



# **ETFO Submission to the Ministry of Education**

## **2023-24 Education Funding Feedback**

November 2022

**Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario**  
**Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario**

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ETFO represents 83,000 elementary public school teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel and professional support personnel across the province. Its Building Better Schools education agenda can be viewed at **BuildingBetterSchools.ca**.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) represents approximately 83,000 public elementary school teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel and professional support personnel across the province and is the largest teacher union in Canada.

ETFO is an important stakeholder in the public education system and appreciates the opportunity to participate in the Ministry of Education's consultations on education funding for the 2023-24 school year.

The COVID-19 pandemic created unprecedented challenges for people across the province and disproportionately impacted individuals and families from marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, racialized, disabled, and low-income communities. As we slowly emerge from the pandemic, these communities are also bearing the brunt of inflation. They will also be most impacted should a recession occur. To alleviate these inequitable burdens, avert a recession, and build a more just and equitable province, Ontario must invest in public services. Those investments must include public education.

The disruptions to in-person learning during the pandemic had a profound impact on students, educators, families, and communities. They served as a stark reminder of how important public schools are to the well-being of students. The pandemic exacerbated pre-existing concerns about large class sizes, the poor physical condition of schools, the insufficient and inequitable access to in-school supports, and the government's failure to provide appropriate funding to meet the needs of all students, particularly students with special needs, English Language Learners and those from marginalized communities. Yet, to date, the government's response to these challenges has been more cuts. This cannot continue. The government must change course.

Ontario's current fiscal position provides a unique opportunity to adequately fund public services and reinstate the funding that has been cut from public education over the past four years. The government must make the necessary investments to provide educators, students, families, and communities with the supports they need.

In this submission, ETFO addresses the themes included in the Ministry's consultation document titled *2023-24 Education Funding Guide*. ETFO also puts forward recommendations that address other important aspects of Ontario's public education system. It is ETFO's hope that the government seriously considers these recommendations and begins to allocate the necessary resources to undo the damage caused by years of funding cuts. Ontario students deserve a high-quality, equitable, inclusive public education system. Investment in this world-class system is the key to Ontario's social and economic recovery.

## **Provincial Economic Outlook**

The current economic data and consensus amongst economists is that Canada is heading towards a recession. The forecasted recession can largely be attributed to the Bank of Canada's misguided strategy of targeting inflation through overnight interest rate adjustments. Higher interest rates are expected to cause a policy-induced recession. The resulting job losses and lower wages will make things even worse.

There are other approaches to targeting inflation that can sustain economic recovery and spur economic growth. The recent pandemic has taught us that governments play a major role in supporting economic growth. The government of Ontario should heed these lessons and play an active role to avert a recession, or at the very least, to soften the impact of a recession on the people of Ontario. This requires investing in workers through higher wages, investing in public services and increasing funding for public education.

Ontario is very sensitive to interest rate changes and recent projections by economists, including those at RBC, estimate drastic reductions to Ontario GDP growth projections.<sup>1</sup> While Ontario’s economy contracted by -5.1% in 2020, the current outlook for Ontario in 2022 and 2023 is showing signs of a slowing economy<sup>2,3</sup> (See Table 1). In fact, based on RBC estimates, the 2023 projection of 0.3% real GDP growth for Ontario means it will be growing at the slowest pace compared to all other provinces.

**Table 1: Ontario’s Economic Growth, Real GDP (%)**

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021e	2022p	2023p	2024p
<b>2021 Fall Economic Statement</b>	2.7	2.9	2.3	2.8	2.2	2.1	-5.1	4.3	4.5	2.6	2.0
<b>2022 Ontario Budget</b>							-5.1	4.3	3.7	3.1	2.0
<b>RBC Economics</b>								4.6	3.2	0.3	
<b>FAO Economic and Budget Outlook, 2022<sup>4</sup></b>									3.3	0.7	1.9

Source: Ministry of Finance, Government of Ontario.<sup>5</sup> e = estimated. p = projected.

A recession will impact all Ontarians and could mean hundreds of thousands of lost jobs, rising bankruptcies and mortgage defaults, and a reduction in the type of investments that create good-paying jobs. As inflation has increased dramatically in the past year, it has eroded purchasing power and resulted in real wage cuts for workers.

