

Children's health services

Ms. Sandy Shaw: There are thousands of children in southern Ontario living with progressive life-limiting and life-ending illnesses, but it's shocking to learn that many Ontarian children and their families cannot access the care they deserve.

Just like many other regions in Ontario, there is no dedicated pediatric hospice in Hamilton.

Gratefully, folks are working hard to change that—to build a children's hospice in Hamilton that will embrace children, families and caregivers throughout their journey. Keaton's House-Paul Paletta Children's Hospice will provide the care, comfort and connection these families deserve close to home.

Dr. Dave Lysecki from McMaster Children's Hospital, a pediatric palliative care specialist, said, "There's a common misconception that pediatric palliative care is only for the dying. But really, it's about living fully, right up to the last moment and supporting families to live fully and carry the memory of their loved one with them."

The CEO of Kemp Care Network, Danielle Zucchet, said, "The impact of caring for a dying child has an inordinate, long-term effect on their families." In fact, Keaton's House is named in honour of Danielle's young son.

This will be a place where these young patients and their families can find joy, live well, and create lasting memories.

I have shared in this House the loss of my sister Nancy Rose. I know that a place like Keaton's House would have provided the comfort that my parents, my sisters and my brother would have needed as we went through that terrible loss.

Access to hospice and palliative care for children should be the highest aspiration of any community. And I know we will make this happen in Hamilton.

Education funding

Mr. John Fraser: My question is to the Premier.

Yesterday, my daughter forwarded me the Minister of Education's letter to parents. The government never ceases to amaze me. It is probably the most pathetic thing I've read and seen in a long time.

After almost eight years in government, they're going to hire—get this, folks—a two-person panel to fix the problem that they created. Eight years of larger class sizes, eight years of starving special education, eight years of ignoring the mental health crisis that's in our schools—and the Minister of Education's solution is a two-person panel.

We don't need a two-person panel. We just need more qualified adults in our schools to help our kids.

When is the Premier going to make that happen?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member from Markham–Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you for the question.

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Our government is restoring accountability in an education system that for so long was allowed to drift without direction or responsibility, while the previous Liberal government, supported by the NDP, closed over 600 schools. We are taking a very different approach. Instead of walking away from communities, we are investing \$23 billion over the next 10 years to build, repair and modernize schools so students can learn in safe, high-quality environments.

We've been clear from day one: Students come first. That means making sure every dollar is spent where it belongs: in classrooms; not on waste, dysfunction or political games that have plagued too many school boards for years.

So while the opposition continues to defend the status quo and failed trustees who waste money, we will continue restoring the accountability and building an education system focused on student success.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: That wasn't even a semblance of an answer.

We don't need a panel. We just need more adults in our schools.

Anybody can tell you that class sizes are too big. They starve special education. There's a mental health crisis in our schools that the government is just walking past. Schools are not safe places to learn or to work.

The solution is simple: more qualified adults in our schools to help our kids, with smaller class sizes, with special education needs, with mental health supports—all to fix the problem that they made.

When is the Premier going to stand up for kids and make that happen?

Mr. Billy Pang: Madam Speaker, parents expect an education system which is focused on student success, not one consumed by chaos and mismanagement.

When trustees waste public money or ignore their responsibilities, we will not hesitate to act. Waiting years for accountability is not acceptable for the families who need answers now.

At the same time, we are making historic investments to improve learning environments across Ontario: record core education funding increases of up to \$30.28 billion—more than \$23 billion over the next 10 years to support school construction, renewal and improvement.

My message and our ministry's message is simple: We are putting students first and restoring accountability in every corner of the education system.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the leader of the third party.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, I'm proud of our record: learning to age 18, higher graduation rates, smaller class sizes, full-day kindergarten, a government that actually cares about education.

But we're not talking about us. We're talking about you.

Yesterday, the Minister of Education said small class sizes are really not important in student achievement and success.

Give your head a shake. More kids, less time. Read my lips: More kids, less time—

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Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The government House leader will come to order. The member for Niagara West will come to order.

Mr. John Fraser: There are only so many hours in the day.

So when will the Premier do the simple math and make sure we have enough adults in our schools—qualified adults—to take care of our kids? When are you going to stand up for kids? Get out of your seat.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize—

Hon. Doug Ford: Excuse me, Madam Speaker.

Read my lips: You closed 600 schools—600 schools. You fired thousands of teachers.

We've hired 9,000 educators—9,000. We spent \$16 billion on building new schools across the province; \$3.6 billion to build 139 schools.

You voted for it—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The leader of the third party, come to order.

Hon. Doug Ford: You voted to close 600 schools, fired thousands of teachers. That is hypocrisy at its best—at its best.

Madam Speaker, we're setting—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): You have to withdraw, Premier.

Hon. Doug Ford: Withdraw.

We ended up adding another \$2 billion to education, financing up to \$39 billion.

They had never seen that their entire lives. They destroyed the school system. That's what they did.

