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RE: OPSBA 2022 Questions to the Green Party of Ontario

Dear Cathy,

Thank you for sending your questions to the Ontario Greens. We appreciate the opportunity to speak on these issues that matter to students and their families in this province. I am happy to provide you with a response on behalf of the party.

Sincerely,

Madeleine Crist
Office Manager
Green Party of Ontario

2022 Questions to the PC Party of Ontario and Opposition Parties

1. As schools transition from the COVID-19 school experience, how does your party plan to address the heightened realities of mental health and well-being, student re-engagement, learning recovery and issues of equity, diversity, inclusion and human rights to ensure student readiness to learn the skills, attitudes, values and knowledge necessary in today's complex global context?

Ontario Greens plan to improve the school experience for students post-COVID, by addressing the significant steps that need to be taken to improve student's mental health, well-being, and their readiness to learn.

We plan to strengthen in-school learning through a variety of means:

- Opposing any move toward mandatory e-learning and hybrid learning models
- Capping grades 4 to 8 class sizes to 24 students and kindergarten to 26 students
- Ensuring the updated funding formula takes into account the unique needs of remote and rural schools.
- Increasing funding for enhanced outdoor education, greenspace in school yards, and an improved curriculum on environmental topics such as food literacy and climate change

- Eliminating the EQAO and updating the elementary curriculum to reduce prescribed student outcomes
- Implementing a province-wide nutritious school lunch program
- Improvements to the learning environment including better ventilation, energy efficiency retrofits, and electric school buses

We would support children with additional needs, including:

- Ensuring the updated formula includes adequate funding for ESL grants, special education assistants, counsellors, and other specific supports to provide equitable access to learning and school activities for all students.
- Addressing the growing waitlist for support with children with Autism: working with experts to identify improvements to the OPA program
- Working with the federal government to develop a National Autism Strategy
- Providing educators training to help them address student behavioural issues and support students with a wide spectrum of needs

To improve mental health care for students, we would:

- Make investments to ensure students can easily connect to a community mental health professional at or near primary and secondary schools
- Ensure mental health, wellness and resiliency training is included across the education system
- Implement a curriculum that covers issues like mental health, coping skills, and stress management
- Reduce wait times to 30 days or less for children and youth by investing in frontline mental health care workers.
- Invest in expanding services for youth who face service gaps as they age out of the youth system of care.

To address systemic racism, diversity, equity and inclusion, we would:

- Address racism in schools with mandatory collection and reporting of race-based data for student, teacher and staff populations, as well as implementing standard procedures around the reporting of incidents of racism.
- Work with school boards to ensure recruitment and retention practices for staff are transparent and reflect the diversity of Ontario's population and ensure culturally relevant and responsive programming is included in mandatory staff training.
- End streaming in our education system to ensure equity for all students.
- Immediately remove all Resource Officers from Ontario schools.
- Establish clearly visible all-gender washrooms and update school communications to become more gender inclusive, recognising that gender exists on a spectrum.
- Update the curriculum to include informed discussions of anti-Black racism, 2SLGBTQIA+ prejudice, and all forms of discrimination across subject areas.
- Restore funding for the Indigenous curriculum program and work with Indigenous educators and community leaders to develop a mandatory curriculum on colonialism and residential schools, treaties, and Indigenous histories and experiences.

2. Boards continue to stress the need for local flexibility in order to balance their operating budgets and meet unique local cost pressures and needs. Will your party consider re-establishing the Local Priorities Grant to allow specific local board initiatives, meet funding challenges and support the achievement and well-being of all students?

Ontario Greens would establish an independent review of Ontario's education funding formula so it adequately reflects student needs. We would review this formula every five years and ensure it includes funding for ESL grants, special education assistants, counselors, and other specific supports. This updated formula would also take into account the unique needs of remote and rural schools.

3. Knowing and acknowledging that many First Nations students already face significant gaps in learning outcomes and achievement, often two to three year gaps by comparison to their nonIndigenous public school counterparts, and knowing the impact the pandemic has had on remote learning for students, what would your party propose to do to mitigate learning loss specific to the unique challenges and needs face by many First Nation students across many Indigenous communities in the province particularly those in remote areas?

Addressing inequalities faced by First Nations students in the education system is a necessary step in the reconciliation process. The government has a legal and moral obligation to work with Indigenous communities – with full partnership, participation, and respect. This begins by working with the federal government to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Ontario Greens would establish true nation-to-nation relationships with Indigenous peoples.

We would ensure school boards and schools would recognize First Nations, Métis and Inuit Elders as knowledge keepers and educators, and recognize their role in transmitting cultural knowledge to the younger generation. This would include increasing access to Elders and guest speakers in schools and making sure Elders/guest speakers are representative of all First Nations, Métis and Inuit students represented in the board.

Other important steps Ontario Greens would take include restoring funding for the Indigenous curriculum program and working with Indigenous educators and community leaders to develop a mandatory curriculum on colonialism and residential schools, treaties, and Indigenous histories and experiences.

