

OSSTF District 24 Waterloo – Education Support Staff

1. Educational Support Staff have a wide and varied role within the Education system as it relates to enhancing and supporting learning for all students. How would your party ensure student success is not compromised by having inadequate staffing levels in these roles?

Educational assistants, education professionals, paraprofessionals, and other educational workers play a crucial role in the success of our students. Working together, we have built one of the best education systems in the world. That is why we have supported the improvement of working and learning conditions in our education system and will continue to do so.

It is unfortunate that the Tim Hudak PCs have committed to increasing class size, firing at least 9,000 teachers and 9,700 support staff, and cutting \$1.5 billion from the education budget. These cuts will have devastating effects on our education system and on student achievement. Less support staff like education assistants, psychologists, and speech-language pathologists will mean less support for special education and less support for students with special needs.

We have chosen a different path. As a result of our investments, school boards have hired more than 5,000 educational assistants and 4,000 professionals and paraprofessionals in addition to increasing school maintenance staff, school office staff, and more library and guidance teaching and non-teaching staff.

We know that these investments make a difference. The caring adults in schools across the province who ensure student success need the safe, accepting, inclusive and clean environments that only educational support staff can provide.

2. How will your party strengthen the public education system in Ontario? In particular, how will your government ensure students with special needs receive the necessary professional support provided through regulated non-teaching special education staff?

The Ontario Liberal plan for education is focused on working collaboratively with our partners in education to deliver better results for students. Working together, we have implemented full-day kindergarten and our schools are now recognized among the best in the world. We will build on that record to meet tomorrow's challenges in education.

Since 2003, funding for Ontario schools is up \$8.1 billion or 56 per cent. We have invested in hiring 13,500 new teachers and over 9,000 support staff; reducing class sizes; creating innovative, new programs like Specialist High Skill Majors and Dual Credits; and supporting programs to make our schools safer and more accepting spaces. Our 2014 budget committed more than \$11 billion in capital grants to school boards to continue building better places to learn across the province.

Our significant investments have supported the hard work of students, educators, and parents and the results speak for themselves. In 2003, only 68 per cent of our students were graduating. Today, the graduation rate is up 15 percentage points to 83 per cent, the highest ever. In 2003, only 54 per cent of our learners in grades 3 and 6 were meeting or exceeding the provincial standard in reading, writing and mathematics. Today, that number has increased 16 per cent points to 71 per cent and we will continue to work with our partners to keep moving in the right direction.

We just released a plan for the system based on extensive consultation with our stakeholders, including OSSTF, entitled "Achieving Excellence". To support the new vision for education, the Province will be investing \$150 million over three years in technology and learning tools such as new digital tablets, netbooks, cameras, software, and professional development for teachers. The vision builds on the education system's three current priorities: increasing student achievement, closing gaps in student achievement, and increasing public confidence in publicly funded education. Our plan raises expectations both for the system and for the potential of our children and students.

Our renewed goals for education are:

Achieving Excellence: Children and students of all ages will achieve high levels of academic performance, acquire valuable skills and demonstrate good citizenship. Educators will be supported in learning continuously and will be recognized as among the best in the world.

Ensuring Equity: All children and students will be inspired to reach their full potential, with access to rich learning experiences that begin at birth and continue into adulthood.

Promoting Well-Being: All children and students will develop enhanced mental and physical health, a positive sense of self and belonging, and the skills to make positive choices.

Enhancing Public Confidence: Ontarians will continue to have confidence in a publicly funded education system that helps develop new generations of confident, capable and caring citizens.

These four goals are interconnected – success in one contributes to success in the others. Our progress over the last 10 years tells us that when educators, students, parents, and our many other partners work together on clear goals, we can build success.

We choose a different path. Despite a period of fiscal restraint the Special Education Grant is projected to be approximately \$2.7 billion in 2013–14. This is an increase of \$1.05 billion or 67 per cent since 2002–03.

The grant continues to be enveloped and protected and provides for the incremental costs of programs and services for students with special education needs. We are ensuring that school boards have the resources they need to hire the necessary staff to deliver high-quality programs and services to our most vulnerable students.

3. How will your party revise the education funding formula to ensure that school boards receive full and adequate funding so that Educational support staff and special education staff can meet the learning needs for all students?

We believe that every Ontario child deserves access to an excellent education, and has the right to a supportive learning environment. Since 2003, funding for Ontario schools is up \$8.1 billion or 56 per cent. We have invested in hiring 13,500 new teachers and over 9,000 support staff; reducing class sizes; creating innovative, new programs like Specialist High Skill Majors and Dual Credits; and supporting programs to make our schools safer and more accepting spaces. And our 2014 budget committed to provide more than \$11 billion in capital grants to school boards to continue building better places to learn across the province.

