



Submission to the 2025-2026 Education Engagement Consultations

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 Ontario Ministry of Education on 2025-2026 Education Funding.

In introducing the revised funding structure of Core Education Funding and Responsive Education Programs, the government has made education funding more opaque than ever. Despite this restructuring and regrouping of allocations into different funds, the methodology remains largely the same. However, details of funding are obfuscated by the complex and seemingly arbitrary splitting of funding generators between classroom staffing and learning resource funds.

The government continues to short-change Ontario's students by significantly underfunding public education. Since 2021-22, enrolment in Ontario schools has increased by 3.4%, while inflation has increased by 12.7%. Over the same period, education funding increased by only 12.0%, less than inflation, and wholly failing to account for the growth in the student population. This means there is a real funding gap of 4.2% or \$1.3 billion in education funding for 2024-25.

This shortfall is even more pronounced when looking at education funding since 2018-19. As Ricardo Tranjan of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA) notes, when adjusting for inflation and excluding planning provision from education funding which is not accessible to school boards for spending, per-student funding has decreased by \$1,500 since 2018¹ – a reduction of 11.4%. This sustained underfunding has removed \$3.1 billion from Ontario's education budget over this period.

The Financial Accountability Office of Ontario (FAO) projected in November 2022 annual shortfalls in education funding totalling \$6.0 billion through 2027-28. The Ontario Public School Board's Association (OPSBA), representing English public district school boards and public school authorities across Ontario, also notes this chronic funding gap and the impact of inflation outpacing funding. They also identify the lack of funding to support a much-needed learning recovery following the recovery from the pandemic².

Principals are reporting daily staff shortages³. Students and parents are experiencing the results of this underfunding in classrooms without qualified teachers and without enough supports, such

¹ <https://monitormag.ca/articles/ontarios-core-education-funding-has-dropped-by-1-500-per-student-since-2018/>

² <https://www.opsba.org/ontarios-education-funding-gap-continues-to-grow/>

³ <https://www.principals.ca/en/who-we-are/resources/Documents/LettersAndSubmissions/Statement-Addressing-Staff-Shortages-in-Ontario-Schools.pdf>

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as educational assistants, administrative assistants and workers supporting student mental health and well-being. Principals also identify a need for an increase in funding for mental health supports in every school.

The financial pressures on school boards because of this ongoing underfunding are worsened due to other government restrictions. For example, an article by Global News⁴ reveals that the government's moratorium on closing schools has resulted in school boards spending funds on old buildings that would otherwise be closed. These funds could be better used to provide programming and supports to students. Government records show that the number of boards posting annual budget surpluses has dropped from 61 to 43 between 2020-21 and 2022-23, while the number of boards posting a deficit grew from 11 to 29 over the same period. The budget for all school boards combined at that time also fell into the red. In the 2020-21 year, Ontario-wide school board surplus was \$211.2 million. By 2022-23, total board budget surpluses had fallen into the negative with \$131.2 million in deficits reported. This is a drastic reversal in a short period and will have ongoing negative impacts on student success and achievement.

Publicly funded education in Ontario provides students with rich learning opportunities, skills, and a sense of community. These building blocks for student success enhance the social and economic fabric of our diverse, dynamic, and prosperous province. OSSTF/FEESO believes that a strong public education system continues to be essential to Ontario's future and is in fact the cornerstone on which Ontario's future economic growth depends. In its 2019 report, "The Economic Case for Investing in Education," the Conference Board of Canada (CBoC) 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 creates a range of private, social, and fiscal benefits, such as higher tax revenues and costs savings in health care, social assistance, and criminal justice.⁵

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 strong foundation of confidence that continues throughout their lives. Ontario thrives when its residents are well-educated, intelligent, skilled, strong, and resilient, and a public education system that supports all students and their needs is the single most important measure to ensure Ontario's youth acquire those qualities. The priority of this government must be to address these funding shortfalls to achieve this goal.

