



People advocating for safe, well-maintained public schools

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**FIX OUR SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN:**

*Founded in Spring 2014, we continue to be a non-partisan, parent-led, Ontario-wide campaign focused on ensuring that:*

- Every publicly funded school in Ontario is a **safe, well-maintained, healthy building that provides an environment conducive to learning and working; clearly this has taken on increased significance in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic**
- **The \$16.3-billion+ of disrepair** across all 72 Ontario school boards is eliminated, which depends upon adequate, stable, equitable provincial funding
- Publicly funded schools are **funded as critical public infrastructure**

The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the criticality of school buildings and education to Ontario's children, their families, and our economy. With this new appreciation for the importance of safe, well-maintained, healthy school buildings, we urge the Ford government to start to truly prioritize publicly funded schools and education. These are the second largest line item on every provincial budget, second only to healthcare, and must be prioritized as such.

With this in mind, we are pleased to provide the following input to the Ministry of Education as part of its 2021-22 Education Funding consultation process. **Please note that given the focus of our campaign, our input will be exclusively focused on education funding for schools as infrastructure and for ensuring schools provide safe environments that are conducive to learning.** The topic of "COVID-19 Outbreak Response" is addressed throughout this submission.



- 1. Ensure provincial funding for public schools and education adheres to the principles outlined in the Rozanski Report** Given the Ministry of Education is the sole funder of our publicly funded schools and education system, the Ministry holds responsibility for ensuring the funding formula provides what is actually needed for success. Therefore, we continue to urge your government to adopt the following principles that, according to the **2002 Rozanski Report**, (commissioned by PC Education Minister, Elizabeth Wittmer) **must** guide all funding for publicly funded schools and education in Ontario:

**“Adequacy.** The goals of high program quality, high levels of student achievement, and continuous improvement in both will not be met, without a concomitantly high level of public investment. While financial support is not the only kind of support needed, it is important that it be adequate to the objectives school boards, teachers, and students are being asked to achieve.

**Affordability.** We cannot afford not to provide adequate funding to meet our goals for public education. Our children deserve no less; our economic future requires no less. But education is only one public priority, and taxpayers’ pockets are not bottomless. The Province and the education community must engage in a continuous dialogue and process of assessing need, determining the appropriate level of funding to meet that need, then assessing results, including levels of student achievement, and reassessing need and appropriate level of funding.

**Equity.** Equity means fairness. All Ontario students deserve equitable access to education and to the financial resources necessary for a high-quality education. Equity is not equality. Equality is not always equitable. One size does not fit all.

**Stability.** To plan for continuous improvement, boards and schools need to be able to count on a stable and predictable education funding system. When boards and schools are issued a new or an expanded mandate, they need assurances that they will also be given time to build the capacity to implement the change and resources that are adequate to meet the new demands.

**Flexibility.** Ontario is a vast and diverse province, and the needs of students in one board’s jurisdiction are not necessarily the needs of those in another. The funding system should be both flexible and adaptable to allow boards and schools a certain amount of discretion in assessing local needs and spending part of their funding allocation to address those local needs.

**Accountability.** In the context of Ontario’s publicly-funded education system, reciprocal accountability means that every demand by the public and the Province for improved performance involves a responsibility to provide appropriate resources to meet the demand, and that every investment accepted requires school boards, principals, teachers, and other staff to demonstrate accountability for using those resources efficiently and effectively for the purpose intended.”



