

Student assistance

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Families in Ottawa are struggling with the cost of living, unaffordable housing and expensive groceries. They want to see our kids get a good start in life, get a good education and a good job when they graduate, and be able to build a life here in Ontario. But it's clear that the government doesn't share that vision. They're not investing in deeply affordable housing. They're doing nothing to bring down the cost of groceries. They've cut more than \$6.3 billion from our elementary and secondary schools. Youth unemployment is at record highs. The government's persistent underfunding of post-secondary institutions means that institutions like Algonquin College are cutting programs and closing campuses—37 programs last year and another 30 this year.

Instead of addressing these challenges, the government is raising tuition, making it harder for students to afford post-secondary education, while also cutting OSAP grants, pushing students deeper into debt.

I've spoken to high school students—like the students from Merivale High School who came to my office—who aren't sure now whether they're going to be able to go to college or university.

Students at Algonquin are telling me they're not sure they're going to be able to finish their program.

And parents are telling me how worried they are that their kids will never be able to afford a home, that they will have to delay starting a family, if they graduate with a huge debt load.

Instead of making life harder for young people in Ontario, the government should invest in them.

Reverse the OSAP cuts, and fund our schools from ECE through PSE.

Minister's letter / Anti-racism activities

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, my question is to the Premier. Yesterday, teachers and education workers all across Ontario received a pretty insulting letter from the Minister of Education, trying to control graduation ceremonies. By the way, graduation ceremonies are those celebrations of our students, their achievements and what they've achieved with the help of our teachers and education workers—I would point out against all odds, because under this government they have seen cuts and underfunding for years. Now it sounds like the minister is telling young people to stay silent.

Let me ask the Premier this: If a high school student giving a speech at graduation, as, say, their class's valedictorian, talks about how they can no longer attend college or university because of this government's OSAP cuts, would that be considered too divisive or contentious for a graduation ceremony, or are they allowed to only praise your government?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's interesting that she didn't like the letter, but she quoted from the letter quite extensively. I made it very clear in that letter that I don't want teachers put in the middle of disagreements between students and school boards. There was a memo that went out from the Hamilton district school board to teachers. A faceless superintendent in that board decided that graduation ceremonies shouldn't focus on student achievement—student achievement, by the way, which comes about because of the hard work of teachers.

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A graduation ceremony is about the students' success, but it's also a way for parents to recognize what teachers have done to build on that success. So this superintendent in Hamilton decided, "Let's make it divisive. Let's turn it away from success of students and put that responsibility on the shoulders of the teachers organizing." Well, you know what that superintendent should do? Go to every single one of these graduation ceremonies so that when parents are upset by the divisive nature of it, when parents are upset that the focus is not on students, let them take the heat from the students, not the teacher. We should focus on the success of students and what they have accomplished.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Marit Stiles: I will point out, first of all, to the minister the hard work of our teachers, yes, but with no thanks to this government, because they have treated our education workers just dismally.

We have a government that is changing the laws to hide everything from the people of Ontario, and now you are trying to muzzle students. The minister cannot force teachers and students to agree with him. That is not how democracy works.

Our classrooms don't need political interference from this minister. They need education assistants. They need windows that aren't broken and hallways that aren't flooded. That's what they need. They need smaller class sizes. Let's start there. Why is this Premier policing what students and teachers can say instead of focusing on fixing Ontario's struggling education system?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Madam Speaker, there is a very clear indication of the difference between the New Democrats and the Liberals, and the Progressive Conservatives. When it comes to education, the focus needs to be on students, parents and teachers—full stop.

Now, 85% of an education budget goes for the salaries of educators. You know why that is? Because educators are the backbone of the education system. Without educators, none of us would be here. That is what the system focuses on. It should not be about putting teachers against parents. The opposition are suggesting that when that 5% of teachers, like any profession, aren't good, aren't focused on bringing student achievement up, we should protect them. No. Is the Leader of the Opposition suggesting that when two teachers went on a racist rant in Toronto, I should not fire them? Well, I disagree, and that's why I fired them.

When a superintendent, a high-ranking board official, went on a rant on TikTok and said that President Trump should be assassinated, you know what happened? That superintendent got fired. That—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member of Ottawa West–Nepean.

