

2025-26

PRE-BUDGET BRIEF

Submission to the
Ministry of Finance

ONTARIO ENGLISH
**Catholic
Teachers**
ASSOCIATION

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) represents the 45,000 passionate and qualified teachers in Ontario's publicly funded English Catholic schools, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

René Jansen in de Wal
President

David Church
General Secretary

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association
65 St. Clair Avenue East, Suite 400
Toronto, ON M4T 2Y8
416.925.2493 or 1.800.268.7230
Fax: 416.925.7764
catholicteachers.ca

February 2025

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | | |
|----|---|----|
| 1. | INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 2. | THE VALUE OF WORKERS AND PUBLIC SERVICES | 2 |
| | Respect for Workers | 2 |
| | Leadership in Times of Challenge..... | 3 |
| 3. | THE COST OF CUTS | 6 |
| | Program (Under) Spending | 6 |
| | Chronic Underfunding in Education | 7 |
| | Privatization: The Costly Alternative | 10 |
| 4. | EDUCATION: INVESTING IN THE FUTURE..... | 12 |
| | Class Size | 13 |
| | Full-day Kindergarten | 14 |
| 5. | SUPPORTING EVERY STUDENT | 15 |
| | Mental Health and Well-being..... | 15 |
| | Special Education | 18 |
| | Learning in a Digital Age | 21 |
| | Ensuring All Learners are Supported | 23 |
| 6. | SAFE AND MODERN SCHOOLS | 26 |
| | Safer Schools for All | 26 |
| | Infrastructure | 27 |
| 7. | ADDRESSING EQUITY IN EDUCATION | 29 |
| 8. | FROM CRISIS TO CARE | 31 |
| | Early Childhood Education and Care..... | 32 |
| | Employment Equity..... | 34 |
| | Addressing Food and Economic Security | 35 |
| | Strengthening the Social Safety Net | 36 |
| | Meeting the Needs of Ontarians with Disabilities..... | 37 |
| | Ensuring Affordable Housing | 39 |
| | Taking Real Climate Action | 40 |

| | | |
|-----|-------------------|----|
| 9. | CONCLUSION | 41 |
| 10. | WORKS CITED | 42 |



INTRODUCTION

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input on behalf of 45,000 Catholic teachers, as the government develops the 2025 provincial budget.


At the time of writing, Doug Ford has launched a snap provincial election, to be held February 27. Quite simply, there is no reasonable justification for this course of action – the Ford Conservative government possesses a legislative majority, there is still more than a year and half left in the government's mandate, and an early election will cost taxpayers \$190 million (Benzie and Ferguson 2025; Paikin 2024).

Instead, as several observers note, an early provincial election is nothing more than a cynical ploy by the Premier to take advantage of political uncertainty – given the resignation of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and the second term of newly-inaugurated US President Donald Trump (Cohn 2025).

Ontarians deserve better than this.

Almost 10,000 people in Ontario died last year while on a health care waiting list, in a system decimated by the Ford government's cuts (SecondStreet 2024). Students are trying to learn in schools that are literally crumbling around them – as the Ford government cuts billions of dollars out of publicly funded education (Rushowy 2024). And while life seems more unaffordable than ever for average Ontario families, we read about this government orchestrating schemes to funnel \$8.2 billion to Doug Ford's developer friends as part of the Greenbelt Scandal (Jones and Brockbank 2022).

All the while, Ford government officials stand smiling at podiums, spinning the facts and trying to convince the public that they are making "historic investments." But politics is not a parlour game. There are real people suffering real consequences from this government's cuts.



No amount of promotional baseball caps and photo-ops can alter reality – almost every aspect of life has gotten demonstrably worse in the past seven years under the Ford Conservative government.

In the submission that follows, Catholic teachers will address a number of areas – education, housing, health care, and more – and will offer our thoughts on the best path forward. Although the government continues to ignore input from frontline workers, we continue to offer insight from our experiences and expertise, with the intent of supporting our students, their families, and investing in the future of Ontario.

THE VALUE OF WORKERS AND PUBLIC SERVICES


Respect for Workers

In a 2022 op-ed for the *Toronto Star*, Rick Salutin proposed a distinction: is it possible for Premier Doug Ford to *like* public sector workers, but not *respect* them? It is a question worth exploring.

Since taking office, the Ford Conservative government has often heaped praise on workers – referring to them as being “absolute champions” and “heroes.” However, it is difficult to square the government’s rhetoric of being “for the people” with a relentless anti-worker agenda that was established early in the government’s tenure.

It is worth remembering that one of the government’s first actions after taking office in 2018 was to recall the legislature to force 3,000 striking York University contract faculty and graduate teaching assistants back to work (Jeffords 2018). The government followed this by cancelling the planned minimum wage increase (PressProgress 2018) and revoking protections under the previous government’s *Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act* (D’Mello 2018). To say this was an inauspicious start would be an understatement. Sadly, this government’s anti-worker and anti-labour trend has continued throughout its tenure.

From the unconstitutional Bill 124 that imposed caps on salary increases; to invoking the Notwithstanding Clause as part of Bill 28 and suspending the Charter rights of Canadian Union of Public Employee (CUPE) education workers; to the shameful dismissal of pleas from migrant agricultural workers for emergency regulations to protect against extreme



heat – seemingly at each opportunity, the Ford Conservative government has used every legislative tool at its disposal to attempt to ignore or eliminate workers’ rights.

It has only been through the solidarity of the labour movement and support from the general public that the Ford government’s worst impulses have been held in check. The Association was proud to join with three teacher affiliates and others to successfully challenge the constitutionality of Bill 124 (D’Mello and Callan 2024). And throughout the Bill 28 fiasco, we stood shoulder-to-shoulder with members of public and private sector unions and citizens across Ontario, as the government was finally forced to back down (Rushowy 2022).

Our Association will continue to defend and promote the rights of workers. It is well past time for the Ford Conservative government to dispense with the meaningless platitudes and attacks on hard-won rights, and instead demonstrate respect for the frontline public service workers who play a vital role in Ontario’s society and economy.


Leadership in Times of Challenge

There is no doubt that that past several years has presented myriad challenges to Ontarians: from the COVID-19 pandemic to global inflationary pressures to the chaos of Donald Trump’s first presidential term – and the uncertainty that accompanies his second term.

During times of turmoil, leaders must set the tone, navigate uncharted waters, and maintain a focus on what matters most to citizens. Such times have a tendency to reveal a government’s priorities – not through slogans or speeches, but through the choices a government makes: the programs that get funded, the process for making decisions, and the people who are intended to benefit. Sadly, in every instance, the Ford Conservative government’s choices reveal glaringly misguided priorities.

The Ford Government’s Misguided Priorities

During their time in office, the Ford Conservative government has created a pattern of policymaking that ignores stakeholders and experts, and is seemingly designed to financially benefit wealthy individuals – specifically PC Party donors – at the expense of the general public, environmental sustainability, and society more broadly.



For instance, the government's decision to buck historical precedent and refuse to release its mandate letters exemplifies their tendency to avoid transparency and accountability – often in a misguided attempt to conceal true intentions (Casey 2022). The same holds true for the Greenbelt scandal, a fiasco for which the government remains under Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) investigation (CBC News 2024).

Despite the Premier's performative gestures of being for "Team Ontario," his government has repeatedly shown a willingness to provide public funds to private and foreign-owned companies – to the detriment of Ontario citizens. As the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) recently revealed, the Ford Conservative government's decision to close ServiceOntario locations and replace them with kiosks inside some foreign-owned Staples Canada and Walmart Canada stores cost taxpayers an additional \$11.7 million and reduced availability by 30 per cent (FAO 2025; Casaletto 2025).

Ontarians are quite literally paying more and getting less – all while the government continues its stubborn refusal to adequately address crumbling public service infrastructure, including a need to invest \$31 billion to address school repairs and necessary upgrades over the next decade (FAO 2024; Payne 2024).

Rather than correct these misguided priorities, the Ford Conservative government is intent on rushing headlong into an unnecessary snap provincial election. This is not a demonstration of leadership. As a popular saying goes, "Nearly everyone can stand adversity; but, if you want to test someone's *character*, give them power." The past seven years have tested the character of Premier Ford and his government – and they have been found wanting.

Addressing the Rise of Hate

There has been a steep rise in incidents of hate and the polarization of societies in recent years, both globally and within Canada. In 2024, the Ontario government highlighted a 20 per cent increase in hate-related crimes year-over-year (Ontario Newsroom 2024).

There are a number of complicated and intersecting factors at play in the growth and spread of societal divisions – from shifts in political discourse and the factions within political parties, to the evolving ecosystems of news and social media, to the widening of economic

inequities; to the psycho-social affects of isolation exacerbated by the pandemic, and more (CBC News 2023; Rana and Jeffrey 2023; Ling 2023). Regardless of cause, these divisions are creating real-world consequences.

In such moments, people often turn to elected officials for leadership. Sadly, rather than speak against hate and polarization, Premier Ford has fanned the flames of division. In September 2023, speaking at the annual “Ford Fest” party, the premier appealed to his far-right base by accusing school boards and teachers of “indoctrinating” students, for the act of protecting students’ right to use gender pronouns of their choice (Teitel 2023).

The premier’s comments were shameful, disrespectful, and potentially harmful – they also demonstrated a breathtaking lack of awareness of the critical role teachers play in creating safe spaces for the students we serve.

However, these comments were not accidental. By specifically using the language of “indoctrination,” the premier was drawing on a strategic approach popularized by right-wing elements in the United States, which is designed to discredit and de-professionalize teachers, and justify funding cuts. A host of US Republican politicians have adopted this tactic (Müller 2023).

Since the Premier’s comments, far-right-wing organizations have increasingly felt emboldened to host demonstrations at school board meetings and to pressure school board trustees to vote against progressive policy motions, such as flying the Pride Flag (Aguilar 2025; Collaco 2024; CBC News 2023).

It cannot fall on the government alone to stem the rising tide of hate and polarization; however, they certainly have a vital role to play.

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Set a positive tone by renouncing support for any far-right groups and individuals who stand in opposition to human rights.• Affirm the right of students to use the gender pronouns of their choice in schools. |

- Commit to working with other political parties and stakeholders, in true and meaningful consultation, and to improving their level of decorum in Ontario’s political discourse.

THE COST OF CUTS

Despite promising to improve the lives of Ontarians, and listen to experts in developing policy, the Ford Conservative government has routinely cherry-picked, spun, or flatly ignored the expertise of relevant stakeholders – choosing instead to pursue an ideological agenda of cuts and privatization, which drives up costs for Ontarians and benefits the wealthy few instead of the many.

Program (Under)Spending

Since coming to office, the Ford government has been trying to justify its austerity plans by claiming Ontario’s finances are in crisis. However, the statement is simply not true.

