

Special-needs students

MPP Alexa Gilmour: My question today is for the Premier. Community Living released a harrowing report about the dangers students with disabilities face due to the chronic underfunding by this Conservative government. The TDSB has a \$58-million deficit, which means more cuts to programs, to staff and to supports.

There is deep pain in the special-needs community today, as children are walking out of classrooms and ending up in the streets, and children like Landyn are dying because schools lack enough funding and trained staff. This is not just a funding issue, Speaker; this is a safety crisis.

Why has the government not taken action to keep children safe and supported?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Response? I recognize the Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I think I said last week that it really doesn't matter that we have record levels of funding in different programs, especially across the education sector. It doesn't matter as long as parents don't feel that their kids are safe in school.

Let me be very clear to the Toronto District School Board and any school board out there: If you think you're going to cut classroom education, think again. If you think you're going to take funding cuts and disadvantage our students, think again. We have some of the best teachers in the world. We have some of the best educators in the world. We have the best principals and vice-principals. These are people who are focused on one thing, and that is ensuring that our students have the best that they possibly can and succeed.

I certainly will not allow the Toronto District School Board, or any school board, for that matter, to cut the programs and services that matter, that give our kids all the advantages that they need to succeed, and that is a very clear message to the Toronto District School Board. Don't test me. Don't push me. I'll make a decision for you if they do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

MPP Alexa Gilmour: Speaker, like so many of us, I love a good musical, but this is the Legislature. Can we skip the song and dance, please?

We know the government's playbook at this point. Act one: Blame the public institution for failures caused by chronic underfunding by the government. Act two: Claim the system is broken so that you can privatize.

With the threat of ballooning classrooms, fewer teachers, our students are at risk, our boards have already made the cuts, and for our special education kids like Landyn Ferris, their lives are on the line.

Why is this government picking a fight with the school boards, who have already made cuts, instead of working with them to help our children?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I think we made it very clear. I don't want school boards going to Blue Jays games. I don't want them sending trustees all over the world to be art inspectors. What I want them to do is focus on providing the highest level of education for the kids in the school. I think parents deserve that, and more importantly, I think students deserve that. So, will I

continue to fight boards that divert money from the classrooms and away from our teachers? Absolutely, Madam Speaker. I'll let the NDP continue to fight for those trustees who waste taxpayer money, and I will continue to fight for parents, students and teachers and make sure that every single dollar that is meant for the classroom goes to the classroom. I will accept nothing less.

And if any school board thinks differently, let me tell them very, very clearly: Do what you're supposed to do, because if you don't, I will do it for you, and I will always side with students, parents and teachers all the time.

Public health

Mr. Adil Shamji: For the Premier: Last week, we heard from the Minister of Health all of the so-called action that has been taken by the Minister of Health since we faced the worst measles outbreak in the last three decades. We heard about letters that have been written and so-called funds that have been spent, and not even 24 hours had passed before we learned that the number of measles cases in this province had increased by over 200 and the measles outbreak in Ontario is accelerating.

Now that the government's approach to addressing measles has failed, what do the Minister of Health and the Premier have to say to Ontarians?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the Minister of Health for a response.

Hon. Sylvia Jones: You know, Speaker, I'll say what I have been saying, what Dr. Kieran Moore has been saying for over a year and a half: Public health units need to refocus their efforts—which we did through a directive—to ensure that childhood vaccinations were up to date. We have ensured, as a government, to make sure that we have sufficient measles vaccines available to primary care clinicians, to public health units, to hospitals. We've done that. We are doing everything that we can to ensure that this outbreak that began in a very small area, very small group, is not going to continue to impact our communities.

Those are the changes that we make as a government to ensure that not only do public health units actually understand what their responsibilities are, but we give them the financial ability to do that, and we direct them through the Chief Medical Officer of Health.

That's action, that's ensuring that people understand the value and importance of a vaccine that has been in the province of Ontario for over 50 years. We will continue to do that.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Mr. Adil Shamji: Back to the Premier: This is not confined to a small community now. We have measles in the Premier's own riding of Etobicoke North at the Woodbine Mall and Fantasy Fair, we've got measles in downtown Toronto at Ripley's Aquarium, and we've got the Minister of Health telling us she's been doing the same thing over and over again for a year and a half. And we know what that same thing is: It's underfunding public health, silencing our public health officials and doing absolutely nothing.

To the Premier: When will you take action? When will you simply utter the word "measles"?

Hon. Sylvia Jones: That's got to be Liberal math, Speaker, when you increase the budget of public health units by almost 20% and they call that a cut. It is insane that they do not

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understand that a 20% investment is actually more money for public health units in the province of Ontario.