

SHARED VALUES, SHARED PRIORITIES

IMPROVING PUBLICLY FUNDED
EDUCATION IN ONTARIO



ONTARIO'S GLOBAL FUTURE STARTS IN OUR CLASSROOMS

INTRODUCTION

A robust plan to protect Ontario starts by investing in our economic future – a prosperous tomorrow, built by a modern workforce, and forged in our publicly funded schools. Our students are Ontario’s future in progress.

We share the government’s commitment to building a stronger, more innovative Ontario – one that is competitive and prepared for the jobs of tomorrow. A strong publicly funded education system is not separate from that mission; it is foundational to it.

Ontario’s publicly funded education system is a Canadian success story and one of our greatest strategic assets. Every day, teachers across Ontario prepare students to become the next generation of skilled workers, entrepreneurs, tradespeople, innovators, and community leaders – Ontarians who will drive growth, strengthen local communities, and build the most competitive economy in all the G7.

Strategic investment in education is not simply a line item in a budget – it delivers stronger productivity, a more competitive workforce, and long-term economic stability. It protects Ontario’s competitive advantage in a rapidly changing global economy.

At the same time, student needs are evolving. Families expect schools to be safe and modern to address the new challenges students face. Infrastructure and technology must keep pace with demands. We must invest in education, with prudent forward-looking action to ensure the system remains strong and stable. We need a forward-thinking strategy to harness the strength of our world-class publicly funded education system, so we can unlock every student’s potential, capitalizing on our greatest economic strength and ensuring the adaptability we need now more than ever.

This is why Catholic teachers are calling for a focus on practical solutions that strengthen student success, starting with four clear priorities:

- **Real and sustained investment** – supported by manageable class sizes that strengthen learning outcomes, so that teachers have the time to ensure that every student is prepared with the in-demand skills that employers need.
- **Safe, modern, and technologically vibrant schools** – taking practical measures to improve safety, maintaining and upgrading facilities, and ensuring students have access to up-to-date technology and tools aligned with tomorrow's needs.
- **Classrooms led by qualified and certified teachers** – our teachers are professionals; their dedication to student success and their own professional growth makes our schools world-class.
- **Reliable access to special education and mental health supports** – so every student can reach their potential and fully contribute to Ontario's future workforce.

We all want to give our children the best possible start, equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in a globalized and rapidly changing world – and that starts in our schools.

Catholic teachers are committed to working constructively with the government, as well as education partners and stakeholders, to protect what works, strengthen what needs improvement, and to ensure that Ontario's publicly funded education system continues to be a pillar of economic growth and opportunity in key sectors.

Together, let's invest in students and unlock Ontario's future.

REAL AND SUSTAINED INVESTMENT: VALUING WHAT WORKS, FUNDING THE FUTURE

Protecting Ontario's long-term prosperity, as we face global economic and geopolitical uncertainty, requires a laser focus on the investments that will strengthen our economy, workforce readiness, and local community stability. Publicly funded education is one of the most consistent and evidence-based drivers of long-term economic growth, workforce participation, and productivity.

Research from the Conference Board of Canada shows that every dollar invested in publicly funded education generates approximately \$1.30 in economic return, through stronger workforce participation, higher lifetime earnings, improved productivity, and reduced long-term social costs. In other words, education funding is not simply an expenditure – it delivers measurable returns to Ontario's economy. When education investment does not keep pace with rising costs and evolving student needs, the province risks future economic pressures including skills gaps and labour shortages.

“Every dollar invested in publicly funded education generates approximately \$1.30 in economic return.”

- Conference Board of Canada

Since 2018, while overall funding has increased in nominal terms, when inflation is taken into account, there has been a zero real-dollar increase in education funding. According to publicly available government figures, the cumulative inflationary gap is almost \$4 billion.

Rising enrolment, inflation, new program requirements, higher operational costs, and increasingly complex student needs have created significant structural pressures for school boards. When funding does not keep pace with real-world costs, school boards are forced to reduce academic programs, special education supports, and student well-being initiatives – the very forward-looking elements that underpin our province's long-term competitiveness.

