



# **ETFO Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs**

## **2023 Pre-Budget Hearings**

February 2023

**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) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 2023 pre-budget consultations. ETFO represents 83,000 public elementary school teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel and professional support personnel across the province.

ETFO is an important stakeholder in the public education system. This submission complements ETFO's written submission to the Ministry of Education on education funding for the 2023-24 school year.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> ETFO (2022). *Submission to the Ministry of Education: 2023-24 Education Funding Feedback*. [etfo.ca/getmedia/1be295b9-a255-42d6-bd99-8dcd16faaf9d/20221115\\_EducationFundingSubmission.pdf](https://etfo.ca/getmedia/1be295b9-a255-42d6-bd99-8dcd16faaf9d/20221115_EducationFundingSubmission.pdf)

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 puts forward recommendations for key areas in Ontario's public education system. It is ETFO's sincere hope that the government heeds these recommendations and begins allocating 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>2</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>3,4</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>5</sup></b>									3.3	0.7	1.9

Source: Ministry of Finance, Government of Ontario.<sup>6</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. Dramatic inflation in the past year 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 who are more likely to be women, Indigenous, racialized and recent immigrant workers. These workers—the same ones who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic—will again be hit the hardest. To avert a recession, the path to economic stability and growth requires the government of Ontario to increase spending in the

<sup>2</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>3</sup> 2022 Ontario Budget (2022). [budget.ontario.ca/2022/brief.html](https://budget.ontario.ca/2022/brief.html)

<sup>4</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>5</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>6</sup> Ministry of Finance (2022) [ontario.ca/page/ministry-finance](https://ontario.ca/page/ministry-finance)

public sector, particularly in public education, to ensure the real wages of workers are rising. Ontario has the money to do so.

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

In February 2023, the FAO released its *Winter 2023 Economic and Budget Outlook*. The report projected that after a surplus of \$2.1 billion in 2021-22 the province will see a deficit of \$2.5 billion in 2022-23. While the FAO report projected that economic growth would slow down over the next few years, it also found that the province would experience budget surpluses growing from \$0.1 billion in 2023-24 to \$7.6 billion in 2026-27.<sup>7</sup>

In its *Fall 2022 Economic and Budget Outlook* report, the FAO found that over the next six years, the government's plan outlined in its 2022 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.<sup>8</sup>

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>9</sup> the lowest ratio since 2008-09.

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<sup>7</sup> Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2023). *Economic and Budget Outlook, Winter 2023*. [fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/EBO-WI2023](https://fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/EBO-WI2023)

<sup>8</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>9</sup> Ibid.

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>10</sup>

During its first term in office, the Ford government made significant cuts to corporate taxes while making public sector workers—including teachers and other educators—bear the brunt of its cost-cutting agenda to finance its loss of revenue. 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.

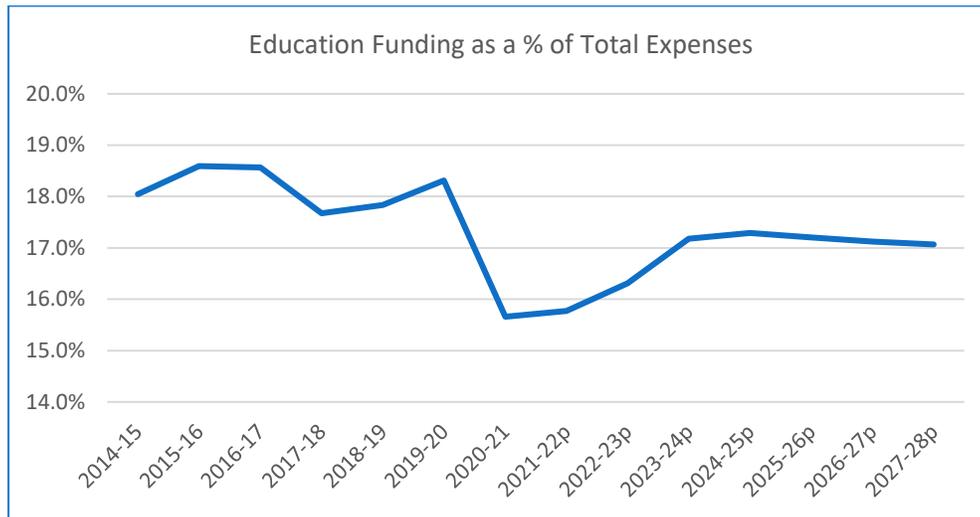
Bill 124, which was struck down as unconstitutional by the Ontario Superior Court in November 2022, disproportionately impacts workers earning lower incomes, including early childhood educators and daily occasional teachers. It also impacted morale and retention among educators and other professions affected by Bill 124, notably those in health care. The government must withdraw its appeal of the Ontario Superior Court’s decision on Bill 124 and compensate all workers impacted by the legislation.

