



ETFO Submission to the Standing Committee of Finance and Economic Affairs

2022 Pre-Budget Hearings

January 2022

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

136 Isabella Street, Toronto, ON M4Y 0B5
416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836
etfo.ca

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

Copyright © January 2022 by ETFO

Follow us online at:



ETFOprovincialoffice



@ETFOeducators



TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Provincial Economic Outlook.....	2
Education Funding.....	3
Smaller Class Size: Important for Student Success and Well-being	7
Full-Day Kindergarten: A Success Story	8
Mental Health Supports	11
Online Learning and Hybrid Learning	14
Support for Students with Special Needs.....	15
Learning Opportunities Grant	16
Addressing Equity and Combatting Anti-Black Racism.....	18
Supporting Second Language Programs.....	20
Educating the Whole Child	21
Health and Safety	24
Public Health Support for Schools.....	25
Health and Safety Training	26
Math Proficiency Test Requirement.....	27
RECOMMENDATIONS	30
SELECTED SOURCES	33

INTRODUCTION

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the 2022 pre-budget consultations. ETFO represents 83,000 public elementary school teachers, occasional teachers, designated early childhood educators, education support personnel and professional support personnel across the province.

ETFO is an important stakeholder in the public education system. This submission complements ETFO's written submission to the Ministry of Education on education funding for the 2022-23 school year.¹

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges for people across the province. While no one has been left untouched by this public health crisis, the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on marginalized communities, including Black, Indigenous, racialized and low-income communities. In its plans for a post-pandemic recovery, the provincial government must consider the impact on these communities and invest in the public services necessary to build a more just and equitable province. Those investments must include public education.

The pandemic has been a reminder of the important role of public schools in our communities and to the overall well-being of students. The pandemic has exacerbated concerns about large class sizes, the poor physical condition of schools, inequitable access to technology and the internet, and the government's failure to provide appropriate funding to meet the needs of all students, particularly students with special needs, English Language Learners and students from marginalized communities. These concerns were evident even before the pandemic due to devastating cuts to public education.

¹ ETFO (2021). *Submission to the Ministry of Education: 2022-23 Education Funding Feedback*. etfo.ca/ETFO/media/Documents/4.2.1%20Publications/Education%20Funding%20Feedback/20211126_EducationFundingSubmission.pdf

Yet, despite these pre-existing challenges, educators have shown incredible resilience and commitment throughout the pandemic. They have consistently done their very best to provide their students with high-quality public education but have, too often, felt abandoned by the provincial government.

In this submission, ETFO puts forward recommendations for key areas in Ontario’s public education system. It is ETFO’s sincere hope that the government heeds these recommendations and begins allocating the necessary resources to undo the damage caused by years of funding cuts. Ontario students deserve a high-quality, equitable, inclusive public education system. Investment in this world-class system is the key to Ontario’s post-pandemic social and economic recovery.

Provincial Economic Outlook

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a glaring spotlight on the challenges faced by the province. The pandemic, and the necessary public health restrictions triggered by it, have impacted economies worldwide. Various governments have responded with increased spending and stimulus packages to reduce the economic impact felt by workers. The pandemic is not over yet, which means governments must continue to support workers while, at the same time, continue to protect the public from COVID-19.

The economic data points to recovery over the next four years. To sustain this recovery, the government must invest in public services, especially public education. While Ontario’s economy contracted by 5.1 per cent in 2020, the current outlook for Ontario in 2022 and beyond is positive news for the province² (See Table 1). With a path to economic recovery and growth, now is the time for the government to increase spending in public education.

² Ministry of Finance (2021). *Build Ontario: 2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review*. budget.ontario.ca/2021/fallstatement/pdf/2021-fall-statement-en.pdf

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

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021p	2022p	2023p	2024p
Ontario Real GDP Growth (%)	2.7	2.9	2.3	2.8	2.2	2.1	-5.1	4.3	4.5	2.6	2.0

Source: Ministry of Finance, Government of Ontario³

p = Ontario Ministry of Finance planning projection based on external sources.

Education Funding

Over the past decade, teachers and other education workers have done their part in responding to the fiscal pressures created by the province. In October 2019, the Financial Accountability Office (FAO) looked at compensation growth in the public education system. It found that between 2010 and 2018 teacher base salary grew on average by 0.9 per cent, while wage growth in the private sector grew by 1.8 per cent.⁴ Despite this, in 2019 the government adopted Bill 124 which limited compensation growth for public sector workers to 1 per cent annually. This legislation, which ETFO and others believe is unconstitutional, disproportionately impacts workers earning lower incomes in professions where women are overrepresented, including early childhood educators and daily occasional teachers. As a result of Bill 124, the salary increases for teachers and education workers have been capped at one per cent from 2019 until 2022 and have been easily surpassed by inflation. Bill 124 must be repealed.

