

# Backgrounder

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## Ford Conservative Government's Problematic Proposed Changes to Publicly Funded Education

The Ford government has introduced a number of sweeping and broad changes to publicly funded education. Many of these proposed changes are problematic and counter-productive. The following outlines Catholic teachers' concerns around several proposals from Education Minister Lecce and the Ford Conservative government.

### Literacy Education

Catholic teachers firmly believe that every child has the right to learn to read – to literacy – and we recognize that this issue continues to disproportionately impact students from equity-deserving communities. However, the Minister's announcement raises many questions, and potential concerns.

While Catholic teachers support the introduction of an early screening tool as one part of a broader approach, the government has flatly ignored the recommendations in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Right to Read* report – a report the government itself commissioned – which called for the hiring of additional and dedicated staff to administer any screening tool. Instead, the government seemingly will require classroom teachers to administer the screening, in an attempt to avoid making necessary investments.

If already-overburdened classroom teachers are required to take on these additional responsibilities, it will inevitably decrease the time teachers have to engage in small- and whole-group instruction, lessening opportunities for vital student-teacher interaction and ongoing assessment. This is counter-productive to literacy success.

Going "back to basics" on literacy instruction threatens to reduce the complexities of learning into a one-size-fits-all approach, imposing a single mode of instruction on all students. This will undermine teachers' ability to use their professional judgement to meet students' individual needs, and will almost certainly see students fall through the cracks.

What is more, Minister Lecce announced yesterday that the government plans to hire one additional literacy support educator for every almost 2,850 students. As a result, any positive impact that could be gained from identifying students with special education needs will be blunted by the government's continued refusal to properly invest in the resources and supports necessary to effectively address those needs.

Equally shameful and foolhardy is the government's plan to overhaul the entire language curriculum in four months, ahead of the start of the 2023-24 school year in September. This shows a profound contempt for the time, resources, and planning required to effectively implement curriculum changes. While additional details are still required, it would appear that this is yet another underfunded and rushed Ford government initiative.

### Math Education

Catholic teachers are disappointed that the Ford government is continuing its preoccupation with shortchanging students and disrespecting educators. Despite Minister Lecce's claim of "historic investment," the government's plan around math education amounts to less than 50 cents per student, per day – and offers next to nothing by way of the comprehensive in-class resources and supports that frontline educators have been calling for in order to address pandemic-related learning loss.

Even if the Minister *could* explain how his government intends to entice additional math educators into the profession in the midst of ongoing and severe teacher shortages, the proposed plan to hire 300 educators to support student learning in math would still only amount to roughly one educator for every 6,650 students. Additionally, the continuation of the government's direct payment scheme, to give parents money for "tutoring," will do nothing to redress this gap.

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