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But, 79% Say Province Should Assign Auditors To Look into School Board Books and Locate Ways to Balance School Board Budgets – With 75% Saying They Would Believe an Auditor's Indications on How to Balance Budget



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Toronto, ONTARIO – On the heels of an announcement that Education Minister Elizabeth Witmer is sending in Supervisors to take over the Toronto District School Board and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board because they have refused to balance their books and run a deficit, a new Ipsos-Reid poll conducted for The Globe & Mail, CFTO and CFRB indicates that the public has sympathy with the Board's position, in principle. A majority (57%) of Ontarians say that the reason that school boards may not be able to run a balanced budget and may run a deficit is that they are inadequately funded by the Provincial Government compared with 38% who say that the reason that some local school boards cannot run a balanced budget and need to run a deficit is that they have not dealt with waste and inefficiency within their own school board. The province has recently received the report of an independent auditor on the boards and has also recently appointed a Supervisor for the Ottawa-Carlton District School Board.

However, the public also supports idea of the Province of Ontario assigning auditors to look into the books of school boards to locate ways to balance school board budgets (79%). Further, three quarters (75%) of Ontarians are likely to believe the auditor's indications as to

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the ways for a Board to balance its budget. In fact, seven in ten (69%) would approve of the Provincial Government appointing a permanent, independent School Board Auditor to deal with these types of cases.

While the clash between School Boards in Toronto, Ottawa and Hamilton may be the immediate focus, the back-drop on satisfaction with the education system has risen sharply. In fact, in comparison with an April, 2001 poll using the same question, where only 38% of Ontarians indicated their satisfaction with the Ontario education system versus 60% dissatisfaction, these numbers have changed dramatically – 53% now say that they are satisfied with 46% saying that they are dissatisfied.

Two Thirds of Ontarians Say School Boards Can Run Unavoidable Deficits...

Sixty-five percent (65%) of Ontarians agree that local school boards should be allowed to run a budget deficit if they believe it is unavoidable, compared with 34% who disagree with this premise. The highest levels for supporting this are found in Southwestern Ontario (70%) and in the City of Toronto (67%). Youth (73%), women (68%) and lower income households (70%) and those with a only a high school diploma or less education (68%) are most likely to agree with this premise. Eighty percent (80%) of committed NDP voters and 77% of committed Liberal voters support the deficit approach with decided Tory voters split 48% in favor and 51% against.

Majority Blame the Province ...

Fifty-seven percent (57%) of Ontarians believe that the reason that local school boards may not be able to run a balanced budget and may run a deficit is that they are inadequately funded by the Provincial Government. This view is more likely to be held in Northern



Ontario (63%), in the City of Toronto (61%), among youth (67%) and women (62%). It is also the view of 71% of committed Liberal voters and 65% of NDP voters.

In comparison, 38% believe that the reason some school boards cannot run a balanced budget and need to run a deficit is that they have not dealt with waste and inefficiency within their own school boards. This view is most likely held in Hamilton/Niagara (41%), the '905 Belt' (49%), among older Ontarians (48%) and higher income households (41%). It is also a view held by 57% of committed Tory voters.

But A Full Majority Agree With The Province of Ontario Assigning Auditors ...

Seventy-nine percent (79%) of Ontarians believe the Province of Ontario should assign auditors to look into the books of school boards to locate ways to balance school board budgets when school board trustees indicate that they cannot produce a balanced budget. This finding is consistent across all regions of the Province (highest in the '905 Belt' at 85%), all demographic and committed voter groups (highest among PC voters at 90%).

And The Public Is Most Likely To Believe What The Auditor Indicates ...

Seventy-five percent (75%) of Ontarians say that they would believe a Provincially-assigned auditor who indicates that there are ways for a school board to balance its budget. This compares with 24% who would not believe the auditor's indications. As for those who would believe, the most individuals holding this view are in Southwestern Ontario (80%), and the '905 Belt' (79%), those over 55 years of age (79%) and with higher household income (77%), with men and women splitting equally at 75%. Eighty-seven percent (87%) of committed Tory voters, 69% of Liberals and 59% of NDP supporters also take this point of view.



In Fact, A Majority Support a Permanent, Independent School Board Auditor To Be Appointed...

Sixty-nine percent (69%) of Ontarians (35% strongly), approve of the Provincial Government appointing a permanent, independent, School Board auditor to deal with cases where school boards say it is unavoidable to run a deficit. This view is strongly held in Eastern Ontario (74%), in the '905 Belt' (72%), among all age groupings, among 72% of men and 66% of women and 71% of the highest household income earners. Majorities of all three committed voter groups also agree – 79% of Tories, 62% of Liberals and 63% of NDP supporters.

And In the Background, The Expressed Satisfaction with the Education System Has Risen Significantly Since April, 2001...

Using an identical question which measured how satisfied individuals are with the overall state of the public education system today compared with April 2001, the numbers indicating satisfaction is up sharply from 38% in April 2001 to 53% in August 2002. Those who are not satisfied with the education system is at 46%, down from 60% in April 2001.

The highest levels of satisfaction are recorded in Northern Ontario (64% -- up 26 points) and Hamilton/Niagara (59% -- up 21 points). Those most likely to express dissatisfaction with the school system are in the City of Toronto (49%), Eastern Ontario (50%), and the '905 Belt' (50%). As for the committed voters, Tories (58%) are the most likely to indicate satisfaction (versus 39% not satisfied), followed by Liberals (52% satisfied versus 47% not satisfied) and NDP supporters (46% satisfied versus 62% not satisfied).

These are the findings of an Ipsos-Reid/Globe and Mail/CFTO/CFRB poll conducted between August 8th and August 15th, 2002. The poll is based on a randomly selected sample of 1,000 adult Ontarians. With a sample of this size, the results are considered accurate to within ± 3.1 percentage points, 19



times out of 20, of what they would have been had the entire adult Ontario population been polled. The margin of error will be larger within regions and for other sub-groupings of the survey population. These data were statistically weighted to ensure the sample's regional and age/sex composition reflects that of the actual Ontario population according to the 1996 Census data.

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