

Ontario's Education System was Affected by the Education Quality Improvement Act, What Changes did It Make?

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Abstract

In the autumn of 1997, 126,000 Ontario teachers decided to go on because the combined result of Bill 160 and Bill 104 was effectively to end the independence of local school boards. This paper will analyze the Education Quality Improvement Act (EQI Act) and will critically analyze the implications and consequences of this act on the Ontario education system. As well it is argued through the thesis that The Education Quality Improvement Act was reflective of the Ontario government's desire to control spending and the consequences of this have been negative for Ontario education. I will first present the conceptual framework that it is using to analyze this education policy. Second, I will provide an overview of the key financial aspects of the EQI Act as well as show how it was reflective of the government's desire to control spending. Third, I will outline four main consequences of this push for financial accountability. Finally, I will explore the implications and consequences of this act on the Ontario education system with a Critical Policy Analysis perspective.

1. Introduction

The focus of this paper is to examine Bill 160 EQI (i.e., The Education Quality Improvement Act) as well as will critically analyze the implications and consequences of this act on the Ontario education system. I will first present the conceptual framework that it is using to analyze this education policy. Then I will consider an overview of the key financial aspects of the EQI Act as well as I will show how it was reflective of the government's desire to control spending. This paper is researched and analyzed from a Critical Policy Analysis perspective.

2. Literature Review

The Ontario government unveiled the Education Quality Improvement Act (Bill 160) On 22 September 1997. According to MacLellan [3], it was one of the most centralizing pieces of legislation that affected Ontario's schools. There were many key components of the bill which included repealing the School Boards and Teachers Collective Negotiations Act (Bill 100) and placing teaching bargaining under the Labour Relations Act. Its main objective was to use non-teaching professionals to deliver selected

programs, remove principals and vice principals from teacher union bargaining units, remove the taxing powers of local school boards, increase the number of instructional days by two weeks for elementary students and by three weeks for secondary students, and set standards for class sizes [3].

Bill 160 mandated more financial accountability, requiring boards, and the Ministry to publish annual Financial Report Cards" to show how their dollars are spent. The Bill removed principals from the teachers' collective bargaining units, thereby taking away their rights to strike and to collectively bargain through the teachers' unions [5]. Further, Anderson and Jaafar mentioned that the government had introduced new rules concerning class size. A maximum average of 25 students per class in primary and 22 students per in secondary schools was fixed. The government had also reduced the teacher preparation time and forced the teachers to participate compulsorily in various curriculum planning and other activities.

The paper is argued through the thesis that The Education Quality Improvement Act was reflective of the Ontario government's desire to control spending and the consequences of this have been negative for Ontario education. As well it outlines four main consequences of this push for financial accountability. Finally, it will then explore the implications and consequences of this act on the Ontario education system.

3. EQI Act: Description and Components

The Education Quality Improvement Act (EQI Act) focused on teachers, school boards, per pupil funding, and taxpayers. This policy became important for teachers especially in the province of Ontario. It also legislated that class size limits, teacher preparation time, administrative time, and the length of the school year would be set by the province and not through local school board negotiations with teacher unions. Teachers had to work hard, and the government even increased the number of teaching days and the instructional time requirements, which resulted in reduced preparation time for high school teachers. In other words, teachers had to spend more time with students, and they had to work with less time for preparation, not

taking into account the quality of time spent with students, individually or in groups.

On the other hand, the government also announced its goal to make high school teacher contribution to additional curricular programs and activities compulsory, not voluntary, where principals and vice principals were not in the same group with teachers. This meant that principals and vice principals could not join strikes nor the contradiction funding which teachers could not bargain.

The Common Sense Revolution (CSR) outlined major changes to a multitude of programs and services, peculiarly in education, that occurred when the Ontario Progressive Conservative Party was elected to office [1]. The Harris Government introduced sweeping change with The Fewer School Boards Act and The Education Quality Improvement Act. The Harris government introduced a system in which all funding available to a school board was determined by the province, and every cent raised for educational purposes was decided by the province too. Elected trustees found themselves stripped of local taxing powers and their position reduced, through governance changes, to a consultative role in the education bureaucracy. EQI Act centralized control over the amount of money to be raised for education and how that money was to be spent; the formulas would spell out how much money each local board would receive and what that money was to be spent on. Thus, the stage was set for much profound cuts \$8 billion overall. Education's share of that reduction was estimated to be in the neighborhood of \$1 billion [5].

