



Submission to the 2021-2022 Budget Consultations

The Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation (OSSTF/FEESO) was founded over one hundred years ago, in 1919. OSSTF/FEESO represents almost 60,000 public high school teachers, occasional teachers, educational assistants, instructors, psychologists, secretaries, speech-language pathologists, social workers, plant support personnel, and many other educational workers, including those in the university sector.

OSSTF/FEESO is pleased to make a 2021 budget consultation submission in advance of the 2021 budget.

The Ontario Government released its fall budget, which included mid-term outlooks for the different ministries and sectors for the next three years. The course the government has set for education in both the K-12 system and in post-secondary education is one that will further weaken our public education system and our economy. With only a \$300 million increase in the K-12 public education system over three years, there will have to be further cuts in order to meet inflation and Ontario's growing population of school aged children. In the post-secondary system, the \$500 million increase is almost entirely earmarked for building. While infrastructure should be an area of investment, the buildings are of little use if the programs are not funded to go along with them. The government is plowing ahead with a performance based funding scheme at the post-secondary level, which is directly from the United States and has not proven to increase accountability or, most importantly, student outcomes. Education is an investment that Ontario has benefitted from for years, as evidenced in the Conference Board of Canada's report released in 2019 titled [The Economic Case for Investing in Education](#). Their research concluded that with every dollar cut from education, a \$1.30 of economic benefit is lost. The reverse is also true, when the government invests a dollar in education, there is an increase of \$1.30 to the economy. When more is invested in education, there is a drop in the demand for social services, such as health care, welfare and the judicial system. This alone should prompt the government to re-think their planned austerity budgets in education and make real investments in Ontario's education system and, therefore, our economy.

This budget consultation submission contains two parts, first the kindergarten to grade 12 sector, followed by the post-secondary sector with recommendations for both.

Kindergarten to Grade 12 Education:

1. Appropriately Fund Destreaming of Grade Nine Courses – Destreaming was an unmitigated disaster in the 1990's when it was implemented in grade nine without appropriate resources, preparation time or funding in place and was ultimately scrapped by the Harris government. Unfortunately, it appears the Ford government is on track to repeat the mistake of underfunding destreaming. The Minister of Education is rushing ahead with plans to destream grade nine math courses for September, while at the same time the government has forecasted an austerity budget in education over the next three years. Destreamed classes will require much smaller class sizes than the current 23:1 funding and 30:1 funding for e-learning. On top of smaller classes, destreamed classes will require great access to support from education assistants, social workers and other classroom based support personnel, along with greater resource supports, such as technology and textbooks. Experts agree that destreaming must be implemented as a vital step to remove barriers that Black, Indigenous and Racialized students have experienced, but they also agree that it will fail, again, if not properly funded.