Ms. Chandra Pasma: Speaker, let's talk about what teachers and parents want to hear from this minister on racism, because this morning, Parents of Black Children is here with a request for the Premier. A year after the Human Rights Commission confirmed that there is systemic racism in our schools and offered a road map with 29 recommendations, nothing has happened. This government has been completely silent while Black students continue to suffer discrimination in our schools.

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Parents and teachers want to hear a firm commitment that the government will implement the recommendations along with a clear timeline. Will the Premier make that commitment to them this morning? Yes or no?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, I tend to agree that, under the current governance structure across the province of Ontario, a governance structure where trustees have been in charge of a system where we have seen failings across the province of Ontario—that has led to challenges. I know the former minister moved very quickly in the Peel situation to put a supervisor in place. Very soon, we will be bringing governance reforms to this House which I think will, in part, deal with this.

As you know, Bill 33 allows the minister to step in much quicker. It's a bill that they did not support. So in instances where we are seeing challenges in the system that aren't being addressed by school boards, we will step in and we will make it right. That is part of Bill 33, and significant reforms are coming very soon, which will allow us to continue these reforms, which will allow us to address very serious situations like this.

I completely agree. Trustees have failed us. Boards have failed us, but change is coming.

Education issues

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Education. After eight long years, this minister and this Premier and this Conservative government continue to make life harder for Ontario families. Our schools are not safe places to learn or to work. Class sizes are too big, special education has been starved and there is a mental health crisis in our schools that's not being addressed. Speaker, Ontarians don't want much; all they need is for their kids' schools to be safe places to learn and to work. And they're not.

Speaker, my question to the minister is, why are you making it harder for young families with kids in Ontario schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I'll remind the member opposite that, under a Progressive Conservative government, we are seeing the highest graduation rates in the history of the province. We are seeing reading and writing scores on the increase across the province—at their highest level ever. We are seeing increases in math scores. Since that government left office, we're seeing them increase. But you know what? It's not good enough for us. That is why we are doubling down to make sure that we can improve our math scores for our students.

Now, under the previous Liberal government, what did they do? They starved teachers, right? They starved teachers for all of their pet projects.

Under our government, you know what we're doing? We're putting \$750 back, giving it directly to teachers. Do you know why? So that they can fund their classrooms, so that they don't have to go to parents like they did under the Liberals and say, "Can you help us? We need to go to Dollarama. We need to go to the dollar store to buy supplies for our classroom."

Do you know what we're doing? We're giving money directly to teachers so that they can outfit their classrooms. That is good news for teachers, it's good news for students, great news for parents and it's all about putting students—

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, I have a four-letter word for the minister: EQAO. It's all on you. Eight years—look at those results.

Let me tell you a story about Marigold. Marigold is six years old. She lives in my riding. She's a young girl with exceptional needs. She's a bright young girl. She got into grade 1 with an assessment that identified her exceptional needs. Two years later, nothing—nada, not a thing. Two years—no support, Minister. And Marigold is not the only child in this province that this is happening to. There are thousands and thousands of others.

My question to the minister is, life is hard already for Marigold. Why are you making it harder for her?

Hon. Paul Calandra: You started off this question by talking about the EQAO. I would remind the member that again, under this government, we have the highest graduation rates in the history of the province of Ontario. Under this government and under the reforms started by my predecessors, we have the highest scores in reading and writing that we have ever had in the province of Ontario. Under this Progressive Conservative government, we are seeing math scores finally increase. Because you all remember, right? You remember, under Liberals, you discovered math; under Progressive Conservatives, you learn math. That is the difference.

But it simply isn't good enough. It's simply not good enough for us, Madam Speaker. That is why we're putting more supports and resources into the classrooms so that our students can do even better. That's why we're directly supporting teachers: because we know that the system works better when you actually listen to the people who deliver that service.

I said in one of the earlier questions, teachers are the backbone of the education system, and the people I'm listening to are teachers, not an opposition that failed—

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

Mr. John Fraser: This government has starved special education, and that's why there are stories like Marigold's.

Both of Marigold's parents work. They can't take time off work. And they couldn't afford the help that Marigold needed. It would've put a big hole in their family budget. But their aunt helped them out. She actually drives Marigold to her appointments every week, because they can't take time off work, Minister. They can't take time off work and they can't afford it. They're lucky they've got an aunt. There are thousands of kids who don't have an aunt or someone who's going to do that. It shouldn't be this way.

