

**Putting Student Achievement First Act, 2026**

Mr. Calandra moved second reading of the following bill:

Bill 101, An Act to amend various Acts in respect of education and child care

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I recognize the minister.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Thank you, Madam Speaker. Let me at the outset just say that I will be sharing my time with the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security.

I appreciate the opportunity to rise today to speak about Bill 101, Putting Student Achievement First Act, which was introduced yesterday. As you know, Madam Speaker, this is the second in a series of reforms since this Parliament returned after last year's election. It really builds on the previous Bill 33, which we passed—it was introduced last June and passed last November.

I think it bears some importance for us to look back a little bit, as I think we always do, when trying to frame why it is that we have brought a bill forward and the changes that are embedded in the bill. I think it's always important that we look back a little bit and see some of the changes that have led up to this bill which was introduced yesterday.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, I've mentioned this on a number of occasions: When we were returned to office back in 2018, following 15 years of Liberal governance in the province of Ontario, we inherited an education system that was really struggling in a number of different areas. Most importantly, student achievement was struggling. Obviously, student achievement should be top of mind for any Minister of Education because I know it is top of mind for every single educator across the province of Ontario. It is one consistent theme that I have heard as I have travelled across the province, as I've spoken to teachers, educators, anybody really associated with the education system—when I speak to parents. The number one focus, they tell me, always should be on student achievement, and they have been really frustrated by some of the distractions in the system.

When you look back to 2018, we saw a system that was struggling under, really, an ideologically driven education agenda by the previous government. Ultimately, we had things like—I know we all know about discovery math and the struggles that our kids were having under discovery math. They had strayed away from some of the proven methods of delivering curriculum. In particular, our reading and writing scores were not achieving at a level that I think made parents comfortable. It certainly did not make educators comfortable.

The system itself was turning into a system, as I said, that was ideologically driven, but really, there was a lot of division within the system. A lot of that division, of course, came because for over 50 years—we can't just put it all at the foot of the previous Liberal government. I think that would certainly be unfair because it has been governments of all stripes for 50 years that had made the decision to download responsibilities for education to school boards and trustees. The reality was, they neither had the expertise nor did they have the authority to make the types of changes that were necessary to ensure that our kids were achieving their best and that our educators had the opportunity to give our children the best.

That is why we started to make changes. In 2018, as I said, our math scores were not where they should have been. Our reading and writing scores were not where they should have been.

There was division within the system. Teachers, by and large, were being put in the middle of fights between school boards and parents, and that's not where they wanted to be.

In 2018, we came to government and it was started almost immediately by former Minister Thompson, who really put a stop to many of the changes that had been on the docket, had the previous government been re-elected—put a stop to those changes, retrenched and said, “Okay, what is it that we need to do to not only pause the reforms that had been taking place and had not been successful but put ourselves back on a track to a back-to-basics approach?” Those reforms were continued by Minister Lecce.

I think it bears in mind reminding, and I know nobody wants to be reminded of it—I certainly don't—the fact that really early on in our first term we were confronted with a global health and economic crisis, the likes of which we had never seen. We were shortly into our first mandate when that hit, and it really changed everything.

The opportunity existed for us to just simply say, “We're going to just deal with that,” and we did—more successfully, I would say, than almost any other jurisdiction in the world. But we didn't just stop there. We said that we have to continue on. The challenges that the province of Ontario are facing, not only because of the global health and economic crisis, are there, but the systemic problems that we see within governance, within the Ministry of Education, within other parts—the infrastructure deficit, the health care deficit, the transit and transportation deficits—they were all still there, so we decided we needed to move forward. And that continued on with education.

Despite the challenges that we were facing with respect to COVID, the minister at the time and the government at the time decided they were going to move forward. We seized on some of the challenges that COVID offered us as well. We kept the school system going—that was really important—but at the same time, we looked at what we needed to do in order to move things forward. That was when we really doubled down on a back-to-basics curriculum in some of the core areas of education, because we knew from educators that that was the way that our children were going to succeed—that proven ways of delivering curriculum, that had served Ontario students and educators well for years, that was the way that we were going to get back on track. That was, really, the start of really fundamental change within the education system—this move towards depoliticizing the system, this move towards listening to teachers and educators, and really also listening to parents, because they're obviously very, very important in all of this.

I remember, myself, going to one of my kids' parent-teacher interviews. I was put in front of the teacher, a wonderful teacher, and they put a math problem in front of the parents, because we were doing a group of us. We thought we had got the answer correct—it was a very simple math problem; we thought we had got it correct and we were all pretty happy with ourselves. I thought, “It's not that hard to get that particular one correct.” In all honesty, it wasn't a challenging one. But we had actually gotten it all wrong, because the answer wasn't what was important; how you discovered the answer was more important. So those parents who got it wrong, got it right, and those who got it right, got it wrong.

As a parent, you're thinking, “I don't know what the heck you're talking about. I have no understanding of what that means. I have no understanding of what my child is getting out of a system that teaches them that they don't need to be correct.” I knew that we had to start making some changes in the system.

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Minister Lecce really led a lot of those initial phases, and you're starting to see it in the EQAO scores. We are starting to see a steady increase in EQAO scores across the province of Ontario, especially in reading and writing. The scores that our students are achieving now are some of the highest scores that we have ever achieved in the province of Ontario. International testing as well confirms that since we went back to a back-to-basics and proven way of delivering that curriculum, we are starting to see achievement the likes of which we haven't seen for many, many years in the province of Ontario. Again, it was a more consistent way of delivering it, with leadership from the Ministry of Education, that has led to these results.

We also saw, though, that our math scores, while increasing—starting to increase, as opposed to falling year over year—we're starting to trend up in the right direction, but not in the fashion that we were happy with, certainly not in the fashion that educators were happy with and parents either. So we have doubled down on some additional investments in that—again, started by my predecessor—to put more supports in the system for math, because we want to see those achievements increase as well.

Look, it really started in 2018. Again, when we were elected just a year ago—I guess this House met for the first time, ironically, a year ago today. As the House leader just mentioned, it's the one-year anniversary of the first female Speaker's election to the Chair, and we then were faced with a global tariff war. It's no secret why people turn to Progressive Conservative governments in the province of Ontario in times of crisis, because they know that a Progressive Conservative government will have the interests of the people of the province of Ontario first and foremost, and that the way you build a better education system is through a strong economy. So it is no coincidence that, of course, we were elected a year ago.

At that point, we brought forward Bill 33, which was the first companion piece of legislation, frankly—the precursor to this one. Bill 33, just to remind everybody, was a bill that came out of a lot of dysfunction that we were seeing in local governance, in particular in a number of school boards.

Mr. Speaker, you will know, of course, that we have assumed responsibility for eight school boards in the province of Ontario—about 40% of the students in this province are directly under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. There were a whole host of reasons why this had to happen across the province of Ontario, but Bill 33, in particular, made it easier for the ministry to assume responsibility when school boards were falling off the rails.

Under the old system, before Bill 33, a Minister of Education really had to wait until a school board and its students were in absolute crisis before stepping in. To put it into context, one of our school boards, school board Near North, which encompasses Parry Sound, North Bay—it is a very large board. They were in a surplus budget situation, so there was no reason for the Ministry of Education to ever have to look at the Near North school board. But then it came to light that at this school board, there was a new school that they were building: a new Parry Sound high school and an elementary school; they were combining them into one super school.

