



# Speak for Children

A plan for a  
stronger Ontario

ONTARIO ENGLISH

Catholic  
Teachers

ASSOCIATION

*The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) has developed a set of key policy recommendations for the 2011 provincial election that we feel are essential for building a vibrant economy. The principle underlying these recommendations is the importance of continued investment in social services for a healthy economy, including a world-class publicly funded school system. What follows is the Association's four-point plan.*

**Almost 95 per cent of students in the province attend publicly funded schools.**

**95%**

## Invest in people to prepare for a new economy

Continued investment in publicly funded education is fundamental to maintain the growth of Ontario's highly skilled workforce and knowledge-based economy. Almost 95 per cent of students in the province attend publicly funded schools, where highly qualified and motivated teachers are preparing them to face the challenges of this new economy and the jobs that have not yet been thought of. We cannot afford to return to a period of instability in public education. Lockouts and other disruptions, dramatic cuts to funding, and a combative relationship with teachers would be damaging to the system overall, reversing years of progress and stability while jeopardizing our potential for sustained economic growth.

Expert policy analysts at organizations such as the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) find a direct connection between strong economies and investment in social services. For instance, in the 2010 report, *Steering Ontario Out of Recession: A Plan of Action*, economist Hugh Mackenzie of the CCPA makes a definitive case for maintaining public investment during difficult economic times, warning against “mindless public service cuts.” He points out, “Investments in people are just as important as, if not more important than, investments in physical infrastructure. The recession has highlighted the importance of education to this province.” Ontario puts a high value on human capital and must continue to recognize that a skilled, educated workforce is the cornerstone of a strong economy.

Economists are increasingly pointing to an early start to learning as the foundation for a stronger Ontario. Full-day Kindergarten, which is currently being rolled out by the provincial government, has the potential to generate both long and short-term economic gains. *Early Learning and Care Impact Analysis*, an indepth study prepared by the Centre for Spatial Economics, projects long-term gains of \$2.42 for every dollar spent on early learning programs. The report also points out that this estimate is conservative, and a similar American study that spanned 40 years identified a long-term return of over \$16 for every dollar invested in early learning. This will come in the form of increased earnings, improved health outcomes and reduced social costs. Equally impressive is the immediate stimulus that accompanies the investment. Ontario will see a boost in GDP and instant returns by means of infrastructure funding, staffing the system, money saved on childcare programs and parents' increased availability to enter the workforce.

**OECTA strongly recommends** a continued commitment to investment and stability in our publicly funded education system and other social services. The implementation of full-day Kindergarten must continue as scheduled for the province to fully realize its short and longer-term economic benefits.

# 81%

of Ontario students graduate  
— up 13% in 6 years.



## Maintain investment in publicly funded education – it is great value for the dollar

Our investment in public education has paid dividends. Among 65 countries assessed in reading in the *2009 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, initiated by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Ontario's students excelled, second only to Shanghai. In mathematics and science, Ontario is among the top jurisdictions in the world.

Further underscoring the caliber of our system, the OECD singled out Ontario as a jurisdiction that the United States should strive to emulate, as discussed in its 2010 report. While other Canadian provinces have declined in their level of achievement, Ontario's students continue to meet or exceed the national average and outperform the majority of jurisdictions in all three subject areas. Of the OECD's top performing jurisdictions, Ontario boasts one of the smallest gaps in level of achievement between low and high-income students. This means all students emerge better prepared in a knowledge-based economy, regardless of their socio-economic background.

In a 2010 report published by consulting firm McKinsey & Company, entitled *How the World's Most Improved School Systems Keep Getting Better*, the world's best and most improved education systems are analyzed to account for their success. Ontario serves as one of five model systems that is making the transition from "great" to "excellent." According to the report, one of the keys to our success thus far is allowing teachers to exercise their professional judgement and "try out new ideas to better support student learning." To continue on this path of improvement, government must continue to recognize that teachers are partners, valuing their skills as grassroots decision makers.

**OECTA strongly recommends** that Ontario continually strive for excellence in our publicly funded education system. Rather than cut or overhaul a system that continues to improve, Ontario must maintain investment in education to maximize our potential for growth.



"Canadian 15-year-olds are more than

# one

year ahead of their US counterparts  
in math and science."







