

The Ford Government's Regressive Education Agenda

Education Cuts

After they were elected, the Ford government made clear that their education agenda includes cutting four per cent of funding – about \$1 billion. Although they have recently made efforts to appease the public and claim they are making investments, the reality is they still plan to make significant cuts over the long term.

• Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund

- Cancelling the cap and trade program meant the loss of \$100 million earmarked for school repairs and retrofits.

• Parents Reaching Out Grants

- In October 2018, the government said these grants were being cut, despite the fact that planning and projects were already underway.
- In December 2018, the government announced that the grants would actually be distributed.
- In October 2019, after parents raised concerns about the government's class size increases and other cuts, it was announced that PRO grants would be cut in half.

• Mental health

- The previous government's 2018 budget committed \$2.1 billion over four years for mental initiatives, including a commitment to hire 400 mental health workers in secondary schools and enhance professional development.
- Despite claiming that mental health is a priority, the Ford government has promised \$1.9 billion in funding over 10 years – a cut of \$335 million per year from the previous government's plan.

• Special education

- In response to repeated requests from OECTA and others, the previous government announced \$30 million to increase the Special Incidence Portion, which has been capped since 1998. This would have allowed for the hiring of an additional 500 education assistants to support students with extraordinarily high needs.
- The Ford government has cut \$2 million from the original announcement and reallocated the remaining \$28 million to the Special Education Per-Pupil Amount Allocation, with no indication of hiring any new educational assistants.

• Guidance teachers in elementary

- Through the GSNs, the previous government planned to provide dedicated funding to hire 450 FTE guidance teachers for Grades 7 and 8.
- The Ford government has the additional funding in place, but have eliminated the requirement that it be used to hire guidance teachers in the elementary panel exclusively – effectively diluting the impact of the funding.

• Post-secondary education funding

- The government has announced a series of changes that will reduce funding to colleges and universities, and make education more expensive for low- and middle-income students.
- Tuition fees are being cut by 10 per cent, with no accompanying increase to operating grants from the government to post-secondary institutions. This will take \$400-500 million out of college and university budgets.
- The government has changed the proportion of the Ontario Student Assistance Program that will be provided in loans as opposed to grants. This means low- and middle-income students are less able to access post-secondary education.
- Ancillary fees are now voluntary, meaning students are able to opt-out of funding for organizations such as student unions, student newspapers, and clubs for equity-seeking groups.

• Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth

- The office was moved under the responsibility of the Ontario Ombudsman.
- There will no longer be an individual dedicated to providing a voice for vulnerable children and youth in Ontario. Also, 40 staff were laid off.
- This is yet another Ford government cut that directly targets vulnerable young people.

• Increasing class size averages

- This school year, the government has begun implementing its plan to increase class size averages from 23.84 to 24.5 students in Grades 4 to 8, and from 22 to 28 students in Grades 9 to 12. They also want to remove class size caps in local collective agreements, and have not ruled out increases class sizes in primary grades as well.
- This will remove more than \$500 million in education funding, resulting in the elimination of more than 10,000 teaching positions and tens of thousands of course options.
- Click [here](#) to see the possible impact in your school board.
- OECTA has filed a complaint with the Ontario Labour Relations Board, arguing that the government introducing these class size changes while collective bargaining is ongoing violates our collective bargaining rights.

• Mandatory e-learning credits

- Beginning in 2020-21, secondary students will be required to earn four of their 30 credits through e-learning.
- E-learning classes will be funded at an average student-to-teacher ratio of 35:1, meaning up to 1,000 teaching jobs are likely to be lost.

• Local Priorities Fund

- As part of the 2017-19 extension agreement, the Association negotiated the hiring of 335 teachers to work with Indigenous students, students with special education needs, and other at-risk students.
- The government has not extended the funding for the 2019-20 school year, and has not committed to including it in our new collective agreement.

• Early Childhood Educators

- Funding used to be provided for 1.14 ECEs per 25 students.
- The 2019-20 education funding formula provides for a student-to-ECE ratio of 25:1.

• Cost Adjustment Allocation

- Currently, school boards receive supplemental operational funding to hire needed education workers.
- This \$64 million fund has been discontinued for the 2019-20 school year.

