

Quick Study

ON EDUCATION ISSUES

May 2008. ISSN 1201-215



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Summary

- Ontario school boards have greatly increased the number of employees who earn more than \$100,000.
- At the same time, enrolment is declining across the province.
- The extra money does not appear to have improved student learning.
- The government should consider more promising measures.

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Text Word Count: 726

Let the Sunshine In

by Malkin Dare

The sun is shining a lot more on the Toronto District School Board these days – and that’s bad news for taxpayers.

I am referring to the annual “Sunshine Report”, which discloses the names of Ontario’s public-sector employees paid \$100,000 or more.

Interestingly, a whopping 657 employees of the Toronto Board made this year’s list. That’s a lot of well-paid educators, especially given that four years earlier, the board had only 140 sunshiners – that’s a hike of 360 per cent! This, of course, is the same Toronto District School board renowned for its financial woes and its chronic inability to balance its budget.

What really interesting however, however, is that as the number of \$100,000+ earners in the employ of the Board is going up, the number of students enrolled in Toronto schools is going down. In fact, during the past four years enrolment is down by almost 18,000 students.

Mind you, the Toronto Board is by no means alone in this regard. Other Ontario school boards have also seen their “Sunshine” numbers skyrocket.

The worst offender is Le conseil scolaire de district des écoles catholiques de l’est de l’Ontario, which increased its sunshiners by fully 1500 per cent, rising from two to 32 over four years. To be fair, this school board did add fully 558 students over the four-year period – a six per cent increase in enrolment.

Next in line is the Windsor-Essex District School Board which, despite a five per cent decrease in enrolment, increased the number of its sunshiners by 1275 per cent.

And so it goes.

Province-wide the average increase in sunshiners was 451 per cent. Student enrolment declines were common around the province as well, with an overall drop of two per cent. In other words, the number of generals increased dramatically, even though the number of foot soldiers dropped.

To put this in context, other Ontario government employees (hospitals, ministries, universities, etc.) increased their sunshine list members by an average of 112 per cent during the same period.

Of course, public servants are generally much better paid than average Canadians, and so it would be more meaningful to compare the rise in highly-paid educators to the salaries of ordinary Canadians.

Unfortunately, Statistics Canada data are available for only the first two years of the period in question. For what it's worth, in the two years from 2003 to 2005 the number of Canadians earning more than \$100,000 increased by only 28 per cent, compared to a 221 per cent hike in the number of education sunshiners during the same two years.

Expressed another way, in 2003 there were 2496 students for every member of the sunshine list, while by 2007 there were only 445 students. At this rate, it won't be long before there are fewer than 100 students per member of the education sunshine list.

Indeed, there are already two school boards who have managed this feat – Le conseil scolaire de district catholique des Aurores boréales (with one sunshiner for every 70 students and Superior North Catholic District School Board with one sunshiner for every 84 students.)

Of course, the \$64,000 question is whether the students are learning more in boards with lots of sunshiners. Judging by this year's results on the provincial literacy test, the answer is a resounding no. When we compared the percentage of successful students with their school board's sunshine ratio, we found zero relationship.

In other words, maybe our kids would do better in school if we spent less money on their education! Just as paying more for gas doesn't result in superior car performance, so too higher education costs don't translate into more student learning.

Yet the Ontario government has been throwing money at its educators for years, actually increasing spending by almost 18 per cent since 2003.

Now if bucketfuls of money meant that fewer students ended up with blighted hopes and stunted lives, then the money would be well spent in our opinion. However, it appears that the extra spending isn't helping students at all.

And as long as the government continues to focus on money as their strategy of choice, they will ignore other more promising measures – such as decentralized education systems, research-based teaching methods, and school choice.

Until such time, the sun is likely to shine on 4338 (and rising) well-paid educators, but go behind a cloud for students.

Sunshiners Up 451% -- Student Enrolment Down 2%