Recessions are felt most by workers earning low-wages and those in precarious employment, particularly women, Indigenous, racialized and recent immigrant workers. These workers—the same ones who were

<sup>1</sup> RBC (2022). *RBC Provincial Outlook – September 2022*. [thoughtleadership.rbc.com/hot-provincial-momentum-to-lose-steam/](https://thoughtleadership.rbc.com/hot-provincial-momentum-to-lose-steam/)

<sup>2</sup> 2022 Ontario Budget (2022). [budget.ontario.ca/2022/brief.html](https://budget.ontario.ca/2022/brief.html)

<sup>3</sup> 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review (2021). [budget.ontario.ca/2021/fallstatement/pdf/2021-fall-statement-en.pdf](https://budget.ontario.ca/2021/fallstatement/pdf/2021-fall-statement-en.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2019). *Understanding Ontario’s 2018-19 Deficit*. p. 1. [fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/understanding-on-deficit-2018](https://fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/understanding-on-deficit-2018)

<sup>5</sup> Ministry of Finance (2022) [ontario.ca/page/ministry-finance](https://ontario.ca/page/ministry-finance)

disproportionately impacted by the pandemic—will again be the ones hit the hardest. Given that the education sector is a very highly gendered work force, education workers are experiencing the difficulties of surviving on a single income, as their real wages have been drastically cut by rising inflation. To avert a recession, the path to economic stability and growth requires the government of Ontario to increase spending in the public sector, particularly in public education, to ensure the real wages of workers are rising.

### **Ontario's Fiscal Situation**

In October 2022, the FAO released its *Fall 2022 Economic and Budget Outlook*. The report found that in 2021-22 the province saw a surplus of \$2.1 billion, and while it projected that economic growth would slow down over the next few years, it found that the province would experience budget surpluses growing from \$0.1 billion in 2022-23 to \$8.5 billion in 2027-28.<sup>6</sup>

The FAO report found that over the next six years, the 2022 Ontario Budget contains funding shortfalls totalling an estimated \$40 billion, including \$6 billion in public education. The report also shows that during the same six-year period, the budget includes \$44 billion in unallocated contingency funds.

In other words, over the next six years, the government, not only has built a surplus for the province, but also plans to accumulate \$44 billion in unallocated funds—all this by underfunding public services to the tune of \$40 billion, including \$6 billion in funding cuts to public education.

This province has the fiscal capacity to restore funding and invest in public services. The FAO is projecting years of future budget surpluses and that the net debt-to-GDP ratio is expected to decline from 39.2 per cent in 2021-22 to 31.5 per cent by 2027-28,<sup>7</sup> the lowest ratio since 2008-09.

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<sup>6</sup> Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2022). Economic and Budget Outlook, Fall 2022. [fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/EBO-FA2022](https://fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/EBO-FA2022)

<sup>7</sup> Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2022). Economic and Budget Outlook, Fall 2022. [fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/EBO-FA2022](https://fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/EBO-FA2022)

Given our recent economic experience with the COVID-19 pandemic, we know governments can ensure economic stability through investment in public services. Ontario is in a unique position to make the necessary investments in public education and put this province on a path to prosperity.

### **Education Funding**

Over the past decade, teachers and other educators have done their part in responding to the fiscal pressures created by the government of Ontario. In October 2019, the FAO looked at compensation growth in the public education system. It found that between 2010 and 2018 teacher base salary grew on average by 0.9 per cent, while wage growth in the private sector grew by 1.8 per cent.<sup>8</sup>

During its first term in office, the Ford government made significant cuts to corporate taxes and insisted on making public sector workers—including teachers and other educators—bear the brunt of its cost-cutting agenda to finance its loss of revenue. The adoption of Bill 124, limited compensation growth for public sector workers to 1 per cent annually for three years. For workers in the education sector, this three-year period started in 2019. During this period annual inflation averaged 1.9 per cent, which means that over the past three years, educators have seen their real wages decrease by 2.8 per cent on average.

