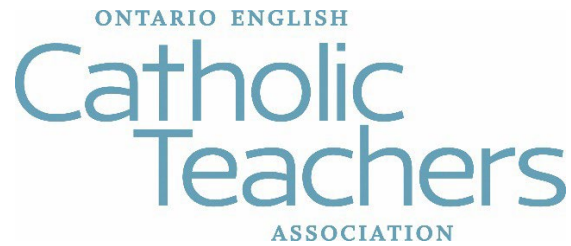


# ***Bill 33, Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025***

Submission to the  
Ministry of Education



The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) represents the 45,000 passionate and qualified teachers in Ontario's publicly funded English Catholic schools, from Kindergarten to Grade 12.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Ontario English Catholic Teachers' Association (OECTA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input on behalf of 45,000 teachers working in publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario, in response to the government's proposed legislation, Bill 33, the *Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025*.

The proposed legislation introduced by Minister of Education Paul Calandra is broad and far-reaching, and would make changes to the *Education Act*; the *Child, Youth, and Family Services Act*; the *Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities Act*; and the *Ombudsman Act*. This submission focuses attention on proposed changes to the *Education Act*, specifically as it relates to Ontario school board governance and operations.

School boards have long played an important role in Ontario's publicly funded education system. When at their best, school boards serve as an important link between the voices of community members and the provincial government – ensuring that the unique needs of students, parents, teachers, and educators are reflected in local education policies and practices. As well, with an existence that predates Confederation, school board elections represent one of Ontario's oldest and most localized forms of democratic participation (Ontario Government 2009; OESC 2023).

As with any democratically elected body, there are opportunities for impropriety. In recent months, a very small minority of Ontario school boards have made headlines of this nature (McGrath 2025).

However, the purpose of this submission is not to litigate individual decisions made by some Ontario school boards – or to assign blame. Rather, the objective here is to assess the proportionality of the government's response in the form of Bill 33, as well as to raise important areas of concern regarding the potential impact the proposed legislation would have on students, schools, and communities, if passed in its current form.

To that end, the remainder of this submission is organized into the following sections:

- Overview of proposed legislation
- Areas of concern and potential impact

- Exercise of democracy and democratic institutions
- Police presence in schools
- Collective agreements and the collective bargaining process
- Upholding the constitutional rights of publicly funded Catholic schools
- Summary of recommendations
- Conclusion

We thank the government in advance for receiving this submission and for considering our perspective and recommendations.

## **OVERVIEW OF PROPOSED LEGISLATION**

On May 29, the Ford Conservative government introduced Bill 33, the *Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025*. The full scope of the proposed legislation would make changes to the *Education Act*; the *Child, Youth, and Family Services Act*; the *Ministry of Training, Colleges, and Universities Act*; and the *Ombudsman Act*.

Specifically, in Schedule 2 of Bill 33, the government is proposing amendments to the *Education Act*, R.S.O. 1990, c. E.2. Broadly speaking, the amendments relate to three matters:

- Ontario school boards working with local police services
- Ministerial approval for the name of a new school or the changing of the name of a school
- New ministerial powers regarding investigations, directions, and supervision of school boards

### *Ontario school boards working with local police services*

If passed, Bill 33 would require every board to work with its local police services to:

- Provide local police services with access to schools in circumstances which will likely be prescribed by regulation, policy, or guidelines.
- Permit local police services to participate in school programs in circumstances prescribed by regulation, policy, or guidelines.

- Implement School Resource Officers (SRO) programs where they are available.

These prescribed duties would become part of the statutory duties of boards.

### *Naming of schools*

Bill 33 proposes to establish a procedure for school boards to apply to the Minister of Education for approval of a name for a new school, or to change the name of an existing school.

The minister would be empowered to approve the name with or without conditions, or to reject the name. A rejection would mean that the school board could not use the proposed name. A time period would be established via regulation to outline the process by which the minister must respond. However, if the minister does not respond within the specified time period, the proposed school name would be considered approved by default.

If passed into law, Bill 33 will empower the minister to establish policies and guidelines, and issue directions relating to processes for naming schools, and require school boards to comply with these policies, guidelines, or directions.


