often expected to learn in conditions that would not be tolerated in the regular day school program. Large class sizes, sometimes in excess of 40 students, as well as different courses being delivered at the same time in one classroom, are commonplace features. Teachers, especially those in day school adult education programs, are employed from contract to contract with substandard salaries, working conditions and rights. Some school boards have been moving courses that were previously delivered by day school teachers to the Continuing Education system, where teachers are paid at an hourly rate, legislated and negotiated class size limits are circumvented, and other contractual obligations are ignored. This is clearly an effort to reduce costs by undermining teachers' salaries and working conditions. However, delivery of the curriculum also suffers. For example, a four-week summer school course does not offer the same opportunity for instruction and learning as the regular 110-hour day school course.

Proper funding and design of adult learning programs would result in long-term cost savings for the province. For example, intensive support to raise the literacy rates of the least-skilled Ontarians would yield dramatic increases in employment and wage rates, significantly reducing the number of adults living in poverty (McCracken and Murray, 2010). 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.

## Workplace Training is an Investment, Not a Cost

Our investments in publicly funded elementary, secondary, and post-secondary education will be futile unless we help young Ontarians make successful transitions from school to work. Unemployment rates have historically been higher for youth than adults, but since 2008 the gap has widened to levels not seen since the 1970s (Bernard, 2013). Moreover, Ontario's youth unemployment rate has consistently been higher than the national average (Statistics Canada, 2017).

Unemployment does not only affect youth in the short term. A considerable body of research shows that "scarring effects" can hamper individuals throughout their years, with a period of unemployment in youth increasing the likelihood of future unemployment, reducing lifetime earnings, and inflicting various other social and psychological difficulties (Busteed and Mourshed, 2016; Deloitte, 2015; Bell and Blanchflower, 2011). There are also societal costs in the form of lost productivity and poorer health (Selenko and Pils, 2016; Schwerdtfeger, 2013). Furthermore, if young people are unable to find satisfying work, and their incomes continue to lag significantly behind those of older generations, this



could lead to social tensions and loss of trust in our political and economic institutions (Gill, Knowles, and Stewart-Patterson, 2014; ILO, 2013).



### Young Workers Face Precarity

For some youth, the problem is not so much *unemployment* as underemployment. They are able to find work in precarious, low-skill occupations, but these jobs do not match their level of education or fulfill their career ambitions. These young workers might be better off than their unemployed counterparts, but there are still significant short- and long-term consequences to underemployment. In addition to the obvious outcome of lower wages and earnings, youth who are underemployed often find that their skills deteriorate and they become ever less attractive to potential employers in their desired field. Again, the broader society and economy also suffer, as public investments in education are squandered and potential productivity is lost (CGA-Canada, 2017; CTF, 2014).

Observers have been warning for several years about a scenario in which unemployed workers will be unable to fill a growing number of job vacancies because they do not possess the proper skills and qualifications (Miner, 2010). Already, while large numbers of young Ontarians scramble to find decent work, certain trades and industries are having difficulty attracting a sufficient number of individuals who are able to step into the positions that are available (CBC, 2017). This so-called skills gap, or skills mismatch, has been estimated to cost Ontario as much as \$24 billion per year in forgone economic activity (Stuckey and Munro, 2013).

### The Importance of Workplace Training

We should be careful not to exaggerate the discussion about a skills mismatch. The hard evidence indicates there is no national emergency, and regions such as Ontario have plenty of people, particularly youth, who are capable and eager to work (Bartlett and Lao, 2014). At the same time, we should also consider how to address the problems that do exist, beginning with the fundamental issue of workplace training. In many cases, employers have become narrowly focused on a specific skill set or level of experience, which shuts young workers out of the competition (Sandell, 2012a). Canadian businesses invest few resources in workplace training, and they appear increasingly reluctant to hire young people for their basic technical skills and critical thinking abilities while allowing them to learn job-specific requirements on the job (Sorensen, 2014). What is described as a skills gap is in most cases simply an experience gap (CLC, 2014).

If we are going to address the crisis of youth unemployment and ensure Ontario has a viable, competitive workforce and economy for the future, we need Ontario's business community to acknowledge their responsibility to create training opportunities for young workers, with the recognition that workplace training is an investment rather than a cost (Jackson, 2014). We need strategies and programs that will engage more employers and show them how meaningful workplace training can positively impact their sales and productivity, the quality of their products and services, and the satisfaction of their employees and customers (Zizys, 2014).

Unions can be valuable partners in this endeavour, as they definitely share an interest in improving on-the-job training to enhance the skills and value of their members. Educational institutions also have a crucial role to play. The Council of Ontario Universities (2014) reports that graduates who participate in co-op programs (also known as experiential learning or work-integrated learning) earn more than their student peers, have higher employment and full-time employment rates, and are more likely to have paid off debt two years after graduation. Ontario's colleges have also been pushing for greater access to, and promotion of, the career-specific training they offer (West-Moynes, 2014).