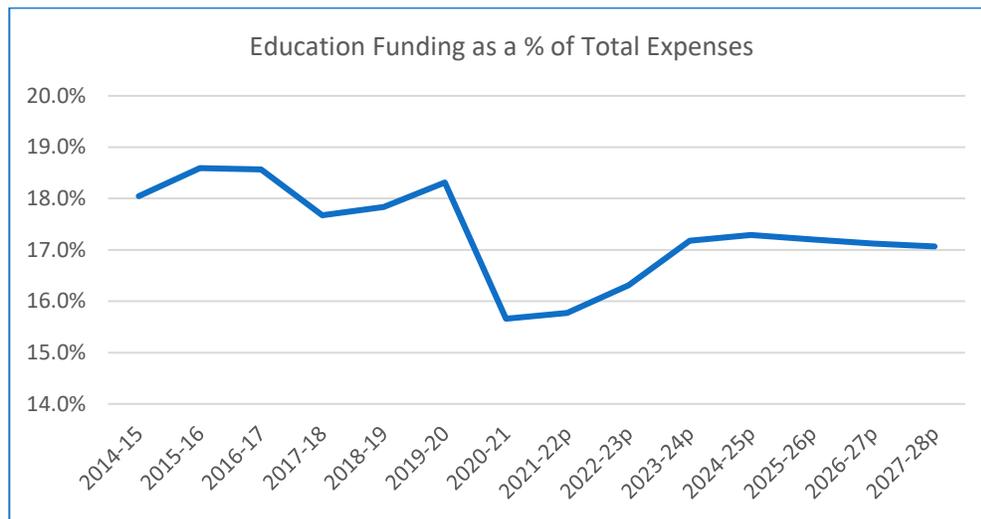
Bill 124—which ETFO believes is unconstitutional and is currently challenging in court—disproportionally impacts workers earning lower incomes, including early childhood educators and daily occasional teachers. The legislation has also impacted morale and retention among educators and other professions affected by Bill 124, notably those in health care. The government must retroactively repeal Bill 124 and compensate all workers impacted by the legislation.

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<sup>8</sup> Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2019). *Expenditure Estimates 2019-20, Ministry of Education*. [fao-on.org/web/default/files/publications/FA1904%20Education%20Estimates%20Review%202019-20/Charts/Ministry%20of%20Education%20Estimates%20Review%202019-20.pdf](https://fao-on.org/web/default/files/publications/FA1904%20Education%20Estimates%20Review%202019-20/Charts/Ministry%20of%20Education%20Estimates%20Review%202019-20.pdf)

The 2022 Ontario Budget signalled further cuts to education spending of \$12.3 billion over the next nine years. Education as a percentage of total government expenses has fallen dramatically since the current government took office. Education funding fell from 18.3% in 2019-20 to 15.8% in 2021-22 and it is projected to plateau around 17.1% by 2027-28 (See Chart 2).

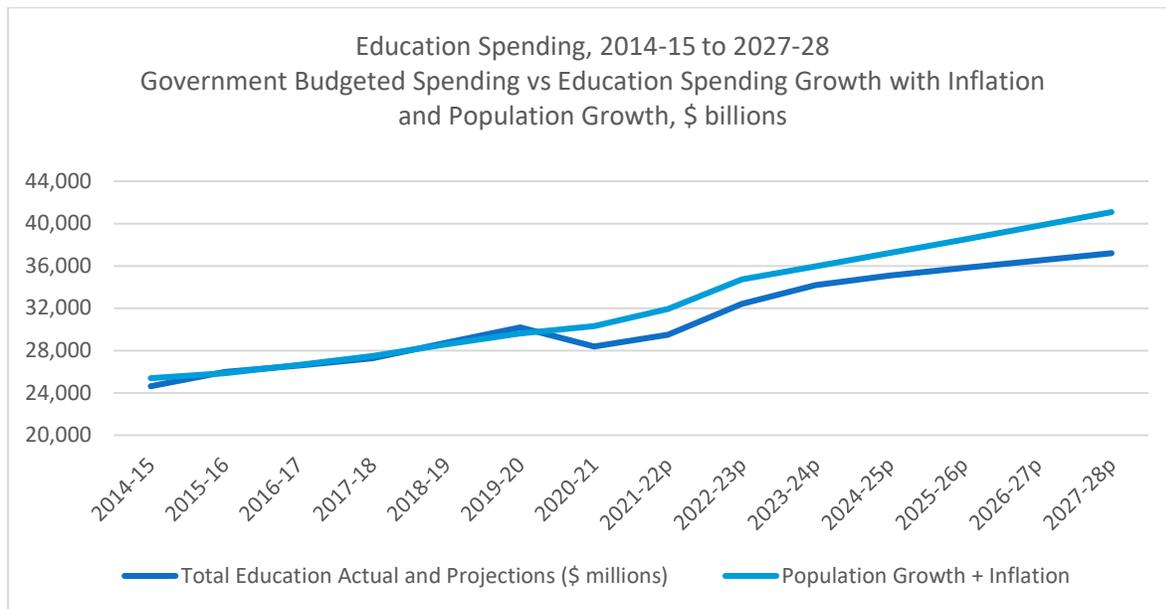
**Chart 2: Education Funding as a percentage of total government expenses**



Source: Authors Calculation based on the Ministry of Finance, Government of Ontario  
 p = Ontario Ministry of Finance planning projection based on external sources.

