



Lisa Thompson, MPP
Ministry of Education
5th Floor, 438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON M5G 2K8

Dear Ms Thompson and the Ministry of Education team,

On behalf of the Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators (CODE), we are sending this submission of feedback on the proposed Class Size changes outlined by the Ontario Government. As a charitable organization and subject association representing over 1000 educators in Ontario, CODE is a crucial stakeholder with expertise, experience, and ideas to provide on these changes and the impact they will have on students participating in arts programs across the province.

CODE appreciates that our government is committed to discussing class size options and engaging in dialogue on the planned changes. We hope that the concerns expressed in our submission are seriously considered, and we would like to meet directly with you and your team to discuss them in more depth.

Before responding to the consultation questions outlined, we wish to state that the determination of class sizes is part of the bargaining process that occurs between the provincial government and the federations. Given that this is a contract year, **the decision to alter class sizes needs to be done in dialogue with educational labour partners.** We are disappointed that our government has announced such sweeping changes before that dialogue has taken place, and we strongly recommend that you put these changes on hold until those negotiations occur.

In response to the three questions outlined in the consultation, please see our feedback below.

What are the opportunities for the planned changes in relation to the four key goals?
--

Goal 1: Student Achievement: Success and well-being of every child.

Provincial, national, and international evidence clearly shows that the current Ontario school system has high rates of student achievement. According to international measurements PCAP (2016), PISA (2015), and TIMSS (2015), Ontario students rank 2nd in Canada and are in the Top 10 of the world in mathematics, and 2nd in Canada and 5th in the world in reading ([Our Kids Succeed, Ontario Teachers' Federation](#)). Ontario's graduation rate reached a high in 2017, with a five-year graduation rate of 86.3 percent and a four-year graduation rate of 79.8 percent ([Getting Results, Ontario Ministry of Education](#)).

As experienced educators, we know that **student achievement is strongly linked to student engagement**, and that dance, drama, media arts, music, and visual arts have a vital role to play in engaging young people. Dance and drama promote active and dynamic learning for all students and particularly engage kinesthetic learners who often struggle in traditional classroom settings.

CODE knows that the arts play a key role in preparing students to work collaboratively, communicate effectively, and problem-solve ethically, which are all necessary for our current and future workforce. [The World Economic Forum](#), in its comparison of job skills needed today versus those required in 2020, identifies key areas such as negotiating, coordinating with others, and emotional intelligence-- all areas that the arts are uniquely positioned to address. Drama and dance deeply enrich these Global Competencies, which are integral to 21st Century Learning ([Council of Ministers of Education](#)).

Increasing class sizes in secondary schools and introducing mandatory e-learning courses will make important elective courses like dance and drama harder to run. It will deprive students of the engaging, active learning that contributes to their success in school. Dance and drama promote collaboration and the face-to-face contact necessary to create a sense of community in adolescent learners. **CODE's concern is that larger class sizes and mandatory e-learning will deprive students from important human contact in an increasingly digital world.**

This concern is echoed by the [Toronto Star Editorial Board](#): "For [some] students, the only thing that gets them through the door so they can learn the basics is the elective class or extracurricular activity that sparks their passion." Cutting elective courses in the arts will hurt students who are "sparked" by engagement in the arts, and will contribute to absenteeism, declining achievement, and lower graduation rates.

In regards to student safety and well-being, **larger class sizes present serious safety concerns in arts classrooms.** Dance and drama are active subjects where students need ample space to move safely. Classrooms designed for 20 students cannot accommodate classes that may exceed 30 students. Many dance and drama classes are held in spaces that are not purpose-built, such as auditoriums and cafeterias, where equipment and layout already present safety issues. Adding more bodies to these classrooms dramatically increases the risk of injury and can cause serious harm to students.

Goal 2: Protecting Front Line Staff: The planned changes are to be managed through attrition protection for teachers.

Despite the government's assertion that teachers will not lose jobs under the proposed changes, evidence from staffing procedures this spring clearly shows that school boards are experiencing higher rates of teacher surpluses, with 292 teachers in Peel District and 121 teachers from Near North School declared surplus alone. Though attrition funding will lessen this number, the fact remains that fewer caring adults will be in school buildings over the next four years, and this is detrimental to students' achievement and well-being.

Educators play a vital supervisory role in schools and with fewer adults in schools students will have less face-to-face time with the teachers upon whom they depend. Many young people today are coping with learning difficulties and mental health issues, and with a decrease in staff and increase in teacher workload, there will be less time to attend to student needs. According to the [Mental Health Commission](#), 75% of those diagnosed with mental health issues are diagnosed between the ages of 16 and 25. To cut staff, and particularly guidance, student success, and support staff during such a crucial period in young people's lives will surely worsen the youth mental health crisis in Ontario. Larger class sizes will not lead to increased student resiliency; in fact, [the Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University](#) asserts that "the single most common factor for children who develop resilience is at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver, or other adult." Having fewer of these caring adults in schools will stretch our system's resources too thin and put our most high-needs students at risk.

Dance, drama, media arts, music, and visual arts educators play a pivotal role in creating extracurricular programs that make students' school lives richer. Many adults, when looking back on their school years, remember being part of a school performance or band as a formative experience. They recall a visual art teacher who sparked their imagination, or a dance teacher who recognized their talents before anyone else did. CODE is gravely concerned that school musicals, plays, choirs, and the many other artistic pursuits that benefit our students will also suffer from cuts due to this proposed reduction of teaching staff.

Goal 3: Fiscal Responsibility: Delivering services in an effective and efficient manner.