OSSTF/FEESO is committed to equity and believes that significant increases in 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. Improving learning conditions for all is about recognizing and meeting the unique needs of learners. We see learning conditions as equity conditions, creating an improved, inclusive and accessible Ontario.

OSSTF/FEESO calls on the government of Ontario to invest in our greatest asset: the people who access Ontario's world-class public education system. The economic payoff is indisputable. Now is the time to act to strengthen public education.

⁴ <https://globalnews.ca/news/10791524/ontario-school-board-deficit-closure-ban-government-docs/>

⁵ <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/product/the-economic-case-for-investing-in-education/>

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OSSTF/FEESO's submission is contained in two parts. *Part A* responds directly to the Funding Engagement Guide and the questions posed by the Ministry of Education; and *Part B*, which provides additional submissions on education funding.

Part A – Funding Engagement Guide

CORE EDUCATION FUNDING MODEL REFORM

Considerations:

- i. Now that the Core Ed funding model has been implemented, please provide your feedback on the reform. For example, did it achieve (or in time do you expect that it will achieve) the two goals set out above of simplification and strengthening accountability?*
- ii. In the refreshed enveloping framework, the ministry introduced limits on funding that can be applied towards student transportation and school facilities expenditures. What opportunities or challenges is this presenting to school boards?*
- iii. Are there other ways in which school board accountability can be further enhanced, either through the Core Ed Funding model itself or other mechanisms?*
- iv. In the 2024-25 Education Finance Information System (EFIS) Estimates reporting cycle, Data forms B, C, and D were suppressed. These schedules provide detailed information on school board expenditures versus funding allocations. Should the ministry re-introduce these forms in the future, what are key considerations to ensure consistency and comparability between school boards that would provide meaningful information to the ministry?*

Core Education funding is just a new presentation of the same education funding model, which was developed over 25 years ago, specifically with a goal to limit education funding and spending of school boards. It created disparities that have only been exacerbated over the years. Since then, changes by various governments have greatly complicated the understanding of education funding. Core Education funding, despite reducing the number of categories and allocations of funds, does nothing to improve either the efficacy or transparency of funding.

Over two decades ago, the Education Equality Task Force led by Dr. Rozanski, 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.⁶ In the years since the funding formula was introduced government changes have only compounded those issues. School boards have been left to make tough choices on the allocation of funding to areas of crisis because they are not receiving enough funding to support the programs that students need.

Special Education funding, for example, has been capped overall and inequitably distributed amongst school boards based on complicated statistical projections which do nothing to

⁶ https://openlibrary.org/books/OL19085192M/Investing_in_public_education

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address individual student needs. 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.

On the issue of student transportation, the new funding structure has already proven to be inadequate, as for over a month at the start of this school year, over 10,000 students in the overwhelmingly rural Renfrew County were left without bus service. A revised transportation funding structure that fails transportation's fundamental purpose of getting students to school must be revisited.

The use of newer statistical and census information does nothing to address the issues raised 22 years ago by the Education Equality Task Force. The report⁷ recognized many disparities in education funding, including 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 the funding formula was introduced government changes have only compounded those issues, leaving school boards to make tough choices on the allocation of funding to areas of crisis because they are not receiving enough funding to support the programs that students need.

OSSTF/FEESO recommends that an expert panel that includes members from all stakeholder groups should be convened to conduct a review of education funding and additionally consider funding with the lens of equity and inclusion. This panel should meet at set intervals to conduct ongoing reviews, for example, every three to five years. The funding formula has not been reviewed since 2002, leaving the public education system critically underfunded and schools in desperate need of repair.

To strengthen transparency parents, communities, and stakeholders should be involved in budget decisions through advisory committees, and mandated annual public consultations. Advisory committees facilitate comprehensive discussions, providing diverse perspectives to shape well-informed decisions. Public consultations allow a broader range of voices to be heard, fostering community engagement, and ensuring education funding aligns with real needs. These integrated elements promote accountability, informed decision-making, and an efficient allocation of resources, all vital for the continuous improvement of Ontario's education system.