If we are going to address the crisis of youth unemployment we need Ontario's business community to acknowledge their responsibility to create training opportunities for young workers, with the recognition that workplace training is an investment rather than a cost.



## Unpaid Internships Have Damaging Consequences

Ontario's youth certainly see the benefit of well-designed experiential learning programs, which help them sharpen skills and develop networks to secure future employment (OUSA, 2013). However, not all training opportunities are equally legitimate or accommodating. In a survey carried out for the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, *lack of payment* was the top-rated challenge for students completing work-integration programs, mentioned by more than half of the respondents (Sattler and Peters, 2013). This points to a broader trend that has become a major concern for Ontario's youth: the proliferation of unpaid internships.

Although data are lacking, it is estimated that there are hundreds of thousands of unpaid interns in Ontario, many of whom are not connected to a university or college program (McKnight, 2013). Proponents say unpaid internships, like other forms of temporary work, enable young people to try out different industries, pick up technical skills, and gain some knowledge of the inner workings of various organizations (Coyné, 2013; Tucker, 2010). However, stories abound of unpaid interns carrying out tasks that have little to do with the ostensible purpose of the internship. While these menial tasks are of limited value to the intern, they are usually of value to the employer. This suggests the interns should really be classified as employees and entitled to receive at least the minimum wage.

### Consequences of Unpaid Internships

Even if some young people are deriving tangible non-monetary benefits from their internships, unpaid work carries a number of possible consequences for both individuals and society. Young people who work in temporary jobs without pay can quickly find themselves in a

cycle of precarious employment, which limits their ability to utilize their education, reduces their long-term earning potential, and causes them to delay major life events. Unpaid interns also do not contribute income taxes or qualify for vital programs like the Canada Pension Plan, Employment Insurance, or workers' compensation (NACE, 2016; Langille and Mandryk, 2013). Moreover, by creating a pool of free labour, unpaid interns displace paid employees and depress wages for everyone (Cowan, 2014).

There are also serious equity issues. One survey found that 73 per cent of "underpaid" interns in Ontario (those receiving less than the minimum wage) are women (Attfield and Couture, 2014). This accords with previous research from the United States, which found that 77 per cent of unpaid interns are female (Gardner, 2011). Furthermore, low-income youth are often unable to enjoy whatever benefits unpaid

internships might provide. These young people, who already face barriers to education and the labour market, either cannot afford to take unpaid work or must accumulate debt in order to do so, both of



which can hurt them in the long run. This is especially concerning given that the fields in which unpaid internships are most common – journalism, arts and culture, politics and public policy – are important for a healthy, democratic society, and would gain from a greater diversity of voices (Shade and Jacobson, 2015; Perlin, 2011).

### **Internships and Workplace Standards**

Perhaps the most troubling fact about the prevalence and persistence of unpaid internships is that many of them do not comply with existing Ontario law covering workplace standards. Under the *Employment Standards Act*, an individual who is not performing work for a school credit can only work as an intern without pay if their position meets certain criteria. Most notably, the position should exist solely for the purposes of training, and the employer should derive little, if any, benefit. Otherwise, the intern should be treated as an employee and paid at least the minimum wage (Ministry of Labour, 2011).

This problem must be addressed through public policy and proactive enforcement of the law. Although it might seem reasonable to put the onus on young people to steer clear of unpaid internships or report law-breaking employers, this places an unfair burden on people whose options can be incredibly limited. Some young people see no alternative but to submit to unpaid work, viewing it as the only way to gain experience and break into their field of choice. And they are often reluctant to report employers who are offering illegal unpaid internships, for fear of damaging their own reputation and risking their chances at future, paid employment (Krashinsky, 2014). The just solution is for the provincial government to actively enforce its own standards.

There have been welcome signals that our political leaders intend to protect the interests of young people as well as those employers who are offering legitimate, worthwhile internships. A “Young Workers Blitz” of 273 Ontario businesses found that 231 (85 per cent) were in non-compliance with employment standards laws and labour entitlements (Ministry of Labour, 2016). Furthermore, the passage of the *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act* will have positive impacts on young workers. At a base level, raising the minimum wage will benefit young workers, many of whom earn lower hourly wages than their core-age counterparts (CLC, 2016). Furthermore, the government has supplemented the labour law legislation with an incentive for employers to hire and retain young workers. Small businesses with fewer than 100 employees will get an incentive of \$1,000 to hire a young person aged 15 to 29, and another \$1,000 if the company retains that worker for six months (Ministry of Finance, 2017).



