

**Ontario, Canada  
Country Summary**

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## **Ontario, Canada**

### **Summary—General Facts and Information\***

**Population:** ~12.5 M

**Education expenditures:**

- As a percentage of GDP (includes primary, secondary and tertiary): <4%
- Per pupil expenditure in US dollars (includes primary, secondary and non-tertiary): ~\$8,000

**Teacher demographics: (~120,000 teachers)**

- Gender distribution (% female): Primary: 80%; Secondary: 53%
- Percentage of unqualified teachers: <4%
- Salary: (equivalent US\$): ~ \$60,000 USD
- Trends:
  - Approx. 13% of new teachers leave within first 5 years

**Student demographics: (~2.1 million students)**

- In public institutions: 95%
- Eligible for free school meals: n/a
- Minority ethnic population: ~40%
- Non-native language speakers: ~ 6-8%
- Graduation rate: 71% (2004)
- PISA Math mean score (2003): 532 (above OECD average)
- Trends:
  - Increasing diversity of student population
  - All population growth is due to immigration

**Structure of the education system:**

- Governance:
  - Education in Canada is the responsibility of its provinces.
  - Provincial education minister develops the curriculum, sets policies & requirements for diplomas, and prepares lists of approved textbooks and learning materials.
  - School boards operate schools with funding they receive from province.
  - Ontario has four separate self-governing school systems – English public (31 districts), English Catholic (29 districts), French public (4 districts), French Catholic (8 districts).
- Teacher employment:
  - Teachers are employed by local authorities; Salaries are determined through negotiations with local unions and are fixed based on years experience and level of education.
  - Certification requires an undergraduate degree and one year of teacher training.
  - Recently, the entry-to-practice assessment (Teacher Qualifying Test) has been abolished and replaced by an induction program.
  - The *Ontario College of Teachers* certifies, governs and enforces standards of the profession. Plans are underway to strengthen this body.
  - Unionization: 100% of the teaching force is unionized.
- Average class size: Primary (K-3) - 20; Lower-secondary (4-8) - 24; Secondary - 23

**Curriculum and Assessment:**

- The Ministry provides curricula to be implemented locally.
- Content, organization of work, and methods are determined at the district and school level
- EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office): independent agency responsible for province-wide assessments in grades 3 & 6 (reading, writing, math) and 9 (math)
- Test scores reported publicly. No formal requirements for graduation or promotion.

\*These statistics are not precisely comparable to those provided for the other countries (OECD data is collected for countries, not subunits such as provinces). Close approximations were chosen where possible.

## **Current Education Reform Context in Ontario, Canada**

This section summarizes current education reform initiatives in order to provide context for the discussion of teacher policy initiatives that follows.

### Overview

Major reforms in Ontario are focused on improving students outcomes, decreasing inequities in outcomes and increasing public confidence in public education. Major priorities include improved literacy and numeracy, higher high school graduation rates, and smaller class sizes (max. of 20) in primary. The Province has comprehensive and well-financed strategies in place to achieve these goals which place great emphasis on building capacity of districts, schools and educators to achieve the goals.

### Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

- Major initiative of the current Ontario government with the goal of having all students read, write, do math and comprehend at a high level by the age of 12.
- Includes reducing class size in the primary grades, improving teacher training, investing in new resources and building on an atmosphere of peace and stability (described below).

*Note: The elements of this policy that are related to teacher policies are described in more detail in the remaining sections of this report.*

### Peace and Stability Measures for Schools

- Historically, Ontario has experienced a great deal of labor unrest. In 2004, the government announced new measures to maintain peace and stability in labor relations in order to have a successful education system:
  - a formal, ongoing dialogue among teachers' federations, school boards and the government to seek long-term solutions on provincial teacher policies (formally established in 2005);
  - new funding supports for salary increases for longer term contracts meeting provincial guidelines; and
  - new requirements to account for funds school receive for provincial initiatives.
- As a result, in 2005 districts and teachers built on a provincial 'framework' to achieve the first-ever four-year contracts for all teachers including additional funding for new teacher positions in key areas related to provincial goals

### Education Partnership Table

- Forum established in 2004 by the former education minister to get broad and diverse insights from the education sector on provincial policy early in the development process.
- Prior to the creation of this forum there was a sense by many stakeholders that the previous government enacted education policy unilaterally.
- Representatives of the major stakeholders (teacher unions, administrator groups, parent groups, students, etc.) attend meetings and work to reach consensus on issues/policies.