Approval for that school had been given, I think, 14 years earlier—14 years earlier they had started deciding to build this new super school. During this construction, it came to light that there were massive, massive problems with this build and more needed to be done. Now, the minister did not have the tools to step in and do something about it. As minister, I was to sit back, because the board was in a surplus situation, and allow the problems to continue

unabated, or without interruption, unless I followed an arcane series of rules and regulations in order to get to a point where the minister could assume responsibility for that board.

Now, we passed Bill 33. It allowed us to step in really quickly. Once Bill 33 was passed, it set out new standards for the minister to move in. It's a responsibility—let's not take that for granted—the Ministry of Education is assuming responsibility; it's taking more leadership, and I have no issue with that at all. I think Ontarians would appreciate that.

But let's look at what happened in that board. We got into the board, and what we found out after an independent investigation is that the elected trustees were actually ignoring conflict-of-interest rules. They didn't care to learn what the conflict-of-interest rules were. Some were voting to benefit themselves. Still other trustees were going out into the community sowing division within the community to try to change a decision that they themselves had made earlier on.

Bear in mind, a 14-year project was on their plate, a school that was three quarters of the way built. They then decided that they didn't want it any more. They wanted a change. So they go out in the community, and they start sowing division within the community to try to get parents upset, educators upset, to try to stop a build.

At the same time, they had come to an agreement previously that they were going to transfer two of their schools to the French school board, which was bursting at the seams and is still very popular. The ministry funded significant repairs, funding about \$15 million to the French board to repair the older schools to be ready for the French board. And this school board decided, "We're going to go out in the community, sow division between French-speaking parents and English-speaking parents to try and get the school to be stopped so that we can keep those two schools and we can disadvantage the entire system," because they wanted to keep one particular school where one trustee had his wife teaching at—conflict-of-interest rules be damned. So we stepped in.

And then when we stepped in, we realized that not only was it a problem with governance at this board, but the entire capital build of this school was in a catastrophic state to the point where we had to step in. We've had to bring outside assistance from the Halton school board to help us build. Portions of the school are being demolished before a student has even set foot in the building.

The previous school that kids were at, the Parry Sound High School, which has served the community for over 60 years, is partially demolished. Kids were moved back into a partially demolished school. They're learning right now in a demolished school that is being made available to them. Trustees, of course, saw no problem with this.

Now, it goes even further. You had a director of education at the Near North District School Board who decided that he didn't want to be in the same building where his superintendents were, where the public service were, so he decided to uplift himself, close a school and make the school his office. So he and an assistant went to a closed high school—a beautiful closed high school that was closed under the Liberal government's time in office—and, like Saddam Hussein, he had himself a wonderful palace, this guy.

Then, to make matters worse, he gave himself a raise.

**Interjection:** Why not?

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**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Yes, why not?

So he gave himself a raise. Now, in giving himself a raise—how did he give himself a raise, you ask? Well, he gave himself a raise to a level that is illegal, first of all, because he wasn't allowed to pay himself that much, but he did something very unique. He decided, as opposed to the trustees giving him a review of his job performance, that he was going to do it himself.

I know many of you are too young to remember Stuart Smalley. That's a Saturday Night Live character who looks at himself in the mirror and says, "I'm great, and I'm going to have a wonderful day."

So this director of education looks at himself in the mirror and says, "I'm doing a damn good job. I've got a school that's half demolished. I'm by myself, away from my bureaucracy. I haven't met with any of my superintendents in years. The trustees who are responsible for hiring and firing me have given me the opportunity to review myself. I'm going to give myself a damn good review."

And he did: He gave himself a wonderful review and then paid himself more than the director of education in Toronto, for a board of some 10,000 students. This went on and on and on. You ask yourself, "Well, why didn't trustees, who have the ability to fire—why didn't they just fire him?"

**Interjection:** Walk him out the door.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Walk him out the door, as I think everybody else would do. Well, they thought it was perfectly fine—perfectly fine. I asked my ministry, "Why are we not stepping in to do something about somebody who has broken the rules, is paying himself more than he can be paid when students are learning in a half-demolished school? What is our responsibility here? Where is the leadership from my ministry in order to stop this from happening?" Well, the tools weren't there.

That's a long-winded way to say that's where Bill 33 came in.

There are still other boards that we took over supervision of because of Bill 33. The York Catholic board: We took control of the York Catholic board recently. They have gone through eight directors of education in the last nine years, I think, so one a year, basically. Whereas Near North wouldn't fire anyone, York Catholic was like—

**Interjection:** A revolving door.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** —a revolving door of directors of education. Now, imagine the impact that has on educators in the system and the public service that surrounds them.

Now, they went to a whole other extreme, the Catholic board in York region. They then decided that they couldn't stomach each other—the trustees—so they have spent more money fighting each other in court than they have on some of the important educational programs within the York Catholic board. And all the while, who's put in the middle of this conflict between trustees and parents? It's teachers. It's always teachers that are going to be put in the middle of this.

You have the Peel District School Board. Well, for years, they kept inflating their numbers, saying, "We have this many students." Despite the ministry saying, "You're not going to have that student enrolment," they would say, "Yes, we have this enrolment," and they'd provide us

with a budget that suggested that they had a balanced budget, then halfway through the year say, “We made a mistake. We now have a deficit. But don’t worry, we’re going to go into our reserves and we’re going to balance it.” So they would give you a fake deficit number every year. Before Bill 33, we had no tools to step in. Peel region—we stepped in and we are putting that back on track.

Similarly, in other boards—the Toronto Catholic board, the Toronto public board: These are boards where some of the challenges they face are certainly of their own making; some are more historical. Frankly, I am very sympathetic, as I said, to Toronto schools. I mean, it was a shock to a lot of people that Toronto schools have pools. You go to different parts of the province and they say, “What are you talking about, Toronto schools have pools?” And I said they do because many, many years ago, the city partnered with Toronto—many, many, many years ago—to bring in pools as a part of their infrastructure. At some point, Toronto no longer supported the pools at those schools to the extent that it used to when they were built, and the board is responsible for that. Through no fault of the board, they have an infrastructure piece where they need assistance, which created a pressure on them. So I’m very sympathetic to things like that.

But at the same time, you had trustees who’d get there and then put all kinds of pet projects in place, which distract from the work of educating. It causes challenges to student achievement. I was brought into the office by one director of education of one of the supervised boards, Toronto, and they showed me the desk—it was a fairly large desk, to be honest with you, a big desk—and it was full of reports, a massive stack of reports after reports after reports. I asked the director, “What are you showing me?” I thought it was just a long decision, something that had to be made. He said, “That is five years, \$5 million worth of reports, and no decision on a school construction project in Toronto.” That decision was made by a supervisor within 45 minutes. That school is now being built, and in two years those kids will have a state-of-the-art facility—45 minutes—

Interjections.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** It’s actually quite interesting. Recently, my team was on the phone with a couple of members of the opposition, the official opposition—an issue in a Toronto board, the Toronto District School Board, a safety issue for parents, which we were able to resolve for them in 30 minutes. The message back to us was, “We have been trying for three years to get trustees to take us seriously.” Now, this is—I won’t say which member of the opposition; if they ask me a question today, I’ll make sure that I highlight that meeting, but I won’t do that here, today. But this was a member of the opposition—I think Dianne Saxe is the councillor in that area—who said, “For years, we have been fighting to get them to appreciate that this is a safety concern and they just simply would not listen to us. And yet here we are, 30 minutes into a meeting, and we are having our safety concerns addressed.” So all good stuff.