### *Ministerial investigations, directions, and supervision*

Part VIII of the *Education Act* deals with "Compliance with Board Obligations."

The proposed legislation makes it far more specific as to what school board conduct may lead to a ministry investigation. Bill 33 provides that the government may intervene in matters of "public interest," which is defined as whether school boards, school board members, and directors of education are carrying out duties under the *Education Act* "in an appropriate manner and any other matter that may be prescribed by regulation."

The legislation outlines seven specific duties as examples of "matters of public interest," which may give rise to an investigation if any of the duties are deemed in non-compliance. These duties include:

- The delivery of education programs
- Student achievement and well-being

- 
- The financial affairs of the board and use of its resources
  - The construction, maintenance, management acquisition, and disposition of capital assets
  - School board governance
  - Day-to-day management of a board
  - The engagement of parents and other entities that may have an interest in the activities of a board

The minister may direct an investigation if they have concerns about a matter of public interest. The investigator may be a ministry employee or an independent person. The investigator can demand production of records, examine and copy the records, and require anyone to give evidence under oath or affirmation relating to the investigation. The investigator must make and give a written report to the minister.

One substantive departure from the current legislation is that, if passed, Bill 33 would not require that a school board get a copy of the report unless the minister acts on the report by giving directions, or makes a vesting order to take control and charge over the administration of the affairs of a school board in the following circumstances:

- The board fails to comply with the direction of the minister
- The minister is of the view that the school board, school board members, or director of education has done or omitted to do something that could affect a matter of public interest where an audit or investigation has taken place, and the minister has received a report
- Any other circumstance that may be prescribed by regulation

A second substantive departure from current practice is that, under Bill 33 as proposed, the minister would be empowered to make a vesting order, rather than the Lieutenant Governor in Council.

Where a vesting order is made, the minister has total charge and control of the school board with respect to any matter affecting the board's affairs. This includes appointing and dismissing the school board's officers and employees, and their powers, duties, salaries, and remuneration.

## **AREAS OF CONCERN AND POTENTIAL IMPACT**

In some respects, it is difficult to comprehensively articulate areas of concern with Bill 33, given that so much remains unknown about the particulars of the proposed legislation and the ways by which it will be operationalized.

At the press conference announcing Bill 33, Minister of Education Paul Calandra spoke at length about his purported desire to impose transparency and accountability over school boards (Ontario Government 2025).

There is a certain irony in these remarks. Much of the legislation's specifics will be fleshed-out at a later date through Orders in Council – bypassing any requirement for legislative debate, committee review, or public scrutiny. In this sense, the government is sidestepping the very principles of transparency and accountability it professes to uphold and demands of others.

Nevertheless, it is possible to assess the legislation as currently proposed, to highlight several areas of concern as well as the potential negative impacts this legislation may have on the individuals and institutions within Ontario's publicly funded education system.


For the purposes of organization, these concerns and potential impacts will be categorized into four areas, each with associated recommendations:

- The exercise of democracy and democratic institutions
- Police presence in schools
- Collective agreements and the collective bargaining process
- Upholding the constitutional rights of publicly funded Catholic schools

### **The exercise of democracy and democratic institutions**

A key element of the proposed legislation would substantially expand the Minister of Education's ability to investigate a school board's conduct, give directions to that board, and to assume supervisory powers over the school board under the vague notion of "public interest."





This would represent an unprecedented consolidation of power in the government's hands and would undermine Ontario's public and democratic institutions. At the same time, school boards are democratically elected bodies that – despite isolated incidents of mismanagement – are ultimately accountable to constituents through regular elections and regularly scheduled and publicized board meetings, where community members can delegate to the board in public session.

The proposed legislation raises an important question: what, precisely, does the government view as the purpose of school boards?


The traditional understanding is that local school board trustees are elected to represent the unique needs of their communities. As such, stripping them of significant decision-making authority would undermine the process that ensures our publicly funded education system remains responsive to the local families and students it serves.

Instead, the Ford Conservative government seems intent – through Bill 33 and subsequent regulations – to erode local decision making and transform school boards into *de facto* arms of the government, meant to carry out the ideological policy directives and whims of the government of the day, irrespective of local circumstances.