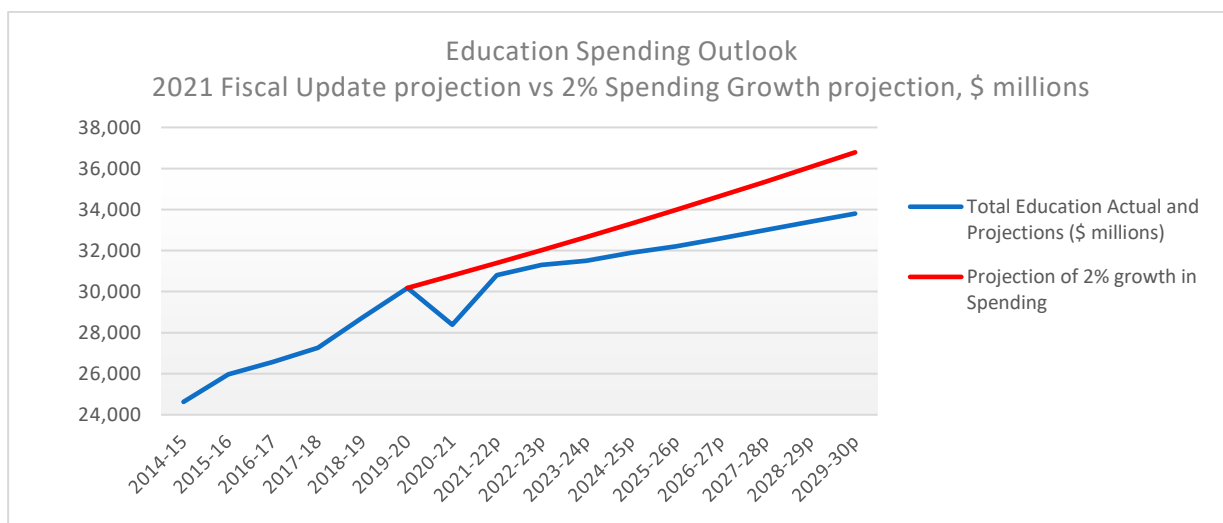
While Ontario's economy appears to be on a path to economic recovery, the government delivered its fall economic statement devoid of any mention of public education, proving once again that Ontario's students and educators are not a priority for this government.

³ Ministry of Finance (2021), Government of Ontario ontario.ca/page/ministry-finance

⁴ Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2019). *Comparing Ontario's Fiscal Position with Other Provinces*. fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/inter-prov-comparisons-feb-2019

The fall economic statement cut \$467 million dollars from the public education budget for 2021-22, and projected that future funding allocations for the sector will grow by only 1.2 per cent per year.⁵ According to the FAO's review of Ministry programs and commitments, education spending needs to grow by 2.0 per cent per year to maintain current levels of service, which is almost double the government's planned spending growth rate in education.⁶ Before the government's fall economic statement, the FAO projected a \$12.3 billion cumulative funding gap for education for the period of 2021-22 to 2029-30. Once the additional funding cut of \$467 million is included in the fall economic spending, this funding gap grows to \$15.8 billion (See Chart 1).

Chart 1: Ontario Education Spending Outlook



Source: Authors Calculation based on the Ministry of Finance, Government of Ontario, Financial Accountability Office of Ontario⁷
p = Ontario Ministry of Finance planning projection based on external sources.

The government must close this funding gap to meet the benchmark established by the FAO for maintaining *status quo* service levels. The government must also recognize that Ontario's students need and deserve

⁵ Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2019). *Comparing Ontario's Fiscal Position with Other Provinces*.

fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/inter-prov-comparisons-feb-2019

⁶ Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2021). *Ministry of Education Spending Plan Review*. fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/2021-education-estimates#_ftn5

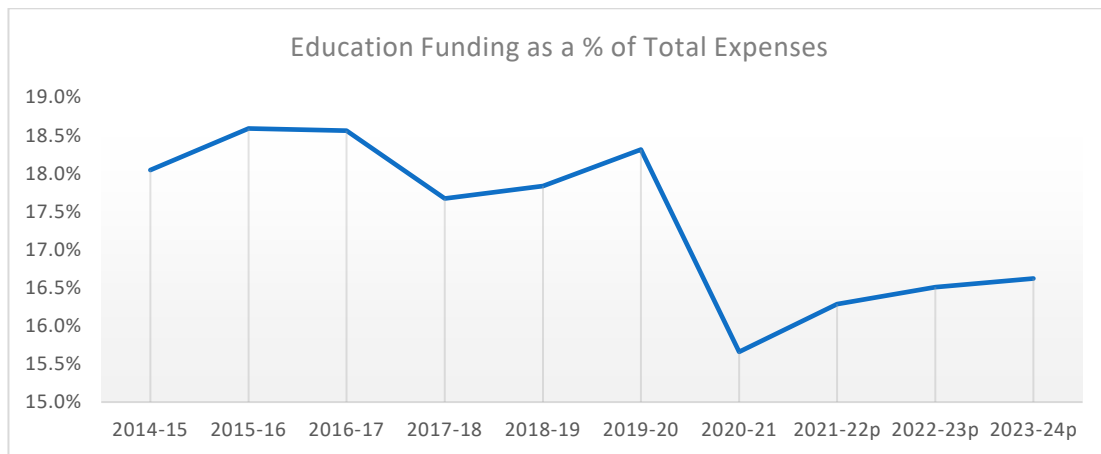
⁷ *Ibid*.

more than the *status quo* and provide a path for improvements to Ontario's public education system through future funding increases.

Ontario's education funding formula needs to be fully reviewed and reformed. It is based on a model introduced two decades ago that was designed to reduce overall expenditure for public schools. The last comprehensive review of the Ontario education funding formula was by the Education Equality Task Force headed by Dr. Mordechai Rozanski in 2002. While several subsequent governments increased education funding by introducing important initiatives such as primary class size caps and Full-Day Kindergarten, they failed to address some of the original cuts made by predecessor governments. An independent, external review of Ontario's education funding formula is required to ensure that the education funding formula reflects the actual needs of students in 2022 and beyond.

