

**Submission to the Standing
Committee on Finance
and Economic Affairs
on Bill 180, *Building a Better
Ontario Act (Budget Measures),
2024***

April 22, 2024



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Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs on Bill 180, *Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures) 2024*

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) was founded in 1919. OSSTF/FEESO represents over 60,000 public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, instructors, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, and many other educational workers.

OSSTF/FEESO is pleased to provide its submission to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs consultation on Bill 180, *Building a Better Ontario Act (Budget Measures) 2024*.

The government's proposed 2024 budget continues to short-change Ontario's students. The budget contains what amounts to a cut for elementary and secondary education, as funding again fails to keep pace with the rate of inflation. According to the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO), the \$1 billion increase to education includes a \$584 million increase in federal transfer funding as part of the Canada-wide Early Learning and Child Care agreement. This leaves just \$416 million (1.5%), far less than the current annual inflation rate of 2.6% in Ontario, as of March 2024. In 2023, Ricardo Tranjan of the Centre for Canadian Policy Alternatives determined that inflation-adjusted school funding in Ontario was down by \$1,200 per student since the Ford government came to power in 2018.¹

Sadly, this will grow even further with this budget. This proposed budget offers inadequate supports for students and investments necessary to strengthen and enhance public education. The government's so called back to basics investments of \$79 in math and reading are insufficient to address the diverse needs of students. The \$18 million plan to support students with special

¹ From Tranjan, Ricardo. (April 18, 2023). *Inflation-adjusted school funding is down \$1,200 per student since the Ford government came to power*. CCPA. Retrieved April 19, 2024, from <https://monitormag.ca/articles/inflation-adjusted-school-funding-is-down-1-200-per-student-since-the-ford-government-came-to-power/>

needs and disabilities is also insufficient and does not recognize the reality in Ontario's schools. Students deserve to have their needs met and to have all the supports they need to succeed.

The government's plan for \$23 billion in infrastructure investment in education, which includes child care spaces, does not acknowledge the school repair backlog that continues to grow from the \$16 billion it hit in 2019². The FAO described the government's 2022 education infrastructure \$21.2 billion ten-year spending plan as \$14% less in real 2021 dollars than the plan for the previous ten-year period. With inflation of nearly 10% since, this plan continues to fall behind the needs of Ontario school boards.

In postsecondary education the government is cutting funding by 2.5%. This reduction, which the government attributes to a reduction in the number of international students entering public colleges and universities, will only worsen existing financial challenges facing post secondary institutions. After 6 years of Ford Conservative governments, Ontario remains last in Canada for provincial per pupil funding, well below the national average. Underfunding, combined with a continued freeze of tuition fees, has pushed Ontario's postsecondary sector to the brink of collapse financially as institutions struggle to raise enough revenues to continue to offer the courses and supports students need and deserve. This is a real per capita decrease of 8.1% in postsecondary funding.

This government is making choices that affect all Ontarians. The choice to underfund education is one that will impact Ontario for decades to come. In OSSTF/FEESO's *Pre-budget Consultations Submission* (see Appendix B attached) we made 38 recommendations, each of which would have a positive and immediate impact on student learning and outcomes. This government has ignored every one of them. This proposed budget continues to take money out of Ontario's world-class schools and campuses. It continues to ignore what students need in order to be healthy and achieve the success they deserve. From the recruitment and retention crisis affecting Ontario schools, the lack of funding for classroom student supports, the failure to address student mental health properly and ensure services are available to students, the failure to properly implement

² From Rushowy, Kristin. (November 6, 2019). *Repair backlog in Ontario schools hits \$16.3 billion*. Toronto Star. Retrieved April 19, 2024, from <https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/repair-backlog-in-ontario-schools-hits-16-3-billion/>

de-streaming with appropriate supports for students, to the continued strangling of funding for universities and colleges, this government continues to short-change Ontarians.

This government has had many opportunities to increase investments and enhance public services. Instead of providing any real investments, it continues to underfund services at less than inflation and what demographic changes in the population require.

We ask that the Committee and Minister of Finance reconsider OSSTF/FEESO's 38 recommendations and amend the budget to address the underfunding of public services, including education and postsecondary education.

As part of this submission, please also accept **Appendix A: Oral Submission of OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood** and **Appendix B: OSSTF/FEESO Submission to the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee 2024 Pre-Budget Consultations**.

Appendix A: Oral Submission of OSSTF/FEESO President Karen Littlewood

Honourable members of the committee, I want to thank you for granting me the opportunity to present to you today.

I'm proud to be here, as President of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation, representing more than 60,000 frontline education workers, including educational assistants, psychologists, office staff, custodians, university support staff, public high school teachers, and occasional teachers who support Ontario students in classrooms and post-secondary campuses across the province every single day.

I myself am a former public-school teacher. I started my career in 1991 and unfortunately, Ontario's public education system is not what it used to be. Our province has been world renowned for decades as having one of the best public education systems on earth.

But instead of doubling down on investments into public education, governments have allowed schools and campuses to become severely underfunded for years, especially since the Progressive Conservatives took office in 2018.

Governing is all about making tough decisions. What's best for some may not be right for others. The thing is... public education benefits everyone. Every single person in Ontario. Their families. And their communities.

