Centralizing Power, Decentralizing Blame: What Ontarians Say About Education Reform

by

Anne O’Connell and Fraser Valentine
with the assistance of the Speaking Out Team

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PEOPLE IN ONTARIO TALK ABOUT EDUCATION

These reforms have been put in place as part of our commitment to improve the quality of education in the province of Ontario. They will help shape an education system known for excellence, discipline and accountability. Our students stand at the brink of a New Millennium. Their education – an Ontario education – must prepare them for the future. It must provide them with the skills and knowledge they will need to succeed in this new century. It must serve as a passport to hope, opportunity, jobs and growth. – David Johnson, Minister of Education and Training (Statement to the Ontario Legislature, May 4, 1998).

Frank, who is trained as an educator and works full time at a community-based organization in Toronto, does not share the optimistic picture painted by Ontario’s Education Minister:

I’m concerned about the changes in education and the degree to which more and more people are pulling their children out of the public system because the perception of the quality of education has changed. I think public education is extraordinarily important and the more fragmented the education system becomes, the more fragmented society becomes. Generations of people have worked very hard to develop a publicly-funded education system that is accessible to everyone. I think this is being eroded by this government. All we are getting is a lot of rhetoric.

Frank belongs to one of the 40 households (63 adults, 66 children) across the province that we have been interviewing since January 1997. In February and March 1998, we talked to the participants in our study about their experiences and views of the massive overhaul being made to the education system by the Ontario government.

Our interviews confirm that education plays a central role in people’s lives. Of the 40 households in our study, 31 households had at least one member with a connection to the education system either as students (in elementary, secondary, postsecondary or adult education) and/or through jobs that are connected to the education field (bus driver, teachers, professor, researcher). (See Appendix A.) Among the adults and children in our study, 30 were in elementary school, 17 were in secondary school, nine were in postsecondary institutions and three participants were enrolled in adult education programs (upgrading, continuing education or training programs). (See Figure 1.)

Sixteen people have active Ontario Student Assistance Plan (OSAP) loans. Another seven participants were employed in the education field, three adults volunteered in educational institutions and 11 children were identified as having special needs such as Attention Deficit Disorder or a physical disability.

While education reform is not new, the Conservative government has made the most extensive set of reforms to the system in 30 years affecting every level from junior kindergarten through adult education and training programs. We asked our participants a simple question: What do the reforms to the education system mean to them?

Like many Ontarians, our participants look to the education system to provide them with the skills necessary to find, get and keep meaningful jobs, as well as the knowledge they need to participate in society as informed citizens. Michelle, a sole-support mother with two children living in Toronto, reflects these views: “The purpose of an education is so that people can have a better future, better job and better lifestyle.” Interviewees talked about education as a means to better themselves, to build self-esteem and confidence, and to teach critical thinking. Jeffrey, a 16-year-old high school student living with his parents in northern
Ontario, simply says that an education should “prepare you for life.”

As might be anticipated, our participants did not speak with a single voice on education. One area around which there was consensus, however, was the view that education is important to the participants personally and to our society more generally. Education continues to be seen as the route to upward mobility: the ‘ticket’ to opportunity. Despite this belief, many of our participants told us that the ‘ticket’ is getting harder to obtain, especially for adults wanting to continue to higher education or upgrade their skills. Many parents of young children have difficulty finding affordable child care that will allow them to attend school. Others cannot secure reliable transportation to get to school. Some have attended postsecondary institutions, but leave because their student loans are too large to carry. Still others have taken adult education courses to upgrade their skills, but find the courses do not reflect the current job market.

We were told not only about obstacles, but also about a general dissatisfaction with the quality and priority of education today. Most of our participants support the idea that the education system must be reformed. Our households want education to be more than ‘just OK’ – they want the education system to be truly excellent. But our participants question whether the reforms of the current Ontario government are really meant to achieve excellence or, instead, are part of a larger cost-cutting and tax-shifting agenda.

**ONE SIZE FITS ALL: REFORMS IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

Most of the people with whom we spoke believe that standards need to be reintroduced into the education system. Many call for a return to the ‘basics’ or the ‘3Rs,’ fearing that children are not finishing school with a competent level of reading, writing and arithmetic. Angie
lives in Ottawa and has two sons in the public system:

*I do believe in a set curriculum, this is what the children should know. When you are in Grade 3 you should know this, this and this. When you are finished Grade 13, which I think they’re getting rid of this year, you should know this, this and this. I think that’s important, that you have to know these things so that you can continue on. So I do believe in standardized curriculum.*

Patrick, who is 33, works part time and is on social assistance:

*I think the lower grades, like secondary school, elementary, should be more focussed on survival, the basic survival skills of reading, writing and arithmetic.*

The Ontario government has responded to popular support for the ‘3Rs’ by introducing a ‘back-to-basics’ curriculum, standardized testing and new report cards. The new approach was implemented in September 1997, for Grades 1 through 8. At a press conference, the then Minister of Education and Training, John Snobelen, said: “Elementary-school students will be more routinely failed if they do not make the grade” [Gait 1997: A1].

By the spring of 1997, the Education Quality and Accountability Office began province-wide testing for reading, writing and arithmetic in Grade 3 as well as math in Grade 6 [Wright 1996: A3]. Accompanying the introduction of new curriculum standards and province-wide testing, a new standardized report card was developed and introduced in 30 percent of elementary schools in Ontario in 1997 [Ministry of Education and Training 1998: 3].

Many of the changes introduced by the Conservatives had been recommended in earlier education reform proposals. The previous NDP government, for instance, established a Royal Commission on Learning to report on the state of education in the province. In its report, *For the Love of Learning* [1994], the Commission called for a rigorous set of learning outcomes to be applied in both the elementary and secondary systems. The Commission’s approach to curriculum reform emphasized high levels of literacy building focussing on “basic reading, writing, and problem-solving skills” [Royal Commission on Learning 1994: 5]. Standardized testing, such as the former NDP government’s proposal to spend $25 million a year on standard math and literacy tests in Grades 3, 6, 9 and 11, has been supported by many stakeholders.

Nevertheless, our participants raise serious concerns about what the current Ontario government actually has done in introducing more rigorously-defined standards into the education system.

### Rushed and rigid standards

The speed with which the new curriculum was introduced was mentioned by many of the people in our study. Parents want assurances that the changes are being implemented at a pace which their children and teachers can handle. Michelle, for instance, noticed that the demands on her two young children significantly increased as the government began to reform curriculum. She questions whether the pace of implementation of the changes to the education system has been well thought through from the perspective of the children:

*Each night, my children are bringing home more and more homework. They didn’t ever have this much homework and I’m beginning to question if it is too much for them. All of a sudden the school is just pushing them. There is no time to gradually grow into the changes.*

Anne has four young children. She also looks at the reforms from the perspective of their effect on her children. She sees the new standards as paying insufficient attention to what children are prepared to learn:
The government has changed what schools are teaching and they are given certain times that it has to be taught. So what if half those kids aren’t ready for that? They just shove it at them and hope they catch on?

Frank, who is trained as an educator, has doubts that the: ... curriculum initiatives will be helpful in the long run because they’ve been hastily thrown together and without enough time to really train teachers well in how to implement the curriculum. It’s kind of maddening, it’s ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous.

The concerns expressed by our participants are well founded. For instance, teachers were offered only a single day of orientation to prepare for the massive overhaul of the elementary system. Similarly, after a year of standardized reports, there remains no training and there is little agreement on a common marking scale. In fact, teachers’ unions argue that the report cards are flawed because of inadequacies in teacher training, computer technology and information supplied by the Ministry of Education and Training [Lewington 1998b: A8].

While many of those with whom we talked support the idea of curriculum reform and standardized report cards, others have serious reservations. Paul, a high school teacher in our study, questions the need for strict outcomes for children: I have a friend whose wife teaches Grade 3 and he said she’s just been beside herself. It’s taken her every night for a month to prepare these report cards and the kids have to get a B+ or a B in art and then this huge anecdotal report. And then the parents come in and say how come Billy got B in art, why didn’t he get B+? She says this is Grade 3 art. What are we explaining here?

According to Pam, who lives in northern Ontario, this level of standardization begins to rank young children before it is necessary or helpful. She does not support a common marking system for young children:

The definition of a level four student [A to A+] is “the child probably won’t need to ask you any questions, they won’t require extra help.” It discourages children from asking questions, and those children are the ones who open the door for the other kids who maybe didn’t understand the problem enough to answer questions and ask questions!

Narrowing the scope of education

The government has assured Ontarians that the new elementary and secondary curriculum will result in a smooth transition for students as they move from grade to grade. By the time they reach Grade 7, students will be expected to “develop an educational plan with their parents and a teacher advisor to prepare them to enter the new four-year, streamed secondary school program. Once in high school, students will be now able to specialize in their chosen destination: university, college or directly to the workplace” [Ministry of Education and Training 1998: 8].

Some of our households are not satisfied with the government’s assurances and point out the contradictions in its approach to reforming education. Anand, a father of two young children, is concerned by the limited content found in a back-to-basics curriculum:

There are standards for the elementary school from Grade 1 to Grade 8. There’s reading and there’s arithmetic, but there’s not anything else like social studies. The intent is that it gets squeezed into the other activities. But there’s nothing in these curriculum standards about some of the other things that children should get exposed to; it’s very general.

For Heather, who recently completed a university degree and has aspirations for a career
Table 1
Bills Affected by Imposed Time Allocation Since June 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>name of bill</th>
<th>date time allocation was imposed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill 7, Labour Relations and Employment Statute Law Amendment Act</td>
<td>Oct. 25/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 26, Savings and Restructuring Act</td>
<td>Dec. 12/95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 99, Workers’ Compensation Reform Act</td>
<td>Jan. 2/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 103, City of Toronto Act</td>
<td>Jan. 29/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 104, Fewer School Boards Act</td>
<td>Feb. 6/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 109, Local Control of Public Libraries Act</td>
<td>Sept. 8/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 136, Public Sector Transition Stability Act</td>
<td>Sept. 17/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 142, Social Assistance Reform Act</td>
<td>Sept. 4/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 148, City of Toronto Act</td>
<td>Sept. 8/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 149, Fair Municipal Finance Act</td>
<td>Oct. 2/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 152, Services Improvement Act</td>
<td>Sept. 16/97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 160, Education Quality Improvement Act</td>
<td>Oct. 6/97</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2
Bills for Which Time Was Limited for Public Consultation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>name of bill</th>
<th>number of public consultation days permitted</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill 7, Labour Relations and Employment Statute Law Amendment Act</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 26, Savings and Restructuring Act</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 103, City of Toronto Act</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 104, Fewer School Boards Act</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 142, Social Assistance Reform Act</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 148, City of Toronto Act</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bill 152, Services Improvement Act</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 160, Education Quality Improvement Act</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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in the arts, the changes to high school curriculum away from arts, music and drama are disappointing:

*I think it’s an incredibly sad thing to happen to Ontario. I just keep thinking of my friends’ children who are not going to have the simple experiences that I had in school. It’s those things that I consider a part of a good life.*

In fact, Heather told us that it was programs in fine arts that helped her stay in high school. Melanie, her mother, says:

*It was the arts that kept Heather in school. If it hadn’t been for those cultural programs, there would be an awful lot of children who would lose interest in school. There is such a contradiction of aims and objectives in education planning. The government cannot make up their minds which wairy they want to go. On the one hand, they want a whole lot of technocrats and business people, but on the other they don’t want kids to drop out of school. The system needs to be broader so that everyone can fit.*

In an environment where the public perceives that standards of excellence are on the decline, it may seem appropriate to impose curriculum reform that requires students to follow and achieve pre-determined results from an ‘easy-to-test’ curriculum. For many of our participants, however, this uniform approach to learning marks an important shift in Ontario’s education system. While many look for standards as a way to ensure higher quality and mastering ‘the basics,’ it now appears that more rigorous standards are being implemented through narrow standardization. Our household participants are concerned that the education system has become too rigid, too unresponsive to children’s actual state of learning and too restrictive in the scope of what children learn.