Below, in Chart 3, we compare the government of Ontario’s budgeted spending on public education to what education funding would be if it had grown at the rate of inflation and kept up with population growth. Chart 3 shows the impact of inadequately funding public education with a cumulative education funding shortfall of \$20.7 billion, from 2014-15 to 2027-28. For 2022-23, this gap in public education funding is approximately \$2.3 billion.

**Chart 3: Education Funding as a percentage of total government expenses**



Source: Authors Calculation based on the Ministry of Finance, Government of Ontario  
 p = Ontario Ministry of Finance planning projection based on external sources.

Budget 2023 and the upcoming release of the Grants for Student Needs (GSN) provide an opportunity for the government to change course and properly address critical and urgent needs in public education.

Educators, parents, students, and the public at large will be paying close attention to the upcoming release of education funding parameters. They will be looking for a change in direction away from damaging cuts and towards investment in our public education system and the public services Ontario families depend on.

**Recommendations:**

1. Retroactively repeal Bill 124 and compensate all workers impacted by the legislation.
2. Increase funding to public education to close the funding gap identified by the FAO.
3. Establish an independent, external review of Ontario’s education funding formula to ensure it reflects actual student needs.

## Efficiencies and Reducing Administrative Burden

The public education system has been severely strained by an inadequate funding formula implemented almost 25 years ago, and misguided funding cuts by consecutive governments. While efficient program implementation should be a shared goal by all education stakeholders, over the past four years the push to find efficiencies and reduce administrative burden has come at the cost of damaging funding cuts and a loss of accountability on how education funds are spent.

No amount of searching for efficiencies can offset the billions of dollars that have been cut from public education over the past four years, and the significant funding gap that has been identified by the FAO in the years ahead. The Ministry should shift its focus away from trying to find savings where little or none remain to be found, and towards prioritizing the investments needed to maintain Ontario's internationally renowned public education system.

### **What other initiatives could support the reduction of administrative burden or further streamline reporting for the education sector?**

#### Online Incident Reporting

Accurate reporting of workplace violence, the timely provision of information to Joint Health and Safety Committees and adequate analysis by the Ministry of Education of safe school incident and workplace violence reports continue to be ongoing concerns in the education sector. They are also critical to creating healthy and safe schools and supporting students.

Many educators experience workplace violence daily, if not more frequently. Fulfilling their reporting responsibilities takes considerable time, particularly when a single incident requires multiple reports. Online reporting systems were intended to streamline reporting and facilitate the necessary communication of reports to the Joint Health and Safety Committee, as well as the Ministry of Education. The government

provided a small amount of funding for school boards to consolidate safe school incident and workplace violence reports in online reporting systems. Unfortunately, school boards selected the services of a variety of software providers for implementation resulting in very different user experiences across boards and, significantly, inconsistent data collection. Not all school boards include illness/injury reports in their incident reporting system, and many school boards are still not meeting Ministry requirements.

Ending suspensions for Ontario’s youngest students—those in Kindergarten to Grade 3—did not end violence and safe school incidents among this demographic of students. It did, however, end a source of data. Adequate and consistent data collection is necessary to ensure the proper supports are in place to prevent these incidents. The Ministry of Education has also requested that school boards submit data on school exclusions but is not collecting demographic data.

Funding for a standardized province-wide incident reporting system is needed to simplify the process for education workers, to facilitate information required by Joint Health and Safety Committees and to support adequate data collection for analysis and action by the provincial government.

#### **Recommendation:**

4. Provide funding for a provincial standardized online incident reporting system for all school boards to use for reporting injuries and illness, safe school incidents, exclusions, and workplace violence.

#### **What are the areas where there is potential or opportunities to find new efficiencies?**

ETFO has consistently raised concerns about how Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) assessments, first administered in 1997, have negatively affected elementary classrooms. EQAO promotes an overly narrow focus on literacy and numeracy to the detriment of a more holistic program and creates a test-driven school culture through the myriad of diagnostic assessments that the Ministry of Education and school boards have imposed on classrooms as part of the drive to improve provincial test results.

The tests and the required preparation for the tests consume considerable classroom time and create stress for students and their teachers. This is particularly concerning for students in Grade 3. Other jurisdictions (e.g., England, Singapore, and New Zealand) are moving away from mandatory standardized testing at an early age to avoid a negative impact on students. Given that EQAO assessments provide no data that can be used to inform daily instruction and student learning throughout the year it seems unnecessary to continue the Grade 3 assessment.