Under the current government, public education funding has been reduced significantly. Education as a percentage of total government expenditures has fallen dramatically since the current government took office. Education funding was 18.3 per cent of total government expenditures in 2019-20; it is projected to be 16.6 per cent in 2023-24 (See Chart 2).

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



Source: Authors Calculation based on the Ministry of Finance, Government of Ontario

p = Ontario Ministry of Finance planning projection based on external sources.

Budget 2022 and the upcoming release of the Grants for Student Needs (GSNs) provide an opportunity for the government to change course and properly address critical and urgent needs in public education.

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

Recommendations:

1. Repeal Bill 124.
2. Reinstate the \$467 million cut from core education funding in the fall economic update.
3. Increase funding to public education to close the funding gap identified by the FAO.
4. Establish an independent, external review of Ontario's education funding formula to ensure it reflects actual student needs.

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

Smaller classes improve student behaviour and peer relationships and increase student engagement and achievement in the early grades. Smaller classes mean educators have the opportunity to give students more individual attention. These factors, in turn, contribute to increased graduation rates and fewer students staying beyond the required four years of secondary school.

Grades 4 to 8 have the highest class sizes in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 system. There is no pedagogical rationale for this. In her 2017 Annual Report, Ontario's Auditor General noted the difference in class sizes and remarked, "It means that not all students will be benefitting from smaller class sizes."⁸

In 2019, the government announced its plan to increase the funded class size average in grades 4 to 8 from 23.84 students to 24.5 students. This change applied to all boards as of September 2019, even if they had been previously exempt. The effects of this change were felt differently from board to board. Cumulatively, this change led to the loss of almost 1,000 teaching positions in Ontario's elementary schools.

Larger classes mean less one-on-one support for each student and disproportionately impact students with special needs. Frontline educators identify smaller classes as the most important factor in their ability to work individually with students and meet each student's unique learning needs.

Average class sizes are not an adequate measure to ensure consistent class sizes, which is evidenced by class size data provided by school boards to ETFO. According to 2020 data, in the Toronto District School Board, 44.33 per cent of all grade 4 to 8 classes had 20 or fewer students. However, 18.4 per cent of classes had 30 or more students, with the largest class size being a class of 43 students. In the Ottawa Carleton

⁸ Ontario Auditor General (2017). *2017 Annual Report*, Chapter 3, Section 3.08 - Ministry Funding and Oversight of School Boards.

District School Board, 33.21 per cent of all grade 4 to 8 classes had 20 or less students while 16.4 per cent had 30 or more students. In Ottawa, there were seven classrooms with 36 students.

Junior and intermediate (grades 4 to 8) are the only divisions that do not have class size caps. Kindergarten and primary grades have hard caps on class size, as do secondary grades. The government should allocate sufficient funding to reduce junior and intermediate class size and establish a class size cap of 24 students for grades 4 to 8.

Recommendation:

5. That grades 4 to 8 class size be capped at 24 students.

Full-Day Kindergarten: A Success Story

The current learning model for Ontario’s Kindergarten program, with a certified teacher and a designated early childhood educator (DECE) working together, gives children and their families the start to school that they need. Research shows that the partnership between a certified teacher and a DECE provides lasting benefits in reading, writing, numeracy, self-regulation and social skills and it “has shown major results when it comes to children’s social, emotional and cognitive development.”⁹

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

Teachers have knowledge and understanding of the elementary school curriculum from Kindergarten to grade 8, and how the Kindergarten program expectations connect to later elementary grades. Teachers

⁹ Charles E. Pascal (2019), *Full-day Kindergarten – The Best of What We Imagined is Happening*, The Conversation, March 5, 2019.

know how to build upon the foundation provided in Kindergarten and are responsible for student learning, long-term planning, effective instruction, formative assessment and have the ultimate responsibility for evaluation and formal reporting to parents.

Designated early childhood educators have knowledge and understanding of the developmental learning needs of young children. DECEs study early childhood development and focus on age-appropriate program planning, thus providing engaging opportunities and experiences for children that contribute to the assessment of their learning.

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

Although the Kindergarten program is funded to have an average class size of 26, there continue to be classes with 30 or more students. Educators in Kindergarten classrooms face significant challenges including a lack of adequate space to set up activity centres to support the play-based program. They must also manage classroom behaviour when many of the students are experiencing formalized learning environments for the first time. Reducing class size would significantly improve the Kindergarten learning and working conditions. ETFO supports implementing a Kindergarten class size cap of 26 students.

Funding shortfalls affect Kindergarten classrooms in other ways. Classes with 15 or fewer students typically are not assigned a DECE and therefore do not benefit from the early childhood development expertise of early childhood educators. Even where a DECE is assigned to a classroom, the lack of funding for lunchroom

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

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

Recommendations:

6. That the government commit to maintaining the current staffing model for Full-Day Kindergarten.
7. That every Kindergarten class be staffed with a full-time certified teacher and a designated early childhood educator.
8. That Full-Day Kindergarten class size be capped at 26 students.
9. That funding be allocated for 30 minutes of preparation time per day for designated early childhood educators.
10. That funding be allocated to support joint planning during the workday for the Full-Day Kindergarten teacher/designated early childhood educator team.
11. That funding be allocated to avoid Senior Kindergarten/Grade 1 split classes.
12. That funding be provided for non-teaching staff to perform supervision duties such as lunchroom supervision.