This bill goes a step further, obviously. This bill limits the Toronto trustees to 12 from the over 20 that they have right now—it brings them in line with the Catholic board. This bill caps their honorarium at \$10,000. It limits their expense accounts—very, very limited expense accounts for trustees across the board. It freezes the amount of trustees across the board, so if you’re a board with five trustees, you’re frozen at five trustees; if you’re a board with 10, you’re frozen at 10; and it brings Toronto’s down to 12. I think those are all very important investments. It allows the trustees to do what they keep telling me that they want to do, it allows them to keep doing

what the opposition says is the most important role of a trustee: to represent the community and bring that voice to the board. But it strips them away of much of everything else that they do that would cause division within our school system.

Going forward, every school board will have a CEO who will be responsible for the day-to-day management, financing, human resources, capital and construction projects throughout a school board. The CEO will be responsible for that, and a chief education officer will be responsible for all of the academic portions of a board—so separating those two positions which are currently housed within one person's office.

The CEO will bring forward a budget. They will create the budget, they bring that budget to the board, and trustees will have the opportunity to review the budget, to make suggestions and, ultimately, hopefully pass the budget if it makes sense. If they choose to not pass the budget, they can ask for changes from the CEO. The CEO can turn down that board and send the budget to the minister for changes or for approval. It is, again, refocusing our trustees on what their oversight job is and what they keep telling me is their most important function: to represent parents' voices to the board. So we're going to allow them to do that.

Moreover, we are changing bargaining in the province of Ontario. With the addition of CEOs across the province of Ontario, school trustees will no longer be invited to the bargaining table, with the exception of Catholic trustees. As you know, Catholic trustees retain a denominational role—it's a constitutional right that they have, and we are going to respect that constitutional right, but those things that fall outside of denominational will be the responsibility of the CEOs. They, through the directors of education, will be representing our communities and school boards at local bargaining, and no longer will trustees be doing that.

We go another step further. We took a look at all of the fees that were being paid by trustees—well, they weren't paying them; they were actually insisting that the board pay for a number of fees. These are association fees—not just travel to conferences and things like that. One board had—well, we're still compiling the list. It's basically millions upon millions of dollars that was being taken out of education to support random associations. So we are banning the use of education dollars for the use of outside associations in any form, which will directly put money back into the education system. If the trustees want to have these associations and they want to pay for them out of their honorarium, they can do so, but they're not allowed to do so with money that is meant for the education system.

Let's be clear that the changes to how boards are governed and the reduction in the role of a trustee to a much less divisive role makes things a lot clearer, and I think—not I think—I know will put the focus back on student achievement. It will allow us a more consistent level of delivery across the province of Ontario, absolutely. I know the opposition is going to light their hair on fire and say, "Oh, my gosh. This means that the ministry is going to govern from Queen's Park, all of the boards." If I wanted to do that, I simply would have gotten rid of all of the school boards. I respect the fact there are some local nuances that need to be shaped by school boards. That's why they're still there. That's why we never contemplated removing them. But I also accept the fact that the Ministry of Education should be responsible for student achievement, in co-operation with our educators. It is the leadership of the Ministry of Education that should lead that step towards student achievement, and this bill allows us to do that. I accept that responsibility. It is a way of making sure that we have a more focused, centralized delivery.

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This bill also talks about curriculum—standardizing the curriculum resources that are allowed. I keep hearing it from teachers over and over and over again that our curriculum that we have been providing our teachers is too open for interpretation. It means that they have to do so much more than just teach. They have to scour the Internet looking for ways of helping teach their classes and that leads to inconsistencies from board to board and from classroom to classroom. We are going to provide that centralized access to ministry-approved curriculum tools.

Recently, as you know, Madam Speaker, we introduced a new history curriculum, we introduced a new kindergarten curriculum, which leads that, which is very, very focused and provides a great deal of focused, academic goals for our students. Our educators are very excited by that, and they want to see that process continue.

We're also doing a couple of other things that I'll highlight before I turn it over. We talked to a lot of high school teachers, and they told us that they need better tools to manage their classrooms, and one of the things that they are challenged with is chronic absenteeism in the classroom. We saw that before the pandemic; we've seen it after the pandemic—that absenteeism has continued to increase. One of the tools that teachers were asking for is a return to a different matrix for grading.

This bill will restore written exams in every school board. I know it's hard to believe, but when we took over supervision of both Thames Valley and Ottawa public, we had to reinstate final examinations because the students there did not have final examinations. Province-wide, there will be a final examination period. All students from grades 9 to 12 must write a final exam. It will be weighted up to 20% to 25% of their final mark. But equally important, a student's mark will also be dependent on their attendance and their participation. So for grades 9 and 10, 15% of their final mark will be for participation and attendance and, of course, 20% to 25% a final exam, and the same goes for, of course, grades 11 and 12.

What teachers are telling us is that this will help them control their classroom, that there is nothing more challenging than when students pop in and out and there is nothing a teacher can do. There is nothing a teacher can do because the majority of their mark was dedicated just on completing their coursework. As important as that is, I think we can all agree that in the real world, you have to show up, you have to participate, you have to be part of the team in order to get the best.

I was FaceTimed—not far from you. A group of teachers last night FaceTimed me. It was an unknown caller; frankly, I don't know how they got my number, but they did. Anyway, they FaceTimed me; I turned it on and there was a group of teachers who basically just said, "Thank you. This will really lead us down a path of getting better control of our classroom."

The other thing I just really want to briefly talk about is school board communications. I'll end on this. School boards will no longer be allowed to communicate—boards themselves, not trustees. Trustees, you can fill your boots; you can communicate any way you like and can be held responsible for that. But school boards, themselves, will no longer communicate on anything outside of educational matters.

I've said it a million times: I could care less what the Toronto District School Board's opinion is on a global conflict. It's of no interest to me and I don't think it's of any interest to parents. I don't care what the York region Catholic board might think of Donald Trump and Pope Leo's ongoing

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tiff. It's of no consequence to me. What I care about is, how are my kids doing in school? Is it a snow day? How did the sports team do? Are there other things to be made aware of? School boards will be refocused on communicating only those issues that matter to parents and that are important for the school community.

There is a lot more in here. I know that I'll have another opportunity at other phases of this to get into it, but I think equally important is the amazing work of the minister of post-secondary education. He can talk about how well received that has been. But, Madam Speaker, again, I look forward to the rest of the debate on this.

With that, I will turn it over to the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

**The Deputy Speaker (Ms. Effie J. Triantafilopoulos):** I recognize the Minister of Colleges and Universities.

**Hon. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you to the Minister of Education for bringing this legislation forward.

Every day across Ontario, our colleges and universities are building the workforce of tomorrow, a workforce that is dynamic, highly skilled and ready to face whatever may come our way. As we always have, our government continues to ensure our colleges and universities are laser-focused on preparing students for success.

