

Efficient schools need more office and clerical workers



The cut-backs experienced during the 1995-2003 period have created an untenable situation for office staff in schools. At the same time staff was being reduced, in many cases cut in half, the demands of government paperwork and computerized report cards were increasing work loads. The remaining harried staff are the first contact for parents and students and service levels have noticeably declined despite everyone's best efforts. Including central staff at board offices, the efficiency of the education system has been pushed beyond the limits. Millions of dollars intended for support staff is routinely redirected to other areas of board budgets. The education funding formula must be modified to include dedicated funding for support staff.

Increasingly high tech schools need to be supported

Technicians keep the computers, the library, and technological equipment running smoothly. As our schools become high tech operations these technicians are needed more than ever but the reduction in these workers has caused unnecessary delays in installations and maintenance of systems that support both board and government priorities. All of this makes it difficult for students to learn and teachers to teach. The inefficiencies caused by thoughtless cut-backs compromise the schools and therefore Ontario's future.



Custodians and trades mean clean safe schools

When it comes to the well being of students, the services of the custodians and trades people are invaluable. They provide the learning environments that are not only clean and pleasant, but meet safety codes, fire codes and public health codes. Cutbacks since 1995 have not only compromised the

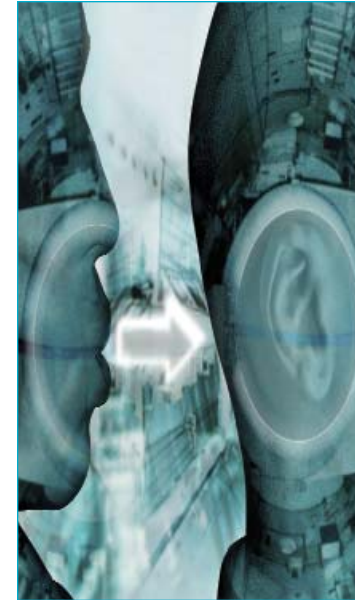
aesthetics of our schools but have undermined safety as well. Some school boards have lost 30 to 50 percent of their custodians despite enrollment growth. Fewer staff, fewer supplies and few building improvements have led to dirty and sometimes unsafe conditions.



Psychologists, social workers, speech/language pathologists in short supply for at-risk students

Almost every education stakeholder now agrees that at-risk students are our most urgent problem in education. Those who drop out or get into legal or social problems are ill prepared for our modern complex society, but it is many of the very people we need to hold these students in school while dealing with personal or family problems that are in short supply. Psychologists, social workers, speech/language pathologists and child and youth workers are the frontline in this struggle and as a society we cannot afford to lose them.

The problem is that because of huge case loads caused by cut-backs, and uncompetitive compensation in some professions we are losing these professionals and in some areas we can not attract new ones. The situation is most acute in rural and northern boards. According to one estimate, 20 percent of the psychological services and speech/language positions cannot be filled.



Educational assistants support our most vulnerable students

Once again, it is our most vulnerable, at-risk students, who suffer when educational assistants are cut back either through lay-offs or the more insidious loss of hours which are just lay-offs in a different form. These staff provide educational, social, emotional and often physical support to those students who need it most. If special needs students are to be integrated in the school system, it is only possible with the support of educational assistants.

Pay equity: Justice delayed is justice denied

The implementation of the *Pay Equity Act* in Ontario for public services dates to 1990. Pay equity was enacted to eliminate gender discrimination in compensation yet there is no direct funding available to address the retroactive requirements of pay equity. This adds strain to already stretched school board budgets. School boards adopt an avoidance posture when a settlement is proposed since the economic conditions are not there for rapid settlements. Due to amalgamation in 1998, liability was transferred to new boards. Even past funding for pay equity was not earmarked and was dissipated over other board priorities. The government must make dedicated funding of at least \$60 million available just for payouts to allow final settlements to be negotiated between boards and their female employees. Despite engagement with every school board, OSSTF, for example, has settled agreements with only 18 of 80 bargaining units.

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OSSTF Recommends

The provincial government funding formula should be modified to include dedicated funding for school support staff to ensure adequate levels of staffing in school boards to meet the office, clerical, technical and plant support staff needs of schools.

The government should include funding to school boards in the budget to allow them to meet the obligations they have in implementing fully the *Pay Equity Act*.

OSSTF believes in a full service school that provides real opportunities for student success. This requires a school team that goes beyond classroom teachers to include office, technical and maintenance staff, education assistants, teacher librarians, social workers, psychologists and a wide range of other education workers. Each plays a valuable role in helping our schools run effectively and our students become the best they can be.

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EDUCATION WATCH

Reinvesting in support staff for good schools

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