At the same time, there are potential negative consequences associated with the new labour legislation. In particular, updates to the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) will maintain a lower wage structure for certain segments of the labour force, such as liquor servers and students under 18 years old – though their wages will increase by the same percentage as the general minimum wage. These exemptions will disproportionately impact young workers in Ontario. Data show that 33.7 per cent of young workers are employed in the retail, hospitality, and food service sectors, compared to 13.4 per cent of workers aged 30 and over (Government of Canada, 2016). Further, 55.2 per cent of young workers employed in the retail, hospitality, and food service sectors were students, and 62.4 per cent of those working in these sectors were youth aged 15 to 19 (Government of Canada, 2016). In effect, maintaining exemptions in the ESA creates a two-tiered labour market, with young workers disadvantaged and undervalued relative to the general worker population.

## **People of All Ages Deserve Training and Preparation for the Modern Economy**

In co-operation with educational institutions, employers, labour unions, and young people themselves, governments can implement measures to help young people get the knowledge and training they need. After years of inadequate investment in youth employment, in 2016 the federal government launched its Youth Employment Strategy (YES) – a horizontal initiative involving 11 federal departments and agencies, which provides annual investments of more than \$330 million into a range of programs (Government of Canada, 2016).



### Providing Real Work and Training Opportunities

The Ontario government has also shown initiative in helping young people break into the labour market and gain on-the-job experience. Initially, the Youth Jobs Strategy aimed to help young Ontarians find work, build job skills, or start a business. As the most recent phase in this strategy, the government launched Youth Job Link and Youth Job Connection, a suite of programs designed to help youth with a broader range of employment needs and to ensure resources are used effectively and targeted. Over the next two years, the government plans to invest \$250 million, which will benefit up to 150,000 more youth (Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development, 2017)

We must still exercise caution. So-called “active labour market policies,” which help people integrate or reintegrate into the labour market, are notoriously tricky to design and evaluate (Martin and Grubb, 2001). Without intense long-term monitoring, it can be difficult to anticipate which kinds of services and training are needed, or determine which have been most effective. Naturally, certain attributes should be considered. For example, we should be wary of an approach that merely seeks to move youths into temporary positions where they will have limited opportunity for meaningful training, permanent employment or advancement. We should also be concerned about an over-reliance on entrepreneurship. There is no doubt that Ontario will benefit from a new generation of innovative risk-takers who can bring exciting, useful products and services to market. However, self-employment is fraught with uncertainty, and it is not really a comprehensive, sustainable strategy to address the youth employment crisis. By putting the bulk of the responsibility on youth to create their own markets, there is a definite risk of exacerbating precarity and insecurity (Geobey, 2013).

### Finding the Right Balance

Catholic teachers are also concerned about employers trying to offload responsibility for job training to the publicly funded education system.

In 2015, Premier Kathleen Wynne convened a Highly Skilled Workforce Expert Panel, to draft an “integrated strategy” to bridge the worlds of skills development, education, and training, in order to help Ontarians adapt to an economy that is increasingly driven by knowledge and technology. Some of the panel’s recommendations are entirely sensible, but others chart a dangerous course (Conway et al., 2016). For example, the report calls for a significant expansion of experiential learning, making it compulsory for every student to participate in some way by the time they graduate. This might benefit some students, but will also result in others participating in programs


that provide them with little long-term value. More insidiously, the report calls for an expanded role for industry in designing and implementing experiential learning projects. Other recommendations have to do with the teaching, and perhaps even assessment, of new attitudes and competencies, such as “entrepreneurial spirit.”

As the government has moved toward policy development and implementation, Catholic teachers have expressed serious concerns about the practicalities





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of many of the panel’s recommendations. More importantly, we have questioned the fundamental implications of some of the ideas. While we understand the importance of advanced education and skills, allowing employers to shift the burden of ensuring “job-readiness” to the publicly funded education system strikes at the heart of our goal to develop thoughtful, creative, caring, well-rounded citizens. This is not in the long-term interests of our students or our society.

### **Currency and Flexibility for Older Workers**

Education and training are needed to help young people gain a foothold in the labour market, but in the modern economy this will not be enough. Given global competition, rapid advances in knowledge and technology, and employers’ increasing desire for flexibility, many adults will have to upgrade their skills or retrain entirely to remain employable. This is already happening, as Canadians in manufacturing industries and declining resource sectors are seeing what might once have been temporary layoffs now turning into permanent disruptions in their careers (Galley, 2015). Ontario has several initiatives in place to deal with these issues, such as the Rapid Re-employment and Training Service, and the Second Career program. Even as the provincial economy comes out of recession, we should consider these programs as permanent parts of our social policy architecture.

Some adults who are already employed choose to return to school to improve their skills, seek a promotion, or prepare themselves for a new career. Especially in an era of increasing instability in the labour market, these efforts should be supported, as they have the potential to increase productivity in the short term and reduce durations of unemployment in the event of job loss. However, unless they are already unemployed, adult learners generally cannot count on financial support from governments. They are also less likely than younger students to receive assistance from parents or other family members. Instead, they must depend on savings, part-time employment, or – in rare cases – support from their employer (Senate of Canada, 2011). As the demands of the knowledge-based economy and the realities of new social risks become more evident, it would be prudent to examine ways to help adult learners undertake proactive education and training.



