



FEDERATION OF CANADIAN SECONDARY STUDENTS
FÉDÉRATION DES ÉLÈVES DU SECONDAIRE AU CANADA

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FCSS-FESC SUBMISSION TO THE ONTARIO 2022 PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS

Legislative Assembly of Ontario
Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs
99 Wellesley St W
Room 1405, Whitney Block
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A2

Introduction

Ontario students have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. As secondary students attending publicly funded Ontario schools, we are aware and cognisant of the challenges that our peers are facing. We are therefore presenting a series of six recommendations for consideration by the committee. It is our belief that these recommendations—touching on all aspects of Ontario's publicly funded education system—will benefit and support student achievement, mental health, well-being, and social-emotional development.

It is imperative that the Government of Ontario commit to making historic investments in public education to ensure that the future generation is prepared and ready to take on the responsibilities of tomorrow.

Background

The Federation of Canadian Secondary Students / Fédération des élèves du secondaire au Canada (FCSS-FESC) is an entirely non-partisan youth-led charity. We were founded in 2012, incorporated in 2014, and gained tax-exempt charitable status in 2017. Over the FCSS-FESC's ten-year history, we have developed programs to support secondary students and are unrelenting in our advocacy on their behalf.

Recommendations

- 1) That the Government of Ontario invest \$9.8 million in a grant for Indigenous reading material.
- 2) That the Government of Ontario allocate an additional \$2.3 million in funding for in-school extracurricular programs.
- 3) That the Government of Ontario allocate \$25 million towards an online school sexual assault reporting system.
- 4) That the Government of Ontario invest \$2.6 billion in funding for repairs, retrofitting and improved ventilation.
- 5) That the Government of Ontario invest a further \$5 million in menstrual products and \$1 million in menstrual education.
- 6) That the Government of Ontario allocate \$250,000 towards a task force analyzing staffing levels of educational support staff.

Detailed Recommendations

(1) That the Government of Ontario invest \$9.8 million in a grant for Indigenous reading material

The proposed funding aligns with the [Ontario government's commitment to reconciliation](#) with Indigenous Peoples by elevating the voice of Indigenous authors who have historically been marginalized. According to [data collected by the University of Wisconsin-Madison](#) on cultural diversity in children's books, only 0.9% of characters in children's books are depicted to be from Indigenous communities. Similar patterns of under-representation of Indigenous cultures are reflected in Canadian books and literature.

Indigenous representation in literature is crucial and allows students to understand past and current Indigenous issues and perspectives. Increased exposure to Indigenous stories, history, and perspectives will spark interest and awareness on the topic among students. The funding would allow students to become more knowledgeable about Indigenous issues and better equipped to support reconciliation efforts in future years.

(2) That the Government of Ontario allocate \$2.3 million in funding for in-school extracurricular programs

We are recommending a total grant of \$9.8 million to allow each of the 4,900 elementary and secondary schools in English and French public and Catholic school districts in Ontario to purchase reading materials in the amount of \$2,000. We would also recommend providing school boards with the flexibility to allow for funds to be used to invite Indigenous guest authors or guest speakers.

Extracurricular activities are crucial to student mental health and well-being. A [2008 study](#) determined that: "positive extracurricular activity settings afford vulnerable youth developmentally appropriate experiences that promote educational persistence and healthy development," underscoring the importance of extracurricular activities. We anticipate that the positive outcomes of increasing funding for in-school extracurriculars (e.g., higher levels of post-secondary attendance) will be visible within five years.

The proposed allocation of \$2.3 million will provide all publicly funded Ontario schools with an average of \$2,500 each to invest in their in-school programs such as school clubs, sports teams, or student

government. For example, these funds can be used to subsidize sports equipment costs for talented athletes, or perhaps allow strong debaters to attend provincial competitions who may not be able to afford these costs if not subsidized by the school.

(3) That the Government of Ontario allocate \$25 million towards an online school sexual assault reporting system

Ontario schools should be a welcoming space for students to learn safely amongst peers; hence, the diligent and ethical upholding of school policies is integral. However, younger students are largely dismissed when allegations of sexual assault in schools are reported to the administration. There are [460,000 reports of sexual assault in Canada each year](#), and young women aged 15-24 are disproportionately impacted. A [survey conducted by CBC News](#) of 4,000 high school students found that 15 percent have been touched inappropriately while at school, most of whom first experienced it before Grade 7. In addition to the [Ontario government's new guidelines](#) for assault claims, presented in September 2021, it is recommended that the government make financial commitments towards reporting, investigation, and administrative support of sexual assault claims in secondary schools.