Funding has consistently fallen short of the rising costs of educations, leaving schools significantly underfunded. Problems caused by underfunding are exacerbated by shortcomings in oversight and transparency. The former Learning Opportunities Grant, now reflected in the Learning Resources Fund, has long been underfunded and school boards were largely unaccountable for the spending of these funds for student supports. The complex methods used to fund many grants, obscure the fact of underfunding and fail to provide resources needed by students, including funding for learning supports that are needed as students continue to recover from the global pandemic.

Funding benchmarks for education workers are disconnected from economic realities and have lagged actual board costs, leading to increasing underfunding over time. Benchmarks

⁷ https://openlibrary.org/books/OL19085192M/Investing_in_public_education

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for the salaries of education workers are not based on any real measure of expenditures by school boards and provide insufficient support for appropriate remuneration. This prevents school boards from hiring the number of staff necessary to fulfill its obligations to provide needed supports for students. In particular, job classes in Professional Student Services Personnel (PSSP) bargaining units are not funded in any way that respects their education, professional designation, experience, and value within the education system. In the most recent round of negotiations these workers, including Speech and Language Pathologists, Psychologists and Behavioural Consultants, who provide students a range of essential services, including in respect of mental health, a supposed priority in schools, received a significant pay decrease when taking into account inflation. This should be remedied immediately to protect these workers and to avoid further worsening the twin crises of education worker recruitment and retention and student mental health.

Supports for de-streaming of courses are not provided in the new funding model. This has resulted in ballooning class sizes for de-streamed courses, a situation that fails all students by depriving them of the individualized attention that is crucial to student success. The proper implementation of de-streaming is paramount for enhancing student success and addressing the diverse range of needs within our educational system. This process must incorporate curriculum modifications that truly reflect inclusion, diversity, and cultural relevance in order to provide engaging, effective and equitable educational experiences for all students. Crucially, any de-streaming initiatives should be accompanied by a commitment to permanent and stable funding to rectify systemic inequities experienced by students.

This funding should address shortfalls in access to technology, curriculum opportunities, programming, and educator support. These critical supports encompass a range of measures, including the reduction of class sizes, comprehensive training for educators, dedicated time for them to adapt and plan for the new curriculum, and the development of rich resources specifically designed to support de-streaming efforts and tackle systemic inequities.

Inequities exist in every classroom in Ontario. The extent of these inequities is not recognized or appropriately addressed by the funding model, which is based on a snapshot of demographic data across a diverse province. To properly address the disparities, funding should be directly allocated to improve learning conditions where they are needed. With smaller class sizes in all schools, all students achieve greater success. Students should have opportunities for learning and growth within their diverse communities. Systemic inequalities must be addressed through actionable and permanent funding changes that promote accessibility, inclusion, and honours equity-seeking and sovereignty-seeking groups.

Numerous studies have shown that the best way to improve student success is investment directly into classrooms and services for students. As such, funding support must be directed to the classroom or student services instead of administration. This investment in school-based staff will assist students in overcoming challenges that prevent them from reaching their full potential.

Minimally, funding should be annually increased across all allocations, to cover inflationary increases in goods and services. Yet the government has consistently underfunded school

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boards for the costs of goods and services school boards must procure. For example, within the Pupil Foundation Grant in 2022-23, every allocation was funded with an increase that was far below the rate of inflation for that year. Since 2018, funding of supplies and things like textbooks has consistently lagged inflation, resulting in a significant decrease in real funding. These underfunding puts pressure on school boards that result in funds being diverted from other programs, classrooms, and students to support these increased costs.

By addressing these systemic issues and providing the necessary resources and support, we can create a more equitable and enriching educational system that maximizes the potential for student success and fosters diversity and inclusion as core values.

SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

Considerations:

- i. School boards are given flexibility to use the Special Education Fund and other funding to support their special education policies and priorities to meet local priorities. How are school boards prioritizing ministry supports to meet the special education needs of their students? What other Core Ed funding are boards using to complement their Special Education Fund?*
- ii. Is there a way to allocate the Special Education Fund (or portions of this fund) more effectively and/or efficiently, without creating the need for new provincial funding or increasing administrative burden?*
- iii. How can the ministry further support school boards in the accurate reporting of students with special education needs and associated expenditures to ensure consistency among school boards?*

Funding for special education and programs for at-risk students must be expanded so that these students receive the support they need to ensure they succeed. OSSTF/FEESO advocates for needs-based funding so that all students who require services and supports have every opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed personally. Funding should be based on the student's needs and not on convoluted statistical projections or historic patterns. Funding should be supplemented to support learners based on their needs, rather than on a statistical model or census data. Furthermore, improvements to comprehensive needs assessments, professional development and flexible Special Incidence Portion (SIP) and Special Equipment Amount (SEA) funding should be considered. Comprehensive needs assessments will play a crucial role in the reform process. These assessments will ensure that the specific requirements of each student with disabilities are thoroughly understood, regardless of the chosen delivery model.

Furthermore, future funding changes should also involve creating flexible funding pools within SIP and SEA. These funding pools will enable school boards to allocate resources based on individual student needs and the chosen delivery model. These needs can quickly evolve, and flexible funding would allow the school boards to adjust solutions without further delays causing harm to students' progress. The reforms should expand these funding pools and enhance the flexibility they offer. This will allow school districts to adapt to changing

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student needs, be it in self-contained classrooms, integrated settings, or other models, ensuring that resources are appropriately distributed to support the complexity of student requirements.

The inadequate funding of special education programs has contributed to an unprecedented rise in violent behaviours in schools. A growing number of OSSTF/FEESO members (educational assistants, teachers and many more job classes) have reported incidents involving biting, punching, kicking, spitting, and other forms of assaults by students year after year. These members work with high-needs students in special education classrooms. This issue has caused severe physical and psychological impacts on education workers and students. This also comes with increased costs in lost time, sick leave benefits, WSIB, and administrative time and resources. Core Education funding should provide increased funding and supports that address the issue of violent behaviours in schools.

In 2021, University of Ottawa researchers published a report titled *In Harm's Way*. The report found that an alarming 87% of personnel operating within classroom-based settings have attested to experiencing considerable adversity in the form of harassment and violence. This adverse phenomenon has exerted a pronounced and deleterious impact on their professional and personal lives, as it has placed them at the precipice of burnout and contemplating disengagement from their respective vocations. This situation is particularly alarming in the context of an education system that is already grappling with formidable challenges in workforce recruitment and retention. The culmination of these factors poses a severe risk to the availability of essential support structures for students, thus imperiling the very foundations of educational efficacy.

OSSTF/FEESO has long highlighted the issue of school violence: our earlier campaign *End the Silence → Stop the Violence* raised considerable public awareness of the issue. In response, the Ministry of Labour released a document in March of 2018 titled, *Workplace Violence in School Boards: A Guide to the Law*. School boards should be required to utilize the best practices in this guide to ensure compliance with the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) and to provide a safe working environment for staff and a safe learning environment for students. Providing new, comprehensive and education sector-specific health and safety training during Professional Development/In-service training days, or other paid time, to all school board employees, is essential if the ministry and school boards hope to reduce workplace violence. Increased funding must be provided to school boards to create programs that protect those who work with high-needs students. Most fundamentally, more education assistants, specialists, and professional student support workers must be hired to support high-needs students and reduce the growing burdens experienced by educational workers.

The scale of the problem of school violence has undoubtedly worsened post-pandemic and must be understood and confronted – and the government's refusal to provide a fulsome report summarizing the data and findings from its 2023 Workplace Violence Compliance Initiative is troubling in this regard. Presently, OSSTF/FEESO has joined many other unions, community groups and individuals to call on the government to immediately address this urgent and growing problem. We join in the Official Opposition's calls for the government to immediately create an Emergency Safe Schools plan that includes, in addition to some of the measures described above, changes to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*

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including the creation of a sector-specific regulation for the education sector that recognizes the unique nature of these workplaces.