Public education is supposed to be the great equalizer. Which is why I continue to be baffled by the Ford government's choice to underfund the public education system.

Ontario is in the midst of one the most severe staffing crises in public education that we have ever experienced... a crisis largely fueled by the province's deliberate underfunding.

And this year's budget will only deepen the cuts! It fails to keep up with inflation, fails to keep up with rising enrollment, and is therefore a cut, not an investment.

We know that from 2018 until last year, the Ford government cut \$1200 in funding per student. Once we get the final funding numbers for school boards this year, that number will surely grow.

The thing is, we know these cuts are intensifying the staffing crisis, as is the Ford government's refusal to invest in fair wages for teachers and especially education workers.

Principals across Ontario were surveyed by the non-profit, People for Education, and they identified staffing as their number one concern. A majority also said that relatively low wages are a main driver of the crisis.

Because in fact, the staffing crisis is not due to shortages. We have more than enough people in this vast province of ours to fill the positions. There are more than 46,000 qualified individuals with teaching certificates that have chosen to leave the profession or to teach outside of Ontario.

This is true for education workers as well who can find far better pay and working conditions, with far less chance of violence, in the private sector.

At the York Region District School Board, they are routinely short staffed on Professional Students Services Personnel, such as psychologists, social workers, and speech-language pathologists... the very people who help our most vulnerable students with special education and mental health needs. They even have members asking to go part-time so they can work part-time in the private sector where they make more money.

Another board had an IT position unfilled for three years... three full years that school went without someone in that position simply because the pay is significantly less than similar positions in the private sector.

There are significant funding issues at the post-secondary level as well. Ontario ranks last among Canadian provinces in terms of public funding per post-secondary student. DEAD LAST.

And the \$900 million that the government announced in new funding in this budget is far less than what is needed, far below what government's own blue-ribbon panel recommended, and still far below the national average in per student funding.

This government is always saying they want to invest in good, high-paying jobs for the future. But you can't simply press a button and have an excess of good paying jobs filled by talented professionals. You need to invest in today's students so they're ready for tomorrow.

I happen to believe that Ontario students deserve the best, which means we need to recruit and retain the best.

So again, this brings me back to making choices. The government chooses to shortchange public education, which drives down wages... wages that then fall further and further behind the private sector.

Qualified professionals leave public education, causing staffing issues, and it's the students who suffer. They have less supports, learning conditions worsen, and unfortunately, violence is all the more likely to occur... All of this in turn causes more staff burnout and turnover. What was once an issue, turns into a full blown, province-wide crisis!

This was all entirely preventable. We know what the solutions are for this crisis. I have presented to this committee numerous times, as have my colleagues. Just this winter, OSSTF/FEESO presented 38 recommendations to this committee to address the staffing crisis and improve public education for all students in Ontario.

Every recommendation was affordable and doable with Ontario's current resources. Yet nearly every one of our recommendations remains unaddressed and unfulfilled. And the crisis has actually intensified since we made that submission.

So, I'm here today to say, it doesn't need to be this way! We can work together, and not only overcome the crisis but regain the world-renowned standing of Ontario's public education system.

Our students deserve no less. The province deserves no less!

Thank you again for listening to me and providing me with this opportunity to speak to you today.

Appendix B: OSSTF/FEESO Submission to the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee 2024 Pre-Budget Consultations

OSSTF/FEESO Submission to the Finance and Economic Affairs Committee

2024 Pre-Budget Consultations
January 23, 2024



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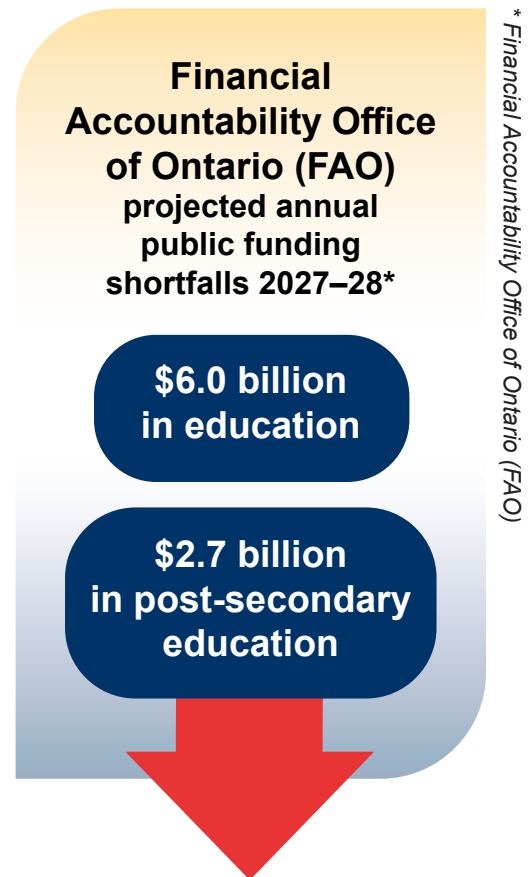
Introduction

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation was founded in 1919 and represents over 60,000 public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, instructors, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, and many other educational workers employed in all levels of the public education sector, from full-day kindergarten to university.