After our interviews were completed, the government announced further curriculum changes that speak to the concerns raised by Anand, Heather and Melanie. In May and June 1998, the Ministry of Education and Training introduced new curriculum initiatives in the areas of the fine arts, physical fitness, health and sex education. History, geography and social studies curriculum changes were released in August 1998. These announcements addressed concerns that the education system is becoming more narrow and rewards only business-oriented approaches to learning.

Critics, however, have questioned the feasibility of implementing these measures at the same time as financing changes to the education system have significantly reduced the resources available for arts, music and drama programs [Gait 1998: A3]. A recent parent-led tracking report on school inventories found that in June 1998, 64 percent of schools responding had no full-time or part-time teacher in physical education and a further 46 percent had neither a part-time nor full-time music teacher [People for Education 1998: 2]. Since the provincial government now controls all resources in the system, and school boards are not permitted to raise their own revenue, any new initiatives must be accompanied by additional resources.

**Streaming in secondary education**

On June 20, 1997, the government announced significant changes to secondary school programs. Beginning September 1999, a high school education will consist of four, not five, years and, perhaps more importantly, students will be streamed into either academic or non-academic programs. Previous governments also tackled the concept of streaming and destreaming. As a result, this aspect of curriculum reform has a long and controversial history.

Prior to the introduction of curriculum diversity through the process of destreaming, a high school education was determined primarily by academic performance. Known as streaming, this process sorted students based on predictors of academic achievement [Robertson 1998: 53]. Beginning in Grade 9, the Ontario secondary system divided students into one of three
streams based on scholastic accomplishments and career plans. In practice, however, social class and race were, and still are, the strongest predictors of whether students graduate with basic or advanced high school diplomas, just as these criteria closely determine drop-out rates [Robertson 1998]. Studies have shown, for instance, that black and minority students wind up in the lowest academic classes with little chance of switching to other programs [Lewington 1998c: AI].

Both the previous Liberal and NDP governments examined the impact of streaming and the NDP government ended the practice. Although the implementation of ‘destreaming’ was criticized by the opposition parties, as well as educators and critics, many people viewed it as a step in the right direction. Destreaming meant that Ontario’s students could have a flexible curriculum responding to a variety of needs and that doors would not be shut on students before they were old enough to make informed decisions. The present Ontario government, however, decided to reverse this reform and has now re implemented streaming.

Aside from causing chaos for Ontario educators as they try to reorganize schools yet again, the reintroduction of streaming has set off alarm bells for some of our participants. Some of our interviewees told us about the stigma that is often associated with streaming, especially issues related to socioeconomic class. Samantha, for instance, is a young single parent trying to finish high school. Aside from the difficulties she faces trying to provide for her two children on social assistance, Samantha finds the environment that streaming creates difficult to manage:

I took general in Grade 9 but moved to the advanced level in Grade 10. I found that the only real difference between the two levels was the label they put on you – the teaching seemed the same to me. If you are in advanced you’re ‘smart,’ but general means you ‘aren’t as good.’ I don’t think it’s good to have the different levels because of the names that people give you.

Like Samantha, Bert, who has two sons and lives in northern Ontario, is skeptical about the reintroduction of streaming. He expresses concern that students will be unable to explore their individuality in a system that slots students into predetermined paths of learning. He says:

How will streaming produce children who develop their own ideas and personalities? It’s just one more thing taking the individuality out of our society.

Ashley, a 55-year-old African-Canadian woman and playwright, campaigned to get rid of streaming, a policy which had a negative effect on her own children. She talks about how testing and streaming combine to enshrine social, class and racial divisions:

Testing Grade 3 children; of course, there’s something behind that – you know, streaming. What? Oh, you failed that in Grade 3? There you go, auto mechanics. There you go, sweep the streets. It’s just streaming kids. Oh, you didn’t speak English then? Well, too bad. Mandatory volunteerism in secondary education

Seven months after the Ministry of Education and Training announced the reintroduction of streaming, the government made further changes to the high school curriculum. Among these initiatives was a mandatory volunteer program that will require students to complete 40 hours of community service while in high school. Among our participants, especially those currently in high school, mandatory volunteerism is not welcomed by everyone.

Gina is a 15-year-old high school student in the Greater Toronto Area. Although the government argues that mandatory volunteerism will teach students important practical skills about the working world, Gina is unconvinced that these measures will benefit her in the long
run. While in high school, Gina would prefer to concentrate on her scholastic abilities rather than those associated with the business world:

The idea is that the school will send you off someplace so you can learn what the business world is about – at least that’s what my science teacher told me. I don’t think it’s going to show you how business works, it’s simply getting you to do free labour. I’m not going to do it, even if they force me to, even if they give me detention after detention, I’m not going to do it without getting paid. I’m not going to do volunteer work when I could be taking another history or science course. I’m not going to support it. There’s no way.

Gina’s comments also reflect the way the government implemented these curriculum changes. Announcements were made on a piecemeal basis and educators often were left in the dark concerning the changes. As a result, students are anxious and ill-informed about the new programs. Even students not directly affected by these changes express concern about the purpose of a mandatory volunteer program at the high school level. Elizabeth, for instance, is a single woman in her 30s living and working full time in Toronto. She comments on the value of volunteer work, when it is based on interests and a commitment to a community:

I think forcing people to do volunteer work is kind of strange, and I don’t see how they are going to monitor that. You can’t legislate caring. If people are interested and connected to their communities, then they are going to want to go out. I remember when I was in high school I went out and collected money for my church and this was important to me. You can’t force that kind of thing because then people will resent it, and they’ll see it as a chore. Who is left out?: creating the myth of the average student

When we asked people to talk about their experiences with the education system, we found the reforms ignore the complexity of their lives. Some of our participants are feeling pushed out of the education system. Across income or education levels, our participants express concern about those students who may not meet the new standards. Many of our households are finding that they themselves do not meet all of the new standards set by the province. These standards have been developed for the so-called ‘average student.’ Many of the participants openly question the meaning of the term ‘average student’ and its implications for quality education. According to Jessie, curriculum changes show that:

The government is trying to come up, from what I can see, with the model of the average child. Now the cute thing about the average is that usually it never really fits any individual – the mysterious average.

For Ray, who has had to fight for an acceptable curriculum at a profound level, the assumptions that underlie the myth of the average student are frightening. Ray is an Aboriginal man with two sons in the public system who has to keep on top of negative depictions of Aboriginal peoples in his own children’s studies. He describes this experience:

It’s amazing to me some of the things they are taking. I guess it goes back to seeing my own kids’ English assignment and it talked about the savages or wild Indians that attacked this fort. You know, I have to explain to them when they’re reading something about history that there’s another side to this too. I’m trying to not make them angry at all. I want them to understand what’s going on, but at the same time I want them to be able to question our role in history, because we shouldn’t be left out of these history books.

Tensions are arising between cultural diversity and standard curriculum. In May 1998, the government implemented the first set of standardized province-wide tests for Grade 3 students. Although there was some resistance because the testing was costly and often produced controversial results, school boards were expected to carry out the testing. Two schools in the Toronto District School Board refused to take part.
Officials at one elementary school decided not to participate after parents complained the tests failed to adequately accommodate the needs of recent immigrants. Parents felt that the tests were unfair and placed undue stress on their children [Toronto District School Board 1998].

The ‘average’ student does not seem to include children with special needs. We found that the costs associated with programs for children with special needs are being downloaded onto individuals and families. Angie is a single mother with two sons living in Ottawa. Her youngest son has learning difficulties and recently was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder. Angie had difficulty securing the necessary supports to help her son, forcing her to pay for testing for her son. With her son now properly diagnosed, Angie is better able to access the services he needs to perform well in school. Out of 642 elementary schools surveyed, there were 2,377 students waiting to be identified for special education in 1998 [People For Education 1998].

Sabrina, a social worker, works with youth with special needs:

*I have real concerns for people with special needs in the system, because they are losing money and they’re losing support. They’re not going to get a good education and they’re going to be extremely dependent on the charity of others, which is not the kind of situation I want to see. I want people to be able to live with dignity and have every opportunity, so I have real big concerns with this. Even though I don’t have any kids, so I don’t have any first-hand experience, this is what I see just from standing outside.*

In its 1994 report, the Royal Commission on Learning devoted considerable attention to Ontario’s special needs program and English as a Second Language. The Commission concluded that Ontario’s education system had to provide extensive support in these areas because the province’s demographics are shifting, and social and economic pressures are affecting children. Increased workloads, nonstandard jobs, underemployment and increasing income disparities are placing new and compounding pressures on parents and the education system.

Since 1991, Ontario’s immigrant population has grown by 15 percent. According to the 1996 census, immigrants accounted for 25 percent of Ontario’s population [Statistics Canada 1997 a: 5]. Furthermore, 80 percent of the immigrants who came to Canada between 1991 and 1996 reported a language other than English or French as their mother tongue [Statistics Canada 1997c: 2]. Diversity of needs demands diversity of education programs to meet these needs. As the government changes the structure and financing of education, however, increased uniformity appears to be the outcome.