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<sup>10</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 1).

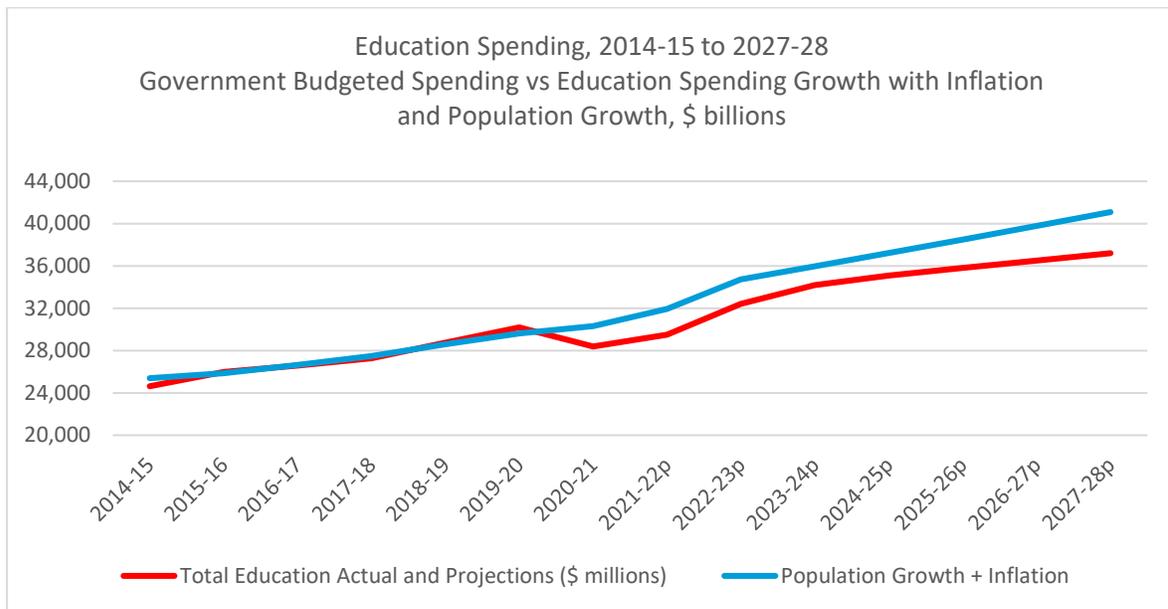
**Chart 1: Education Funding as a percentage of total government expenses**



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 2, 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 2 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 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.

The public education system has been severely strained by an inadequate funding formula implemented 25 years ago, and misguided funding cuts by consecutive governments. The problems of the 1998 funding model that have not been adequately addressed include: funding for special education programs and supports, funding for English and French as second language programming; funding for basic school-level facilities and services such as libraries, guidance, Music, Art, and Physical education; funding to support local priorities; and funding for school operations and maintenance. Ontario’s education funding formula needs to be fully reviewed and reformed to ensure it meets the needs of students.

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. Withdraw the government's appeal of the Ontario Superior Court's decision striking down 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.