Making the transition from "Great" to

# "Excellent"



## Ensure our schools are safe and inclusive to maximize learning potential

Schools are an integral part of Ontario communities. An inclusive learning environment in which students and staff feel safe and respected is an important component of the knowledge-based economy. Discrimination, racism, sexual harassment and all other forms of bullying cause serious distress among students and undermine a child's ability to learn and a teacher's ability to teach.

The Safe Schools Action Team, commissioned by the Ontario government in 2004, notes in its first report that aggression, exclusion and intimidation prevent students from performing to their full potential. The report further points out that the longer-term social and economic implications of unchecked student bullying are severe. Both bullies and the targets of bullying are more likely to face mental health issues, be less successful in the future and potentially develop criminal and anti-social tendencies.

The Action Team has also examined the underlying causes of bullying in Ontario schools, most recently producing the report, *Shaping a Culture of Respect in Our Schools: Promoting Safe and Healthy Relationships*. The provincial government has implemented several of the team's key recommendations, including several bullying awareness and prevention initiatives, new reporting requirements for bullying, recognizing "cyber-bullying" as a suspendable offence, and launching an Equity and Inclusive Education strategy.

For Ontario to be at its best, every student needs to be at his or her best. Our students are the future of our economy, and feeling unsafe or unwelcome at school compromises their potential.

**OECTA strongly recommends** that the Ontario government build on its recent accomplishments and continue to implement the recommendations of the Safe Schools Action Team. These include embedding anti-bullying strategies into school curriculum, more anti-bullying training for students, teachers and parents, and ensuring all schools have programs in place to allow for unfettered learning and development.



## Strengthen the safety net – strengthen the economy

Government programs and poverty-reduction initiatives should be evaluated to ensure they accomplish their intended goals. Programs that fall short should be adjusted to maximize returns, rather than be eliminated outright. It is important that Ontario continue its commitment to helping its neediest, who have become more vulnerable during this tough economic climate. Adequate pensions, affordable childcare and support for our impoverished Northern communities are vital.

As noted by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives in its report *Steering Ontario Out of Recession*, reducing funding on public services in the wake of an economic downturn is counter-productive. Recessions and post-recessionary periods are precisely when services are needed the most. A cost-benefit analysis demonstrates that maintaining or expanding public programs is the best way to bolster Ontario's economy in both the long and the short-term. This includes investment in early learning programs, adult education, and unemployment insurance. Without investment in both infrastructure and human capital, the economy stalls and it becomes more difficult to emerge from the recession as a stronger Ontario.

The government's legislated minimum wage increases, the introduction of the *Poverty Reduction Act*, and the plan for a comprehensive Social Assistance Review represent a commitment to eliminating poverty in the province, yet Ontario still has a long way to go. In its 2010 report, *Building a Resilient Ontario*, the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction reports that billions of dollars in private and public sector investment are spent annually to combat the devastating symptoms of widespread poverty. Reducing poverty by targeting its underlying causes would allow this money to be invested in provincial programs, producing a "healthier, more educated and more productive workforce." As reported by the 25 in 5 Network, "every Ontarian who is free from poverty is better equipped to contribute to an economic recovery that needs *all hands on deck*."

**OECTA strongly recommends** that Ontario maintain its commitment to strengthening the safety net by following through with the Social Assistance Review. The province must continue to implement its poverty reduction strategy and be unwavering in its goal to eliminate child poverty.

# SpeakForChildren.ca



### Crazy Waves

Waves are a natural part of our lives. They are everywhere, from the ocean to the wind. Waves are a powerful force of nature, and they can be both beautiful and dangerous. In this activity, you will learn about the science of waves and how they affect our lives.

**Objectives:**

- To understand the science of waves and how they are formed.
- To identify the different types of waves and their characteristics.
- To explore the impact of waves on our environment and lives.

**Materials:**

- A large sheet of paper for the project.
- Colored markers and pens.
- A basket of snacks (optional).

**Procedure:**

1. Divide the class into small groups.
2. Assign each group a different type of wave to research.
3. Have each group create a poster or presentation about their wave.
4. Have each group present their findings to the class.

**Assessment:**

- Observe the students' participation and understanding during the activity.
- Evaluate the quality of the posters and presentations.



Waves are a natural part of our lives. They are everywhere, from the ocean to the wind. Waves are a powerful force of nature, and they can be both beautiful and dangerous. In this activity, you will learn about the science of waves and how they affect our lives.





**SpeakForChildren.ca**



 MIX  
Paper  
FSC FSC® C008925