EQAO assessments also fail to measure more complex skills required for problem solving and innovation, lead to “teaching to the test,” demotivate students and are misused to rank schools. In 2022, the Ministry of Education allocated more than \$28 million to EQAO, ETFO believes that these funds should be reallocated to improving student learning conditions, for example, reducing class size or providing more supports for students with special needs.

### **Recommendation:**

5. Cancel EQAO assessments and reallocate EQAO funding to improving student learning conditions.

### **Capital: Reducing Time to Completion for Capital Projects**

Ontario’s ageing school infrastructure has been ignored by successive governments leading to a growing repair backlog which is estimated to be approximately \$17 billion. In 2019, the government of Ontario announced a 10-year infrastructure plan for school repairs and construction totalling \$14 billion, with annual allocations of \$1.4 billion. Even if the entire 10-year allocation was spent solely on addressing the school repair backlog, it would still not be sufficient to cover it.

The repair backlog and lack of investment in maintaining and upgrading existing schools impacts learning and working conditions and has health and safety implications. The pandemic put a public spotlight on

ventilation, its role in disease transmission, and aging schools. Climate change and heat waves that are beginning earlier and ending later each are also a concern in many schools.

While capital projects should be completed in a timely manner, the larger problem facing public school infrastructure is the lack of provincial investment.

In the 2022 Ontario Budget, the government announced significant investments in infrastructure for highways, ETFO encourages the government to make comparable investments in repairing the existing public school infrastructure and in building new schools in the communities that need them.

### **Recommendation:**

6. Address the \$17 billion school repair backlog with increased funding beginning in the 2023-24 school year.

### **Capital: Joint Use of Schools**

Funding for school operations and maintenance has been mired with problems from the moment the funding formula was implemented. From the start, the use of median-cost factors among Ontario's schoolboards as benchmarks for funding allocations created incredible disparity among school boards across the province.<sup>9</sup> This approach ignored actual costs of operating and maintaining buildings in vastly dissimilar parts of the province and did not consider the use of school facilities for other programming and purposes. While successive governments have made some modifications to the way that space allocation funding is calculated and distributed, the underlying flaws in the way funding for operations and maintenance are allocated remain.

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<sup>9</sup> Mackenzie, Hugh (2017). *Shortchanging Ontario Students: An Overview and Assessment of Education Funding in Ontario*. Toronto: Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario.

The addition of utilization factors in the process of funding allocation for school operations and maintenance has compounded the challenges school boards face. The use of utilization factors pushes school boards to lock away so called ‘underutilized’ space. Over the years, this has had the effect of deferring maintenance and allowing significant portions of school buildings to deteriorate as school boards prioritize scarce funds for repairs to other areas.

The joint use of schools by coterminous school boards should not be seen as a solution to the ongoing challenges with school infrastructure across the province. While in a limited number of cases, the sharing of existing school space or the construction of a joint school might be the right solution for a particular community, due to changes in enrolment, population, etc., this would only be the case in rare circumstances. The government should not be considering replicating or “scaling up” these type of local arrangements across the province. Instead, the government should focus on providing the necessary capital investment to clear the \$17 billion school repair backlog and support the construction of new schools in growing communities, while allowing school boards, municipalities and local unions representing school board staff the option to explore joint-use arrangements in the few cases where they make sense.

Some of the considerations school boards would address when considering possible joint use of schools include servicing local communities appropriately. Local municipalities must have a voice in this process and the government should consider providing additional funding to account for community use of school facilities.

In the few cases where joint-use arrangements might be an adequate solution to existing challenges, school boards and the Ministry must minimize situations where students in the elementary panel must share space with students in the secondary panel. The difference in the development of students in grades 7 and 8 with those in grades 9 and 10 are significant. Maintaining Kindergarten to Grade 8 schools provides students in

grades 7 and 8 mentoring opportunities with younger students while acknowledging the significant developmental gap with secondary students.

### **Recommendation:**

7. Increase the funding allocation for school operations and maintenance to reflect actual costs of operating school buildings.
8. Amend the funding allocation formula for school operations and maintenance to support the use of school facilities for community programming.

### **Class Size**

Larger classes mean less one-on-one support for each student and disproportionately impact students with special needs. Frontline educators identify small classes as the most important factor in their ability to work individually with students and meet their diverse needs. Smaller classes improve student behaviour and peer relationships and increase student engagement and achievement in the early grades. Smaller classes mean educators have more opportunity to give students more individual attention. These factors, in turn, contribute to increased graduation rates and savings to the system from fewer students staying beyond the required four years of secondary school.