Mental Health Supports

The Ministry of Education maintains that the mental health and well-being of students continues to be an important priority. In documentation provided during its recent education funding consultation, the Ministry refers to the allocation of \$80M in student mental health funding to boards, with \$45M —more than half of this funding—has no application in elementary schools. The \$25.4M for the Mental Health Workers Allocation excludes elementary schools, since the Mental Health Workers Staffing Component is only for regulated mental health workers in secondary schools. The government has committed to a renewed focus on achievement, equity, mental health and well-being, and yet there are no equitable supports for student mental health and well-being in elementary schools.

A 2019 report from People for Education¹⁰ on supporting students’ mental health found that:

- only 23 per cent of elementary schools have guidance counsellors, and the majority work less than half time;
- only 30 per cent of elementary schools have regular access to psychologists who spend, on average, 4.2 hours per week in elementary schools;
- 48 per cent of elementary schools have regular access to social workers who spend, on average, 4.7 hours per week in elementary schools; and
- 38 per cent of elementary schools have regular access to child and youth workers who spend, on average, 16.6 hours per week in elementary schools.

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

Several surveys and research studies suggest student well-being has been negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some students have been affected by the increased stress of the pandemic on their

¹⁰ People for Education (2019). *What Makes a School?* (Annual report on Ontario’s publicly funded schools 2019). Toronto. peopleforeducation.ca/report/2019-annual-report-on-schools-what-makes-a-school/

caregivers and loved ones, and others are still feeling the impact of the government’s failure to take necessary action to ensure schools could remain safely open to in-person learning during the 2020-21 school year.

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

The impact of the pandemic on learning, on the social-emotional wellness of elementary students, and on the physical safety of our school communities would have been much worse without the dedication shown by ETFO members. ETFO members taught themselves online learning platforms, connected with children and families however they could, followed challenging health and safety guidelines, and continued to be caring adults creating a safe space for their students.

Despite the incredible support ETFO members have provided to students and their families, navigating uncertainty amidst a pandemic has exacerbated a pre-existing mental health crisis. The stress and pressures of school closures, hybrid learning, repeated disruption and shifts to remote learning, compounded by other factors that disproportionately affect the most marginalized communities, have resulted in an increased need for additional mental health support and resources in Ontario’s public schools. The government must develop and deliver—in consultation with mental health experts, teachers, education workers, unions and

other education stakeholders—long-term, fully-funded, comprehensive, culturally-responsive mental health supports for students.

Priorities and Partnerships Funding to Support Mental Health

Additional funds were provided through the Priorities and Partnerships Funding (PPF) to support mental health and well-being in 2021-22.

The Well-Being and Mental Health bundle provided funding to school boards and school authorities to meet local needs and priorities that promote well-being and mental health (including safe, healthy, inclusive and accepting learning environments). The total amount of Well-Being and Mental Health funding that is being distributed to 72 school boards is only \$3 million. One is left to question what can be done with that money. For example, Algoma District School Board (ADSB) has been allocated \$26,500 from the Well-Being and Mental Health fund. With 9,341 students enrolled in ADSB, that works out to funding of only \$2.83 per student. The Toronto District School Board’s 239,579 students will receive \$312,800 from the fund - or \$1.30 per TDSB student. The funding allocation is simply not sufficient to provide appropriate support to students at a time when the need for support is at its highest.

In terms of professional development, the Ministry allocated \$6.5 million from the PPF to School Mental Health Ontario to provide implementation support to 72 district school boards through clinical expertise, evidence-based resources/practical tools for educators, and the delivery of consistent professional learning to school-based mental health clinics. Most of the new resources created thus far direct members to visit other websites, learn on their own time—outside of the instructional day—and do not include collaboration with colleagues. This method of delivery for professional development is not pedagogically sound. Funding needs to be provided for high-quality professional learning within the instructional day that is ongoing and sustainable.

Recommendations:

13. That additional funding be provided to improve access to in-school supports, including guidance counsellors, social workers, psychologists, and child and youth workers, especially in underserved areas.
14. That funding be allocated for additional in-school and community supports necessary to ensure students’ developmental and behavioural needs are met.
15. That the government develop and deliver—in consultation with mental health experts, teachers, education workers, unions and other education stakeholders—long-term, fully-funded, comprehensive, culturally-responsive mental health supports for students.
16. That ongoing, sustainable funding be allocated for high-quality professional development for educators in the area of student mental health, occurring within the instructional day.

Online Learning and Hybrid Learning

The Ministry of Education has revealed that it has been working on a plan to fundamentally change our public education system by outsourcing and potentially privatizing online learning. The government’s plan proposes an entirely new online education system that would function in parallel to the current public education system. This proposal will negatively impact students’ health, well-being and learning outcomes.

ETFO believes that the daily, in-person model of instruction and support best meets students’ educational, developmental, and social needs. In-person learning provides the best learning experience and is the most equitable learning model for all students. Throughout the pandemic, we have seen that remote learning and the hybrid model of learning have detrimental impacts on student health and well-being. In-person learning is critical to the social and emotional health of students.