This is hardly the first anti-democratic effort waged by the Ford government against Ontario citizens. It is worth remembering that one of the government's first actions was to cut the size of Toronto city council nearly in half, in a thinly-veiled attempt to influence the municipal election outcome in Toronto (Rieti 2018). When the legislation was initially deemed unconstitutional, the premier threatened to invoke the notwithstanding clause to override *Charter* rights.

The following year, the government passed Bill 48, the *Safe and Supportive Classrooms Act*, which transformed the governance structure of the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT) into a body whose members could be appointed and controlled by the government (OECTA 2019; Tagliaferri 2018). The passing of Bill 48 ended the self-regulation of the teaching profession, a practice that had existed since the OCT's founding in 1997.

More recently, Bill 5, the *Protect Ontario by Unleashing our Economy Act*, 2025, has been sharply criticized for its brazen attempt to undermine democratic processes, environmental



protections, and Indigenous rights. Among other elements, Bill 5 gives the cabinet the power to designate special economic zones, select who will develop said zones, and allows them to breach statutory environmental and worker protections.

Bill 5 represents an egregious concentration of power in the hands of the provincial cabinet, bypassing normal legislative procedures, and limiting opportunities for public input (Smith Cross and Duggal 2025; Pinkerton 2025).


Sadly, Bill 33 fits perfectly within a longstanding and shameful pattern of anti-democratic actions taken by the Ford Conservative government.

While public oversight of trustee and board expenditures is important, transparency cannot be a one-way street. The government must also be transparent about its own education funding decisions. Years of chronic underfunding by the Ford Conservative government have forced Ontario teachers to do more with less; a fact conveniently ignored by the proposed legislation.

At the press conference announcing the legislation, Minister Calandra lamented that, “Teachers shouldn’t have to be going to Dollarama to buy pencil cases or crayons for their classes” (Ontario 2025). This much is true; however, if the minister took a moment to review Core Education Funding for 2025-26, he would realize that his government is currently providing 62 cents per-student per-day for classroom supplies (Ministry of Education 2025).

When teachers are forced to purchase basic classroom supplies for their students, or when parents take up collections so there are enough pencils and crayons, the fault resides not with the school boards – the blame should be placed squarely on the shoulders of the Ford Conservative government and their chronic underfunding of education in Ontario.

The government must rethink its unprecedented and unwarranted expansion of authority, as well as its thinly-veiled attempt to shift blame for chronic government underfunding on to school boards – and must instead invest in the resources and supports students need, while upholding the principles of democracy on which Ontario – and school boards – are founded. Catholic teachers urge the government to rescind Schedule 2, items 1-4 of Bill 33, and instead engage in meaningful consultation with teacher and education worker unions, school



board representatives, and other relevant stakeholders to develop mechanisms that promote effective accountability and transparency, such as additional enveloping in Core Education Funding.

As well, if the government is serious about promoting accountability and transparency, any and all reports related to school board investigations should be made available to school boards and posted publicly in a timely manner, regardless of any actions that arise from the investigation.

Catholic teachers also recommend that the government uphold the democratic nature of Ontario school boards, so that local trustees may best reflect the unique needs of students, teachers, and education workers within their school communities.

### **Police presence in schools**


Catholic teachers express our serious concern with the element of Bill 33 that would mandate School Resource Officers (SRO) within schools, where local police offer those services.

SROs are police officers assigned to schools with the stated goals to provide security, law enforcement, and sometimes mentorship. Their roles vary widely, but in many schools, they also influence student discipline.

While there may be schools and school boards that wish to engage SROs, mandating their use in a one-size-fits-all approach is yet another move by the Ford government that undermines local decision-making.

### **Equity concerns**

Research has clearly demonstrated that police presence and surveillance inside schools has a disproportionate negative impact on Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving students. A recent study published by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) found that “Police in schools may subject Black and other racialized children, and particularly Black boys, to a higher level of surveillance that could ultimately significantly impact their mental health and education” (OHRC 2025).