OSSTF/FEESO welcomes the opportunity to provide input for the development of the 2024 Ontario Budget.

The government continues to short-change Ontarians and Ontario's students, with the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) projecting annual shortfalls in public funding through 2027–28 totalling \$40 billion, with a \$6.0 billion shortfall in education and \$2.7 billion in post-secondary education. Per pupil funding for public elementary and secondary programs has decreased significantly since 2018–19, when adjusted for inflation. In post-secondary education, the government has aggressively and consistently cut public funding to universities. Ontario's funding model is simply less effectual funding, year after year.

This continued underfunding and underspending in these sectors is jeopardizing student outcomes and negatively impacting Ontario's future. The ongoing lack of sufficient investment in public education is shortsighted and especially disappointingly given that Ontario is in a period where economic recovery and inflation have significantly grown provincial revenues. The government should take the opportunity to invest in the future of Ontario—its children. The government must increase investments in public education in order to meet the demands of our growing economy.



Publicly funded education in Ontario provides students with rich learning opportunities, skills, and a sense of community.

A strong public education system enhances our social and economic fabric and creates a diverse, dynamic, and prosperous province. A strong publicly funded education system is essential to Ontario's future and is the cornerstone

of the province's economic growth. In its 2019 report, "*The Economic Case for Investing in Education*," the Conference Board of Canada found that, for each \$1.00 increase in public education spending, \$1.30 is generated in positive economic impacts for the province.

Investment in education also creates a range of private, social, and fiscal benefits, including higher tax revenues and cost savings in health care, social assistance, and criminal justice.

While the global pandemic presented unprecedented challenges and revealed deep levels of inequity in our society, it also highlighted the crucial role education and schools play in maintaining a strong and vibrant society. It particularly highlighted how schools are integral parts of communities and provide vital supports for students. As Ontario continues its strong economic recovery, it will need a well-educated, intelligent, and skilled population coming from a public education system that will support all students and their needs. This government must ensure public education receives the funding it needs, eliminate any funding shortfalls, and make significant investments to address mental health and the widening gaps in inequity among the diverse students of Ontario.

OSSTF/FEESO believes that all students deserve to have every opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically, with access to rich learning experiences that provide a solid foundation of competence and confidence that continues throughout their lives. Ontario continues to need well-educated, intelligent, skilled, and resilient workers and a public education system that will support all students and their needs. This government must make it a priority to address these funding shortfalls and to make significant investments to address mental health and the widening inequity among the diverse peoples of Ontario.

“ ...for each \$1.00 increase in public education spending, \$1.30 is generated in positive economic impacts for the province.”

– Conference Board of Canada, 2019

OSSTF/FEESO is committed to equity and believes that investments in education funding must also be made so there is funding for boards to address inequalities that arise as a result of differences in income levels, gender, race, special education identification, newness to Canada, and Indigenous status. Improving learning conditions for all is about recognizing and meeting the unique needs of learners. Learning conditions are equity conditions and creating an equitable education system benefits Ontario. When students feel safe and see themselves represented in schools, they succeed. There are also inequities in the funding of adult and continuing education, occasional teachers, education workers, class size, at-risk student programs, student transportation, as well as in many other areas. OSSTF/FEESO promotes the need for systemic changes and actions that are permanent. Funding must be sustained and specific to addressing systemic inequalities.

OSSTF/FEESO calls on the government of Ontario to invest in our greatest asset, the students in Ontario's world-class public education system. The economic payoff is indisputable. The ability to properly fund public education exists. Now is the time to act to strengthen public education.

Education Funding

OSSTF/FEESO is very concerned that public education continues to be underfunded. Despite the government's continued claims of historic investments in education, real Grants for Student Needs (GSN) funding has not kept up with the pace of enrolment growth and inflation. Ricardo Tranjan, of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, determined that taking inflation into account, school boards received an average of \$1,200 less per student in the 2023–24 school year than they received in 2018–19. This year alone, funding was an average of \$600 lower per student than the year before.

The Ford government is shortchanging Ontario students.

School boards received an average of

\$1,200 less per student in 2023–2024

compared to 2018–2019.*

*Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives

In 2021, \$2.2 billion in education funding that could have been used to improve student outcomes went unspent. As well, in recent years, over \$2 billion was transferred directly to parents. Providing this funding to school boards as an investment in public education would have been much more effective in improving student outcomes, as the school boards are in a much better position to provide educational services to students.

Furthermore, in 2023–24, base GSN funding was increased by only 1.4%. With a 0.6% enrolment increase and 1.2% of funding unallocated to school boards and unavailable for to support student needs and programming, this is clearly a reduction in funding to school boards. Compounding this intentional short-changing of public education, inflation of 6.8% in 2022 and 3.1% in 2023 has meant that school boards have much less buying power and are struggling to maintain programs.

One-time grants for learning recovery and limited other funding for reading, mathematics and de-streaming initiatives have proven to be inadequate. Ontario's students need focused, sustained funding in order to meet their educational needs.