Since becoming the Minister of Colleges, Universities, Research Excellence and Security, I've had the privilege of visiting many of our post-secondary institutions. I can tell you from first-hand experience that Ontario is home to some of the brightest graduates in the world.

The people of Ontario are the greatest asset that we have. We will do whatever it takes to protect Ontario, and that includes protecting our students. By creating the right conditions for students to succeed, both during their academic journey and in their future careers, Ontario will continue to build a strong, resilient economy.

That brings me to my main focus today: teachers. Teachers shape the lives of young people every day. They are mentors, role models and leaders in our classrooms. The strength of our education system depends on their skill, dedication and readiness to meet the needs of today's learners, which is why Minister Calandra and I have introduced legislation to modernize teacher education. Should the bill pass we would create a more nimble and responsive pipeline of highly skilled teachers who are ready to meet the needs of students, families and the communities they serve.

Ontario's teacher education system has long been respected for its quality, but communities across Ontario need more highly skilled teachers to give students the best possible start to their education. That is exactly what this legislation would do.

Before I get into the details, let's take a quick look at how we arrived at our current model. For years, Ontario's teacher education programs were delivered over two semesters with a minimum 40-day practicum. In fact, 80% of the teachers in our world-class system today were trained through this model. At that time, Ontario graduated 9,000 teachers annually. But in September 2015, the Liberals made the programs four academic semesters, with an average of an 80-day practicum spread out over two years. This change resulted in admissions to teacher education programs dropping by 50%, threatening our pipeline of highly skilled teachers and deterring excellent candidates from a fulfilling career.

Over the last 10 years, Ontario has continued to grow, especially in the last few years. That means more families need excellent teachers to give their kids the best start to their educational journey.

School boards across Ontario are telling us the same thing: The demand for teachers is increasing. We especially need French-language teachers, French as a second language, technological and rural and northern teachers. At the same time, there are capable individuals who want to become teachers but face barriers, including time, cost and rigidity in current teacher education pathways.

Our plan to modernize teacher education has three pillars. First, with this legislation, we are proposing to shorten teacher education from the current two-year, four-semester program to a one-year program delivered in three consecutive semesters. By shortening teacher education to one year, we would prioritize in-class learning, break down barriers to students launching their careers and get teachers into classrooms sooner.

Should the bill pass, teacher programs at all of our 14 publicly assisted or three private institutions that offer initial teacher education would offer the shortened program by May 2027. To be clear, these proposed changes apply across the board to both English-language and French-language teacher education programs. Our approach is province-wide, consistent and focused on meeting student needs wherever they live and learn.

Research and stakeholder feedback consistently show that teacher readiness is driven more by the quality of practicum experience and mentorship than by program length alone. This is the lived experience of educators, school leaders and teacher candidates themselves. Plus, many other provinces offer shorter, more flexible pathways into teaching while maintaining professional standards.

We have reviewed teacher education programs across multiple Canadian jurisdictions and found no consistent evidence that longer programs alone lead to better prepared teachers or improved student outcomes. What does make a difference, Speaker, is the quality of practicum experience, strong mentorship and structured classroom immersion.

Ontario needs a system that prioritizes classroom readiness, while allowing qualified teachers to enter the workforce sooner, which is why the second pillar of our plan to modernize teacher education is to establish a new minimum length of practicum across all programs. Across the country, practicums range from 70 days to 120 days.

Teachers, faculties, students and school boards have been clear: In order to best prepare for a successful teaching career, our teacher candidates need as much time as possible in the classroom during their studies. We see it across every single sector, from STEM, health care, teaching and skilled trades: The more time a student spends learning the job while studying, the better equipped they are to succeed and stay in their chosen career.

In order to strengthen our pipeline of highly skilled teachers who can hit the ground running upon graduation, under this legislation, we would be consulting with the sector to identify a practicum length that best prepares future teachers to thrive in the classroom. And then we would build that practicum length into every single teaching program in Ontario—from North Bay to Kingston to Windsor—so that every community has access to teachers who have the hands-on skills they need to give our kids an exceptional education.

Across our province, there are passionate, dedicated individuals with relevant work experience who want to enter the teaching profession, and that experience would make them a better teacher—experience like early childhood education diplomas and working as an educational assistant. We believe these individuals should be recognized for their experience. Under this legislation, Ontario would explore opportunities to create accelerated pathways into teaching for qualified candidates.

The goal is straightforward: to allow some candidates to complete their program in a shorter time frame by reducing duplicative coursework, or adjusting practicum requirements, while still meeting regulatory standards. This flexibility is especially important for mature learners and second-career applicants, for whom time and cost can be significant barriers to pursuing a teaching career.

So we're looking into how we can diversify entry pathways including the responsible use of prior learning assessment and recognition, or PLAR for short. PLAR allows candidates to demonstrate prior learning gained through work, study or life experience, and receive credit where appropriate. This tool already exists within Ontario's post-secondary system and is supported through ministry guidelines and existing funding.

By expanding these pathways responsibly, we can reduce unnecessary duplication of training, attract skilled candidates into high-demand teaching areas and remove structural barriers, all without compromising quality or consistency of education so that our children get the best possible teachers for their classrooms.

Speaker, we recognize that shifting program design requires careful implementation, which is why our government would work closely with the universities that offer teacher education, as well as the Ontario College of Teachers, to ensure a smooth transition. We would identify what core courses must remain in the one-year program to keep producing highly skilled teachers while accommodating a new, elongated practicum. In addition, we'll also be providing transition funding to our institutions to support the cost of transitioning the program.

This program will not go into effect until May 2027, meaning all of the programs that begin before then, like the ones this fall, will follow the existing format, keeping things straightforward for our current students—because our students' success is the main focus of this bill, and their future success is exactly what we had in mind by choosing the start date for this program.

Our proposed start date of May 2027 means our first cohort of students under the new program would graduate by May 2028. This graduation date better aligns with the K-to-12 school calendar, so that our students have finished their education right when our school boards are looking to hire for the fall, increasing our students' ability to be hired and start their meaningful careers sooner.

By bringing these three pillars together—a one-year teaching program, a longer, standardized practicum and recognizing prior relevant learning—we would break down barriers, prioritize in-class learning and create a nimbler and more responsive pipeline to meet the needs of students and families. This efficient, high-quality program would allow more people to launch their teaching careers sooner while ensuring that parents and their children have access to well-prepared teachers—because when it comes to protecting our province's future, that means protecting our children's future, and that starts with ensuring our teachers have the skills they need to empower our children to reach their full potential.

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But our work doesn't stop there. Like we always have, our government is backing this plan with critical, decisive investments. Through budget 2025, we invested nearly \$56 million to train 2,600 more teachers by 2027—especially for northern, rural and remote communities. From this investment, we're teaching more than 500 new teachers in French-language and French-as-a-second-language education programs. On top of this, we've doubled the amount of French-language teaching students enrolled at the Université de l'Ontario français.

Speaking of French teachers, in 2021, our government launched a French teacher recruitment and retention strategy to increase the supply of French-language teachers in Ontario. To date, we have invested more than \$30 million to bring more French teachers to communities that need them the most. As a result of these critical investments, Speaker, the French-language teacher shortage has been reduced by 30% since its peak in 2022.