“In rural communities across Ontario, schools are often a student's gateway to the wider world and to future opportunity.”

- Scott Lafreniere,
Catholic Teacher and OECTA Renfrew Unit President

“Class size matters. Classrooms should nurture differences, conversation, and civic skills. Smaller class sizes allow teachers to best meet one-on-one needs, leading to increased student engagement, motivation, and academic achievement.”

**- David Geraghty,
Catholic Teacher and OECTA Waterloo Unit President**

Ontario’s publicly funded education system has earned an international reputation for excellence. Hardworking teachers across the province have built a world-class system, which is reflected in our international rankings. To continue to be a global leader, we need to reinvest in where it all starts – our classrooms.

Investing in a forward-thinking class size and complexity strategy will give students the best possible start – a decision that will pay dividends for decades to come.

Research shows that smaller class sizes improve student attentiveness, engagement, and long-term achievement – outcomes that boost graduation rates and labour market readiness. At a practical level, smaller class sizes allow teachers to give students more one-on-one time, which provides an unparalleled return on investment, especially in the early years – and reduces the need for more intensive interventions later.

Similarly, addressing classroom complexity through appropriate staffing and supports will maximize student success, ensuring that all learning profiles are supported, with respective language, behavioural, and mental health and well-being needs being met. This will have a positive impact for all students – improving classroom stability and enhancing overall achievement.

Improving classroom conditions will also boost workforce stability, helping to reverse challenges related to teacher recruitment and retention. Teachers leave the profession when they see the system failing their students. By addressing class size and complexity, and the attached workload pressures, Ontario can create conditions that attract and retain talented teachers. A stable, well-supported teaching workforce, is essential to preserving Ontario’s high performance, world-class status, and ensuring students graduate prepared for post-secondary pathways, skilled trades, and the modern labour market.

Recognizing education as a strategic economic investment aligns with the shared goal of protecting Ontario’s future. As we have seen south of the border and in other jurisdictions, failing to invest in students can limit economic growth. By ensuring that funding structures reflect real-world costs and evolving student needs, the province can build on its world-class education system, strengthen workforce readiness, and reinforce Ontario’s position as a competitive, resilient, and globally oriented economy.

SAFE, MODERN, AND TECHNOLOGICALLY VIBRANT SCHOOLS

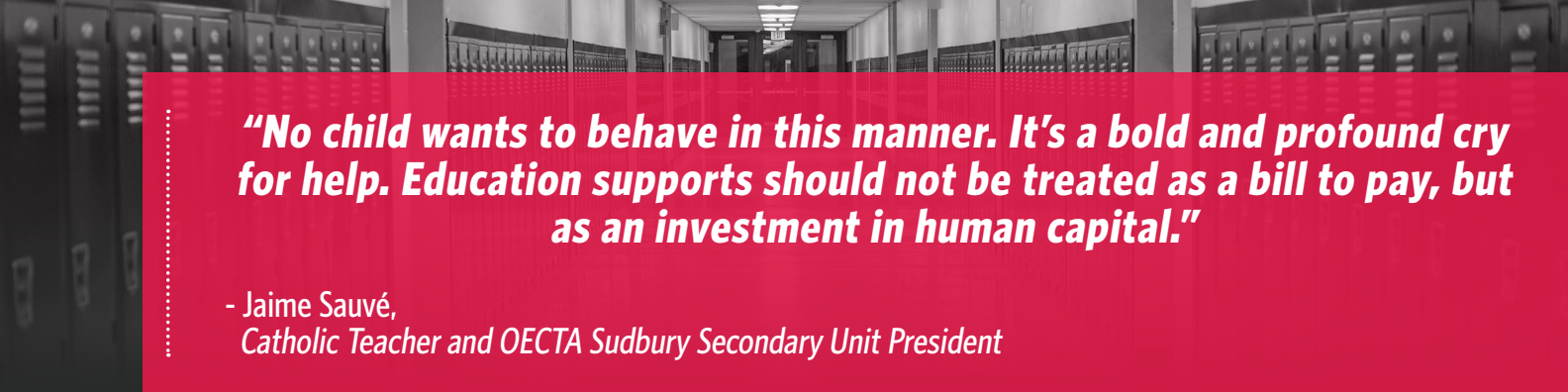
Practical and forward-thinking investments in safe, modern, and technologically vibrant schools are essential to drive strong student achievement as we strengthen Ontario's workforce – now and in the future.