Bill 124, Protecting a Sustainable Public Sector for Future Generations Act, 2019, created a crisis in Ontario's public service. The 1% cap on compensation has created a wage disparity between the provincial public sector and private and other sectors. Ontario's public sector workers, including nurses and health workers, teachers and education workers, and many other workers—the majority of whom are women—have fallen behind other sectors in their wages. Some even had to abandon their chosen professions as their income had been eroded by inflation. This is contributing to a shortage of qualified workers in schools. The public sector needs to retain and recruit workers by showing them the respect they deserve. Employers and unions must be able to freely negotiate a level of compensation that will retain current staff and attract a new generation of teachers and education workers.

OSSTF/FEESO urges the government to make real investments in Ontario's education system to build for a better tomorrow. Now is the time to embrace the opportunity before us. Ontario's

world-class publicly funded education system must be protected and enhanced to build a strong Ontario and benefit all Ontarians.

Recommendations:

1. Improve compensation and working conditions and begin an active recruiting campaign to attract qualified teachers and education workers to fill the many vacancies in classrooms and schools across the province.
2. Instead of providing direct tax-funded transfers to parents, invest those funds in Ontario's world-class public education system.
3. Increase GSN funding immediately to bring funding levels up to the levels that existed before 2018–19 and build in automatic annual adjustments for inflation.
4. Ensure that education funds are allocated and available to be fully utilized by school boards to provide supports to students in schools and classrooms.
5. Allow free collective bargaining of public sector wage increases to proceed without legislative interference so that increases can be negotiated to retain and attract a new generation of workers and professionals to the public sector.
6. Immediately end the appeal of the unconstitutionality of *Bill 124* and engage with affected unions on a remedy.

Increasing Student-Centred Supports and Services

The global pandemic presented unprecedented challenges and revealed deep levels of inequities in society. The pandemic magnified the significant inequities that continue to plague our public services and institutions and negatively affect the lived experiences of students and families in Ontario. It also highlighted the crucial role education and schools play in fostering and maintaining a strong and vibrant society.

OSSTF/FEESO believes that all students deserve to have every opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically, with access to rich learning experiences that provide a solid foundation of competence and confidence that continues throughout their lives.

The current education funding model, which was developed over 25 years ago specifically to limit education funding, created disparities that have only been exacerbated over the years. Over two decades ago the Education Equality Task Force, led by Dr. Rozanski's, recognized these disparities: the underfunding of school maintenance and operations, the negative consequences of the funding formula's fixation with uniformity and its inadequate funding for special education, programming for students at risk, and support for students whose first language is neither English nor French. In the years since changes to education funding have only compounded those issues and school boards are left to make difficult choices on the allocation of funding to areas of crisis because they are not receiving enough funding to support the programs that students need.

Program changes since, mostly politically or financially motivated, are also consistently underfunded, magnifying these issues and forcing school boards to redirect funding from other programs. Both Special Education and Learning Opportunities total funding, which support the most at-risk students, have been consistently capped and divided among school boards in an inequitable manner based on statistical projections, which do nothing to address individual school board or student needs.

There are also inequities in the funding of adult and continuing education, occasional teachers, education support staff, class size, at-risk student programs, student transportation, and many other areas. OSSTF/FEESO is committed to equity and

The current Education Funding Formula is outdated, inadequate, and creates systemic inequities in:

- Special Education Funding
- Adult and Continuing Education Students
- Building Maintenance and Repairs

believes that investments in education funding must be made so there is adequate funding for boards to address inequalities that occur as a result of income levels, gender, race, special education identification, new immigrant, and Indigenous status.

As Ontario continues its strong economic recovery, it will need a well-educated, intelligent, skilled, strong, and resilient population. The priority of this government must be to invest in education at all levels to address funding shortfalls, the mental health of students and staff, and the widening gaps in inequity among the diverse peoples of Ontario.

Recommendations:

7. Provide funding for staffing models that support student and worker opportunities for success, including:
 - funding to reduce class size and provide student supports in classrooms and schools where they are needed,
 - using a standard formula for the generation of educational worker staff/student ratios for education workers from kindergarten through post-secondary education, and
 - providing equitable funding to all programs, including adult and continuing education, to support all learners.
8. Review and overhaul public education funding by conducting a comprehensive review of the Grants for Student Needs by an expert panel that includes members from all stakeholder groups and appropriately centers equity and inclusion considerations.
9. Implement and fund a comprehensive recovery program that helps students increase achievement and success and provides the supports that students need.

Mental Health

The government must provide permanent, predictable, and meaningful funding for specialized programming and supports for all students from early learning through post-secondary education. Strengthening learner outcomes translates into increased graduation rates, student opportunity, and success. Equity objectives are met best when funding is accessible and widespread.

“ The government must provide permanent, predictable, and meaningful funding for specialized programming and supports for all students from early learning through post-secondary education.”

With the pandemic further magnifying the importance of mental health and well-being, more mental health professionals are needed to provide services directly to students in Ontario’s schools and on campuses. Schools are the initial point of contact for such services for many students and should be fully integrated with community mental health providers. All tiers of services should be structured through schools to make them more accessible, equitable, and inclusive.

OSSTF/FEESO believes that there is a need for comprehensive tier 1 and tier 2 mental health services within schools, supplemented by access to tier 3 services within the community, as appropriate. Students who require tier 3 services often face barriers to access, significant wait times, or a lack of available services in their communities. Intensive mental health services should be available by referral from schools, be timely, and be fully funded by the appropriate ministry so that there can be seamless and equitable access in every community in Ontario.

