



BUILDING BETTER SCHOOLS

The ETFO education agenda



buildingbetterschools.ca

PLATFORM HIGHLIGHTS – Eight Building Blocks for Better Schools

- 1. Fair Funding for Public Schools** – Establish an independent review of the provincial education funding formula to identify changes required to meet actual student needs.
- 2. Small Classes for All Elementary Students** – Reduce class sizes in grades 4 to 8 and Kindergarten to enhance activity-based learning, positive social interaction among students and individual attention from teachers.
- 3. More Resources for Students with Special Needs** – Expand opportunities for all students to reach their learning and development potential by providing greater support for students with identified special needs and mental health issues and for students who are English language learners.
- 4. More Meaningful Student Assessment and Learning** – Cancel EQAO testing and focus instead on teachers’ classroom assessments of students.
- 5. Greater Access to Specialist Teachers** – Ensure access to teacher-librarians and specialist teachers in the arts, guidance, and physical and health education to provide an enriched and engaging program for all elementary students.
- 6. Greater Focus on Equal Opportunity and Inclusion** – Foster equity and inclusion in Ontario schools by providing more support for children living in poverty and children whose families are marginalized and by using schools to expand children’s services.
- 7. A Strong Union Voice** – Maintain the ability of unionized teachers and other education staff to speak out on behalf of safe and healthy schools and policies that contribute to student engagement, academic success and personal growth.
- 8. One Secular School System** – Move to fund one secular school system for each official language in the province.

INTRODUCTION

SAM HAMMOND, PRESIDENT



The June 2018 provincial election offers an important opportunity to discuss what needs to be done to ensure our public schools provide all of our students the education that enables them to be successful learners and reach their full potential.

The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) introduced its first edition of *Building Better Schools* prior to the 2011 election and an updated and expanded version in advance of the 2014 election. This edition of the ETFO platform revisits the original policy areas and adds “fair funding for public schools” and “one secular school system” as priorities to be addressed by the incoming government. The current education funding model is two-decades old and needs to be updated to reflect the actual needs of Ontario students. The increasing ethnic, cultural and religious diversity of Ontarians also makes it timely to revisit the merits of funding a Catholic school system, especially as we experience declining student enrolment and the spectre of school boards waging expensive and wasteful marketing campaigns to compete for students.

Since the last provincial election, ETFO – representing more than 80,000 teachers and other education workers – has increasingly raised concerns related to the incidence of school violence. Parents are also concerned. Much of the violence relates to the lack of classroom resources and supports, including supports for students with special needs and students with mental health issues. Through *Building Better Schools*, ETFO is bringing forward recommendations to strengthen and improve Kindergarten to Grade 8 education and address the violence issue. We are asking parents, other concerned voters and election candidates to engage in the discourse related to education reform and make education issues a priority focus in this election.

FAIR FUNDING FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

Ontario's education funding formula needs to be fully reviewed and reformed. It is based on a model introduced two decades ago that was designed to reduce overall expenditure for public schools.

While the current government has increased education funding since taking office in 2003 by introducing important initiatives such as primary class size caps and full-day Kindergarten, it has failed to address some of the original cuts imposed by the predecessor government. The problems of the 1998 funding model that haven't been adequately addressed include: funding for English and French as second language programming; funding for basic school level facilities and services such as libraries, guidance, music, art and physical education; funding to support local priorities; and funding for school operations and maintenance. The latter issue received considerable attention recently and was the subject of a research report that documents a backlog in maintenance and repairs of school facilities amounting to \$15.9 billion.

ETFO members' identification of increasing incidence of classroom violence has also focused on the need for smaller classes in Kindergarten and grades 4 to 8, as well as more student supports on the part of special education resource teachers, educational assistants and paraprofessionals such as behavioural therapists, psychologists, speech-language pathologists and child and youth workers. Ontario's education funding model needs to reflect the broad range of supports students need to be successful learners.