And, of course, as part of our historic new funding model that will bring an additional \$6.4 billion to the sector—the single-largest investment in post-secondary education not only in Ontario but Canadian history—we are investing \$150 million into our teacher education program, funding 4,000 more seats and increasing per-student funding by 27%. Because we know if we want to protect Ontario families' access to high quality K-to-12 education, we cannot only ensure the teacher program is efficient, well-focused and responsive to parents' needs, we must also ensure that we're expanding enrolment and ensuring our schools have the support they need to deliver a world-class education.

Not only will our new funding model raise operating funding to \$7 billion this fall, which is a 30% increase over this year, it also includes \$1.7 billion in additional funding to support 70,000 more seats in economy-driving sectors like STEM, health care and the skilled trades—and, of course, teacher education, which means while today, we're supporting over 12,000 teaching students across Ontario, through this record-setting investment, we will expand capacity and train even more teachers for classrooms today and into the future.

These targeted expansions reflect the demands of Ontario's labour market and the skills employers consistently identify as critical to long-term growth. We're expanding the programs students want while building the workforce Ontario needs because that is how we protect this province.

Under this legislation, our government is also taking steps to streamline performance and accountability for our colleges, universities and Indigenous institutes. Following the introduction of our historic \$6.4-billion funding model into the post-secondary sector, our government has modernized and strengthened our funding agreements with each post-secondary institution to include stringent performance metrics, like graduate employment rates, economic impact and hands-on learning. We're seeing first-hand how our schools are meeting the needs of students, employers and our economy, and we've tied a portion of their funding to their performance to ensure our institutions continue to deliver a world-class education.

To reduce duplication and administrative burden, under this legislation we are proposing to absorb the accountability and performance mandate of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario into ministry functions. We would also bring their free speech reporting function into the ministry as well.

Our government is leading by example, Speaker. As colleges and universities find efficiencies and focus on their core mandate, our government would also eliminate duplication, find

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efficiencies and deliver savings for taxpayers. This absorption would ensure institutions continue to find efficiencies and remain focused on their core mandate: equipping students with the skills they need to thrive in high-demand careers. With proposed savings to be reinvested in student success, our government would be ensuring that our higher education system is building the most competitive workforce in the G7.

In closing, as Minister Calandra and I say often, education is about the students. It's about giving the students the support they need to succeed in the future, whether that's K-to-12 students or post-secondary students. It's about giving students the support they need to succeed, and that is exactly what this legislation would do for our teachers and our children. By working together with our exceptional faculties, our school boards and the OCT, we would launch a more nimble and responsive teacher education pipeline that is ready to deliver an exceptional education, no matter what the province may face.

I say this often, but, as a proud husband of a teacher and a father of three young children, I see first-hand every day the incredible impact Ontario's teachers have on our children. Our proposed changes in this bill will not only ensure we have more teachers to give our children the best start to their education, but it will make sure those teachers are highly capable of leading a successful, fulfilling career—the type of career where children far into their adulthood will look back and remember the teacher who made a difference.

I'm confident that teachers trained through our proposed new program will protect our children's future, protect our pipeline of skilled teachers and protect Ontario.

Thank you, Speaker, and I ask for your support of this bill as we move forward.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Questions?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** I would like to ask my question to the Minister of Education. It seems as though, in hearing this government speaking, they've undergone a miraculous conversion. This was the same government that cut \$6.4 billion out of education. They had an attack on educational assistants with the unconstitutional Bill 28. They set up a snitch line on educators in 2018 and forced online learning, even knowing that it was not pedagogically appropriate for all students. They've also set up this supervisor scam, blaming trustees for their mistakes in education. Not only that, but they have also shut down special education advisory committees from being livestreamed, thus removing accountability.

My question to this government: Given their miraculous conversion, will they finally fund education appropriately, value teacher professional judgment, address violence in schools and finally stand up for the words they claim?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Look, I think the member is debating the wrong bill. The bill that's in front of us here is a bill with respect to school board governance. It is a bill with respect to the delivery of curriculum. It is a bill that the Minister of Colleges and Universities has brought forward to improve teacher education, which, frankly, every single school union, teachers' union has been asking for for a very, very long time. That is what is before him. It is a bill that puts more resources into our schools. It is a bill that structures the management of boards away from division and back to the focus on student achievement. It is a bill that gives teachers better management control of their classroom and greater expectations on our students when it comes to how they are to achieve the best of themselves.

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So I think if the member looks at that particular bill, the bill which is in front of him, he will have a decision to make: whether he's going to support this bill—support students, parents and teachers—or support his union friends.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** The minister has named time and time again some really extreme cases of mismanagement to justify this bill that concentrates powers at Queen's Park, that removes essential powers from school boards. But I'm just wondering, why is he using a sledgehammer to crack a nut instead of addressing those extreme cases—instead of penalizing all the boards across Ontario, even the ones that are being exemplary in their practice?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Look, I'll let the Liberals defend out-of-control spending. I'll let the Liberals defend a system of governance that they created which focused more on division as opposed to bringing people together, Mr. Speaker.

The bill that is before the House is a bill about the Ministry of Education showing leadership to have delivery of education that is focused, that is consistent across the province of Ontario. If that leadership doesn't come from the Ministry of Education and from the government, then I'm not sure who it's supposed to come from.

The big problem that we have in the education system today—which I hear from a lot of parents, which I hear from a lot of teachers—is that it is inconsistent, that it is open to interpretation, that if you go to Toronto, you learn one thing, if you go to Toronto Catholic, you learn something else, and if you're in Peel, it's something completely different.

So, yes, I have a difference of opinion with the member opposite. I think that the Ministry of Education for 50 years has downloaded responsibility, and this bill is about the ministry showing the leadership that is required to give our students the best opportunity to succeed.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Whitby.

**Mr. Lorne Coe:** Parents in my riding tell me they expect their school boards to focus on student achievement and not on infighting and political games. We've seen the York Catholic District School Board burn through seven different directors of education in nine years and rack up at least \$400,000 in costs from constant trustee fighting.

Can the Minister of Education speak to how Bill 101's new chief executive officer model will bring the kind of professional, qualified leadership our school boards need to put students first?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I thank my colleague for the question. Yes, by separating the role which is currently held by one person, the director of education, into two distinct roles—one that focuses exclusively on academic achievement, which is the educational director in each board, and another that focuses on the business management end of it, the capital, the staffing and the budgeting—it allows us to have a more consistent, less partisan voice for bringing forward that budget.

We've seen, of course, it's not only once a year that trustees bring budgets forward; it is done throughout the year when they try to undercut each other with different motions at the table and they change their mind constantly. That does not improve education. So this system here that we're bringing in, with a CEO, is about focusing those aspects that should be managerial with a

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CEO and those aspects that should be academic where they belong with an educator, who can focus exclusively on student achievement.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Ms. Peggy Sattler:** My question is to the Minister of Education. There are 76,000 qualified, OTC-certified teachers in this province who are not currently teaching. We are seeing thousands of education workers being laid off across this province. So clearly the problem is not just the recruitment of new teachers; the problem is the retention of existing teachers. We need to make the investments in our classrooms that will support student learning and create positive work environments for educators.

