



Presentation to the Ontario Government's Fall 2020 Budget Consultations

Parker Robinson, President, Ontario Teachers' Federation
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Good afternoon. I am Parker Robinson, President of the Ontario Teachers' Federation.

I wish to thank the Honourable Rod Phillips, Minister of Finance and the Honourable Stan Cho for the invitation to participate in the Fall 2020 Budget Consultations. Thanks also to MPP Robin Martin and MPP Vincent Ke.

Preparing a budget is the quintessential act of planning for the future. It is an opportunity to take stock of the impact of past decisions and adjust accordingly. A strong publicly funded education system is the cornerstone of a healthy democracy. Ontario's world-class publicly funded education system was, until recently, touted by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) and the McKinsey Global Institute as one of the greatest in the world, but now there is an exodus of students from our schools. Two world-renowned education experts, Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves, in a recent article entitled "How to Ruin a World-Class Education System," sounded the alarm that Ontario's publicly funded education system is heading in the wrong direction. Ontario still has an opportunity to correct the path, beginning with this Fall Budget.

The Ontario Teachers' Federation believes that the answer to many of the questions that you have asked us to consider is to invest in our publicly funded education system; that is, if Ontario is seriously committed to growth and long-term recovery and to making this province a more attractive place for people to live, invest, work and grow a business.

A recent study by the Conference Board of Canada showed that, for every dollar invested in education, the return to our economy was one dollar and thirty cents. This province needs to invest every penny it can, as soon as it can, in our publicly funded education system to achieve that phenomenal return.

You have asked what actions the government can take to help people find a good job. We believe that the answer is obvious; there is no better way to prepare someone for a good job than a world-class education.

A safe, functioning publicly funded school system will provide relief to families struggling as a result of COVID-19. To be sure, families have endured – and continue to endure - many challenges and hardships in their current lives. Knowing that they can send their children back to school safely will allow them to return to their workplaces and participate in an economic recovery.

How else might the government support families and workers in this province? Our advice, which is really a no-cost item, is that this government needs to invest more time and energy in genuine collaboration with stakeholders. Working together, we can always achieve more effective policies and better decisions.

Finally, it bears repeating that a strong publicly funded education system is a bulwark against the erosion of democratic principles and institutions. We need to invest in this cornerstone and, as with any

effective democratic process, we also need a commitment to authentic collaboration with all stakeholders to achieve the best possible outcomes. Ontario will reap the dividends if we correct our path and invest in Ontario's publicly funded education system.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address you today.