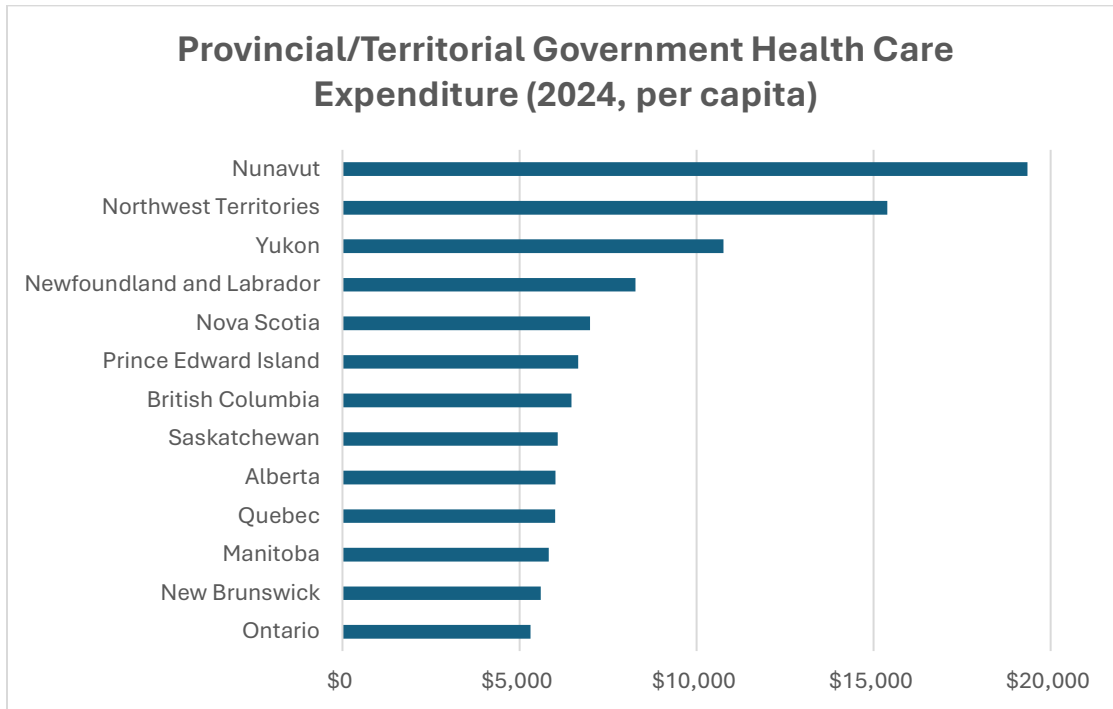
According to government documents and the 2024 Budget, the government’s revenues are projected to rise from \$205.7 billion in 2024 to \$217.4 billion in 2025 – a 5.7 per cent increase (Ministry of Finance 2024). However, spending is only projected to rise by 2.6 per cent – less than half of the anticipated increase in revenue (Tranjan 2025).

In addition, in 2023 the FAO revealed that the Ford Conservative government is sitting on more than \$22 billion in “excess funds,” with no indication or transparency on how that money will be used (FAO 2023; D’Mello and Callan 2023).

Add to this, the billions of dollars in uncollected revenue and the government’s weak “fiscal effort” – defined as the effort a government puts into raising “own-source revenue” as a proportion of gross domestic product – that has resulted from such actions as waiving Highway 407 penalties, breaking a contract with The Beer Store, eliminating licence plate renewal stickers, and more. Put simply, the government has access to substantial public monies with which they could fund public services.

Despite this, the Ontario government’s per capita program spending remains the lowest in Canada (FAO 2024a).

Looking at the health care sector, in 2024 Ontario spent the least per capita of any jurisdiction in Canada – and was \$3,051.88 *below* the national per capita average.

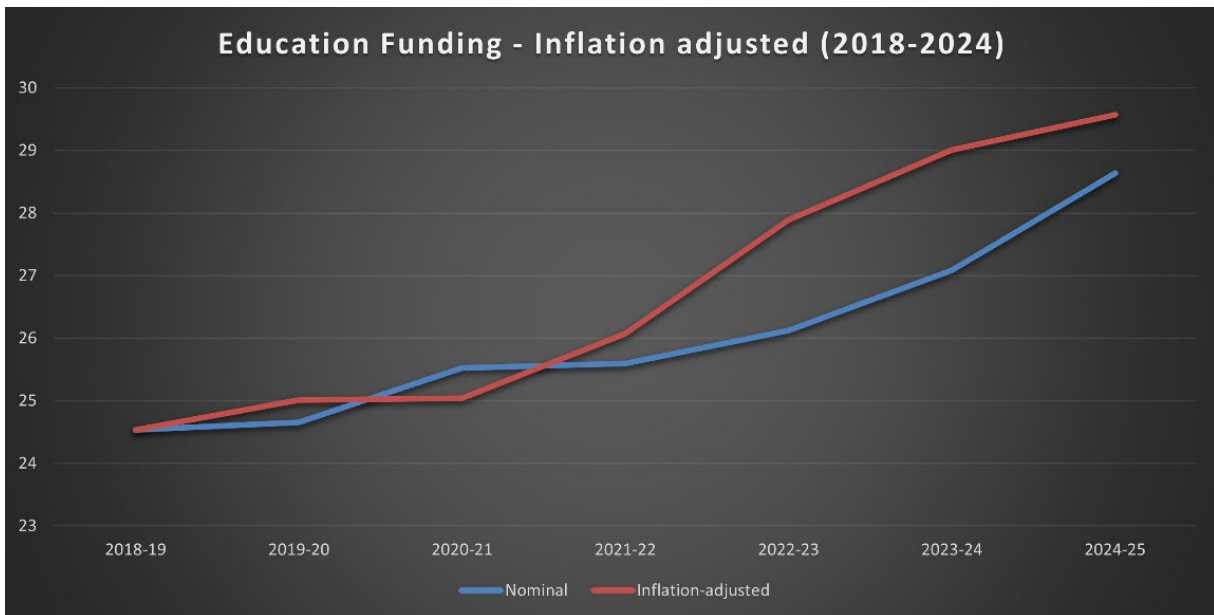


It is shameful that in the midst of a health care crisis – with more than 2.5 million Ontarians without a family doctor, unprecedented wait times, and record emergency room closures – the Ford Conservative government would continue to underspend on health care, and seemingly undervalue the health and lives of Ontarians.

Chronic Underfunding in Education

Every year since taking office in 2018, the Ford Conservative government has framed their education funding announcements as an “historic investment.” And every year, when you strip away the non-classroom items and account for inflation, the government has made deep cuts.

For the 2024-25 school year, Core Education Funding was projected to be \$28.6 billion, which is a 2.7 per cent nominal increase over the previous year. However, when you compare this funding to what the prior Liberal government had invested in the 2018-19 GSNs, and adjust for inflation, the reality is that in 2024-25 the Ford government underfunded education by \$860 million.



It is worth reiterating that, even in a hypothetical world where the government addressed the \$860 million shortfall, this would still do nothing more than maintain funding at the rate of inflation since 2018. In reality, given the diversity and complexity of students’ needs, and as many still grapple with learning loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the actual funding amount that would be required to provide students the necessary resources and supports likely far exceeds inflation.

The situation is not likely to improve – the recent Fall Economic Statement released by the government includes projected education spending as well as projected inflation. When those figures are compared, using 2024 as a baseline, it indicates that by 2026 there will be a further \$200 million inflationary shortfall in education spending (Ministry of Finance 2024a).

Taking a more granular look at per-student funding for 2024-25, we can refer to several tables from different sections of the Core Education Funding document to reproduce a reliable year-over-year funding comparison.

Using the most recent publicly available enrolment data from the Ministry of Education (2022-23 school year), and examining classroom funding per Average Daily Enrolment (ADE), we are able to gain a better sense of the Ford Conservative government’s deep

inflationary cuts across all divisions of the publicly funded education system – for last year and compared to 2018:

| Division | ADE \$ | Nominal % | vs. 2023 | vs. 2018 | Impact |
|---------------------|------------|-----------|----------|----------|-----------------|
| Kindergarten | \$6,890.62 | 2.1% | \$55 | \$750 | \$192.8m |
| Primary | \$6,173 | 1.2% | \$100 | \$704 | \$296.7m |
| Junior/Intermediate | \$5,144.59 | 1.2% | \$84 | \$713 | \$521.2m |
| Secondary | \$6,047.38 | 0.9% | \$117 | \$1,112 | \$718.4m |
| | | | | | -\$1.73b |

In every respect, students and teachers have once again been forced to do more with less, as funding continues to fall well short of inflation. This extends right down to pencils and paper – where schools in Ontario are receiving less than \$1 per day, per student, for classroom supplies.

| | Elementary | Secondary |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Textbooks and learning materials (per student, per day) | \$0.36 | \$0.49 |
| Classroom supplies (per student, per day) | \$0.44 | \$1.00 |

While the Ford government continues to make inflationary cuts to per-pupil funding, they have also quietly been cutting the number of funded classroom teaching positions since 2018.

By using enrollment projections for 2024-25 from the Ministry of Education, we are able to calculate the impact staffing cuts have, specifically on classroom teachers. The table below presents the number of funded classroom teachers per ADE (classroom teachers, specialist teachers, preparation and planning time teachers, online learning teachers, and programming teachers). Using this, we can determine the total number of classroom teaching positions for 2024-25, and compare that against what those numbers *would* be, if the Ford government had simply maintained staffing at 2018 levels.

| Division | Projected school board ADE, 2024-25 | Total # of classroom teachers per 1,000 ADE (2018-19) | Total # of classroom teachers per 1,000 ADE (2024-25) | Difference 2018 vs. 2024 | Change in # of classroom teaching positions 2018-19 vs. 2024-25 |
|--------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|--------------------------|---|
| FDK | 256,348 | 46.77 | 46.77 | - | - |
| Grades 1-3 | 424,923 | 60.18 | 60.18 | - | - |
| Grades 4-8 | 732,667 | 50.11 | 48.78 | -1.33 | -974 |
| Grades 9-12 | 641,096 | 58.78 | 54.74 | -4.04 | -2,590 |
| TOTAL | 2,055,034 | 215.84 | 210.47 | -5.37 | -3,564 |


As the table makes clear, since 2018 the Ford Conservative government has quietly – and shamefully – cut more than 3,500 classroom teaching positions from publicly funded schools in Ontario. Ricardo Tranjan from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives has looked at the data from a system-wide staffing perspective, and found that more than 5,000 classroom positions have been cut by the Ford government since 2018 (Tranjan 2024).

It is astonishing to think that, in the face of chronic underfunding in education and other public services, the Ford government would spend \$3.2 billion dollars from public coffers (Benzie 2024) to send \$200 cheques to millionaires and billionaires, as a cynical ploy to curry favour ahead of a snap provincial election.

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|--|
| • Increase per-student funding beyond the rate of annual inflation. |
| • Consult meaningfully with teachers’ unions and increase the funded number of classroom teachers per 1,000 ADE beyond 2018 levels. |
| • Commit to improving “fiscal effort” to a rate matching the Canadian provincial average, with the additional revenue going to properly fund public services in Ontario. |

Privatization: The Costly Alternative

Taken in isolation, the Ford Conservative government’s funding cuts, refusal to invest, and blatant disrespect of workers could be regarded as a callous but uncoordinated attack. Indeed, commentators point to the sheer number of policy reversals as evidence of government incompetence (Toronto Star 2023). While this is true to a point, one must not



lose sight of a cohering element that underpins much of the government's policymaking motivation: the desire to privatize public services.