Annual Financial Report Cards were published by the Ministry to show how their dollars were spent, and the EQI Act mandated more financial accountability, requiring boards. The EQI Act was not just about money, but many of its provisions were linked to a policy of student-focused spending. The EQI Act defined classroom and non-classroom spending. This was meaningful, given the government's promise to protect classroom funding from budget cuts. Classroom costs included teachers, supply teachers, classroom assistants, learning materials, classroom supplies, library and computer use, guidance and psychological service, and staff development. Non-classroom expenses included teacher preparation time, school administrators, district consultants, and custodial service [13, 9].

Money can either help to improve the education system or can make it worse. The Harris government tried to develop cost-control focusing on the Ontario Education system. It believed that two issues, namely efficiency and accountability, could attract taxpayers' attention, but this paper will demonstrate how this is wrong. The policy was to develop a private education system in Ontario. White says "The Harris government intends to reduce the role of

the state and create the maximum possible scope for the private sector. In addition, it wants the public sector to function in a more business-like manner" (p. 101).

Accordingly, these ideas are set out in the Common Sense Revolution (CSR), the certificate that clearly outlines the policy agenda of the Harris government. This intent is also obvious in the legislation that has been passed since coming to office by the government, as well as in its 1996 budget and prior economic and fiscal statements [12]. On the other hand, the CSR adopted a policy of alignment that would impose a clear division of labor between the political leadership as policy makers and the public service as policy implementers. Burak recalls, the Harris government was very clear about wanting to actually implement the CSR [2, 4, 7, 10].

On the one hand, Howard Hampton, the new leader of the NDP, let out a leaked copy of Veronica Lacey's performance contract' as deputy minister of education, in which she was directed to slash \$667 million from the schools' budget during 1998-9 [5]. Gidney says by Thursday both Johnson and Harris had confirmed the additional cuts, effectively undermining their earlier claims that there were no budget-reduction targets. Talks dragged on through the weekend. Neither side budged (p.237).

The funding formula had a critical effect in the situation of teachers in the province of Ontario, and it was a fundamental reason for the big strike in the North America in 1997. Before the strike, the government appeared to have the general support of the public, and it expected the teachers to suffer a debasing defeat. But what turned parents and other concerned citizens against the EQI Act was the discovery of a leaked draft copy of a "performance contract" for Veronica Lacey, the deputy minister of education, which revealed that she was given the goal of cutting \$667 million from the elementary and secondary schools in 1998-99. Confronted with this information, Harris admitted that the education budget would be cut by that amount. Harris and his education minister tried to convince the public that they had no specific target for further education cuts. But the leaked document exposed the real intent of the government, which was to find money to reduce income taxes, as it had promised it would do. The nearly \$700 million would be equivalent to the amount of money the government would lose from reducing income taxes. What effect will the removal of nearly \$700 million from elementary and secondary schools have on Ontario's education system? It will increase class size, even though there is already a law capping class size at 20 for elementary schools and 25 for high schools. But the government has ensured that government regulations will take precedence over legislation passed by elected representatives [5].

The funding formula does not provide sufficient funding for the basics of the system; that is to say, the payment of teachers, principals, and the operation and maintenance of school facilities. Addressing these problems is not a simple matter of sending more money into the existing formula structure, because that structure itself reflects a vision for the school system in this province that is at variance with the government's reform objectives. The main objective of the Harris government in designing the funding formula was financial - to control and reduce the provincial government's total financial obligation. The formula's success in doing just that provided much of the fuel for funding discussion. "But the funding formula is more than a mechanism for rationalizing funding cuts. In its detailed provision and restriction, it reflects a well-defined ideological perspective" [11].

4. Critical Analysis of the EQI Act: Implications and Consequences

First and foremost, the formula could not clearly define education, namely it made around a narrow definition of education and of the real role of schools in our communities. It provided no preparation for society use of schools. It made no provision for student health-programs, nutrition programs, and things that have proven positive impacts on learning. It made no provision for programs to support the role of parents in their children's learning. In its failure to provide funding for the use of the school space for childcare, the formula embedded the previous government's hostility towards publicly funded and regulated childcare. It provided totally inadequate funding for adult education [11].