Tier 1 and tier 2 services should be provided by board-employed professional student services personnel and paraprofessionals. Any gaps in service should first be addressed by hiring additional board-employed staff to enhance the services available to students in schools. When considering external partnerships, if it is not possible to provide a service internally through board-employed staff, school boards must avoid duplication of services provided by existing board-employed staff and ensure a partnership protocol is in place.

Funding for mental health and well-being supports for all students must be permanent, predictable, and meaningful. These supports strengthen learner outcomes and translate into increased graduation rates, opportunity, and success. Employers must be accountable for ensuring that all funding provided for mental health and well-being is used effectively to provide the intended supports to students. A school-based team of professionals who have experience and an existing connection to schools are in the best position to support the needs of students. Any funding should maximize the number of front-line services and be used to hire additional dedicated staff to deliver services directly to students in schools as part of the school team of trained, experienced, and dedicated professionals. Having more staff in buildings creates safer school buildings and campuses, promotes student and worker mental health, and healthy communities.

“ A school-based team of professionals who have experience and an existing connection to schools are in the best position to support the needs of students.”

Recommendations:

10. Fully fund and support mental health services in schools and on campuses provided by permanently employed professionals and paraprofessionals so that students are healthy and able to succeed.
11. Ensure that mental health services are available by referral from schools and campuses, can be obtained in a timely manner, and are fully funded by the appropriate ministry so that there can be seamless and equitable access in every community in Ontario.
12. Provide funding to increase mental health supports for students, including:
 - trauma and learning support post-COVID-19, from early learning through post-secondary, and
 - mental health supports in every school/worksites and on every campus.

Improving Learning Conditions for All

Inequities exist in every classroom in Ontario, from early learning through post-secondary. To properly address these inequities, funding should be directed to improving learning conditions where they are needed. With smaller class sizes all students achieve greater success.

Students should have opportunities for learning and growth within their diverse communities. All services for students should be viewed through the lens of equity and inclusion. Systemic inequity must be addressed through a change that provides positive impacts to equity and sovereignty-seeking groups, and these changes must be actionable and permanent.

More school-based services should be made available, including mental health and speech and language services. Specifically, school boards should be provided with increased funding for services by board-employed practitioners.

De-streaming must be properly implemented with supports including smaller class sizes, training, time for educators to plan for a new curriculum. Permanent funding for de-streaming must address systemic inequities that students experience with access to technology, curriculum opportunities, programming, and educator support. Any de-streaming of courses must also be accompanied by both curriculum modifications that reflect inclusion and diversity and that are culturally appropriate and engaging. Supports must include smaller class sizes, training, time for educators to adjust and plan for a new curriculum, and rich resources developed specifically for de-streaming and addressing inequity.

Any allocation of funding based on proxy measures, such as demographics and statistical projections, can lead to systemic inequities. OSSTF/FEESO advocates for needs-based funding so that all students who need services and supports have every opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically, regardless of inequities that result from income levels, gender, race, special education identification, and new immigrant and Indigenous status.

Funding for special education and programs for at-risk students must be expanded so that those who need supports receive them to ensure they succeed. Grants should be adjusted to provide education assistants for students in secondary school, just as they are funded throughout the elementary grades. The allocations in the Learning Opportunities Grant and Special Education Grant should be supplemented by funding to support learners based on their needs.

Newcomers to Canada must have access to increased support for English or French language learning in order to achieve the best possible outcomes. These supports should be provided in schools and through adult education centres and should address the increased need that school boards across the province are experiencing. The government must properly fund and school boards must be held accountable for ensuring that language funding for newcomers provides comprehensive classroom supports.

Finally, all students should have access to in-person learning and not be subjected to hybrid classrooms. In-person learning helps to diminish inequities in education for equity seeking and First Nations, Métis, and Inuit groups. There should be no requirement for mandatory e-learning. Where remote instruction is necessary, it should occur in a single modality through dedicated virtual learning programs, with smaller class sizes and appropriate resources, which allow for teachers and education workers to provide high-quality learning opportunities for all students. Funding and support must be provided for culturally responsive curricula, learning materials, assessment and evaluation, testing, and learning environments. As with in-person learning, direct and specific supports must be provided, where needed, to bridge gaps caused by inequity and to increase student success and well-being.

The best way to improve student success is to invest directly in classrooms and services for students. An investment in school-based staff will assist students in overcoming challenges that prevent them from reaching their full potential. Numerous studies have shown that the best method of improving education outcomes is by directly supporting students in the

classroom; any support must be directed to schools and direct services provided by school staff.

By focusing on higher-need areas, better outcomes can be achieved with targeted reductions in class sizes for at-risk students and students identified with special education needs. These classes should be funded beyond the current class size average, based on a model of ADE, for at-risk students and students in special education. Accountability is necessary to maximize the impact on students.

“ Numerous studies have shown that the best method of improving education outcomes is by directly supporting students in the classroom; any support must be directed to schools and direct services provided by school staff.”