This ideologically-driven approach is evident in the government's actions toward various public services.

The Ford government has taken every opportunity to destabilize publicly funded education, and push Ontario's world-class system toward privatization. Over the past three years, the government has cut billions of dollars in education funding (Thompson 2023); made plans to commercialize and expand mandatory online learning (PressProgress 2021); significantly underfunded in-class resources and supports at a time when students are in desperate need of a real and robust plan (Draaisma 2022); and attempted to impose a substandard contract on education workers, while negating their ability to exercise Charter-protected rights (Hauen 2022).

More generally, by underfunding education, the Ford government is removing students' access to the resources they need, by extending wait times for psychoeducational assessment and decreasing availability of paraprofessionals such as psychologists, social workers, child and youth workers, and others. As a result, families are being forced to turn to private sector options – and families without financial means are left to wait, further widening equity gaps.

In health care, as well, the Ford Conservative has demonstrated a worrying trend toward expanding privatized care. In May 2023, the government passed Bill 60, the *Your Health Act*, which was designed to grow the for-profit health care sector and expand the types of surgical and diagnostic procedures allowed to be performed outside of hospitals. An analysis by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) concluded that, despite the government's rationale, expanding for-profit health care options would neither increase capacity nor reduce wait times, as "capacity depends on the availability of qualified staff, which is unchanged by the addition of profit" (Longhurst 2023).

Following this, in June 2024, the government announced it was looking to increase the number of publicly funded MRIs and CT scans offered through private clinics, again predicated on reducing wait times (Ontario Newsroom 2024a).



However, reports soon emerged of patients at private clinics being pressured or deceived into paying additional fees for supplementary services. According to a study by the Ontario Health Coalition, 52 per cent of patients in the study reported at least one circumstance of extra-billing, additional “user fees,” and/or manipulative upselling (OHC 2024).

There are costs to privatization that extend beyond the financial. Research shows that private delivery worsens public sector staffing shortages and destabilizes public sector institutions. Ultimately, for-profit businesses are designed to maximize profit – inevitably this will involve cutting services and decreasing quality in an effort to reduce costs. At the same time, as workers and funds are siphoned into the private sector, a two-tiered system develops, exacerbating social inequity.

CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL...

- Immediately cease any efforts toward privatization and commit to properly funding public services in Ontario, while respecting workers and the expertise of frontline staff.

EDUCATION: INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Catholic teachers are proud of Ontario’s publicly funded education system, and the students we serve. Along with publicly funded English, French public, and French Catholic schools, teachers in publicly funded Catholic schools have made significant contributions to the overall excellence of Ontario’s world-renowned education system.

But the success of Ontario’s education system is not a given. For seven years, the Ford Conservative government has continued to underfund schools, leaving students and teachers with less and less.

Our students are the future – and our schools need real investment, and they need it now. As the Conference Board of Canada has calculated, every dollar invested in publicly funded education yields \$1.30 in total economic benefits to Ontario – and at the same time, the inverse holds true for each dollar cut from publicly funded education (Conference Board of Canada 2019).

Socially and economically, properly funding education is one of the smartest investments we can make in Ontario’s future. In doing so, it is critical that we set students up for success.

Class Size

The benefits of smaller class sizes are well established. Research shows that reductions in class size are associated with improvements in students' psychological engagement with school, more positive reactions to teachers and peers, higher levels of interest and motivation, lower levels of boredom and anxiety, a greater sense of belonging, and more optimism and confidence (Bouguen, Grenet, and Gurgand 2017).

The same principles apply to online classes, which are currently staffed at a student-teacher ratio of 30:1. In a study of online learning for students from Kindergarten to Grade 12, researchers from the University of Hong Kong determined that for online classes that require collaboration, 15 students was the preferable average (Zhang, Liu, and Lin 2018). Researchers also concluded, in a separate study, that student success was maximized when the number of students in an online course did not exceed the in-person class size averages (Noonoo 2020).

The Ford government has pointed to jurisdictions in Canada with higher class size averages than Ontario as counterevidence to the benefits of smaller class sizes. However, it is important to note that collective agreements in British Columbia, Alberta, and Quebec offset higher class size averages by ensuring additional supports/educators based on class composition.

The fact is, reductions in class size from 2003 to 2019 resulted in Ontario achieving the highest four- and five-year graduation rates in the province's history, and Ontario's system of publicly funded education routinely ranked among the best in Canada and the world. This serves to highlight the costs of the government's ideologically-driven decision in 2019 to raise class sizes in grades 4 to 12.

All students deserve the opportunity to interact with their peers in a safe and enriching environment, and to receive the individual attention they need to realize their full potential.

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commit to lowering class size averages in Ontario's publicly funded schools. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work meaningfully with teachers' unions to understand – and factor in – the role of class composition when determining class sizes. |

Full-day Kindergarten

Parents, teachers, early childhood educators (ECEs), administrators, and researchers agree that Ontario’s Full-day Kindergarten (FDK) program is preparing children socially and academically, leading to better outcomes in later years (Alphonso 2017; Janmohamed 2014; Pelletier and Corter 2019). It is imperative that the government continue to respect and support the functioning of the teacher/ECE teams that lay at the heart of this program’s success.

At the same time, to build upon the benefits of the FDK program, the government must address several outstanding issues, such as reducing the number of large and/or split Kindergarten and Grade 1 classes. In addition, the government must reassess provisions that allow a certain percentage of FDK classes within a school board to exceed the class size limit of 29 students.

This has become a significant issue in several areas, including the Halton Catholic District School Board, which this year has seen nine per cent of FDK classes exceed the limit – impacting the learning environment and creating challenges for classroom management (Cilliers 2024). This hurts our youngest learners at the start to their education journey. However, with the *proper* support, the investment in FDK will continue to pay dividends long into the future for students, families, the economy, and society.

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continue to support and strengthen the FDK program so it can honour its original promise. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work meaningfully with teachers’ unions and commit to eliminating the exceptions that allow a certain percentage of FDK classes within a school board to exceed the class size limit of 29 students. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve the funded number of FDK teachers per 1,000 ADE, to ensure that our youngest learners are not forced into large and/or split Kindergarten and Grade 1 classes. |



SUPPORTING EVERY STUDENT

Every student, regardless of their individual needs, should have access to the resources they need in order to thrive.

Whether it is additional assistance with reading or math, special education, mental health, and more, the Ford Conservative government must reverse course to prioritize increasing the broad suite of supports that students rely on to learn, grow, and achieve.

Mental Health and Well-being


It is disappointing that the government's 2025-26 education funding consultation guide included no section dedicated to mental health and well-being, nor made any comment about mental health being a priority for this government.

Despite the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has subsided, everyday teachers see the impact that the pandemic is still having on all students – as well as themselves. According to a 2022–23 survey of more than 10,000 Ontario students in grades 7 to 12, more than half (51 per cent) reported moderate-to-serious psychological distress – a figure double that of the previous decade's rate (Boak et al. 2022).

Unfortunately, the government has still not acknowledged or acted upon the recommendation from Catholic teachers to invest in proactive and comprehensive mental health assessment of students – to determine a “baseline” of mental health fitness, and then to follow up with additional mental health climate assessments at regular intervals. Examples from other jurisdictions can provide a roadmap to how this type of initiative could be implemented in Ontario. For instance, in the United States, the National Center for School Mental Health (NCSMH) at the University of Maryland School of Medicine developed SHAPE – the Student Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation system.

The NCSMH developed a simple mental health screening tool and follow-up assessments that could be delivered to students at regular intervals throughout their education journey. The culturally relevant and grade-specific tools are based on seven variables:

- Indicators of well-being and positive mental health
- Sense of school belonging

- 
- Life satisfaction
 - Social determinants of mental health
 - Adverse early life experiences
 - Food and housing security/insecurity
 - Socioeconomic status

This program allows school districts to shift their philosophy from reactive to proactive, allowing for early identification and intervention, through a multi-tiered system of supports. With respect to data collection and analysis, not only does this type of program allow for cohort analysis across time, but it also reveals trends within grades and various other factors.

Not only can this improve student mental health fitness and access to resources, but also – as assessments become normalized – research indicates that it has enhanced students’ sense of empowerment and self-esteem, and reduced stigma around talking to students about mental health within the school setting (NCSMH 2023).

There is little reason that a province as wealthy and prosperous as Ontario, with as much public revenue as is available to the provincial government, could not implement this type of program. Sadly, the main obstacle is not capacity, but political will.

As a result of this government’s negligence, Ontario schools remain woefully under-resourced. According to a 2023 report from People for Education, only nine per cent of schools have regularly scheduled access to a mental health/addiction specialist or nurse, and 46 per cent report no access at all.

With respect to psychologists, 28 per cent of Ontario schools report having no access to this critical resource, either in-person or virtually – a figure that has almost doubled since 2011. Overall, 95 per cent of schools in Ontario report needing “some” or “more” support for students’ mental health and well-being (People for Education 2023).

It is important to note that, although *all* students are experiencing mental health issues, they are not always experiencing these issues equally or in the same ways. Research shows that families who were already vulnerable prior to the pandemic – for example, those from equity-deserving groups or those with lower household income and parental education rates

– have been “disproportionately impacted by economic hardship as a result of the pandemic, such as job loss and food insecurity” (SickKids 2021).

As well, funding allocations such as the Special Incidence Portion (SIP), continue to be based on historical averages and not on system need – thus, especially in smaller school boards, there could be significant funding shortages in situations where there has been an increase of students requiring this funding line. To this point, geographic and demographic needs must be considered to ensure that no regions, communities, or populations are disadvantaged.

Just as the government must address the epidemic of *student* mental health issues, so too must they fulfil their duty to consider the mental health needs of teachers and education workers. According to research from the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF 2020), close to 70 per cent of teachers across the country are concerned for their own mental health and well-being, and 75 per cent say they are finding it increasingly difficult to meet their personal and professional expectations. The vast majority – including 99 per cent of OECTA members who completed the survey – do not feel they are being supported by the Ministry of Education as they cope with these struggles.

CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL...

- Immediately and dramatically enhance investments into mental health services in schools, and expand school-based resources, supports, and services. This should include funding to support ongoing mental health-related professional development opportunities for educators, as well as the hiring of additional mental health professionals, including social workers, psychologists, psychotherapists, guidance teachers, child and youth workers, and school mental health workers.
- Invest in proactive and comprehensive mental health assessment of students – and act with speed to deploy mental health and well-being teams in every school in Ontario. Consider a program – developed in partnership with paraprofessionals, frontline teachers and education workers, and their representatives – that assess student mental health at regular intervals over their education journey to better understand trends over time.

- Acknowledge the relationship between mental health and equitable student outcomes. All mental health interventions should be culturally responsive and adaptable to meet the diverse needs of all students, and especially those from equity-deserving groups.
- Increase annual funding for Student Mental Health Ontario in a manner that reflects sustainability and long-term needs.
- Co-ordinate with other ministries to explore the community hub model, located within publicly funded schools, and consult meaningfully and regularly with the representatives of frontline teachers and education workers.
- Ensure that school administrators are honouring teachers' contractual rights to access sick leave for mental health issues, including investigating the reasons for, and redressing, the shortage of qualified occasional teachers.
- Return to providing detailed breakdowns of funding at the component level.


