Virtual Learning Shouldn't Be Permanent

The move to virtual learning was never intended to be permanent; it was a temporary measure designed to deliver emergency instruction during a global pandemic. And yet, in Ontario, virtual learning continues to be supported by the government and its not-so-hidden privatization agenda.

Under the pretext of providing families with "choice," the Ministry of Education has worked behind closed doors with unidentified organizations and lobbyists on a plan to erode Ontario's public education system by shifting education funding away from schools and outsourcing learning to online and private options. In an attempt to keep students in public education and maintain their enrolment, school boards are making virtual classrooms and schools a permanent feature.

In 2022, the Ford government went a step further. Rather than making investments to improve public education for all students, it offered individual payments to families for private tutoring. Through this program, tens of millions of public dollars have been siphoned away from students and schools. This indirect way of reducing funding for public education is disproportionately shouldered by students with special education needs and from marginalized communities.

The Ford government's outsourcing of learning to online and private options, coupled with its reduction of funding to the public education system, is a lose-lose scenario for Ontario's students.

In-person learning matters.

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) believes that quality, in-person learning in publicly-funded schools provides the best experience for students. In-person schools are dynamic social environments where children can learn by exploring, taking risks, building relationships and accessing individual attention from teachers and educators.

In-person classrooms are intentionally designed to encourage inquiry, conversation, and collaboration, as well as respond to children's unique learning needs. In-person learning environments include hands-on materials and resources that students need to support and extend their learning.

To effectively support the acquisition of reading and numeracy skills, and to meet students' unique learning needs, educators must be able to assess and work with students in person.

The daily interactions that in-person classrooms provide are also essential for the academic and social growth of students.

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The future of public education in Ontario is at stake.

The funding and resources needed to meet the unique learning needs of each and every student in this province are best provided within the public system. Daily, in-person instruction in publicly-funded schools best meets students' educational, developmental, and social needs, and provides the tools to support equitable learning models for children.

If school boards or the government enable virtual learning options as a regular learning model, the impact on students and our publicly-funded schools will be devastating:

» Existing inequities will be deepened.
» Student privacy will be undermined.
» Standards in publicly-funded education will be lowered.
» Learning outcomes and the social health and well-being of students will suffer.
» Boards will fund and operate two parallel elementary school systems, forcing funding cuts that will hurt students.
» Education quality and the public's confidence in Ontario's internationally-renowned public education system will be eroded.
» Virtual schools will place Ontario further on the path to privatization.

Here's what you can do:

1 Share this fact sheet with friends and family to spread awareness.

2 Contact your school trustee and the trustees for your board. Tell them to oppose permanent virtual schools in your school board.

3 Contact your MPP and demand the government support fair funding to keep kids in bricks-and-mortar schools.

TAKE ACTION at
BuildingBetterSchools.ca/StopVirtualSchool

Refuse to allow the integrity and quality of student learning to be fractured beyond repair. Tell your board to say **NO** to virtual school programs.

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