We're improving—we're actually teaching kids about STEM. You want to teach them about every wacko thing—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the leader of the third party.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Folks, I'm going to start—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Ottawa Centre will come to order.

Education funding

Ms. Jessica Bell: My question is to the Premier.

Parents from Heydon Park Secondary School are here today in the Legislature. They fear that their school is going to be closed because the TDSB has informed them there will be no enrolment of kids in grade 9 and now grade 10. They've had no answers and no explanation as to why. Heydon Park is one of the very few schools that focuses on special education, helping our most vulnerable kids.

Can this government work to keep Heydon Park Secondary School open?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the government House leader.

Hon. Steve Clark: Speaker, the minister, the parliamentary assistant, the government have been very clear: Everything we're doing in the education system for that school or every other school—it's all about putting students, parents and teachers first; it's putting real accountability and real results. The minister has stood in this place, in regard to the supervisors, the review that they're doing—everything is about strengthening the system.

I appreciate the fact that there are members from one particular school here today.

Everything we're doing, regardless of where you live—whether you live in the GTA or any other corner of Ontario—is all about ensuring that school boards have the opportunity to succeed.

The minister stood up and talked about accountability, talked about transparency, the reasons why trustees were removed.

At the end of the day—no matter whether it's this school or any other school—it's all about putting parents and the classroom first.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for University–Rosedale.

Ms. Jessica Bell: This issue is very important. I'd really like the Premier to answer this question.

Every school board is not being set up for success. They have seen massive funding cuts under this government year in and year out.

Special education is seeing the worst cuts. We just got the EQAO results yesterday, and it shows that our schools are failing our kids who are in special education. They are not meeting learning outcomes in math, in reading or in writing. Properly investing in schools like Heydon Park, a school that specializes in special education, is the answer.

To the Premier: Can this government commit to keeping Heydon Park Secondary School open?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Markham–Unionville.

Mr. Billy Pang: The facts are clear: Every single year our government has been in office, we have increased education funding—including a more than 36% increase to special education funding that has helped hire over 4,000 additional educational assistants to support the most vulnerable learners.

But increasing funding alone isn't enough when the school board trustees continue to fail students. We have seen examples across Ontario where mismanagement and infighting have diverted attention away from the special education and classroom supports. It is unacceptable.

We will continue to invest, continue to support teachers, and continue to hold school boards accountable so that every dollar we invest goes to supporting students in the classroom.

Education funding

Mr. Ted Hsu: I want to go back to classrooms. I know we're all worried about what's holding kids back. That's what the minister says he's worried about. We're all worried about that.

This week, there was a parents' forum in my riding of Kingston and the Islands, and one of the things they talked about—maybe it's evacuations. This is when a kid becomes violent and we have to move all of the students out of the classroom for one or two hours before they can come back. It happens about once per week, on average, in my riding. Maybe that's disturbing education.

Another thing that came up in the parents' forum: Many of the little kids are seeing that something is going to happen, and they try to prevent problems; they try to prevent things from escalating to violence. People are generally good, and even the little kids know when something is wrong, and they try to fix the situation. People are basically good.

You're spending money on a lot of things. Minister, why can't we have more adults per student in our schools?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you for the question.

To address rising violence in our school communities, our government has increased funding for school safety initiatives to the highest in Ontario history—including more funding to hire psychologists, social workers, child youth workers, and educational assistants. They are adults who enhance direct service for students.

The rise in school violence also coincides with the short-sighted decision by many school boards across the province, starting in 2017, to end the school resource officer program in schools.

This is why our government has introduced measures that will require school boards to work with police services to develop school resource officer and youth engagement programs that will help foster positive relations between students and law enforcement while making schools safer.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Kingston and the Islands.

Mr. Ted Hsu: You know this is not working.

At the same parent forum that we had in Kingston and the Islands, we had some educational assistants. One of them just showed everybody the scars on her hands from students—little kids—gouging them. They're suffering physical as well as verbal abuse. And this is just the tip of the iceberg. I know the minister realizes this.

What's going to happen? Our kids are about the same age—the Minister of Education and I. What's going to happen to all these little kids who are violent in the classroom and disrupting the education of everybody because there are not enough adults to supervise them? What's going to happen when they grow up? What's going to happen to our society when all these kids grow up?

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I really want a good answer from the minister. Why won't you increase the adult-to-kid ratio in our schools right away?

Mr. Billy Pang: Thank you again for the question.

As I mentioned earlier, those short-sighted trustees removed adults from schools—they are police officers. A short-sighted decision made by school boards to remove school resource officer programs has made schools less safe for students, and teachers as well—the adults. The teachers are adults. When they remove the school resource officers, even the adults are in danger.

We need to remove politics from the classroom and focus on policies that will help keep students and teachers safe.

Working with police officers through the student resource officer program helps build relationships between youth and police—activity promotes positive behaviour and creates a culture of mutual respect that will help keep students and teachers safe.