Although the government made massive changes to the education system purportedly to bring ‘quality’ back to Ontario schools, our participants question whether the changes really are meant to improve quality. In fact, when we asked our participants who will benefit from the reforms implemented by the current Ontario government, 60 percent responded that they hoped it would be the students, but suspected that it will be government and big business that will prosper. Julie, who has a Masters degree and lives alone in Toronto says:

*Big business is winning. The government is winning. The little person is definitely not winning.*

Our participants are unconvinced that the reforms introduced by the Conservative government will make the system work better. Many other Ontarians share their concern. According to an Environics poll conducted in June 1998, one third of those surveyed believed reforms to education have been “mostly negative,” while only one out of ten thought that the system would improve. Almost half the respondents believed that the results of reform are mixed, that is, “about equally positive and negative.”
Angie, a single parent of two boys in elementary school living in Ottawa, says:

*I think the government is trying to make the education system better for themselves. If they were actually trying to make it work better for the students, they would be involving them in the decision-making process, and they are not doing that as far as I know. The government is just trying to save money. They aren’t actually thinking about how to make the education system better.*

We found that few of the issues that affect the daily lives of our participants are addressed by the current reforms – issues such as child care, transportation, supports for special needs children and student debt. In some instances, the government is creating – not removing – obstacles. Anand, a college teacher in Toronto, summarizes these concerns:

*I think the weaknesses in the education system relate to all these changes with restructuring and changes to the funding, as well as the cutbacks that have been going on for the last decade. These things are compounding, so that in the next few years I’m worried we will see major changes in what’s available to students.*

Melanie, an English as a Second Language teacher living in Toronto, says:

*These are not educational reforms. These are cuts to an essential service. This is the paring down and the dumbing down of the system. I think that the only people who may benefit from this process is the private sector.*

**MANAGING AND PAYING FOR ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION**

**Board structure**

Some of our participants complained about the amount of spending and number of school boards in Ontario. Christine, who lives in a small town in Southern Ontario and has one son in high school, says:

*To a point, I supported the amalgamation of the school boards because as far as I’m concerned there was a heck of a lot of money being spent on administration.*

Patrick, who is single, on social assistance and working part time agrees:

*I see the centralization of school boards as a positive thing. You’re getting back to where people are wanting to take the job for the right reasons and not for the money.*

However, when we asked participants to whom they would turn when faced with difficulties in the school system, most stated they would turn to their local school board.

While Christine comments on too much spending, she nevertheless argues that the diminished power of trustees means they no longer have any real independent function, referring to their new role as a "puppet trustee." People wonder about the role of trustees, given the lack of resources and time to meet the needs of the large populations they now represent. More recently, it was reported that the Minister of Education, David Johnson, has left open the door to the elimination of all school boards if his government is re-elected. Opposition parties note that abolishing school boards is easier to sell if you have taken away their authority [Girard 1998].

Some of our participants noted that unequal funding created wealthy and poorer boards. The reduction of school boards and trustees, and the establishment of four school board types in the province (English public and separate boards, and French public and separate boards) can be found in past proposals for reform. The Royal Commission on Learning [1994], the Sweeney Report [1996], and the Who Does What Report [Ontario Ministry of Education and Training 1996] suggested various models for equity
between school boards. However, a funding formula based on treating all boards the same does not translate into establishing equity, in the views of our households.

The impact of unequal funding between boards was experienced by one family that moved recently from Toronto to a small town in Southern Ontario. Christine and Dwight notice differences in their new school:

*We all have different concerns and I respect that. Like in downtown Toronto, it’s much more multicultural. They have more concerns with needing English as a Second Language teachers and stuff like that. We have a very small minority population out here, but a lot of kids are doing without.*

**School councils**

One of the main selling features of Bill 104, and the subsequent Bill 160, is the supposed opportunity for increased parental involvement in the education system. The Education Improvement Commission, established under Bill 104, has been asked to review the role of school councils to determine how they can be improved over time [Ministry of Education 1998]. Bill 160 makes school councils a requirement at each institution.

While on the surface this appears to be a positive move, our participants feel that school councils do not necessarily reflect the reality of parents’ lives. While parents want accountability in the system, many fear they are too busy to participate in a meaningful way. Ray, a father of two boys living in northern Ontario, describes how the councils have no teeth, focussing primarily on time-consuming fundraising issues. Angie, who lives in Ottawa and is a single parent of two young boys, feels caught because she wants to participate, yet knows that it is impossible with her schedule. Josie lives in the Greater Toronto Area and works full time in a nursing home while raising three young girls. She points out that those who can participate will not be single-parent families or parents working two or more jobs.

**Summary of Bill 104, Fewer School Boards Act, 1997**

- schools boards reduced to 72 from 129
- created four types of district school boards – 31 English and four French public boards and 29 English and eight French separate boards
- school board trustees reduced to 700 from 1900, pay capped at $5,000 per year
- school board employees and spouses prohibited from running for trustee
- number of school board trustees limited between five and 12 per board, except Toronto District School Board with 22 trustees
- Educational Improvement Commission (EIC) established to oversee school board reform
- EIC to make recommendations on role of school councils and extent of parental involvement

The introduction of school councils adds to the unpaid work that parents – women in particular – already contribute to the school system. It is women who do a larger share of household management and child care, staying home with sick children, packing lunches, providing breakfast, clothing and transportation, and making sure homework gets done [Cawthorne 1998]. Research on parent groups has found that parent activists and members are more likely to be unpaid women [Dehli 1998]. The changes mean that paid responsibilities once fulfilled by trustees will devolve to unpaid women in the school councils.

Another participant in our study says she heard that parents who want to participate may be silenced or even fined. Pam, who is married with two children and lives in northern Ontario, decided to get involved in her local school council. Pam quit the council, however, after she was told that the rules governing her involvement would limit her ability to speak freely in public. She says:
I didn’t like the rules that were given to the parents on parents’ councils so I quit. You’re not allowed to complain. Bill 160 says that you are not allowed to complain about the system in public. You can work through the system, but I wasn’t going to be able to go outside or complain in public or to my neighbours or on television.

More information will be revealed in late fall 1998, when the Education Improvement Commission reports on the proposed role of school councils. As the government continues to talk about strengthening the role of parents, parents themselves wonder if this really means downloading unpaid work and responsibility to individuals and families.

### Summary of Bill 160, Education Quality Improvement Act, 1997

- changed four key areas: governance, finance, labour relations and in-classroom instruction
- established school councils at every institution
- removed a portion of education costs from municipal property taxes
- centralized education funding so that the provincial government sets funding levels through a new education funding formula (released in March 1998)
- removed principals and vice principals from collective bargaining units
- increased class time for students (two weeks for elementary, three weeks for secondary schools)
- reduced teacher preparation time by nearly half to 40 minutes per day
- limited average class sizes (25 students in elementary, 22 students in secondary school), yet Minister has authority to exceed the provincial average
- reduced professional development days from nine to five per year

### Class size, class time and preparation time

Not surprisingly, participants in our study want smaller classes and more one-on-one attention for their children. The government’s move to limit class sizes was supported by almost all of our participants. Angie, a single mother in Ottawa, says:

*The one thing that bothers me with the education system is that when they throw together a group of 30 students plus, you will get only a handful of children who are actually getting anything out of what they are being taught. Make the classroom smaller.*

Pam, who lives in northern Ontario, talks about her son’s class sizes:

*His English class had 38 students. His chemistry class had 42 and math had 36. This is Grade 11.*

Richard, who lives in the Greater Toronto Area, says:

*I think we are slipping. We have all these kids: What’s it – 20 or 40 kids in a classroom? And the ones that don’t get it – well, we haven’t got time. Let’s get onto the next subject and that’s too bad. And if you don’t learn and you don’t go to ask, well I’m sorry, I haven’t got time for you. So class size has to be watched.*

Although Bill 160 puts a cap on the average class size within school boards, many of our participants question the feasibility of this policy. Remarking that the province has promised to limit elementary class size to 25 students, Frank, who lives in Toronto, comments:

*That’s a crock. They’ll never be able to manage that when the amount of money actually going into the school board has decreased. Boards are going to have to make difficult decisions, and those numbers in classrooms will be higher. This government is masterful at saying things they can’t deliver.*
Bill 160 puts limits only on the ‘average’ class size across each school board. This means that Pam’s son may have as many or more students in his classes next year. Class size statistics mask wide differences, with some classes well above 30 and growing, while others are quite small. The funding formula has allocated $1.2 billion over three fiscal years (1998-99, 1999-2000, 2000-01) so that school boards meet the newly-created provincial class size averages. This is being done, however, without providing an analysis of the impact of class size by geographic region, type of student or by rural-urban differences [Lewington 1997: A10]. In other words, it is unclear – even to the provincial government – whether the funding is adequate to the diverse needs of Ontario’s schools. In particular, the funding available is not sufficient for some school boards to reduce their class sizes to the new provincial average.

Our participants have different views on class size and teacher preparation time, depending on whether teaching is discussed as a labour issue or in terms of their personal experiences with teaching professionals. When Denise, who is raising four teenagers currently in high school, talks about teachers in general, she sees them as getting too much vacation time and making too much money. She notes that some also manage to run small businesses. However, when she talks about the teachers of her own children, she expresses amazement at the demands of their job.

Jeffrey is in Grade 11 and lives in northern Ontario. His observation shows how teacher preparation time gets eaten up:

*I think a lot of teachers are afraid to stay after school because, when you come out of your classroom and sit down at your desk and start marking papers, there is a line of 15 students outside your door.*

Paul, a high school teacher in our study, talks about the number of duties he carries outside of the classroom – his work as department head, federation work, a 40-minute working lunch and helping students after school. A sizable 37.5 percent of teachers work unpaid or paid overtime – the highest of any occupation. Almost all of the teachers working overtime are not paid for their extra efforts [Statistics Canada 1997b: 26]. Attempts made to get more teaching time out of each teacher, do not necessarily translate into more time for each student. These changes may be cutting down on time the teacher would have spent on the students outside of the formal classroom.

Reducing preparation time and increasing class time remain difficult issues for school boards to negotiate, especially in the secondary school system. According to Earl Manners, President of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation, high school teachers’ preparation time levels are at the national average, with the rest of the time spent “monitoring halls, cafeterias and libraries, supervising co-op education programs and covering for sick colleagues” [Girard 1997: A11]. Teachers’ unions complain about having to negotiate with school boards and trustees that have no control over funding. The battle over class size and preparation time will reach a negotiating pitch in the fall of 1998, as school boards attempt to reach settlements with teachers’ unions. It is hard to understand how the provincial government can avoid some form of direct, centralized negotiations with teacher unions given that it has taken over all of the funding from local school boards. Adequate, negotiated arrangements for labour relations do not appear to have been made or even considered as part of the education reform process.

**Losing teachers**

Many of our participants voiced concerns about teachers they have lost even before the 1998-99 school year begins. Some wonder about the loss of young teachers and if teachers who bring new energy to the system really will be hired; others worry about the loss of older teachers who have taken advantage of the early retirement package negotiated between the government and unions. As of July 1998, about 7,700 teachers had opted for the early retirement package [Lewington and Mackie 1998: A7]. Students and parents express
great attachment to teachers who have played pivotal roles in their lives. In adult education, many teachers will return to the standard school system, replaced by contract teachers with little experience teaching adults.

Gina, who is 15 years old and lives in the Greater Toronto Area, talks about her favourite teachers who may take the early retirement package:

Next year half of the amazing teachers will be gone and then some young teachers are going to be replacing them. And I find that the older teachers are the ones that really care.

Janet, who has five children and lives in southeast Ontario, thinks that the loss of young teachers will hurt students who are barely getting by:

What's going to happen to these kids? They won't have a cross country coach. They won't have a girls' basketball coach. These are the ones that will be out of a job because they are all the young teachers, they make it exciting to learn. I see the students that were marginal are going to drop out, the ones that were hanging on because they had a few subjects that they liked.