In 2019, the Ontario government announced its plan to increase the funded class size average in grades 4 to 8 from 23.84 students to 24.5 students. This change applied to all boards as of September 2019, whether or not they had been exempted in the past. The effects of these changes were felt differently from board-to-board and led to the loss of almost 1,000 teaching positions in Ontario's elementary schools.

Junior and intermediate (grades 4 to 8) classes are the only divisions that do not have class size caps.

Because of this, classes can vary significantly in size, with many of them well above 30 students and in some

cases above 40. The government should allocate sufficient funding for reductions to junior and intermediate class size and establish class size caps for grades 4 to 8 of 24 students.

Class size is also an issue in Ontario’s Full-Day Kindergarten program. This program has proven to be very successful. It has become a model for other jurisdictions and a fundamental part of our world-class education system. However, there are still many classes with more than 30 students and an even greater number of Kindergarten/Grade 1 split-grade classes, which are not supported by a designated early childhood educator. ETFO members consistently raise concerns about the challenges of setting up activity-based programs for so many young children and managing classroom behaviour when many of the students are experiencing formalized learning environments for the first time. Overcrowded, noisy classrooms or open “pods”—where multiple classes share a room separated only by dividers—limit teachers’ and early childhood educators’ ability to take full advantage of the play-based program. These conditions are stressful for students and educators. The government should allocate sufficient funding to reduce Kindergarten class sizes and cap Kindergarten classes at 26 students.

### **Recommendations:**

9. Cap grades 4 to 8 class size at 24 students.
10. Cap Kindergarten class size at 26 students.
11. Ensure every Kindergarten class be staffed with a full-time certified teacher and a designated early childhood educator.

### **Support for Students with Special Needs**

Students with special education needs are not getting the front-line supports and services they need.

Inadequate supports have a bigger impact on students who face additional barriers, such as Black,

Indigenous, and racialized students, students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, and those who are English Language Learners.

These students need access to educational assistants, behavioural counsellors, child and youth workers, psychologists, and speech and language pathologists in school to help them learn and thrive.

Meeting the special education needs of students is a constant challenge for any government. A substantial portion of existing special education funding is currently based on a predictive statistical model tied to overall enrolment numbers. Unfortunately, this model fails to account for the increase in participation in special education programs and services that Ontario's public schools have experienced over the past few years. It also fails to account for the differences in needs among students requiring special education supports. For example, the current funding formula treats a student who may require occasional withdrawal support from a resource teacher to complete their work, similarly to a student with more significant needs. Special education funding must be based upon the actual needs of students.

In 2013-14, 340,562 students, representing 16.3 per cent of all students, received special education programs or services. By 2019-20, this number had increased 350,602, representing 17.3 per cent of all students. Special education funding has not kept up, either with inflationary costs, or with students' increasing need for special education supports. The government must increase special education funding to address this funding gap and ensure that special education grants are based on the actual education needs of students.

Creating inclusive and supporting learning environments for students with special needs also requires that occasional teachers and occasional education workers receive paid professional learning on teaching and

educational strategies for supporting these students while in occasional roles—without the benefit of day-to-day knowledge of the student and an ongoing rapport.

### **Recommendations:**

12. Base special education grants on actual student needs.
13. Allocate funding to school boards for the hiring of additional educational assistants, psychologists, behavioural therapists, child and youth workers, school support counsellors, and speech and language pathologists.
14. Allocate funding to provide occasional teachers and occasional education workers paid professional learning on teaching and educational strategies to support students with special education needs.

### **Addressing Equity and Combatting Anti-Black Racism**

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the deep-rooted socio-economic disparities that exist in our province. The negative impacts of the pandemic were disproportionately felt by already marginalized communities. Those communities are also most impacted by inflation as they struggle to make ends meet and will be most affected by a recession.

The government must take concrete steps to ameliorate the inequity experienced by these communities and build a more just Ontario for everyone, especially Black, Indigenous, racialized, and low-income communities.

Over recent years, there has been a wide-spread and unprecedented public recognition that systemic racism and, in particular, anti-Black racism, persists in our societies. ETFO recognizes the multiple and systemic ways that anti-Black racism is enacted and reproduced in all our institutions, including policing, health care, immigration, social services, and public education.