But across Ontario, classrooms are under growing strain, incidents of violence are becoming more frequent, and many teachers are forced to rely on outdated resources and technology to deliver curriculum.

Proactive investment is needed to maintain and modernize schools.

To ensure that all students have full access to the tools they need to succeed, we must eliminate barriers, and set them up on the path to becoming responsible, productive members of society. Investing in safe, well-staffed, and well-maintained schools is a practical step that fosters student growth today, while ensuring public dollars are spent responsibly and in a manner that provides the best possible return on investment for Ontario taxpayers.





“No child wants to behave in this manner. It’s a bold and profound cry for help. Education supports should not be treated as a bill to pay, but as an investment in human capital.”

- Jaime Sauv ,
Catholic Teacher and OECTA Sudbury Secondary Unit President

VIOLENCE IN SCHOOLS: A CLEAR PLAN OF PREVENTION AND SUPPORT

Students, teachers – everyone in our schools – have the right to learn and work in a safe and healthy environment. While our schools strive for positivity, across Ontario there is growing concern about violence, harassment, and unsafe behaviour in schools. These challenges affect student learning environments, staff retention, classroom stability, and trust across the system – all of which are essential to maintaining strong, effective schools. The system’s failure to support any one child impacts everyone in the classroom.

A System Under Strain: Violence and Harassment in Ontario Schools, a province-wide survey of Catholic teachers conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights – one of Canada’s leading research and polling firms – found that:

- More than 90 per cent of teachers reported experiencing or witnessing violence and harassment in their schools.
- Almost 85 per cent of respondents said that violence disrupts their teaching.
- Nearly a third have had to take time away from work due to the physical or mental toll of a violent incident.
- 4 in 5 say violence disrupts their ability to teach and manage their classrooms, highlighting how unaddressed needs can impact all students.

These disruptions carry real human and financial costs, from disruptions in instructional time to staff turnover, resulting in lost expertise and experience.

As teachers know firsthand, an act of violence is often a cry for help. It is rarely an isolated incident. More often than not, it is a signal that the student is struggling; that there is an unmet need rooted in mental health challenges, trauma, or learning and behavioural needs. Addressing rising violence in schools requires a serious, prevention-focused plan that identifies concerns early and connects students with appropriate supports.

Increased access to frontline professional services, including child and youth workers, social workers, psychologists, and behavioural specialists, will help schools address issues before they escalate. Early intervention keeps students engaged in learning, supports families, and reduces the likelihood of repeated incidents, creating safer classrooms and more stable learning environments.

This approach benefits everyone:

- **Students** receive timely supports that keep them connected to school and on track to graduate.
- **Teachers and school staff** can focus on curriculum delivery rather than crisis management.
- **Parents** gain confidence in school stability and safety.
- **Taxpayers and public systems** avoid higher long-term future costs.

Safety must remain a core priority if we want to harness the power of our world-class publicly funded education system. Our children need consistent supports, early intervention, and stable learning environments that reduce the likelihood of violent incidents.

A prevention-focused strategy is not only compassionate, but fiscally responsible and essential to ensure that Ontario's publicly funded education system continues to produce skilled, resilient graduates who contribute to the province for years to come.

MODERN CLASSROOMS FOR A MODERN ONTARIO

“Aging technology is not keeping up with the demands of modern teaching pedagogy.”