## **CONCLUSION**

*Our social structures insist that individuals are responsible to do what they can to develop the skills and attitudes that will best place them to succeed in a competitive world. But the government can help by providing information and policies that will help people make wise decisions about education and give them access to fruitful training opportunities.*

*This serves everyone’s interest. Giving young people access to higher education and job training means they will be able to grow the economy and support our public services as the population ages. Helping adults boost their literacy and upgrade their job skills improves employability and productivity, enabling them to better care for themselves and their families. Overall, fostering a more informed, engaged citizenry makes for robust public discourse and more responsive politics.*



# Working for the common good



Ontario has the capacity to build a society in which everyone has genuine opportunities to participate and succeed, but achieving this goal will require shifts in attitudes and bold investments in infrastructure, public services, and citizens.

Every day, teachers see the effects of poverty and inequality firsthand, as children arrive at school tired, hungry, and unprepared. We meet parents who are forced to work multiple jobs in order to pay the bills, or who are in unstable or precarious employment. We know that one of the keys to raising children and families out of poverty is ensuring that parents have access to secure, well-paying jobs, while providing adequate levels of social assistance to those who are unable to work.

This is why Catholic teachers continue to support and participate in the advocacy work of organized labour. For more than two centuries, Canada's unions have fought for better wages, benefits, and working conditions. Things many Ontarians and Canadians take for granted – such as health and safety legislation, weekends, paid vacation time, pay and employment equity, as well as parental leave – would not have been possible without a labour movement and a legal structure that permitted free and fair collective bargaining.

Important progress has been made in a number of areas. But we must be unwavering in our commitment to create a more equitable society with a better quality of life.

## Poverty and Inequality Must be Eradicated

Poverty continues to be a blight on the province. In particular, the government says that 15.1 per cent of children live in poverty, while other measurements say it is more than 17 per cent (Campaign 2000, 2017). Previous research has shown that in big cities like Toronto, the rate could be as high as one in three (Polyani et al., 2014). Clearly, poverty reduction efforts need to be continued and expanded.

### The Real World Consequences of Child Poverty

Families with insufficient income are forced to make enormous sacrifices and live under stressful conditions that seriously affect their physical and mental health (OAFB, 2014; Block, 2013; CMA, 2013). Food Bank Canada's most recent HungerCount survey found that more than 335,000 Ontario citizens used food banks in 2016, 33.4 per cent of which were children. More than 170,000 households remain on waiting lists for affordable housing, 44 per cent of which are families with children (ONPHA, 2016). Over the long term, poverty and inequality carry direct and indirect costs for all of society, in the form of increased health and criminal justice costs, increased social assistance payments, lost productivity, lower tax revenues, and less civic participation (NCW, 2011).

**More than 170,000 households remain on waiting lists for affordable housing, 44 per cent of which are families with children.**



In 1989, the House of Commons passed an all-party resolution committing to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000. Nearly 30 years later, students from across the country came together to urge Canada's political leaders to "keep the promise" (Bielfeld and Leddy, 2014). In its annual Poverty Reduction Strategy report, the Government of Ontario (2017) noted that it had made progress on its target to reduce child poverty by 25 per cent by 2025. However, a persistent lack of data and a tendency to couch results in vague language ("steady," "some progress") raises doubts about the government's ability to meet or measure its targets. Co-operation among levels of government is certainly necessary, but a variety of organizations have put forward concrete proposals as to what the provincial government can do. Ideas include pursuing guaranteed minimum income programs, increasing the Ontario Child Benefit, raising rates for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Payment, allowing social assistance recipients to keep more of their income when they gain employment, and making substantial investments in affordable housing.

The issue of affordable housing remains especially problematic. Draft legislation in December 2017 proposed to allow municipalities to use "inclusionary zoning" to force developers to create affordable units. Unfortunately, as a consequence, the province would be required to either exempt developers from funding community benefits such as park improvements and child-care spaces, or pay developers 40 per cent of the cost of the units (*Toronto Star*, 2018). All the while, reports show that the shelter system in major cities such as Toronto continue to be overcrowded and entirely insufficient (*Globe and Mail*, 2018). While Ontario has taken incremental steps, and a national strategy has recently been introduced, meaningfully addressing the lack of affordable housing will require a commitment to ambitious funding and deadlines.

### **Income Inequality Hurts Everyone**

Between 1981 and 2010, Ontario experienced the largest percentage change in income inequality of any Canadian province (ICP 2013a; Osberg and Sharpe 2011). Although the distribution of income has improved slightly, the richest 10 per cent of Ontario families still garnered 190 per cent of the average family's earnings in the 2013 to 2015 period, indicating a real "hollowing out" of the economy for the poorest households (Block, 2017).