• Long-term education funding

- The government says it is investing in education, but the facts tell a different story.
- The 2019 provincial budget shows a modest increase in education spending this year, and a freeze in spending next year.
- The increase this year is due to a new child care tax credit and the introduction of a short-term attrition fund. **The core per-pupil funding grant has actually been reduced by \$630 million.**
- When we account for inflation and enrolment growth, by 2021-22 there will be a \$1.1 billion shortfall in core education funding.

**While these cuts are moving ahead, the government has also created chaos and confusion in other important areas, including special programs for vulnerable students and funding for students with autism. After announcing drastic cuts and causing great distress for teachers, schools, students, and families, the government has introduced new policies and investments to quell widespread public outcry.*

Undermining Teacher Professionalism

In addition to funding cuts, the Ford government has introduced a number of changes that have disrupted publicly funded education, and attacked the professionalism of teachers.

• Teacher “Snitch Line”

- After repealing the 2015 version of the health and physical education (HPE) curriculum, and reverting to the 1998 HPE curriculum, the government launched a dedicated platform that encouraged parents to report any concerns they have with their child’s teacher to the Ontario College of Teachers.
- The platform instructed parents to call the College’s Investigations and Hearings department, or file a complaint online, if they felt a teacher was deviating from the 1998 HPE curriculum.

- This “snitch line” as it came to be known, was widely considered as an attack on teacher professionalism, and an attempt by the government to drive a wedge between teachers and parents.

• **Education Consultations**

- In the fall of 2018, the government launched what it touted as the largest education consultation in Ontario’s history. However, the exercise was largely a sham.
- The so-called consultation involved online submissions and telephone townhalls on a few selected issues, with biased and leading questions.
- To date, the government still has not released the full results of the consultations.
- Despite repeated requests by our Association to develop an open dialogue and genuine consultation, the government has refused to involve teachers or other education experts in the development of their policies.

• **Ontario College of Teachers governance**

- Since its creation, the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) has operated on the principle of self-regulation, which has ensured that teachers’ specialized knowledge has guided College’s regulatory functions.
- In April 2019, the government passed Bill 48, the *Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act*. The act gives the government power to alter the composition of the OCT Governing Council and OCT committees.
- These changes eliminate the principle of self-regulation, and hand control of the College over to people outside of the teaching profession. The act also enables the government to stack the College with government-appointed members, who have no background or understanding of education.
- Many regard the act as an attack on the professionalism of teachers, who are no longer able to regulate their own profession.

• **Teacher Testing**

- In August, Minister of Education Stephen Lecce announced the government would move forward with plans for a math proficiency test for pre-service teachers. As justification, the Minister indicated that a proficiency test for teacher-candidates will improve student performance, and pointed to research allegedly showing that “one-third of educators... were having challenges passing their math test.”
- The announcement was widely criticized, both for its attack on the competency of teachers, and as a gross misrepresentation of research. Many observers also noted there is no evidence linking a math proficiency test for teacher-candidates with improved student achievement.

• **Health and physical education curriculum**

- After fulfilling a campaign promise to extreme social conservatives by repealing the 2015 health and physical education (HPE) curriculum, the Ford government launched a province-wide consultation to solicit recommendations on updating the curriculum.
- The government’s decision to revert to the 1998 version of the HPE curriculum was widely condemned by education stakeholders, health experts, and the general public, all of whom highlighted the need for a curriculum that reflects modern realities.
- In the year since repealing the HPE curriculum, the government faced public protests, a Charter challenge, and complaints before the Ontario Human Rights Tribunal
- In late August 2019, the government rolled out its revised HPE curriculum. People were quick to note that, other than some tinkering around the edges, the curriculum was nearly identical to 2015 version. This led many to wonder if changes could have been made without the intervening year of chaos and confusion.

• **Cellphone ban**

- Claiming that student cellphone use was damaging the learning experience, the Ford government instituted a cellphone “ban,” and solicited feedback on this topic during the government’s province-wide education consultation.
- Minister of Education Stephen Lecce released several advertisements, and held a press conference, touting the ban as a significant step in improving student learning.
- In reality, the actual policy includes a number of exceptions, to be determined at the discretion of educators. This is essentially a restatement of current practice.
- The government has never adequately explained why this became a priority, or why it was necessary to engage in prolonged discussion and confusion, only to maintain current practice.

Go to [KnowMore.ca](https://www.knowmore.ca) to send a message to your MPP and tell them to stop the cuts to publicly funded education.