- Carlo Cappello,
Catholic Teacher and Thunder Bay Secondary Unit President

Ontario's future workforce requires strong digital and media literacy, technological competence, and adaptable skills to succeed. Forward-thinking investments in schools are essential to ensure that teachers and students across the province have equitable access to modern technology and infrastructure aligned with tomorrow's needs, to enhance teaching and learning, support accessibility, and expand opportunities in the classroom.

Investment in technologically vibrant, modern classroom resources, with a full suite of school board-provided electronic learning and teaching devices, reliable broadband access, and meaningful professional development opportunities, ensures that:

- Every student in Ontario has the supports to meaningfully engage with curriculum to learn, grow, and thrive.
- Teachers have access to the electronic devices needed to set their students up for success in a rapidly changing global economy.

Inconsistent access to modern technology can create inefficiencies in instruction and limit opportunities for student engagement. Our schools function at their best when we have dependable tools that allow teachers to focus on delivering high-quality instruction rather than compensating for resource gaps.

When vital technologies are limited or inconsistent, students' ability to learn, practice new skills, and build confidence is directly impacted. Not all families can afford to fill these resource gaps at home. Ensuring that every student has dependable access to a full suite of technological resources creates classrooms where success is determined by effort and potential, not by a family's financial circumstances.

To best support students, modernized technology must be supported by meaningful investment in Ontario's school facilities, as we build upon the competitive advantage of our world-class publicly funded education system.

As school buildings age and enrolment grows, Ontario must be proactive and take action to address maintenance, make upgrades, and modernize schools.

Ontario faces a \$17 billion school repair backlog and the Financial Accountability Office of Ontario estimates that it will cost \$31.4 billion over 10 years to clear the infrastructure backlog and maintain school buildings in a state of good repair. Deferring infrastructure maintenance and much-needed upgrades increase long-term costs for taxpayers.

Our competitive advantage, globally and at home, starts in our publicly funded education system. Investing in safe, modern, and technologically vibrant schools strengthens our capacity as we enhance Ontario's productivity and secure our position as a global leader.

CLASSROOMS LED BY QUALIFIED AND CERTIFIED TEACHERS – DEDICATED TO STUDENTS; DEDICATED TO THEIR PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

“When schools rely on unqualified people, student learning suffers and student safety is at risk.”

***- Mary Catherine Hogan,
Catholic Teacher and Ottawa Unit President***

Ontario’s teachers are highly trained, dedicated professionals who invest their time, energy, and passion into nurturing the potential within each student and helping them to become productive members of society. Ensuring that every classroom is led by a qualified and certified teacher is essential to maintaining strong educational standards, student safety, and system performance.

But a growing teacher shortage – which is actually a recruitment and retention crisis – threatens that success, with more classes being covered by unqualified and uncertified people. According to data from the Ontario College of Teachers, 40,000 fully qualified and certified individuals holding Ontario teaching credentials are not teaching.

Every day, Catholic teachers see firsthand how the growing shortage negatively impacts student learning. It is critical that students always have their classroom staffed with a qualified and certified teacher.

For students, addressing the shortage means:

- More dedicated one-on-one time with their teachers.
- More help with reading and math.
- More special education and mental health supports.
- More time focused on building the skills needed to succeed in our fast-paced, global economy.

As a province, we must take immediate action to address the recruitment and retention crisis, by meaningfully collaborating with teachers to strengthen learning and working conditions in our schools.

As part of that process, we need to be doing everything that we can to support teachers’ professional growth, so that they have the training, development, and tools needed to best prepare students for the jobs of tomorrow in a rapidly changing digital landscape.

This starts by ensuring that teachers in classrooms across the province have access to the necessary electronic devices and resources, such as modern laptops and reliable high-speed internet, to carry out their professional responsibilities effectively.

Additionally, teacher-directed professional development, with the time to adapt instructional practices, is essential. Let teachers do what they do best: teach, so that they can train each other, ensure best practices are elevated, and remain laser-focused on their professional growth throughout their careers.

