



Survey Response: Ontario Public School Boards' Association

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?

Mental Health and Well-Being

Increasing access to mental health for all Ontarians – including children and youth – is a cornerstone of our platform. Our mental health strategy has a unique focus on children and youth. In addition to training 3,000 new mental health and addictions professionals, our government will hire 1,000 more mental health professionals for children to eliminate wait times for services. We'll also make mental health first aid training more available to school staff.

Nutritious food helps kids learn and focus, and fundamentally supports their well-being. An Ontario Liberal government would work to guarantee that no student goes hungry. That's why we'll provide a free Ontario-grown breakfast for every K-12 student who needs one by expanding the Student Nutrition Program.

Student Re-Engagement and Learning Recovery

While the Ford Conservatives try to cut education funding and raise class sizes, we'll cap class sizes at 20 students in every grade across the province – starting first with schools where this would have the biggest impact. So many families told us how the pandemic greatly disrupted the education of their kids with special needs. Because routine and focused attention are so important for these students, we'll hire a new special education worker for every school – more than 5,000 professionals – to reduce wait times for services and help close learning gaps, including additional support for students with autism and reading disabilities

Our government would end mandatory online learning – which the Ford Conservatives have implemented as a means of cutting publicly-funded education, increasing class sizes and saving money by shortchanging students.

The Ontario Liberal government would also create an option for all current high school students to register in a formal Grade 13 at no penalty to them or their school board, eliminating the 34 credit funding policy. This new grade will allow students to make up for learning and credits where needed, as well as offer new credits we'll develop together with the education sector in mental health and resilience, financial literacy and taxes, experiential or co-op placements and post-high school pathway planning.

Addresses Issues of Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Human Rights

What students learn in the classroom should not only be up-to-date and modern, but they should also be able to see themselves reflected. We'll review and update curriculum and evaluation tools – working closely with educators, school boards, parents and experts to make sure lessons and learning materials include diverse communities.

Ontario cannot advance goals of equity, diversion, inclusion and human rights without examining our past wrongs and taking meaningful action on reconciliation. We need to



make sure that reconciliation is instilled in the next generation of Ontarians – which starts with our education system. Our government would increase the mandatory learning on the painful history of Canada’s residential schools across the K-12 curriculum while also learning about and celebrating the significant contributions of Indigenous peoples to Ontario and Canada.

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?

The way Ontario funds schools is based on a decades-old, one-size-fits-all formula – one that forces smaller and rural schools to close while also failing to upgrade schools in larger, fast-growing communities. It’s time to refresh that formula top to bottom – including a review to ensure equitable access to Education Development Charges. We’ll also consider the needs of Franco-Ontarians, students with special needs, people living in rural and Northern Ontario and those in fast-growing neighbourhoods in this new formula. Our \$375 million investment in special education supports will also create local flexibility in an area that is traditionally underfunded compared to board expenditures.

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 non Indigenous 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?

We are committed to implementing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Calls to Action by working with and learning from Indigenous peoples and First Nations, guided by the principles of self-determination, reciprocity, and mutual recognition of nationhood. This includes increasing support for the option to learn First Nations languages and allowing Indigenous elders to teach Indigenous language classes. Our investments in smaller class sizes, mental health and special education resources will also enable school boards to create the conditions to close learning gaps built up through the pandemic.

We’ll also partner to expand and strengthen Ontario’s Indigenous Institutes to increase opportunities for diplomas, certificates and degrees in culturally enriched settings with permanent funding and invest \$2 million in First Nations Public Libraries since only 30% of First Nations reserves have libraries.

Finally, we’ll continue to support the investigation and commemoration of former residential school sites across Ontario and make September 30th – National Day for Truth and Reconciliation – a statutory holiday so there’s an annual occasion for everyone to learn and reflect.

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?



Hate and intolerance have no place in Ontario. We'll reverse the Ford Conservatives' cuts to anti-racism programs and strengthen ways to respond to complaints about racism in public school, health and child welfare systems, led by a stand-alone Minister.

In addition to the initiatives mentioned above, we'll end academic streaming with the appropriate supports – including smaller class sizes, teacher training and additional help for students experiencing learning gaps. We'll also address how streaming can perpetuate anti-Black racism and further segregate students from marginalized backgrounds, including before high school and through special education.

To address anti-Black racism specifically, we'll refresh Ontario's 2017 Anti-Black Racism Strategy. In education, we'll make sure Black history, literature and the contributions of Black Canadians are featured in the curriculum.

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

The pandemic has been exceptionally difficult for teachers, education workers and school administrators, who have been some of the most important and courageous frontline workers in the province. An Ontario Liberal government will repeal the wage-capping Bill 124. We will freely negotiate new collective agreements in good faith with all public sector employees. While the Ford Conservatives planned to fire 10,000 teachers, we'll do exactly the opposite – with the Ontario Liberal Party proposing to hire 10,000 more teachers and 5,000 more special education staff.

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

An Ontario Liberal government would listen to associations and elected school boards on the commitments we're making around learning. We'll protect the rights of parents, students and education workers to be heard in evidence-based decision making by reconvening the Education Partnership Table.

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

We are committed to strengthening Ontario's public education system. Here are some of the additional ways we're committed to doing that:

- Modernize school report cards to make them easier to understand and more meaningfully communicate progress to families
- End EQAO assessments so students and teachers can focus on making up for lost learning during the pandemic. Since we'll need a way to measure how our kids are catching up in math and literacy, we'll collaborate with parents, teachers and education experts to develop a new assessment strategy to capture and address the pandemic's impact on learning
- Consult on how best to increase equitable access to French immersion programs and recruit, train and retain more French-language teachers, including simplifying the hiring process for qualified newcomers



- Increase funding for international languages in class sizes of 20 since knowing multiple languages is so important in our globally-connected world
- Invest an additional \$10 billion to build and repair more schools by cancelling Highway 413
- Put new technology and devices in classrooms to close the digital divide, increasing the existing budget for such resources by \$25 million
- Support schools as community hubs, reverse budget cuts to after-hours community programs in schools and encourage schools and community services to share buildings so students and their families can easily access services, especially in rural and Northern Ontario