Special Education

Special education funding remains a glaring weakness in Ontario's publicly funded education system, as it continues to insufficiently address student need, opting instead for a one-size-fits-all formula approach.

In the 2024-25 Core Education Funding document, the government lauded itself for providing \$3.49 billion in its Special Education Fund, a 2.3 per cent increase over the previous year. However, it must be noted that this still represents an inflationary cut of \$20 million over last year – and a \$130 million shortfall compared to what the Liberals were investing in 2018.

More to the point, the increase is still a “drop in the bucket” of what is needed. Currently, the funding formula assigns a total of 1.73 support staff per 1,000 elementary school students and 2.21 per 1,000 secondary school students, dedicated to support students who need special education programs, services, and/or equipment (Ministry of Education 2024). This is a woefully inadequate ratio, which produces significant shortages in supports. Based on funding allocations and enrolment projections, this amounts to roughly 0.6 speech-language pathologists per elementary school.

Looking at psychologists, People for Education's 2019 survey of principals found that almost 30 percent of schools in Ontario reported having no access to a psychologist – a figure that



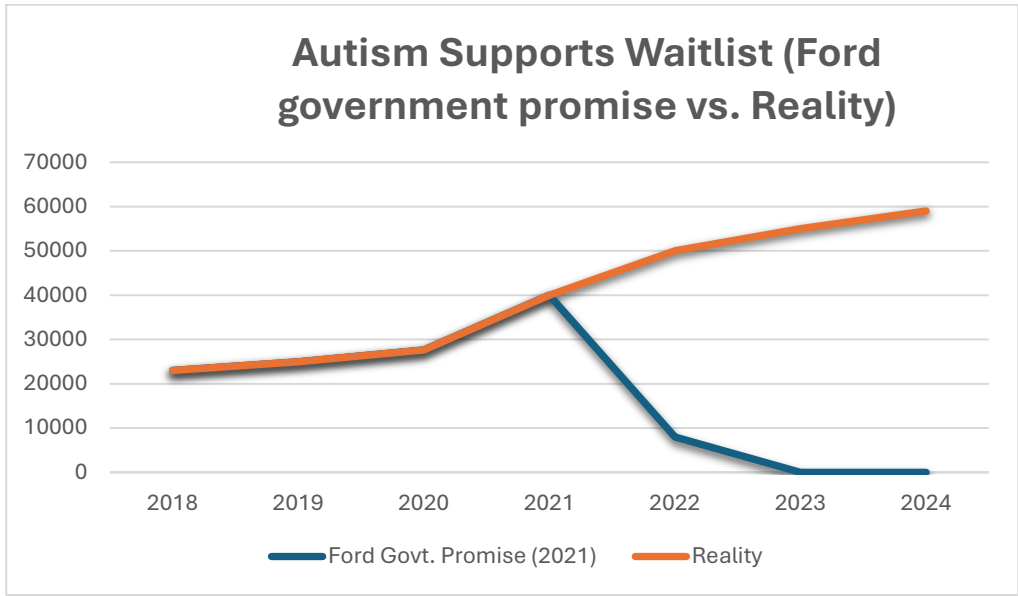
increases when geography is taken into account, and has only worsened in the intervening years (People for Education 2019).

At the same time, it is important to note that Ontario's special education program was never designed to deliver mental health services. Increasingly, psychologists are being required to provide these supports, in addition to the psychoeducational support that has been their traditional responsibility. This speaks to a clear need to reassess Ontario's special education program, and to ensure that the investment in supports and resources – including human resources – are sufficient to meet students' diverse and evolving needs.

If the Ford government is to address this issue comprehensively, it will need to improve upon past performance. This should include a movement to a needs-based funding model, rather than the ineffective and inefficient one-size-fits-all approach the government currently employs.

However, a transition to needs-based funding should also not replace base funding for special education. Instead, additional funding should be provided in a "base-plus" model. Without this, the government risks widening equity gaps between schools and communities. On the issue of special education, it would be remiss not to mention the government's shambolic handling of the autism file. The government has put families of children with autism through an incredible ordeal, first announcing a widely condemned move from a needs-based support system to a fixed amount, then walking back this decision but delaying implementation of the new program – at the time leaving more than 27,000 children on the waitlist for services (MacMillan 2021; Waberi 2020; Sharkey 2019).

In March 2021, the government promised there would be fewer than 8,000 children on the waitlist for needs-based autism programs by the end of that year. Fast-forward to September 2024, the list now stands at almost 60,000 children (Jones 2024).



Beyond issues with the waitlist, there remains a significant gap in the availability of services offered in schools. This, in turn, often drives families to seek external supports from expensive privatized providers – which creates equity issues between families who can and cannot afford these services. All of this serves to reinforce the ineffectiveness of taking a “one-size-fits-all” approach to special education, rather than providing sufficient funding to ensure that students get the specialized supports they need.

As the government solicited feedback in developing education funding for 2025-26, the section on special education included the following prompt: “Is there a way to allocate the Special Education Fund (or portions of this fund) more effectively and/or efficiently, *without creating the need for new provincial funding or increasing administrative burden*” (*emphasis added*) (Ministry of Education 2024a).

Quite simply, there is no substantive way to improve supports and resources for students with special education needs without dramatically increasing funding. The government must immediately disabuse itself of the notion that teachers can do more with less to help the neediest of our students.



| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|--|
| • Dramatically increase funding to the Special Education Fund. |
| • Work with teachers’ unions to revise and increase the ratio of professional and paraprofessional supports for students with special education needs per 1,000 ADE. |
| • Work with teachers’ unions to develop a framework for a “needs-based-plus” system of special education funding. |
| • Return transparency and accountability to special education funding by clearly outlining funding amounts and the sub-component level. |

Learning in a Digital Age

Online Learning


It must be stated plainly that any attempt to expand online learning and privatize aspects of Ontario’s publicly funded education system will lead students to lose out on vital interactions with teachers, education workers, and other students. Inequalities would increase, and learning gaps would widen, especially among students with special education needs, Indigenous students, and those from vulnerable and equity-deserving communities (Maimaiti et al. 2021).

There are also significant disparities in academic programming between courses offered in-person and online. For instance, at the secondary level, there are reports that several school boards are advertising the elimination of exams for online credit courses, in an effort to drive enrolment. However, we must be clear that doing so dilutes the credit integrity of those online courses and impacts student learning.

It is concerning that in the 2024-25 Core Education Funding document, the credit load per student for online learning was increased from 0.225 to 0.35. As discussed previously, this will result in a decrease of the overall number of secondary classroom teachers. We once again ask the government to “show their work” on how the percentage used as the basis for per pupil credit load is generated, and how it compares to actual use.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

There is an emerging issue that the government must proactively address: the role of generative AI in the classroom. Catholic teachers know their students best; however, the



speed with which AI is developing presents an unprecedented challenge for teachers and education workers.

While, at first glance, some individuals in the sector may regard AI software as having the potential to provide support in developing materials such as assessments or lesson plans, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has raised significant concerns that AI-generated materials can echo and perpetuate biases, spread dis- and misinformation, and negatively disrupt labour markets – especially in high-skills fields (OECD 2024).

The Association strongly objects to any attempt to integrate AI into publicly funded education without careful consideration and appropriate legal and pedagogical guardrails in place. While there is an emerging body of research that highlights the student-focused dangers of AI, there are a number of potential impacts on teachers and education workers that must be addressed – ranging from issues of supervision to surveillance and privacy to job security to vendor compliance and more.

If publicly funded education is to properly address the challenges posed by generative AI, teachers and their representatives must be at the centre of any discussions – involved in everything from policy development, to curriculum writing, to professional development opportunities, and beyond.

Many of the emerging issues are the result of private sector encroachment into publicly funded education; it is neither acceptable nor beneficial to turn to the private sector for solutions to public services. In fact, exposing children to profit motive as a driver jeopardizes safety, privacy, and security. The impact of simpler but significant technologies like social media has already created serious and real concerns for parents, teachers, and children.

Equitable Access

Reliable broadband access remains uneven across the province, with northern and rural areas facing significant gaps in service. This has been compounded by several internet outages, even in urban areas. As well, many families in Ontario cannot afford high speed internet, or the technology required to access online courses (Mundie 2021; Draaisma 2019).

In the government’s seemingly relentless pursuit of expanding online learning, they have failed to take into account the social, cultural, economic, and geographic factors that impact a student’s ability to engage with, and achieve success, in an online learning environment. The government must recognize that not all children live in areas that enjoy reliable and consistent access.


We must remember at all times that in-person learning is unquestionably the best and most equitable form of learning. That said, for those students who are interested in online learning, students and teachers must be provided with appropriate resources and supports to facilitate achievement.

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide dedicated funding for teacher-led, teacher-directed professional development for online learning, as well as adapt or develop curriculum – in collaboration with teachers – to incorporate critical approaches about appropriate use of AI in the classroom. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide predictable and ongoing funding to ensure that every student who needs it has access to their own electronic device, and must ensure that all families have equitable access to broadband internet. In addition, any educator required to deliver instruction remotely must be issued the technology and/or devices required for the task by their school board. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cease the expansion of online learning, as well as the extension of service delivery to third party entities beyond the publicly funded education system – and commit to in-person learning by providing the necessary investments into classroom resources and supports to allow students to thrive, academically and socially. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that any courses that are delivered in an online format must be delivered by certified teachers, within the publicly funded education system, and must not be hosted or delivered by any third-party and/or private organization. |

Ensuring All Learners are Supported

Indigenous Education

The 2015 report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission drew attention to a number of issues pertaining to Indigenous youth and education. While much of the focus has been on



students attending on-reserve schools, it is important to note that in Ontario the majority of Indigenous students attend a provincially funded school.

Shamefully, there remain significant resource gaps in schools with high proportions of Indigenous students compared to other schools in the province, including lower than average access to guidance teachers, teacher-librarians, and music and physical education programs (Cimellaro 2023; Gallagher-Mackay et al. 2013).

As of 2022, 13 per cent of elementary schools and 20 per cent of secondary schools offer Indigenous languages programs. As well, nearly a quarter of elementary schools and one-in-five secondary schools still report having no professional development offered to teachers regarding Indigenous education (People for Education 2023).


It is clear that, in addition to investments in resources and supports, teachers and education workers will require ongoing professional development to facilitate curriculum delivery, as well as to promote familiarity and comfort in providing instruction on important, but potentially sensitive topics.

The government must act now. It has been well established that integrating Indigenous students into their school communities and enabling them to realize their full potential will reduce marginalization and pay significant social and economic dividends over the long term (Sharpe and Arsenault 2010).

English Language Learners

Currently, funding for English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) programs is based on census data and immigration statistics. While these figures provide an estimate, they do not accurately reflect English Language Learners' needs based on actual proficiency.

The current funding formula also “fails to recognize the additional costs associated with higher densities of ESL needs in areas with high levels of immigration,” while a lack of oversight and transparency mechanisms means some school boards might not be spending the funds on programming for students who need support (Mackenzie 2017).