Goal 4: Evidence-based Decision Making: Grounded in sound policy, inter-jurisdictional scans, and empirical research.

Inefficiencies in the school system exist, but making the deep cuts proposed directly hurts students and jeopardizes their futures. Our government should be looking to other areas for financial savings. **There is no evidence in the results of the 2018 education survey conducted by our government to suggest that Ontarians support increasing class sizes.** The review did not include questions about class size, and despite repeated requests, our government has not provided data to support the assertion that parents, students, and educators support these changes. There is, however, strong evidence to suggest that many Ontarians support the elimination of EQAO as a fiscal measure, as outlined by [People in Education in its summary of the survey results](#):

While one-third of respondents said that standardized testing should continue in grades 3, 6, and 9, almost the same percentage of respondents said that there shouldn't be any standardized testing. When asked how they feel about EQAO, over half of the respondents said that it 'disrupts education by requiring teachers to teach to the test.'

The results from the telephone town halls reflect an even stronger attitude towards standardized testing. Sixty-eight percent of participants in the town halls said that they thought that Ontario didn't need more standardized testing, and 62% didn't value the results of the standardized tests. **In fact, many of the responses pointed to eliminating EQAO, which would also be a way of saving money** [emphasis ours].

Current data contradicts our government's assertion that increased class sizes align Ontario with other provinces in Canada. [The Ottawa Citizen](#) detailed the challenges in comparing provincial class size data. It noted that New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan do not collect such statistics, that New Brunswick and Nova Scotia have "hard" and "soft" caps that keep class sizes from exceeding a specific number, and that three provinces (British Columbia, Alberta, and Prince Edward Island) currently have smaller class sizes than Ontario.

It is CODE's position that the decision to increase class sizes is not sufficiently grounded in evidence, and we strongly encourage our government to take a closer look at the data and consult with stakeholders, experts, parents and students to determine less harmful ways of making financial decisions about education in Ontario.

Will the status quo in grades 1-3 and modest changes to grades 4-8 allow for continued flexibility in organizing school board class sizes?

Status quo is a positive step for grades 1 to 3. Modest changes to grades 4 to 8 are not as productive. Grades 4, 5, and 6 form the junior division with core classroom teachers continuing to work with whole classes. We know that literacy and numeracy are developmental in the early years; it is in the junior grades that teachers begin to identify those students who are struggling as well as excelling in these areas and differentiate instruction. EQAO test results from grade 3 are followed up in grade 4 and testing takes place again in grades 6.

Grades 7 and 8 are the first two years of the intermediate division where students experience both core instruction as a group as well as some rotary with subject specialists. Almost the same number of students in grades 7 and 8 are suspended as those in grades 9 to 12, and suspensions more than double between grade 6 (1.62%) and grade 7 (2.83%) in most school boards ([Caring and Safe Schools Report, 2017-2018, TDSB](#)). This is a crucial period for young people as puberty begins and the challenges of adolescence and sexuality arise and self-control and maturity fully develop. Larger class sizes in grades 7 and 8 are not beneficial to students.

Are there any other comments on the planned changes, keeping in mind the key goals outlined above, you would like to provide?

The impact that class size changes will have on dance, drama, media arts, music, and visual arts programs will be detrimental to students and will last for many years to come. Recently, [the Toronto District School Board released a list of the 313 classes cut for 2019-2020](#), and it is clear to see how damaging these cuts are for elective courses in the arts, technology, science, math and family studies.

When elective classes are cut, particularly at the Grade 9 or 10 levels, programs are effectively wiped out because students will not have the prerequisites necessary to move on to senior level classes. CODE is gravely concerned that due to these changes, drama and dance programs could quickly disappear from schools in Ontario.

These cuts will also deeply impact small and rural schools. In the Avon Maitland District School Board, 69 secondary school teachers have been declared redundant, a reduction of 17% of teaching staff. Student Success teachers and Re-engagement Coordinator, who work with students with special needs, as well as Learning Coaches will be eliminated, as they have been in Peel District and other school boards. As Shane Restall explains, these changes will “result in ballooning class sizes in some subjects, cuts in specialty programming with small classes, fewer choices for students and more classes that are multi-grade . . .it is already difficult to offer a variety of program choices for students [in rural schools]. These cuts will make an existing problem much worse or even impossible” ([Kathleen Miller, Goderich Signal-Star](#)).

These cuts are real and they are being experienced by school boards across Ontario right now. They will undoubtedly diminish the quality of education provided to our students.

Conclusion

The Ontario education system, and specifically its Arts curriculum, is admired around the world. When the Australian government announced its plans to include the Arts in its first-ever National Curriculum, curriculum writers looked to the 2009 Ontario Arts Curriculum, describing it as “an outstanding model of thoughtful, forward thinking arts curriculum” (Pascoe, 2018). It is CODE’s position that the proposed cuts will severely damage the very programs that make Ontario a leader in arts education across the world.

Most importantly, increasing class sizes will rob students of valuable formative experiences. It will jeopardize their physical safety and diminish their academic achievement, depriving them of opportunities to develop skills integral to their post-secondary plans and future employment. **For these reasons, we strongly urge our government to reconsider its plan to increase class sizes in Ontario.** Our government must engage in positive and ongoing dialogue with key stakeholders such as CODE, as well as labour partners, educators, parents, and students to maintain and improve Ontario’s world-class education system. We look forward to continuing this vital conversation.

Sincerely,



Kim Snider, OCT
Chair, Advocacy Committee
Past President

Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators
Jane Deluzio (President)