Growing income inequality reveals a fundamentally unfair and inefficient economic system. While many high-income earners bring impressive skills and experiences to the table, it is impossible to argue that their exorbitant levels of compensation are commensurate with their actual contribution to the economy and society (Macdonald, 2018). Furthermore, when money moves from the bottom and middle of the income scale to the top, there is a reduction in consumer demand, because higher-income individuals tend to spend a smaller proportion of their income. This hurts everyone in the long run (Stiglitz, 2011). Research also shows that inequality is associated with a range of social problems. Societies with lower levels of inequality experience better physical and mental health, as



well as lower rates of crime, addiction, and teen pregnancy. They have better child well-being, better educational outcomes, greater social mobility, and higher levels of trust among citizens (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009).

Even conservative, market-oriented voices are becoming concerned about the consequences of inequality. The World Economic Forum (2015) has stated that unequal societies lack common values and social cohesion, which makes them harder to govern and increases the risk of “prolonged economic stagnation.” Researchers at the International Monetary Fund have found lower inequality is “robustly correlated with faster and more durable [economic] growth,” and only in extreme cases does redistribution have a negative impact on the economy (Ostry, Berg, and Tsangarides, 2014). TD Economics has cautioned that income inequality threatens social mobility and long-term prosperity (Alexander and Fong, 2014). The Ministry of Finance (2014b) has acknowledged inequality is one of the “key risks” to Ontario’s long-term economic outlook.

There is a tendency to believe inequality is a natural, inevitable feature of a market economy. However, the vast majority of citizens recognize that pronounced inequality threatens the fabric of society. Seven in 10 Canadians believe the income gap is growing and this is making Canada a less fair country (Northrup and Jacobs, 2014). While the public actually underestimates the magnitude of the wealth gap, more than 80 per cent believe political leaders should enact progressive policies to address the problem (Broadbent Institute, 2014). Governments must act urgently on their mandate to restore fairness and opportunity to our economic system.



### **Progressive Taxation Supports the Common Good**

The revenue problem is especially important. Tax cuts implemented from the 1990s onward have created a structural revenue problem for Ontario (Yiu, 2015; Mackenzie, 2012). As was acknowledged in the 2017 provincial budget, Ontario now trails all other provinces in revenue per capita. In order to finance a robust public sector, we need to think about expanding the tax base. We also need to address the progressivity of the system, because there has been a steady shift of the tax burden away from businesses and high-income earners toward less affluent Ontarians.

The combined federal-provincial corporate income tax rate in Ontario is 26.5 per cent. This is among the lowest rates in Canada, below the average for both the G7 and G20, and significantly lower than the average for US states (Ernst and Young, 2017). It is reasonable to suggest that business activity should not be taxed excessively, as this could potentially discourage businesses from spending and growing. However, the recent experience in Ontario and throughout Canada has shown that reducing corporate tax rates to extraordinarily low levels is effective for increasing corporate profits, but not particularly helpful for attracting new companies or encouraging business expenditures on equipment, research and development, wage increases, or new employees (CLC, 2014). When it comes to business decisions, other factors – like local infrastructure and the quality of the labour supply – are equally, if not more, important (Stanford, 2014).

Similarly, Ontario’s top personal income tax rates are among the lowest in the country. And the maximum threshold is \$220,000, so the extremely wealthy get to keep a much greater percentage of their income than other citizens (Goar, 2015). Progressivity is further undermined by the fact that some forms of income, such as capital gains and inheritances, are taxed at lower rates than wages and salaries, or not



taxed at all. These sources tend to make up a larger proportion of richer citizens' income, which "reinforces widening income inequalities and reduces the revenue collection capacity of the tax system" (Lee and Ivanova, 2014).

In addition to re-examining tax rates for corporations and high-income earners, the provincial government could pursue new (or, in some cases, old) sources of revenue. For example, as was done in Nova Scotia, Ontario could use the tax room that was vacated when the federal government cut the GST. Each additional point of HST would raise more than \$2.6 billion in revenue. Other possibilities include raising gas taxes or implementing road tolls (Block and Weiss, 2015; Mackenzie and Hennessy, 2013).



When governments are not collecting enough revenues to balance their budgets, the resulting misperception is that the public sector is bloated and spending needs to be dramatically reduced. However, while everyone wants to be sure that tax dollars are being spent efficiently and effectively, we also need to have a serious dialogue about what is required to fund the programs we all desire. Only with new revenues can the province continue making the necessary investments in infrastructure and public services that will support Ontario's long-term health and prosperity (Ragan, 2014). There can be honest discussions about the impact of taxes on work incentives or the efficient operation of the market, but we must start with the recognition that dogma about the economic benefits of low taxes is not supported by the evidence, while the significance of public spending in the lives of Ontarians is incontestable.