The full-time synchronous remote learning option that has been implemented by some school boards will contribute to greater isolation and mental health challenges for some students. ETFO’s position remains that brick-and-mortar schools are the best source of re-connection for all students and, in particular,

provide our most vulnerable students with face-to-face emotional support and a sense of belonging that cannot be replicated in a virtual format.

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

Recommendations:

17. That the government abandon its plan to make virtual learning a permanent fixture of elementary instruction.
18. That the government instruct school boards to immediately cease the use of hybrid learning as a method of instruction.

Support for Students with Special Needs

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

Students with special education needs who are Black, Indigenous, racialized, have a disadvantaged socio-economic background, and those who are English Language Learners are particularly underserved.

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

Meeting the special education needs of students is a constant challenge for any government. A substantial portion of existing special education funding is currently based on a predictive statistical model tied to overall enrolment numbers. Unfortunately, this model fails to account for the increase in participation in special education programs and services that Ontario's public schools have experienced over the past few years. It also fails to account for the differences in needs among students requiring special education supports. Special education funding must be based upon the actual needs of students.

In 2013-14, 340,562 students, representing 16.3 per cent of all students, received special education programs or services. By 2019-20, this number had increased to 364,038, representing 17.7 per cent of students that were accessing these programs and services. Special education funding has not kept up, either with inflationary costs, or with students' increasing need for special education supports. The government must increase special education funding to address this funding gap and ensure that special education grants are based on the actual education needs of students.

Supporting students with special needs includes ensuring that occasional teachers and occasional education workers receive professional development to assist them in the additional challenges they face in the classroom. These educators often support students without knowledge of their individual needs and without the benefit of an ongoing rapport with the students. The government should allocate funding to provide paid professional development on teaching and educational strategies to support students with special needs.

Recommendations:

19. That special education grants be based on actual student needs.
20. That funding be increased for educational assistants, psychologists, behavioural therapists, child and youth workers, school support counsellors, and speech and language pathologists.
21. That funding be allocated to provide occasional teachers and occasional education workers paid professional development on teaching and educational strategies to support students with special education needs.

Learning Opportunities Grant

The Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) was included in the education funding formula in 1997. The objective of the LOG was to provide additional funding to school boards with higher proportions of students

who were deemed to be ‘at-risk’ of academic failure. The aim of the additional funding was to support a variety of interventions that would provide those students with an equitable chance of success.

From its inception, the LOG did not meet the recommendations made by the expert panel that was convened to advise the government on its implementation. This structural funding shortfall must be addressed. ETFO recommends that a review of the LOG be part of an independent review of the funding formula recommended earlier in this submission.

In its recent education funding consultation, the Ministry of Education identified that the largest portion of LOG funding is found in the Demographic Allocation. This allocation is currently based on social and economic indicators derived from 2006 Statistics Canada’s census data. The Ministry has indicated that updating the census information, based on the 2021 census, for the 2022-23 school year and beyond, would require a redistribution of funding between school boards.

ETFO recommends that the government provide education stakeholders with a projection of the impact of integrating updated census data in the distribution of LOG funding. ETFO also recommends that the government allocate additional transitional funding to support a phase-in period to ensure that school boards that would otherwise see a reduction in LOG funding through this re-distribution do not do so immediately. Finally, ETFO recommends that those school boards that stand to see their funding increase as a result of the redistribution of LOG funding, begin receiving this increase for the 2022-23 school year.

Recommendations:

22. That a review of the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) be part of an independent review of the education funding formula.
23. That the government provide education stakeholders with a projection of the impact of integrating updated 2021 census data in the distribution of LOG funding.

24. That transitional funding be allocated to support a phase-in period to ensure school boards that would otherwise see a reduction in LOG funding because of redistribution.
25. That school boards which would see an increase of LOG funding because of the redistribution, begin receiving this funding increase in the 2022-23 school year.

Addressing Equity and Combatting Anti-Black Racism

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the deep-rooted socio-economic disparities that exist in communities across the province, the country and the world. The negative impacts of the pandemic have been disproportionately felt by already marginalized communities. Intersections of gender, race, sexuality, disability, status, language, employment precarity and a host of other factors have had a tremendous impact on how students and their families have experienced this ongoing crisis.

The government must take concrete steps to ameliorate the inequity experienced by these communities and ensure that Ontario’s recovery plans account for the disproportionate impact felt by Black, Indigenous, racialized, and low-income communities.

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

Anti-Black racism in education is longstanding and has harmed Black students, their families and Black educators. Recently, several school boards have come under intense public scrutiny following the exposure of anti-Black racism in their practices. School boards, and the provincial government, need to be accountable to existing anti-Black racism policies and push for the introduction of additional policies, programs and strategies to address anti-Black racism. These must be appropriately funded and include professional development and training for everyone involved in the delivery of public education—from

school trustees and senior management to teacher candidates. Accountability for school boards and the provincial government requires that progress be tracked and measured. This cannot be done without mandating and standardizing the collection of disaggregated race-based data for students and all staff in school boards.

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

Recommendations:

26. That additional funding be provided to school boards to hire additional counsellors, social workers and school nurses that would specifically assist families and students from Black, racialized, and Indigenous communities, as well as students living in low-income communities.
27. That funding be provided to the public education sector and community groups for the purpose of eradicating anti-Black racism and other forms of racism.
28. That all school boards be instructed to begin collection of disaggregated race-based student and staff data starting in the 2022-23 school year.
29. That the Ministry ensure that the collection of race-based data by school boards is standardized, includes all employees and their positions, respects employees’ privacy, meets current best practices, and is made publicly available.