Speaker, it's really, really hard for Marigold and her parents and thousands of other families like that. Why is this minister making their life even harder?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, just the opposite, Madam Speaker—I've said this on a number of occasions. I don't think parents care when the minister gets up here and says, "Oh, we have the highest level of funding in the history of the province." I don't think parents care. I don't think they care when the Leader of the Opposition talks about funding cuts that they know aren't actually in the system.

Do you know what they care about? It's "When my child goes to school, does the teacher have the resources they need to deliver the best possible outcome?" And that is what we are focused

on: making sure that our students, parents and teachers have the resources that they need to give us the best-quality students.

That is why in Ottawa, in the member's own community, we stepped in to take over a board—he did not support it—where parents were flooding the Ministry of Education because the trustees were not listening to them. They were taking money out of the classroom and putting it into pet projects.

What we're doing is we're refocusing the system to put students first, and the way you put students first is by listening to teachers because they are the ones who deliver for students and parents. I'll continue to do that regardless of what the opposition says. I'm going to focus on teachers, the backbone of the education system.

Minister's letter

Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Education. Like many of us here, I was at the education breakfast this morning and heard the Minister of Education speak to teachers. I was gobsmacked; I couldn't believe it. I've never heard anything quite like it, but I shouldn't be surprised because if I'd read the letter, which I did earlier, I would have known why. It was the same tone. It was imperious, condescending and out of touch with the people, the adults, who are responsible for our kids every day. Why would you send a letter like this to every teacher when, admittedly, you say it's a very—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Prop?

Mr. John Fraser: Thank you. The letter is right here, folks. This letter—why would you send it? Why would you send it to every teacher when you say it's a small problem? You're trying to make a problem bigger than it actually is, and you're trying to vilify somebody in doing that.

Will the minister apologize for the condescending, imperious tone he took with teachers this morning and what he put in the letter?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I encourage the member to do two things. First, table the letter, and, after question period, I'll ask for unanimous consent for him to read the letter, and then we'll see what the tone was in that letter. I will simply not apologize for what is in that letter.

As I said earlier when I was speaking with teachers—you know what? We have a situation where, in Toronto, two teachers went on a racist rant on Instagram. The Liberals and the NDP would like to see those teachers in the classroom. I fired them.

In the northern Ontario board, a high-ranking school board official went on TikTok because that official thought it was important to tell everybody that the President of the United States should be assassinated. You know what? That person is fired because they don't belong in an education system.

The backbone of our education system is teachers; 95% of our teachers are hard-working, but we're going to weed out those 5% that have a different agenda than supporting our parents and supporting our students.

I won't be swayed by the opposition. We're going to deliver a system that works for parents, a system that works for teachers, and we're going to give our students every opportunity to succeed.

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

Mr. John Fraser: When you send a letter to everybody in an organization when you have a small problem, it's because you're trying to make it a bigger problem and you're trying to deflect from the real problems, which are class sizes that are too big, special education that's being starved and a mental health crisis in our schools.

If the minister loves the letter so much, I am going to read him a bit of this letter. What it says is, "Those in positions of authority must be held to a higher standard, consistent with their responsibilities." Minister, consistent with your responsibilities, will you make class sizes smaller? Will you stop starving special education? And will you address the mental health crisis in our schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: What we have done since we've come to office is ensure that students, parents and teachers are put first in the system. Under the Liberals it was a war zone in our schools. What we're doing is depoliticizing it so students can focus on one thing: learning. What teachers have told me is they don't want to be parents; they want to be educators. We're going to deliver a system that allows them to do that.

The member opposite is supporting a graduation ceremony in Hamilton and a superintendent who has decided that we shouldn't focus on students, that it shouldn't be focused on student achievement; it should be focused on colonization. Well, you know what? Students work hard. By that point, education for them in that year is done, and what we should focus on is students. We should focus on our parents and teachers. And do you know what? We should always be proud to be Canadian. We should always be proud of the achievements that we've accomplished. I will step in every single time someone goes off of that message.

Student assistance

Ms. Peggy Sattler: My question is to the Premier.

Speaker, Julia is a first-year med student. She is president of her class and active with the Ontario Medical Students Association. Medical school tuition is about \$25,000 a year. Medical training costs well over \$100,000. Julia is worried that the cuts to OSAP grants will make it financially impossible for qualified students from diverse backgrounds to become physicians.

