

Education funding

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, the minister can't even address the grift anymore, right? He just has to go to petty insults.

But listen, back to the Premier, because that is quite the performance from a government that is failing on every single front. The EQAO results that we saw last week gave us another clear example of that. Now even our children are having to pay the price for this government's mismanagement. These kids in grade 3 and in grade 6, all they have ever known is a school system under this cruel and callous government, a government that doesn't believe in public education. All they have seen are cuts and crowded classrooms.

When is the Premier going to take responsibility for the mess that he has created in our schools?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, obviously nothing could be further from the truth. The member will know, as I've said on many occasions, we are spending more than we ever have in education.

But ultimately, as I have said, I don't think parents care that we're spending more than any other government has ever. I think what they care about is what are the results that their students are having. And you know what? Under Progressive Conservatives, we see the highest graduation rates in the province's history. Under Progressive Conservatives, we see the best literacy—reading and writing scores are at the highest that they've ever been. Under a Progressive Conservative government, we are seeing increases in the math scores. But you know what the difference between Progressive Conservatives and the opposition is? It's not good enough for us.

So that is why we're going to double down, build on the success of the previous ministers and make sure that we give our kids every opportunity to succeed. Despite the opposition, who would like to take us back to the future, we're going to go back into the future stronger than ever before by focusing on students, parents and teachers and their needs.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Wow, the minister said one thing that I agree with: This government is not good enough for our kids. It is darn well not good enough.

This government cut education funding by \$1,500 per student and now they are blaming, once again, students and teachers, and hiring so-called advisers for \$1,500 a day. I've got some free advice for this minister: Take that money and put it back in our classrooms.

The math here is very, very simple, Speaker. More students plus fewer resources equals worse outcomes.

So why is the government, once again, blaming students and teachers for the conditions that they themselves have created?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, as you know, that's just simply incorrect. The reality is that we are at the highest level of spending ever, and it's just still not good enough in the sense that we want to have our students do even better.

I just highlighted for the member opposite—the member opposite would like to bring us back to what it was when the NDP and the Liberals combined to give us a system where parents were at war with their teachers, and students were failing, Madam Speaker.

Under a Progressive Conservative government, because of the work started by the former minister to stop and reverse the horrific things that the Liberals and the NDP were doing—Minister Lecce, who brought us through a global health and economic pandemic.

And you know what we're seeing in all of this? We're seeing graduation rates at the highest that they have ever been, literacy scores higher than they have ever been before in the province's history. But we're not accepting of the fact that our students can't do better when it comes to math and that we can't do better in all facets of the education system. That's why we're going to see what it is that we're missing, look at other jurisdictions and look to ourselves. Where we have failed, we will do better. That's what our parents, students and teachers deserve, and we won't be stopped because the NDP—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Final supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, this minister needs to do his homework because students out there are struggling; families are exhausted. Our education workers—I mean, I'm meeting principals that are responsible for three schools in three separate locations in a city because there aren't enough people that they can find to fill those roles because everybody is burning out because of this government's incompetence and mismanagement.

Enough with the blame game. The government has spent millions on handouts and millions on self-serving ads, but our kids are struggling in crumbling and overcrowded classrooms. Instead of fixing the problems, the Premier just wants to create more chaos.

Why won't the Premier direct his education minister to put our kids first and put resources back in the classroom?

Hon. Paul Calandra: That's an interesting question coming from the Leader of the Opposition who, as a school trustee and, I think, a chair of the board in Toronto, brought more executive principals on the system than ever before. You know why there aren't more principals in the schools, Madam Speaker? When she was a trustee and a chair of the board, she took them out of the school and made them executive principals. You know what an executive principal is? Somebody who sits in the board office and isn't assigned to a school. So you know what we're doing? We're undoing everything that the Liberals and NDP did. We're doubling down by giving them more money, more resources. We're telling the principals, "Get back into the classroom."

And do you know what principals are telling me? They want to be educators again, and they're saying that when the NDP and Liberals were in charge, they took them out of the classroom, put them at war with parents and students and teachers. Do you know what we're going to do? We're going to end the divisiveness. We're going to double down and focus on student achievement. We'll let them be satisfied with students who don't pass, who are failing. We're going to be only satisfied when 100% of our students achieve the best—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Education funding

Ms. Chandra Pasma: The Premier's cuts to education funding have put our kids in schools that can't even deliver the basic elements of education: paper and books, qualified teachers and now principals. Some schools are getting half a principal, creating risks to student safety, disruptions to learning and increasing the workload for already overworked teachers and education workers.

Our kids deserve the best, but under this government they keep getting less and less and, as the EQAO results show, our kids are struggling. Will the Premier reverse course, quit taking money out of classrooms for cushy Conservative jobs and properly fund our schools?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Education.

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's interesting getting some questions from the opposition on education because I've been the minister for a year and the first time they actually ask questions is when I'm actually out of the House for the first time in eight years. So it's good to see that they're actually paying any attention to question period now.

So let me just say this, Madam Speaker: We're continuing to fund education, but the difference between Conservatives and the Liberal and NDP opposition is that we always expect more. It's not simply good enough to have the highest graduation rates in the province's history. It's not simply good enough for us that literacy rates are higher, that reading and writing scores are higher than they've ever been before. It's not good enough for us that math scores continue to increase year over year. What we want to do is what parents and teachers and educators are telling us: Remove the division from schools, focus on what matters by giving our teachers the ability to do what they do best, teach our kids, and that's what we're going to do.

We're going to continue to fund education at the highest levels it ever has before, but we're not going to simply say, "Great, that's good enough." It will not be good enough until every single student passes with the highest level of support and opportunity—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Ottawa West–Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Well, the minister is getting an F for math, Speaker, but apparently an A for creative writing.

It's clear what the future holds under this minister, Speaker:

—supervisors who shut parents out of decision-making and restrict our access to public meetings;

—fewer parent council meetings because one principal has to run back and forth between different schools; and

—gaps in student safety and learning that put our kids at risk, and there's nothing we can do as parents because the Conservatives making the decisions don't care what we think.

Parents don't want this minister's dystopia, Speaker. We want our kids to be safe, cared for and supported, and we want to have a say in their education.

Will the Premier do what the minister won't, listen to parents and fund our schools?

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Hon. Paul Calandra: Speaker, do you know what parents want? They want us to show the leadership that is necessary to make sure that our students, parents and teachers have the absolute best outcomes.

I'll let the Liberals and the NDP sit here and support and fight for school trustees who have failed our students year after year after year after year.

Do you know what happened in Ottawa when I was there, colleagues? I'll tell you what happened in Ottawa: Parents were coming up to me and saying, "Thank you for firing our trustees. They were not listening to us."

Do you know what's happening in Near North in North Bay and Parry Sound? I'm getting emails from grandparents who say, "Our students have been failing for years because of school trustees who could care less" about their kids, Madam Speaker.

I'm seeing the same thing in Toronto, the same thing at the Catholic board and the public board, the same thing at Dufferin-Peel. Parents are very clear, as are teachers: Stop focusing on division, stop supporting the very trustees that that party and the Liberals are supporting day in and day out, and focus on students, parents and teachers. That's what we're going to do. We'll let them focus on the one-room schoolhouse. We'll focus on—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?