The last comprehensive review of the Ontario education funding formula was by the Education Equality Task Force headed by Dr. Mordechai Rozanski in 2002. In its 2007 election platform, the Ontario Liberal Party committed to reviewing the education funding formula by 2010. That review has yet to take place.

ETFO commissioned an analysis of education funding and released the findings in 2017. A number of other education organizations have come forward to join ETFO in calling for a full external review of the funding formula. In her 2017 *Annual Report*, Ontario's auditor general also concludes that the funding benchmarks in the funding formula are out of date and that there should be a full external review of education funding. The 2018 ETFO poll indicates that 76 per cent of Ontarians believe it's time for an external review of the education funding formula.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish an independent, external review of Ontario's education funding formula that will provide recommendations on what is required to update the formula so it reflects actual student needs.



THE BENEFITS OF SMALLER CLASSES

Frontline classroom educators identify small classes as the most important factor in their ability to work individually with students and meet their diverse needs.

Smaller classes improve student behaviour and peer relationships and increase student engagement and achievement in the early grades. Investing in smaller classes will contribute to alleviating the antisocial, aggressive behaviour that contributes to incidents of classroom violence.

Class size has been extensively studied. A 2014 US-based review of the research concludes: “The academic literature strongly supports the common-sense notion that class size is an important determinant of student outcomes.” A 2018 study of the California class size reduction program – the largest in US history dating back to the late 1990s – found smaller classes in public schools reduced private school attendance and improved the quality of education through the enrolment of former private school students and the additional funding that followed them.

Ontario’s investment in smaller classes in primary grades has had a positive impact on our classrooms. Ontario-based research demonstrates that smaller primary classes have enabled teachers to provide more individual attention to students and use a greater variety of instructional strategies. The Ontario research indicates that small classes have an even greater impact if educators use teaching strategies and classroom practices that take full advantage of the benefits of smaller classes. Educators need opportunities to share and collaborate on best practices in smaller classes.

The benefits of small classes we have seen in the primary grades need to be extended to grades 4 to 8. Currently, grades 1 to 3 grades are funded for an average class size of 20 and secondary grades for a class size average of 22. By comparison, funding for grades 4 to 8 supports a class size average of 24.5. These grades have the largest class sizes in the system, often more than 30 students in a class. A poll conducted by ETFO in early 2018 indicates that 67 per cent of Ontarians support placing a cap of 22 students on grades 4 to 8.

Ontario's full-day Kindergarten program is an exciting, bold initiative but there are issues that must be addressed, including class size. The Kindergarten program is funded to have an average class size of 26 and an average staff-child ratio of 1:13. There are still, however, a number of classes with over 30 students and an even greater number of Kindergarten/Grade 1 split grade classes, which aren't supported by a designated early childhood educator. ETFO members consistently raise concerns about the challenges of setting up activity-based programs for that many young children and managing classroom behaviour when many of the students are experiencing formalized learning environments for the first time. Overcrowded and often noisy classrooms or open "pods" limit teachers' and early childhood educators' ability to take full advantage of the play-based program and create stressful work and learning environments.



Ontario has a policy of integrating students with identified special needs into regular classrooms. The policy recognizes that our public schools have the responsibility to support the education and growth of all children. The inclusion model is based on the notion that students' learning environment should reflect the diversity of society at large and foster understanding and appreciation for individual differences. To effectively support this policy and enable classroom educators to meet the individual needs of their diverse students, class sizes should be adjusted to reflect the number of students with identified special needs in each class.

In 2017, through negotiations with the provincial government to extend our members' contract provisions for two years, ETFO achieved modest improvements to grades 4 to 8 class size, a cap of 30 students for Kindergarten in 2017-18 and of 29 students the following school year. Ontario must continue to reduce class size in these grades.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Cap grades 4 to 8 class size at 24 students.
- Cap Kindergarten at 26 students.
- Introduce a weighting factor that reduces class size in accordance with the number of students with identified special needs integrated into regular classrooms.



