



People advocating for safe, well-maintained public schools

Please accept this submission as part of the 2024-25 Consultation process from the Fix Our Schools campaign.

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FIX OUR SCHOOLS CAMPAIGN:

Founded in Spring 2014, we continue to be a non-partisan, parent-led, Ontario-wide campaign working to ensure that:

- Every publicly funded school in Ontario is **safe, well-maintained, healthy, and provides an environment conducive to learning and working.**
- **A Standard of Good Repair** for Ontario's publicly funded schools is developed and implemented, which would include transparent **metrics** for school buildings, portables, and schoolyards. These **standards** and **associated metrics** must include and address:
 - The \$16.8-billion+ of disrepair in school buildings
 - A program to assess current repair backlogs in **portables and schoolyards**
 - Air quality and ventilation
 - Classroom temperatures
 - Accessibility
 - Environmental efficiency & durability
 - Job site safety for school construction projects and maintenance work
 - Drinking water
 - Asbestos
 - Cleanliness
 - Classroom space
 - Vermin, mold
 - Fire and electrical code
- Publicly funded schools receive **adequate, stable, equitable** provincial funding that enables school boards to **meet these provincial standards** and publicly **demonstrate positive outcomes** by **collecting and releasing associated metrics** at regular intervals.



People advocating for safe, well-maintained public schools

INTRODUCTION:

Given the goal of Fix Our Schools, our input here will focus on what is needed from the provincial government to ensure that Ontario's publicly funded school buildings, portables, and schoolyards are safe, healthy, and well-maintained.

To that end, we urge the Ford government to expand the narrow definition of accountability outlined in the 2024-25 Education Funding Consultation Guide to be one of **reciprocal accountability**. As we have stated in many previous submissions to this government, "every demand by the public and 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."

So, while accountability by school boards is imperative and worthy of consult, it must be noted that the provincial government has not lived up to its end of this reciprocal accountability. Quite simply, school boards have not been provided appropriate resources by the provincial government. As proof of this lack of accountability of the provincial government to provide appropriate resources, we point to the fact that the overall repair backlog for all Ontario's schools has continued to grow year-over-year even after provincial funding for school repair and renewal increased to \$1.4-billion/year in 2016. Therefore, we urge this provincial government to hold up **its** end of the reciprocal accountability needed for our public education system to thrive.

On the issue of transparency, we note similar concerns. While demanding enhanced transparency from school boards, the provincial government has demonstrated absolutely zero transparency on disrepair data in Ontario's publicly funded schools. This provincial government has steadfastly refused to release updated disrepair and Facilities Condition Index (FCI) data on Ontario's publicly funded schools since taking office in 2018. Therefore, the public relies upon detailed disrepair data last released by the former provincial government in October 2017. To even obtain rolled up total disrepair data for all Ontario's schools from the Ford government, the public has had to rely upon the Opposition party seeking this information at committee meetings.

Please accept the following recommendations and note that the **numbers presented in our submission have not been indexed for the inflation we've been experiencing over the past 24+ months, so the funding requirements presented in our submission are very conservative.**



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 a funding formula is in place that provides what is 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.”



People advocating for safe, well-maintained public schools

2. **Develop a Standard of Good Repair for all of Ontario's publicly funded schools,** which must include transparent metrics for school buildings, portables, and schoolyards. These standards and metrics must include and address:

- The \$16.8-billion+ of disrepair in school buildings
- A program to assess current repair backlogs in **portables and schoolyards**
- Air quality and ventilation
- Classroom temperatures
- Accessibility
- Environmental efficiency & durability
- Job site safety for school construction projects and maintenance work
- Drinking water
- Asbestos
- Cleanliness
- Classroom space
- Vermin, mold
- Fire and electrical code

Without a defined and commonly understood metric for what conditions are acceptable in Ontario's school buildings, portables and schoolyards, there is no reasonable way to assess the outcomes of provincial funding for school infrastructure.

These same standards must also be applied to all **First Nations schools**.

3. **Commit the adequate, stable funding required to eliminate the \$16.8-billion+ of disrepair in Ontario's publicly funded schools.** We have outlined the funding that is actually **needed** to eliminate the \$16.8-billion+ repair backlog in our previous **seven** funding submissions, and will continue to do so until such time that your government begins to provide the funding required to eliminate the unacceptable levels of disrepair in Ontario's publicly funded school buildings, and to build the new schools required in this province. **As noted above, we would also expect provincial funding to be adequate to address the repair and renewal needs of portables and schoolyards across the aspects noted above, which would require additional provincial funding on top of what is outlined below:**

Despite the significant increase in provincial funding for school renewal since 2016, \$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 when compared to what industry standards would have demanded – not only for renewal but also for school capital projects and operational maintenance in schools. Certainly, we have seen this to be true given



People advocating for safe, well-maintained public schools

that **current provincial funding levels for school renewal have resulted in a consistent year-over-year increase in Ontario's overall school repair backlog.**

With this in mind, and with the new appreciation of the criticality of schools in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we urge your government to take the following bold funding steps to truly fix Ontario's school buildings and achieve the outcomes deserved by the 2-million students who spend 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 industry standard 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 \$16.8-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 \$16.8-billion+ repair backlog in school buildings is eliminated and the \$1 billion of SCI funding can be redirected

The \$16.8-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**



People advocating for safe, well-maintained public schools

our economy. We cannot lose another generation of students learning in abysmal school 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 cannot underinvest in critical public infrastructure and then expect it to provide what is needed amidst a crisis situation.

Reactive repairs waste taxpayer money. When repairs and maintenance of publicly funded assets are done reactively instead of proactively, maintenance is far more expensive. Every homeowner knows that if you wait to replace your roof until the roof is leaking, the roof repair job is a much more expensive undertaking than to have replaced your roof proactively. Complications such as water damage, rodents and mold can significantly add to the overall expense. Due to the chronic and gross underfunding of school repairs for two decades, school boards have been and continue to be in the unfortunate position of addressing most repairs 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 at least \$1.6-billion+/year – **on top of the current funding** - to eliminate the \$16.8-billion+ of accumulated disrepair in Ontario's publicly funded school buildings as quickly as possible. We also urge you to determine the funding required each year to also address disrepair and inadequacies in **schoolyards and portables.**

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 \$16.8-billion+. We do not actually know current disrepair totals because the Ford government has failed to exhibit any transparency on this data and stopped making annual updates and public releases of current disrepair data.

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 and inadequacies, instead blaming school



People advocating for safe, well-maintained public schools

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 school buildings, portables and schoolyards are safe, healthy, well-maintained and that these components of school infrastructure provide environments conducive to learning and working – even amidst a crisis such as a global pandemic.

4. **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 in their school buildings, without specific funding for AODA repair and renewal items in schools, school boards will not meet the imminent 2025 deadline for full accessibility.
5. **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 publicly funded 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.
6. **Release annual updates on school building disrepair data; and start collecting and releasing transparent metrics for portables and schoolyards at regular intervals.** In 2016, the provincial government began releasing disrepair data on a school-by-school basis for the general public to see. October 2017 was the last time that the provincial government updated and released this disrepair data. To measure the outcomes of provincial funding for school infrastructure, your government must not only collect data, but also publicly release disrepair data for every publicly funded school building in Ontario - and begin to collect and share transparent metrics for portables and schoolyards as well.
7. **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, and school



People advocating for safe, well-maintained public schools

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 coming year.

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