



ETFO: 7 Recommendations to Fix Ontario's Education Funding Formula

1. That the Ontario government revise its 2017-2018 Grants for Student Needs to increase support for special education funding to school boards to address the challenge of meeting the needs of children with learning exceptionalities and mental health issues.
2. That the government conduct an independent, external review of the statistical model it uses for funding special education to evaluate its effectiveness in meeting actual student need.
3. That the education funding formula be amended to increase school boards' capacity to deliver front-line children's services by paraprofessionals such as school counsellors, psychologists, behavioural counsellors, social workers and speech language pathologists so that students have greater access to services and shorter wait times.
4. That the education funding formula be amended to ensure the average class size of grades 4 to 8 does not exceed 22 students, the current average class size for secondary students.
5. That the government continue the reduction of Kindergarten class size beyond 2018-2019 through a systematic and sustained application of class size caps that bring Kindergarten class size in line with other primary grades.
6. That the government address the current \$612 per pupil differential in funding for elementary and secondary students by increasing Pupil Foundation Grant allocations for elementary specialist teachers, guidance, librarians, learning and library materials, classroom supplies and computers.
7. That the government establish, through legislation, a comprehensive evidence-based review of the education funding formula every five years to determine its effectiveness in supporting high quality public education.

Shortchanging Ontario Students Highlights of Report

Shortchanging Ontario Students: An Overview and Assessment of Education Funding in Ontario is an August 2017 report by the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) and economist Hugh Mackenzie of Hugh Mackenzie & Associates. Among its findings:

- Between 1995-96, when the Harris government was first elected, and 1998-99, the first year of the new education funding formula, the Conservative government cut a total of \$1.5 billion from education. In today's dollars, that amount equals \$2.2 billion.

- Elected in 2003, the Liberal government increased education funding – largely through important new initiatives such as smaller primary class size and introducing full-day Kindergarten – but didn't fully address the structural cuts to programs 'beyond the basics' made by the previous government. It has adjusted key funding benchmarks to inflation but has not addressed the adequacy of the benchmark funding numbers themselves.
- When enrolment, inflation, the cost of new programs and the element of catch-up reflected in education system salaries and benefits are considered, education funding in 2017-2018 is roughly equivalent to the level recommended by the Rozanski Task Force Report on education funding in 2002. While that is a positive sign, it essentially reflects *no progress at all* in addressing the fundamental funding issues built into the base funding formula introduced for the 1998-99 school year.

Shortchanging Ontario Students

The Harris government made fundamental cuts to education funding. The 1997 funding formula:

- didn't fund teacher salaries to actual levels, forcing school boards to make cuts to other programs like English as a Second Language (ESL) and for students at risk;
- reduced overall support for special education;
- underfunded costs of school board maintenance and renewal, forcing school boards to defer expenditures on these areas; and
- narrowed the definition of the "classroom" to exclude art, music and library services from core funding.

Elementary students continue to be shortchanged. Grades 4 to 8 class sizes are the largest in the K-12 system for no pedagogical reason and elementary students get significantly less support for specialist teachers, library services, guidance, classroom supplies and computers.

Special education and programs that support English-language learners and students at risk as well as funding for school operations and maintenance have all been short-changed.

Funding for special education has shifted from needs-based bottom-up funding to formula-based funding with no direct link to individual students' needs. This has had profound implications for students, parents, teachers and special education administrators. There is no longer a link between needs and funding that can serve as a guide to available services. There is no longer a link between identified special education needs and the additional resources required to address those needs.

There is no basis on which to assess the adequacy of special education funding.

While the Liberal government promised, in its 2007 election platform, to undertake a review of the funding formula, there has been no full-scale review since 2002, the year the Rozanski Task Force Report was released.

Because of this, there is a total lack of accountability on the part of the provincial government for the role its funding plays in the system's performance.

ETFO is committed to building better schools. Its *Building Better Schools* education agenda can be viewed at buildingbetterschools.ca

The full report of *Shortchanging Ontario Students: An Overview and Assessment of Education Funding in Ontario* can be viewed at etfo.ca.