She also comments on a school close to her home which has:

... no arts program anymore, they have no home-ec and shop is gone. Their music program is shot, they don't have a band this year. So things are looking pretty sad. I've noticed an extreme decrease in funding for the arts and for what we used to call optional programs.

Another change identified by some of our participants was the removal of vice principals and principals from the collective bargaining unit. Some of our participants view this change as a business-driven approach similar to that the government is advocating in the curriculum and standardization discussions. Richard, who lives in the Greater Toronto Area, compares the new role of principals to that of a manager:

What they're doing with principals, turning them into managers, how is that any different than a giant corporation? And the education system to me is not about business, it's not out to make a profit.

Heather, who is unemployed, has a post-secondary degree and lives in Toronto, agrees with Richard:

You can't set up that kind of management structure! The principal is there to look out for teachers, not to be in conflict with them. Schools require leaders, not managers. That is setting up a completely different kind of institutional structure.

Funding the new system

Between its election in June 1995 and the end of 1997, the Ontario government removed at least $1.4 billion from Ontario’s education and training system. (See Table 1.) The new elementary and secondary school funding formula, introduced in March 1998, will remove even more funding.

Between 1995 and 1997, some education sectors were hit harder than others. (See Table 2.) Nonetheless, all sectors experienced significant cuts.

Each education sector responded in different ways to the funding cuts imposed by the government. While the provincial government allowed colleges and universities to increase tuition levels, it did not support attempts by school boards to raise revenue locally to offset decreasing provincial grants. Instead, the government passed Bill 160 in December 1997 which, among other things, took away the ability of local school boards to raise revenue. The provincial government now sets the funding levels for all elementary and secondary schools in the province. As a result, planned total spending declined from $13.320 billion in 1995 to $12.990 billion in 1998 (excluding government payments to the teacher pension plan).

Labels applied to the new funding formula conceal the reality of both past cuts and new cuts...
to the education system. Words like ‘protected,’ ‘stable’ and ‘student-focused’ are used to describe the government’s commitment to cut money out of administrative and ‘non-classroom’ areas, which supposedly will return $583 million to the classroom over three years. A closer look at the budget, however, reveals that funding will not remain stable as the number of changes made by the government work their way through the system. Figure 2 shows the trend in funding for elementary and secondary schools in inflation-adjusted 1998 dollars.  

The government has promised that funding will remain stable at more than $13 billion for 1998-99, 1999-2000 and 2000-01. At the time of writing this report, the exact amount was not clear, but according to our calculations the new funding formula announced in March 1998 will see nearly $1 billion being removed from the education system over three years. The government will reduce funding to elementary and secondary schools by $552 million in 1999-2000 by removing various one-time funding elements. While the government will add $29 million

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**Table 1**  
Cuts in Education Funding by the Ontario Conservative Government

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Funding Cuts</th>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>- $162 million from training programs as government eliminated jobsOntario Training Program&lt;br&gt;- $20 million from the Ontario Training and Adjustment Board&lt;br&gt;- $32 million from school board operating grants&lt;br&gt;- $7 million from college operating grants&lt;br&gt;- $17 million from university operating grants&lt;br&gt;- $88 million final cut to jobsOntario Training&lt;br&gt;- $141 million from other training programs&lt;br&gt;- $368 million from elementary and secondary school operating and capital grants (includes $58 million cut to junior kindergarten and $60 million cut to adult education)&lt;br&gt;- $122 million from colleges&lt;br&gt;- $268 million from universities&lt;br&gt;- $65 million from training programs&lt;br&gt;- $125 million from elementary and secondary school operating grants (includes $90 million cut to adult education)</td>
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in 2000-01, a further $381 million will be removed in 2001-02 after three years of ‘phase in’ and ‘class size protection’ ends. (See Appendix B.)

In addition, although government sources show that adjustments have been made to include expected enrollment growth, funding either declines or does not increase enough to adequately support the new students. The Ontario Public School Boards’ Association estimates that, for one year alone, enrollment growth of one percent costs school boards about $246 million. Nor have the funding levels been adjusted to account for cost-of-living increases [Ontario Public School Boards’ Association 1998: 21].

Due to the reconfiguration of the funding model, unions, school boards and parents are still attempting to understand the implications of new funding levels. The confusion lies with the varied

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<td>College grants</td>
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<td>Training program budgets</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Source: Compiled by Speaking Out Project. (See Table I for sources.)
time periods allotted to different pots of money and the reorganization of funding categories from 34 to 11 categories, making comparisons with past years impossible. Finally, at the heart of the new model is the government’s promise that more money will make its way back into the classroom. In order to achieve this goal, however, the government has redefined what constitutes classroom and non-classroom expenses.

Our interviews were conducted before the funding model was released, yet participants had a lot to say about funding issues. One of the most commonly mentioned problems is the deterioration of the educational infrastructure. Every household with children in the elementary and secondary levels spoke of having no textbooks, old textbooks or paying for photocopies. Jeffrey is in Grade 11 this year:

_I mean, I’m halfway through my semester and I still haven’t got my marking outline for chemistry because my teacher didn’t have his photocopy budget, it was slashed so bad._

Samantha is finishing Grade 10:

_I was taking computers and there weren’t enough computers, so they had to take the kids out of computers and put them in another course. For math, instead of getting math books they photocopied it for us, and for history it was the same thing. When I started Grade 9, we got books and stuff, but when I went back we didn’t get anything, because they couldn’t afford to give it. Now if you take a textbook home, you have to sign it out and if you drop out of school and you don’t bring it back, you can’t get your report cards and transfer to another school._

A June 1998 tracking report proposed by People For Education, a parent-led volunteer group, reported that 82 percent of schools responding to the survey were using worn, out-of-date or shared textbooks [People for Education 1998]. While recent announcements for funding new textbooks attempt to address such concerns, the funding is well below levels needed to replace current textbooks, let alone provide new books required for the massive curriculum changes across the system. The amount of $100 per student for textbooks and learning materials is well below the $430 required, for example, by one Grade 11 student from a Durham high school [Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation 1998a].

Veronica, who lives in the Greater Toronto Area with two young children in elementary school, remarks on changes to the library. The library remains open but Veronica says her daughter Sally:

... _was coming home with these books that were designated JK and kindergarten. So I phoned the teacher and I said: “Is there no librarian? “_

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**Summary of Student-Focussed Education Funding Formula, 1998**

- details released to school boards in March 1998, six months later than promised by the government, thus compromising the ability of school boards to make decisions
- government says funding for education set at $14.4 billion, for 1998-99. In 1999-2000, funding to education will be reduced by $552 million and a further $381 million will be removed in 2001-02
- changed the funding allocation structure to 11 from 34 categories: one basic per pupil Foundation Grant, nine Special Purpose Grants and one Pupil Accommodation Grant
- redefined classroom expenses: adult education, classroom heating and maintenance are considered non-classroom expenses
- allocated a maximum of $1.2 billion over three years to limit class sizes to provincial average set in Bill 160
- allocated $1 billion per year for special education programs
- allocated $100 million as a one-time investment for materials such as textbooks, computer software (1998-99)
- created an Early Learning Grant (funding level not set) for early childhood education programs for students up to Grade 3
because she’s bringing home books that are way too young for her. Oh, no, our librarian is there only two mornings a week.

Many of our households talked about having no school trips this year. Funding for transportation has been reduced as school boards attempt to find savings outside of the classroom. One of our participants, who has worked as a school bus driver, warns:

I’m sure many parents out there would not believe what I am going to say and will freak out. When you’re forced to drive at 100 kilometres an hour in a 60 zone with a busload of kids to get where you have to be on time because you’ve got another school to do, because the boards won’t pay any more money, that’s deadly.

Piecemeal funding allocated to weak spots in the education system will not alleviate the problems experienced by our participants. The ‘good news’ announcements are losing steam as people increasingly view them as public relations strategies. In addition, we found that the Ontario government’s changes to education are creating new barriers to learning, downloading the costs of education to individuals and families, and allowing for the privatization of the public school system.

Who is left out?: downloading costs to individuals and families

Jenny is on social assistance and has three young children:

They have popcorn orders for 25 cents a day and they have to bring it the week before. While 25 cents isn’t a whole lot of money [but] when you have zero, zero, zero, it’s just another thing! There’s pizza day, hot dog day, popcorn day, book day and they miss out on all of them and you know they don’t understand.

Pam, who lives in northern Ontario, explains:

My sister has small children and they’ve noticed a lot more payment of fees, everything, field trips, there’s no school trips that you don’t pay for, she had to send Kleenex, and you get your name checked off the class list when you bring your box of Kleenex in. She paid probably about $70 worth of specific things.

Other households estimate between $100 and $160 per child in extra costs for materials, trips, outdoor education courses, photography courses, yearbooks, agendas, student cards, locks, photocopying charges, tryouts for sports teams, costs for practices and renting local arenas, skating and bowling fees, and on and on.

Olivia, who is Gina’s mother and lives in the Greater Toronto Area, has noticed the rising costs and the number of children who cannot afford them:

The poor students are excluded because they can’t afford to pay. The lines are really beginning to be drawn. You’re actually already seeing the effects in the school. What are these students going to say two or three years down the road?

Veronica, who has two young children, talks about having to struggle with more and more attempts at fundraising at her child’s school:

There are pizza days and there are McDonald’s days. And it isn’t fair if I don’t give her the money. Up until now, it was very hard to scrape together that $4. But if I didn’t, she would be the only kid that didn’t get it and I couldn’t do that to her.

While some participants mention that subsidies exist, the onus is placed on the child to repeatedly reveal his or her financial situation. As one teacher told us, he notices many children who are too embarrassed to do this and thus forego participation in many activities.

As the provincial government cuts education funding and takes over control of taxation, schools located in wealthier areas will be able to compensate for these changes through individual contributions, while those in poorer areas will suffer. Anand comments on the new computers at his child’s school:
The school’s got a very nice computer lab and CD-ROM centre. But that was essentially donated by the PTA. So, in a school where that sort of resource is not there, those things won’t be in place.

Christine also worries that the wealth of a community now will determine the quality of the school:

_I mean, I have a lot of concerns that we’re going to end up with elitist schools. I was reading in the newspaper that the parents are fundraising to bring in computers and stuff. I mean, in an upper-class area you can do that, but what about schools in poorer areas?_

User fees are increasing across the board. Students in adult education face a number of new barriers, with the loss of day schools and new costs for programs. Education at the postsecondary level will become more difficult for middle- and low-income students. While participants hope education prepares them for important things in life, many fear future life chances and employment opportunities will be decided for some children long before they leave the public system.

Changes to education programs and financing will leave those who are already struggling with rising costs less able to reach their goals. Income level always has been a determinant in accessing postsecondary education, but up until now elementary and secondary education was largely free and universal. However, many households in our study spoke about rising costs for basic supplies starting at the elementary level. Families struggle with costs such as user fees for school trips, paper and other supplies, and numerous activities inside and outside the classroom. As families continue to attempt to absorb these costs and schools are forced to find savings, we will witness growing inequality in the education available to children.