Anti-Black racism in education is longstanding and has harmed Black students, their families, and Black educators. In the past several years alone, several school boards have come under intense public scrutiny following the exposure of anti-Black racism in their practices. School boards, and the provincial government, need to be accountable for upholding existing policies aimed at eradicating anti-Black racism, reporting on progress, and making the changes necessary to address anti-Black racism in schools.

The concept of ‘critical mass’ is important if the potential of racialized and Black teachers and education workers is to be realized within the education system. They need to see themselves represented in the system as part of a welcoming and inclusive culture. This is also true for Black students.

There must be a concerted effort among all education stakeholders to address barriers in recruitment, hiring and retention of Black educators. Anti-Black racism training for all education leadership, staff, teachers and education workers is key to achieving institutional and systemic change and to creating organizational cultures that are welcoming and inclusive of Black educators and students. The Ministry of Education must adequately fund and resource initiatives that address anti-Black racism within the public education system.

The government has acknowledged that anti-Black racism exists within the education sector and has stated that the well-being and mental health of Black communities is paramount. Ending streaming in the public education system is an important step to addressing existing systemic barriers. The government has announced the end of streaming in the secondary panel; however, it has not allocated adequate funding to support this important transition. Without the necessary support for students and educators, students who have faced systemic barriers in the past will continue to do so. The government must make good on its commitment and must direct funding to the education sector and community organizations to eradicate anti-Black racism, and all other forms of racism, from Ontario’s public education system.

### Recommendations:

15. Provide additional funding to school boards to hire more counsellors, social workers and school nurses that would specifically assist families and students from Black, racialized, and Indigenous communities, as well as students living in low-income communities.
16. Provide funding to the public education sector and community groups for the purpose of eradicating anti-Black racism and other forms of racism.
17. Instruct all school boards to immediately begin collection of disaggregated race-based student and staff data.
18. Ensure that the collection of race-based data by school boards is standardized, includes all employees and their positions, respects employees' privacy, meets current best practices, and is made publicly available.
19. Implement mandatory ongoing training and professional development for all administrators, school board trustees and teacher candidates on recognizing and addressing anti-Black racism, including microaggressions.

### **Mental Health Supports**

The mental health of teachers, education workers, and students requires the provincial government's urgent attention. In May 2021, ETFO shared research that showed many of its members experienced burnout and other negative mental health impacts linked to the provincial government's failed response to COVID-19. The government's chronic underfunding of public education has led to unnecessary negative mental health impacts and outcomes for ETFO members and students. The government must fund the supports in schools and in the community that are necessary to ensure students' developmental, emotional, and behavioural needs are met so that ETFO members can focus on supporting students' learning needs.

In its 2022 Annual Ontario School Survey,<sup>10</sup> People for Education reported that:

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<sup>10</sup> People for Education (2019). *What Makes a School?* (Annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2019). Toronto, ON: People for Education [peopleforeducation.ca/report/2019-annual-report-on-schools-what-makes-a-school/](https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/2019-annual-report-on-schools-what-makes-a-school/)

- only eighteen per cent of elementary schools have guidance counsellors, with virtually all of those working part-time (98 per cent);
- only thirty per cent of elementary schools have regular access to psychologists;
- forty-nine per cent of elementary schools have regular access to social workers; and
- thirty-six per cent of elementary schools have regular access to child and youth workers.

Additional funding must be provided to improve access to in-school supports, including guidance counsellors, social workers, psychologists, and child and youth workers, especially in underserved areas.

### **Recommendations:**

20. Provide additional funding to improve access to in-school supports, including guidance counsellors, social workers, psychologists, and child and youth workers, especially in underserved areas.
21. Allocate funding for additional in-school and community supports necessary to ensure students' developmental and behavioural needs are met.
22. Develop and deliver—in consultation with mental health experts, teachers, education workers, unions and other education stakeholders—long-term, fully-funded, comprehensive, culturally-responsive mental health supports for students.
23. Allocate ongoing, sustainable funding for high-quality professional learning for educators in the area of student mental health, to take place within the instructional day.

### **Supporting Second Language Programs**

An area that requires greater transparency and accountability from boards, and where additional funding is necessary, is supporting children who enter Ontario schools without language proficiency in either English or French.

These students require appropriate support to ensure they progress well academically, socially and emotionally. The number of children who speak neither English nor French when they register for school has increased significantly. As reported by the 2017 People for Education annual survey of public schools, 63

per cent of English elementary schools have English Language Learners (ELLs)<sup>11</sup> as compared to 43 per cent in 2002-03. These students face significant challenges in catching up to their peers, and schools do not have adequate resources to support them. The pandemic created additional challenges for these students, especially for those engaged in virtual learning.

