Portfolio Strategy

After starting the month strongly, equity markets in North America ended up giving back those gains in the last week of August to end flat to slightly down. Comments from Fed Chairman Jerome Powell about interest rates having to be higher for longer to combat inflation prompted the late month sell-off.

Markets continues to search for their footing and are experiencing volatility due to concerns over inflation and economic growth. In an inflationary environment, and especially when growth momentum is slowing, strong companies with entrenched competitive advantages and pricing power will be better able to protect their profit margins, thereby offering a measure of protection to their share price. We have positioned the portfolios with mostly defensive “blue chip” names (such as P&G, Costco, Coca-Cola, Enbridge, Waste Management) supplemented by companies that will benefit from the unavoidable recovery and display strong relative strength (i.e., WSP Global, Aritzia, Thomson Reuters) and companies that have a unique opportunity in the current market (i.e., Cameco, Albemarle, Nutrien). Again, it is crucial to remember that the market will begin to discount better economic momentum (and profit growth by extension) well ahead of official economic data releases.

While conventional wisdom is that the stock market struggles when interest rates are rising, work done by BMO Nesbitt Burns’ research team has shown that history does not show this and it depends on a number of other factors as well. To better address this issue, they conducted a detailed analysis of the impact of the Federal Funds rate (“Fed funds”) cycles on stock returns going back to 1971. The conclusion from their work is that the S&P 500 Index had actually performed better when the Fed Funds rate is flat or rising relative to when interest rates are declining. For Canadian stocks, the performance discrepancy is even wider with the S&P/TSX Composite Index rising far more in flat/rising environments than in declining rate periods. This result makes intuitive sense as the Fed typically raises rates to prevent an acceleration of inflation when the economy is strong and lowers the Fed funds rate to stimulate the economy when times are hard. Clearly, company profits are stronger in an improving economic scenario which drives market valuations higher.

We continue to monitor our market indicators looking for opportune time to lower our cash position. Our current portfolio positioning is underweight fixed income and equity, while holding a higher than usual amount of cash and cash equivalent securities.

Education Planning for the Children in your Life

Most parents hope their children will pursue higher education – and for good reason. A post-secondary education can prepare your child for a fulfilling career and steer them on the path to a successful and rewarding life. However, if adequate savings are not in place for post-secondary education, your child may graduate with the added stress of carrying significant student debt before they've even secured their first job. The attached article illustrates the different vehicles that parents can use when saving for a child's education.

As always if you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us.

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Education Planning
For the Children in Your Life

August 2022

Most parents hope their children will pursue higher education – and for good reason. A post-secondary education can prepare your child for a fulfilling career and steer them on the path to a successful and rewarding life. However, if adequate savings are not in place for post-secondary education, your child may graduate with the added stress of carrying significant student debt before they've even secured their first job.

In the early 1990s, average undergraduate tuition fees in Canada were $1,464.[1] Today, these fees have risen dramatically to an average of $6,580[2], far outpacing inflation. In today's competitive job market many young people are choosing to remain in school to earn a second degree, making post-secondary education expenses even higher. According to the Canadian Federation of Students, Canadian post-secondary students graduate with an average student debt of $30,000.[3]

With these costs in mind, education planning should be an important component of your overall family wealth management plan. Beginning a dedicated education savings plan while your children are still young helps ensure you have the funds necessary when they begin their post-secondary studies.

Education savings options

There are many ways to fund your children's higher education. What's right for your situation depends on many factors, including your disposable income; whether financial assistance will be provided by other family members, such as grandparents; the ages and number of children involved; the options for your savings if your child doesn't pursue a formal post-secondary education program; and whether you want your children to have control over the assets when they reach the age of majority.[4]

Registered Education Savings Plans

Many parents begin saving for their children's post-secondary education by establishing a Registered Education Savings Plan ("RESP"). While your RESP contributions are not tax deductible, the funds grow tax-deferred inside the plan and are eligible for additional contributions from the Federal government through the Canada Education Savings Grant ("CESG"). Over the life of the RESP, parents can contribute up to $50,000 per child, and each child qualifies for up to $7,200 in CESGs. As well, RESPs may be eligible for additional educational grants through other Federal and provincial programs, where applicable.[5]

When RESP funds are used to pay for education expenses, the accumulated income (including CESGs) is taxed in your child's hands, resulting in little or no tax if withdrawn over a few years because of the basic personal exemption and the tuition tax credit.

Your RESP contributions can be returned to you (or your child) tax-free at any time. However, a withdrawal of the RESP contributions will require repayment of the CESG if your child is not attending a qualifying post-secondary educational program.

While an RESP is a great starting point, you may want to consider additional funding options to supplement your children's education expenses.

Non-registered account

One of the simplest ways to supplement RESP savings is by opening a non-registered account specifically earmarked for your children's post-secondary education savings. The account will not be subject to any special rules or restrictions concerning contribution amounts or their frequency, and you maintain control over the timing of contributions and use of the funds, even when your children reach the age of majority. You can withdraw money to fund your children's post-secondary education tuition fees or other needs.

The downside of saving for your children's education with a non-registered account is that all income and capital gains are taxable to you, causing tax inefficiencies.