## Everyone Benefits When People Stand Up for Workers' Rights

For more than two centuries, unions have fought for better wages, benefits, and working conditions. Things many Ontarians and Canadians take for granted – such as health and safety legislation, weekends, paid vacation time, employment and pay equity, as well as parental leave – would not have been possible without an organized labour movement and a legal structure that permitted free and fair collective bargaining (OFL, 2013a). Although much has already been achieved, unions are as necessary today as ever. As the Supreme Court of Canada (2015) put it, "Individual employees typically lack the power to bargain and pursue workplace goals with their more powerful employers. Only by banding together in collective bargaining associations, thus strengthening their bargaining power with their employer, can they meaningfully pursue their workplace goals."



The labour movement also contributes to the overall political culture. Unions are democratic, and their members tend to be more engaged with, and committed to, democratic processes. Canadian data indicate that higher union densities are associated with higher voter turnout (Sran et al., 2013). This is especially important because unions generally organize and advocate in favour of fairness, inclusivity, equity, and strong public services (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2014).

### Myths About Unions

Despite these widespread benefits, unions have come under harsh criticism over the past 30 years. They are seen as inflexible and self-serving, and have been blamed for government debts, plant closures, and slow economic growth. On several occasions in recent years, federal and provincial governments have used legislation to interfere in the collective bargaining process in public and private workplaces.

The attack on unions is already leading to consequences for Canadian society. Since the mid-1980s, the increase in the income share going to the top one per cent of earners, as well as the rise



in Canada's Gini coefficient (a key measure of inequality), have mirrored the falling rate of unionization (Jackson, 2013). Recent research from the United States confirms this relationship, where economists have linked decreased unionization with greater income inequality and stagnated wages (Semuels, 2016). There have been other factors at play, but Canadian economists have estimated the decline in unionization contributed about 15 per cent of the rise in male wage inequality in the 1980s and 1990s (Fortin et al., 2012). This is in line with research from the International Monetary Fund examining advanced economies around the world, including Canada, which shows that declining union density has been a key contributor to the rise of top income shares (Jaumotte and Buitron, 2015).



### The Benefits of Unions

Research has demonstrated the positive, macroeconomic effects of collective bargaining and found that higher union density improves economic performance (Rios-Avila, 2014; Hirsch, 2010). In so-called "right-to-work" jurisdictions in the United States, where unions have been weakened by laws permitting employees to opt out of paying union dues, declining unionization rates have failed to produce the economic growth and job creation that proponents would have anticipated. In most cases, wages have fallen and workplaces have become less safe and less productive, which has actually damaged these economies (OFL, 2013b; Gould and Shierholz, 2011). In Ontario, union members have negotiated an average of 23 per cent higher wages than those who are non-union members – this percentage is considerably higher for women and lower paid occupations (CUPE, 2016). This is why some seemingly unlikely sources, like former Conservative senator Hugh Segal, have become vocal critics of regressive reforms to our country's labour laws, insisting that free collective bargaining and fair wages are as important to economic growth as capital investment and profits (Thompson, 2013).

**In Ontario, union members have negotiated an average of 23 per cent higher wages than those who are non-union members.**

### Modern Unions for Modern Societies

There is certainly room for the labour movement to adapt to shifting economic and demographic conditions. Growth is occurring in industries and job types that have not traditionally been unionized. Meanwhile, young people are entering the workforce with more individualistic attitudes and some skepticism about the value of the labour movement in the modern context. This does not mean unions should abandon the major principles that have guided them over the years – solidarity, respect for seniority, and so on. However, it does mean they will need to find creative ways to reach out to workers on the margins of the labour market (Timm, 2015; Kochan, 2014; Mackey, 2013), and to train and encourage young people to take on leadership roles, so their voices can be heard at the bargaining table and beyond (Loreto, 2013). When combined with governments' and employers' renewed respect for the collective bargaining process and the role of unions in our democracy, a refreshed union movement can continue acting as one of society's chief bulwarks against austerity and inequality.

## Every Worker Deserves a Good Job and Fair Wages

Since the passage of the *Employment Standards Act* (ESA) and *Labour Relations Act* (LRA) in the 1990s, trends in globalization and technology have fundamentally altered the nature of work and workplaces across the globe. In Ontario, these changes have produced a growing realization that the ESA and LRA no longer adequately recognize or protect Ontario workers, specifically those in precarious employment.



In 2017, the Ontario economy made important progress, both in lowering unemployment and improving employment rates (Statistics Canada, 2018). However, persistent structural shifts have created what is known as an “hourglass economy”: there are a good number of high-paying jobs in technology and financial services at the top, but a growing proportion of the jobs are in retail and hospitality industries at the bottom (Zizys 2011). In 2012, the Law Commission of Ontario found that more than one-fifth of workers in Ontario were in “precarious” jobs, which are described as “having low wages and at least two or three other features: no pension, no union and/or small firm size.” It has recently been estimated that the number might have been as high as 32 per cent in 2014 (CWR, 2017). This created serious consequences for the economy and society. While employers seek the benefits of flexibility and lower labour costs, workers have to take on the risks and costs of insecurity and lack of protection (Gellatly, 2015), a reality that particularly affects groups more susceptible to precarious work, such as women, racial minorities, immigrants, Indigenous people, and persons with disabilities (Block et al., 2014).