Supported by these investments and led by the professionalism of Ontario's teachers and education workers, Ontario has become a global leader in education and a highly successful model for other jurisdictions.

We are proud of our record in education.

Our strong partnership with educators and our continued investments in publicly funded education have delivered higher graduation rates, smaller class sizes, and improved student outcomes.

Despite a period of fiscal restraint, our funding for Special Education is projected to increase to more than \$2.7 billion this year. Our investments have resulted in an increase of \$1.05 billion or 67 per cent since 2002–03.

This year, we are also making changes to the High Needs Amount (HNA) included in our special education funding to be even more responsive to student needs. The change will increase the focus on supporting student outcomes, while responding to requests for a more fair and equitable High Needs Amount allocation. We are ensuring school boards have the resources they need to deliver high quality programs to our most vulnerable students.

Our funding changes will help schools be more responsive to the needs of students receiving special education programs and services, and increase the focus on supporting student outcomes.

4. What will happen to full day kindergarten if your party forms the next government?

Full day Kindergarten is the most significant transformation in our education system in a generation. Starting this fall, all four- and five-year-olds will have access to full day kindergarten. Their families will save about \$6,500 in child care costs. The plan is the first of its kind in North America and it is important for Ontario's future prosperity.

That is why we have invested over \$1.5 billion to support the implementation of full-day kindergarten and will continue to support this transformational program. The results of the investment are clear. Recent research from Queen's and McMaster, proves that children in full-day kindergarten programs are better prepared to start Grade one.

We will continue to rely on discussions with our partners as well as research and evidence to inform how we can best implement the program across the province. The PC plan for education is a plan of cuts and disruption. It would change an FDK model we know is working and has delivered positive results for kids. It would require seven more children for every adult in the classroom and would eliminate thousands of teaching jobs. We don't think that is the way forward, and we are committed to support the success of our youngest learners. In fact, this year we made funding to FDK ongoing and permanent by including it in the Grants for Student Needs for all school boards.

5. With declining enrollment, schools have been faced with tough decisions on what programs can be offered. What steps would your party take to address this pressure? What programs do you see as the highest priority?

The number of school-aged children in Ontario has been decreasing in recent years, and enrolment is currently declining in 53 of 72 school boards. School boards are making important decisions to ensure they can deliver excellent programming in communities where the number of students is declining.

To ease this challenge, in the 2014 Budget we committed to providing more than \$11 billion over the next 10 years for elementary and secondary education infrastructure. This funding will target critical needs in the sector. It includes a \$750 million capital consolidation funding to support the management of school assets and facilities to ensure our investments are supporting programs that are proven to improve student outcomes.

We have also benefited from advice from our education partners about how to modernize our system and become more efficient while increasing the number of education workers.

During recent consultations, we heard that E-learning and the use of digital technology, including e-books, are on the rise in Ontario schools and that it provides an opportunity to deliver a balanced and varied learning experience and resources to address the diverse need of Ontario's students.

We believe that if done equitably, technology has the potential to provide new learning opportunities for students across the province, particularly in northern and rural boards. We have recently released a renewed vision for the system based on extensive consultation with our stakeholders, including OSSTF, entitled “Achieving Excellence”. To support this new vision for education, we are investing \$150 million over the next three years in technology and learning tools such as new digital tablets, netbooks, cameras, software and professional development for teachers.

This \$150 million investment will build on teaching and learning innovations that are already surfacing in schools across Ontario and will support new avenues to improved programming and student outcomes.

With an increase of \$8.1 billion in funding to school boards over the past decade, it is important that we work with our school board leaders to ensure they have the resources, the capacity, and the expertise, to manage their budgets in a way that supports our goal of improved student achievement.

6. What will your party do to restore full funding to adult education programs across Ontario?

Since 2003, we have committed to providing our adult learners with the programs and services they need to reach their full potential. And, in 2014–15, a projected \$116 million will be provided to 61 school boards to support adult and continuing education programs, and recognize prior learning for mature students.

We have increased funding for adult education and continuing education programs by about \$54 million, or 53 per cent, since 2002–03.

We are also providing adult learners with innovative programs available in Ontario high schools such as Specialist High Skills Major, Dual Credits, and Co-op. Adults can access these through adult day school, alternative education, continuing education, night, and summer schools.