Core Education funding should also be adjusted to provide education assistants for students in secondary schools by adding funding generators for educational assistants in the Classroom Staffing Fund, just as they are funded throughout the elementary grades. Education assistants in secondary schools would help address diverse student needs, support inclusive education, and provide specialized assistance for learners with disabilities or special needs. Education assistants contribute to classroom management, offer individualized support, and promote emotional well-being. Throughout every stage of a student's learning journey, their presence is essential, whether for ensuring a smooth transition to secondary school, compliance with legal obligations, or enhancing students' overall learning experience. Students' need for supports does not disappear after Grade 8. Without this funding to support students with differentiated needs, school boards are forced to take funds from other allocations to pay for educational assistants assigned to students in secondary schools.

EFFICIENCIES AND REDUCING ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

Considerations:

- i. How can the ministry best collect data from school boards in the following instances:

 - a. Information that is infrequently requested (e.g., during the pandemic, to support central bargaining)*
 - b. Programs particularly in the early stages of transition from REP to Core Ed**
- ii. Are there other areas where there is potential or opportunities to find new reporting efficiencies, within EFIS or other reporting requirements to the ministry?*

OSSTF/FEESO has repeatedly expressed concerns about transparency and accountability for school board spending, particularly for the Learning Resources Fund and Responsive Education Programs (REPs).

School boards should be more transparent with the funds they receive and should provide timely reporting on the details of the spending of those allocations. Creating a publicly accessible online dashboard for tracking and visualizing the generation, allocation, and distribution of education funds, including REPs, by individual school boards is a significant step towards enhancing transparency in Ontario's education funding. The platform should offer real-time, user-friendly access to complex financial data to make it more comprehensible for members of the public and stakeholders, fostering engagement while also enhancing accountability. School boards should use this data to report regularly in an accessible and plain language format on trends, disparities, and best practices.

OSSTF/FEESO must highlight that administrative requirements and reporting provide accountability for the use of funds, and ensures the funds are used in a way that maximizes services to students. Reductions in reporting and administration must result in improved services to students; any savings should be reinvested into direct supports for students.

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Relatedly, a windfall of savings and administrative burden can be achieved by eliminating the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). EQAO testing has not proven itself to provide any value for money. The current standardized testing regime creates high-stakes, high-stress, low utility evaluations. Alternative methods of testing would save millions of taxpayer dollars that could be better invested in staffing schools with caring adults to support students in their education and well-being. OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the EQAO and its testing programs be discontinued, and the savings are reinvested into student learning. At a minimum, more cost-efficient alternative methods of standardized testing, such as randomized tests, should be used instead.

COMMUNITY USE OF SCHOOLS

Considerations:

- I. What criteria do you use, to determine rates for use of school space?*
- II. What criteria do you use to prioritize access to school space, if any?*
- III. How do you make your rates and access policies known to the public?*
- IV. What criteria do you use to identify which schools are available to book?*

Schools are anchors in communities across Ontario. Community use of schools should be funded to cover the actual costs, including operation and maintenance, of the facilities.

In the Core Education Funding model, an amount for each school board is estimated based on its relative share of the total components of the School Operations Allocation of the previous year, which is then multiplied by the total available funding for the new year to yield what an individual school board will be allocated. This model therefore utilizes past allocation to formulate the basis for funding in each new year and does not consider on-the-ground factors such as: utilization of a space; available or prospective community programming; the varied requirements for events or activities; ongoing community relationships; parent and community involvement; neighbourhoods and zoning; facility offerings; and staffing requirements.

The basis for funding does not specifically consider community needs, in other words, which fails one of the fundamental concepts in the “Community Use of Schools” idea: to connect public education and school boards with the community. Schools play a key role in their local communities, including providing a place to integrate, volunteer, build skills and relationships, become physically active, and build strong and vibrant communities. They serve as community hubs, or as milieus for the integration of recreational, social, and learning activities.