### **Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act - A Step in the Right Direction**

We were pleased that government finally, if belatedly, acknowledged the reality of work and workplaces in Ontario, and in 2015 appointed special advisors C. Michael Mitchell and John C. Murray to lead the Changing Workplaces Review (CWR). The CWR Final Report confirmed what we had been saying for several years: the changing nature of work has disadvantaged far too many Ontario workers and their families. In addition, as the special advisors indicated, many of the 173 proposed recommendations would create “better workplaces in Ontario, where there are decent working conditions and widespread compliance with the law” (*Changing Workplaces Review Final Report 2017*).

The resulting *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act* that was signed into law takes critical steps toward improving the lives of millions of Ontario workers. Among the law’s highlights are: mandatory equal pay for part-time, temporary, casual, and seasonal employees



doing the same job as full-time employees; equal pay for temporary help agency employees doing the same job as permanent employees; a prohibition of employers misclassifying employees as “independent contractors;” the establishment of card-based union certification for the temporary help agency industry, the building services sector, and home care and community services industry; an additional two paid days of Personal Emergency Leave (PEL), as well as the designation of a separate, dedicated PEL leave category for survivors of domestic and sexual violence.



The centrepiece of the *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act* was the increase in minimum wage to \$15 per hour, which will take full effect on January 1, 2019. This provision will undoubtedly have significant benefits for Ontario workers. Currently, roughly one-third of Ontario workers earn less than \$15 per hour (CCPA, 2017). Thus, roughly 30 per cent of Ontario’s workforce will immediately benefit from this legislation. Further, research clearly demonstrates the short- and long-term advantages of minimum wage increases. UBC economist David Green has concluded that the positive impact of reducing income inequality and increasing incomes for low-wage workers will offset any reduction in employment that could result from the rise in wage costs (Green, 2015).

## There is Great Value in Public Service

The neo-liberal policies promoted in Europe and North America since the 1970s have portrayed public services and public sector workers as inefficient, uncompetitive, and overly expensive. The sentiment was epitomized in former US President Ronald Reagan’s first inaugural address in 1981, when he claimed that “government is not the solution to our problem; government is the problem.” Since the onset of the recession in 2008, the public sector has faced new challenges. Governments of all stripes have become enamoured of the idea that reducing their spending is necessary to avoid debt and restore confidence in the market (Blyth, 2013). Ideas about the overextended public sector and the danger of deficits have become so pervasive that even socially conscious political leaders find it necessary to talk the language of austerity.



### Public Services Help Ontarians Every Day

The current Ontario government often touts its record as the lowest per capita spender on programs of any province in Canada, but this is a dubious distinction. Public services ensure the majority of citizens enjoy an enhanced quality of life (OECD, 2015; Mackenzie and Shillington, 2009). Clean drinking water, safe food, universal health care, public transportation, and publicly funded education are just a few of the things we all enjoy because governments take the responsibility to provide them. In most cases, these goods and services must be offered by government because for-profit businesses will not produce them with the level of quality or equitable access we need. Public spending is also necessary to provide transfers and programs that help ameliorate poverty and inequality. Cutting funding or failing to keep up with necessary investments or maintenance costs might look good on a balance sheet, but these actions come with real consequences. And despite what political leaders usually claim, it is impossible to make such cuts without affecting frontline services (Macdonald and Hatt, 2014).

Government expenditure is also an economic imperative. It has been shown that public spending has greater direct and indirect impact on GDP growth than spending by businesses or households (Somerville, 2012). Despite this, the government has maintained the lowest per capita program of any province in Canada (Ministry of Finance, 2017).



Our investment in public services must include equitable, appropriate compensation for public sector workers. The only groups that enjoy a significant pay premium in the public sector are those that are paid remarkably low wages in the private sector: women, visible minorities, and those in low-skill occupations (McInturff and Tulloch, 2014; Sanger, 2011). In general, public employees working in high-skill, professional occupations are actually paid less than their private sector counterparts (ICP, 2014). These people have been falling even further behind as a result of the government's austerity agenda. In 2016, collectively bargained agreements in the public sector included much smaller average annual wage increases than those in the private sector (Ministry of Labour, 2017). The trend has continued for several years now, and in many cases is the result of a policy of public sector wage freezes, which not only subverts the collective bargaining process but also undermines consumer demand and limits economic growth and tax revenues (Hennessy and Stanford, 2013).