Tax-Free Savings Account

Another option to consider is the Tax-Free Savings Account ("TFSA"). Canadians can contribute $6,000 annually to a TFSA and unused TFSA contribution room is carried forward for use in future years. While your contributions to a TFSA are not tax deductible for income tax purposes, your savings grow tax-free and you can withdraw the money when it comes time to finance your children's post-secondary education without attracting any taxes.

Additionally, once they reach the age of majority, you can give money to your children who can then use these funds to make a contribution to their own TFSA. While you can't contribute directly to someone else's TFSA, this strategy allows you to help your adult children build assets, without having to worry about any income being attributed back to you. However, they will have full control over how their TFSA funds are used and whether they are withdrawn.

Trusts

A formal trust may be appropriate if you want to contribute a large amount of money in a tax effective manner, or where it is important that a trustee has flexibility and discretion over the management of the trust assets.

A formal trust requires that there be a settlor, contributed property, a trustee, and one or more beneficiaries. The person, usually a parent (or grandparent) who creates the trust and initially contributes the assets is the settlor. The trustee is responsible for choosing the investments and for the overall administration of the trust, including distributing funds as governed by the terms of the trust. For an educational trust, the beneficiary – a child or children – is(are) the individual(s) who will benefit from the trust by receiving payments when they begin their post-secondary studies. The trust deed specifies how the trustee must manage the trust assets, name the beneficiaries and detail when the trust's income and capital can be paid to the beneficiaries or the educational institution.

While there are costs associated with establishing and administering a trust, parents (or grandparents) have peace of mind knowing that the money in the trust will be used for the purpose for which it was intended. For more information, including education funding strategies involving the current prescribed interest rates on family loans, ask your BMO financial professional for a copy of our publication, *Tax Planning Involving Family Trusts*.

Corporate dividends

Previously, if you were an incorporated professional or had an incorporated family business and had accumulated funds in your corporate account, you were able to pay out company dividends to split income with other family members, including your children aged 18 or over, provided they owned shares of your company either directly or indirectly.

However, in light of the recent expansion of these tax rules on split income or "TOSI" rules, effective for the 2018 and subsequent taxation years, any shareholder of a private corporation who does not meet specific exceptions will now be subject to these expanded TOSI rules, which will apply the highest marginal tax rate to income, including dividends, paid to them directly or through a family trust. For more information, please ask your BMO financial professional for a copy of our publication, *Tax Changes Affecting Private Corporations: Tax on Split Income ("TOSI")*.

As a result, the feasibility of this strategy to pay dividends to your children to help fund their education will be largely curtailed, unless your children (aged 18 or over) have made a substantial labour contribution (generally an average of at least 20 hours per week) to the business during the year, or during any five previous years. Instead, you may wish to consider alternative compensation structures such as wages paid to family members, since wages earned by family members are not subject to these TOSI rules. However, in order to ensure wages paid are deductible to the private corporation for tax purposes, the wage expense must be reasonable in the circumstances.

For further assistance, please consult with your professional tax advisor as these rules are complex.

Life insurance

If you've maximized your RESP contributions and have a need for permanent life insurance protection, this may be another way to help save for your child's post-secondary education. Using life insurance gives you the ability to tap into the excess cash value in certain types of policies.

With this strategy, an application is made for a life insurance policy naming yourself as the owner and your child as the individual whose life is being insured. The beneficiary – the individual who will receive the death benefit – can be the owner of the policy or someone else. For example, grandparents wanting to help fund their grandchild's education could purchase an insurance policy insuring their grandchild, and then name their child – the grandchild's parent – as the policy beneficiary.

To build the cash value within the life insurance policy, a supplement to the required monthly premium is made by depositing additional payments (within set limits), which grow tax deferred inside the policy during the accumulation period. When your child reaches the age of majority, ownership of the policy can be transferred tax-free to your child. As the new owner, your child can withdraw the excess cash value that has accumulated to pay for post-secondary education costs or other expenses. Any resulting gains will be taxed in the hands of your child, who will presumably be in a lower tax bracket than you.

It is important to note that this strategy is not suitable for everyone as you may lose control over the money and other policy rights, such as beneficiary designations, after you transfer title to your children, and issues caused by excess withdrawals impacting the coverage offered by the contract.

Choosing the best option

The actual cost of a higher education varies with the school chosen, the degree(s) sought and the field of study which is selected. While these costs continue to rise, a comprehensive education savings strategy, and an early start, will help ensure your children get the education they want and deserve.

Your BMO financial professional can prepare an in-depth education analysis that details the anticipated costs of educating your children and your ability to fund these costs. This information will assist you in developing a personalized education savings strategy that complements your overall wealth management plan and may include one or more of the savings options discussed in this article

For more information, speak with your BMO financial professional.

BMO Private Wealth

[1] Statistics Canada, "The Daily," September 1, 2005.

[2] Statistics Canada, "Tuition Fees for Degree Programs Increase in 2020/2021."

[3] The Canadian Federation of Students, "Public Education for the Public Good," 2014.

[4] Age 18 or 19, depending on your province of residence.

[5] Additional educational grant programs include the Canada Learning Bond, Quebec Education Savings Incentive, and British Columbia Training and Education Savings Grant ("BCTES").

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