### Quality and the Classroom Act (2001)

- The previous government enacted a teacher quality program that included a qualifying test for new teachers and mandatory professional development requirements.
- The McGuinty Government (current administration) has revoked these provisions as they contributed to labor unrest and were not effective.
- These strategies have been replaced with an induction program for new teachers and substantially expanded professional development.
- There is a strong effort in this administration to create dialogue with all education partners based on respect and mutual problem-solving.
- There is recognition that quality and motivation of teaching and leadership are critical to any educational improvement.
- The policy strategy around teachers (as described in the following section) involves:
  - strengthening professional identity and sense of respect;
  - putting good labour relations in place;
  - expanding professional learning; and
  - removing irritants and distractions.

## Ontario, Canada Teacher Policy Highlights

### Attracting and Supporting New Teachers

#### *Induction:*

- In 2005, the current government created a New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP) for the entire province.
- This program was developed in cooperation with a subgroup of the Education Partnership Table (described above) called the Teacher Development Working Table.
- The program aims to better prepare and support new teachers and therefore improve instruction.
- The program is to complement the formal one-year pre-service education provided by schools of education with another entire year of full supports for new teachers.
- Consists of the following components:
  - Orientation for all new teachers
  - Mentoring by experienced teachers
  - Professional development and on-the-job training in classroom management, parent communication, and instructional strategies (particularly those addressing learning and cultural needs of diverse learners)

### Improving Schools As Places To Work and Learn

#### *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy:*

- This is a major initiative of the current Ontario government with the goal of having all students read, write, do math and comprehend at a high level by the age of 12.
- The government's target is to have 75% of 12-year-olds reach the provincial standard on province wide reading, writing and math testing by 2008.
- This plan includes:
  - Reducing class sizes in primary grades to 20 by 2007-08.
  - Investing in additional specialist teachers in key areas.
  - Facilitating and supporting local projects to improve literacy/numeracy.
  - Providing effective professional development and resources including intensive training for teachers in effective instruction in literacy and numeracy.
  - Sending Turnaround Teams of experts to help 100 schools struggling to improve achievement.
  - Establishing a Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat to carry out these goals by ensuring schools, teachers and principals get the supports they need.
  - Dealing with labour-related issues through new mechanisms such as a Provincial Stability Commission that defuses potential grievances and a Student Success Commission that gives teacher union input on many proposed policies.

#### *Ongoing Professional Development:*

- The previous government enacted strict requirements for ongoing professional development in order to maintain certified status. This requirement was revoked given strong opposition from teachers.

- Current professional development initiatives (many which fall under the above described Literacy and Numeracy Strategy) include:
  - Summer development programs for primary teachers in literacy and numeracy.
  - Increasing the number of lead teachers in primary grades from 8,000 to 16,000 (Lead Teachers are teachers exposed to best practices that they share in their schools.)
  - Student Success Leaders are provided to every board for 1) coordinating high school teachers to implement new initiatives and 2) providing the necessary professional development.
  - Professional development in other areas – special education, safety, physical activity, high school student success,
- The Teacher Development Working Table is revising policies for evaluating teachers. There is a view that the current evaluation system is too formal, too time consuming and does not provide useful information to teachers about their strengths and weaknesses. Changes have already been made for new (first two years) teachers.
- Two additional PD days have been added to the school calendar (cut by the previous government).

#### *Leadership Programs:*

- Several steps to improve leadership including a strategy for reducing administrative workload for principals; stronger PD for all school leaders, creation of a provincial ‘leadership development institute,’ more input from leadership groups on policy issues.
- Recognizing school leaders face new challenges in schools and that more is expected of these individuals, the goal is to find a systematic way to support them including:
  - Freeing them and enhance abilities to be instructional leaders
  - Lessen administrative workload
  - Ensuring professional respect and security
  - Clearly defining their roles

#### Improving Compensation and Professional Opportunities

- *Revitalizing the Ontario College of Teachers:*
  - The College was established in 1995 to govern (self-regulate) the profession but has been mired in political difficulties that the stakeholders in education hope to resolve.
  - New legislation will alter the governance of the College, increase the role of classroom teachers, and provide greater public input.
  - The goal is for this organization to govern the entry into and quality of those who remain in the profession.

## **Focus on Current Teacher Policy Initiative Literacy and Numeracy Strategy**

### Overview

In 2003, the Government of Ontario made improving publicly funded education its central goal. The first major step in achieving this goal is the enactment of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy aimed at ensuring all students develop reading, writing, mathematics and comprehension skills at a higher level by the age of 12. By 2008, 75 percent of students should reach the provincial standard. The major components of this plan include reducing class size in the primary grades, improving teacher training, investing in new resources and building on an atmosphere of peace and stability.

While this policy is directly aimed at improving student achievement, it has been chosen for the focus of this document because one of its major underlying methods of improving student achievement is through policies targeted at teacher quality. These policies will directly and indirectly affect the ability of the system to attract, support, and retain quality teachers.

