

Education Is The Key To Empowerment And A More Prosperous Ontario

The next generation needs a government that's here for them.

The best investment a government can make is in the next generation. Instead of seeing children as a fiscal burden, the Ontario government should work its hardest to empower students in K-12 education so that they can lead our province into the future and make Ontario the best it can be.

My education plan is intended not just to empower our students, but to send them a message that previous generations will stand behind them throughout their lives, and not use them to balance a budget or score political points.

Undoing the damage done by the Ford Conservatives won't be easy, but we owe it to our children and youth to not just return to the status quo, but to be bold and build on our success to make Ontario's education system the best in Canada. As part of my education plan, I am committing to achieving a high-school graduation rate of 90%.

Here's how we'll succeed.

1. Acing the basics

A. Reversing Conservative cuts

- Our children should never be used as leverage in union negotiations or to find savings. One of my first acts in government will be reversing the harmful Conservative cuts to K-12 education that have left our students in crowded and underfunded classrooms. This will include a commitment to return to the average class sizes under the previous Liberal government and adding more curriculum content on indigenous history and ways of knowing.

B. Securing long-term predictable funding

- For too long, education funding has been subject to short-term decision-making of the government in power. Under my leadership, securing long-term predictable funding for school boards will be a priority. I will conduct a full funding formula review. This will also include ensuring sufficient support for students with special needs, in particular in the North where access to specialists is limited.

C. Ensuring a successful learning environment

- Cost-cutting has forced our children to take mandatory online courses to graduate and to deal with outdated curricula, while waiting for the Conservatives to change the classroom materials that only satisfy party ideologues. Under my leadership, mandatory online courses will be eliminated

and core academic curricula will be updated according to expert opinion only. I will encourage e-learning through support for broadband infrastructure, especially in rural and northern communities.

- We know that standardized testing has merit to maintain public confidence in Ontario's education system. However, other forms of testing including random testing and classroom testing are also valid. I would cancel standardized testing in Grade 3 and provide resources for classroom assessment in younger grades.
- I would require school boards to collect more detailed demographic data on student learning and well-being.

2. Building on the Foundations

A. Increasing practical and exploratory learning opportunities

- Across our province, students are learning in an environment with fewer classes that explore passions and teach practical skills required in everyday life. Under my leadership, increasing the number of courses teaching practical life skills and exploratory topics will be a key focus of any education strategy. Support for maker spaces in elementary schools will be introduced. Grade 9 will be the year to explore all career pathways including skilled professions.
- I will put an emphasis on STEAM, which consists of science, technology, engineering, arts, and math. This will include a review of the math curriculum by experts and having trained math teachers in elementary schools.

B. Preparing the next generation for the job market

- A key purpose of our education system is to prepare the next generation of workers for the requirements of the job market. In today's schools, however, opportunities for students to gain technical training and learn how their studies apply to career paths are lacking, making career choices difficult. I will focus on increasing the number of career and technical programs so that students can gain the practical experience and knowledge necessary to succeed in the job market.

C. Supporting teachers and aides

- We have well-trained teachers in this province, and we need to trust their professional judgement. I will create more space for teachers' professional judgement and for innovative ideas to be heard.

D. Formalizing family engagement

- I will introduce revised report cards with the aim to provide parents with a simple and more complete understanding of their child's progress.
- I will restore the Parents Reaching Out Grants that support local School Council activities.

3. Lending a helping hand

A. Creating a healthy, safe, and productive environment in our schools

- Bullying, violence, and mental health issues are unfortunate realities for too many children in today's school systems. If we want our children to meet their full potential, we must focus on supporting them mentally and physically by ensuring our schools are safe and healthy environments. If elected, I will order a full review into specialized staffing levels and resources so that we have the necessary tools available for students to succeed.
- I will introduce 60 minutes of physical activity for students each day.
- I will allocate sufficient funding to keep schools in a good state of repair, and provide a healthy learning environment for students and educators.
- I recently heard from a young person that when he was in high school, a friend of his growing up did not always attend school, as his parents were scared that Children's Aid would take their son if he went to school unfed. I would introduce school nutrition programs on a province-wide basis.
- I will require that mental health coverage for children and young people under 30 is covered by OHIP (see also my Take Flight program for post-secondary education). This will include reintroducing the abandoned plan to have a mental health worker in every high school.