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The Retirement Wave

Government Action Prepares for the Future

On July 18, 2007 the Globe and Mail headline read *The Economic Challenge of Age*. However it was the sub-title that caught my immediate attention: “Within a decade, Statscan says, there won’t be enough young people to replace those leaving the work force”.

Supporting this point is the information on the Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan website (www.otpp.com) where the CEO Report indicated there are 1.6 active members for every retiree in 2006 compared to 10 active members in 1970. The website also provides other important pension information that all members should read concerning their benefits and contribution rates.

While the Globe and Mail article focused on the economic impact of the retirement wave there are also significant implications for education. The financial security of the country hinges on the ability of the education system to provide workers that can generate the wealth needed to support our health and social services. Those future workers are coming from the ranks of our aboriginal population and the immigrant families who increasingly choose Canada as a preferred home for their children’s future.

The Ministry of Education has recognized the significant shift in school demographics and the *Many Roots, Many Voices* document provides a practical guide for Ontario educators. The document also refers to the other reports such as the 2006 study by The Learning Partnership entitled *Demographic Changes in Canada and Their Impact on Public Education*. You may also view a webcast on this topic by visiting www.thelearningpartnership.ca. Another very important document is the 2005 Auditor General Report which addresses English as a second language and English literacy development. The recommendations in this report have significant ramifications for policy, funding, assessment and instruction.

For CPCO members, leadership succession is the other critical issue arising from the retirement wave. The CPCO census in February 2006 indicated that 45.3% of the members were over 50 years old while 12.9% were under 40 years old. The survey also reported that 44.9% of the respondents intended to retire by 2009. That percentage rose to 76.6% by 2016.

It is evident that some school boards are beginning to face a leadership shortage at a time when excellent leadership skills and system accountability are in great demand. How are boards addressing the shortage in the short and long term? Anecdotal information indicates that few boards have a plan to fill the vacancies beyond the short term. While increasing numbers of principals and vice-principals are acquiring the Supervisory Officer’s Certificate, there is a decline in the number of teachers who are applying for vice-principal positions,

especially at the secondary level. Discussions with teachers taking the CPCO Principal’s Qualification Program have identified some of the obstacles for potential leaders. For many teachers the most significant deterrent is the observed workload of school administrators but the loss of job security is a major road block for most candidates.

The job security issue lies in the fact that teachers who become administrators lose their teaching seniority when they leave the bargaining unit. This was the direct result of the Harris government decision to remove principals and vice-principals from the teacher unions in 1998. This issue has become significant for new CPCO members because the enrolment decline has caused some boards to begin teacher layoffs. In these situations a veteran teacher who enters and then leaves administration could not return to a teaching position before all layoffs were recalled. As a result many teachers are unwilling to risk unemployment in order to undertake a probationary leadership position.

The issue of job security has been reported to the Ministry and the government for the last six years. Now there is some urgency to finding a solution that will address the leadership needs of the future. The Ministry of Education is holding consultations on the terms and conditions of employment for principals and vice-principals but no changes have been made at this time.

The job security issue is further exacerbated by declining enrolment which has resulted in the loss of 30 administrator positions in the past year. It was extremely timely that Premier McGuinty and Minister Wynne recently announced an additional \$12.5 million for vice-principals in the Catholic boards. While \$10 million will be applied to funding the existing 869 vice-principal positions, the remainder will create approximately 30 new full-time positions across the system. As stated in a press release by President Dan Tighe, the government’s action recognizes the important role that vice-principals play in student safety, school operation and leadership development. It is another indication that McGuinty and Wynne have responded to the recommendations from CPCO and other stakeholders.

While McGuinty and Wynne have demonstrated their understanding and support for the development of our future school leaders their ongoing attention to the needs of students is evident in their continuing consultations with boards and provincial organizations. During the past 4 years they have added more than double the amount recommended in the Rozanski Report because they believe that the government must continually invest in improvements to the education system. Premier McGuinty has kept his promise to restore and improve our education system in Ontario. A second term will help to deal with the retirement wave that will affect all Canadians.