Allocating \$25 million towards the investigation of sexual assault claims will ensure student allegations are appropriately investigated to allow all students feel safe in their learning environments.

(4) That the Government of Ontario invest \$2.6 billion in funding for repairs, retrofitting, and improved ventilation

A 2019 audit determined that Ontario elementary and secondary schools are awaiting \$16.3 billion in backlog repairs, up from the previous audit which deemed the province to be behind in repairs by [\\$15.9 billion](#). The severity of this situation is exacerbated by the ongoing pandemic situation. While the Ministry of Education invested in HVAC systems, the funds were quickly depleted given that many schools already lacked sufficient ventilation infrastructure.

The Toronto District School Board (TDSB) alone has a capital improvement backlog of [\\$3.7 billion](#). The TDSB's worst Facility Condition Index (FCI) is 135.53, where an FCI greater than 100 means it is more cost efficient to tear down a school rather than to fully repair it. Several schools in the TDSB alone have met or exceeded this value. Student enrollment numbers have increased in the last five years and are expected to keep increasing. When a full return to in-person teaching occurs, there will be an even greater impact on school infrastructure. It would be advantageous to repair vital infrastructure now and over a gradual period of time when schools are not at full capacity.

The lack of repairs creates inhospitable learning environments for our students. Given the extraordinary circumstances of the pandemic, \$2.6 billion is the bare minimum to ensure that students and staff can thrive in a safe learning environment. Ontario has consistently ranked among the best for education [among Canadian provinces](#). With this additional funding, Ontario will continue to be a leader in education and foster the next generation of learners.

(5) That the Government of Ontario invest a further \$5 million in menstrual products and \$1 million in menstrual education

This funding targets the challenges faced by women in accessing menstrual hygiene products. According to [Plan International Canada](#), around 80 percent of menstruating students reported that their lack of access to feminine hygiene products caused them to miss school activities. This negatively impacts students' academic performance. Many students from low-income families have to prioritize other essentials over menstrual hygiene products, leading to [poor hygiene and infections](#). The same survey also highlighted that approximately 60 percent of menstruating students have experienced shame or felt uncomfortable letting others know that they are on their period. Students deserve to learn in an inclusive environment where they do not feel embarrassed by menstruation.

Over four years, \$5 million, in addition to the existing initiative ([Enhanced Student Access to Free Menstrual Products in Ontario Schools](#)), would cover [a quarter of the yearly cost](#) for the [100,000 Ontario students living in poverty](#). Furthermore, it is recommended that multiple types of feminine hygiene products be provided to meet the different needs of individuals. Reusable products, such as reusable pads and cups, are also effective approaches to reduce costs while protecting the environment. \$1 million allocated to menstrual education for the next five years would allow all individuals present in schools to develop a more comprehensive understanding of menstruation. These funds are recommended to be directed towards initiatives such as student support programs and curriculum development.

(6) That the Government of Ontario allocate \$250,000 towards a task force analyzing staffing levels of educational support staff

The diverse needs of secondary students across Ontario must be met to ensure that every student has the chance to succeed and feel included in the classroom environment. Students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) are the most severely impacted by the lack of professional support workers who provide various services for students across Ontario. These educational support staff include education

assistants, psychologists, social workers, vision itinerants, and child and youth workers. When staff shortages occur, remaining [staff are forced to cover the needs of students](#) across their school—or even their school board—that they do not normally cover. Further, students learning remotely do not have access to the [familiarity](#) that comes with being in an in-person school environment, which includes face-to-face, one-on-one access to educational support workers that they know and trust.

Statistics calculated by The Monitor indicate that Ontario school boards hired [286 special education workers](#) across its 4,000+ schools in 2020. If this number continues to decrease, more students will have their learning and accommodations affected. An in-depth review should be conducted to determine how staffing shortages will be addressed in the 2022 budget, as well as the minimum number of educational support staff per school board that should be hired over the next five years. The \$250,000 allocation will permit the steering committee to conduct extensive research on this issue and compile a series of recommendations for the government.

Thank you for your consideration. We would value the opportunity to further discuss our recommendations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bruce Yu".

Bruce Yu

Chief Operations Officer / Chef des opérations

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The Federation of Canadian Secondary Students / Fédération des élèves du secondaire au Canada (FCSS-FESC) extends its appreciation to the authors of this Pre-Budget Submission.

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