

# THE ISSUES

## School Boards



**VOTE OCT. 6**

**CUPE** **SCFP**  
Ontario

## Current Issues

As the government reduces funding for schools, school boards across the province continue to look at closures and amalgamations to reduce costs. But there is no correlation between highly populated schools and student success.

### School Closures

In rural and northern areas, closed schools mean longer bus times for children, adding to an already long day. At the same time as schools are being closed, there is increasing direction for schools to become “hubs” offering an array of services to children and families.

By closing schools, the boards reduce their capacity to offer a home to these services and programming for the broader community.

### Schools fundraising

Schools in all boards have to do more and more of their own fundraising.

People for Education recently reported that in 2009/2010 Ontario schools raised a total of \$588.4 million to augment school budgets and support charitable causes.

These funds have been used to buy essentials such as computer equipment and smart boards, or for building and playground improvements. In some cases, students have to pay for materials necessary to complete their courses.

Studies have shown schools in low-income neighbourhoods, on average, raise less than half the money as those in higher income neighbourhoods. This adds to the increasing inequality in our public schools.

### Cuts to Necessary Programs

The lack of funding also means cuts to school services such as libraries and student safety.

Over the past year, school boards have tried to reduce spending by cutting school libraries budgets or eliminating them all together.

Inadequate funding also jeopardizes students physically and medically. During the H1N1 influenza scare, it became clear that custodial staff play a key role in preventing the spread of communicable diseases such as influenza in schools.

Custodians are also quick to identify and report individuals who don't belong in schools. In spite of their key role, environment boards try to save money by reducing the custodial staff through alternate day cleaning, twinning of schools, split shifts, contracting out, etc.

Having a consistent adult presence in the hallways of secondary school reduces the incidents of violence and creates a safer learning environment for youth. The “Julian Faulkner Report,” which followed the shooting of a student in a Toronto school, recommended the hiring of Safe School Supervisors to provide such a presence. Unfortunately, this recommendation has not been acted upon.

### Special Education

The vast majority of school boards report spending more on Special Education than what is allocated by the funding formula. In spite of this, People for Education reports 23% of elementary schools and 21% of high

schools have identified students who are not receiving support.

In 2010/2011, 69% of elementary schools reported they have at least one full-time educational assistant, compared to 80% in 2007/2008. Funding is not keeping up with the demand.

## Early Learning

Ontario is struggling with the Liberals' plan for early learning for 4 and 5 year olds. The plan promised a "seamless", all day, year round program which would provide consistency by having the same early childhood educators working with the child throughout the day and year. The program was also supposed to give working parents the chance for daily interaction with their child's educators.

Instead, the government opened the door to third party providers (including the for-profit sector). This returns 4 and 5 year olds to multiple transitions and returns working parents to a more distant relation with the school system.

## Policy recommendations

Adequate funding for our school systems is a necessary investment in the future of Ontarians. Funding the programs that our children need should be a fundamental priority for our province. That should include adequate funding for the Early Learning Program as originally envisioned. Turning over the care of our children – whether of school age or younger – to private sector providers should not be an option.

## Questions for candidates

**Q** If elected, would you freeze school closures to enable the community to make plans for alternative educational uses for the unused space?

**Q** If elected, what would you do to ensure all elementary and secondary schools across the province have fully staffed and equipped libraries open to students throughout their school day?

**Q** If elected, what assurances would you make to families of children with special needs who require these supports in order to succeed?

**Q** If elected, how would you ensure the implementation of the Early Learning Program as originally envisioned?



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