### **Smaller Class Size: Important for Student Success and Well-being**

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 Division (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 designated 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:**

4. Cap grades 4 to 8 class size at 24 students.
5. Cap Kindergarten class size at 26 students.

#### **Full-Day Kindergarten: A Success Story**

The current learning model for Ontario’s Kindergarten program, with a certified teacher and a designated early childhood educator (DECE) working together, gives children and their families the start to school that they need. Research shows that the partnership between a certified teacher and a DECE provides lasting

benefits in reading, writing, numeracy, self-regulation and social skills and it “has shown major results when it comes to children’s social, emotional and cognitive development.”<sup>11</sup>

Ontario’s Kindergarten program was designed by education experts. It has proven to be a great success, is a model for other jurisdictions to follow and a fundamental piece of our world-class education system. The full-time certified teacher and DECE team has been central to the success of the Kindergarten program.

Teachers have knowledge and understanding of the elementary school curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 8, and how the Kindergarten program expectations connect to later elementary grades. Teachers know how to build upon the foundation provided in Kindergarten and are responsible for student learning, long-term planning, effective instruction, formative assessment and have the ultimate responsibility for evaluation and formal reporting to parents.

Designated early childhood educators have knowledge and understanding of the developmental learning needs of young children. DECEs study early childhood development and focus on age-appropriate program planning. DECEs provide engaging learning opportunities and experiences for children.

To optimize the potential of the Kindergarten program, the government needs to address issues identified by the front-line educators and Ontario researchers. The issues include class size and physical space, deployment of DECEs in every Kindergarten classroom, professional learning to support the teacher and DECE team, preparation time for DECEs, and deeper, systemic support for the inquiry, play-based learning philosophy underlying the program.

Funding shortfalls affect Kindergarten classrooms in unique ways. Classes with 15 or fewer students typically are not assigned a DECE and therefore do not benefit from the early childhood development

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<sup>11</sup> Charles E. Pascal (2019), *Full-day Kindergarten – The Best of What We Imagined is Happening*, The Conversation, March 5, 2019.

expertise of early childhood educators. Even where a DECE is assigned to a classroom, the lack of funding for lunchroom supervisors and other non-teaching staff results in school principals often assigning DECEs significant supervision responsibilities outside of their classroom, commonly as much as 500 minutes per week. Joint planning time is a fundamental aspect of creating an effective and collaborative professional team, but the education funding formula does not fund time for these educators to prepare together. Consequently, the DECE supervision assignments make it virtually impossible to schedule joint planning time for the educator team in the Kindergarten classroom; it also means when the principal assigns the DECE outside of the Kindergarten room, the teacher is left on their own.

The intent of the Full-Day Kindergarten program was to have a DECE and teacher in the classroom to support the philosophy of the play-based program. Senior Kindergarten/Grade 1 split classes are not in line with this objective and should be avoided. Sufficient funding should be allocated accordingly.

### **Recommendations:**

6. Ensure that every Kindergarten class be staffed with a full-time certified teacher and a designated early childhood educator.
7. Allocate funding for 30 minutes of preparation time per day for designated early childhood educators.
8. Allocate funding to support joint planning during the workday for the Full-Day Kindergarten teacher/designated early childhood educator team.
9. Allocate funding to avoid Senior Kindergarten/Grade 1 split classes.
10. Provide funding for non-teaching staff to perform supervision duties such as lunchroom supervision.

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

Students with special education needs are not getting the front-line supports and services they need. The lack of timely access to appropriate special education supports has an even greater 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.

Students need timely and appropriate 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, 331,532 students, representing 16.3 per cent of all students, received special education programs or services. By 2019-20, this number had increased to 364,038, representing 17.7 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 supportive 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:

11. Base special education grants on actual student needs.
12. 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.
13. 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, including 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 government 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; however, the decision to end streaming in the secondary panel must be accompanied by 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:

14. 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.

15. Provide funding to the public education sector and community groups for the purpose of eradicating anti-Black racism and other forms of racism.
16. Instruct all school boards to immediately begin collection of disaggregated race-based student and staff data.
17. 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.
18. 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. The government's chronic underfunding of public education has led to unnecessary negative mental health impacts and outcomes for ETFO members and students. 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.