_Privatization_

With the new funding formula, the government has opened up the road to privatization in ‘out-of-classroom’ expenses, including the financing and building of new schools, curriculum, early childhood education and school custodial services [Lewington 1998a: AI].

In the past, the Ministry of Education and Training hired teachers to develop new curriculum, with ministry officials managing the process. In January 1998, the government introduced a confusing bidding process to curriculum development. The private sector, including firms in the United States, now can bid on contracts for curriculum development. Several of our participants questioned the potential for opening up curriculum development to the private sector.

Victoria, a mother of two daughters, one of whom is in the postsecondary system and the other preparing for university, tells us:

_I just was listening on the evening news about this curriculum, the privatization of curriculum, it makes me shudder. I’m just skeptical. We had expertise within the system. I don’t know why we’re going outside, it just makes me worried. But as I said last time, I’m really glad I don’t have any kids coming up through the system._

Gina is concerned by the increase in corporate sponsorship for computers and technology in her high school. She is worried that an increasing corporate presence has the potential to affect a student’s learning ability:

_I think the corporations want us to be dumb and follow trends. The dumber you are, the more you’ll follow what people say and just do what the industries want. Just follow the trends, whatever they make you do._

At the postsecondary level, Anand explains how cutbacks and corporatization affect research in the university system:

_These cuts are affecting the ability of the university to do competitive research. So what it means for the type of research that’s going to get done is that we have shrinking resources available for investigator-initiated research –_
what’s referred to as the curiosity type of research model. More and more, the type of model being driven is one of looking for immediate applications – a corporate agenda.

Anand is keeping a close watch on his children’s education and, although he is reluctant to do so, is considering moving them to a private school if things deteriorate. Anand’s dilemma over his children’s education is precisely what worries some of our participants. Veronica, who has two children in the elementary system, is concerned about the future of public education:

*I’m very pleased to be in the public system. I would hate to see people opting out and privatizing, partly because of the diversity it brings.*

Patrick points out that privatization will diminish the universality and accessibility of education:

*If we leave it in the hands of the private sector, they will weed people out, taking only those who can afford it. And if that’s the case, then the rich are going to get the education and the poor are not. And then we’re right back to where we started from.*

**MANAGING AND PAYING FOR POST-SECONDARY AND ADULT EDUCATION**

**College and university cuts**

Students now in high school worry about job prospects and are choosing the ‘right’ career path based on their ability to payoff a loan. Gina, the 15-year-old mentioned earlier, surprised her mother in our interview when she commented on how it would be financially unwise for her to become a historian. Her mother Olivia says:

*It freaked me out when you asked her about what does education mean, and how [she responded] it is only about getting a job. We’re also in it for the enjoyment and to contaminate it with ‘will I be able to get a job?’ is grotesque. But kids are being forced to only think this way, and that’s what I don’t agree with.*

For Jessie and Mark, a couple living in northern Ontario, outstanding loans from college determine all of their expenses, from food to rent. Sabrina who lives in Toronto, finished her postsecondary diploma program and then lost her full-time job in the first round of social service cuts. Instead of slowly paying off her loan, as planned, her elderly parents have agreed to relieve her debt load.

Universities and colleges responded to the government’s $400 million cut to the postsecondary budget in 1995 by increasing tuition fees for the 1996-97 academic year – universities by ten percent and colleges by 15 percent. In December 1997, the province allowed universities and colleges to raise tuition a further 20 percent over the 1998-99 and 1999-2000 academic years. In addition, the province deregulated tuition for graduate and professional degree programs, allowing universities and colleges to set their own fees. The University of Toronto, for instance, increased tuition fees for first year dentistry students by 36 percent for the 1998 academic year.

Anand, a college teacher, tells us how increased fees are changing the make-up of postsecondary students. In the past, he noticed his students included parents returning to school after having children. Now, this is happening much less, and he describes:

*I think those opportunities are becoming more difficult for people to take on. The social makeup of the classes is different.*

Frank, who has a postsecondary education, agrees with Anand’s comment, adding:

*If you’re well off, you’re going to be able to access postsecondary education. I don’t know how a single mom is going to be able to get to university if she wants to.*

For some of our participants, cuts to education are exacerbated by reductions and changes made to social programs.
Teresa is a 30-year-old woman with a physical disability who lives in Toronto. Her disability prevents her from working as a veterinary assistant, a field in which she has a college diploma. Her health is a major concern as she is frequently hospitalized and, as a result, finds it difficult to keep stable employment. At the time of our interview, Teresa was receiving social assistance through the Family Benefits Act. Her benefits are now delivered through the newly-created Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) which came into force in June 1998. Teresa supports the current government’s attempt to help people with disabilities find jobs through the Ontario Disability Support Program, but she is fearful that her benefits may be terminated because the definition of disability to qualify for assistance has been narrowed. Narrowly-defined eligibility criteria are one way the Ontario government has reduced its welfare case load.

When we talked to Teresa in February 1997, she was attending a community college program in the hopes of becoming a medical secretary. She was able to attend college only through the support of the Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) program (now collapsed into ODSP). Despite her goals of finishing school and finding a full-time, full-year job, Teresa told us about a variety of barriers both within and outside the education system that are making these goals difficult to achieve.

Two of the hospitals in which Teresa receives care are being closed and her attendant care has been scaled back. Additionally, Toronto’s accessible public transportation system reassessed all its clients, using stricter criteria, because budget cutbacks have found it to reduce the number of individuals who use the system. Teresa was cut off and now finds herself without the freedom to get around the city. Her sessions with her counsellor are now significantly limited due to funding cutbacks. Her postsecondary education is no longer funded through VRS. Instead, the government requires individuals on social assistance to take out student loans through the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP). Teresa will have to pay back any money she receives through this program.

Many of the supports that were intended to assist Teresa make the transition from social assistance to the labour market are being withdrawn. The cumulative impact of policy changes to welfare programs, disability supports and the education system have left Teresa fearful and uneasy about her future. The changes that have hit Teresa are out of her control.

Teresa questions the feasibility of the government’s strategy of making people on social assistance – especially those with disabilities – carry loan payments, when their employment status is so tenuous. Even if she is able to complete her courses and graduate with a diploma, she is wary about whether she will be able to find a job given the dismal employment rate for persons with disabilities. She also worries if she will be healthy enough to hold down a job and pay back the student loan.

Denzel also is concerned about his ability to pay back his student loan. A 26-year-old man living at home with his mother in the Greater Toronto Area, Denzel has a full-time position as a customer service clerk for a major transportation company. He has completed two-thirds of his university degree and would like to return to school in September 1998. He is fearful, however, that he will not be able to complete his degree because of rising tuition. Denzel already has upwards of $20,000 in student loans and is unwilling to put himself further in debt. He is concerned that changes to postsecondary education will jeopardize his attempts to finish his degree and get a good job. He believes:

A postsecondary education should not be handed to you on a silver platter, but if the first obstacle you face is a $20,000 debt, there’s a problem. What’s the point? What it does is that it raises the bar again.

The Ontario government argued that the rise in tuition fees is acceptable because it would implement a new income-contingent loan repayment program. In March 1998, however, the income-contingent loan program fell apart when the five
major Canadian banks refused to participate. As a result, the existing student loan system is out of pace with rising tuition levels. Although the government’s proposed student loan program did not materialize, it has made significant changes to the existing Ontario Student Assistance Plan, which are outlined below. With few exceptions, these changes have reduced the availability of student aid to Ontarians.

Adult education

Our participants anticipate that programs such as adult education and English as a Second Language will be targeted for cutbacks. Frank, who is trained as an educator, says:

*I’m not confident that adult education is going to get well supported – that’s a great concern.*

The new people arriving in this country who need to learn to speak English won’t survive in this climate. There are people who may not have had the chance to complete their schooling for a whole lot of reasons, and may want to be able to access adult education, and they won’t be able to, the door will be closed.

The cutbacks to adult education began with a $60 million reduction in November 1995 and continued in June 1996, when Bill 34 was passed. Bill 34 made junior kindergarten optional and further reduced funding levels to adult education. School boards now fund adult education at the continuing education rate, which is much lower and offers fewer supports. While a variety of institutions offer adult education programming, school boards are the largest delivery agent for adult basic literacy services in Ontario. In an area such as Toronto, the changes to funding levels have meant a drop from $7,000 per student to the continuing education rate of $2,257 per student. The new funding level established by the provincial government does not cover, among other things, central supports to adult students such as librarians and guidance counsellors. Without these additional supports, adult educators fear that students will drop out. Although boards have been offering continuing education at night schools for decades, the funding level is much lower and night schools do not have the success rate of adult day school programs. Former levels of funding allowed for some coverage of child care and transportation costs; this assistance has been all but eliminated.

In a 1996 survey, the Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation found that among adult students, 63 percent were female, 16 percent had disabilities, 53 percent needed additional assistance with English as a Second Language and 48 percent were on social assistance. Severe cuts to adult education eliminate future chances for work and schooling for these students. In the past, each school year numbered 80,000 daytime students aged 21 and over, of whom 83 percent got a job or moved on to further education after leaving the program [Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation 1998b].

Larger boards, such as those in Toronto and Ottawa, were able to absorb the initial cuts to adult

### Summary of Changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)

- Changes to OSAP announced in two parts, May 1991 and February 1998
- Students must report earnings over $600 per year (from $1,700 per year)
- Student and Spouse’s assets (e.g., bonds, car, RRSPs) over $5,000 count in assessing financial need
- Students must take 60 percent full-time course load to qualify for assistance: limits the ability of part-time students to receive financial support; students must pass 60 percent of their courses to remain eligible for assistance
- Introduced restrictive criteria through which student aid is available
- Introduced a series of new measures aimed at limiting students who default on their loans
- Parents expected to contribute to cost of their children’s education before the student is eligible for a loan
- Students must pay a $10 fee to process OSAP applications; fee waived if application is completed using the Internet
education due to their ability to levy local property taxes. Smaller and rural boards had no choice but to eliminate junior kindergarten and much of their adult education programming. With Bill 160, however, all taxation powers have been centralized in the hands of the provincial government. In April 1998, the Toronto District School Board voted to cut adult education programs for 4,000 students, with anticipated job losses for 600 teachers. Other impacts of this vote include: courses shortened from 17 to seven weeks, class sizes doubled, class periods cut from 80 to 40 minutes, and salaried teachers replaced by contract instructors paid by the hour.

Melanie has been an adult educator for 18 years and has experienced first hand the impact of these cuts. In February 1998, she predicted that boards will cut adult education in order to protect their first priority – elementary and secondary school for those under 21. In the new funding model, adult day schools are now classified as ‘out-of-classroom’ expenses, which makes them vulnerable to cutbacks. New costs are expected for students: Some will have user fees of $50 per student. Other programs are seeking corporate funding to stay afloat. Melanie is now teaching English as a Second Language, and she is seconded by the school board to a small agency that runs a program for recently-arrived immigrants and refugees. Until recently, the agency never had experienced any problems receiving referrals from government social workers. However, she describes how the problems in one policy area can have an effect on another – in this case, the education system. Fewer students have been able to access adult education programs given the current confusion in the Ontario Works program. Melanie notes:

*The intake procedures have all collapsed All of the teachers in my program have been laid off The welfare workers are unable to make referrals because the rules have not been given to them. In the past, they would refer people to various agencies but, when Ontario Works came in, the entire system broke down.*

Adult education and training programs are important tools to help people find jobs. The government has cut severely these programs, affecting persons most vulnerable in the labour market. As noted earlier in Table 1, since 1995 the Ontario government has cut $626 million from adult education and training programs.

