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MEDIA RELEASE

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Sixty percent of school boards to cut jobs; more expected

Liberal failure to fix faulty funding formula creating another year of crisis

Toronto, Ont. – In a preliminary tally of 45 Ontario school board budgets, over 60 per cent of boards plan to make staff cuts in 2007-2008 as they wage a battle to balance budgets in the face of a faulty funding formula that the Liberal government has failed to fix, according to the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) Ontario. As well, the union's analysis shows that shortfalls in the hundreds of millions of dollars are being met with runs on reserve funds and cuts to programs like adult education.

"With at least 575 support staff positions to be cut so far, the Liberals are fuelling a job crisis in Ontario in many communities that are already reeling from cuts to the manufacturing sector," said CUPE Ontario President Sid Ryan at a media conference today at Queen's Park. The numbers are based on reports and information available to date from 45 of the province's 72 public, Catholic and Francophone boards.

Ryan said that special needs children and their parents will be especially hard hit with at least 300 Educational Assistant (EA) jobs being cut in the coming term. Added to that, cuts to custodial/maintenance workers and secretarial positions mean that boards are compromising cleanliness and safety in order to meet the province's requirements for balanced budgets.

A partial list of school boards and the minimum estimated number of support staff job cuts for 2007-2008 includes:

Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario: 41
Durham Catholic District School Board: 27.5
Hastings & Prince Edward Counties District School Board: 29
Lambton Kent District School Board: 39
Near North District School Board: 50
Ottawa-Carleton Catholic District School Board: 52
Peterborough, Victoria, Northumberland and Clarington Catholic Board: 41
Toronto District School Board: 500
Trillium-Lakelands District School Board: 50
Windsor-Essex Catholic District School Board: 31

"Premier McGuinty has styled himself as the 'Education Minister' but over his term of office, school boards have continued to cut jobs and raid reserves in order to balance budgets that are underfunded because the Liberals have failed to fix the faulty funding formula," said Ryan.

Last fall, the union released research showing board-by-board shortfalls totalling \$300 million and use of reserves amounting to \$60 million province-wide. Today's figures, based on 45 of 72 boards reporting, show an estimated funding shortfall of more than \$166 million, the difference between what the province provides and what boards say they need for the 2007-2008 year. To date, more than one-third of these boards report that they are using reserve funds totalling \$24 million to make up shortfalls.

“Over 500 support staff cuts at the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) are being deferred to next year in order to make this year’s budget look better,” said Giselle Burton, Vice President of CUPE 4400 that represents TDSB members. “How can anyone believe that reducing 500 education worker jobs—people who work directly with students—would not have a drastic impact on students’ success and students’ safety.”

Deep cuts are also being made in adult education, including adult ESL and other programs that help newcomers gain skills to succeed, in boards including Kitchener-Waterloo public and Catholic boards. “The problem is that, while the funding formula provides money for instructors, there is no money to cover the heat, light and classroom space for these programs,” said CUPE 4400 Vice President Terri Preston.

Ryan said the fact that the province has allowed some boards including Upper Canada, Toronto public and Catholic, to run deficits while other boards such as Ottawa are applying for permission, suggests that the Liberal government is bending the rules to avoid messy news with an election around the corner. He added that new regulations that compel boards to pass balanced budgets by the end of June—two months earlier than usual—also seem suspiciously timed to suit provincial election plans.

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