Rapidly expanding debt was inherited by the Harris government. Around this time, people started to accept that Ontario's public education system was failing. A freshly completed report entitled "For the Love of Learning: Report of the Royal Commission on Learning" was also created. The commission's mandate was to set "new directions in education" to support "economic renewal and social justice" [5], and to determine how to achieve "appropriate measures of accountability, relevant curriculum content to meet the needs of students and society, improved retention rates, effective links to work and higher education, an effective system of education and increased levels of public involvement in education" (Royal Commission on Learning, 1994). This mandate closely reflects the neoliberal-utilitarian tenets of economic self-interest, marketable skills for the workforce, and increased efficiency and productivity [5]. According to Anderson and Jaafar propose that Bill 104 introduced four substantive changes [5]. First, it reduced the number of boards from 129 to 72 and called them "district school boards"; this legislation came from a

government committee report from January of 1996 that recommended a huge diminution in the number of school boards. Second, the legislation declared Francophone school boards (public and Catholic) as distinct entities, rather than as sections within the English-medium boards. Third, the number of school board trustees per board was cut by Bill 104, and their salaries capped at \$5,000 per year (in large urban boards trustees were being paid as much as \$25,000 to 40,000 a year). The Toronto public school systems were under legislation with a powerful impact. One of the effects was that it required consolidation of the existing six Toronto public boards into one district board serving over 300,000 students. For reduction and duplication of services, consolidation of school boards was supposed. "Critics argued that it eroded community participation in the governance of schools and that it reduced teacher and student access to significant district support services that had evolved under the previous system". Finally, this act also set up the Education Improvement Commission to oversee the board amalgamations and approve budgets, administrative appointments, and the initial operations of individual boards (p. 12). The Harris government assumed this agenda with pleasure and passed the Fewer School Boards Act in 1997, which amalgamated Ontario's 129 school boards into 72, reduced the number of school trustees country-wide from roughly 1,900 to 700, and limited their salary increase at \$5,000. This act also established the Education Improvement Commission to oversee the board amalgamations and approve budgets, administrative appointments, and the initial operations of individual boards [5].

Despite all of this, school boards still do not receive funding to support adult continuing education, and public access to school facilities has improved but is still limited. As a counterpoint, the provincial government can demonstrate that, on a per-student basis, elementary and secondary education funding is actually greater than it was in 1997, the year before the introduction of the Harris government's funding formula. While that is true, it is misleading. It is true that on a per student inflation adjusted basis, total operating funding is approximately \$900 million higher than it was in 1997. But that does not take into account the fact that provincially mandated changes in school operations - additional funding specifically earmarked for class size reductions, elementary teacher preparation time, and special support teachers in secondary schools - account for \$1,800 million of the operating funding provided in 2009-10. On a basis that is comparable to the level of activity required of boards in 1997, total funding is approximately \$900 million lower on a per-student inflation-adjusted basis [5,2].

Second, the formula is clearly designed to produce equality in funding regardless of

circumstances or need, rather than equity. Before continuing this discussion, it is necessary to define the difference between equity and equality. Educators use the term equity to talk about a wide variety of the population related to gender, race, poverty, disability, etc. Many also consider equity to be more comprehensive and flexible than equality because it implies the concept of fairness or some differences in education processes rather than the concept of sameness when dealing with a diverse student population [11].

In other words, Ontario has a different demography in comparison to other provinces, namely more than 90 per cent of immigrants at the first time prefer to stop in this province; also, Ontario has the highest number of students who have English as a Second Language. These students are from different social classes, so naturally, those students will not do as well during standardized testing and they need more attention, under such a view financial formula is made some inequity situation for different students and their families. Delhi believes parents tended to be split on the subject. Socioeconomic status became entangled in the issue with the majority of people from higher income classes disagreeing with the EQI Act. Some academics propose that the EQI Act laid the groundwork for the creation of charter schools and a two-tiered have/have not system of education. The government may argue that school choice enhances overall education, but the current research does not support this assumption. On the other hand, the centralization of fiscal control also made a different constitutional question, and one that was even more fundamental: the right to gathering local property taxes and how the government gets way with removing that right? The answer was a political seal stuck between the government and the Catholic school, it was not a formally speaking, that both sides denied, but a deal nonetheless [5].