MORE RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

Integrating students with special needs into regular classrooms requires more resources to support the students as well as the classroom teacher in terms of training, human resources and material resources.

Teachers are reporting an increase in incidents of violence on the part of students with psychological and behavioural issues. To address these and other issues, classrooms require more access to educational assistants, behavioural counsellors, child and youth workers, psychologists, and speech and language pathologists. Educators, including occasional teachers, need more training to address student behavioural issues and the wide spectrum of special needs.

The Ministry of Education's core special education grants are tied to overall enrolment. Therefore, as total student enrolment declines across the province, school boards receive less money for special education. However, the number of students being identified through the special needs identification process is increasing, not decreasing. There are also many students not formally identified who are receiving supports and interventions not covered by special education funding. As a result, most school boards spend more on special education than they receive in grants, which means they take funds from other program areas to support special education.

Special education grants are based on a new statistical model that estimates special education support based on demographic data rather than students' individual needs. The demographic data are based on outdated census data. As recommended by the government's Declining Enrolment Working Group in 2009, special education grants should be revised to better reflect the needs of special education students.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Base the special education grants on the educational needs of students.
- Increase the funding allocation for educational assistants, behavioural counsellors, child and youth workers, psychologists, and speech and language pathologists.
- Provide educators training to assist them address student behavioural issues and adopt teaching strategies that support students with a wide spectrum of special needs.



MORE MEANINGFUL STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING

EQAO-Driven Education

ETFO has consistently raised concerns about how Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) tests, first administered in 1997, have negatively affected elementary classrooms by promoting an overly narrow focus on literacy and numeracy to the detriment of a more holistic program and by creating a test-driven school culture through the large number of diagnostic assessments that the Ministry of Education and school boards have imposed on classrooms as part of the drive to improve provincial test results.

The tests and preparation for them consume considerable classroom time and create stress for students and their teachers. They also fail to measure more complex skills required for problem solving and innovation, lead to “teaching to the test,” demotivate students and are misused to rank schools.

EQAO test results are being misused by real estate agents and organizations like the Fraser Institute to rank schools and neighbourhoods and by the government’s online School Information Finder to compare schools. This is socially divisive and a misuse of the results. ETFO believes EQAO’s \$36 million budget would be better spent if the funds were allocated to frontline education programs.

The narrow focus on literacy and numeracy and on student performance in EQAO assessments over two decades has led to system fatigue. Educators – from classroom teachers to superintendents – are stressed. And so are students. It is not only staff who are calling for fundamental changes. Ontario-based education experts advocate for a new vision for education, one that is not focused on standardized test results. Their vision is based on creating supportive and collaborative school cultures where educators can exercise their professional judgement regarding their classroom practice, curriculum and assessment strategies.

There are alternatives to Ontario's testing regime. Finland, a top-performing nation on international assessments, uses random sample tests to occasionally check if its curriculum and teaching approaches are appropriate. The international tests that Ontario students participate in, conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), are random sample tests.

In the end, the most effective assessment of student progress is the assessment that teachers do every day in the classroom. Teachers strive to balance their instruction with assessment that provides students with immediate feedback about their own progress and helps them to work more productively on their own and with other students. Teachers use ongoing assessment to reflect on their teaching, improve their teaching strategies and respond to individual student needs. If the government is truly interested in improving the levels of student success, it should put its focus on supporting teachers' professional judgement and ongoing classroom assessment skills rather than on the EQAO tests. This view is supported by a majority of Ontarians. According to ETFO's recent poll, over two-thirds (68 per cent) of Ontarians agree that EQAO testing doesn't accurately measure student success and that teachers' classroom assessment should take higher priority.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Cancel EQAO grades 3 and 6 tests.**
- **Respect teacher professional judgement and place more emphasis on the role of ongoing teacher assessment of student progress.**

Fostering Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving

There is a general consensus that to be responsible citizens and successful in their future careers, students need to develop the skills of critical thinking, problem solving, communications, creativity and the ability to work collaboratively.