Another factor that impacts the learning experience of English language learners, as well as adult and continuing education learners, is a critical lack of infrastructure. With immigration increases in recent years, there has been an increase in demand for education programs at all levels (Ministry of Finance 2024b). However, there has not been a corresponding investment to ensure these learners have the necessary infrastructure to ensure an adequate learning environment.

Adult and Continuing Education

Adult and continuing education programs continue to be funded at a fraction of the level of regular day school credit programs. Looking at per-student funding, in 2023-24 the government provided \$3,661 per continuing education ADE, whereas funding for regular day school credit program amounted to \$13,584 per student.

This funding disparity creates significant issues for learners. Funding allocations from Special Purpose Grants are directed only toward students in the regular day school program, even though in many cases adult and continuing education programs are being delivered to new immigrants or students who have been marginalized from the regular day school credit program.

At the same time, the lack of special purpose funding means that in schools where alternative education programs for traditional-aged students run concurrently with adult and continuing education programs, support services such as guidance and special education are forced to be spread across both programs – leaving all students without proper access to critical resources.

As a result, adult or continuing education students who have significant needs are often dealing with large class sizes, different classes being delivered in the same room, and a lack of early intervention processes, while teachers are often employed from contract to contract, with substandard salaries, working conditions, and rights.

CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL...

- Dramatically increase funding for Indigenous education, English Language Learners, and Adult and Continuing Education.

- Provide ongoing professional development to facilitate curriculum delivery, as well as to promote familiarity and comfort in providing instruction on important, but potentially sensitive topics as they relate to Indigenous education.
- Allocate dedicated funding for school boards to provide the necessary supports to improve language skill assessment. At the same time, Indigenous, English language, and adult learners require additional and specific trauma-informed mental health supports to improve chances for successful completion of their respective programs.

SAFE AND MODERN SCHOOLS

Safer Schools for All

“Almost nine-in-ten teachers (89 per cent) indicate that they have experienced or witnessed violence or harassment in their schools” (OECTA 2017). The preceding quotation comes from an OECTA survey report released in 2017.

In the eight years following this report, incidents of violence and harassment in schools have only grown more frequent and severe – and to-date, despite education stakeholders and opposition parties demanding action, the government has done nothing of substance to address this critical issue (CBC News 2024a).

The issue of violence in schools is complex and challenging. There is no simple answer. Addressing this matter requires a multifaceted, comprehensive, and co-ordinated response. Despite greater media attention being paid to this problem, and although education unions have worked hard to negotiate contractual obligations requiring school administrators to report incidents of violence, we are still a long way from implementing the solutions originally outlined in our Association’s *Safer Schools for All* platform (OECTA 2017a). It is disconcerting that there is an expectation by some that educators must bargain for safe schools at negotiating tables, because the government refuses to adequately address the safety of children and schools.

The lasting consequences that the COVID-19 pandemic had on student mental health have been well established (St. George et al. 2021; SickKids 2021). And by no means is this an education-specific issue: our schools reflect broader social trends, and evidence points to a rise in threats and acts of violence across Canada in recent years (Green 2024). It is incumbent upon the government to address the issue of school violence and to do whatever

is necessary to ensure a safe learning environment for students, teachers, education workers, and staff. This requires honest assessment and proactive investment.


An act of violence is often a cry for help. It has, as its basis, a multitude of intertwining factors – everything from inadequate access to mental health resources, to large class sizes, to a lack of special education supports, to the defunding of before- and after-school programming, and more, plays a role.

However, there is a consistent theme to each of these, which has contributed to the rise in violence and harassment: chronic underfunding of publicly funded education (Bond and McAllister 2024). There are a number of actions the Ford Conservative government can – and must – take immediately in order to begin to address the issue of school violence.

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide resources and supports for more frontline, school-based child and youth workers, social workers, psychologists, and other professional services to help students and education workers deal with their social, emotional, and behavioural needs, in some cases attributable to pandemic-related causes. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide teachers and school staff with comprehensive trauma-informed training. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work meaningfully with education unions and other key stakeholders to proactively support students or staff who are in crisis, by developing a whole-school approach to addressing incidents of violence, which includes follow-up actions to prevent recurrence. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage and facilitate collaborative efforts between the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development, the Ministry of Health, and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services on the development of a proactive, multifaceted response that addresses the needs of both victims and perpetrators of school violence. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work with education stakeholders to develop sector-specific regulation for education under the <i>Occupational Health and Safety Act</i>. |

Infrastructure

The need for urgent and comprehensive upgrades to Ontario’s publicly funded schools has now been evident for many years. In 2016, the school repair backlog was estimated to be



\$15 billion (Rushowy 2019). Today, the repair backlog is estimated to exceed \$17 billion (Balintec 2024).

A recent FAO report (2024) drives home the point. The report found:

- Four in 10 Ontario schools are currently in a state of disrepair. If funding levels remain insufficient, that number will jump up to seven in 10 schools by 2034.
- The Ford government's inadequate budget is \$12.7 billion less than what is needed for schools to meet the repair threshold and the demand of growing student enrollment numbers over the next decade.
- This school year alone, there are 150,881 more students than available classroom spaces, forcing schools to house students in portables and other temporary learning spaces.
- The province needs to build the equivalent of 227 new schools over the next decade to accommodate growing capacity needs – a necessity they are woefully behind on.

Students and teachers should not be forced to learn and work in an unsafe environment with leaking roofs and crumbling infrastructure (Lavoie 2024).

Instead of addressing this critical issue with substantive investment and action, the government has chosen to grandstand – trumpeting its desire to build new schools, and forcing school boards to redirect already-insufficient funds to erect advertising signs on school buildings as part of the government's shameless self-promotion (Pinkerton and Duggal 2024).

In the zeal to build new schools, the government has made no assurances that school buildings will be fully accessible and comply with all relevant legislation. In June 2023, Rich Donovan, Chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Alliance, released a scathing report, concluding that Ontario has reached a "crisis state" and that the Ford government has failed its obligation to make Ontario accessible. The report also says it is a "near certainty" that the Ford government will miss its legally mandated target of ensuring accessibility by 2025 (Donovan 2023).

More broadly, in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is time to reassess the province's approach to school construction. Since the 1970s, the physical construction of

Ontario schools has been driven by economic and demographic considerations, and has entirely ignored public health concerns (McQuigge 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that school facilities are not well-positioned to respond to public health emergencies, with small, overcrowded classrooms and inadequate, dated, and substandard ventilation systems, where such systems exist.


The same holds true with respect to climate-change-related construction. Many schools in Ontario are simply too old to be properly retrofitted to ensure they are energy-efficient, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and help fight climate change.

It is clear that Ontario needs meaningful investment so that Ontario school facilities are part of a climate action solution, and to ensure that schools are prepared in the event of a future pandemic.

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide immediate, stable, and sufficient annual funding for infrastructure and repairs sufficient to eliminate the current repair backlog within the next three years. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide immediate funding to upgrade all school facilities such that they meet accessibility standards and legal requirements. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make the necessary investments to ensure that all schools have ventilation systems that meet the health and safety standards set by the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating, and Air-Conditioning Engineers. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ensure that any efforts to build new schools do not involve private-public partnerships (PPP) as a method to promote school construction, as this form of creeping privatization has no place in the development of public infrastructure. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Must ensure that any construction of new school facilities is fully accessible and complies with all relevant accessibility legislation. |

ADDRESSING EQUITY IN EDUCATION

Catholic teachers have always supported efforts to eliminate racism, discrimination, and all systemic barriers in our schools, and we will continue to advocate for action, offering our perspectives on how to best promote equity in education, including combatting anti-Black



racism, anti-Indigenous racism, and supporting and protecting the rights of 2SLGBTQIA+ students and staff. With respect to anti-Black racism, some of these ideas are expanded upon in Association publications, such as our *Submission to the Ontario Human Rights Commission on Anti-Black Racism in Education* (2023).

We recognize and acknowledge the many, varied, and systemic ways that discrimination and racism manifest and are reproduced in all our social institutions, including publicly funded education. And we understand the consequences such harms have on students, teachers, education workers, and families in the short and long terms.

Unfortunately, too often, the government has opted for a performative approach to this critical issue, rather than taking concrete steps, with proper investments and resources, to redress inequities faced by a variety of equity-deserving communities.

The situation around destreaming offers a case-in-point. The Association strongly supported destreaming efforts, but insisted that the government commit stable long-term funding to ensure that students and teachers had the necessary resources and supports to maximize success.

Shamefully, the government has taken the opposite approach. By pursuing destreaming without providing additional supports for students, smaller class sizes so that teachers can provide greater individual attention and differentiated instruction, revamped curricula, implementation training for educators, or meaningful collaboration with educators, the government's approach inhibits success (Coalition for Alternatives to Streaming in Education 2021).

Most outrageous of all, when the 2024-25 Core Education Funding was released, it was discovered that the government had reduced destreaming funding from – an already insufficient – \$103.69 million to \$3 million (Ministry of Education 2024). This represents a 97 per cent funding cut. This is utterly disgraceful for a government who drapes itself in talking points about the importance of equity.

The Ford Conservative government must immediately reverse course, and make good on its stated commitment to eradicate anti-Black racism, and all other forms of racism and discrimination, from Ontario's publicly funded education system.


CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL...

- Provide immediate investment to allow school boards to hire additional resource teachers, educational assistants, special education supports, social workers, psychologists, guidance teachers, school nurses, and culturally responsive counsellors, to assist families and students from Black, racialized, and Indigenous communities, as well as 2SLGBTQIA+ students, students with disabilities, and those living in low-income communities or from other equity-deserving groups.
- Invest in mandatory ongoing training and professional development for all administrators, school board trustees, teachers, education workers, and teacher candidates, on a range of equity-related topics, including microaggressions.
- Adopt a more dedicated and substantive approach to disaggregated, demographic-based data collection. Any effort by school boards to collect equity-related data must involve a standardized approach, consider cultural relevance and responsiveness and trauma-informed principles, include all employees and their positions, respect privacy, and achieve the highest standards of data collection integrity – results must also be made available in an accessible form.
- Commit to working collaboratively with education affiliates on any policy and program implementation, including curriculum writing.

FROM CRISIS TO CARE

Catholic teachers take a broad view of our responsibility to make this province a better place. This is not simply a philosophical position. Every day, teachers see the real-world consequences of social and economic inequities – we see it on the faces of students who have difficulty focusing because they have come to school hungry. We see it on the faces of students whose parents are unable to assist with homework because they must work multiple, low-paying jobs.

Teachers have a front row seat to the impact socio-economic factors play within a student's educational journey – and this has steeled our resolve to make this province, and world, fairer and more just for all.



Ontario is a wealthy province, with the capacity to build a society in which everyone has genuine opportunities to participate and succeed; but achieving this goal will require shifts in attitudes and bold investments in infrastructure, public services, and people.

Early Childhood Education and Care


Research confirms the importance of the early years in a child's life in the development of cognitive and non-cognitive skills (Cleveland 2021). And it has long been known that affordable, accessible, high-quality early childhood education and care increases equity in outcomes at school and creates a strong foundation for lifelong learning (McCuaig, Bertrand, and Shanker 2012).

It also improves labour force participation, particularly among women, which helps to boost household incomes and reduce poverty. According to one analysis, every public dollar spent expanding enrolment in early childhood education and care yields close to \$6 in economic benefits (Alexander et al. 2017).