In its 2022 Annual Ontario School Survey,<sup>12</sup> People for Education reported that:

- 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.

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<sup>12</sup> People for Education (2022). *2021–2022 Annual Ontario School Survey data handbook*. Toronto. [peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PFE-AOSS-AnnualReport2022-EN.pdf](https://peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/PFE-AOSS-AnnualReport2022-EN.pdf)

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.

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.

### **Recommendations:**

19. 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.
20. Allocate funding for additional in-school and community supports necessary to ensure students' developmental and behavioural needs are met.
21. 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.
22. 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>13</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 who are not born in Canada 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 government should establish accountability measures by mandating that school boards spend English as a Second Language (ESL) grants on the intended programs.

### **Recommendations:**

23. 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.
24. 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>13</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)

25. 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.

### **Online Learning and Hybrid Learning**

In 2021, in the midst of a devastating pandemic, Ontarians found out that the Ministry of Education had been working behind closed doors on a plan to fundamentally change our public education system by outsourcing and potentially privatizing online learning. The government’s plan proposed an entirely new online education system that would function in parallel to the current public education system. This proposal would negatively impact students’ health, well-being and learning outcomes.

ETFO believes that the daily, in-person model of instruction and support best meets students’ educational, developmental and social needs. In-person learning provides the best learning experience and is the most equitable learning model for all students.

Throughout the pandemic, we have witnessed the detrimental impacts on student health and well-being associated with remote learning and the hybrid model of learning. In-person learning is critical to the social and emotional health of students.

The full-time synchronous remote learning option that has been implemented by some school boards will contribute to greater isolation and mental health challenges for some students. ETFO’s position remains that brick-and-mortar schools are the best source of re-connection for all students and, in particular, provide our most vulnerable students with face-to-face emotional support and a sense of belonging that cannot be replicated in a virtual format.

The use of hybrid learning models by several school boards has resulted in unprecedented challenges and pressures on students and educators, further compounding the ongoing mental health crisis. The use of hybrid learning by school boards in Ontario must end.

### **Recommendations:**

26. Abandon the proposed plan to make virtual learning a permanent fixture of elementary instruction.
27. Instruct school boards to immediately cease the use of hybrid learning as a method of instruction.

### **Educating the Whole Child**

Elementary students would have a more enriched educational program if they had more opportunities to learn through the Arts and outdoor experiential learning, as well as be supported by teacher-librarians and teachers who are specialists in the Arts, Health and Physical Education, and Guidance.

Research confirms that the knowledge and expertise of teacher-librarians and specialist teachers make an important contribution to the quality of elementary education, both in terms of academic success and students' broader emotional, physical, cognitive, personal and social development. An extensive literature review on specialist teachers, including teacher-librarians, commissioned by ETFO concluded: "Overall, the literature surrounding specialist teachers in a range of content areas appears to support the claim that specialist teachers can positively impact student achievement and contribute to student success at the elementary level."<sup>14</sup>

The number of specialist teachers at the elementary level has dropped significantly since 1998 when the current funding model was introduced. People for Education has systematically documented the decline of

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<sup>14</sup> Katina Pollock and Michael Mindzak (2015). *Specialist Teachers - A Review of the Literature prepared for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario*. Toronto.

student access to teacher-librarians and specialist teachers. In its 2017 annual report,<sup>15</sup> People for Education reported:

- 40 per cent of elementary schools have neither a specialist Music teacher, nor an itinerant Music instructor; and
- Elementary schools in the Greater Toronto Area are 2.5 times more likely to have a Music teacher than those in eastern and northern Ontario.

In its 2018 report,<sup>16</sup> People for Education reported:

- 46 per cent of elementary schools have a specialist Music teacher, full- or part-time;
- Only 8 per cent of elementary schools with grades 7 and 8 have specialist Drama teachers; and
- 39 per cent of elementary schools have a Health and Physical Education full-time teacher.

In its 2022 annual report,<sup>17</sup> People for Education found that:

- 55 per cent of elementary schools had at least one teacher-librarian, either full- or part-time. This number drops to only 39 per cent for schools in rural areas; and
- Only 12 per cent of elementary schools reported having a full-time teacher-librarian.

