

Doing More With Less

Here are the recommendations of Ontario's Education Value for Money Review Panel.

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The Education Value for Money Review Panel had the bold task of analyzing the publicly-funded education system in Ontario to make recommendations that would increase the value for money to Ontario taxpayers.

Because Ontario spends more on public education than most Canadian provinces, its students should surpass other provinces in student achievement. In fact, Ontario students perform at or below the Canadian average and significantly and consistently below the students in Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec.

Alberta and Quebec actually spend less per student than Ontario, while British Columbia spends slightly more. These provinces appear to receive greater value for money from their publicly-funded education system than does Ontario.

What becomes apparent from this analysis is that more money is not the reason for better student and system performance. Instead, how that money is utilized is more important.

Ontario's education system resembles the same structure and institutions that have governed public education in North America and around the world for more than 100 years.

As a command-and-control system that judges performance by rules and regulations compliance, these institutions are incompatible with the needs of the 21st century. What is needed is a system that is driven by performance — student outcomes and measures of efficiency being two types of performance.

The Value for Money Review Panel recommends ten fundamental initiatives to focus the mission of the publicly-funded education system and change the way it operates. At the same time, these reforms could result in significant cost savings — improved system performance at lower costs leads to greater value for money.

School-Based Funding and Budgeting

To provide funds to the institutions responsible for service delivery, the government should move to a school-based funding and budgeting model of publicly-funded education. This will allow the majority of funding to go directly to the school sites.

Estimated savings: \$227-\$340 million

Block Grants for Special Purposes

The present special-purposes funding is administered on a cumbersome case-by-case basis and could be much more efficiently allocated to schools through block granting on an enrolment basis.

Estimated savings: \$228 million

Continuing Education

The province's Continuing Education Grant funds such things as heritage language programs, adult education, and correspondence courses, but these programs are not consistent with the core educational functions of schools. The responsibility for these programs should be shifted to other ministries.

Estimated savings: N/A

Transportation

The existing grant is based on historical costs, adjusted for increase in enrolment. The Ministry of Education should develop a new transportation funding formula based on geographic information system technology.

Estimated savings: \$58-\$87 million

School Facilities

The Ontario government should pursue public-private partnerships for the design and construction of schools.

Estimated savings: \$8-16 million

Pupil Assessment and Reporting

The current program for student assessment at grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 is inadequate for a performance-driven education system. Accountability, autonomy, efficiency and effectiveness are compromised. Ontario should pursue public-private partnerships for tests in every grade from 3 to 10.

Estimated cost: \$20 million

Information Services

The present data collection, management, analysis, and reporting systems are inadequate. The province should develop a new student-level information management system/education database.

Estimated cost: \$12 million

Special Education

To enhance flexibility and consumer choice in special education, the government should introduce measures, such as public-private service providers and opportunity scholarships to independent schools, that will result in greater consumer choice.

Estimated cost: nil

Employment Relations

The government should move to dual contracts whereby the province would be responsible for negotiating a core contract to establish a standard pay schedule and benefits, while boards and schools would have the ability to bargain beyond the core contract according to their local conditions.

Estimated cost: nil

Teacher and Administrator Credentialing

To overcome the anticipated shortage of school personnel, the province should instruct the Ontario Principals' Council and the Ontario College of Teachers to develop alternative certification processes.

Estimated cost: nil

The total estimated savings could range from \$178-788 million.

(Adapted with permission from a report commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Finance. www.edcon-sultants.com/Reports/Ontario.pdf. Mr. Seder is a senior consulting associate with Management Analysis and Planning, Inc. Dr. Guthrie is professor of public policy and education at the University of California, Berkeley. Dr. Lawton is Chair of Educational Administration and Community Leadership at Central Michigan University.)