## Retirement Needs Security

One of the most significant advances unions have pushed for over the years has been meaningful pension plans for retired workers. Ensuring financial security for citizens in retirement is a hallmark of a caring society and a necessary condition for maintaining a robust, sustainable economy. Unfortunately, Canada Pension Plan benefits are not sufficient, and the majority of Ontarians do not have a workplace pension plan to supplement their retirement income. This leaves too many people relying on private savings, or having no savings at all. We were heartened to see years of advocacy from the labour movement culminate in the recent expansion of the Canada Pension Plan. However, we must remain vigilant against continued threats to stable, secure private pension plans.



### Retirement Security Should be a Priority

The public discourse around pensions is often clouded by rhetoric about unfairness or unsustainability, especially with regard to the defined benefit plans enjoyed by many public sector employees. However, the evidence shows the advantages of the defined benefit pension model are unparalleled. Rather than tearing these plans down, we should aim to give more Ontarians quality of life and peace of mind in retirement (Lorinc, 2013).

As Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan CEO Ron Mock (2014) has remarked, "By almost any measure, our defined benefit pensions are the most cost-effective retirement savings system in the country." Unlike individual savings arrangements, these plans can: pool longevity and asset mix risks; make large-scale investments in illiquid assets such as real estate and infrastructure; afford professional, in-house investment advisors; and keep administrative costs down. Furthermore, everyone in society shares in the benefits. Although the prevailing myth says these "gold-plated" plans are financed by tax dollars, the reality is that they derive most of their funds from investments, which spurs economic growth. And by giving recipients financial security, these plans relieve the government of potential cash transfers, health care payments, and other costs that would result from retirees not having enough income. A steady source of income also enables retirees to continue spending money in the economy and contributing tax dollars (Jones, 2015; Hatanka et al., 2013).

**"By almost any measure, our defined benefit pensions are the most cost-effective retirement savings system in the country."**

### Threats to Retirement Security

Under the guise of reducing costs and giving people more "choice," some commentators, advisors, and politicians have recommended shifting from defined benefit pensions to defined contribution plans or "target benefit" arrangements (Nguyen, 2014; Ovsey, 2013). Neither of these routes is advisable. Defined contribution pensions

are essentially individual savings plans, which expose workers to the whims of the market and cannot guarantee financial security in retirement. Furthermore, experience and modeling shows that converting a healthy defined benefit pension plan to individual-account defined contribution arrangements would actually increase the ongoing costs of the plan by 77 per cent, and reduce the proportion of the final benefit coming from investment returns from 75 to 45 per cent (Brown and McInnes, 2014). Target benefit plans, which include fixed contribution rates but allow for reductions in benefits in the event of funding shortfalls, also provide no legal right to a predictable income. These arrangements fail to respect the fact that pension plans are “deferred earnings that exchange current compensation for a future pension promise” (CLC, 2014). Workers should be able to expect and depend on secure pension benefits when they retire.

### **Ensuring Security for Future Generations**

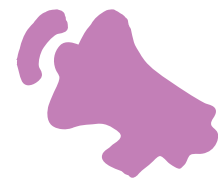
Reducing poverty among senior citizens has been one of Canada’s most remarkable policy achievements over the past few decades. Programs like the Guaranteed Income Supplement and Old Age Security set an income floor below which no senior citizen is allowed to fall. However, as the population ages, we need to think about how to provide stable, predictable, and adequate sources of income for all retirees. With wages stagnant and the cost of living rising, Ontarians are struggling to put aside funds for retirement. This is especially true for young workers who cannot find decent, full-time jobs. Statistics Canada data confirm that families with workplace pension plans are better off, and that those without employer pensions are not compensating through increased savings in other assets (Messacar and Morissette, 2015). Both the federal and provincial governments have recently introduced legislation that would make it easier for employers to convert defined benefit plans in to less secure options, even giving them the option to target individual employees. This is unacceptable. Governments should set a clear example by demonstrating their commitment to the defined benefit pension model, and encouraging employers to follow suit.

## CONCLUSION

*We teach our students about the value of fairness, and that all people deserve the opportunity to succeed. And although there is discussion about the need for public investments, balanced budgets and limited program spending continue to dominate the political discourse.*

*We must reframe the narrative. Central to social progress is a commitment to fairness for all Ontarians. Certainly, the government has taken important steps in a number of policy areas. Legislation that provides free pharmacare for Ontarians under 25 years old, that makes investments to provide 100,000 additional child care spaces, and that overhauls the province’s outdated labour laws and raises the minimum wage, will undoubtedly benefit citizens across the province.*

*There is more to do. Every day, Catholic teachers try to impart on our students a deep commitment to promote equity, democracy, and solidarity in order to achieve a just, peaceful, and compassionate society. This same commitment must be taken up by those in the halls of power. Investing wisely and robustly in areas such as employment opportunities, social infrastructure, and other public goods will ensure that today’s students have the best chance to succeed in the ultimate test: life.*





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