Why is the Premier making it harder for qualified students to access medical training?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Colleges and Universities.

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I'm sure that member knows about Ontario Learn and Stay Grant and our new Ontario Learn and Stay Grant that's going to be for family physicians. We're going to cover 100% of tuition, books and other costs that are associated with that.

Do you know what? That party loves to cherry-pick facts and only present half of the facts to the general public. The cherry blossoms haven't even bloomed yet, but they're all about cherry-picking the facts. Please give all of the information to the students. There is a significant amount of information you're not sharing with the students. We have a significant amount of grants; the universities have \$1.8 billion of grants every year that they give out every year as well.

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We will continue to be there with our Ontario Learn and Stay Grant, our PSW Learn and Earn Program as well as our new Ontario Learn and Stay Grant that will coming online this fall for family physicians, bringing 400 every cohort.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for London West.

Ms. Peggy Sattler: I would encourage the minister to listen to the Ontario Medical Students Association about the kind of support that medical students need.

The Ontario Nurses' Association estimates that Ontario will be short more than 30,000 nurses by the end of the decade. OSAP cuts are going to make things worse. Ontario desperately needs more nurses from diverse backgrounds, and students should not have to take on a lifetime of debt in order to go into nursing.

Will this government reverse its damaging cuts to OSAP grants so that Ontario can graduate the nurses we urgently need?

Hon. Nolan Quinn: I guess she didn't hear me, because she's speaking about the nursing shortages, and I guess she didn't hear about the Ontario Learn and Stay Grant that we've invested over \$170 million into, helping 13,000 students come online in nursing and high-priority programs.

But if she wants to speak about OSAP, let's speak about OSAP. The Auditor General in 2017 said the desperate moves by the Liberal government were unsustainable, and they are unsustainable. The Premier and I have been very clear about that they are unsustainable. But OSAP is not going away. We have ensured that OSAP has sustainability and stability, not just for these students but for the next generation of students behind them.

We'll always be there for our students, but they need to make the investments into themselves and into their future careers, and it will pay tenfold with their future earnings

Government accountability

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Before I get into my question, I just need to echo the comments of my colleagues about the appalling remarks by the Minister of Education this morning towards teachers. The tone was much more like the emperor of education. They deserve more respect.

Speaker, on the eve of the budget, though, the government is trying to fix something that isn't broken. Freedom of information exists so that taxpayers know how their money is being spent. After eight long years of this Conservative government, life is harder and taxpayers deserve to know why. Instead, the government is set on hiding the truth. Speaker, this is dead wrong, and everyone knows it.

There are 700,000 people without a job, and many more are worried. One million people rely on food banks, and kids are going to school hungry. To the Premier: Why is this government more focused on hiding their track record than fixing it?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The minister of business and public service delivery.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: We are a government that's committed to fixing the problems that we inherited. In fact, this Minister of Education is the first one that's stood up for students, stood up

for teachers and stood up for parents—since she brought it up—so let's give him a round of applause, please.

Interjections.

Hon. Stephen Crawford: On that note, Speaker, I do want to talk about what we are doing with the legislative changes because it does pertain to children's safety. In fact, I have four kids; I have two that are in high school. There are many people in this House that have kids in high school or public school, and they don't know how these third party software providers are accessing children's data.

With the legislation that we're proposing today, you are going to have notification to parents. We are working in the best interests of the parents of Ontario. Whether it's the Minister of Education, whether it's the Premier or whether it's our caucus colleagues, we're working together to protect the children of Ontario.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Folks—

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. Order.

I recognize the member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: Polling shows that Ontarians reject the Premier's freedom-of-information changes; 73% reject doing it retroactively.

Hon. Graham McGregor: What else do the polls say?

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I know you care about the polls a lot, actually.

Transparency and accountability are not optional for a government; they're fundamental. These changes will bury information about how decisions are made at the very top. This is not the government's money; it's the people's, paid for by their hard work and sweat. That money should be going to creating good jobs. It should be going to health care. It should be going to education. We know it's not.

Speaker, to the Premier: With life getting harder, why is this government more focused on keeping its record secret than fixing it?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the minister of economic development.