2. Provide additional funding to school boards to allow students to take a fifth academic year without financial penalty. Due to the pandemic, and despite the best efforts of teachers and education workers, there will be some students who have fallen behind and are not ready to start their post-secondary education. Remote learning has proven not to be the best method of delivery and some students may have reached the credit cap but would benefit from an extra semester or two to hone their skills and upgrade marks before moving on to post-secondary education. Providing increased funding to school boards would allow school boards to promote the option to students to stay until they are ready to move on to post-secondary education.
3. Increase the education worker benchmarks in the Grants for Student Need (GSN). The benchmarks in the funding formula for education workers are not consistent with current salaries. These benchmarks should be updated, so that money does not have to be taken from other areas of the GSNs to make up the shortfall.
4. Provide funding to School Boards for Education Assistants at the Secondary Level. Currently, there is no funding mechanism from the Ministry of Education to fund Educational Assistants (EAs) at the secondary level. There is only the Special Incident Portion, which covers limited funding in extreme cases. There is a severe lack of funding for boards to provide EA support to our most at-risk students at the secondary level. There should be an Average Daily Enrollment portion to the Pupil Foundation Grant in the Grants for Student Needs, as there is for students in the primary and junior divisions.
5. Eliminate mandatory e-learning for secondary students. Ministry of Education documents forecast up to 250,000 secondary students will be taking e-learning courses in four years' time. This represents over 40% of secondary students. With the current funding model of 30:1 for e-learning classes and a class size max of 35, the government is selling our students short. E-learning fits the needs of some students, but is also detrimental to many students, particularly students at risk. The reason for this push is the removal of supports for students through the direct removal of teacher and education worker positions in a bid to cut funding to education. As previously discussed, this is a plan that will result in harm to our world-class public education system, while simultaneously hurting our economy. Parents, students, teachers and education experts have been unequivocal in their opposition to mandatory e-learning, yet these voices that this government insists are being heard, are being completely ignored. E-learning is acceptable on a voluntary basis only. The very few secondary students who possess the self-discipline and have access to the necessary technology should be free to choose these courses of their own volition.
6. Increase funding for adult non-credit continuing education. In school boards that offer Literacy and Basic Skills (LBS) programming along with Adult English as a Second Language (ESL) and other non-credit programs for adults, the funding is from different ministries other than the Ministry of Education. The Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and the Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development are not providing enough funding for these programs to operate properly by capping enrollment in courses, with no system to increase funding when enrollment grows. This results in a system without funding for appropriate administration and preparation time needed by Adult Education Instructors to ensure the program requirements are met. Also, Portfolio Based Learning Assessment methodologies have been mandated as the method of assessment, but the workload and time required to adequately operationalize the program is non-existent, creating tremendous pressure on Adult Education Instructors and frustration for students. The funding these ministries provide for Adult Non-Credit Instruction must be increased to address these pressures and ensure that instructors receive the appropriate preparation time and compensation to fulfil their duties and ensure a successful program. Improving language skills in adults, including those new to Canada, has a significant impact on the economy, as these adults seek employment within Ontario.

7. Increase funding for Adult Credit Day School. Adult Day School teachers teach the same curriculum as regular day school teachers to students 21 years and over, yet they do so in conditions that are more difficult. Adult Day School teachers have little to no preparation time, no class size protection, and fewer teaching materials compared to their regular day school colleagues. Although some Adult Day School teachers have finally reached parity in salary with regular day school teachers, this parity is not based on the same workload. In addition, Adult Day School students do not have the same services available to them, such as guidance and special education assistance. The primary reason is that the funding grant for these programs, Continuing Education and Other Programs Grant, uses a per average daily enrolment benchmark well below that of regular day school students. We recommend increasing this benchmark to match that of secondary school students.
8. Increase funding to repair schools. As of November 2019, the cost to repair Ontario's public schools has risen to \$16.3 billion and must be addressed at a greater rate than previously planned. This disrepair is not only dangerous for staff and students, it also impacts the learning environment and student success. The government has pledged to spend \$13 billion over 10 years but this rate of funding will not keep pace with what is needed now. The government must address the repair backlog with additional funding.
9. Expand the retrofitting of HVAC systems in schools. Due to Covid-19, the Ontario Government was forced to finally acknowledge that the HVAC systems in Ontario schools are out of date and in need of repair. This program should be expanded, so that all students and education workers can benefit from learning and working in a safer school.
10. Remove or reduce the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). EQAO testing has not proven itself to provide any value for money. It fails to test student achievement and instead tells us which students are best at learning how to take a test. Many alternative methods of testing (e.g. randomized) would save millions of taxpayer dollars that could be better invested in staffing schools with caring adults to support students in their education and well-being. It is time to eliminate the EQAO or, at the very least, scale it back to provide a better return on investment.
11. Increase Covid-19 funding to school boards. School boards should be in a financial position to lower the class size numbers in our schools, so that proper social distancing and contact tracing is possible and supported through asymptomatic testing. Funding these priorities would put the province in a position to know if it is actually safe to re-open schools or if schools are a source of asymptomatic spread. Currently, the best the Ministry can do is guess, as it lacks the data to make informed decisions.
12. Stop the practice of unaccountable spending. This government has spent well over three-quarters of a billion dollars by spending to provide funding directly to parents. Recently, the government expanded the program to include students of high school age outside of special education, diverting millions more from the public education sector with no accountability as to where these dollars will go. This represents over 2.5 times the amount of money the government is projecting that they will invest in the public education sector over the next three years. OSSTF/FEESO recommends that the government redirect this funding to the front lines of public education.

