

News Release

Ontario's Parents Give Ford Government Failing Grade on Education

9 in 10 parents say in-class learning is best and majority feel the government is not investing enough in publicly funded education.

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TORONTO – As students receive their end of year report cards, Ontario parents are giving the Ford government an “F” for their mishandling of publicly funded education in Ontario. New research from the Ontario English Catholic Teachers’ Association (OECTA) conducted amongst Ontario parents who are members of the online Angus Reid Forum found that:

- 90% of Ontario parents say that their child receives a higher quality education in-person in the classroom than online; and
- almost 3 out of 4 (74%) say the government is spending too little on publicly funded education.

The *Ontario Parents’ Report Card for the Ontario Government* study surveyed a representative sample of Ontario parents of students in publicly funded schools, asking them about screen time, mental health, social development, and their confidence in the government’s ability to open schools and keep them safe in the fall.

Amidst continuous disruption and inadequate funding, school performance dropped during the pandemic

Parents who participated in the survey were asked to think about their child’s academic success and performance in the 2020-21 school year:

- nearly 2 in 5 (38%) parents said their child’s performance in school worsened, as a result of school closures and the move to online learning;
- 76% of parents believe their child did not receive the equivalent of a full year of school; and
- almost half (49%) felt their child did not meet the same academic milestones as they would in a normal year.

“It has been ridiculous to be switched continuously from in-person learning to online learning,” said one Barrie-area parent of a child in high school. “Just as students are getting used to one format, the government flips them back to the other format of learning. This has had an impact on their mental health, education, and grades.”

Catholic teachers have been advocating since the start of the pandemic for the necessary investments and resources to make schools safe for in-person learning and to allow Ontario’s educators to provide the world-class instruction they know how to deliver to realize student success.

“Despite the lack of investments and leadership from the Ford government, and the extreme challenges that everyone has faced this past year, teachers and education workers have done everything they can to make this school year as successful as possible. This government has had more than 15 months to learn and adapt – let’s hope they finally listen to and follow the recommendations of public health and education experts, to ensure a safe and sustainable return to in-person learning this coming September that better supports students’ academic achievement and mental health,” said OECTA President Liz Stuart.

“These poll results show that parents want their kids safely in school, with the necessary investments from this government to avoid the disruptions, frequent class re-organizations, and closures of the past school year.”

More than half of parents not confident government will ensure a safe return to school in the fall

Parents’ confidence in this government’s ability to manage our publicly funded education system is eroding, with 54% of parents saying they are not confident that the Ford government will ensure a safe return to school in the fall.

More than 4 in 5 (83%) parents said that they would be concerned if schools moved to the hybrid learning model in the fall – a burden the Ford government’s inadequate funding has placed on school boards that would require online and in-person learning to be delivered simultaneously by one teacher.

More time online, more demands of parents

Seven in 10 (70%) parents said they spent more time helping their child with school during the pandemic as a result of the move to online learning, with 39% of this group reporting spending five or more extra hours per week. Half (50%) of all working parents said they took time off work or adjusted their work schedule to help their child with online school.

Prior to the pandemic, parents said kids spent on average three hours of screen time per day, but since the pandemic that number has more than doubled to 7.1 hours per day. This has parents concerned about their children’s mental health and development, with:

- 3 in 4 (75%) parents saying that online learning has had a negative impact on their child’s mental health; and
- almost 9 in 10 (89%) parents believing their child is not meeting the same social milestones as they would if they were learning in-person.

“The unspoken assumptions that caretakers can maintain their work while caring for children and supporting their education is absolutely absurd and has had devastating consequences for individuals and families,” said one Toronto-area parent of a child in Kindergarten. “The gravity of this error cannot be overstated.”

Time to make up for the government’s failures of the past school year

“Now more than ever, additional resources should be directed to the classroom to ensure schools are safe and to help students recover from unprecedented disruption and learning loss,” said Stuart. “Parents and educators alike want to see more investments in publicly funded education this fall – not more budget cuts. This means students safely in class this fall and an investment to make up for the learning losses experienced this past year as a result of this government’s mishandling of COVID-19 and our schools.”

About the Ontario Parents’ Report Card for the Ontario Government Survey

Survey respondents were members of the online Angus Reid Forum. The sample was comprised of n=1,224 parents of children who attended a publicly funded school (K-12) in the 2020-21 school year, across Ontario. Parents were asked to respond to the survey, thinking of one of their children. For comparison purposes only, probability samples of this size would yield a margin of error of +/- 2.8 percentage points, 19 times out of 20. The study was fielded in English from May 26 - 29, 2021.