The current education funding formula still leaves elementary students significantly short-changed in terms of their access to quality programs in the Arts and Health and Physical Education, and support from teacher-librarians. The shortfall is greater in smaller and more remote schools, such as those in rural communities, because the funding is based on per-pupil grants rather than grants per school.

In the case of Arts programs, current funding levels, inflation-adjusted, are far below what they were in most school boards in 1996, prior to the implementation of the funding formula. The government should at the very least increase funding for Arts programs to match the levels seen in 1996 adjusted for inflation.

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<sup>15</sup> People for Education (2017). *Competing Priorities* (Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2017). Toronto.

<sup>16</sup> People for Education (2018). *The new basics for public education*. Toronto: People for Education.

<sup>17</sup> People for Education (2022). *2021–2022 Annual Ontario School Survey data handbook*. Toronto: People for Education.

Teacher-librarians play a critical role in developing student literacy, supporting teachers' classroom instruction and making the library the technological hub of the school. Studies conducted by People for Education document the extent to which trained teacher-librarians have a positive effect on student literacy achievement and on children's enjoyment of reading. It is ETFO policy that all elementary students have access to a teacher-librarian. In recent years, many school boards have replaced teacher-librarians with library-technicians, who are not teachers and are not trained to support teachers' classroom instruction. The per-pupil allocation of teacher-librarians has not changed since the funding formula was introduced.

During the pandemic many specialist teacher positions were cut in a significant number of school boards to staff virtual schools. When teacher shortages occur, specialist teachers and teacher-librarians are often asked to fill staffing gaps and pulled from their programs.

School libraries cannot fulfill their role of assisting teachers to meet the learning expectations of the provincial curriculum without up-to-date resources and technology. The education funding formula must be amended to provide dedicated resource funding to support school libraries.

### Recommendations:

28. Amend the education funding formula to provide all elementary schools with specialist teachers in the arts, guidance and health and physical education.
29. Amend the education funding formula to provide dedicated funding to support school library learning resources and technology.
30. Amend the education funding formula to restore funding for arts programs to 1996 levels adjusted by inflation.

## Health and Safety

### Online Incident Reporting

Accurate reporting of workplace violence, the timely provision of information to Joint Health and Safety Committees and adequate analysis and follow-up action by the Ministry of Education to safe school incident and workplace violence reports are critical steps 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 board administrators, 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.

The collection of demographic data about students related to suspensions, expulsions and exclusions should happen through the incident reporting system. The collection and analysis of this data by the Ministry and school boards is important for identifying and addressing the barriers to success experienced by students whose behaviour results in these reports. As noted in Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (2017)

examining identity-based data may reveal more precisely how certain groups are being disadvantaged, how to identify and remove systemic barriers to success, and where to target resources (p. 17-18).<sup>18</sup>

Some school boards collect and share demographic data related to suspension and expulsion rates, but they are not required to do so. Many students are not subject to suspensions. Suspensions for students in Kindergarten to Grade 3 ended in July 2020 in response to concerns about racism. Many students with special needs are not subject to suspension due to mitigating factors. However, these students be temporarily “excluded” from school due for safety reasons, often because the school is unable to meet the students’ needs. This is an ongoing concern for families of students with special needs. There is currently no data available on exclusion rates. That must change.

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:**

31. 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.

### **Health and Safety Training**

Employers are required to provide time to employees during the workday to complete training required to keep them safe. Currently, occasional teachers, occasional DECEs and temporary support staff are not being provided with paid time to complete required health and safety training.

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<sup>18</sup> Ministry of Education (2017). *Ontario’s Education Equity Action Plan*. [files.ontario.ca/edu-1\\_0/edu-Ontario-Education-Equity-Action-Plan-en-2021-08-04.pdf](https://files.ontario.ca/edu-1_0/edu-Ontario-Education-Equity-Action-Plan-en-2021-08-04.pdf)

In addition to the half-day violence prevention training negotiated centrally, school boards require staff to complete several other training programs each year, including emergency procedures, epi-pen training, and WHMIS.