For many years, our Association has advocated for accessible and affordable publicly funded child care in Ontario. Sadly, the Ford Conservative government has met these requests from ourselves and others with a callous disregard, bordering on hostility toward publicly funded early childhood education and care – cutting millions of dollars in child care funding; loosening child care regulations; and refusing to transfer promised funds to municipal service managers, therefore making it very difficult for them to pass on proper levels of funding to the frontline operator (Jones 2024a).

It has been almost two years since the Ford government's delays made Ontario the last jurisdiction in Canada to sign on to the federal government's Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care (CWELCC). However, despite signing on to the CWELCC, the provincial government has continued its efforts to siphon money meant for publicly-funded operators into the hands of for-profit companies.

In July 2024, then-Minister of Education Todd Smith sent a letter to the federal government, requesting the removal of limits on for-profit child care expansion, which under the agreement are to comprise no more than 30 per cent of spaces (Jones 2024).



When the story broke, Carolyn Ferns, Policy Co-ordinator with the Ontario Coalition for Better Child Care, and Morna Ballantyne, Executive Director of Child Care Now, penned an op-ed with a clear warning: “The further expansion of for-profit child care will destabilize the child-care sector, put at risk the popular project to lower parent fees and divert public funds from quality improvements to profit-making” (Ferns and Ballantyne 2024).

Sadly, their words were prophetic. Just four months later, in November, news broke that a number of child care centres were withdrawing from the CWELCC and drastically increasing fees – in many cases, more than doubling the current rate, costing families \$15-20,000 more per year (Wilson 2024).

This expansion for for-profit child care under the Ford Conservative government is disappointing, but not surprising. Since the CWELCC’s creation, the Ford government has been responding to the lobbying efforts of for-profit providers (Mendleson and Kennedy 2022). In the city of Toronto, the government abruptly cancelled construction plans for 3,000 child care spaces that would have been operated in non-profit centres as part of the \$10-a-day program, and instead handed the funds to private corporations to “accelerate expansion of private for-profit operators” (Lang 2024).

Given the Ford government’s willingness to sacrifice the public good for private company profit, it is no surprise that Ontario has the lowest rate of child care centre participation in the CWELCC of any jurisdiction in Canada – a figure driven primarily by the number of for-profit child care operators choosing not to participate (Kennedy 2025).

Beyond financial consequences, child care in Ontario remains plagued by long-standing systemic issues. The sector continues to suffer from a severe staffing shortage, precipitated by low pay for workers. The Ford government is well aware of the problem: internal government documents project a shortfall of 8,500 child care workers by 2026, continuing a trend that saw the percentage of early childhood educators in Ontario child care decline in 2024, which it has since 2019 (Jones 2024a).

Coupled with the chronic staffing crisis is a lack of available child care spaces. The introduction of the CWELCC has increased demand for publicly funded child care. According to Statistics Canada, almost 26 per cent of Ontario parents were on a waiting list in 2023,

up from 19 per cent in 2022. However, wait times to access centres are measured in years due to a lack of available space.

At the local level, the Scarborough—Rouge Park and Humber River—Black Creek regions of Toronto have enough licenced child care spaces for less than 20 per cent of the children in the area (Hasham 2023). More broadly, an FAO report estimates that the province will be more than 220,000 child care spaces short of meeting demand by 2026 (Jones 2024). The Ford Conservative government’s negligence toward ensuring publicly funded, accessible, and affordable child care in Ontario – and the impact this has on families and women’s economic security – is a stain on this government’s legacy.

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Honour its commitments under the CWELCC and commit to an immediate phase-in of fully-publicly funded child care, co-ordinated with the creation of licensed child care spaces sufficient to meet demand. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Address recruitment and retention issues through measures such as providing a living wage to early childhood educators. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cease providing public funding to for-profit child care centres, and ensure all funding is dedicated to publicly funded, not-for-profit child care centres. |

Employment Equity

Income inequality is one of the defining issues of our times. As an increasing number of Ontarians find themselves in precarious work and we fail to improve our social safety net accordingly, our economy and society are at risk.

Juxtaposed against workers’ struggles is the exorbitant pay enjoyed by Canadian company CEOs. In 2023, Canada’s 100 highest-paid CEOs earned an average of \$13.2 million. To put this into context, by 10:54 a.m. on the first working day of the year, these 100 CEOs made \$62,661 – the *annual* salary of the average Canadian worker. As of 2023, Canadian company CEOs earned 210 times the amount of the average worker – a 102 per cent increase from 25 years ago (Macdonald 2025).

We must confront rampant inequality with aggressive and progressive government policy. And while we should strive to improve the lives and compensation of all workers, we must

continue to recognize persistent and historical factors that impact different workers in different ways.

Women, racialized workers, Indigenous Peoples, and other equity-deserving groups, continue to confront disproportionate disadvantages in society and the economy. According to the Ontario Equal Pay Coalition, the gender pay gap is, on average, 32 per cent, and has remained stagnant for nearly three decades (OEPC 2024).

This gap widens further for women of different identities. Indigenous and Black women experience a pay gap of roughly 42 per cent. Put differently, Indigenous and Black women must work an additional 153 days to earn what a man makes in one year, on average. Similar barriers are faced by transgender women. A seminal study in 2018 found that more than 20 per cent of transgender women had suffered significant employment setbacks in the past three years, including unjustified terminations, unfair disciplinary procedures, persistent harassment, and unpaid wages (James et al. 2018).


More broadly, although the employment gaps have narrowed over the past several decades, women still face an 8.2 per cent employment gap compared to men – a gap that widens to 14.1 per cent for women with children (Scott 2023). This, along with the fact that women face earnings loss of up to four years following child birth, reinforce the need for the Ford Conservative government to not only address employment equity, but also to make good on its agreements as part of the CWELCC.

CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL...

- Immediately re-engage a review of Ontario workplaces, and adopt the necessary changes to labour legislation that would remove structural barriers to participation and ensure equity in all Ontario workplaces.
- Establish an equal pay for equal work provision; and institute a transparent employment pay law as part of a strategy to reduce the pay gaps suffered by women, racialized, and other equity-deserving groups, as well as Indigenous Peoples.

Addressing Food and Economic Security

Closely related to employment equity are the interconnected issues of poverty and food insecurity. Catholic teachers see this reality in our classrooms, as students from families of



lower socio-economic status disproportionately come to school hungry – a factor that has knock-on effects for student learning (Anisef, et al. 2017).

In a province as wealthy as Ontario, poverty – and especially child poverty – should not be an issue. Nevertheless, Ontario’s child poverty rate remains staggering. According to a 2024 report by Campaign 2000, 19.5 per cent of children under 18 and 20.4 per cent of children under six years old live in poverty in Ontario. This is a 3.5 per cent increase over the previous year, and represents the largest annual increase in poverty rates in Ontario’s history (Campaign 2000 2024).

As a direct consequence, food insecurity has reached an all-time high. Feed Ontario reports that over the last two years, the number of unique individuals using food banks increased by 73 per cent, and the number of visits to food banks increased by 78 per cent. Sadly, 43 per cent of food bank visitors had never accessed a food bank before. As a devastating and dangerous consequence, 38 per cent of food banks reported having to reduce the amount of food they can offer to individuals (Feed Ontario 2024).

Along these lines, the Association welcomed the news that the provincial government had finally agreed to join the federal government’s national school food program, which will provide almost 10 million meals per year (McGregor and Zimonjic 2024).

This is only one step toward addressing the ongoing crisis. The government must also acknowledge the interconnectivity of factors that exacerbate conditions that create and perpetuate poverty: from the devaluing of women’s work to employment inequity between racialized and non-racialized populations to a weakened social safety net.

Strengthening the Social Safety Net

The continued inadequacy of Ontario’s social safety net demands far more than what has been provided to-date by the Ford Conservative government. Ontarians desperately need a prompt and thorough re-examination of the province’s social policy framework and the role of programs and services in promoting health and prosperity.

According to publicly available data, in July 2024, a total of 276,753 individuals received Ontario Works (OW) benefits, meant to provide short-term financial support for people looking for work (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services 2024). In that same

month, 372,858 individuals and families received Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) assistance (Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services 2024a).


Currently, an individual on OW receives a maximum of \$733 per month, while an ODSP recipient receives a maximum of \$1,308 per month – and has been frozen at this rate for five years. A central structural weakness with these programs is that, currently, the average monthly cost of living in Ontario is \$2,300 per month. This means that an OW recipient is \$1,569 below the monthly poverty line, while an ODSP recipient is \$575 short. This is unacceptable.

As the gap between the cost of living and social assistance rates continues to grow, more people than ever have been legislated into poverty. In fact, in 2022 fewer than 14,500 people on OW or ODSP were experiencing homelessness. As of 2024, this number has almost doubled, and stands at more than 26,500 (Pinkerton and Hauen 2024).

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve employment standards, ensuring better and more affordable access to education and training, redressing economic and employment inequities, and bolstering the province’s social safety net. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revisit and revise its Poverty Reduction Strategy, which aims to transform how critical social assistance is delivered through the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW). |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Double the rates for OW and ODSP. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Revisit the premature cancellation of the Basic Income Pilot. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Update Ontario’s Employment Standards Act, to make it easier to unionize, as a sure way to improve wages and working conditions |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Legislate 10 permanent, employer-provided, paid sick leave days for all Ontario workers. |

Meeting the Needs of Ontarians with Disabilities

On January 1, 2025, the Ford Conservative government officially missed its self-appointed deadline to ensure broad accessibility for Ontarians with disabilities and compliance with the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)*.



There are approximately 2.9 million Ontarians, aged 15 or older, currently living with one or more disability – representing one of the largest population categories in the province (Donovan 2023). As codified by several pieces of legislation – namely, the Ontario Human Rights Code and the AODA – persons with disabilities are entitled to equal rights and opportunities, and freedom from discrimination (Government of Ontario 2005; OHRC 2023). Nevertheless, persons with disabilities continue to face considerable barriers, both structural and explicit. A 2021 survey from Ipsos found that more than 75 per cent of respondents with disabilities reported negative experiences in their daily interactions and engagement with various services (Ipsos 2021). These negative experiences, which result from systemic barriers and persistent discrimination, manifest in a variety of ways.

Despite a legal obligation to ensure the rights and opportunities of persons with disabilities, the Ford Conservative government has fallen well short of fulfilling its responsibilities. In 2022, the government appointed Rich Donovan, Chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Alliance, to review the AODA and offer recommendations – the fourth such review of the legislation, which is required by Ontario’s accessibility laws. Delivering the final report in June 2023, Donovan presented a damning indictment of the Ford government’s inaction on this critical topic.

The Donovan report has characterized the situation as a “crisis state,” and called for immediate action, including the creation of a cabinet sub-committee to immediately address accessibility issues categorized into four main themes:

1. Research
2. Tools and Mechanisms for Behavioural Change
3. Mobilizing Government Actions
4. Built Environment

Although the government has already missed its deadline for compliance, Catholic teachers urge action, so that all Ontarians with disabilities enjoy equal rights and opportunities, and freedom from discrimination.

CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL...

