

Letter to the Editor re “Unions blur truth on class size” (Chronicle Journal - Thursday, Oct 24, 2019)

Jasmine Pickel of the Canadian Taxpayers’ Federation has completely missed the real impacts of the Ford Conservative government’s education changes and their effects on students. Under the Government’s plans there will be 10,000 fewer teachers in over the next four years. Many school boards have already laid off teachers and support staff in Special Education, affecting our most vulnerable students. Larger class sizes in grades 4-12 will mean less one-on-one instructional time for students. Per student funding has decreased by 3% after adjusting for inflation, and programs that focused on Indigenous students and other at-risk students have been defunded.

Pickel asserts that teachers’ claims about the negative impact of Ford’s cuts to the classroom are “demonstrably false.” Nothing could be further from the truth. In one year of cuts alone, there are no less than 20 fewer full-time teachers working in Thunder Bay high schools, and over 120 fewer secondary classes available to high school students this year in the Lakehead and Catholic school boards. Many more classes have over 30 students in them resulting in a deterioration of learning conditions and fewer opportunities for students. Teachers and students across the province are bracing for more cuts as this is only the first year of the Ford government’s plan, which will see more teachers and school staff lose jobs while class sizes continue to increase. The negative impact that the government’s changes are having on students’ learning conditions and teachers’ working conditions are palpable and cannot be understated.

The truth is that the bulk of new education spending go to an “attrition fund” to get rid of teachers, as well as other funding dedicated to after-school childcare. To say this constitutes an ‘increase’ to education funding is a stretch. How does that benefit students in the classroom?

The new full-day Kindergarten program instituted in 2010 has been shown to have lasting benefits for children’s reading, writing, numeracy, self-regulation and social skills, giving them the best start for the rest of their school life, university and careers. The Ford government is looking to change Kindergarten in yet another way to cut education funding.

A recent report by the Conference Board of Canada revealed that Education needs to be seen as an investment, not an expense. The report concluded that for every dollar invested in education, the overall economy reaps \$1.30 in return. Conversely, for every dollar removed from education, the economy sheds \$1.30 in activity. If the CTF and the Conservative government were truly interested in maintaining a robust economy, one would think they would champion increased investment in education.

Neither Jasmine Pickel nor the Canadian Taxpayer Federation are in classrooms every day. They need to do more homework when it comes to what’s really happening to public education under this government.

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