Jenny is a single parent of three children, all of whom are under 10 years old. She lives in a medium-sized city in southeastern Ontario and receives financial support through the Ontario Works program that replaced the Family Benefits Act. Jenny’s experiences provide a vivid account of the difficult circumstances Ontarians can encounter as the government reforms the education system.

When we first spoke to Jenny in February 1997, she told us that her hope was to return to school to finish her high school diploma and, in time, go on to college. Jenny faced significant barriers as she planned her return to adult education courses. The most significant obstacles were financial concerns – child care and transportation. Despite the odds, Jenny successfully returned to school in September of 1997. Once in school, Jenny had trouble finding affordable and reliable transportation to get her kids to and from day care and herself to and from school. Although she tried to get a transportation subsidy, she was told by government and school officials that no funding was available. When we interviewed Jenny in March 1998, she said:

*I finally got into school, which was hard enough, but I found that there isn’t any assistance available, nothing.*

As well, Jenny found the demand on her as a single parent, on top of her own responsibilities as a full-time student, made her days gruelling.

Compounding Jenny’s experiences with education were issues concerning her daughter’s health and learning. Tamura has Attention Deficit Disorder and the drugs she takes cause her to lose her appetite, making her underweight. Jenny spoke at length about the problems she has had trying to get someone to sit with Tamura at lunch to make sure that she eats. Teachers are too stretched to
provide individual attention, especially for children with special needs. Increasingly, the responsibility for learning is being offloaded to parents.

The October 1997 teachers’ strike mounted by Ontario’s elementary and secondary school teachers meant that Jenny’s kids were not in school for two weeks. As well, the strike occurred in the middle of her academic term. Jenny neither could find nor afford additional day care for her children and was forced to drop out of school. As a result, Jenny lost her academic year and had to reapply for the 1998-99 academic year. Jenny’s story is but one example of the obstacles people can face as they try to access the education system to improve their opportunities in life. Unfortunately, the Ontario government’s reforms appear to be creating new barriers, not removing them. For our participants, the implications of these barriers have had a profound impact on their ability to secure meaningful jobs.

Education and jobs

Jerry dropped out of a college program and now works full time in the hospitality industry in Ottawa to support his 2-year-old daughter. He laments the jobs that have slipped through his fingers because he does not have formal training:

An education, in general, gives you a piece of paper that employers are looking for. I lost so many job opportunities because I didn’t have that piece of paper.

Liz, a retired school administrator living in Toronto, makes a similar observation about the need for formal qualifications:

It’s hard enough to get a job now with an education, so what are you going to be able to do if you don’t have an education? It used to be that if kids dropped out of school they could go and apprentice, learn a trade and they could support themselves. But it’s not like that anymore. You have to have training before you look for work. On top of that, there are very few jobs

and a lot of people trying to get them, so you need the best education you can get.

Postsecondary education is increasingly a prerequisite for stable employment. The unemployment rate in 1997 for 20- to 24-year-olds with a high school diploma was 14.1 percent, while the jobless rate for those with postsecondary credentials was 9.7 percent. The Ontario Ministry of Finance suggests that the fastest growing jobs in the future will be those that require high levels of education and training [Ontario Ministry of Finance 1997: 34].

Yet even those of our participants with postsecondary training find that their skills need continual upgrading. Ron holds a university degree and works full time as a computer technician for a large multinational corporation. He finds himself in a position where he may have to return to school to upgrade his skills. The company he works for continues to promise that it will provide the necessary training, but little has materialized:

I’m in a general fear mode now. I want to be certified I want something to hold on to. Talent will only get you so far now. You need some kind of paper to get you in the door and that’s more and more the case now. I always try to get as much training as I can.

Rick, a unionized full-time worker in the transportation industry, notes that people are taking jobs for which they did not train:

You can’t say an education can prepare you for a job today because half the time a lot of people who did go to university didn’t get the job that they trained for in university. It was just a waste of time.

Barbara works as a full-time office administrator in northern Ontario. She comments on the number of people applying for jobs for which they are overqualified:

A few weeks ago, we had a job posting for a receptionist. We had 130 applications and there
were people who had Bachelors and Masters degrees applying.

Many of our participants are making strategic education plans based on where they anticipate jobs will be in the future. Michael has just returned to university on a part-time basis to pursue a PhD. He has a full-time job with a community-based organization in Toronto as a counsellor and researcher, but feels that he needs to go back to school because of changes in the economy:

_I went back to school because I saw the economy shifting very quickly and I became worried about my ability to get work in the future. I knew that I had a fairly limited and specialized skills set and I was concerned that I couldn’t be able to do anything with it as the economy shifted. So, for me, it was a direct result of shifts in the economy that I decided to go back to school and retool myself._

While our participants look to the education system to improve their lives, most have pragmatic expectations. Gina, for instance, is 15 years old and lives with her parents in the Greater Toronto Area. Although she has just started high school, Gina already has set herself the goal of attending university and ultimately completing a Masters degree in History. Gina worries about the rising cost of a university education and wonders if she will be able to afford to attend university:

_I don’t know how I’m going to get to university. I can keep the marks up to get into university, but if I don’t have the money then I won’t be able to go._

Gina is already questioning the practical relevance of an advanced degree in the liberal arts:

_How am I going to get a job with a Masters in History? You could be a historian, but how many historians make money?_

For some of our participants, the changing economy already has hurt their employment prospects. Sabrina, a 32-year-old woman with some training as a social worker, has seen her field of specialization reduced by shifting government priorities. When we first spoke with Sabrina in May 1997, she had lost her full-time job as a case manager and was living on social assistance. Sabrina is now off welfare and survives on a patchwork of temporary contract positions which brings her a gross annual income of only $20,000:

_I didn’t ask to lose my job. I didn’t ask for my entire field to be decimated. I know people on welfare who have had to deal with this for years and everyone just thinks they are lazy, but their jobs are gone. Even if I went back to school to upgrade, I still wouldn’t have a higher income for years. And that’s assuming I could even afford to go back to school, which is not an option._

Sabrina’s story points to the complex relationship among education, jobs and economic change. Despite her specialized knowledge and years of work experience, she is unable to find a permanent full-time position. As well, her ability to return to school to upgrade her skills is limited because of the obstacles she encounters. Even though higher levels of education and training increase the likelihood of securing a good job, even better-educated workers run a significant risk of unemployment or underemployment.

As discussed in our report, _Take It or Leave It: The Ontario Government’s Approach to Job Insecurity_ [Noce and O’Connell1998], government policies are failing people in the labour market. Not surprisingly, our participants look to the education system to improve their ability to find secure and stable jobs. Yet our interviews support recent research findings that more education and training do not necessarily translate into secure employment. This vicious circle is referred to as the growing ‘education-jobs gap,’ which leaves many of our participants underemployed and looking for more training [Livingstone 1998]. However, our interviewees find that the Ontario government also is failing to keep education and training both affordable and accessible.
THE PROCESS OF EDUCATION REFORM

As the participants in our study talked about how the government is reforming the education system, two themes emerged. First, individuals overwhelmingly feel that the government wants to reform education as quickly as possible. Our participants tell us that the Premier and his Ministers do not want the input of Ontarians. Most feel that there were few opportunities for meaningful consultation.

Second, the teachers’ strike occurred at significant cost to Ontarians. Our participants face a variety of financial and emotional costs that were downloaded from the province and school boards onto individuals and families, but this does not mean that participants uniformly blame the teachers or opposed the strike. For these reasons, we find that when our participants talk about the process of education reform, many of their comments are centered on the October 1997 teachers’ strike.

Rushing the reform process

Our households express deep concern about the speed and scope of education reform in the province. Frank, a 36-year-old social service worker in Toronto, reflects on the process of education change:

I think the decisions that have been made by the government are going to affect the entire education system from elementary to secondary and to postsecondary sectors, but there has been alarmingly little consultation. This government has gone in like storm troopers with little or no consultation or only token consultation.

Similarly, Richard, a 51-year-old who lives in the Greater Toronto Area with his partner, has AIDS and receives disability benefits from the Canada Pension Plan, observes:

The government just went in and chopped education. It doesn’t matter who is affected, whether it’s the high class, low class or middle class, they just went in and chop, chop, chop and did everything much too fast.

Some of our participants mentioned their friends’ reactions to the education reform process. Anand states:

I know, from people that I talk with, that people who were supportive of the Harris government’s platform started to get concerned about the way the government brought in particular legislation. In particular, the way they rammed it through the legislature and the draconian nature of the legislation itself.

As well, some participants saw this governing style as a tactic to get unpopular legislation passed into law as quickly as possible. Melanie says:

I think one of the things the government has learned is that when they are going to push their agenda, they push it fast and they do it quickly before people have time to turn around. The government keeps people in the dark as much as possible because then those who disagree with the changes really can ‘fight back with democratic tools at their disposal.

These views are consistent with a Globe and Mail/Angus Reid poll in December 1997 which found that 68 percent of Ontarians believe the government is acting too fast as it implements the Common Sense Revolution [Mackie 1997: A3]. As we reported in Act in Haste... The Style, Scope and speed of Change in Ontario [Bezanson and Valentine 1998], the sheer size of the government’s agenda meant that to make the changes within a single mandate, it had effectively to shut down the input side of the democratic policy-making process. The government has used all means at its disposal to thwart debate in both the Legislature and the public. While most of our households do not know the exact measures used to limit debate and consultation, their comments show they are aware that the government has rushed the policy-making process and narrowed citizen engagement.

As in other policy areas, such as health, the government has centralized some of the decision-making for reforming the elementary and secondary school system in a non-elected, quasi-independent commission that reports directly to the Minister of
Education and Training and, ultimately, to the Premier and his staff. The Education Improvement Commission was given a mandate from the government to make recommendations to the Minister; many of these are reflected in Bill 160 and Bill 104.

On the legislative side, the government has used its powers in the Legislature to limit public debate on controversial education bills. The government has passed large amounts of legislation that affect the education system; five bills, in particular, are central to its reform and directly affect our household participants. (See Table 3.) A common tactic used by the Conservative government to speed up the legislative process on controversial bills is to impose time allocation, which is the amount of time allowed in the Legislature for debate and public consultation on legislation. Of the five pieces of legislation that directly involve the reform of Ontario’s education system, four had time allocation imposed. Public consultation was further limited on three of the bills because the government limited the number of days legislative committees could consult the public. In one instance, the bill was never referred to the legislative committee for review and consultation.