According to Gidney, for some years a few Catholic leaders had suggested that they were willing, in return for equitable financing, to suspend or put in abeyance their constitutional right to levy taxes for school. (p. 253). Funding benchmarks are based on province broad standards, which are thoroughly insensitive to local differences in needs and costs. What this means is that formula factors were supposed to beget additional funding for boards with extraordinary high needs, funding level were adjusted the outcomes of board, so this funding formula could be different from board to board [11].

Gidney believes formula is only formula. The real challenge was to write in the dollar amounts. How much money was to be spent overall? And how much of that was to be put in the various envelopes the formula encompassed? (p. 250). Consequent to the release of the May documents four ministry appointed teams started to work on some of more

technical problems, such as the cost of school accommodation and maintenance, or the student cost of special education. Finally, the government and its senior officials released the dollar amounts in late March 1998. The minister of education announced that funding would remain stable at over \$13 billion for each of the next three years. And that did not include an additional \$385 million for a restructuring and transition fund. This means the new funding model would increase the share of resources to classrooms from 61% to 65% [5].

Another contradiction from the Harris government is the class size in the early grades. Smaller classes mean more classes, and this inevitably means more money. This also contradicts the idea of cutting the budget. Teacher preparation time is anytime during the school day where the teachers are not directly teaching the students. It may involve creating lesson plans, marking papers, assisting students and conversing with parents. The people who have faced the most working changes by this new legislation are high school teachers. Their preparation time has been severely cut and they have been forced to teach an additional period each day [5].

The funding situation prompted the emergence of an alternative system of monitoring the state of funding for public education that does not depend on government control of data about the costs of education at the local level. A parent lobby group, People for Education, was built in the context of the debate surrounding the passage of EQI Act. This group set about to fulfill and publish the results of annual surveys of elementary and secondary education across the province. The surveys investigate many issues, such as class size, library services, textbook availability, school budgets, support personnel and services, how much money local parent groups and teachers are contributing to supplement provincial funding, and how these supplemental funds are used. Centralization of funding and the removal of local board authority to raise additional money through property tax adjustments severely constrained the unions' capacity to bargain increased wages and benefits. Legislation to control things like class size, preparation time, instructional time, and the number of instructional days by provincial regulation, rather than by contract negotiation removed much of the traditional working conditions content of collective bargaining from local teacher union control [12].

Third, the funding formula insufficiently supports local priorities and the provincial government had limited control over how its grant money was actually spent by the boards. Despite the equalization feature designed to ensure that youngsters in assessment-poor boards had the same opportunities as that elsewhere, local per-pupil spending still varied enormously. The EQI Act

centralized control and monitoring over the quantity of money to be raised for education and how that money was to be spent. “The third part of the Tories’ restructuring initiative was the new funding model: the formulas which would spell out how much money each local board would receive and what that money was to be spent on. The problems of the existing funding model had been recognized for years.” (p. 249) The funding formula eventually became excessively complex – consisting of thirty-five different kinds of grants. As new sources of funding were added to the formula, it also became increasingly incomprehensible [5].

Namely the formula set out to punish large urban public-school boards for what the Harris government supposed to be excessive spending and their resistance of the government’s funding those elements that were intended to address largely urban cost drivers, the Harris era formula in practice has been almost completely insensitive to the cost of providing education urban centers. Control over how its grant money was actually spent by the boards had been limited by the provincial government. And despite equalization features designed to ensure that all students especially youngsters in assessment poor boards had the same opportunities as those elsewhere, local per pupil cost still varied enormously. By the mid 1990s, the main policy of NDP and then the Tories not only wanted a clear formula, accountability, and equity across the province, but one that would focus a large amount of spending directly on the classroom [5, 8].