30. That the Ministry implement mandatory ongoing training and professional development for all administrators, school board trustees and teacher candidates on recognizing and addressing anti-Black racism, including microaggressions.

Supporting Second Language Programs

An area that requires greater transparency and accountability from boards, and where additional funding is necessary, is supporting students who enter Ontario schools without language proficiency in either English or French. These students require more support to ensure they progress well academically, socially and emotionally. The number of students who speak neither English nor French upon registration for school has increased significantly. As reported by the 2017 People for Education annual survey of public schools, 63 per cent of English elementary schools have English Language Learners (ELLs)¹¹ as compared to 43 per cent in 2002-03. These students face significant challenges in catching up to their peers, and schools have not been provided with adequate resources to support them. The ongoing pandemic has created additional challenges for these students, especially those engaged in virtual learning.

The funding formula for ELLs who are not born in Canada is a guaranteed per-student amount which is reduced over a four-year period. The funding formula for ELLs who are born in Canada is a lump sum divided amongst school boards, which results in Canadian-born ELLs receiving funding of more than \$10,000 per eligible pupil. The grants to ELLs born outside of Canada assume that ELLs will only require special language programs for up to four years, an assumption that is not supported by reports from teachers who work with these students or by research on language acquisition. Funding should be allocated based on students achieving a standard level of language proficiency and not based on whether they were born in Canada or the number of years they have been in Canada.

¹¹ People for Education (2017). *Competing Priorities* (Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2017). Toronto. peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/P4E-annual-report-2017.pdf

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

Recommendations:

31. That the government ensure all funding envelopes that have been established to support equity-related programs, special education programs, and ESL programs be maintained.
32. That funding for English Language Learners (ELLs) program and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers be expanded to meet the language acquisition needs of students requiring ELL support.
33. That accountability measures be established to prevent school boards from diverting ESL funding to non-ESL services and to require school boards to spend ESL funding on ESL program delivery.

Educating the Whole Child

Elementary students would have a more enriched educational program if they had more opportunities to learn through the arts and outdoor experiential learning, as well as be supported by teacher-librarians and teachers who are specialists in the arts, health and physical education, and guidance.

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

specialist teachers can positively impact student achievement and contribute to student success at the elementary level.”¹²

The number of specialist teachers at the elementary level has dropped significantly since 1998 when the current funding model was introduced. People for Education has systematically documented the decline of student access to teacher-librarians and specialist teachers. In its 2017 annual report,¹³ People for Education reported:

- 52 per cent of elementary schools had at least one teacher-librarian, either full- or part-time, a decline from 60 per cent in 2008, and an all-time low in the 20-year history of the People for Education Annual Survey;
- 40 per cent of elementary schools have neither a specialist music teacher, nor an itinerant music instructor; and
- Elementary schools in the Greater Toronto Area are 2.5 times more likely to have a music teacher than those in eastern and northern Ontario.

In its 2018 report,¹⁴ People for Education reported:

- 46 per cent of elementary schools have a specialist music teacher, full- or part-time;
- Only 8 per cent of elementary schools with grades 7 and 8 have specialist drama teachers; and
- 39 per cent of elementary schools have a Health and Physical Education (H&PE) full-time teacher.

The GSNs still leave elementary students significantly short-changed in terms of their access to quality programs in the arts and health and physical education, and support from teacher-librarians. The shortfall is greater in smaller and more remote schools because the funding is based on per-pupil grants rather than grants per school.

¹² Katina Pollock and Michael Mindzak (2015). *Specialist Teachers - A Review of the Literature prepared for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario*. Toronto.

¹³ People for Education (2017). *Competing Priorities* (Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2017). Toronto.

¹⁴ People for Education (2018). *The new basics for public education*. Toronto.

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

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

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

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

Recommendations:

34. That the education funding model be amended to provide all elementary schools with specialist teachers in the arts, guidance and health and physical education.
35. That the education funding model be amended to provide dedicated funding to support school library learning resources and technology.
36. That the education funding model be amended to restore funding for arts programs to 1996 levels adjusted by inflation.

Health and Safety

Ventilation and Air Filtration

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

The need to improve air quality in schools to reduce COVID-19 transmission has increased as a result of the current wave of the pandemic driven by the highly contagious Omicron variant. While the government required school boards to assess ventilation systems only some focused funding for priority areas was provided. Additional funding must be made available to school boards to make necessary improvements to ventilation and air filtration.

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

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

High temperatures distract students from learning tasks, and studies show that poor ventilation, as indicated by high carbon dioxide levels, negatively affects student achievement. Even before the pandemic, many jurisdictions regularly monitored air exchange through carbon dioxide levels, but it became increasingly common throughout the pandemic. The government should allocate funding for the procurement, installation and maintenance of carbon dioxide (CO₂) monitors in each classroom and provide the necessary training to school staff on what to do when CO₂ levels are elevated.