Recommendations:

13. Provide funding and supports to address systemic inequities and to ensure every student is successful, including:

- reduced class sizes,
- increased classroom supports, such as education assistants in secondary classes, and
- increased school-based supports, such as professional student support personnel, and
- provide supports for students based on actual need, not on demographic or other statistical data that predicts need.

14. Provide additional funding to ensure that all students, such as students at risk and students with special education needs, receive needed supports.

15. Provide increased funding for English and French language learners and supports for newcomers to Canada.

16. Abolish hybrid learning and fully fund school boards to provide dedicated remote learning through virtual schools only where it is warranted.

17. Remove the requirement for mandatory e-learning in secondary schools and fund e-learning equitably with in-person learning.

18. Provide enhanced funding for de-streaming including:

- reduced class sizes,
- dedicated education workers in classrooms,
- training for all educator workers and teachers,
- time for educators to adjust and plan for a new curriculum, and
- rich resources developed specifically for de-streaming and addressing inequality.

19. Funding and support must be provided for culturally responsive curricula, learning materials, assessment and evaluation, testing, learning environments, and professional development.

Providing Safe, Healthy Learning and Working Conditions

All students, teachers, and education workers, from junior kindergarten to post-secondary, need safe, healthy, well-maintained environments in which to learn and work. Investments in well-maintained physical spaces and resources will protect and improve the physical and mental health of staff and students in Ontario's publicly funded education system and means more and better jobs for Ontario workers. Additionally, students and staff want a learning environment that is free from violence. We need a culturally responsive, proactive violence prevention plan that includes training and funding.

Students and staff continue to experience an escalation of violence in schools. The government must establish an education sector Health and Safety Regulation that will end violence against education workers.

Enhanced mandatory training must be implemented to prevent, appropriately respond to, and report incidents of violence. An increase in the number of trained adults in our schools is needed to maintain the physical and mental health of staff and students.

Year after year a growing number of OSSTF/FEESO members and other workers report incidents, involving biting, punching, kicking, spitting, and other forms of assault by students. These members, primarily educational assistants, but also teachers and other staff, work with high-needs students in special education classrooms. The issue of violence in schools has reached a crisis level, with severe physical and psychological impacts on education workers. This crisis also comes with increased costs in lost time, sick leave benefits, WSIB, and administrative time and resources.

In November 2021, the University of Ottawa released a report called *"In Harm's Way: The Epidemic of Violence Against Education Sector Workers in Ontario."* The report identified that the rates of violence against education workers are among the highest of any occupation. The increasing rates of violence are attributed to increases in aggression coupled with decreasing staffing levels. Violence against education workers is becoming normalized and minimized. The harmful impacts are profound and lasting, including diminished physical and mental health and job performance. Workplace violence impacts everyone in the school community, including students' anxiety levels and

Problem:
Rates of violence against education workers are amongst the highest of any occupation

OSSTF/FEESO Solutions:

1. Establish an education sector Health and Safety Regulation for the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.
2. Increased health and safety training for all school board employees.
3. Increased funding for more education workers to support high-needs students and reduce worker injuries.

the development of social phobias as a result of their witnessing frequent and increasingly normalized violence against predominantly women education workers.

OSSTF/FEESO's program *End the Silence—Stop the Violence* has highlighted this issue and brought it to the attention of the government. In response, the Ministry of Labour released a document in March 2018 titled, "*Workplace Violence in School Boards: A Guide to the Law.*" School boards must be compelled to utilize the best practices in this guide. Providing proactive health and safety training, during PD days or other paid time, to all school board employees, is an important step toward reducing the workplace violence incidents. Increased funding must be provided to school boards to create programs that protect those who work with high-needs students. More education assistants, specialists, and professional student support workers must be hired to support high-needs students and reduce injuries to educational workers.

Recommendations:

20. Establish a specific education sector Regulation within the *Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act*.
21. In consultation with stakeholders and unions, establish a standard enhanced online reporting tool and direct school boards to follow the guidelines from "*Workplace Violence in School Boards: A Guide to the Law.*"
22. Increase the number of qualified and trained adults in our schools. Professional student services personnel, secretaries, custodians, educational assistants, early childhood educators, and teachers all provide a high level of care for students.
23. Provide enhanced mandatory training to prevent, appropriately respond to, and report incidents of violence in schools.

Ontario's School Repair Backlog

Students and education workers need safer, healthier, and more accessible schools. The government must fix the more than \$16.8 billion repair backlog and establish the stable funding necessary to increase board-employed staff to

maintain schools and prevent further disrepair. This backlog continues to grow due to the chronic underfunding of school maintenance annually, which is projected to be at about only 10% of what is necessary to ensure Ontario's schools are maintained in a good state of repair and fails to ensure that schools will meet the obligations of the *Ontarians with Disabilities Act*.

The FAO noted in 2022 that the government plans to invest \$21.2 billion in education sector infrastructure over 10 years, from 2022–23 through 2031–32. After adjusting for inflation, this 10-year investment plan represents a \$3.0 billion (14%) decrease in infrastructure spending in 2021 dollars as compared to the previous 10-year period.

