



Provincial Election 2007



Education

Public education is one of the most important building blocks of Canadian society, laying the foundation for social and economic equality and cultural and political engagement. From elementary to secondary to post-secondary, life-long learning is a political and economic necessity. In short, education is fundamental to a democratic society.

During the mid-1990s, former Conservative Premier Mike Harris set out to create a crisis in education—and did so. There were massive funding cuts and drastic legislative changes that reduced the number of school boards from 129 to 72, introduced standardized testing, froze collective bargaining, and centralized control of almost all aspects of education at Queen's Park. The reverberations of these measures are still being felt today.

Funding Formula: Elementary and Secondary Education

With the 2003 election of Dalton McGuinty and the Ontario Liberals, Ontarians hoped for a new approach to education that would put children and students first.

Although the repressive and hostile attitude towards public education that characterized the Harris/Eves Conservative government ended with the McGuinty Liberals, and despite some welcome reinvestment in education, the McGuinty government has ignored the most damaging legacy of the Harris/Eves Conservatives: the funding formula.

The current funding formula is inflexible and flawed. The new funding was tied to specific election campaign promises such as smaller class sizes in primary grades. However, this move created a funding gap and class size increases in higher grades.

The McGuinty Liberals did provide special capital funding for renovations to address the backlog of deferred maintenance, but the amount allocated fell far short of what is actually needed to return Ontario schools to health after years of cuts under the previous Conservative government.

As the funding formula currently stands, school boards do not have the financial resources to cover the actual costs of teachers' and other education workers' salaries, nor to cover the costs of maintaining school facilities or the cost of adult education. The new funding does not provide nearly enough resources to address the needs of students at risk. In short: Ontario schools are still not able to provide the range of services demanded of Ontario's school system.

The \$667 million increase in education funding for this year (2007-08) will do little to ease the problems facing many of Ontario's school boards. In concrete terms, this means: larger class sizes for elementary grades, particularly Grades 4 to 8; fewer specialist teachers providing programs in music, physical and health education, and art; fewer elementary schools staffed with a teacher-librarian and fewer elementary schools staffed with a guidance specialist; and cuts to support staff, including custodians, office-clerical workers, and professional staff who support at-risk students. For the 2007-08 academic year school boards may cut up to 400 Educational Assistants throughout the province.

These kinds of staffing cuts do not only eliminate crucial services, including supervision, but also increase the workload of remaining staff, adding stress to the system as a whole. Children suffer when the teachers and staff they rely on do not have the time to provide the attention they need and deserve; students with special needs suffer most. Staff reductions contribute to unhealthy workplaces and unhealthy learning conditions for Ontario's children.

Ontarians need a publicly funded and delivered educational system that is accessible and dedicated to the needs of all students. Public funding must be adequate, not only to ensure no further erosion of staff and services, but to begin restoring the services lost over the previous decade. Education should not be seen as an "expense", but as an investment in our children and our future.

Ask Your Local Candidates:

Will your party re-vamp the failed funding formula based on principles of adequacy, equity, stability, flexibility and accountability and fully restore the billions that have been cut since 1995 to ensure that adequate resources are available for all our children and for adult education?