According to Gidney writes structure on the efforts of both the Sweeney committee and the Working model on Education Finance, the Ministry of Education sketched a new model in September 1996 and invited reaction from the education community [5]. The Ontario budget of May 1997, while continuing to reduce the total level of public spending, also included a burst of new and repackaged spending commitments that were redolent of electoral calculation. The printed version of the budget was even subtitled “Investing in Future” and illustrated with picture of a hospital operating theatre and of students working at classroom computer. Its unsubtle message was designed to counter a growing popular perception that valued public service. Particularly in the areas of health care and education, are being needlessly scarified or placed in jeopardy for no reason other than to serve a doctrinaire agenda. “There was not much that was new in principle; indeed, it maintained the traditional tools of education finance: a ‘foundation grant’ designed to provide basic per pupil funding for the common needs of every classroom, and a series of ‘special purpose’ grants to cover variable costs ranging from special education to transportation.” In other words, the highly solicited requirement that special education funding

be spent on special education turns out on closer analysis, to be a smokescreen for the fact that the formula actually provided for substantially less special education programming the school board were actually delivering before the formula was introduced.

Fourth, in the education system and control cost issue two kinds of cost should be separated-classroom and non-classroom costs. The distinction between classroom and non-classroom spending around which the formula is supposedly unrelated to any coherent perspective on how students learn or how schools support learning. For instance, there has not been any explication as to why preparation time, school principle and vice principals, and school operation and maintenance are considered as non-classroom expenditure. These constrains have driven some disputable unfavorable decision, for example the closure of Toronto’s outdoor education center, expenditures considered by the Ministry to be administrative in nature. These distinctions may work as populist campaign rhetoric; however, for running a school system they have no legitimate place [5]. Stephen and Jaafar in their papers have a clear definition about classroom and non classroom cost: Classroom costs included teachers, supply teachers, classroom assistants, learning materials, classroom supplies, library and computers for classroom use, guidance and psychological services, and staff development. Non-classroom expenses included teacher preparation time, school administrators, district consultants, and custodial services (p, 13) [5].

It is important to consider that the provincial government funding only covers about 35% of the cost of elementary and secondary education in the province. This includes even the provincial contribution to the teachers’ pension fund. This has two important implications for the Harris downloading scheme, (Ontario Federation of Labor, 1997) [5]. Ontario federation of labor writes first, 35% share of funding on average across the province does not provide enough leverage either to force school boards to cut in provincial grants, or to influence the areas in which spending cuts were made (p, 197). In other wards, that fact is obvious when you look at the responses of school boards to the \$400 million provincial funding cut announced in the fall of 1995. On the other hand, most school boards either raised taxes, cut highly visible service, or increased class sizes overall- all contrary to Harris government’s stated intention of targeting non classroom expenses. Second, to the area that changes impose by the provincial government actually result in reduced spending on education, only 40% the resulting savings would accrue to the provincial governments fully 60% would accrue to school boards and their property government, this presents the unattractive proposition of having to pay the

political price for striking the cuts but being unable to recoup more than 40% of the resulting savings. It means it has been clear right from beginning that the Harris government really has no goals of their own for education system on cash cow from which to fund part of their in-come tax cut [2].

What is the stated intention or purpose of the policy? The Harris government introduced Bill 160: The Education Quality Improvement Act (EQI Act). In an interview, he said, “There is more than enough money in the system: the problem lies in the fact that that it is not spent to improve the quality of classroom education. Stephen and Jaafar say they tried to define classroom and non-classroom spending. Classroom costs focused on teachers, supply teaches, learning material, classroom supplies, staff development, library and computer use for classrooms and classroom assistants. Non-classroom costs included teacher preparation time, district consultants, school administrators and custodial services (p.13) [5]. The Harris government introduced a fiscal formula in which all funding available to a school board was determined by the province, and every cent raised for educational purposes was decided by the province too. They believed with centralized system in the fiscal; they can improve the education level. But in the time indicated their policy was to develop a private education system in Ontario. The White’s theory is reasonable who believes “The Harris government intends to reduce the role of the state and create the maximum possible scope for the private sector. In addition, it wants the public sector to function in a more business-like manner (p. 101)” [5]. The formula Cuts the number of school board, trustees per board and set out to punish large urban public-school boards for what Harris government deemed to be excessive spending to cut funding for education. Explain about these questions can help us to achieve more information about this policy: When did the construction of the policy text begin, and why now? And whose interests are the policy intended to serve?