In the context of a global economy and rapid technological change, our students need to be self-directed, lifelong learners who are innovative, flexible, resourceful and resilient.

Focusing on these skills does not mean abandoning the basics, like reading, writing and mathematics. It does mean addressing the barriers Ontario educators face in creating classrooms and strategies to foster these skills, including an overly broad and prescriptive curriculum. Teachers need to be able to provide students with opportunities to study what matters to them. Authentic, experiential, inquiry-based learning encourages students to pursue areas of interest, solve problems and make connections to the broader world to become responsible, global citizens.

On average, the Ontario curriculum establishes about 500 specific expectations for each elementary grade. These expectations limit teachers' ability to delve deeply into specific areas, take advantage of open-ended enquiry, plan for experiential learning and develop activities that are both student- and teacher-directed. It is important to move away from a highly prescribed set of expectations and to identify broad, core educational outcomes. Such an approach would retain a framework based on standards but give teachers greater flexibility to meet the range of abilities and learning styles of students. This is critical for elementary teachers who teach one, two or even more grades in one classroom.

The Kindergarten program is centred on a play-based philosophy that stresses the importance of children learning through “intentional” or “guided” play. This activity-based philosophy should not end when students enter Grade 1 classrooms. All elementary students should continue to be engaged through experiential learning supported by classroom manipulatives, hands-on activities and outdoor education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Revise the elementary Ontario curriculum by reducing the number of prescribed student outcomes and identifying, instead, a set of core learning goals.**
- **Provide all elementary classrooms with resources that support hands-on, experiential learning.**



GREATER ACCESS TO SPECIALIST TEACHERS

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

However, the government does not provide sufficient funding for teacher-librarians or specialist teachers.

Research confirms that the knowledge and expertise of teacher-librarians and specialist teachers make an important contribution to the quality of elementary education, both in terms of academic success and students' broader emotional, physical, cognitive, personal and social development. An extensive literature review concluded that, "Overall, the literature surrounding specialist teachers in a range of content areas appears to support the claim that specialist teachers can positively impact student achievement and contribute to student success at the elementary level."

The number of specialist teachers at the elementary level has dropped significantly since 1998 when the current funding model was introduced. A decade ago, ETFO negotiated additional funding for specialist teachers that contributed to a modest increase in their numbers. The Ontario education grants still leave elementary students significantly shortchanged in terms of their access to quality programs in the arts and health and physical education, and support from teacher-librarians. The shortfall is greater in smaller and more remote schools that have less access to specialist teachers and programs because the funding is based on per pupil grants rather than grants per school. The ETFO poll indicates that 89 per cent of Ontarians agree that all students should have access to art, physical education and library services.

In the context of the Ministry's focus on student well-being, including addressing mental health issues, the lack of guidance counsellors in elementary schools is a barrier to meeting the needs of students. According to a recent report by the public advocacy organization, People for Education, 83 per cent of all elementary schools report having no full- or part-time guidance counsellors and only two per cent report having a full-time guidance counsellor. In the context of increased concerns related to classroom violence, it is shortsighted for the government not to ensure greater student access to guidance counsellors in elementary schools.

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

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

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish more balance between the focus on literacy and numeracy and the importance of providing elementary students access to programs in other subjects including science, social studies, the arts, and physical and health education.
- Increase the Elementary Foundation Grant to provide all elementary schools with specialist teachers in the arts, health and physical education and guidance, and a teacher-librarian.
- Increase the Elementary Foundation Grant to support school library learning resources and technology.



GREATER FOCUS ON EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND INCLUSION

English Language Learners

Children who enter Ontario schools without language proficiency in either English or French require more support to ensure they progress well academically, socially and emotionally.

