

For immediate release

Parents, teachers call on Ontario Government to reverse trends toward defunding, mandatory virtual learning and privatizing of publicly funded education

TORONTO, June 29, 2022 – Parents and teachers are calling on the Ontario Government to reverse cuts to publicly funded education and end mandatory virtual learning, parent vouchers and the commercializing of e-learning, all of which are hurting students and their learning success.

“Ontario’s world-class, publicly funded education system and its students need post-pandemic recovery strategies that are teacher-led to repair the damage caused by virtual learning and budget cut-backs,” said Chris Cowley, President of the Ontario Teachers’ Federation (OTF). “Our public system must empower all students to succeed and that will take concerted, collaborative action to achieve.”

Mandatory virtual learning, and especially the hybrid model, proved a major set-back for a vast majority of students during the pandemic. These approaches to teaching and learning led to major declines in student motivation, readiness to learn, hands-on learning, attention span, the development of social-emotional skills and student wellbeing, according to a research report entitled “The Implications of Virtual Teaching and Learning in Ontario’s Publicly Funded Schools, K-12” by Dr. Lisa Bayrami.

Funding cutbacks during the pandemic have led to larger class sizes and shortages of teachers and support staff including educational assistants, psychologists and other vital professionals, according to the report “Schools, Austerity & Privatization in the Pandemic Era” authored by Dr. Paul Bocking. Both reports were funded wholly or in part by OTF.

Government funding is now \$800 lower per student (adjusted for inflation) than in 2018, according to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, and Ontario’s Financial Accountability Office is forecasting a \$12.3 billion shortfall for public education by the end of the decade.

Along with monetizing costs for e-learning through a new partnership with TVO/TFO that school boards will have to pay, the government offered cash payments to parents of K-12 students for “online pandemic-related costs” with no conditions attached. Those vouchers siphoned \$1.8 billion from the provincial education budget, according to the Bocking study.

“Our kids need in-person classroom learning with enough teachers and support staff to help students close the learning gaps that they suffered during the pandemic,” said Romana Siddiqui of the Ontario Parent Action Network. “We can’t starve the public education system of funds and resources, and fuel a possible exodus of students from wealthier families to private education.”

“Some students with autism who could not learn online were told to return to schools, but there was no money and resources to support them,” said Laura Kirby-McIntosh, past president of the Ontario Autism Coalition. “That, plus a waiting list for autism therapy that’s grown from 23,000 in 2018 to over 50,000 means an entire generation of our children will never reach their potential.”

English versions of the Bayrami and Bocking research reports and their Key Findings can be viewed at <https://www.otffeo.on.ca/en/advocacy/position-papers/>.

French versions of the Key Findings can be found at <https://www.otffeo.on.ca/fr/resources/exposes-de-principes/>. Both full reports will be available in French in mid-July 2022

The Ontario Teachers’ Federation is the advocate for the teaching profession in Ontario and for its 160,000 teachers. OTF members are full-time, part-time and occasional teachers in all the publicly funded schools in the province—elementary, secondary, public, Catholic and francophone.

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