Gidney says the policy text was introduced by John Snobelen on 22 September and passed after some amendment on 1 December 1997 (p. 247). This policy had two contradiction poles: the Harris government and the teachers. With the establishment of this policy and a reduction in education funding the Harris government could support his deficit funding. In other words, they could have more flexibility in taxation that would be trump card for the next election. On the other hand, teachers were in a critical situation because they had to spend more time with students and even their parents, not the amount or quality of time spent with students individually or in groups in other words, reduction fiscal budget had a direct effect in teachers’ life [8]. After the Harris government this policy changed and only teachers, students, and their parents have a bad

reminiscence about this policy. In all policies knowing this question is vital for analyst: What are the key concepts of the policy?

The funding formula is supposed to demonstrate that the system already has more than enough resources to do the job, and the Government claims to be motivated by a concern for equity among students. With these issues the Harris government started to develop a centralization policy, monitoring cost, reduced the number of boards, and renamed them “district school boards” for improving the education system. But in this policy “funding formula” some inconsistencies and contradiction issues existed such as the formula is made around a narrow definition of education and of the real role of schools in our communities. The formula is clearly designed to produce equality in funding regardless of circumstances or need, rather than equity. This formula not only could not establish equality between students, but also, we concluded that directly or indirectly, race and class figure in popular school’s enrolment decisions, often in ways that increase segregation, social divisions, and school achievement.

2.3 Is resistance collection or individual?

The 126,000 Ontario teachers decided to go on strike in the autumn of 1997. The combined result of Bill 160 and Bill 104 (The Fewer School Boards Act) was effectively to end the independence of local school boards. Bill 160 relieved municipalities of about \$5.4 billion spent on schools and gave the provincial cabinet unprecedented power over future education tax rate increases without requiring legislative approval. Gidney says “on Thursday, solidarity crumbled. Three of the teachers’ unions OPSTF, FWTAO and the French language affiliate called for their members to return to work the following Monday. Finally, after two weeks teachers were in classes, but some believed centralization of funding means the government can remove as much as it wants, and they have called Bill 160 a “money grab and a power grab”.

3. Conclusion

The main problem associated with The Education Quality Improvement (EQI) Act is the complete authority of the provincial government. Mike Harris had an obligation to cut the budget. He believed much money is pumped into the education system. Since 1995, the Conservative government has built a politicized administrative agency that has adopted a confrontational stance towards stakeholders, reduced the powers of school board trustees, decimated middle-level professional staffing, and muffled teacher union executives. Decision-making now seems to reside with Harris advisers and key cabinet

ministers, whose stance is driven by an amalgam of neo-liberal and neo-conservative ideology and by voter opinion. This neo-conservative approach differs in its embrace of a social conservatism - that government maintains social order and that excessive concern for individual choice and liberty not be allowed to undermine it.

The Harris government scheduled the policy for privatization of the Education System, especially in the province of Ontario. Centralization and monitoring costs were fundamental reasons to reduce the education budget to compensate the Harris government deficit. Graham White says "The Harris government intends to reduce the role of the state and create the maximum possible scope for the private sector. In addition, it wants the public sector to function in a more business-like manner."

In the large urban school, the benchmark for maintenance and school operation was set at a level so far below the actual costs incurred that it can only have been intended to drive two issues, such as boards to contract out these services and the Canadian Union of Public Employees out of the education sector. The Harris government could not legally have implemented it directly, so they tried to use its funding formula to make a change to the school board operation. The inadequate level of funding for school operation and maintenance and the insensitivity of the formula and a major contributor to deteriorating maintenance standard is schools.

The fundamental policy of the formula set out to punish large urban public-school boards such as Ontario for what Harris government considered to be excessive spending to cut funding for education. By underfunding those elements that were intended to address largely urban cost drive, the Harris era formula in practice has been almost completely insensitive to the cost of providing education in urban centers.

Cut the number of school board trustees per board and capped their salaries at \$5,000 per year and the formula is clearly designed to produce equality in funding regardless of circumstances or need, rather than equity.

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