The number of children who speak neither English nor French when they register for school has increased significantly. The 2017 People for Education annual survey of public schools reports that 63 per cent of English elementary schools have English language learners (ELL) compared to 43 per cent in 2002-03. These students face significant challenges in catching up to their peers and schools do not have adequate resources to support them. The challenges have increased within the last couple of years as Ontario schools have welcomed into their classrooms Syrian and other refugees, many of whom had experienced trauma and been without school for a considerable period of time.

There is no direct accountability for school boards to spend their second language grants on the intended programs. All too often, the overall shortfalls in the funding formula have led to school boards using their second language grants for other purposes and shortchanging ELL students.

Students who enter English language schools without English as a first language should also have the opportunity to benefit from French immersion programs. These students often need additional support to be successful in the immersion program; additional supports should be provided to ELL students enrolled in these classes.

Student Diversity

To promote engaged and active learning among all students, classrooms and school libraries need textbooks and other resources that reflect the rich cultural, racial and gender identities of students and their families. Ontario has adopted an Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy. This policy provides an important policy framework for equity but more needs to be done to ensure that the vision for equity is realized. Teachers need classroom materials that reflect the diversity of their classrooms and school communities. Teachers and other education workers also need professional learning that improves their ability to address racism, sexism, homophobia, ableism and classism, elements that affect our schools and permeate our society.

In the past, when school boards had taxation powers, some of them funded community workers who interacted with parents, in particular those who were immigrants and refugees. These workers served as an important link between schools and those parents who weren't able or inclined to be active in their child's school. Their work helped to address language and class barriers and broaden the school's connection with the more marginalized in the community. Currently, the Ministry of Education, through the Parent Engagement Office, supports important initiatives to promote parent engagement but the initiatives can't fill the gap of work formerly done by community workers. The Ministry should support school board community workers through Grants for Student Needs.



RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Revise ESL grants to more accurately reflect the number of students who don't speak English when they enrol at school.**
- **Revise ESL grants to increase the capacity of schools to extend ESL programs to students who continue to need the support beyond four years.**
- **Provide classroom resources to support the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.**
- **Provide teachers and other education workers with professional learning that addresses discrimination and oppression of marginalized students.**
- **Fund community workers at the school board level through the Grants for Student Needs.**

Children Living In Poverty

Perhaps the most significant factor contributing to the difference in student achievement is socio-economic status. Reports by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conclude that countries with smaller gaps in income inequality have higher student achievement levels. Its reports have attributed Canadian students' high achievement scores on international assessments, in part, to the narrow income gap and social programs that support lower-income Canadians. However, Canada is poised to lose this advantage as we witness a widening income gap. Lower family incomes mean many students arrive at school hungry and unable to fully engage in learning. School nutrition programs only partially meet the need and can be stigmatizing and short-term.

Schools can address poverty-related issues. For example, with the Ministry of Education support, ETFO has developed a number of programs to increase teacher and community awareness about poverty issues and has promoted school nutrition programs. However, the root causes of poverty must be addressed at the macro level. The education funding formula must be revised to more effectively provide disadvantaged students with access to resources and experiences that more affluent students take for granted. Additional funding is required to expand library resources and access to computers and increase the number of field trips and in-school arts performances. These additional resources would increase student engagement and student success. ETFO's experience through its poverty work at the school level also points to the importance of school boards employing community workers to make connections with parents and foster greater parental engagement in their child's school and education.

Beyond the school level, Ontario must also live up to the commitment of its poverty reduction strategy and address income levels, social housing needs and access to early intervention programs. The federal government has a key role

to play in addressing poverty but Ontario can do its part by investing more in anti-poverty strategies. Increasing the hourly minimum wage to \$15 and the guaranteed living wage pilot project are important steps forward. Other measures include more generous income support programs and tax reform to distribute economic prosperity more evenly in the province.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Provide specific compensatory grants for school boards to provide enhanced programming for schools in disadvantaged communities.
- Increase investments in anti-poverty measures such as income support measures and tax reform.