13. Public Education should be offered through one school system in each official language. Ontario has a duplicate education system running with the Catholic education system. Moving to one public education system in each official language would eliminate an enormous amount of duplication. Ontario is a multi-cultural, multi-faith society. Our public education system brings together students from diverse backgrounds to build a shared sense of community. Singling out one religion for separate education funding runs contrary to public education's commitments to universality and equity. In 1999, and again in 2005, the Human Rights Committee of the United Nations asserted that Ontario needs to eliminate discrimination on the basis of religion in funding only Catholic schools with public funds. In 2012, the Federation of Urban Neighbourhoods in Ontario estimated that the province could save between \$1.2 and \$1.6 billion annually by moving to a single public education system in each official language. In the nine years since, the potential for savings has surely grown. Additionally, school boards are currently wasting valuable education dollars through advertising campaigns designed to attract students from the public and Catholic systems. These dollars would be better spent in our schools and on our students. OSSTF/FEESO recommends involving all education stakeholders in a discussion about moving toward one public education system in each official language. The savings achieved should be re-invested in Ontario's public education system.

Post-Secondary Education

1. Reverse the plan to increase outcomes-based funding for universities and colleges. The government announced its intention to increase the portion of funding for universities and colleges that will be outcomes-based to 60% from 1.2% by the 2024-2025 academic year. This change flies in the face of research that counters outcomes-based funding and the fact that there are no objective metrics to assess the outcomes. The previous Liberal government introduced this form of funding after review and consultation. However, the consultation raised concerns regarding this type of funding, which resulted in only a small portion of funding (1.2%) to become outcomes-based and only for special purpose funding for universities. The arm's length agency of the Ontario government, HEQCO (Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario), studied outcomes-based funding and found that this type of funding in higher education has shown little evidence of improved student outcomes. Further, research from the United States found that it has no discernable effects on retention or degree completions. Funding that is outcome-based will favour the creation of a system that advantages institutions in large urban areas, disadvantages those in the north, stifles equity and access for students, and will demolish the culture of universities as an incubator of free thought and academic liberty. So far, there has been no proof presented that outcomes-based funding will improve Ontario's post-secondary institutions and we recommend that its use be stopped. At the very least, Ontario should follow the lead of Alberta and pause this entire plan while the economy recovers from the effects of the pandemic.
2. Provide a funding mechanism to address Covid-19 related declines in post-secondary enrollment. There is a potential for a drop in enrollment in Colleges and Universities due to secondary students remaining for an additional year of high school. A mechanism should be built in to address this potential decline in enrollment for secondary institutions so that they can ensure that there is a full offering of programs and services for students.
3. Create and fund a mechanism that recognizes non-academic staff form as an integral part of the university. Universities need to be able to employ and pay for appropriate support staff and be confident that there is stable and adequate funding to provide these invaluable resources for students. There is a disturbing trend towards part-time or contract work in university employment, as the current model for research grants fails to recognize the important role of non-academic staff.

4. Reduce the reliance on tuition fees for post-secondary education by providing appropriate funding. Any Ontarian, regardless of economic status should be able to attend a college or university. Ontario needs to address this often discriminatory practice and should increase public funding to universities to relieve the crushing financial burden on students and address the racial and socio-economic bias in our current post-secondary system.
5. Compel universities to report to the provincial government their allocations from public and private funds to promote transparency. Adopt a reporting system like the one for public schools. The Education Funding Information System (EFIS) reports are designed to provide both accountability and transparency to the public and stakeholders. The same system should be established and required for Ontario's universities.