- Immediately accept and act upon the recommendations in the *Independent 4th Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

- Convene a cabinet sub-committee to oversee the fulfillment of AODA compliance requirements.
- Take all measures necessary, including financial investment, to immediately achieve AODA compliance

Ensuring Affordable Housing

The topic of housing has become a controversial “political football” in recent times, but the facts are clear: Ontario, and Canada broadly, is in the midst of a housing crisis (DeClerq 2023). In Ontario, a report by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation revealed that housing starts in Ontario were *down* 18 per cent in 2024 (Elliot 2024). In four of the last five months of 2024, the government failed to hit even 50 per cent of its target of 12,500 housing starts per month.

The *National Housing Strategy Act* clearly states that adequate, safe housing is a fundamental human right. To address the crisis, the Ford government must ensure availability of “deeply affordable housing” – defined as housing that is affordable to those earning up to 30 per cent of the area’s median income for rentals, and 80 per cent of the area’s median income for homes that are owned.

As part of any holistic solution to the housing crisis, the government must also consider greater protections for renters. As housing prices have skyrocketed, so too have rental prices. In 2019, economist David Macdonald from the CCPA calculated the minimum hourly wage that a person would need to earn in order to comfortably afford renting a one- and two-bedroom apartment in various Ontario cities – using the standard benchmark of dedicating no more than 30 per cent of one’s salary toward housing. (Macdonald 2019). The situation has worsened dramatically since then.

There are significant consequences that result from unaffordable rent prices – individuals are being displaced from their communities; some are forced to commute many hours between home and work; and in extreme situations, some are being priced out entirely of the ability to afford rent, and are left unhoused (ACTO 2018).



| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Work collaboratively and meaningfully with all levels of government to address the supply issues as part of the housing crisis |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• immediately reverse its decision to eliminate rent control and commit to strengthening protections for renters, especially those from lower-income families. |

Taking Real Climate Action

The current and devastating wildfires that are raging in California at time of writing serve as a potent reminder of the impact climate change has on our lives and livelihoods. It is well past time for the Ontario government to take bold and comprehensive action on climate change.

A strong, progressive climate change action plan, focusing on leveraging green technology to de-carbonize Ontario will require significant investment, and changes to the province’s economic and labour systems. But, if implemented with a forward vision, a green Ontario, with a green economy, has added benefits beyond environmental concerns.

A green economy has the potential to create tens of thousands of high paying, green jobs, to promote electrification over fossil fuels, retrofit existing buildings, and to build public transit.

With the federal government’s carbon pricing plan now in political limbo, the Ford government will no longer enjoy a windfall of \$2.2 billion in carbon pricing revenue over the next eight years (Crawley 2023). The government must now pivot, and find new opportunities to invest in long-term sustainability and climate action.

| CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL FOR A GOVERNMENT THAT WILL... |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invest in new or emerging, low-emission technologies and clean economy initiatives, such as renewable energy programs like wind and solar. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• develop and properly invest in a climate change action plan that prioritizes transitioning to a low-carbon economy, while creating good jobs, with the necessary job training supports for workers in transition and a pathway for the equity-deserving communities that need decent work most. |



CONCLUSION

Over the past seven years, the Ford Conservative government's consistent attacks on public services and public sector workers have wrought havoc on the critical systems that all Ontarians rely upon. Chronic underfunding has left us with a health care system in crisis, a publicly funded education system that has been weakened, and a social safety net that has frayed to the breaking point – all the while, life has become less affordable for average Ontarians.

With an unnecessary snap provincial election underway, the government would do well to listen to the majority of Ontarians who want a healthy, prosperous, and sustainable society and economy, in which *everyone* has a fair chance to participate.

This means ending chronic underfunding and cuts – and investing in publicly funded education, child care, and the broader public sector. This means respecting workers and the role of public services. This means re-evaluating the misguided priorities that have placed profits ahead of people.

Every election is determined by the people who show up. Catholic teachers will continue to lend the strength of our voice and call on Ontarians to elect education-friendly MPPs across Ontario in an effort to elect a government that is meaningfully committed to building a better, fairer, and more prosperous Ontario – for everyone.

WORKS CITED

Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario (ACTO). (2018). "Where will we live? Ontario's affordable rental housing crisis." Toronto: ACTO. Available at: https://www.acto.ca/production/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/WhereWillWeLive_May2018_ACTO_Report.pdf

Aguilar, Bryann. (2025). "GTA school board upholds policy that prohibits flying the Pride flag." *CTV News* (January 22).

Alexander, Craig, Beckman, Kip, Macdonald, Alicia, Renner, Cory, and Stewart, Matthew. (2017). *Ready for Life: A Socio- Economic Analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care*. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada.

Alphonso, Caroline. (2017). "Ontario children gain learning benefits from full-day kindergarten: study." *Globe and Mail* (August 9).

Anisef, Paul, Robson, Karen, Maier, Reana, Brown, Robert S. (2017). *Food Insecurity and Educational Outcomes: A Focus on TDSB Students*. Toronto: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Balintec, Vanessa. (2024). "Ontario needs to tackle \$16.8B school repair backlog: advocates." *CBC News* (May 29).

Benzie, Robert, and Ferguson, Rob. (2025). "Doug Ford may call Ontario election as early as next week: sources." *Toronto Star* (January 21).

Benzie, Robert. (2024). "Doug Ford announces details of \$200 cheques for 15 million Ontarians." *Toronto Star* (October 30).

Boak, Angela, Alton-Marshall, Tara, and Hamilton, Hayley A. (2022). *The Well-being of Ontario Students: Findings from the 2021 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS)*. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Bond, Meredith, and McAllister, Mark. (2024). "Ontario called on to do more to combat school violence as some teachers forced to wear protective gear." *CityNews* (October 23).

Bouguen, Adrien, Grenet, Julien, and Gurgand, Marc. (2017). Does Class Size Influence Student Achievement. *Institut des Politiques Publiques, September 2017, No. 28*.

Campaign 2000. (2024). *Tackling Child Poverty: a call for bold solutions, 2024 report card on child and family poverty in Ontario*. Toronto: Campaign 2000. Available at: <https://campaign2000.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Ontario-2024-Report-Card-on-Child-and-Family-Poverty-Tackling-Child-Poverty-A-Call-for-Bold-Solutions.pdf>

Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF). (2020). *Teacher Mental Health Check-in Survey*. Ottawa: Canadian Teachers' Federation.

Casaleto, Lucas. (2025). "Ford government's ServiceOntario move to Staples will cost \$11.7M, exceeding initial estimate: FAO." *CityNews* (January 15).

Casey, Liam. (2022). Supreme Court to hear case about access to Premier Doug Ford's mandate letters." *Global News* (May 19).

CBC News. (2024). "RCMP interviewing government witnesses for Greenbelt probe." *CBC News* (August 9).

CBC News. (2024a). "NDP calls for school safety plan amid 'urgent and growing' violence." *CBC News* (September 10).

CBC News. (2023). "What's driving polarization in Canadian politics?" *CBC News* (August 2).
Cilliers, Roland. (2024). "'We can go over': 9% of kindergarten classes are over the size limit at Halton Catholic District School Board." *InsideHalton* (October 4).

Cimellaro, Matteo. (2023). "Peace, order and bad education: How Canada is failing remote First Nation students in northern Ontario." *National Observer* (September 6).

Cleveland, Gordon. (2021). "Ontario's Kindergarten Program: a success story, how we all benefit from quality public Full-day Kindergarten." Available at:
https://www.etfo.ca/getmedia/05d5d7d5-4253-48ca-92d5-6b0b7e261792/210204_ExecSummaryDrGordon.pdf

Coalition for Alternatives to Streaming in Education. (2021). "CASE Fact Sheet and Recommendations." Available at:
https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ee2aedfd4916c68b6bb2c26/t/60e384cfad15b92d09754e47/1625523434220/CASE_Reccomendations_2021.pdf

Conference Board of Canada. (2019). *The Economic Case for Investing in Education*. Toronto: Conference Board of Canada Report (June).

Cohn, Martin Regg. (2025). "With Trump returning and Trudeau leaving, this is no time for Doug Ford to call an unnecessary election." *Toronto Star* (January 7).

Collaco, Conrad. (2024). "Niagara school board trustees again reject motion to ban Pride flag, police called to remove protesters." *CBC News* (October 24).

Crawley, Mike. (2023). "Ontario now has a carbon tax on industry. What will Doug Ford's government do with the revenue?" *CBC News* (January 11).

DeClerq, Katherine. (2023). "Ontario builders slam Doug Ford's 'political football' housing plan." *CTV News* (December 15).

D'Mello, Colin, and Callan, Isaac. (2024). "Ford government's Bill 124 backpay cost increases again, closing in on \$7B." *Global News* (September 19).

D'Mello, Colin, and Callan, Isaac. (2023). "Ontario government sets aside \$22 billion in 'excess funds': watchdog." *Global News* (June 13).

D'Mello, Colin. (2018). "Ford: Government plans on ditching labour reform law." *CTV News* (October 2).

Donovan, Rich. (2023). *Independent 4th Review of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA): Final Report*. Toronto: Government of Ontario.

Draaisma, Muriel. (2022). "'Real investments' in education, health care needed in Ontario budget, teachers, doctors warn." *CBC News* (April 25).

Draaisma, Muriel. (2019). "High cost of internet access leaving low-income families behind, report finds." *CBC News* (August 13).

Elliot, Matt. (2024). "Doug Ford wants you to focus on bike lanes and beer — and pay no attention to this, his biggest failure." *Toronto Star* (November 26).

Feed Ontario. (2024). *Hunger Report 2024: Unravelling at the Seams, Ontario's Food Banks have been Stretched to the Limit*. Toronto: Feed Ontario. Available at: https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/FEED_Ontario_HungerReport24.pdf

Ferns, Carolyn, and Ballantyne, Morna. (2024). "Doug Ford's dangerous child-care plan." *Toronto Star* (July 17).

Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO). (2025). *ServiceOntario Relocations: Financial Analysis of the Agreement with Staples Canada*. Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario.

Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO). (2024). *Ontario School Boards: School Building Condition, Student Capacity and Capital Budgeting*. Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario.

Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO). (2024a). *2022-23 Interprovincial Budget Comparison*. Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario.

Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO). (2023). *Economic and Budget Outlook, Spring 2023*. Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario.

Gallagher-Mackay, Kelly, Srivastava, Prachi, Underwood, Kathryn, Dhuey, Elizabeth, McCready, Lance, Born, Karen, Maltsev, Antonina, Perkhun, Anna, Steiner, Robert, Barrett, Kali, and Sander, Beate. (2021) "COVID-19 and Education Disruption in Ontario: Emerging Evidence on Impacts." Law and Society Faculty Publications. Available at: https://scholars.wlu.ca/laso_faculty/1

Government of Ontario. (2005). *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act, 2005, S.O. 2005, c. 11*. Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario.

Green, Kiernan. (2024). "Violent crime in Canada has increased 30 percent in the last decade of recorded incidents." *The Hub* (September 21).

Hasham, Alyshah. (2023). "'We are in a perfect storm': Toronto faces child care space crisis, advocates say." *Toronto Star* (November 28).