The Ministry must fund at least a half day for each daily occasional teacher and temporary support staff to complete the required health and safety training each year that permanent staff complete during Professional Activity days.

**Recommendation:**

32. Provide funding to school boards to ensure all temporary and occasional staff are provided with required health and safety training provided during Professional Activity days.

**Ventilation, Air Filtration, and Heat**

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the poor physical condition of many public schools and the impact physical infrastructure can have on the learning conditions for students and the working conditions for teachers and education workers. The alarming backlog in school repairs, which in 2017 stood at \$16 billion, has only grown under the current government.

While the government required school boards to assess ventilation systems, only some focused funding for priority areas was provided. Additional funding must be made available to school boards to make necessary improvements to ventilation and air filtration.

The Ministry of Education has referred to minimum ventilation guidelines by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) as part of the criteria for prioritizing infrastructure projects. The ASHRAE ventilation recommendations take “occupant density” into account. Class sizes should not exceed the maximum occupancy based on ASHRAE recommendations resulting from ventilation assessments.

As ventilation systems are upgraded, it is important to ensure cooling systems are considered to address the increasingly high temperatures that staff and students are experiencing at various times during the school year. It is also important to ensure heating and cooling systems are energy efficient and not contributing to climate change.

High temperatures distract students from learning tasks, and studies show that poor ventilation, as indicated by high carbon dioxide levels, negatively affects student achievement. Even before the pandemic, many jurisdictions regularly monitored air exchange through carbon dioxide levels, but it became increasingly common throughout the pandemic. The government should allocate funding for the procurement, installation and maintenance of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) monitors in each classroom and provide the necessary training to school staff on what to do when CO<sub>2</sub> levels are elevated.

### **Recommendations:**

33. Make funding immediately available to school boards to make necessary improvements to ventilation and air filtration in classrooms.
34. Provide funding to school boards to ensure class size and occupancy levels do not exceed ASHRAE recommendations based on ventilation assessments.
35. Provide funding to school boards to retrofit existing buildings and construct new buildings with energy-efficient heating and cooling systems.
36. Provide funding to school boards to install carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) monitors in each classroom and provide each staff member with instructions on strategies that can be used when CO<sub>2</sub> levels are elevated.

### **Math Proficiency Test Requirement**

In 2019, the government passed Bill 48, *Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act*, which included the introduction of a mandatory Math Proficiency Test (MPT) for all new graduates of the teaching profession. ETFO, alongside the Ontario Federation of Teachers (OTF) and many other education stakeholders opposed

the introduction of the MPT requirement. Despite widespread opposition, the government piloted the MPT in 2020, during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and implemented the testing program in Spring 2021.

The MPT was challenged in court by the Ontario Teacher Candidate Council (OTCC). The OTCC sought rescindment of the regulation requiring the MPT on the grounds that it violated section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The MPT, the OTCC argued, has a disproportionately adverse impact on racialized teacher candidates and that the government had effective alternatives to achieve its objective that did not infringe the *Charter*. This argument was supported by data from the first test sittings and expert evidence.

On December 16th, 2021, the Divisional Court of the Superior Court of Justice ruled in favour of the OTCC. The court found that the MPT infringed section 15 of the *Charter* and could not be justified under section 1. “The evidence points to significant disparities in success rates of standardized testing based on race, including statistical evidence of racial disparities with respect to the MPT specifically.”<sup>19</sup> The government requested leave to appeal the decision to the Ontario Court of Appeal, the Court granted leave to appeal with a hearing date yet to be scheduled.

