

## FACT SHEET

# Elementary and Secondary Education

### **The Harris/Eves Conservative Government Record**

"The debate about the adequacy of funding for elementary and secondary education is over. After years of denying that there was a problem at all, claiming that funding had actually increased since it was elected in 1995, the Government was forced in 2002 to appoint an independent task force to review funding adequacy. The report of the Rozanski Task Force silenced the Government."

- Funding benchmarks had fallen far behind changes in costs in the system.
- Key areas of the funding formula – school maintenance, special education, and English as a second language – were inadequate to begin with.
- Underfunding of education since 1995 has resulted in the loss of many programs and services. School libraries have been closed. Class sizes in the critical early years have increased. Music, arts, and physical education programs have been cut or reduced. Special education programs have been cut and nearly 40,000 students are waiting for assessment.

### **The Ontario Alternative Budget Proposal**

We know there is a better way. We would:

- Immediately implement the recommendations from the Rozanski report.
- Phase in a reduction in class sizes in the early grades.
- Reinvest any savings from the elimination of grade 13 for further enhancements to elementary and secondary education.
- Cancel the standardized testing for students.
- Cancel the mandatory teacher recertification program, reinvesting the money into appropriate professional development at the local level.



# What does the Ontario Alternative Budget do?

The Ontario Alternative Budget Working Group is made up of economists and researchers from labour, social, and faith groups. We have first hand experience with the impact of eight years of Harris/Eves policies. We know there is a better way.

## **Our budget does three things:**

- One: It discredits the Harris/Eves government's claim that its tax cuts and fiscal policies have produced substantial gains for middle-income earners;
- Two: It documents the devastating impact of the Harris/Eves government policies on Ontarians; and
- Three: It proposes an alternative budget that would restore public services to their real per-capita 1995-96 level with a balanced budget.

## **Problems**

- Social assistance cuts of 21.6 percent have meant a reduction in purchasing power for the poorest families in the province of 35 percent by August 2003. We see record participation in food banks, record number of homeless too many of them families.
- The sum effect is a huge change in the public economy of this province. The relative size of Ontario's public economy has been cut by almost 20 percent.
- The sum total impact of all Ontario's tax cuts, including personal income tax cuts, corporate tax cuts, and employer health tax cuts, is over \$15 billion. That is the impact in 2003-04 alone.
- Sixty percent of the benefit from the Harris/Eves tax cuts has gone to the highest 20 percent of income earners.
- Independent reports on health and on education confirm that massive reinvestment is needed in these key areas. The Walkerton inquiry showed the devastating impact of a government more concerned with the bottom line than with people's lives.

## **Solutions**

The Ontario Alternative Budget proposes to

- Increase revenues in order to restore public services and balance the budget. We can do this by minimally raising all personal income taxes (0.25%), introducing new tax brackets for those earning over \$100,000, cancelling future corporate tax rate cuts, and eliminating the graduated rate structure for the Employer Health Tax.

## **The Choice**

The Ontario Alternative Budget shows that

- Ontario's public services deficit is not inevitable but the result of political choices made by a government that is not interested in the greater public good.
- It is possible to reverse the damage caused by the Harris/Eves government and repair our public services within a responsible taxation and fiscal framework.

## **Need more information? Contact us:**

Erika Shaker or Kerri-Anne Finn

Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 410-75 Albert Street, Ottawa, ON K1P 5E7

tel: 613-563-1341 fax: 613-233-1458

or visit our web site at <http://www.policyalternatives.ca>