The disrepair of schools is dangerous for staff and students and negatively impacts the learning environment and student success, including their mental health and well-being. The effective funding cut pledged by the government will not come close to keeping pace with the need for repairs. The government must address the repair backlog with additional funding by increasing the out-of-date benchmarks for pupil accommodation. The School Operations Grant must be funded to a level that will maintain the good repair of buildings and the ongoing refusal of this government to do so means that learning conditions in Ontario's schools continue to deteriorate.

It's time to fix our schools!

A \$16.8+ billion repair backlog is unacceptable and negatively impacts student learning, school safety, and makes schools less accessible.

Recommendations:

24. Provide funding to address the \$16.8 billion repair backlog and fix Ontario's public schools.
25. Conduct a comprehensive review to establish stable funding for school infrastructure and increase board-employed staff to address and prevent further disrepair in Ontario's schools and keep buildings in a state of good repair.
26. Provide funding to meet the 2025 *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) deadline.

Post-Secondary Education Funding

In post-secondary education, the government has consistently and significantly reduced public funding to universities. In 2022, provincial funding constituted a mere 24% of total university revenues. Notably, between 2018 and 2022, university operating revenues, derived from both the provincial government and domestic student fees, saw a substantial decline, amounting to approximately \$3,200 (in 2020 dollars) per full-time student. This staggering reduction underscores a ill-conceived trend of underfunding that demands immediate attention and highlights the need for increased transparency in post-secondary funding models.

Two recent publications, the "*Ensuring Financial Sustainability for Ontario's Postsecondary Sector*" from a blue-ribbon panel and the "*Back from the brink. Restoring public funding to Ontario's universities,*" prepared by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report that Ontario

Problem:
Ontario ranks at the bottom among provinces for per-pupil university funding

OSSTF/FEESO Proposed Solution:

Increase per-student funding by at least 20% in 2024 and commit to ongoing annual increases to match inflation.

ranks at the bottom among provinces in government support for universities. Despite the global recognition of Ontario's universities and their commitment to preparing graduates for the evolving social and economic landscape, the lack of sustainable and predictable funding jeopardizes the quality of education delivered.

Research and experience indicate that performance-based funding does little to enhance accountability or student outcomes. Therefore, it is recommended that the government abandon the implementation of performance-based funding and instead adopt enrolment and special purpose envelopes, which have proven to better serve the post-secondary sector and its students.

Moreover, additional investments are needed to improve access to post-secondary education, support academic perseverance, and boost graduation rates. Lowering tuition fees and reversing changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) that were made in 2019 will not only alleviate immediate student debt post-graduation but will also prevent a lifelong reduction in net wealth, making university studies more affordable, sensible and accessible to all Ontarians. This can be achieved by ensuring that all low-income and middle-income Ontarians have access to grants sufficient to cover the cost of tuition, facilitating their ability to adapt to evolving economic conditions.

Safe and maintained campus infrastructure is integral to the creation of a vibrant learning and working environment at Ontario post-secondary institutions. As of 2019, deferred maintenance at these institutions was estimated to cost \$4.7 billion.

Without increased funding for facility and equipment renewal, the declining state of Ontario's post-secondary institutions will negatively impact research capabilities and student learning and could decrease enrolment.

Furthermore, given the impact of the pandemic, now is the time to enhance mental health supports for post-secondary

FACT:

At least 53% of post-secondary workers experience precarious work conditions.

students and increasing the number of support staff to guide and assist them throughout their academic journey will contribute to the overall thriving of both students and campuses and the cities and communities that host them. Immediate investments are crucial for the future of the sector, considering that in 2016, 53% of workers in Ontario's post-secondary sector experienced precarious work conditions. Despite the growth in university enrolment, the number of qualified permanent support staff positions has decreased, worsening student experience and emphasizing the need for proactive measures.

The following specific recommendations aim to address the current challenges faced by Ontario's post-secondary sector and ensure that the province remains at the forefront of delivering high-quality education:

Recommendations:

27. Increase per-student university funding immediately by a minimum of 20%, acknowledging partial inflation since 2017, and commit to ongoing annual increases, at a minimum matching the rate of inflation.
28. Doubling of the 2022–2023 provincial funding for facilities renewal to \$350 million and equipment renewal to \$60 million in the 2024 Budget to immediately address the safety and compliance with new requirement issues raised by the blue-ribbon panel.
29. Ensure that funds allocated for post-secondary education are fully utilized and directly benefit students, by increasing the transparency and accountability of institutional spending.
30. Abandon the performance-based funding model for post-secondary institutions and instead allocate increased, stable, and predictable funding through the enrolment and special purpose envelopes, which is proven to better serve both the post-secondary institutions and its students.

31. Allocate adequate funding to enable universities to establish permanent support staff positions and ensure that student support grows proportionally.
32. Lower tuition fees to alleviate the financial strain on students and families. This can be achieved by adequately funding post-secondary institutions, reducing their reliance on individual student income. Notably, the current average tuition for undergraduate domestic students in Ontario's universities is among the highest in Canada.
33. Reverse changes to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP), expanding eligibility and minimizing barriers.

Centring Schools as Part of our Communities

Our communities deserve more from this government, including meaningful investments in public services to fuel community-centered economic growth. Services such as affordable childcare, universal basic income, and improving access to supports will help build stronger, healthier communities. The people of Ontario deserve to have every opportunity to fully participate in a prosperous and healthy future.