My question is, why does this bill do nothing on the retention side to be able to retain teachers in Ontario?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** First and foremost, I think the Minister of Colleges and Universities has outlined in his reforms some of the things that we are hearing directly from teachers. So, in the bill, it also provides a significant increase in funding for what we call associate or mentor teachers. These are the people that help the next generation of teachers be prepared for the classroom.

One of the things that the minister has done in his portion of the bill on teacher education is— not only is it short and more concise, but it is about increasing the amount of time that a student teacher spends in front of a classroom. Because we've heard it over and over and over again: If you want to keep them in the classroom, they need to spend more time in front of the classroom before they get in there permanently so that they know how to manage a classroom. That's why in those first few years, we were seeing such challenges with the system that was brought in by the Liberal government, of course supported by the member opposite.

So the changes by the Minister of Colleges and Universities are a direct response to those teachers that said, "We need more help in the first few years if we're going to stay in the system."

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further questions?

**Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon:** Thank you very much for the explanation of your new bill, to the Minister of Education.

You mentioned a school in Parry Sound, I believe, where students were studying in a kind of construction site of a school. I'm wondering what your government is going to do to address the backlog of disrepair. Second public school in my riding is in desperate need of a renovation. It has been on the top five TDSB shovel-ready school list for over eight years, and I just wonder when they could expect their rebuild.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** It's a great question because the member's not wrong: We did inherit a massive repair backlog from the previous government. We have put significant resources into catching up—the largest capital infusion in the province's history.

I acknowledge it's still not enough but that's one of the reasons why we want to refocus our boards of education, right? Because when they start wasting money on things outside of their mandate—when they start wasting money on pet projects—that is direct funding that does not go to repair a school.

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So the member is absolutely correct, and this bill, with Bill 33, allows us to address those backlogs much quicker. I thank her for her support on both of those.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I recognize the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock.

**Hon. Laurie Scott:** My question is to the Minister of Colleges and Universities. Time and time again, I've heard from parents, I've heard from people that want to be in teachers' college, that it's too long, and I'm happy that we're addressing that issue. I wondered if the minister, in the short time that I have left him, could build on that condensation of the teachers' college program?

**Hon. Nolan Quinn:** Thank you to the member from Haliburton–Kawartha Lakes–Brock for that question. Yes, going from a four-semester to a three-semester program will save students approximately \$3,000, but it's going to save a year of their time as well, Speaker. Our old system—the one-year system, prior to being changed to a two-year system—only had about 40 days of practicum. Our system currently has about 80 days, and we're going to ensure that they have more time in the classroom, but it's also a quicker, more efficient program.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** Further debate?

**Mr. Terence Kernaghan:** It's an honour for me to rise today, as I was a former lead educator, prior to entering this great chamber.

I wanted to begin my remarks by stating that I will be sharing my time with the member from Ottawa West–Nepean, as well as the member from Humber River–Black Creek.

Speaker, Conservatives have never seen a service or a core aspect of our free and democratic society that they haven't wanted to cut, gut, privatize and find a way for their connected cronies to skim off of the top and fill their pockets.

When we see bills titled such as this one, when it comes from a Conservative mouth, it really is garbage, vacuous and a false title. Because we see the track record of this government—really attacking education, undermining education, attacking educators and really disregarding students across the province of Ontario.

Since they first took office, they've cut \$6.4 billion out of our education system. They've also engaged in an unconstitutional attack on educational assistants with Bill 28. Remember the bill that was until it wasn't? They understood that it was not going to stand up.

We also saw that they set up a snitch line for educators when they were first elected in 2018. This is a government that does not respect the discipline of teaching. And by extension, they do not respect students. Otherwise, they would fund education appropriately.

We also saw a government that would force online learning. Now, while this isn't discussed in Bill 101, we know that this government is just really picking around the edges, trying to find ways to put their friends and their insiders in positions of power so they can skim money off of the top of our public funding.

We also have heard a lot today about trustees. And while I won't defend all of the actions of all trustees, I will say this government has used them as a false opportunity for them to really seize the reins of power.

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In my school board, or in the school board that represents the largest portion of London, Thames Valley District School Board, we saw this minister come in and take the board and place it under supervision. They appointed a very highly paid, really lucrative position to a supervisor—and that is not actually represented on the sunshine list.

But you see, I think one of the reasons they wanted to push these trustees to the sidelines was because trustees in Thames Valley spoke truth to power, Speaker. They wrote letters to the Minister of Education, both in 2021 as well as 2023. In 2021, it was July, and in 2023, it was June 6. These trustees were calling out this government for not paying its bills.

You see, since 2019, there have been statutory benefit increases to the Canada Pension Plan as well as EI. And these were statutory increases that the government was not paying. They were not paying their bills. They were cutting and underfunding Thames Valley by somewhere in the neighbourhood of \$13.2 million.

This is something that they knew they were doing. It was like that person, you know, you go to dinner with and suddenly, as soon as the bill arrives, they have to go to the bathroom, or they suddenly get a phone call. The Conservatives don't want to pay what they owe.

It's also distressing when we see this lack of transparency and accountability from this government, because they cut off the public livestream of the Special Education Advisory Committee.

As anyone ought to know, a parent of a young person who has special needs or who has exceptionalities has an incredibly busy life caring for a person. Sometimes they may not be able to take that young person with them. Sometimes they may not be able to find child care. And so being able to attend these meetings virtually was really something beneficial to them. But yet, this government shut that down. They stopped those parents from seeing and from advocating and from being a voice for their children.

And as I understand it, I don't believe this connected, Conservative supervisor in Thames Valley has even attended one of these meetings.

This government, if they truly wanted to actually put their money where their mouth is and actually have the backbone to stand behind the words that they would claim, they could fund special education appropriately.

You see, with this government, they don't fund students properly. The Grants for Student Needs and the funding formula are broken. It has been long broken. Funding each student as though they are a cookie-cutter model and then passing over purses of money to school boards with the hopes that they spend it on students—there are two problems with that: (1) There is no guarantee it will be spent on the students who need it; and (2) There is no guarantee it will be spent in a developmentally appropriate way.

If we opened the funding formula and made sure that students with exceptionalities were funded based on their needs, we could ensure that that funding would follow them and that it would also be prescribed in ways that are set out under their individual education plan, or IEP. That way, the experts would actually have a say in ensuring that that student had all of the things that they required.

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You see, this government does not pay educational assistants nearly enough. They are paid mercenary wages by this government and they're disregarded, and I suspect it's largely because it is a female-dominated profession, as is education. This is why all of these care professions in Ontario are often disregarded. They're undermined and they're underpaid because this government really does not pay women appropriately. Today is Equal Pay Day. The government is nowhere near paying women what they deserve, what is fair and what ought to be legal.

I would also say that this government, when it comes to education, talks about how education should be run like a business, yet this government has shown how they are really ineffectual and pathetic at running a business themselves. When it comes to the creation of new schools, why is it that in the province of Ontario, any time a new school is finally opened, it's woefully inadequate? Its parents are ready. They show up, and that new school has to be populated with five, 10, 15 portables because they, in their so-called business minds, can't project that eventually that school that they're going to open is not going to meet the needs of the population.

