

Services for persons with disabilities

Ms. Jessica Bell: I'd like to share a story about a constituent who recently came into my office, Daniel. Daniel came into my office exhausted and frustrated with how this government is treating people with developmental disabilities.

Daniel cares for his sister Nancy, who is 43 and developmentally disabled. She will always need support, and much of that responsibility falls on him. Recently, her disability support payments were suddenly cut off due to an administrative error. Daniel spent hours—days—trying to fix it in a system that does not treat him or his sister with respect. It's not because the caseworkers don't care. It's because they're overwhelmed and managing impossible caseloads.

But what troubled Daniel most was not the bureaucracy; it was Nancy's quality of life. Programs have been cancelled for Nancy; activities have gone. In his words, "People are being warehoused, not supported."

He's also worried about her safety. He shared reports of abuse in care settings, including an assault in Nancy's own building.

He said to me, "We are failing an entire cohort of vulnerable people who can't speak for themselves ... I can't take much more of it."

Daniel's story is not unique. There are over 250,000 people in Ontario who have developmental disabilities, and just as many family members carrying that care. They need more support. They need dignity. They need safety—

The Acting Speaker (MPP Andrea Hazell): Members' statements?

Jeremy Hansen

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Before I go to you on a point of order and before we begin question period, I would like to take this opportunity to wish astronaut Jeremy Hansen, a proud native of London, Ontario, all the very best as he prepares this evening to embark on an extraordinary journey around the moon. His dedication, courage and commitment to exploration has inspired Canadians from coast to coast to coast. As he reaches new heights, he carries with him the pride of a nation.

We wish you safe travels, clear skies and a safe return home. Godspeed.

Applause.

Stephen Lewis

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Leader of the Opposition on a point of order.

Ms. Marit Stiles: Speaker, yesterday we lost a great Canadian, a great Ontarian. I seek unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence in remembrance of Stephen Lewis, former MPP for Scarborough West, leader of Ontario's first NDP official opposition and, of course, Canada's ambassador to the UN and UN special envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa, who, very sadly, passed away yesterday, March 31, 2026.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): MPP Stiles is seeking unanimous consent of the House to observe a moment of silence in remembrance of Stephen Lewis. Agreed? Agreed.

Hansard Wednesday, April 1, 2026
(Education Funding)

The House observed a moment's silence.

Education funding

Ms. Sandy Shaw: My question is to the Minister of Education.

We've already lost 5,000 educators in this province because of this government's funding cuts. Classrooms are already drastically overcrowded. But instead of hiring more teachers and education workers, bringing down class sizes and helping our kids, this government has continued to gut our classrooms with \$150 million in cuts to education.

The 2026 provincial budget cuts have forced the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board to announce layoffs. Preliminary staffing levels for next year show a reduction of 125 jobs, including 55 fewer elementary school teachers.

My question is simple: Why don't our young students deserve so much more than this?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member, of course, will know that that board is facing severe enrolment declines, and that is why there have been some notices sent out. But the member will also know that typically these notices go out at this time of year, and in September, after a recalibration is done, most of these teachers are hired back.

More importantly than that, we're of course looking at an education system and renewing that system. This budget, thankfully, does have significant increases in the core education funding, so we're proud about that.

More importantly, we are seeing literacy rates at the highest level that they've ever been across the province of Ontario. Reading and writing scores are absolutely smashing previous records. We're seeing graduation rates at the highest level in the province's history. And we're seeing math scores finally starting to increase, after 15 disastrous years under the Liberals. What we have said is that it's not good enough; we want to do better.

That's why we're reinvesting—this budget actually reinvests in math so that we can see even better outcomes in the future.

What we're doing is building a system that works for students, parents and teachers, and gives us the best opportunity for success going forward.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Hamilton West–Ancaster–Dundas.

Ms. Sandy Shaw: Minister, there is no parent in Hamilton who thinks their kids need fewer teachers in the classroom. In fact, we've received hundreds and hundreds of petitions asking just that—that the government will increase staffing to make sure that we can reduce these dramatic class sizes. Kids need more help than what they were getting, not less. Hamilton students can't afford to lose more teachers. With this government's chronic per-student underfunding, the school board says they are waiting to see what will be cut next. The parents of Hamilton expect more support in their classrooms, not less.

So my question, again, is very simple: When will you invest in our students' education and give the students and their families the supports that they need? Reduce class sizes, increase supports, increase programs to—

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

Hansard Wednesday, April 1, 2026
(Education Funding)

Hon. Paul Calandra: We're doing just that.

Of course, some of the challenges that she's talking about in her community stem from decisions that are being made by trustees. We've seen this with parents choosing to get their children out of that system and put them in different systems. That's why the enrolment is decreasing.

What we're doing is refocusing the education system on students, parents and teachers. That is why this budget gives an extra \$750 per teacher on top of existing supports for classroom education—because we want to focus our resources in the classroom. Why do we want to do that? Because we want to support teachers, who are the lifeblood of the education system and who have told us, “Refocus the education system on what matters”—giving our teachers the opportunity to give our students the ultimate opportunity for success. We're doing that with increased funding. We'll refocus the education system. That's why literacy score are up. That's why graduation rates are up. That's why math is going in the right direction. We are refunding. We're putting it back into the classroom, and what we're going to see is more people get back into the public education system because it's on the right—