

Information about the Ontario Budget – May 19, 2004

Re: EDUCATION FUNDING

with responses from *The Ontario Coalition for Inclusive Education* (in bold type)

\$2.1 billion was announced – called Grants for Student Needs (GSN)- in additional provincial education funding, to be phased in over the next 4 years ¹:

- This is said to bring Ontario schools up to a level of funding equivalent to what last school year's Rozanski Commission said was needed – but not until the school year 2007-08.
- The government calls this “stable funding”. Knowing what is available for 4 more years allows longer collective agreements and less frequent labour unrest.
- Some of this money adds to what is now named Stabilization Funding – for additional operating costs, school repairs, textbooks, and resources.
- Another portion of the new money is called Investments in Student Success – for smaller primary class sizes and additional supports.
- **It does not seem that increases are allocated within the special education “envelope” – and we wonder whether such existing special purpose envelopes will continue.**
- **School boards have still not heard how much special ed. money they will receive for this current school year – there is great uncertainty about the Intensive Support Amount (ISA) totals. We are adamantly opposed to this harmful funding formula and glad to hear that questions have been asked about whether it should continue.**
- \$20 million – next school year – is to be spent on technology education equipment
- Also earmarked is \$3.5 million over 4 years for a new secondary school “Learning to 18 Strategy”

Ontario is making a huge investment into lowering primary class sizes:

- **We do not object to smaller primary classes – and the Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario said this was an important factor to ensure successful inclusion of students with disabilities. Red Flag – when students leave primary or for those who are older, need to emphasize that this is not the single most critical feature to successful inclusion.**
- **But we need to “do the math”... will bringing in 1000 new teachers in September 2006 mean that other grades don't end up with larger class sizes? And what will happen to class sizes until then?**
- **Will the government really be able to demonstrate that learning will improve? Will the public think this was worth paying increased taxes? After all, it will be many years before the long-term effects of smaller primary classes are known.**
- **We see that education could be improved if school boards stopped increasing the number of segregated classes for students with disabilities, and redirected funding to improve classroom instruction for all students – learning better together.**

The Liberal government was elected to institute change, especially in education, but seems to be heading in the same direction as its predecessor – measuring educational outcomes by means of standard EQAO testing. We think this is dangerous – for 2 main reasons:

¹ It appears that an additional \$133 million next year – for an overall total of \$250 million by 2005-06 – will be for “other student success funding outside GSN”

1. **The government's best case scenario still means that 25% of Ontario students do not meet the standard**
 - **Many students with disabilities are not accommodated and are excluded from EQAO tests. This means they will never graduate from high school.**
 - **The number of students eligible for ISA funding has grown greatly. More money is being spent and more kids are shown to be failing.**
 - **Will these students who have disabilities still pursue literacy goals? The ISA funding formula discourages academic learning.**
 - **We fear students with disabilities will not have access to assistance from**
 - **new in-school "Literacy and Numeracy Specialists"**
 - **ongoing school "Turnaround Teams", and**
 - **new high school "Learning to 18 Strategy"**

2. **Government is hoping that 25% more of Ontario students will meet the EQAO standard. But we have seen that EQAO's standardized measures of learning outcomes can promote inflexible instruction. These kids don't need drill and repetition; they need new strategies, more individualized instruction, co-operative learning; etc. Will they access more physical activity, libraries and arts education? Will kids keep dropping out? Or will the standard be lowered?**

We fear that these announcements will actually undermine the "Results, Respect and Responsibility" the government says it aims for. We hope further announcements allay our fears.

It has been our experience that the best way to help ALL students is by effectively *including* those who have disabilities. However, inclusion is NOT about students with disabilities; it is NOT about "special needs", but instead focuses on and fosters strengths. Inclusive education involves unconditional acceptance of all the children from a given neighbourhood, as individuals with varied learning styles, interests and abilities, learning together with and from each other. Teachers must be supported to offer a variety of skills, techniques and knowledge – in order to foster a love of learning in every child.