So, instead, school boards then have to go and purchase temporary accommodations in the form of portables, which are not ideal learning environments. We know that schools are built based on a certain population. That means that their gymnasium facilities, their washroom facilities are all based on a certain student number. But when you open a school and have to put 10 or 15 portables there, those accommodations are nowhere near enough.

I would also like to say, Speaker, that in this world, we have legislation governing that video games, movies and television all have warnings on them when there is coarse language, when there are depictions of violence in them. You know, this government has chosen to ignore the massive problem of violence in our schools. Children in schools are seeing things that their parents would not allow them to watch on a screen.

But worse yet, at least there is a critical distance when a young person is watching something on a screen. What they're seeing in classrooms right now is absolutely unacceptable. They're seeing students attacking educational assistants. They're seeing students attacking educators. They're seeing students use some of the most vile, misogynistic language to their teachers—and we're talking about young people. This government is okay with that because they have not addressed violence in schools, they have not brought down class sizes and they have not made sure that there are adequate mental health supports for young people.

Throughout the pandemic, the official opposition said, "Because of the way in which this interrupted society, we have to ensure that students have the supports that they need and that they deserve because of that lack of socialization for that extended period of time." This government said, "Everything's fine here. Nothing to worry about. Everything will be just great." Well, we're seeing the consequences of that. One day, these young people will be looking after us in our old age, and I shudder to think because of the way this government has let them down.

Yet this is all part of the Conservative program. I remember back when the Harris Conservatives went and moved administration and teachers into different bargaining units. What they did was try to divide and conquer. They made it so administrators in schools and educators were in different bargaining units and, that way, would be fighting with one another.

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We also had the Minister of Education, John Snobelen, who was caught on a hot mike saying that if we manufacture a crisis in education, it will justify and allow the public to agree with the cuts that they wanted to make. You see, the Harris Conservatives cut a billion dollars out of education—money that has never been returned.

Nobody believes the miraculous conversion of this government, that they actually stand up for students, that they actually stand up for educators and that they actually stand up for parents. What they're hoping to do is to destroy, to privatize and find a way for their cronies to fill their pockets with public dollars. We have so many titles, like with Bill 101, and they are self-reflexively, ironically titled. I wonder if Conservatives actually believe that they stand up for students, because—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ric Bresee):** I'm sorry to interrupt the member, but it is now time for members' statements.

Second reading debate deemed adjourned.

### **Special-needs children**

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Speaker, today, I stand before you to shed light on a pressing issue that affects many families in my riding of Scarborough–Guildwood: the challenges faced by parents of children with special needs. These families are navigating a complex landscape within the current underfunded school system that is filled with obstacles that often leave these parents feeling like the government has failed their children.

Let me share a story of the dedicated mother of twins who are both deaf, blind and non-verbal. Like many parents, she envisioned a bright future for her children filled with opportunities and support. However, the reality has been starkly different. The lack of specialized teachers and intervenors has left her feeling isolated and overwhelmed. Despite her relentless advocacy for the support for her children's needs, this mom has found herself in a heartbreaking position. She had no choice but to leave her job to care for her twins full-time.

This is not just one mother's story; this is the reality of many parents in Scarborough navigating a failing school system while trying to support their children with special needs. These parents are the unsung heroes fighting tirelessly for the rights and needs of their children, yet they often feel unsupported by the very system meant to help them.

Mr. Speaker, families are struggling, not just to meet their children's educational needs—

### **School boards**

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** My next question is to the Premier of this province—I hope he answers a question. Yesterday, the Minister of Education tabled a very disturbing piece of legislation. It is basically another big power grab by this government. They are constantly changing the rules so they don't have to follow the rules that already exist. They couldn't make it clearer that they don't care about the students, they don't care about the parents, they don't care about the teachers or the communities.

Why is the Premier allowing the Minister of Education to take power and agency away from parents, students and communities?

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

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**Hon. Paul Calandra:** In fact, we're doing no such thing. What we're doing is refocusing the education system back on student achievement. I know that's something challenging for the Leader of the Opposition to accept.

Look, we've said right from the beginning we want leadership to come from the Ministry of Education. For too many years, the Ministry of Education has downloaded responsibility to the school boards, which have put anything but student achievement first. This bill—in addition to Bill 33, in addition to the very real reforms that were brought in by previous Ministers of Education since 2018—is putting us back on the right path to focusing exclusively where parents and teachers want us to be focused on: student achievement, full stop.

I will not apologize that the Ministry of Education should show the leadership that parents have been calling for. If it's not the Minister of Education, if it's not the government, who the heck is supposed to show that leadership? So I will not apologize—

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, I want to be very clear: This legislation has absolutely nothing to do with students, with kids, with making our schools better; it is only about taking power away from schools, from educators, from parents, from communities and—guess what?—consolidating it in the hands of the Minister of Education.

What is interesting is that the minister has also evaded any accountability for the impact of whatever decisions he's going to make. The legislation mentions liability 43 times and mentions students only five times. Do you know how many times it mentions classrooms? Zero.

Nobody has ever worked harder than this government to cover their own behinds, and let me tell you, if they were doing the right thing, they sure as hell wouldn't be doing that. When students don't have basic supplies, why is the minister more focused on protecting himself?

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I will caution the member on language.

I recognize the Minister of Education.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** This, coming from a Leader of the Opposition who says that giving teachers a \$750 supply card is a frill, and that if they ever got the opportunity—now, let's be honest: They're never going to get the opportunity to govern, right? We tried that show once for five years; it was a disaster, so they'll never get the opportunity to rip that supply card out of the hands of teachers. I'll tell you that.

But what this bill does is it restores leadership from the Ministry of Education, yes. It professionalizes bargaining in the province of Ontario, yes. It gives our classroom teachers in the high school level a better opportunity to manage their classrooms, yes. It is insisting that students participate in order to get marks. It insists that they go to school and that attendance be a part of that, and that there are exams that have to be taken into consideration as well.

I've gotten message after message from classroom teachers at the high school level who are telling me, "Finally, somebody has actually listened to us." And do you know what they're also saying? That the changes that the Minister of Colleges and Universities has brought in will not only bring more teachers into the system, it will keep them in the classroom longer, because we listened, finally.

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

**Ms. Marit Stiles:** Speaker, under this government, children are struggling more than they ever have, in our classrooms that are overcrowded. Our education workers are burning out faster than we can hire them. Parents have nowhere to turn because they—this minister and his \$400,000 supervisors—are laying off teachers and vice-principals. And now they're looking at how much property they can sell off. There are fewer education workers, there are fewer teachers, there are overcrowded classrooms and still there is nothing—nothing—to support that child in a classroom who needs help right now, today.

I want to know: If this legislation is so great, why does the Minister of Education need immunity?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Madam Speaker, what the bill does is refocus the education system on student achievement.

Now, I notice that the Leader of the Opposition isn't talking about the new role of a CEO, which ensures that the management of a board is run by a professional while the academic part of it is run by a qualified educator. She doesn't want to talk about that.

She doesn't want to talk about the things in the bill that have to deal with student achievement. She doesn't want to talk about curriculum. She doesn't want to talk about attendance. She doesn't want to talk about the things that the Minister of Colleges and Universities has brought in because it's supported broadly by our teachers, it's supported broadly by our parents.