The funding formula for ELLs who are not born in Canada is a guaranteed per-student amount—which is reduced over four years—rather than a lump sum divided amongst school boards, as is the case for Canadian-born ELLs. Furthermore, the grants assume that ELLs only require special language programs for up to four years, an assumption that is not supported by reports from teachers who work with these students or by research on language acquisition. Funding should be allocated based on students achieving a standard level of language proficiency and not based on whether they were born in Canada or the number of years they have been in Canada.

There is currently no direct accountability for school boards to ensure that second-language grants are used for their intended programs. All too often, the overall shortfalls in the funding formula have led to school boards using their second language grants for other purposes and short-changing ELL students. The Ministry of Education should establish accountability measures by mandating that school boards spend English as a Second Language (ESL) grants on the intended programs.

### **Recommendations:**

24. Ensure all funding envelopes that have been established to support equity-related programs, special education programs, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs be maintained.
25. Increase funding for English Language Learners (ELLs) programs and ESL teachers to meet the language acquisition needs of students requiring ELL support.

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<sup>11</sup> People for Education (2017). *Competing Priorities* (Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2017). Toronto, ON: People for Education. [peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/P4E-annual-report-2017.pdf](https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/P4E-annual-report-2017.pdf)

26. Establish accountability measures to prevent school boards from diverting ESL funding to non-ESL services and require school boards to spend ESL funding on its intended purpose.

SO:LL:MW:FC:CC

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Retroactively repeal Bill 124 and compensate all workers impacted by the legislation.
2. Increase funding to public education to close the funding gap identified by the FAO.
3. Establish an independent, external review of Ontario's education funding formula to ensure it reflects actual student needs.
4. Provide funding for a provincial standardized online incident reporting system for all school boards to use for reporting injuries and illness, safe school incidents, exclusions, and workplace violence.
5. Cancel EQAO assessments and reallocate EQAO funding to improving student learning conditions.
6. Address the \$17 billion school repair backlog with increased funding beginning in the 2023-24 school year.
7. Increase the funding allocation for school operations and maintenance to reflect actual costs of operating school buildings.
8. Amend the funding allocation formula for school operations and maintenance to support the use of school facilities for community programming.
9. Cap grades 4 to 8 class size at 24 students.
10. Cap Kindergarten class size at 26 students.
11. Ensure every Kindergarten class be staffed with a full-time certified teacher and a designated early childhood educator.
12. Base special education grants on actual student needs.
13. Allocate funding to school boards for the hiring of additional educational assistants, psychologists, behavioural therapists, child and youth workers, school support counsellors, and speech and language pathologists.
14. Allocate funding to provide occasional teachers and occasional education workers paid professional learning on teaching and educational strategies to support students with special education needs.
15. Provide additional funding to school boards to hire more counsellors, social workers and school nurses that would specifically assist families and students from Black, racialized, and Indigenous communities, as well as students living in low-income communities.

16. Provide funding to the public education sector and community groups for the purpose of eradicating anti-Black racism and other forms of racism.
17. Instruct all school boards to immediately begin collection of disaggregated race-based student and staff data.
18. Ensure that the collection of race-based data by school boards is standardized, includes all employees and their positions, respects employees' privacy, meets current best practices, and is made publicly available.
19. Implement mandatory ongoing training and professional development for all administrators, school board trustees and teacher candidates on recognizing and addressing anti-Black racism, including microaggressions.
20. Provide additional funding to improve access to in-school supports, including guidance counsellors, social workers, psychologists, and child and youth workers, especially in underserved areas.
21. Allocate funding for additional in-school and community supports necessary to ensure students' developmental and behavioural needs are met.
22. Develop and deliver—in consultation with mental health experts, teachers, education workers, unions and other education stakeholders—long-term, fully-funded, comprehensive, culturally-responsive mental health supports for students.
23. Allocate ongoing, sustainable funding for high-quality professional learning for educators in the area of student mental health, to take place within the instructional day.
24. Ensure all funding envelopes that have been established to support equity-related programs, special education programs, and English as a Second Language (ESL) programs be maintained.
25. Increase funding for English Language Learners (ELLs) programs and ESL teachers to meet the language acquisition needs of students requiring ELL support.
26. Establish accountability measures to prevent school boards from diverting ESL funding to non-ESL services and require school boards to spend ESL funding on its intended purpose.

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