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2. **Develop a standard of good repair for all of Ontario’s publicly funded schools.** Fix Our Schools has been asking for a standard of good repair for Ontario’s schools since 2014. Without a defined and commonly understood metric for what school conditions are acceptable in Ontario, there is no reasonable way to assess the outcomes of provincial funding for school infrastructure. Your government must develop a standard that takes into consideration not only Facilities Condition Index (FCI) data but also issues such as:
- Air quality and ventilation in classrooms, which has been cited as key factor in preventing the spread of COVID-19
  - Cleanliness of schools and classrooms, which has also been a focus of preventing the spread of COVID-19
  - Classroom space, which is needed to ensure the physical distancing to prevent the spread of COVID-19
  - Water quality
  - Vermin
  - Mold
  - Asbestos
  - Fire and electrical code
  - Temperatures of classrooms

These same standards must be applied to all **First Nations schools** as well. Furthermore, these standards must be applied not only to permanent school buildings but also to **portables**, which often end up being on a school site for over a decade, instead of as a temporary measure, as originally intended.

3. **Commit the funding required to eliminate the \$16.3-billion+ of disrepair in Ontario’s publicly funded schools.** We have outlined the funding that is actually needed to eliminate the \$16.3-billion+ repair backlog in our previous three funding submissions, and will continue to do so until such time that your government actually begins to provide the funding required to eliminate the unacceptable levels of disrepair in Ontario’s publicly funded schools.

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. Certainly, we have seen this to be true given that **current provincial funding levels for school renewal have resulted in a consistent year-over-year increase in Ontario’s school repair backlog.**

With this in mind, and with the new appreciation of the criticality of school buildings in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge your government to take the following bold



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funding steps to truly fix Ontario's schools and achieve the outcomes deserved by the 2-million students who ought to all be spending their days in school buildings:

- 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**.
- d. **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.

Therefore, to eliminate the \$16.3-billion+ of disrepair in Ontario's publicly funded schools, your government must maintain the existing special SCI funding at \$1-billion/year until the repair backlog is eliminated; and also maintain existing funding for renewal, amortized costs of building new schools, and operational maintenance costs. As well, your government 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 \$16.3-billion+ repair backlog is eliminated and the \$1 billion of SCI funding can be redirected

The \$16.3-billion+ of disrepair that plagues Ontario's publicly funded schools accumulated over decades, so is not going to be solved overnight. However, we look to your provincial government to take the bold steps to invest in our publicly funded schools as critical infrastructure and, in so doing, make a critical investment in our youth, our communities, and our economy. We cannot lose another generation of students learning in abysmal learning conditions. It is **worth noting that had your government adopted this funding approach immediately upon taking power in 2018, schools would have been in significantly better shape to provide safe, robust learning environments amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.** We



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cannot underinvest in critical public infrastructure and then expect it to provide what is needed amidst a crisis situation.

**Reactive repairs waste taxpayer money.** As true conservatives, we know that you will understand how much waste occurs when repairs and maintenance of publicly funded assets are done reactively – instead of proactively. Every homeowner knows that if you wait to replace your roof until the roof is actually leaking, the roof job is a much more expensive undertaking than to have simply replaced your roof proactively. Complications such as water damage, rodents and mold can significantly add to the overall expense. Sadly, because of the chronic and gross underfunding of school repairs for two decades, school boards are in a position that the majority of repairs are done reactively. We know that your government will recognize the waste in that approach and we urge you to please take the bold steps needed to significantly increase funding by \$1.6-billion/year – **on top of the current funding** - to eliminate the \$16.3-billion+ of accumulated disrepair in Ontario’s publicly funded schools as quickly as possible.

**With power comes responsibility and accountability.** In 1998, Mike Harris’ PC government amalgamated school boards and implemented a new funding formula, with school boards relying exclusively on the provincial government for funding. In 2002, the Rozanski report, commissioned by the PC government, identified that \$5.6-billion of disrepair had accumulated in Ontario’s publicly funded schools since the provincial government took over education funding. Furthermore, the Rozanski report identified that the yearly funding provided by the provincial government to school boards for school renewal was less than 1% of the value of the current replacement value of schools, even though established guidelines recommended that governments provide a minimum of 1.5% - 4% of the current facility replacement value of a building for renewal needs each year. The Liberal governments that held power for the 15 years after the Rozanski report allowed the \$5.6-billion of disrepair in Ontario’s publicly funded schools to **triple** to \$15.9-billion. Since the current government came to power in 2018, we’ve seen a further increase to \$16.3-billion+.