Hon. Victor Fedeli: Let's talk a little bit about our record. In your very own riding, Kinectrics invested \$22 million and hired 15 people. Oakhill Distribution invested almost \$6 million and hired 20 people. All across we can find—Andriani in London, \$55 million, hired 42 people; Jungbunzlauer, a \$200-million investment, hired 50 people; in MPP Gates's riding, Siltech, a \$100-million investment, 51 people; Heddle Shipyards, \$107 million, 30 people.

These companies continue to expand in Ontario because they know exactly what they're going to get: dependability, reliability, predictability. That's why, all around the world, we've seen such huge increases in economic development and in companies coming here to Ontario. They know what they're going to get and they trust it.

Accessibility for persons with disabilities

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: My question is for the amazing, incredible Minister for Seniors and Accessibility. We know that accessibility is essential to daily life. Whether it's getting to school, going on public transit or visiting local facilities, residents in my wonderful community of Oakville North–Burlington and across Ontario want to see real progress being made so everyone can fully participate in their communities.

Since 2018, our government has heard from families, advocacy groups and municipalities, and we are taking action.

Speaker, could the minister share how our government is helping make Ontario more accessible and what progress has been made in communities across our province?

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: Project by project, community by community, Ontario is becoming more accessible every day. We are working with all levels of government to meet, achieve and exceed the goals of the AODA. All 444 municipalities have accessibility plans that outline how they will implement the AODA. This includes the 2,200 accessible buses we've delivered to municipalities. All GO trains and new subways are accessible. This year alone, \$275 million is being invested in making schools accessible.

This is how we are driving accessibility: project by project, community by community. We are getting it done.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Oakville North–Burlington.

Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos: Thank you to the minister for that incredible response.

Speaker, we know that when barriers are removed, accessibility improves; daily life becomes easier and more inclusive for people of all abilities. They notice the impact no matter where they are in the province. All over Ontario, neighbourhoods, organizations and community partners are working to make sure people of all abilities are supported.

Speaker, could the minister share what supports are available to help communities enhance accessibility and create more inclusive spaces across Ontario?

Hon. Raymond Sung Joon Cho: I'm so glad the member asked this important question. This morning, I was so happy to announce that the next round of applications for the Enhancing Access to Spaces for Everyone, or EASE, grant is opening today. This is now the second year of the grant. Earlier this year, we invested in 48 projects all across Ontario. This grant invests \$2.25 million for local communities to become more accessible.

These opportunities didn't exist under any previous government, but they do now. Under the leadership of this Premier, Ontario is more open than ever before for people of all abilities.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the Minister of Education on a point of order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: I seek unanimous consent to allow the leader of the Liberal Party to read the letter that I sent to school boards into the record.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of Education is seeking unanimous consent to allow the leader of the third party to read a letter he referenced earlier in the chamber for our records. Agreed? I heard a no.

Notice of dissatisfaction

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Pursuant to standing order 36(a), the member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to the question given by the Minister of Education regarding schools. This matter will be debated today following private members' public business.

Adjournment Debate - Education issues

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): The member for Ottawa South has given notice of dissatisfaction with the answer to a question given by the Minister of Education. The member has up to five minutes to debate the matter, and the minister or parliamentary assistant may reply for up to five minutes.

Mr. John Fraser: That's right, Speaker. I ain't ever satisfied, especially when it comes to this ministry and this minister.

I asked a question this morning, and I started by talking about a young girl in my riding, Marigold. She's six years old. She started school two years ago, and when she started—well, she had exceptional needs. And when she started, her parents were able to get her an assessment of what she needed for her special needs. It's two years later. She's a bright young girl. She's not getting the help she needs, not at school. Two years—no help.

Two years, in the development of any child—five, six, seven, eight years old—is really important, and Marigold is like thousands of other children across this province. Marigold's parents both work, and they can't afford the kind of help that Marigold needs. It would put a big hole in their family budget. So, lucky for Marigold, her aunt is helping out, and in fact, she is who drives her to her appointments every week as well, because her parents can't take the time off work.

Speaker, Marigold is just one child. There are thousands and thousands of other children and their families that are experiencing the same thing. This government has been underfunding special education by at least \$800 million, because that's what the school boards across Ontario are having to go and take out of other things, just to ensure that children's needs in some way are met, and they still can't do it.