In 2024, prioritize investments in people and social services so Ontario can have better schools and stronger communities.

- Universal Basic Income
- Accelerate and expand affordable \$10 per day, childcare
- More paid sick days

A prosperous future for Ontarians is dependent on investments in communities and public services. The foundation of economic growth begins with families and communities. When they have direct access to strong public services and supports, families and communities succeed. Strong public services fuel economic growth.

Greater investments in community training and education for newcomers to Ontario and

skill retraining opportunities for people transitioning back into the workforce are needed.

Guaranteeing paid sick days for workers will keep workers and communities healthy, reducing the spread of illness and providing financial security for families.

Recommendations:

33. Institute a universal basic income.

34. Accelerate the implementation of \$10 per day childcare so that all families have equitable access in all parts of the province immediately.

35. Increase investments in community training and education for newcomers to Canada, as well as improved skill retraining opportunities for people entering or transitioning back into the workforce.

36. Provide paid sick days to allow workers the ability to stay home when sick. This will significantly reduce the spread of illnesses, keep workplaces safe, and provide financial security to families.

Consolidated Recommendations

1. Improve compensation and working conditions and begin an active recruiting campaign to attract qualified teachers and education workers to fill the many vacancies in classrooms and schools across the province.
2. Instead of providing direct tax-funded transfers to parents, invest those funds in Ontario's world-class public education system.
3. Increase GSN funding immediately to bring funding levels up to the levels that existed before 2018–19 and build in automatic annual adjustments for inflation.
4. Ensure that education funds are allocated and available to be fully utilized by school

boards to provide supports to students in schools and classrooms.

5. Implement and fund a comprehensive recovery program that helps students increase achievement and success and provides the supports that students need.
6. Provide funding for staffing models that support student and worker opportunities for success, including:
 - funding to reduce class size and provide student supports in classrooms and schools where they are needed,
 - using a standard formula for the generation of educational worker staff/student ratios for education workers from kindergarten through post-secondary education, and
 - providing equitable funding to all programs, including adult and continuing education, to support all learners.
7. Review and overhaul public education funding by conducting, through the lens of equity and inclusion, a comprehensive review of the Grants for Student Needs by an expert panel that includes members from all stakeholder groups.
8. Provide funding to increase mental health supports for students, including:
 - trauma and learning support post-COVID-19, from early learning through post-secondary, and
 - mental health supports in every school/worksite and on every campus.
9. Fully fund and support mental health services in schools and on campuses provided by permanently employed professionals and paraprofessionals so that students are healthy and able to succeed.

10. Ensure that mental health services are available by referral from schools and campuses, can be obtained in a timely manner, and are fully funded by the appropriate ministry so that there can be seamless and equitable access in every community in Ontario.
11. Provide funding and supports to address systemic inequities and to ensure every student, including those in regular day school, adult and continuing education and non-credit programs, is successful, including:
- reduced class sizes,
 - increased classroom supports, such as education assistants in secondary classes, and
 - increased school-based supports, such as professional student support personnel, and
 - provide supports for students based on actual need, not on demographic or other statistical data that predicts need.
12. Funding and support must be provided for culturally responsive curricula, learning materials, assessment and evaluation, testing, learning environments, and professional development.
13. Provide additional funding to ensure that all students, such as students at risk and students with special education needs, receive needed supports.
14. Provide increased funding for English and French language learners and supports for newcomers to Canada.
15. Abolish hybrid learning and fully fund school boards to provide dedicated remote

learning through virtual schools only where it is warranted.

16. Remove the requirement for mandatory e-learning in secondary schools and fund e-learning equitably with in-person learning.

17. Provide enhanced funding for de-streaming including:

- reduced class sizes,
- dedicated education workers in classrooms,
- training for all educator workers and teachers,
- time for educators to adjust and plan for a new curriculum, and
- rich resources developed specifically for de-streaming and addressing inequality.

18. Establish a specific education sector Regulation within the *Ontario Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

19. In consultation with stakeholders and unions, establish a standard enhanced online reporting tool and direct school boards to follow the guidelines from “*Workplace Violence in School Boards: A Guide to the Law*.”

20. Increase the number of qualified and trained adults in our schools. Professional student services personnel, secretaries, custodians, educational assistants, early childhood educators, and teachers all provide a high level of care for students.

21. Provide enhanced mandatory training to prevent, appropriately respond to, and report incidents of violence in schools.

22. Fix the \$16.8 billion repair backlog for Ontario’s public schools.

23. Conduct a comprehensive review to establish stable funding for school infrastructure and increase board-employed staff to address and prevent further disrepair in Ontario's schools and keep buildings in a state of good repair.
24. Provide funding to meet the 2025 *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* (AODA) deadline.
25. Immediately end the appeal of the unconstitutionality of *Bill 124* and engage with affected unions on a remedy.
26. Allow free collective bargaining of public sector wage increases to proceed without legislative interference so that increases can be negotiated to retain and attract a new generation of workers and professionals to the public sector.
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28. Doubling of the 2022–2023 provincial funding for facilities renewal to \$350 million and equipment renewal to \$60 million in the 2024 Budget to immediately address the safety and compliance with new requirement issues raised by the blue-ribbon panel.
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