Expansion And Integration of Children’s Services

In 2016, The Ontario government announced a commitment to create an additional 100,000 child care spaces over five years. However, the objective of expanding access to spaces cannot be reached without significant reform to how child care is funded. The demand for child care is high and the government has rightly identified additional child care spaces as a priority but Ontario is experiencing the paradox of long waiting lists for subsidized spaces while available spaces remain unfilled because parents who do not qualify for subsidies cannot afford the exorbitant fees.

To achieve its goal of creating 100,000 additional spaces, the government must significantly increase the funding allocated to capital projects, child care subsidies and wage enhancement grants for child care workers.

Schools can build partnerships with the community if they function as hubs for children’s services. The government’s recent announcement to add additional child care spaces in schools is a positive step forward and aligns with the concept of establishing schools as hubs for children’s services. There are models where schools are the sites for community recreation programs or public libraries, but such examples are far too rare. More can be done to integrate services, especially in communities with declining enrolment where schools have available space. Better integration at the community level should result in cost efficiencies through reduced program overhead costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Increase funding to expand parent access to early learning and care programs for children aged 0 to 3.8 by funding capital expansion, child care subsidies and wage enhancement for child care staff.**
- **Increase the capacity of schools to act as hubs for community services.**



A STRONG UNION VOICE

Ontario public education has benefited from having unions representing teachers and other education workers for more than one hundred years.

ETFO and other unions have worked to negotiate compensation and working conditions that attract and retain highly-qualified, committed professionals to the school sector. Through our programs and training, ETFO members engage in professional learning that improves their capacity to be effective educators and keeps them current with new teaching strategies.

By advocating for safe and healthy workplaces, education unions ensure students are learning in safe and healthy classrooms. ETFO, through its health and safety representatives, identifies potential hazards such as poor air quality, unsafe equipment and the potential threat of asbestos. Through their unions, classroom educators advocate for measures to address workplace violence that threatens the safety and well-being of the entire school community.

By promoting policies such as smaller classes, curriculum reforms and more meaningful student assessment policies, unions are not only promoting improved working conditions for their members, they are also addressing issues that affect student learning and success.

Education unions are committed to addressing broader social issues that affect their students' ability to be successful learners and to become active and engaged citizens. With the support of their union's training and classroom resources, ETFO members work in their classrooms, their schools and their communities to fight against poverty, inequality and discrimination.

It is important that the provincial government continue to recognize education unions as important partners in the discussion and implementation of education policies. It is equally important that the government not introduce initiatives that weaken the ability of education unions to represent their members and be strong advocates for public education.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Engage education unions as full partners in the discussion and implementation of education reforms.
- Support labour laws that enable unions to represent their members, organize unorganized workers and advocate for democratic rights and equality.



A SINGLE SECULAR SCHOOL SYSTEM FOR ONTARIO

The increasing diversity of Ontario's population makes it difficult to defend a school system devoted to one religion.

Ontario today is much different demographically than it was in 1867 when rights for Catholic and Protestant schools were established through the *British North America Act*, precursor to the *Canadian Constitution Act*, 1982.

Given the diversity of Ontario's population, our school system should be playing a key role in fostering mutual understanding and social cohesion. This goal is best achieved through an education system where students of all backgrounds learn together and see themselves in the faces of their teachers, and where curriculum is developed based on the whole population, not on the beliefs of one religion.

Due to recent declining student enrolment, many communities in rural and northern areas have an insufficient number of students to support schools delivered through four different school boards. This is leading to school closures that leave some communities without an elementary English-language public school; it is forcing school boards to bus young students long distances. To compete for students, Catholic boards are accepting non-Catholic students and both public and Catholic boards are waging expensive marketing campaigns. This is an example of wasteful spending that should be directed to the classroom.

ETFO believes the public and Catholic school systems should be merged to create one public school system for English language students and another for French language students. The 2018 ETFO poll indicates that 56 per cent of Ontarians agree with this position.