Hauen, Jack. (2022). "Ford government passes bill with notwithstanding clause to force contract on education workers." QP Briefing (November 3).

Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids). (2021). "SickKids releases new research on how COVID-19 pandemic has impacted child and youth mental, physical health." Toronto: SickKids. Available at: <https://www.sickkids.ca/en/news/archive/2021/research-covid19-pandemic-impact-child-youth-mental-physical-health/>

Ipsos. (2021). *Awareness & Attitudes Towards Accessibility*. Toronto: Ipsos.

James, J., Bauer, G., Peck, R., Brennan, D., and Nussbaum, N. (2018). "Legal Problems Facing Trans People in Ontario." *TRANSforming JUSTICE Summary Report 1(1)*, September 6, 2018. Available at: <https://www.halco.org/our-services/trans-legal-needs-assessment-ontario>

Janmohamed, Zeenat, Kerry McCuaig, Emis Akbari, Romona Ganathan, and Jennifer Watkins. (2014). *Schools at the Centre: Findings from Case Studies Exploring Seamless Early Learning in Ontario*. Toronto: Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development – Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.

Jeffords, Shawn. (2018). "Ontario passes back-to-work legislation, ends York University strike." CTV News (July 25).

Jones, Allison. (2024). "Ontario autism therapy bottleneck worsens as enrolments decline." *CBC News* (September 11).

Jones, Allison. (2024a). "Toronto daycare exiting \$10-a-day program, citing funding uncertainty." *CityNews* (January 17).

Jones, Ryan Patrick, and Brockbank, Nicole. (2022). "Who are the GTA developers set to benefit from Ford government's Greenbelt land swap?" *CBC News* (November 11).

Kennedy, Brendan. (2025). "Most provinces have dropped daycare costs to \$10/day. Why are some Toronto parents still paying full fees?" *Toronto Star* (January 25).

Lang, Ethan. (2024). "Toronto urges province not to cancel funding for 3,000 new child-care spaces in schools." *CBC News* (July 30).

Lavoie, Joanna. (2024). "'Decades of neglect': MPP calls out Ontario education minister over flooding at west-end Toronto school." *CTV News* (May 30).

Ling, Justin. (2023). *Far and Widening: The Rise of Polarization in Canada*. Ottawa: Public Policy Forum.

Longhurst, Andrew. (2023). *At What Cost? Ontario hospital privatization and the threat to public health care*. Toronto: CCPA.

Macdonald, David. (2025). "Company men: CEO pay in 2023." *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives* (January 2).

Macdonald, David. (2019). *Unaccommodating: Rental Housing Wage in Canada*. Toronto: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives – Ontario Office.

Mackenzie, Hugh. (2017). *Ontario's deteriorating schools: the fix is not in*. Toronto: The Campaign for Public Education. Available at: https://fixourschools.ca/wpcontent/uploads/2017/11/Hugh_MacKenzie_Report_Ontarios_deteriorating_schools.pdf

MacMillan, Sarah. (2021). "Families worry new Ontario Autism Program won't be truly needs-based." *CBC News* (January 6).

McCuaig, Kerry, Bertrand, Jane, and Shanker, Stuart. (2012). *Trends in Early Education and Child Care*. Toronto: Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development, OISE/University of Toronto.

Maimaiti, Gulipari, Jia, Chengyuan, and Hew, Khe Foon. (2021) "Student disengagement in web-based videoconferencing supported online learning: an activity theory perspective." *Interactive Learning Environments*: 1-20.

McGregor, Janyce, and Zimonjic, Peter. (2024). "Ontario strikes \$108.5M school food program deal with feds to provide 9.8 million meals a year." *CBC News* (November 22).

McQuigge, Michelle. (2020). "Schools face daunting, unique reopening challenges during pandemic." *CTV News* (May 14).

Mendleson, Rachel, and Kennedy, Brendan. (2022). "How intense pressure from for-profit daycares has transformed Ontario's rollout of \$10-a-day child care — and sparked a political standoff." *Toronto Star* (January 17).

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. (2024). "Ontario Works" Available at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-works>

Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services. (2024a). "Ontario Disability Support Program." Available at: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/ontario-disability-support-program>

Ministry of Education. (2024). *Education Funding: Technical Paper, 2024-25*. Toronto: Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Education. (2024a). *2025-26 Education Funding Engagement Guide*. Toronto: Ministry of Education.

Ministry of Finance. (2024). *Building a Better Ontario: 2024 Ontario Budget*. Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario.

Ministry of Finance. (2024a). *2024 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review: Building Ontario For You*. Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario.

Ministry of Finance. (2024b). *Ontario's Long-Term Report on the Economy 2024*. Toronto: Ministry of Finance.

Müller, Jan-Werner. (2023). "Conservatives angry about school 'indoctrination' are telling on themselves." *The Guardian* (February 4).

Mundie, Jessica. (2021). "Many Canadians struggle to afford pricey high-speed home internet in urban areas." *National Post* (December 28).

National Center for School Mental Health, University of Maryland School of Medicine (NCSMH). (2023). *School Mental Health Quality Guide: School Health Assessment and Performance Evaluation System (SHAPE)*. Available at: <https://www.schoolmentalhealth.org/media/som/microsites/ncsmh/documents/quality-guides/Screening.pdf>

Noonoo, Stephen. (2020). "K-12 Class Sizes Have Ballooned With Online Learning. It's Not a Good Thing." *EdSurge* (October 21).

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA). (2023). *Submission to the Ontario Human Rights Commission on Anti-Black Racism in Education*. Available at: <https://www.catholicteachers.ca/OECTA/media/pdfs/Political%20Action/election%20readiness%20training/OHRC.pdf>

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA). (2017). *Workplace Violence and Harassment Against Teachers: Results of a Comprehensive Members Survey*. Toronto: OECTA.

Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA). (2017a). *Safer Schools for All: Addressing Violence and Harassment Against Teachers*. Toronto: OECTA.

Ontario Equal Pay Coalition (OPEC). (2024). "Open letter to Ontario's leaders." (April 16). Available at: <https://equalpaycoalition.org/2024/04/15/open-letter-to-ontarios-leaders/>

Ontario Health Coalition. (2024). *Illegal, Unlawful and Unethical: Case Studies of Patients Charged for Medical Care in Ontario's Private Clinics*. Toronto: OHC.

Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC). (2023). "The Ontario Human Rights Code." Toronto: OHRC. Available at: <https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/ontario-human-rights-code>

Ontario Newsroom. (2024). "Ontario Fighting Back Against Rise in Hate Crime." Toronto: Government of Ontario (January 15). Available at: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1004059/ontario-fighting-back-against-rise-in-hate-crime>

Ontario Newsroom. (2024a). "Ontario Reducing Wait Times for MRI and CT Scans." Toronto: Government of Ontario (June 3). Available at: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1004658/ontario-reducing-wait-times-for-mri-and-ct-scans>

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2024). *The Potential Impact of Artificial Intelligence on Equity and Inclusion in Education*. Paris: OECD.

Paikin, Steve. (2024). "Will Ontario go to the polls a year early?" *TVO* (May 24).

Payne, Elizabeth. (2024). "Most Ontario hospitals are facing deficits, some have reached their financial limit: Ontario Hospital Association." *Ottawa Citizen* (January 12).

Pelletier, Janette, and Corter, James. (2019). "A longitudinal comparison of learning outcomes in full-day and half-day kindergarten." *The Journal of Educational Research* (January 3).

People for Education. (2023). "Principals sound the alarm about students' mental health." Available at: <https://peopleforeducation.ca/report/principals-sound-the-alarmabout-students-mental-health/>

People for Education. (2023). "Indigenous education in Ontario show signs of progress."

People for Education. (2019). *2019 Annual report on schools: What makes a school?* Toronto: People for Education.

Pinkerton, Charlie, and Duggal, Sneh. (2024). "Province directed school boards to put up more blue 'Ontario Builds' signs." *The Trillium* (October 29).

Pinkerton, Charlie, and Hauen, Jack. (2024). "Number of homeless OW, ODSP recipients has almost doubled in two years: government data." *The Trillium* (September 26).

PressProgress. (2021). "Doug Ford's Government Wants TVO to 'Commercialize' Online Learning Content Designed for Ontario Schools." PressProgress (May 14).

PressProgress. (2018). "Doug Ford Just Cancelled Ontario's Minimum Wage Increase. Low-Wage Workers Are Out \$2,000 Per Year." PressProgress (September 26).

Rana, Abbas, Jeffrey, Stephen. (2023). "'I've never seen the country in a darker, more divided mood than we find it today': polarization, unpopular leaders present challenges for parties to break out of poll stasis, pollsters say." *The Hill Times* (June 26).

Rushowy, Kristin. (2024). "Ontario students will suffer from Ford government's education funding shortfalls, school boards warn." *Toronto Star* (May 9).

Rushowy, Kristin. (2022). "Ford government kills controversial bill that ordered CUPE school staff back to work, as talks continue." *Toronto Star* (November 14).

Rushowy, Kristin. (2019). "Repair backlog in Ontario schools hits \$16.3 billion." *Toronto Star* (November 6).

Salutin, Rick. (2022). "Sure, Doug Ford 'likes' his education workers. But does he respect them?" *Toronto Star* (November 4).

Scott, Katherine. (2023). "Still in recovery: assessing the pandemic's impact on women." *Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives* (September 22).

SecondStreet. (2025). "15,474 Canadians Died Waiting for Health Care in 2023-24." *SecondStreet.org* (January 25).

Sharkey, Jackie. (2019) "Families of children with autism under 'severe stress': Report." *CBC News* (June 2019).

Sharpe, Andrew, and Jean-Francois Arsenault. (2010). *Investing in Aboriginal Education in Canada: An Economic Perspective*. Ottawa: Centre for the Study of Living Standards.

St. George, Donna, Strauss, Valerie, Mckler, Laura, Heim, Joe, and Natanson, Hannah. (2021). "How the pandemic is reshaping education." *Washington Post* (March 15).

Teitel, Emma. (2023). "My question for Doug Ford: When it comes to gender who is indoctrinating whom?" *Toronto Star* (September 16).

Thompson, Mitchell. (2023). "Ontario Budget 2023: Doug Ford Pulled a Sneaky Move to Quietly Cut Education." *PressProgress* (March 23).

Toronto Star Editorial Board. (2023). "Another day, another policy climbdown for Doug Ford's government." *Toronto Star* (October 25).

Tranjan, Ricardo. (2025). "Doug Ford always had a mandate to invest in Ontario, he just didn't do his job." *Toronto Star* (January 19).

Tranjan, Ricardo. (2024). "Ontario has lost 5,000 classroom educators since 2018." *The Monitor* (April 29).

Waberi, Osobe. (2021). "Ontario government's autism program not enough, families and critics say." *Canadian Press* (August 7).

Wilson, Codi. (2024). "'A big bombshell:' Toronto parents scrambling to find child care after daycares warn of huge fee hikes in January." *CP24* (November 8).

Zhang, Yining, Liu, Haixia, and Lin, Chin-Hsi. (2018). "Research on class size in online K-12 Learning," in Kennedy, Kathryn, Ed. *Handbook of Research on K-12 Online and Blended Learning, 2nd edition*, 273-283. Pittsburgh: ETC Press.