

# PROMISES UNFULFILLED

## Addressing the Special Education Crisis in Ontario

### Recommendations

All children deserve a high-quality education that recognizes their diverse needs and abilities. For decades, ETFO has advocated for Ontario's education system to mandate and fully fund the supports and programs necessary to make this goal a reality for children with disabilities.

Ensuring all Ontarians thrive is essential for the economic and social health of the province. That support begins in elementary school. The unfortunate reality is that educators and families are faced

with a broken system that is failing our children on a daily basis.

*Promises Unfulfilled* explores the ongoing history, broken policy, and chronic underfunding that have led to today's classroom challenges. The 27 recommendations included in this report are based on research, statistics, expert analysis, and input from educators directly impacted by the current reality and complexities in our schools.

### Recommendations

ETFO recognizes that the practical implementation of special education is a complex web of history, policy, and funding that intersects with the diverse spectrum of student exceptionalities and learning needs within the classroom.

The following recommendations take all these complexities into account while also demanding necessary change. Our children deserve better, and it is incumbent upon our governments and education systems to ensure that all children in Ontario are provided with every tool and opportunity to thrive.

**It is time that we begin supporting Ontarians with disabilities in elementary school.**

- 1 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased funding to ensure a full range of responsive special education placements and supports that honour a child as a whole person are available in each district school board.
- 2 That the Ministry of Education convene a special education committee that includes education stakeholders (including the affiliates) that meets three times during the school year to review and advise on special education policy.
- 3 That the Ministry of Education engage education unions as full partners in the discussion and implementation of special education at local and provincial levels.
- 4 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased, ongoing, and sustainable funding for high-quality professional learning for educators in special education and student mental health, to take place within the instructional day.
- 5 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased funding for the creation and implementation of Individual Education Plans (IEP) including professional development and the development of curriculum-related resources.
- 6 That the Ministry of Education immediately index special education funding to inflation, address the assessment backlog, and enhance the statistical model.
- 7 That the Ministry of Education resume the practice of including the breakdown of funding allocations under the education category in the provincial budget.
- 8 That the Ministry of Education establish an independent, external review of Ontario's education funding formula to ensure it reflects actual student needs and close any funding gaps that may exist by increasing base special education grants.
- 9 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased enveloped special education funding that is more accessible and allows for more flexibility to meet the wide range of needs of all children throughout the school year.
- 10 That the Ministry of Education increase funding to ensure every Kindergarten class is staffed with a full-time certified teacher and a designated early childhood educator.
- 11 That the Ministry of Education increase funding for early reading intervention services, special education services, resources, professional development, and staffing for children in Year 1 and 2 of Kindergarten, Grade 1 and Grade 2.
- 12 That the Ministry of Education amend [Regulation 132/12](#) of the Education Act and cap grades 4 to 8 class size at 24 children.
- 13 That the Ministry of Education amend [Regulation 132/12](#) of the Education Act and cap Kindergarten class size at 26 children.
- 14 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased funding that ensures all children with exceptionalities have access to the full range of special education placements that meet their needs, from full withdrawal to full integration, with accompanying services, programs, and resources.

- 15 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased funding to increase special education teachers and educators for children to receive the direct support necessary to meet their needs.

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- 16 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased funding to school boards for the purchase of technology devices on a 1:1 basis for children in Grade 4 and above.

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- 17 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased funding to school boards for the hiring of additional behavioural therapists, child and youth workers, educational assistants, guidance counsellors, psychologists, registered nurses, school support counsellors, social workers, special education teachers, speech and language pathologists, teacher librarians and other specialized teachers to support culturally relevant and responsive support to children.

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- 18 That the Ministry of Education provide adequate funding to school boards to ensure availability of appropriately trained staff to fill absences.

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- 19 That the Ministry of Education implement a province-wide strategy to address violence in schools.

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- 20 That the Ministry of Education develop and deliver long-term, fully funded, comprehensive, culturally responsive mental health and special education supports for children.

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- 21 That the Ministry of Education ensure that district school boards comply with their legal obligations under the Occupational Health and Safety Act to provide a safe working environment.

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- 22 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased funding to ensure that an expanded range of programs are provided by school boards to support English language learners with special education needs.

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- 23 That the Ministry of Education ensure that district school boards spend ESL grants on their intended purpose.

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- 24 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased funding for ongoing high-quality professional development for teachers and education workers supporting ELLs with possible special education needs, to take place within the instructional day.

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- 25 That the Ministry of Education allocate increased funding to ensure that district school boards provide a variety of programs for children disadvantaged by intersectional issues that contribute to marginalization, including socioeconomic status, such as but not limited to breakfast and lunch programs, 1:1 technology programs, and free before- and after-school care.

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- 26 That the Ministry of Education require district school boards to collect disaggregated race-based data and provide professional development opportunities to eradicate continued over- and underrepresentation within special education.

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- 27 That the Ministry of Education commit to increased professional development on the importance of culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy as it relates to student engagement and its implications on the special education identification process.

# Conclusion

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For too long, ETFO has sounded the alarm about the state of special education in Ontario. After years of funding cuts and policy changes by successive provincial governments, school boards simply do not have the ability to provide children with disabilities in this province with the supports, resources, and programs they need to succeed. The system is fundamentally broken.

Children with diverse abilities and needs must be welcomed and embraced in our schools. We must begin to truly value differences – in our classrooms and in our society. The whole child must be considered to ensure we are creating the most responsive educational environments.

ETFO urges the Ontario government to adopt our 27 recommendations – to appropriately fund our education system to provide a full range of student supports and ensure schools are designed to nurture authentic community so that all children have a full and valued presence within their classrooms.



To read the *Promises Unfulfilled* materials, including the full report, please visit [etfo.ca](http://etfo.ca)



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