The fact that Canada's leaders in 1867 made a deal should not mean that deal can never change. Quebec and Newfoundland both changed their school systems. Quebec has eliminated its Catholic and Protestant school boards and Newfoundland has replaced seven denominational school boards with one public board. What is needed is the political will to make the change.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Establish one publicly funded education system in Ontario for each of Canada's official languages.



CONCLUSION

In Ontario, we are fortunate to have a strong public school system, but our schools are showing the strains of an outdated education funding formula and the failure of the funding to reflect actual student needs. ETFO's platform proposals are focused on updating the provincial education funding formula, creating a more engaging program and learning environment for students, and ensuring schools provide healthy and safe learning and working conditions for all.

Some of the ETFO proposals – scaling back on standardized testing, integrating children's services and moving to a single secular school system — should result in cost efficiencies. Others, like reducing the number of curriculum expectations and giving more authority to teachers' classroom assessment, are cost neutral. Overall, ETFO's proposals for creating classrooms that more successfully engage students and serve the needs of all students amount to a significant additional investment in elementary education. This investment is long overdue.

The government can fairly claim that it has increased education funding during its four terms in office but the additional funding has gone largely to additional programs, not to addressing significant program cuts imposed by the previous government. Core aspects of elementary education require additional investment and should be part of the government's plan for long-term economic renewal and social cohesion.

Over the last year, ETFO locals have engaged parents and other members of the public through a series of community forums. The conversations we've had have been important in identifying common concerns and potential solutions. During this election campaign, we look forward to continuing the public discourse about the public schools that Ontarians need and deserve. We invite you to join us in this important conversation and to have an impact on future education policy through your election involvement and vote.



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Establish an independent, external review of Ontario's education funding formula that will provide recommendations on what is required to update the formula so it reflects actual student needs.
2. Cap grades 4 to 8 class size at 24 students.
3. Cap Kindergarten at 26 students.
4. Introduce a weighting factor that reduces class size in accordance with the number of students with identified special needs integrated into regular classrooms.
5. Base the special education grants on the educational needs of students.
6. Increase the funding allocation for educational assistants, behavioural counsellors, child and youth workers, psychologists, and speech and language pathologists.
7. Provide educators training to assist them address student behavioural issues and adopt teaching strategies that support students with a wide spectrum of special needs.
8. Cancel EQAO grades 3 and 6 tests.
9. Respect teacher professional judgement and place more emphasis on the role of ongoing teacher assessment of student progress.
10. Revise the elementary Ontario curriculum by reducing the number of prescribed student outcomes and identifying, instead, a set of core learning goals.
11. Provide all elementary classrooms with resources that support hands-on, experiential learning.
12. Establish more balance between the focus on literacy and numeracy and the importance of providing elementary students access to programs in other subjects including science, social studies, the arts, and physical and health education.
13. Increase the Elementary Foundation Grant to provide all elementary schools with specialist teachers in the arts, health and physical education and guidance, and a teacher-librarian.
14. Increase the Elementary Foundation Grant to support school library learning resources and technology.
15. Revise ESL grants to more accurately reflect the number of students who don't speak English when they enrol at school.
16. Revise ESL grants to increase the capacity of schools to extend ESL programs to students who continue to need the support beyond four years.
17. Provide classroom resources to support the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy.
18. Provide teachers and other education workers with professional learning that addresses discrimination and oppression of marginalized students.
19. Fund community workers at the school board level through the Grants for Student Needs.
20. Provide specific compensatory grants for school boards to provide enhanced programming for schools in disadvantaged communities.
21. Increase investments in anti-poverty measures such as income support measures and tax reform.
22. Increase funding to expand parent access to early learning and care programs for children aged 0 to 3.8 by funding capital expansion, child care subsidies and wage enhancement for child care staff.
23. Increase the capacity of schools to act as hubs for community services.
24. Engage education unions as full partners in the discussion and implementation of education reforms.
25. Support labour laws that enable unions to represent their members, organize unorganized workers and advocate for democratic rights and equality.
26. Establish one publicly funded education system in Ontario for each of Canada's official languages.



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