The mandate of the MPT requirement by the government appears to be more about optics than about enhancing student learning. In its submission to the legislative committee that conducted hearings on Bill 48, ETFO stated:

*“Requiring teacher candidates to complete a mandatory math test to receive a teaching certificate will not lead to improvements in math instruction or math outcomes at the elementary level. It is based on a false premise that this ‘crisis’ in math outcomes is related to teachers’ basic math competency. ETFO rejects these assumptions, which undermine the professionalism of its members and detract from the real barriers to Ontario’s students reaching their full potential in math.”<sup>20</sup>*

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<sup>19</sup> Ontario Teacher Candidates’ Council v. The Queen, 2021 ONSC 7386 (CanLII), [canlii.ca/t/jlcvg](https://canlii.ca/t/jlcvg)

<sup>20</sup> ETFO (2019). ETFO’s submission re Bill 48, *Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act, 2019*. [etfo.ca/getmedia/24552a73-eb90-4d28-a59b-0aa62a73c2b7/190226\\_SubmissionBill48Feb2019.pdf](https://etfo.ca/getmedia/24552a73-eb90-4d28-a59b-0aa62a73c2b7/190226_SubmissionBill48Feb2019.pdf)

The MPT is not an effective practice, and it does not yield the intended results. Rather, it creates further barriers to new members and those attempting to enter the teaching profession in this province. ETFO believes that fully supported professional learning, accompanied with appropriate resources, will be more effective for educators and will be more effective in programming for student needs.

Since the announcement of the MPT requirement, the Ministry introduced a revised elementary Mathematics curriculum. Against the advice of key stakeholders and the Affiliate Curriculum Workgroup, the government chose to release the document in late June 2020 during the pandemic when educators were engaged in emergency teaching. As of January 2022, Ontario educators have yet to be given sufficient time, resources and support to implement this comprehensive revision in a way that its impact can be fully realized. Supports for this new curriculum's implementation with sufficient professional learning and resources is where the government should be placing its attention.

ETFO calls on the government to withdraw its appeal of the Divisional Court's decision on the MPT and instead provide additional funding and resources to support professional development for educators.

### Recommendations:

37. Withdraw the appeal of the Divisional Court's ruling on the Math Proficiency Test.
38. Provide additional funding for professional learning and resources for educators to support the implementation of the revised Mathematics curriculum.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Withdraw the government's appeal of the Ontario Superior Court's decision striking down 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. Cap grades 4 to 8 class size at 24 students.
5. Cap Kindergarten class size at 26 students.
6. Ensure that every Kindergarten class be staffed with a full-time certified teacher and a designated early childhood educator.
7. Allocate funding for 30 minutes of preparation time per day for designated early childhood educators.
8. Allocate funding to support joint planning during the workday for the Full-Day Kindergarten teacher/designated early childhood educator team.
9. Allocate funding to avoid Senior Kindergarten/Grade 1 split classes.
10. Provide funding for non-teaching staff to perform supervision duties such as lunchroom supervision.
11. Base special education grants on actual student needs.
12. 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.
13. 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.
14. 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.
15. Provide funding to the public education sector and community groups for the purpose of eradicating anti-Black racism and other forms of racism.

16. Instruct all school boards to immediately begin collection of disaggregated race-based student and staff data.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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.
20. Allocate funding for additional in-school and community supports necessary to ensure students' developmental and behavioural needs are met.
21. 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.
22. 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.
23. 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.
24. Increase funding for English Language Learners (ELLs) programs and ESL teachers to meet the language acquisition needs of students requiring ELL support.
25. 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.
26. Abandon the proposed plan to make virtual learning a permanent fixture of elementary instruction.
27. Instruct school boards to immediately cease the use of hybrid learning as a method of instruction.
28. Amend the education funding formula to provide all elementary schools with specialist teachers in the arts, guidance and health and physical education.
29. Amend the education funding formula to provide dedicated funding to support school library learning resources and technology.
30. Amend the education funding formula to restore funding for arts programs to 1996 levels adjusted by inflation.

31. 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.
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36. Provide funding to school boards to install carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) monitors in each classroom and provide each staff member with instructions on strategies that can be used when CO<sub>2</sub> levels are elevated.
37. Withdraw the appeal of the Divisional Court's ruling on the Math Proficiency Test.
38. Provide additional funding for professional learning and resources for educators to support the implementation of the revised Mathematics curriculum.

SO:LL:MW:FC:CC

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