

# ONTARIO SHOULD COMPROMISE ON EDUCATION CUTS

As the education dispute between Ontario teachers and the Ford government continues to escalate, there are no shortage of claims and counterclaims about which side has the most public support.

Most are based on anecdotal evidence or partisan wishful thinking. But to the extent there is quantifiable evidence, it suggests that teachers and their unions are handily winning the critical battle for public support.

Recently, public opinion research firm Ekos released polling showing that 57 per cent of Ontarians back the unions and 30 per cent support the government. Ten per cent backed neither and 2 per cent had no opinion.

Another poll, from Environics, also found that two-thirds of Ontarians believe the government's cuts "are more harmful to students than job action," such as one-day strikes and work-to-rule campaigns. That poll suggested about 57 per cent of Ontarians sympathize with teachers and education workers, while 56 per cent believe education unions are being more reasonable in the talks; and 59 per cent say teachers should keep pushing for a better deal.

That's good news for teachers and all educators, plus the rest of us who believe the Ford government's education "reforms" are really all about saving money and eliminating teaching jobs, and have nothing to do with improving the public education system. Larger classes don't improve educational outcomes. Forcing students to take e-learning courses doesn't make them more successful. Cutting 10,000 teaching jobs over five years, which will decrease face-to-face learning time, isn't going to help kids learn more effectively. Maintaining already implemented cuts to special education supports doesn't help kids who rely on them.

Yes, these measures will save money, so there are people who think they are worth doing even if they damage the system. But they're not in the majority. Polling data suggests 61 per cent of Ontarians believe spending on public education is a more "important priority" than eliminating the province's \$9-billion deficit or erasing the \$357-billion debt.

So it's safe to say that as of now, the public is solidly behind teachers and their unions as they try to push back on the cutbacks. But that support isn't unanimous, and it's not unshakable. That's why the unions directing the push-back need to move carefully. As job actions escalate and more and more families face disruptions, more people are likely to change their view, either due to reasons of enlightened self interest or feeling that unions have gone too far. Just where that tipping point is located is a matter of opinion and debate, but it's fair to say teachers and their unions need to cherish the public support they now have and not put it at risk.

As for the government, it should take this opportunity to hit reset. It's weak arguments that its "reforms" offer some educational benefit have been thoroughly debunked. Forget the class size increase. Restore the special ed support money. Scrap mandatory e-learning. And compromise on the 1 per cent increase. Private sector increases have been averaging 3.8 per cent.

In short, the government should quit while it's behind.

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## SNAPSHOT



Lisa Bowen photo

A snowy owl has been seen a number of times atop a light post in south-east Halton Hills. Got a great local photo you'd like to share? Send it to [sleblanc@metroland.com](mailto:sleblanc@metroland.com), along with a brief description.

## INVESTING IN PRIORITY AREAS AND MAINTAINING QUALITY SERVICES

HERE IS A LOOK AT WHAT WE'RE COMMITTED TO IN 2020 BUDGET, WRITES GARY CARR



GARY CARR  
Column

On Dec. 11, 2019, regional council approved Halton's 2020 Budget and Business Plan, which supports essential services while making strategic investments to help build healthy, complete communities supported by high-quality programs, services and infrastructure.

The 2020 budget details how we are continuing our strong record of investing in essential programs while preserving Halton's strong long-term financial position. By keeping property taxes low, residents are able to enjoy a high quality of life supported by essential pro-

grams.

The budget fulfils council's objective to keep property tax increases at or below the rate of inflation, with a 1.7-per-cent property tax increase for regional services. When combined with Halton Regional Police Service's 2.5-per-cent tax increase, the overall regional property tax increase is 2.0 per cent.

The budget increases regional investment in priority areas outlined in the 2019-22 Strategic Business Plan. Some of these investments include:

- Water and Wastewater Infrastructure: \$7.3 million to support the water and wastewater state-of-good-repair capital program

- Road Operations: \$1.9 million to address roads state-of-good-repair, resurfacing, and maintenance, as well as operation of the Regional Advanced Traffic Management System

- Services for Seniors: \$1.5 million to maintain service levels and strengthen resident care

- Waste Management: \$1.3 million to address cost and market pressures, tonnage growth, and operation of the expanded Container Station services at the Halton Waste Management Site
- Burlington Beach Waterfront Master Plan: \$1.2 million to support land acquisition

- Paramedic Services: \$1 million to address call volume increases and maintain existing service levels
- Employment & Social Services: \$600,000 to strengthen delivery of the Ontario Works program

- Halton Region Community Investment Fund: \$300,000 to increase funding for programs that support the health, safety and well-being of Halton residents.

By investing for today and tomorrow, we help keep Halton a great place to live, work, raise a family and retire. To learn more about Halton Region's 2020 Budget and Business Plan, visit [halton.ca](http://halton.ca).

*Gary Carr is Regional Chair of Halton Region. His column appears the first week of each month. To contact him, email [gary.carr@halton.ca](mailto:gary.carr@halton.ca).*

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