Despite the reality that provincial funding to school boards for school repairs and maintenance has been chronically and grossly inadequate and unstable, these same provincial governments failed to take accountability for the resulting disrepair, instead blaming school boards. We urge your government to take accountability and responsibility for these important public assets called schools and to allocate the additional \$1.6-billion/year needed – **on top of the current funding** – to ensure that every one of Ontario’s publicly funded schools is a safe, healthy, well-maintained building that provides an environment conducive to learning and working – even amidst a global pandemic.



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#### **4. Technology and Public Health Nurses in Ontario's Schools**

Although these topics fall outside of our focus of school buildings, they most definitely fall within our focus of seeing Ontario's schools provide safe environments that are conducive to learning. Furthermore, these topics have gained far more importance within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. With this in mind, we urge your government to provide the funding required to:

- a) **Ensure technology is in place and available for both at-home and in-school learning.** When the COVID pandemic shuttered schools back in March, millions of dollars worth of technology was, understandably, taken from Ontario's public schools and redistributed to students who needed this technology in order to access online learning. When Ontario's public schools opened their doors again in September, the majority of the technology that was borrowed was not returned to those schools. Again – for good reasons. Many students opted to attend on-line school this year and, for many high school students in Ontario, online learning is a significant component of their education, if they opted for in-school learning.

However, it makes no sense that your government has failed to provide funding to school boards to buy the technology required for all students in their jurisdiction to learn.

- b) **Ensure Public Health Nurses (PHN) can provide support to all Ontario schools and students.** Public health nurses have a longstanding history of providing **key support in the health of students**, and by extension their families and communities. They have made essential contributions to schools by preventing illnesses, monitoring and treating student health, reducing costs to our health care system, and improving community health. Having a PHN in a school means that not only could small issues like a bandage for a cut knee can be taken care of by a professional (rather than adding to the workload of teachers, principals, and office staff) but that students with conditions such as diabetes could receive support, leveling the playing field for them in their academic day. Similarly, children falling behind in school could be immediately evaluated for vision or hearing issues, and a child going into anaphylaxis after eating an allergen could be treated professionally while waiting for an ambulance, improving their outcome. Of note in the current context, a child showing symptoms of a contagious disease such as COVID-19 could be diagnosed & isolated, preventing outbreaks.



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5. **Provide additional funding for school boards to reasonably meet the 2025 deadline for compliance with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities (AODA) Act.** The goal for Ontario is to be fully accessible by 2025, including publicly funded schools. Clearly, when the current provincial levels of funding don't even allow for school boards to proactively address disrepair, without specific funding for AODA repair and renewal items in schools, school boards cannot reasonably meet the 2025 deadline for full accessibility in schools.
  
6. **Update the provincial regulation that guides the collection and use of Education Development Charges (EDCs).** This provincial regulation is outdated and we urge you to update it so that developers contribute to the local publicly funded school infrastructure from which they ultimately profit. We look forward to a time when developers, who clearly profit from choosing to build in communities with "good local publicly funded schools" and "good transit", are contributing to the public school infrastructure from which they profit. Hundreds of millions of dollars are being left on the table with the current outdated provincial regulation preventing many school boards from collecting EDCs.
  
7. **Release annual updates on school disrepair data.** In 2016, the provincial government began releasing disrepair data on a school-by-school basis for the general public to see. In November 2017, the provincial government updated that disrepair data. In order to measure the outcome of provincial funding for school infrastructure, your government must continue to collect and publicly release disrepair data for every publicly funded school in Ontario. Furthermore, we urge your government in a manner that allows for comparison to the 2017 data release and to:
  - Release disrepair data by school board and by riding
  - Begin collecting and releasing disrepair data for all portables on school sites.



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- 8. Implement 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.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to education funding for the 2021/22 school year.

Kind regards,  
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