One of the consequences of this haste is to pass bills that may not be thoroughly reviewed from a legal and constitutional perspective. Consequently, sections of Bill 160 restricting the taxation powers of Catholic school boards were found unconstitutional by Mr. Justice Peter Cumming of the Ontario Court (General Division) in July 1998. The provincial government is appealing the court’s decision, so the impact on the government’s reform plan is not yet known. But it could prove to be significant.

Reforming education and citizen engagement: the October 1997 teachers’ strike

Forty percent of our participants stated that they feel excluded by the government from the reform process. Jenny, a mother of three living in southern Ontario, says:

*I think the government likes to let us think that we have a say in the reform process, but when it comes right down to it, we don’t have any say at all.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Bill</th>
<th>Date When Time Allocation Imposed</th>
<th>Date Bill Became Law</th>
<th>Number of Public Consultation Days Permitted</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bill 34, <em>Education Amendment Act</em></td>
<td>not imposed</td>
<td>June 27/96</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 142, <em>Social Assistance Reform Act</em></td>
<td>Sept. 4/97</td>
<td>Nov. 28/97</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill 161, <em>Fairness for Parents and Employees Act</em></td>
<td>Dec 2/97</td>
<td>Dec. 8/97</td>
<td>not referred to committee</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3

Bills Which Reform Ontario’s Education System
Anne, a mother of four living in southern Ontario, notes:

I don’t think the government wanted anything to do with our say. I think the government had its own little mission and they were doing it regardless.

Teresa, a college student living in Toronto, believes:

The whole thing just made me frustrated because I felt that people’s input was falling on deaf ears. There just seemed to me no point to the whole thing.

Aida, a mother of three living in Toronto, states:

The process is a joke. It’s a terrible joke.

Liz, who is retired and lives in Toronto, feels:

This government doesn’t want the input of people. I think they want to cut so many thousands of billions of dollars from the budget, and they’re going to do it no matter what anybody says, whether people want it or not.

The Ontario government has failed to provide opportunities for meaningful consultation as it has changed the education system. As a result, the October 1997 teachers’ strike came to symbolize what passes for citizen engagement. On the one hand, our participants were frustrated that the strike occurred, and most blamed both the government and the teachers’ unions. On the other hand, many individuals talked passionately about the role of the strike as a tool of democracy. A strike, however, is a costly way to debate important public issues.

Downloading the costs of education reform onto Ontarians

Participants such as Jenny, whose story we told earlier in this report, tell of the significant cost that Ontarians have borne as the education system was changed. Most talk about the impact the strike had on their children, friends and family. The households in our study which were directly affected – those with school-age children – found it hard to cope with the strike. Many found it difficult to deal with the emotional turmoil of the strike. Angie recounts her emotional state during the two weeks of the strike:

During the strike, I think that was definitely one of the times where I sat in the kitchen and had a nice cry. You know, the first week was definitely unbearable and the second week was a little bit better. I became very proactive and just told myself that you are going to get through this thing. There is no question that it made my life more stressful because of all the extra stuff I had to do.

For those interviewees who require child care, the strike was especially difficult. Michelle, a Toronto clerk who is raising her two children alone, found it hard to cope with the strike. The day care she uses for her two children is in a public school, so during the strike it was closed. The local municipality attempted to make temporary arrangements for the children, but Michelle was not comfortable with the facilities they put in place. As a result, she had to pay a babysitter to watch her children while she was at work. She says:

I found the strike very hard. I had to bring in a sitter to watch the kids because they were at home all day and I had to work.

For Josie, who lives in the Greater Toronto Area and has two school-age children, the strike meant additional costs for child care:

I was working days and I was paying $40 for babysitting for all three kids. That’s considered cheap. So it cost me $40 a day for every day of the strike. I consider myself lucky.

Even participants who did not have to worry about child care found having their children at home for a two-week period very stressful. Cheryl, who has two children and is married to a teacher, says:
It was really hard to have the kids at home. I love to have them at home. I mean I am a parent and I love my kids, but for some reason it was very irritating to have them at home during the strike. I didn’t want them home. I thought they should be in school and I know parents who were at the end of their rope with their kids being at home.

Janet also found it difficult to cope with the strike, even though she does not require child care:

We are already struggling so hard. I was totally supportive of the strike, but at the same time what am I going to do with my kids while the teachers are on strike and I have to go to work every day? I was worried about this and my kids don’t need a babysitter. Those people out there with 4-year-olds and 6- and 7-year-olds found it next to impossible to cope.

Other families mentioned higher grocery bills and other unexpected costs. Janet, for instance, says:

My grocery bill skyrocketed for those two weeks. It went up about $50 a week. It was amazing.

**Reimbursing Ontarians for the teachers' strike**

Both the government and the teachers acknowledged that some Ontarians were having difficulty coping with the strike. The government decided to disburse funds it saved while the teachers were on strike. The government introduced Bill 161, the *Fairness for Parents and Employees Act*, which reimbursed households $40 a day for each day of the teachers’ strike to cover extra child care costs. The government was able to make Bill 161 law in less than three weeks because it imposed time allocation and did not refer the Bill to legislative committee hearings. Most eligible families received their reimbursement cheques within two months.

All of the households in our study which qualified for the reimbursement collected it. Most were glad to have the extra money, but many were skeptical about the government’s motives in providing these extra funds. Angie says:

I think the whole thing was a public relations tactic. People weren’t going to give in to the government and they just decided that they would give us all money to make our lives a little bit easier.

Cheryl is much more blunt in her assessment of the reimbursement:

It was about buying votes from people. Like that’s a lot of money to offer people, especially around Christmas time.

Janet says:

The government used that $400 to wave a carrot in front of my nose and they think that I’m not going to know that it was a carrot in front of my nose. I knew what it was, but I still took the money.

**Blaming both sides**

The difficult experiences that our participants have faced with education reform leads most to conclude that there is no clear winner. Angie, for instance, blames both the government and the teachers for the strike:

I think the whole situation was preventable if both the government and the teachers had put a little bit more effort into the process. From what I’ve learned, I think both sides were being very obstinate. I think that had they been willing at the beginning to bend a little bit, then the whole thing may have been resolved without a strike and without disruption to the children and to their education.

Jenny reminds us that throughout the process of education reform it is the children that feel the impact most directly:

I think the strike really hurt the kids. I don’t think there should have even been a strike. The government just jumped the gun to the point where the teachers were so mad they had to walk out. But the kids were in the middle of all of it.
In the end, many of our participants view the teachers’ strike as an important tool for democracy. Most, however, conclude that the government is not interested in talking with Ontarians about the education reform process. Christopher, who is married with five children and works in a hospital kitchen in southeast Ontario, says:

_The government asks for your input, but you’re powerless. I know that my input isn’t going to make a damn bit of difference in the scheme of things. This government has decided that they are going to do things a certain way and what I have to say doesn’t really matter. Look at all the parents and all the teachers who had something very loud to say in October [about the teachers’ strike in 1997], it didn’t make a bit of difference._

**CONCLUSION**

The Ontario government’s reforms have changed almost every aspect of the education system. Our interviews confirm that the scope of the changes mean that everyone involved in education – from junior kindergarten to adult education – has been affected. Most of our participants support the idea of education reform, but they do not necessarily endorse the reforms being implemented by the Ontario government. While most look to education as a means to improve their lives, many have encountered barriers preventing them from realizing their education goals.

Our households identify four areas of concern that lead them to question the direction of education reform: the introduction of across-the-board standardization, centralization of power, a massive withdrawal of funding from the entire education system and lack of democratic input into the process of education reform.

For many of the participants in our study, the reforms are not addressing the obstacles that they face, such as transportation, child care, indebtedness, special needs supports and the connection between education and jobs. This feeling of exclusion is reinforced by the speed and undemocratic style with which reforms were implemented. The government’s approach to education reform led many participants to predict the province-wide teachers’ strikes and lock-outs in September 1998. In the end, most participants concluded that the massive reforms to the education and training system have been driven largely by the government’s overall agenda of deficit reduction.

**Endnotes**

1. Poll results from personal communication with Jane Armstrong, Senior Vice President, Environics Research Group Limited. The FOCUS ONTARIO poll was conducted from June 19 to 29, 1998, with a survey sample of 1003 adults in Ontario. The margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points 19 times out of 20.


**References**


Bezanson, Kate and Fraser Valentine. (1998). *Act in Haste ... The Style, Scope and Speed of Change in Ontario*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.


## Household Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household name</th>
<th>Profile and size</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Education level and connection</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Individual Sources of Income</th>
<th>Individual Employment Status</th>
<th>Present Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jenny</td>
<td>lone-parent family of 4 – mother and 3 children</td>
<td>27, children are 9, 6 and 2</td>
<td>mid-size south-east Ontario city</td>
<td>Jenny recently left Gr.n12 upgrading; 2 in Catholic elementary school, 1 with special needs</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Family Benefits (FBA)</td>
<td>Not in labour market but wants to work</td>
<td>N/A</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anne</td>
<td>lone-parent family of 5 – mother and 4 children</td>
<td>27, children are 8, 6, 3 and 2</td>
<td>mid-size south-east Ontario city</td>
<td>Anne has less than Gr. 12; 2 in Catholic elementary school, 2 have special needs</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>FBA</td>
<td>Not in labour market but wants to work</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ashley and Rosa</td>
<td>3-generation family of 3 – mother, daughter and grandchild</td>
<td>57 and 33, grand-daughter is 3</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Rosa, some postsecondary, withdrew from upgrading; Ashley Has some Postsecondary</td>
<td>low ($6K) low</td>
<td>Rental income</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Seeking work + cottage industry (casual, pt) N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia and Gary</td>
<td>2-parent family of 3 – mother, father and teenager</td>
<td>37 and 35, daughter is 15</td>
<td>Greater Toronto Area (GTA)</td>
<td>Olivia and Gary, some postsecondary; 1 in public high school</td>
<td>low ($30K/-) Employment</td>
<td>Unemployed/illness Self-employed</td>
<td>N/A Painter (self-employed)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Denise and Rick</td>
<td>Blended family of 6 – mother and father with 2 teens each</td>
<td>39 and 44, children are 17, 17, 15 and 14</td>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>1 in public elementary, 3 in high school, 1 has special needs</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Painter (self-employed)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christine and Dwight</td>
<td>2-parent family of 3 – mother, father and child</td>
<td>mid-30s and 37, son is 12</td>
<td>small south west Ontario town</td>
<td>Christine is completing BA; Dwight has Gr. 12; 1 in French elementary immersion</td>
<td>middle ($50K) Employment</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
<td>Child care (self-ft) Journalist (ft)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>lone-parent family of 2 – mother and 1 teen (1 lives away)</td>
<td>49, daughter is 19</td>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>Victoria has MSW; 1 in university; 1 in public high school</td>
<td>middle ($55K) Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Social worker (ft)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>single – lives alone</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>College diploma; self study</td>
<td>low ($10K) General Welfare (GWA)/pt work</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Book store clerk (pt)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix B