Numerous reports and case studies have drawn similar conclusions:


- Students who are Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and/or disabled are more likely to be suspended, expelled, or arrested when SROs are present in schools. In addition, minor misbehaviours – such as tardiness and dress code violations – are more likely to lead to police involvement (ACLU 2020).
- Racialized and 2SLGBTQIA+ students report feeling less safe and more surveilled with SROs present, and SRO presence can erode trust between students and school staff (Sheikh et al. 2024).
- In *Policing Black Lives*, Robyn Maynard argues that Black youth in Canada are over-surveilled in schools, contributing to their disproportionate criminalization – not because of their behaviour, but due to systemic racism and surveillance (Maynard 2017).

Mandating SROs sends a clear message that these critical voices do not matter and ignores the historical evidence that such programs have not been effective in building a sense of community between police and students.

Over the last decade, many school boards in Ontario and across Canada have chosen to end SRO programs after listening to experts and the voices of students, particularly those from Indigenous, Black, and other equity-deserving groups who often felt surveilled and unsafe by the presence of police in schools.

Catholic teachers strongly demand that the government remove the mandate that school boards implement SRO programs.

Instead, we urge the government to encourage and empower school boards to engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including education unions, advocacy groups, and students and families from Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities, as well as recognized experts in education equity, before making any decisions regarding SROs. To better understand the relationship between SROs and students, the Association once again recommends the government take a more dedicated and substantive approach to disaggregated, demographic-based data collection.



Any effort by school boards to collect equity-related data must involve a standardized approach, consider cultural relevance and responsiveness, include trauma-informed principles, respect privacy, and achieve the highest standards of data collection integrity – results must also be made available in an accessible form to all relevant stakeholders and community members.


### *SROs as a response to school violence*

Minister Calandra has suggested that mandating SROs could serve as one solution to the critical issue of violence in schools. Unfortunately, not only is this view simplistic but it also fails to understand or address the root causes of violence in schools.

The issue of violence in schools is complex and challenging. There is no simple answer. Addressing this matter requires a multifaceted, comprehensive, and co-ordinated response. An act of violence is often a cry for help. It has, as its basis, a multitude of intertwining factors – everything from inadequate access to mental health resources, to large class sizes, to a lack of special education supports, to the defunding of before- and after-school programming, and more, plays a role.

However, there is a consistent theme to each of these, which has contributed to the rise in violence and harassment: chronic underfunding of publicly funded education (Bond and McAllister 2024). There are a number of actions the Ford Conservative government can – and must – take immediately in order to begin to address the issue of school violence. If the Ford government sincerely wants to address the issue of violence in schools, there are far more effective and foundational steps it could take.

For instance, Catholic teachers call for the government to provide resources and supports for more frontline, school-based child and youth workers, social workers, psychologists, and other professional services to help students and education workers deal with their social, emotional, and behavioural needs, in some cases attributable to pandemic-related causes. We also urge the government to work meaningfully with education unions and other key stakeholders to proactively support students or staff who are in crisis, by developing a whole-school approach to addressing incidents of violence, which includes follow-up actions to prevent recurrence – including providing teachers and school staff with comprehensive trauma-informed training.



Catholic teachers once again call on the government to work across relevant ministries and with education stakeholders to develop sector-specific regulation for education under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*.

### **Collective agreements and the collective bargaining process**

Given the lack of specificity in the proposed legislation, it is important to highlight that Bill 33 must respect negotiated collective agreements and the collective bargaining process, and to seek clarification on several matters.

As such, our Association is urging the government to clarify that the proposed extensive powers being given to the minister relating to finances, debt, supervision, “public interest,” and other matters, do not override collective bargaining or collective agreements. As currently written, there is no provision as to whether the minister’s newfound authority overrides collective agreements and collective bargaining. We recommend that the primacy of collective agreements and collective bargaining should be expressly written into the legislation.

Further, given that the *School Boards Collective Bargaining Act* identifies OECTA as the legal bargaining agent for all teachers in publicly funded Catholic schools in Ontario, we are requesting that the government consult meaningfully with our union to determine the role OECTA should play in the process under which a board is put under supervision.

Finally, with respect to the SRO portions of the legislation, the Association firmly believes that the effects of the presence of local police in schools is a matter subject to collective bargaining, particularly regarding the authority of local police within schools and the legal relationship between local police and teachers.