Recommendations:

37. That funding be immediately made available to school board to make necessary improvements to ventilation and air filtration in classrooms.
38. That funding be provided to ensure class size and occupancy do not exceed ASHRAE recommendations based on ventilation assessments.
39. That funding be provided to school boards to retrofit existing buildings and construct new buildings with efficient heating and cooling systems.
40. That funding be provided to install carbon dioxide (CO₂) monitors in each classroom and provide each staff member with instructions on strategies that can be used when CO₂ levels are elevated.

Public Health Support for Schools

In the past, public health nurses were common in public schools. Many public health units continue to run programs involving public schools to support immunization efforts and addressing mental health. During the pandemic, funding for public health nurses was temporarily increased so that they could assist with infection prevention control practices and outbreak management.

The recent decision by the government to no longer report COVID-19 cases in schools and no longer have contact tracing performed by public health units has raised concerns for educators, students and their families. It has also raised concerns for many school boards, which have implemented their own reporting and tracking mechanisms. ETFO calls on the government to reverse this decision, resume case tracking and

reporting, and restart contact tracing in Ontario’s public schools. Government funding for public health supports for public schools must continue given that immunizations, infection control practices and mental health continue to be significant concerns.

Recommendations:

41. That the government reverse its decision to cease reporting and tracking of COVID-19 cases in public schools.
42. That funding provided to public health units for school nurses be continued to facilitate contact tracing, to promote vaccination and infection control practices, and to enhance school-based mental health supports.

Health and Safety Training

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

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

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

Recommendation:

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

Online Incident Reporting

Accurate reporting of workplace violence, the provision of information to Joint Health and Safety Committees and adequate analysis by the Ministry of Education of safe school incident and workplace violence reports have been ongoing concerns in the education sector. The government provided a small amount of funding for school boards to consolidate safe school incident and workplace violence reports. Unfortunately, school boards selected the services of a variety of software providers for implementation which has resulted in inconsistent data collection. Not all school boards include illness/injury reports in their incident reporting system, and many school boards are still not meeting Ministry requirements.

Ending suspensions for Ontario’s youngest students—those in Kindergarten to Grade 3—did not end violence and safe school incidents among this demographic of students. It did, however, end a source of data. Adequate and consistent data collection is necessary to ensure the proper supports are in place to prevent these incidents. The Ministry of Education has also recently requested that school boards submit data on school exclusions but is not collecting demographic data. Funding for a standardized province-wide incident reporting system is needed to simplify the process for education workers, to facilitate information required by Joint Health and Safety Committees and to support adequate data collection for analysis and action by the provincial government.

Recommendation:

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

Math Proficiency Test Requirement

In 2019, the government passed Bill 48, *Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act*, which included the introduction of a mandatory Math Proficiency Test (MPT) for all new graduates of the teaching profession.

ETFO, alongside the Ontario Federation of Teachers (OFT) and many other education stakeholders opposed the introduction of the MPT requirement. Despite widespread opposition, the government piloted the MPT in 2020, during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, and implemented the testing program in Spring 2021.

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

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

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

“Requiring teacher candidates to complete a mandatory math test to receive a teaching certificate will not lead to improvements in math instruction or math outcomes at the elementary level. It is based on a false premise that this ‘crisis’ in math outcomes is related to teachers’ basic math

¹⁵ Ontario Teacher Candidates’ Council v. The Queen, 2021 ONSC 7386 (CanLII), canlii.ca/t/jlcvvg

competency. ETFO rejects these assumptions, which undermine the professionalism of its members and detract from the real barriers to Ontario’s students reaching their full potential in math.”¹⁶

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

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

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

Recommendation:

45. That the government withdraw its request for leave to appeal the ruling on the Math Proficiency Test.

FC:CC:MW

¹⁶ ETFO (2019). ETFO’s submission re Bill 48, *Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act*, 2019. etfo.ca/getmedia/24552a73-eb90-4d28-a59b-0aa62a73c2b7/190226_SubmissionBill48Feb2019.pdf

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Repeal Bill 124.
2. Reinstate the \$467 million cut from core education funding in the fall economic update.
3. Increase funding to public education to close the funding gap identified by the FAO.
4. Establish an independent, external review of Ontario’s education funding formula to ensure it reflects actual student needs.
5. That grades 4 to 8 class size be capped at 24 students.
6. That the government commit to maintaining the current staffing model for Full-Day Kindergarten.
7. That every Kindergarten class be staffed with a full-time certified teacher and a designated early childhood educator.
8. That Full-Day Kindergarten class size be capped at 26 students.
9. That funding be allocated for 30 minutes of preparation time per day for designated early childhood educators.
10. That funding be allocated to support joint planning during the workday for the Full-Day Kindergarten teacher/designated early childhood educator team.
11. That funding be allocated to avoid Senior Kindergarten/Grade 1 split classes.
12. That funding be provided for non-teaching staff to perform supervision duties such as lunchroom supervision.
13. That additional funding be provided to improve access to in-school supports, including guidance counsellors, social workers, psychologists, and child and youth workers, especially in underserved areas.
14. That funding be allocated for additional in-school and community supports necessary to ensure students’ developmental and behavioural needs are met.
15. That the government develop and deliver—in consultation with mental health experts, teachers, education workers, unions and other education stakeholders—long-term, fully-funded, comprehensive, culturally-responsive mental health supports for students.
16. That ongoing, sustainable funding be allocated for high-quality professional development for educators in the area of student mental health, occurring within the instructional day.