#### Household Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household name</th>
<th>Profile and size</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Education level and connection</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Individual Sources of Income</th>
<th>Individual Employment Status</th>
<th>Present Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veronica</td>
<td>lone-parent family of 3 – mother and 2 children</td>
<td>29, children are 7 and 4</td>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>Veronica has Gr. 12, drives school bus, plans to start college; 1 in public elementary school</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>FBA and pt employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>School bus driver (pt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank and Michael</td>
<td>couple – no children</td>
<td>36 and 38</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Frank has MA; Michael completing PhD</td>
<td>middle ($95K)</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Counsellor (pt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalia and Antonio</td>
<td>2-parent family of 4 – mother, father and 2 children (1 lives away)</td>
<td>40 and 36, children are 11 and 7</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Antonio finishing college; 2 in Catholic elementary school</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Not in labour mkt</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A Care provider (pt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teresa</td>
<td>single – lives alone</td>
<td>31 years old</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Enrolled in college</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>FBA</td>
<td>Not in labour market but wants to return to school</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angie</td>
<td>lone-parent family of 3 – mother and 2 children</td>
<td>34, sons are 14 and 12</td>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>Angie has Gr. 12; 2 in public elementary school, 1 with special needs</td>
<td>middle ($42K)</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Building manager (ft)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sadan</td>
<td>lone-parent family of 6 – mother and 5 children (1 other lives on own)</td>
<td>40, children are 21,14, 11,7 and 1</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Sadan has Gr. 4; 3 in public elementary school, 1 with special needs</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>GWA/now OWA</td>
<td>Seeking work</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard and Robbie</td>
<td>Housemates – no children</td>
<td>51 and 28</td>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>Richard has Gr. 12/13; Robbie Gr. 11</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>CPP/FBA top-up GWA</td>
<td>Unable to work/ill Unemployed</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amy (and Charles)</td>
<td>now 1-parent family of 4 – mother and 3 children</td>
<td>27, children are 12, 6 and 4</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Amy has Gr. 12; 2 in public elementary school, 1 has special needs</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>GWA/Handicapped Child Benefit</td>
<td>Upgrading</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Household Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household name</th>
<th>Profile and size</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Education level and connection</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Individual Sources of Income</th>
<th>Individual Employment Status</th>
<th>Present Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kate and Carl</td>
<td>2-parent family of 4 – mother, father and 2 children (1 lives away)</td>
<td>34 and 28, children are 8 and 3</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Carl has some post-secondary; Kate has Gr. 8; 1 (+1) in public elementary school, (1) has special needs</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Employment/FBA Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liz</td>
<td>single – lives alone</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Liz has some college</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Pension</td>
<td>Retired, but wants to work</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rosie and Bob</td>
<td>couple (+ adult son who pays rent)</td>
<td>60 and 67</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Rosie has bus. school diploma, Lloyd has Gr. 5; Rosie is school crossing guard</td>
<td>low ($12K)</td>
<td>Employment, rental OAS/CPP</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Retired</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denzel</td>
<td>lives with mother and 2 siblings</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>Some university; plans to return to university</td>
<td>he earns $19K: low-middle</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Customer service(pt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jackie</td>
<td>lone-parent family of 3 – mother and 2 children</td>
<td>34, children are 15 and 1; mother 59</td>
<td>mid-size south-east Ontario city</td>
<td>Jackie has BA; 1 in high school; grandmother has Gr. 10, 1 has special needs</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Community development worker (pt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cheryl and Paul</td>
<td>2-parent family of 4 – mother, father and 2 children</td>
<td>47, 49, sons are 15 and 12</td>
<td>small south-west Ontario city</td>
<td>Cheryl and Paul have BA; Paul teaches; 1 in public elementary school; 1 in high school</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Josie and Rebecca</td>
<td>3-generation family of 5 – mother, daughter, 3 grand-children</td>
<td>late 40s and 20s, children are 6, 5 and 3</td>
<td>GTA</td>
<td>Josie has Gr. 11; Rebecca Gr. 9; 2 in public kindergarten</td>
<td>middle ($541k) low ($2.3k)</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Was working – lost both jobs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria and Leo</td>
<td>2-parent family of 4 – mother, father and 2 sons</td>
<td>51 and 52, sons are 23 and 19</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Leo has college; Maria has teach.cert. and teaches; 1 in university; 1 in public high school</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabrina and Elizabeth</td>
<td>housemates – no children</td>
<td>32 and 34</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Sabrina has diploma; Elizabeth has BA</td>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>Employment/GWA Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Household Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household name</th>
<th>Profile and size</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Education level and connection</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Individual Sources of Income</th>
<th>Individual Employment Status</th>
<th>Present Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monica and Randy</td>
<td>blended family of 5 – mother, father and 3 children</td>
<td>29 and 30s, children are 14, 8 and 6</td>
<td>small southern Ontario city</td>
<td>Monica has Gr. 9; Rob just compl. Gr. 12, 1 in catholic high school, 2 in public elementary school, 1 with special needs</td>
<td>low ($20K+)</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Self-employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa and Ray</td>
<td>2-parent family of 4 – mother, father and 2 children</td>
<td>44 and 38, sons are 14 and 11</td>
<td>mid-size north Ontario city</td>
<td>Lisa has some secondary and adult ed; Ray has some college, 2 in catholic elementary school</td>
<td>low ($30.5K)</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Janet and Christopher</td>
<td>blended family of 5 – mother, father and 3 children (+2 more on weekends +2 away)</td>
<td>40 and 47, children are 17, 15 and 12</td>
<td>mid-size south-east Ontario city</td>
<td>Janet has 1 yr. college; Chris is RPN, 4 in public high school, 1 in elementary, 1 with special needs</td>
<td>low-middle ($30-$35K)</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Self employed</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>some postsecondary</td>
<td>low ($2.3K)</td>
<td>GWA</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pamela and Bert</td>
<td>2-parent family of 4 – mother, father and 2 children</td>
<td>late 40s and early 50s, sons are 26 and 16</td>
<td>mid-size north Ontario city</td>
<td>Pamela has BSW and 1/2 MBA; Bert has Grade 11; 1 doing 2nd university degree, 1 in secondary school</td>
<td>middle ($50K+)</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aida and Xavier</td>
<td>2-parent family of 5 – mother, father and 3 children</td>
<td>47, daughters are 24 and 26, son is 20</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Aida has college; 2 in university</td>
<td>low ($35K)</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara and Adam</td>
<td>family of 4 – lone parent with 2 children and new partner</td>
<td>30s and 40s, daughters are 15 and 16</td>
<td>small northern town</td>
<td>Barbara has university; 2 in high school switched from Catholic</td>
<td>middle</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Employed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Household Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Household name</th>
<th>Profile and size</th>
<th>Ages</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Education level and connection</th>
<th>Household Income</th>
<th>Individual Sources of Income</th>
<th>Individual Employment Status</th>
<th>Present Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sara and Anand</td>
<td>2-parent family of 4 – mother, father and 2 children</td>
<td>37 and 36, children are 4 and 7</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Sara and Anand have advanced university degrees</td>
<td>high</td>
<td>Employment Employment</td>
<td>Employed Employed</td>
<td>Researcher (ft) College teacher (ft)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie</td>
<td>single – lives alone</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>Julie has MSW</td>
<td>low-middle ($20k)</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Researcher (pt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>single</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>has Gr. 10, in school</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>GWA and pt casual employment</td>
<td>Employed and in school</td>
<td>Squeegeeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha</td>
<td>lone-parent family of 3</td>
<td>17, children are 2 and 6 mos.</td>
<td>Toronto</td>
<td>has Gr. 10, returning in fall</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>GWA</td>
<td>Not in labour market</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jerry</td>
<td>lone-parent family of 2</td>
<td>23, daughter is 2</td>
<td>Ottawa</td>
<td>Gr. 12</td>
<td>low</td>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Hospitality industry supervisor (ft)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

1998 Elementary and Secondary Education
Funding Model and Estimates of Funding Cuts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRANT</th>
<th>1998 AMOUNT (millions)</th>
<th>1999 AMOUNT</th>
<th>2000 AMOUNT</th>
<th>2001 AMOUNT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Grant (basic student grant)</td>
<td>$6,971</td>
<td>$6,971</td>
<td>$6,971</td>
<td>$6,971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adult and Continuing Education Grant</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>187</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Learning Grant (alternatives to JK)</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Grant</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>374</td>
<td>374</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Opportunities Grant (at-risk students)</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geographic and School Authorities Grant</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>176</td>
<td>176</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Accommodation Grant (school operations)</td>
<td>1,737</td>
<td>1,737</td>
<td>1,737</td>
<td>1,737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Board Administration &amp; Governance Grant</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Education Grant 1</td>
<td>1,052</td>
<td>1,052</td>
<td>1,052</td>
<td>1,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Compensation Grant</td>
<td>823</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>703</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation Grant</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>560</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total of Grants</strong></td>
<td>$12,591</td>
<td>$12,471</td>
<td>$12,471</td>
<td>$12,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase-in/mitigation funding 2</td>
<td>299</td>
<td>352</td>
<td>381</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>“STABLE” ANNUAL TOTAL</strong> 3</td>
<td>$12,890</td>
<td>$12,823</td>
<td>$12,852</td>
<td>$12,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary Textbooks 4</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-Total Capital and Operating $</strong></td>
<td>$12,990</td>
<td>$12,823</td>
<td>$12,852</td>
<td>$12,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transition/restructuring</td>
<td>385</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Total Before Pension</td>
<td>$13,375</td>
<td>$12,823</td>
<td>$12,852</td>
<td>$12,471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Pension Plan 5</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
<td>unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Annual Grand Total</strong></td>
<td>$13,436</td>
<td>$12,823+</td>
<td>$12,852+</td>
<td>$12,471+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1. Includes one-time assistance of over $120 million in 1998 to reduce teacher preparation time.
2. Three years funding have been promised to “phase in” the new formula and “protect” class size as enrollment increases. The 1998 amount is known; the figures for 1999 and 2000 have been estimated by subtracting the grants sub-total from the “stable” annual total. In 2001, the funding ends.
3. The figures for 1998, 1999 and 2000 appear in March 1998 Ministry of Education and Training projections for school board operating revenue under the new funding model. The figure for 2001 does not include “phase-in” funding, as that was set for three years only.
4. Funding to help boards amalgamate and adjust to the new funding formula, and purchase elementary school textbooks, is provided only in 1998. There are no indications that the money will be reinvested in education.
5. This amount is what appears in the May 1998 provincial budget. The amount the government planned to contribute ($1.4 billion) when the funding formula was announced in March 1998 was reduced by agreement with the teachers’ unions.
Reports available from the Speaking Out Project

Project Description: Research Strategy and Methodology
December 1997

Periodic Report #1
Take It or Leave It: The Ontario Government’s Approach to Job Insecurity
January 1998

Periodic Report #2
Act in Haste ... The Style, Scope and Speed of Change in Ontario
January 1998

Periodic Report #3
Centralizing Power, Decentralizing Blame: What Ontarians Say About Education Reform
October 1998