### Context

Student achievement measures in Ontario show that a significant proportion of students are not reaching provincial standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Ontario's students fall short of expectations for student achievement, particularly when compared to national and international benchmarks. Therefore, the current government is taking specific action to address this challenge and urgent need to improve student achievement.

### Key Tenets of the Literacy and Numeracy Strategy

The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat is charged with the following tasks, all of which directly or indirectly influence teacher quality and working conditions.

- 1) Work with school boards to set achievement targets using student data.
- 2) Assemble and support teams at all levels (regional offices, boards and schools) to drive continuous improvement in literacy and numeracy.
- 3) Reduce class sizes to 20 in primary grades by 2007-08.

- 4) Build capacity to support student learning and achievement. The Secretariat will work with school boards to:
  - Identify and offer needs-based professional development;
  - Coordinate and integrate initiatives within and across schools districts;
  - Work with boards and professional agencies to design district and school-based programs for leadership teams;
  - Provide leadership programs for principals on a) literacy and numeracy development and b) organizational improvement initiatives;
  - Identify “sites of excellence” to serve as models for other schools and districts; and
  - Apply lessons learned from the Turnaround Teams (teams sent to help 100 schools struggling the most to improve student achievement).
- 5) Work with districts to ensure they make the best possible use of all available resources to support their target setting for student achievement and their school improvement plans.
- 6) Mobilize the system to provide equity in student outcomes using disaggregated data to build awareness among educators and stakeholders on equity in student achievement.
- 7) Embark on a process of community outreach and engagement to build support for the literacy and numeracy initiative. The Secretariat will work with student leaders, parents, school councils, professional organizations, the public and other stakeholders to focus support on literacy and numeracy.
- 8) Demonstrate a commitment to research and evidence-based inquiry and decision making. The Secretariat will conduct research on effective practices and ensure this information is transmitted to school boards via a variety of dissemination methods.
- 9) Establish a growing presence on the national and international scene in learning from and contributing to the knowledge base about how to improve literacy and numeracy achievement.

#### Selected Successes/Policy Progress Update

As of 2006, the Secretariat has taken many steps towards realizing these goals. The Secretariat has:

- Established the office of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) as a credible provincial infrastructure with a cadre of outstanding educators working collaboratively with schools.
- Created Student Achievement Offices who work directly with boards and schools setting achievement targets and improvement plans.
- Provided training to boards for implementation of reading strategies.
- Selected and funding 235 local initiatives.
- Collaborated with principals' associations to provide over 700 principals leadership development in establishing learning communities.
- Trained over 10,000 teachers in summer programs over the last two years.
- Provided 1775 tutors for students in 54 boards.
- Conducted in-depth case studies of eight effective school districts for publication and sharing across the province.
- Collected and analyzed successful practices from 170 school and classroom sites as the basis for sharing across the province.
- Established a partnership with a Faculty of Education to have teacher candidates provide tutoring in schools.
- Planned and hosted a Pan-Canadian Literacy Forum.
- Shared LNS strategies with visiting educators from six countries.

The student achievement results indicate improvement:

- The 2004/05 EQAO results (Ontario's student assessment system) are the highest since the start of the assessment. There is improvement in all subjects at Grades 3 and 6 for the first time.
- The gender gap is closing, although there remain gaps in students with special needs and those with language needs.
- There has been an overall improvement in board results (92% of boards improved in writing, 87% in reading and 72% in mathematics) and a narrowing of the gap between the highest and lowest achieving boards.

### Selected Implementation Challenges

- Labor Issues: Contending with opposition to professional development, opposition to teachers who receive provincial training sharing their expertise with other teachers, and grievances against principals holding positions in board offices.
- Educators spend a lot of time out of classrooms, schools and districts for ministry and district professional development initiatives.
- Great variability exists in the capacity of boards to develop targets, plan and report on progress, gather and analyze student data, and provide capacity building and leadership development for staff.

## References/Additional Information

Most of the information in this report was obtained through correspondence with ministry officials and documents available on Ontario's Education Ministry website ([www.edu.gov.on.ca](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca)).

The following reports were utilized in addition to consultation with appropriate officials:

Teacher Excellence — Unlocking Student Potential Through Continuing Professional Development, August 16, 2004 (v.2)

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/potential.html>

Creating an Education Partnership Table, March 18, 2004 (v.2)

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/creating.html>

Building the Ontario Education Advantage: Student Achievement, April 29, 2004 (v.3)

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/building.html>

Revitalizing the Ontario College of Teachers, March 18, 2004 (v.2)

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/general/elemsec/partnership/revitalizing.html>

Teaching and Learning Mathematics – The Report of the Expert Panel on Mathematics in Grades 4 to 6 in Ontario, 2004

<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/reports/numeracy/panel/index.html>