As such, it seems like a devastating oversight not to attribute more weight on community consultation, social pressures, and data analysis, including looking at socio-economic factors and demographics through an equity lens, in funding Community Use of Schools.

The funding should therefore be increased to, at a minimum, match the demands of using these spaces; assessments should be required on how the community uses, or intends to

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use, these spaces; and more consideration should be given to the equitable distribution of funds that factors in these intersecting complexities. Given the nature and fundamental goals of Community Use of Schools as a concept, it is not adequate to simply rely on what was allocated in the previous year as the primary consideration for ongoing funding.

Further, to ensure the continued good condition of schools in communities, the government must immediately increase the funding to repair schools and fully address the larger than \$16.3 billion⁸ backlog. The disrepair of schools is not only dangerous for staff and students; it also impacts the learning environment and student success, including their mental health and well-being. The government has pledged to spend \$13 billion over ten years, but this rate of funding will not keep 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 Facilities Fund must be funded to a level that will maintain the good repair of buildings so that Ontario's backlog stops growing. As an additional consideration: the government has managed to prioritize faster building within the provincial budget through, amongst other things, providing a dedicated fund called the "Building Faster" fund. This fund is meant to help stakeholders access capital to meet their targets expeditiously, and it also actually prioritizes and incentivizes the addressing of infrastructure needs through increasing funding for stakeholders that exceed their targets on an annual basis. Such consideration could similarly be extended to school boards to properly fund, prioritize, and incentivize addressing the repair backlog in schools.

The Facilities Condition Index information, which discloses foundational information for both the generation of funding and the prioritization of renewal projects in schools, was published by the Ministry of Education for a number of years. It was removed from the public realm shortly after 2018-19. For reasons of accountability and transparency to members of the public using these spaces, the government should continue to publish this information.

Additional funding to meet the obligations and 2025 deadline of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) should also be provided.

Part B – Other Considerations

1. Taxes should be used to fund programs, such as health care, education, postsecondary education, and other social programs. They should not be used to fund transfer payments to Ontarians in a transparent attempt to curry favour in advance of an election. Since 2018, this government has removed \$1,500 in real funding from per student education funding. Investing that \$3 billion into public education would bring the level of funding for 2024-25 up to the same levels as 2018, when taking into account inflation. This would also be a responsible investment for a government that claims to promote student success and achievement as appropriately funded social programs and education equalize the possibility of success for all. The funding for these payments totals \$3 billion and could be used to address the school repair backlog, ensure that all

⁸ <https://fixourschools.ca/faqs/>

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classrooms have a qualified teacher every day, that students who need supports, such as educational assistants in classrooms and mental the opposite of those goals.

Supporting mental health and well-being are a critical component of education. The Ministry should ensure that mental health services are provided to students in all schools and where and when they are needed. These services should be provided by full-time employees of school boards, where possible. Funding should be increased to provide for mental health professionals in all schools. This funding should be provided for front-line positions in schools to work directly with students.

Mental health supports for students, including trauma and learning support, from early learning through post-secondary, should be increased and a breadth of supports available in every school. The government should fully fund and support mental health services in schools that are provided by board-employed professional student services personnel so that students are healthy and able to succeed. More intensive mental health services should be available by referral from schools, obtained in a timely manner, and be fully funded so there can be seamless and equitable access across Ontario. This approach will effectively address the diverse needs and socio-economic disparities within the student population.

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 best met when funding is accessible and widespread.

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. Schools are the initial point of contact for such services for the overwhelming majority of students and families 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. 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.

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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.