I was asking that question this morning. I was thinking of my question the day before. I was at the breakfast this morning where the Minister of Education was addressing teachers, and I couldn't believe my ears. I wasn't the only one; my colleagues from the NDP were there—five or six of my colleagues—and I could not believe the imperious, condescending, out-of-touch tone from the minister. It was combative. It didn't fit in the room. These are people, these are teachers, the people that represent teachers—they're the adults in our schools who are helping our kids. But it all makes sense. If you take a look at this letter and the other letters that the minister has sent over the last—they're literally decrees. They are like royal decrees: "Thou shalt."

Speaker, there are 100,000 teachers in this province—more than 100,000 teachers—and there are a handful that aren't doing things the right way, which is normal in any organization. But you've got to ask yourself: Why would you send a letter about a problem that you say is small, and send it to everybody? A hundred thousand people? Why? Because you're trying to make the issue bigger than it actually is. And actually, you're trying to show you're the boss. Well, you

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know how they say about millionaires: They don't have to tell you they're millionaires, because they are. The boss? He doesn't have to tell you he's the boss, because he is. And if he's telling you that he's the boss, he's not the boss; he's just trying to be the boss, and that's not what we need in education.

What we need in our schools is smaller class sizes. Let's see that in the budget tomorrow. What do we need in our schools? More than \$800 million into special education, because kids aren't getting what they need. We also know there's a mental health crisis in our schools that's just reflective of what's going on in our broader society. The government needs to make an investment in that and not distract and play games.

Speaker, playing games is for recess. And after 100 days, to the minister and this government, recess is over.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Further debate?

Mr. Billy Pang: I welcome this opportunity once again to set the record straight, because from day one, our government has been focused on building an education system that puts students, parents and teachers first. Every single year we have been in office, we have increased education funding, strengthened classrooms supports, and made targeted investments to ensure that students have the tools they need to succeed. But once again, we hear the opposition repeat the same tired talking points, ignoring the facts and the real progress that has been made in classrooms across this province.

Let's start with class sizes: Despite what the opposition would have Ontarians believe, the independent Financial Accountability Officer has confirmed that since 2018, class sizes have remained stable. That means students are continuing to learn in consistent classroom environments, and teachers continue to have the support they need to do what they do best: teach. The opposition can try to rewrite history, but the facts simply do not support their claims.

I also want to talk about special education, because this is where the contrast between our government and the previous Liberal government could not be clearer. For years under the Liberals, special education was underfunded and the most vulnerable students were left without the supports they need to succeed.

We have taken a very different approach. Since 2018, we have increased special education funding by almost 40%, to the highest level in Ontario's history. That funding has helped support the hiring of more than 4,000 additional education assistants in our schools. That matters, because behind every one of these education assistants is a student who is receiving more one-on-one attention, more tailored support and a better chance to succeed in the classroom. It means a child with autism has someone there to help them stay engaged and navigate the day. It means a student with learning challenges can receive the individualized help they need to build confidence and achieve their full potential.

Speaker, imagine for a moment if these investments had not been made. Imagine if we had continued with the Liberals' failed record of underfunding, and what it would mean for students who rely on these supports. Students would not get the attention they deserve, and their outcomes would suffer. That is the reality we inherited, and that is the reality we are fixing. We are making sure that the most vulnerable students are not left behind, but instead given more opportunity to succeed.

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While we are making these historic investments, the opposition stands here and accuses this government of arrogance. There is nothing arrogant about putting students first. There is nothing arrogant about increasing funding year after year, supporting teachers and ensuring that resources are reaching the classrooms, where they belong.

What would be arrogant is ignoring the facts, dismissing real progress and choosing politics over students. This is not what this government is about. We are focusing on results. We are focusing on building an education system that prepares students for the future, a system that equips them with the skills they need to succeed. We will not be distracted by political games or ideological debates.

In fact, as the minister has said, it is time we had an honest conversation about the role of politics in our classrooms. Our schools should be places of learning; places where students build skills, develop critical thinking and prepare for the future; not places where they are subject to political or ideological agendas. We need to take politics out of the classroom and put learning back at the centre of education. This means ensuring that every student, regardless of their background, has access to a high-quality education grounded in knowledge and opportunity, not ideology. We will stay focused on what matters: student success.

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): There being no further matters to debate, pursuant to standing order 36(c), I deem the motion to adjourn to be carried.