17. That the government abandon its plan to make virtual learning a permanent fixture of elementary instruction.
18. That the government instruct school boards to immediately cease the use of hybrid learning as a method of instruction.
19. That special education grants be based on actual student needs.
20. That funding be increased for educational assistants, psychologists, behavioural therapists, child and youth workers, school support counsellors, and speech and language pathologists.
21. That funding be allocated to provide occasional teachers and occasional education workers paid professional development on teaching and educational strategies to support students with special education needs.
22. That a review of the Learning Opportunities Grant (LOG) be part of an independent review of the education funding formula.
23. That the government provide education stakeholders with a projection of the impact of integrating updated 2021 census data in the distribution of LOG funding.
24. That transitional funding be allocated to support a phase-in period to ensure school boards that would otherwise see a reduction in LOG funding because of redistribution.
25. That school boards which would see an increase of LOG funding because of the redistribution, begin receiving this funding increase in the 2022-23 school year.
26. That additional funding be provided to school boards to hire additional counsellors, social workers and school nurses that would specifically assist families and students from Black, racialized, and Indigenous communities, as well as students living in low-income communities.
27. That funding be provided to the public education sector and community groups for the purpose of eradicating anti-Black racism and other forms of racism.
28. That all school boards be instructed to begin collection of disaggregated race-based student and staff data starting in the 2022-23 school year.
29. That the Ministry ensure that the collection of race-based data by school boards is standardized, includes all employees and their positions, respects employees' privacy, meets current best practices, and is made publicly available.
30. That the Ministry implement mandatory ongoing training and professional development for all administrators, school board trustees and teacher candidates on recognizing and addressing anti-Black racism, including microaggressions.

31. That the government ensure all funding envelopes that have been established to support equity-related programs, special education programs, and ESL programs be maintained.
32. That funding for English Language Learners (ELLs) program and English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers be expanded to meet the language acquisition needs of students requiring ELL support.
33. That accountability measures be established to prevent school boards from diverting ESL funding to non-ESL services and to require school boards to spend ESL funding on ESL program delivery.
34. That the education funding model be amended to provide all elementary schools with specialist teachers in the arts, guidance and health and physical education.
35. That the education funding model be amended to provide dedicated funding to support school library learning resources and technology.
36. That the education funding model be amended to restore funding for arts programs to 1996 levels adjusted by inflation.
37. That funding be immediately made available to school board to make necessary improvements to ventilation and air filtration in classrooms.
38. That funding be provided to ensure class size and occupancy do not exceed ASHRAE recommendations based on ventilation assessments.
39. That funding be provided to school boards to retrofit existing buildings and construct new buildings with efficient heating and cooling systems.
40. That funding be provided to install carbon dioxide (CO₂) monitors in each classroom and provide each staff member with instructions on strategies that can be used when CO₂ levels are elevated.
41. That the government reverse its decision to cease reporting and tracking of COVID-19 cases in public schools.
42. That funding provided to public health units for school nurses be continued to facilitate contact tracing, to promote vaccination and infection control practices, and to enhance school-based mental health supports.
43. That funding be provided to school boards to ensure all temporary and occasional staff are provided with required health and safety training provided during Professional Activity days.
44. That funding be provided for a provincial standardized online incident reporting system for all school boards to use for reporting injuries and illness, safe school incidents, exclusions and workplace violence.
45. That the government withdraw its request for leave to appeal the ruling on the Math Proficiency Test.

SELECTED SOURCES

ETFO (2021). *Submission to the Ministry of Education: 2022-23 Education Funding Feedback*. etfo.ca/ETFO/media/Documents/4.2.1%20Publications/Education%20Funding%20Feedback/20211126_EducationFundingSubmission.pdf

Ministry of Finance (2021). *2021 Ontario Economic Outlook and Fiscal Review*. budget.ontario.ca/2021/fallstatement/pdf/2021-fall-statement-en.pdf

Ministry of Finance, Government of Ontario. ontario.ca/page/ministry-finance

Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2019). *Comparing Ontario's Fiscal Position with Other Provinces*. fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/inter-prov-comparisons-feb-2019

Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (2021). *Ministry of Education Spending Plan Review*. fao-on.org/en/Blog/Publications/2021-education-estimates#_ftn5

Ontario Auditor General (2017). *2017 Annual Report*, Chapter 3, Section 3.08 - Ministry Funding and Oversight of School Boards.

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

People for Education (2019). *What Makes a School?* (Annual report on Ontario's publicly funded schools 2019). Toronto. peopleforeducation.ca/report/2019-annual-report-on-schools-what-makes-a-school/

People for Education (2017). *Competing Priorities* (Annual Report on Ontario's Publicly Funded Schools 2017). Toronto. peopleforeducation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/P4E-annual-report-2017.pdf

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

People for Education (2018). *The new basics for public education*. Toronto, ON: People for Education
Ontario Teacher Candidates' Council v. The Queen, 2021 ONSC 7386 (CanLII), canlii.ca/t/jlcvvg

ETFO (2019). ETFO's submission re Bill 48, *Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act, 2019*. Toronto. etfo.ca/getmedia/24552a73-eb90-4d28-a59b-0aa62a73c2b7/190226_SubmissionBill48Feb2019.pdf



Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
Fédération des enseignantes et des enseignants de l'élémentaire de l'Ontario
136 Isabella Street, Toronto, ON M4Y 0B5
416-962-3836 | 1-888-838-3836 | etfo.ca