Ontario Greens would require anti-racism and anti-oppression training for all public sector employees and legislators. We will address racism in schools with mandatory collection and reporting of race-based data for student, teacher and staff populations, as well as implementing standard procedures around the reporting of incidents of racism.

We also commit to engaging education workers, board administrators, education researchers, and Black and Indigenous families to help guide de-streaming to ensure student success. Additionally, we would work with school boards to ensure recruitment and retention practices for staff are transparent and reflect the diversity of Ontario's population. We would also ensure culturally relevant and responsive programming is included in mandatory staff training.

We also need to address the inequities in the system that put additional pressure and stressors on Indigenous youth. For example Ontario Greens will address the housing crisis that has hit Indigenous peoples particularly hard by funding 22,000 Indigenous-owned and operated permanent homes under an Urban and Rural Indigenous Housing Strategy. The strategy and implementation would be led by Indigenous communities to create homes for Indigenous peoples living in Ontario. We will provide properly funded Indigenous-led supports for survivors of residential school trauma. We will publish annual progress reports and assess long-term trends and indicators in areas such as suicide, mental health, chronic diseases, and availability of appropriate health services to ensure equity in access to care. We will increase the number of Indigenous-led health centres, youth programming, crisis support teams, and support suicide-prevention training.

4. What concrete actions will your party take to promote and facilitate the elimination of systemic racism and oppression within the policy, practices and structures in our public education system?

Ontario Greens are committed to eliminating systemic racism and oppression, and making equity a pillar of public education. We would:

- Create an anti-racism strategy for public education
- Update the curriculum to include informed discussions of anti-Black racism and all forms of discrimination across subject areas
- Address racism in schools through the mandatory collection and reporting of race-based data for student, teacher, and staff populations
- Work with school boards to ensure recruitment and retention practices for staff are transparent, and reflect Ontario's population diversity. We would also ensure culturally relevant programming is part of mandatory staff training
- Implement standard procedures around the reporting of incidents of racism
- Engage education workers, board administrators, education researchers, and Black and Indigenous families to help guide de-streaming to ensure student success
- Remove all Resource Officers from schools
- Update the curriculum to include informed discussions of anti-Black racism, 2SLGBTQIA+ prejudice, and all forms of discrimination across subject areas.

5. How would your party work towards maintaining labour peace in our school system?

Education workers should be permanently protected with fair wages and paid sick leave.

Additionally, Ontario Greens would work towards maintaining labour peace in Ontario's school system by:

- Immediately repealing Bill 124 and the problematic sections of Bill 106 and allow all public sector workers to bargain collectively for fair wages and working conditions.
- Ensuring the protection of unionized education workers collective bargaining rights.

- Ensuring consistent and fair labour standards and working conditions for all faculty, including contract faculty.
- Establishing an independent review of Ontario's education funding formula so it adequately reflects student needs, and review the formula every five years to make funding decisions less political
- Consulting regularly with education providers and when any changes to the system are implemented

6. Is your party committed to working together with public school boards and do you support the current form of school board governance?

Ontario Greens would update school board governance by working to improve the diversity of representation on the boards as well as to address the systemic racism that exists in our education system.

We would ensure that Ontario school boards would have an Indigenous Education Advisory Council as required under the Ontario First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Education Policy Framework Implementation Plan. School boards would be required to make sure the Councils, and any other places where First Nations, Métis and Inuit students are discussed, are representative of each of the Indigenous communities that are represented in the school board, to ensure that distinct needs and perspectives of students and families are addressed.

Ontario Greens would ensure all school boards and schools adopt trauma-informed and culturally safe approaches including by providing guidance, resources and supports. We would ensure school boards and schools create trauma-informed and culturally safe school environments and provide comprehensive, sustained and job-embedded training to educators on trauma-informed and culturally safe practices. Additionally, we need to address racism in schools with mandatory collection and reporting of race-based data for student, teacher and staff populations, as well as implementing standard procedures around the reporting of incidents of racism. We would work with school boards to ensure recruitment and retention practices for educators and staff are transparent and reflect the diversity of Ontario's population. We would also immediately remove all Resource Officers from Ontario schools.

Are there any other specific education-related platform pieces you would like to highlight?

Ontario Greens believe in a strong, public education system and would work to continue to strengthen it. That includes ending mandatory e-learning and hybrid learning models, capping grades 4 to 8 class sizes to at least 24 students and kindergarten to at least 26 students, eliminating the EQAO standardised testing and updating the elementary curriculum to reduce prescribed student outcomes. We would also increase funding for enhanced outdoor education, greenspace in school yards, and enhanced curriculum content on critical environmental topics such as food literacy and climate change and implement a province-wide nutritious school lunch program.

Because the learning environment is essential for positive student outcomes, some other key education-related pieces of our platform are:

- Addressing the repair backlog for Ontario public schools
- Allocating funds to ensure schools comply with the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Providing funding for schools to make energy efficiency and ventilation improvements
- Providing funding for schools to purchase zero emission electric buses to replace retired diesel buses
- Retrofit public buildings like schools to dramatically reduce their energy consumption, improve ventilation and make them more resilient and fund 100 geothermal systems for schools across Ontario