2. The benchmarks in the funding formula for education workers are not consistent with current salaries. They should be updated to better reflect the education, value, and expertise of these essential members of the school team who often respond to students with complex and evolving needs. Education worker salaries in many school boards are very low and should be adjusted, so school boards are not forced to redirect funds from other grants or programs. With the current shortage of qualified education workers, a salary enhancement would attract and retain these valuable and dedicated workers who are critical to the success and well-being of students.
3. Full Day Kindergarten (FDK) funding should be reinstated and should be fully allocated to Early Childhood Educators (ECEs). For several years, funding generated through the Kindergarten and Primary Pupil Foundation Allocations for ECEs has been constantly underspent by over \$200 million since 2014-15. Boards have used their discretion under the funding rules and legislation to reallocate these funds elsewhere. OSSTF/FEESO members working in the FDK program report high class sizes, classes in which no ECE is assigned, and multiple split classes – all a direct result of boards choosing not to allocate FDK funds to ECEs. OSSTF/FEESO is calling on the government to envelope the funds generated for FDK so that the program can operate as intended and not be used to subsidize other chronically underfunded portions of education funding.
4. Following the passage of *The School Boards Collective Bargaining Act*, the ministry allocated funding, through the Administration and Governance Grant, essentially to pay school boards' fees to their respective trustee associations. This taxpayer-provided funding is unaccounted for by school boards. OSSTF/FEESO insists that the trustee organizations be required, through law, to publicly report the allocation and expenses of these funds for the interest of public accountability and transparency.
5. Adult day school and adult non-credit continuing education funding should be adjusted to be equitable and consistent with regular day school funding. There exists an inequity between adult day school programs that serve students who are primarily 21 years old or older and regular day school programs. These programs are identical to regular day school programs for students under the age of 21 but are funded at a level that is far below those programs. All learners, regardless of age, deserve to have every opportunity to reach their full potential and succeed personally and academically, with access to rich learning experiences that provide a strong foundation of confidence that continues throughout their lives. Funding for these programs should be increased.

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6. Similarly, non-credit adult programs in English as a Second Language and Literacy and Basic Skills are funded at a level far below that of regular day school programs for all students. In school boards that offer Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC), Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS), Adult English as a Second Language (ESL), and other non-credit programs for adults, the funding is from different ministries with the LINC funding coming from the federal government. These streams of funding do not provide for appropriate administration and preparation time needed by Adult Education Instructors to ensure the basic program requirements are met, nor to ensure sustainable, inclusive and accessible programs for the unique needs of these students. Portfolio Based Learning Assessment methodologies have been mandated as the method of assessment and time required to adequately operationalize the program is non-existent, creating tremendous pressure on Adult Education Instructors and frustration for students.

Improving language skills in adults, including those new to Canada, has a significant positive impact on the economy as these adults seek employment within Ontario. As well, many of these programs operate on a continuum with schools where individuals enrolled in ESL will progress to LBS and then enrol to take credit courses with the school board. Increases in funding for these students will allow them to achieve their full potential and faster contribute to the growing economy of Ontario. The funding for these programs should be consolidated under the Ministry of Education and must also be increased.

7. The government should eliminate hybrid instruction and mandatory e-learning. The richest learning occurs in-person. Hybrid learning must be abolished, and remote learning must be used sparingly in emergency situations like the pandemic, where students would be unable to learn in-person for long periods of time and other options are not viable. While some students may benefit from e-learning, no students should be mandated to take e-learning courses. The mandatory e-learning graduation requirement should be removed.
8. The School Boards Collective Bargaining Act (SBCBA) was originally designed to curtail costs associated with collective bargaining in Ontario's education sector. Its primary cost-saving mechanism focused on restricting negotiations at central tables to items requiring provincial funding, primarily salaries and benefits. However, the current SBCBA permits school boards to introduce administrative and working conditions matters into central negotiations. Consequently, during the last round of central bargaining, school board participation hindered progress and added costly months to the bargaining process. A 2018 Ernst and Young review underscored the efficiency of negotiating working conditions and administrative issues between school boards and unions at local bargaining tables. In light of this, OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the government collaborate with all education affiliates to streamline central bargaining, to such matters as salaries, benefits, and other issues tied to provincial funding while leaving working conditions and administrative issues to local bargaining tables.