### **Upholding the constitutional rights of publicly funded Catholic schools**

As the government considers any amendments or regulations related to Bill 33, it is imperative to ensure that the rights outlined in Section 93 of the *Constitution Act, 1867* are maintained. These rights include the unfettered right of the Catholic community to fully control and manage its school system.

To that end, the Association is requesting an amendment to the denominational rights clause (S.257.31) within Bill 33. The proposed language ensures constitutional protections related to “Divisions” of the legislation. However, there are sections of Bill 33 that are not categorized by “Divisions.” This creates confusion as to whether the stated constitutional protections extend to these other aspects of the legislation. For clarity and consistency, we are requesting a housekeeping language change whereby “Divisions” is replaced by “Part.”

## **SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS**

Although important details of the legislation remain unknown to stakeholders, based on the current proposed Bill 33, Catholic teachers are recommending the following:

<b>CATHOLIC TEACHERS CALL ON THE GOVERNMENT TO...</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rethink its unprecedented and unwarranted expansion of authority – and must instead invest in the resources and supports students need, while upholding the principles of democracy on which Ontario – and school boards – are founded.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Rescind Schedule 2, items 1-4 of Bill 33, and instead engage in meaningful consultation with teacher and education worker unions, school board representatives, and other relevant stakeholders to develop mechanisms that promote effective accountability and transparency, such as additional enveloping in Core Education Funding.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ensure that any and all reports related to school board investigations are made available to school boards and posted publicly in a timely manner, regardless of any actions that arise from the investigation.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uphold the democratic nature of Ontario school boards, so that local trustees may best reflect the unique needs of students, teachers, and education workers within their school communities.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Remove the mandate that school boards implement SRO programs.</li></ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage and empower school boards to engage in meaningful consultation with stakeholders, including education unions, advocacy groups, and students and families from Indigenous, Black, and equity-deserving communities, as well as recognized experts in education equity, before making any decisions regarding SROs.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Take a more dedicated and substantive approach to disaggregated, demographic-based data collection.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that any effort by school boards to collect equity-related data must involve a standardized approach, consider cultural relevance and responsiveness and trauma-informed principles, include all employees and their positions, respect privacy, and achieve the highest standards of data collection integrity – results must also be made available in an accessible form.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide resources and supports for more frontline, school-based child and youth workers, social workers, psychologists, and other professional services to help students and education workers deal with their social, emotional, and behavioural needs, in some cases attributable to pandemic-related causes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work meaningfully with education unions and other key stakeholders to proactively support students or staff who are in crisis, by developing a whole-school approach to addressing incidents of violence, which includes follow-up actions to prevent recurrence – including providing teachers and school staff with comprehensive trauma-informed training.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work across relevant ministries and with education stakeholders to develop sector-specific regulation for education under the <i>Occupational Health and Safety Act</i>.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clarify that the proposed extensive powers being given to the minister relating to finances, debt, supervision, “public interest,” and other matters, do not override collective bargaining or collective agreements – and that the priority for collective agreements and collective bargaining should be put into the legislation expressly.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consult meaningfully with our union to determine the role OECTA should play in the process under which a board is put under supervision.</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the effects of the presence of police in schools is a matter subject to collective bargaining, particularly regarding the authority of local police within schools and the legal relationship between local police and teachers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Replace the word “Division” with “Part” in Section 257.31 of Bill 33, to ensure consistency and applicability of the denominational rights clause.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure that the rights outlined in Section 93 of the <i>Constitution Act, 1867</i> are maintained.</li> </ul>

## CONCLUSION

The Ford Conservative government’s one-size-fits-all approach to policy making hurts Ontario students and the communities we serve. These moves, evident in the proposed Bill 33, are not concerned with improving education — they are about centralizing power, shifting the blame for chronic government underfunding, weakening public institutions, and sowing division by promoting populist, conservative narratives.

Everything that we are proud of as Ontarians starts in our classrooms. We call on Premier Ford, Minister Calandra, and the provincial Conservative government to reconsider this legislation, heed the recommendations from Catholic teachers outlined in this submission, listen to the voices of teachers and community advocates, and make the necessary investments in the supports that truly serve the best interests of our students and Ontario’s publicly funded education system.

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