

Infuriated by provincial cuts

Written by Doug Beffort

I follow your twitter account and as much as I thank you for your information I don't know when I have been so upset with the direction and seemingly off the cuff statements and decisions being made by our present government. I chose to stay silent and steam inside until you wrote a twitter that started, and I quote, 'Enough games. It's time to put the education of our students in Dufferin Caledon and across the province first.

First and foremost, Minister Jones I don't know anyone, teacher or non-teaching citizen who is 'playing games' with our education system and our students. Teachers and most parents are devoted to their students and kids and want nothing but the best. To say they are playing games is demeaning and an affront to the skill, education and devotion of many.

Our Provincial Government has made decisions around Education that appear to be quick and dirty and do not reflect the reality of what is happening in Education today. It is simply not sufficient to say that you will increase the class sizes to save dollars.

Let me give you a very simple example of where this is wrong. The policy of the Ontario Provincial Government is to increase the number of immigrants to our province. I applaud the new immigrants who have joined us and as a Principal in our local education system for over 30 years I worked diligently with a number of them. The problem, of course, is that many new immigrants choose to live with relatives and friends thus having 2 or 3 families in an apartment or house. For them it is a necessity but unfortunately for the education system there is only one tax income base from that household with perhaps 3 or more new students to our system. Once those students arrive on the doorstep of our schools they must be placed in a class thus increasing the class size. In most cases they undoubtedly require English as a Second Language support which means that a specialized teacher has to be 'freed up' to help. In addition, like an overview of the regular school population, some require much assistance and Teaching Assistant support for Autism, Behaviour problems, specialized support for Developmental Challenges, etc. In the most recent years many of these programs have been offloaded to the regular class teacher because there is not sufficient funding for specialized support. Now your government wants to cut even more.

The outcome is severe for all of us for now and our future. The Province has gradually removed many of the essential skill programs related to Industrial Arts, Home Economics, Art, Music and others because the support has to go to the 'regular' class and 'regular' teacher. Your government has decided that these programs will be further infiltrated as a result of your recent announcements. I can tell you as an Administrator that we are doing a disservice to our future to deny students these opportunities.

How can we prepare our youth for the demands of the future and the daily needs of today when they must sit in a classroom that is overcrowded and where the overall learning opportunities are watered down because there are too many students or there are such specialized needs that interrupt the flow for the many.

I ask you to reconsider the cuts to education related to the above but also ask you to consult those of us who know what it's like to try to prepare our young people for the future when we are struggling with the demands of the present. Perhaps we can establish a sensible ratio of students to teachers but also provide support for the most needy. It is not happening at the present and your cuts will make it worse.

I remain available to discuss this and other issues with you at any time.