



People advocating for safe, well-maintained public schools

FIX OUR SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN:

Founded in Spring 2014, we continue to be a grassroots, non-partisan, parent-led campaign creating a large network of citizens across Ontario who all expect that:

- Every publicly funded school in Ontario is a **safe, well-maintained, healthy building that provides an environment conducive to learning and working**
- **The \$15.9-billion of disrepair** across all 72 Ontario school boards is eliminated
- Publicly funded schools are **funded as critical public infrastructure** - on par with transit
- **Public education is a priority** within every party's platform in the 2018 provincial election

PROGRESS IN RECENT YEARS:

We are pleased to point to several positive steps the Wynne government has taken in recent years, in response to our calls to action:

1. In June 2016, Education Minister Hunter announced a substantial increase in annual renewal funding for Ontario's schools to \$1.4-billion/year, retroactive to the 2015/16 school year.
2. In August 2016, Ontario's Ministry of Education publicly released disrepair data for school all 72 Ontario school boards and followed through with an updated release of data in Fall 2017. We would expect that this level of tracking of and transparency into disrepair in Ontario's schools is now firmly embedded in the Ministry's approach and processes.

However, much work remains to be done to truly fix Ontario's schools. Since 2002, the **repair backlog in Ontario's publicly funded schools has increased from \$5.6 billion to \$15.9 billion, tripling in 15 years.**

Economist Hugh Mackenzie's recently issued report, entitled: "*Ontario's deteriorating schools: The fix is not in*" confirms that despite the significant increase in provincial funding for school renewal since 2015, \$1.4 billion/year is simply not enough to make up for the 20 years when provincial funding was a mere fraction of what it ought to have been – not only for renewal but for school capital projects and operational maintenance in schools. In fact, the report highlights that even with **current increased provincial funding levels for school renewal, the repair backlog will continue to increase.**



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WHAT IS NEEDED TO TRULY FIX ONTARIO'S SCHOOLS:

1. **A commonly understood and measurable standard of good repair** must be developed and implemented for Ontario schools. This standard must:
 - Take into consideration not only FCI data but also issues such as:
 - Water quality
 - Air quality
 - Vermin
 - Mould
 - Asbestos
 - Fire and electrical code
 - Temperatures of classrooms
 - Be applied not only to permanent school buildings but also to **portables**, which often end on a school site for over a decade, instead of as a temporary measure.

Fix Our Schools has been asking for a health and safety standard for children in schools since our very first submission to the Ministry back in December 2015 and is disheartened that there has been no movement towards fulfilling this very reasonable request.

Even more disheartening is the fact that, **as far back as 2005, the Toronto Parents Network (TPN) – an organization co-founded by Premier Wynne – was calling for a health and safety standard for children in schools.** We are including as an attachment the damning 2006 report written by TPN called, *“Health, Safety and Learning: Schools in Crisis”* as relevant to today’s situation because should a similar report be written today on all Ontario’s schools, we would almost certainly find similar - or worse - results.

2. **A new approach to school closures** that is not focused on utilization rates but, instead, determines the importance of a school to its surrounding community and considers the implications for student access to programs and commute times. **If a school is open, then its capital costs and operational maintenance costs must be fully funded by the provincial government, regardless of the utilization of that school.** Additionally, the condition of a school relative to other schools nearby must be a consideration in any acceptable new approach to school closures. To ensure efficient use of renewal funding by school boards, school boards ought to be incented to keep a school in a relatively good state of repair open instead of a nearby one in a relatively poor state of repair.
3. **An updated provincial regulation that guides the collection and use of Education Development Charges (EDCs)** such that developers contribute to the local school infrastructure from which they ultimately profit.



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Fix Our Schools has been asking the Ministry to update the provincial regulation guiding the collection and use of Education Development Charges since 2014, when our campaign launched. We have been **consistently disappointed with the Ministry's slow response to updating what is clearly an outdated and inequitable piece of provincial legislation.**

Momentum is building across the province for change to this regulation and we look forward to a time when **developers, who clearly profit from choosing to build in communities with "good local schools" and "good transit", are contributing to the public school infrastructure from which they profit.**

4. The following renewal and capital funding is needed each year to truly fix Ontario's schools and the provincial approach to funding schools in this province:
 - a. **Keep special School Condition Improvement (SCI) funding at \$1 billion per year** until the repair backlog is gone.
 - b. **Increase annual School Renewal Allocation (SRA) funding from the current \$357 million per year to \$1.7 billion per year**, and maintain that funding at 3% of the replacement value of Ontario's schools to conform to the generally accepted level of renewal funding required to keep schools in a state of good repair.
 - c. **Create a new and separate capital stream of funding to replace the 346 school buildings** across the province determined to be too expensive to repair as of the most recent provincial review cycle; an estimated \$3.9 billion one-time capital injection amortized over 40 years would result in a **new budgetary expense of \$100 million per year.**
5. **Increase the current operational maintenance budget by \$165 million per year** (an 8.7% increase from current levels, based on industry averages) and ensure that the formula used to determine this annual figure explicitly recognizes the underlying drivers of differences in operating costs for schools in the province including: labour costs in the community, heating costs and climate, age & design of school buildings.



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So to recap, in order to truly fix Ontario's schools, the Province must commit to:

- Developing and implementing a standard of good repair for Ontario's schools
- Fully funding the capital and operational maintenance costs of all open schools
- Updating the provincial regulation that guides the collection and use of EDCs
- Maintaining existing special SCI funding at \$1-billion/year until the repair backlog is eliminated

As well, the Province must commit to the following **new annual funding**:

- + an additional \$1.3 billion/year in renewal funding
- + an additional \$100 million/year to cover amortized cost of rebuilding 346 schools
- + an additional \$165 million/year for operational maintenance in schools

= **AN ADDITIONAL \$1.6 BILLION OF ANNUAL FUNDING** until the \$15.9 repair backlog is eliminated and the \$1 billion of SCI funding can be redirected

We know this is a lot of new money to be asking for in the provincial budget. However, we also know that:

- Schools are a critical element of our public infrastructure
- 2 million Ontario children spend their days in school buildings and need safe, healthy, well-maintained places to learn
- Teachers, education workers, adult learners, and preschoolers who attend childcare facilities in local public schools also need safe, healthy, well-maintained environments in which to work and learn
- Repairs in Ontario's schools are only going to get more expensive if we do not fully address the \$15.9 billion repair backlog as soon as possible.
- School boards can only be effective and efficient in carrying out their school repair plans if the **Province provides adequate and stable funding**

So, if we collectively agree that we value our children and we value their education then we will start to do what it takes to truly fix Ontario's schools and fix the broken provincial funding approach to education that has allowed \$15.9 billion of disrepair to accumulate in Ontario's schools.



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COMMUNITY HUBS – A GOAL WORTH CONTINUING TO PURSUE:

Fix Our Schools realizes the use of schools as community hubs as a goal worth continuing to pursue. While complex and involving multiple levels of government and multiple stakeholders, we would make the following recommendations, which have been outlined in previous submissions also:

1. Allocate the renewal and operational maintenance costs in proportion to usage by the school boards, municipalities, various provincial ministries, and various federal ministries that use a given school asset and its surrounding green space as a Community Hub.
2. Design and build new schools with the foresight and intention to use these public assets as Community Hubs in the future, weighing the costs and benefits of building for Community Hub use vs. retrofitting later.