

# Put extra \$2.5-billion into education, panel urges [CA-ON] <sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

A blue-ribbon panel is calling on the Ontario government to implement sweeping changes to the education system by investing an additional \$2.5-billion a year, money that can be saved through slashing subsidies for electricity and industrial programs.

In a report expected to be released today, the government-appointed panel puts forward recommendations for all levels of schooling, including copying Quebec's model of early-childhood education.

"The panel thinks economically, socially and politically having a highly educated citizenry is key to meeting the major challenges of the future", said one source.

The panel, chaired by University of Toronto dean of law Ron Daniels, was set up by Mike Harris's Conservative government to look at the way Ontario is governed. It commissioned research papers on such issues as education and job training. Although the main focus of the report is education, it also looks at such things as infrastructure.

Senior government officials say they have looked at the report and find several items interesting, especially programs that will yield economic returns.

But it's unclear whether Dalton McGuinty's Liberals will be able to finance any of its recommendations immediately, with the province weighed down by a \$5.6-billion deficit.

The panel says the money need not start flowing immediately, but rather in a year or so. It says money could be redirected to education by slashing electricity subsidies to consumers, cutting some programs in the industrial sector and even ending some economic subsidies to remote communities.

The report calls for making junior and senior kindergarten classes full-day across the province and putting in place a comprehensive child-care program for preschool children, much like the one in Quebec. In contrast to other provinces, Quebec has poured hundreds of millions of dollars into a \$7-a-day child-care system.

Strengthening an early-childhood program in Ontario would cost \$1.5-billion a year, the report says. But sources say that investing in the early years will have a dramatic effect on children's educational performance and social-adjustment skills.

"This doesn't all have to be done overnight. You can start with senior kindergarten, then move to junior and then move to pre-JK," one said.

The panel found elementary and secondary schools reasonably well-funded by national and international standards, a view sure to anger some school board officials and teachers who say that more money needs to be injected into the system. The panel says the central problem is not money but lack of accountability and effective governance.

The report calls for the revitalization of Ontario's school boards by making them more accountable to the provincial government with regular reporting and student testing.

It recommends that more decision-making authority be given to principals and school councils: for example, to put new programs in place and organize after-school activities. At present, this is done at the school-board level.

- reprinted from the Globe and Mail

**Region:** Quebec <sup>[2]</sup>

Ontario <sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** kindergarten <sup>[4]</sup>

pre-school <sup>[5]</sup>

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