By addressing the growing teacher shortage, ensuring teachers have access to electronic devices, and harnessing the power of teacher-directed professional development, Ontario can ensure that our students are prepared to join the workforce of tomorrow, ready to make our province the most competitive jurisdiction in Canada and the G7.



SUPPORTING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE: RELIABLE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH AND SPECIAL EDUCATION SUPPORTS

“Our most vulnerable students cannot continue to be left behind. Real investments are required to ensure all students receive the staffing and individualized supports they’re entitled to, not just in principle, but in practice.”

- David Rosso,
Catholic Teacher and Northeastern Unit Release Officer

Ontario schools are supporting a growing number of students with diverse and complex learning needs. Social isolation, anxiety, and dysregulation impact more families and children than ever. A proactive, early intervention approach can reduce costs while ensuring that every student has the opportunity to graduate, gain the skills that employers need, and become a productive member of society with a good paying job.

Every year, Catholic teachers report an increased prevalence of complex student needs, autism spectrum disorders, mental health challenges, learning disabilities, and overlapping social and emotional needs. Across the province, more and more students require specialized supports, but access to timely assessments and interventions remains a challenge.

Special education funding must reflect real needs. We cannot leave our most vulnerable students behind. To be proactive and to help every student thrive, we must prioritize investment in frontline, school-based professional supports, including educational assistants, psychologists, speech-language pathologists, child and youth workers, social workers, and other professional services.

When funding does align with need, schools face difficult decisions about staffing, program availability, and service delivery. Teachers are often forced to balance competing classroom needs without sufficient access to specialized supports, affecting both students with identified needs and their peers.

Ontario’s students are also facing growing mental health pressures. Research shows that up to 70 per cent of mental health challenges emerge by adolescence, yet young people remain the least likely age group to receive adequate care. Anxiety, depression, trauma, emotional dysregulation, and learning-related challenges are appearing earlier and with greater intensity. If we are truly committed to putting students first, our actions as a province must reflect that.

A survey of more than 10,000 students in Grades 7 to 12 found that 51 per cent report moderate-to-serious psychological distress – double the rate reported a decade ago.

Teachers support student well-being every day, but they cannot replace trained special education or mental health professionals. When students lack access to appropriate supports:

- Learning disruptions increase
- Student absenteeism rises
- Behavioural challenges intensify
- Families experience added stress

Expanded school-based special education and mental health supports allow challenges to be addressed early – improving academic outcomes while reducing long-term pressure on health care and social services. Supporting students proactively is compassionate governance, fiscally responsible policy, and necessary to ensure that students graduate with the critical skills that employers need.



A SHARED COMMITMENT TO ONTARIO'S FUTURE

We believe everyone involved in Ontario's publicly funded education system shares a common goal: supporting student success and building a stronger, more prosperous province. We may approach issues from different perspectives, but we all want to best serve Ontarians through practical solutions that strengthen student outcomes, build public confidence in schools, deliver long-term value for families, and set Ontario up to be the most competitive economy in Canada and the G7.

The priorities outlined in this document reflect what Catholic teachers, families, and school communities consistently identify as essential: stable investment, smaller class sizes, safe learning environments, and modern resources that prepare students for the future.

Catholic teachers are proud of the work happening every day in classrooms across Ontario. We see firsthand both the strengths of the system and the opportunities to strengthen it further. With practical, evidence-informed policy decisions and ongoing collaboration between teachers, education workers, and the government, Ontario can continue building an education system that serves students and families.

This document is intended as a foundation for continued dialogue. By focusing on shared values and practical, results-driven solutions, we can strengthen Ontario's education system and support long-term economic growth in an increasingly globalized world.

Catholic teachers remain ready to collaborate constructively with the government to protect what works and strengthen what can be improved. Together, we can ensure Ontario's publicly funded schools remain safe, stable, and world-class – preparing students for success in school, in life, and in the jobs of tomorrow. Let's invest in students and unlock our economic future, as we create good-paying jobs, attract investment, lower costs and keep life affordable for taxpayers, harness our global potential, and champion Ontario's long-term prosperity.





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