She goes to one small part of the bill, which is about bargaining. Well, you know what we're going to do about bargaining? We're going to professionalize bargaining, take it away from school trustees, put it into a cadre of professionals who can represent their community, Madam Speaker, and I will not apologize for ensuring that leadership comes from the Ministry of Education so that we can have a concise and more consistent level of education not only in Toronto but province-wide.

### **Education issues**

**Mr. John Fraser:** My question is to the Premier. After eight long years, this Premier and this government are adrift. Just look at the announcement of Bill 101 yesterday.

Bill 101 is going to hurt kids. It's going to hurt our kids by not fixing what's wrong with our schools. Bill 101 is not going to make one child's class smaller, it's not going to get a child who has exceptional needs the help that they need and it's not going to address the mental health crisis in our schools.

Our kids are hurting, our schools are not safe places to learn or to work, and this minister should be focused on class sizes and helping our kids instead of hurting them. Will he do that?

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Do you know when we started doing that? In 2018 when, after 15 long, miserable, dark years, the people of the province of Ontario threw that lot out of government and never allowed them to come back, Madam Speaker.

It's been three elections, and this person is again the leader of the Liberal Party. He was after the first loss, they brought him back, they brought somebody else, they brought him back, he

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lost again. They brought him back three times, right? They've lost three times, but what have they learned through all of that, colleagues? What have they learned? Nothing. Nothing. And they're upset because we're refocusing a system on—wait for it—student achievement.

While they want to support their trustee buddies, what we're going to do is professionalize education. We're going to ensure that our teachers have the resources that they need and that our schools are safer. While they were pulling police out of the schools, we're putting them back in the schools. You know why? Because we trust them. You know who else we trust? We trust our educators. That's who we trust, and we trust our parents to deliver the best possible education for our students, and that's what this bill does.

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

**Mr. John Fraser:** This government has made a mess of our schools over the last eight years. They're not safe places to learn or to work. And the appointment of CEOs is just supervision by another name.

If you want to know what Bill 101 is going to do, how it's going to hurt kids, just take a look at those supervised boards. What's happening there? Changing bell times, cutting special education, firing teachers, firing vice-principals, surplus properties and closing schools, all without anybody's input who has a kid in the school.

This minister is behaving like he's some sort of benevolent dictator. Will the minister focus on getting class sizes down instead of making them his political playground?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** The member references bell times; I've heard this a few times. It was actually school trustees at the Toronto Catholic District School Board who negotiated that and gave it to the unions, so his friends are the ones who negotiated that away. He talks about decisions in his own community—

**Mr. John Fraser:** It's the kids. Bell times matter to parents, you moron.

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** In his own community, people were begging for us to take over that school board. Why? Because under Liberal—

Interjections.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I apologize.

**Mr. John Fraser:** Withdraw.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I am cautioning members about parliamentary language. I have no problem warning and naming members today.

I apologize. Start the clock.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Sorry, I actually didn't hear that.

But, Madam Speaker, look, he personifies everything that was wrong with 15 long years of Liberal rule—the arrogance that comes from that party and that member.

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For 15 years our students were failing. Under Conservatives, our students are doing better in reading and writing, and math scores are going up. Under Conservatives, we have the highest graduation rates ever.

But under an arrogant Liberal government who think that they know better than teachers, that they know better than educators, they know better than parents—it kills them that we're putting the system back where it matters, in the hands of our teachers, in the hands of our parents, and ending the conflict between teachers and parents and putting—

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

**Mr. John Fraser:** Well, if that's true, then that's the pot calling the kettle black because I've never met a minister more arrogant than the one across from me.

This government is tired and out of touch. And while this minister is scapegoating other people and pointing the finger and blaming them, he should maybe take a look at his own government—you know, the one that tried to sell off the greenbelt, or the MZOs, or that sketchy Skills Development Fund and millions of dollars for a strip club owner and the Ford family dentist. So maybe the minister should say to the Premier, "Why don't we get a supervisor, a CEO for our government, to clean it up?"

After eight long years, you've made a mess of our schools. Class sizes are too big, special education has been starved and we have a mental health crisis that you guys are just ignoring. Will the minister actually do his job and address those three things?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Look at the irony of that question. Colleagues, help me out here. The member opposite is asking the minister to take responsibility for issues within education. But when he has a bill in front of him that will allow the minister and the ministry to show that leadership, he then criticizes the very tool that allows us to bring on that leadership. So I will say to the member, put your money where your mouth is.

Now, it should not be very difficult for a Liberal because they're always putting their hands in your pocket, right? They're always putting their hands in your pocket. They always know better than people.

But I will say this to the member: This is what this bill is about. It is about leadership. It is about the ministry stepping back up to the plate to deliver a consistent level of education province-wide. And you know who wants it? Our teachers want it. Our parents want it. That's why they threw that lot out after 15 long, miserable years of failure. They know that we're moving in the right direction. Put your money where your mouth is: Vote for the bill and put us back—

Interjections.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Question?

### **School boards / Conseils scolaires**

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Speaker, yesterday morning, the Minister of Education stood in this House and said he would not interfere with the governance of francophone school boards. I took him at his word. My mistake, because when I read his bill, I was totally flabbergasted. What we see in that legislation is clear: It's a significant centralization of power at Queen's Park.

And the minister now points to the fact that certain provisions of this bill, like the CEO model, do not applied to francophone boards. Well, that's fine, but it's actually a cosmetic distinction when his own bill still gives him the power to issue directives, control budgets and intervene directly in board decisions.

So I will ask the minister, how can he claim to protect francophone governance when this legislation gives him the power to override it?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** The member will know, as I said to her yesterday—the member texted me right away, and I told her that you have to read the bill. What she was saying was incorrect. The French-language boards are exempt from these provisions in the bill. I mean, it is stated right there: They will not be part of this governance change.

But I get it; they're going to continue to stoke fear. But the reality is our French-language boards are doing a very good job. They have a constitutional and a charter right, and we are going to respect that. I've said that over and over again for the last year: that I would do nothing to intervene in the charter and constitutional rights of our Catholic system and of our French-language system. This bill protects the French-language system in its entirety, but still, obviously, a minister should have the tools to work with the French-language boards when they fall off the rails. That's not happened in our French boards, but obviously, we're going to show that leadership on behalf of students and parents should that situation arise.

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

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** Speaker, I need to insist: Francophone school boards are not like other boards. They exist to fulfill rights protected under section 23 of the charter, rights that have been clearly and repeatedly affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada. This is not a policy preference; it is a constitutional obligation. And yet, this bill concentrates decision-making in the minister's hands and removes key safeguards to ensure real community control.

As the minister, does he understand that this level of centralization puts his government on a direct collision course with those constitutional rights, and is he prepared to defend that in court?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Nothing the Liberals would like more than to waste education dollars in court, right?

The bill quite clearly exempts our French-language boards from the provisions. There is no CEO going to a French-language board. Trustees will still be negotiating in the French-language boards.

Now, what I have done, I will admit, is I have reduced the salary of the French-language trustees in the Catholic system as well. I have reduced them to a maximum of \$10,000. The charter does not guarantee a salary. It is something that I think that we have to remain consistent province-wide, but those additional authorities will remain with the French-language boards. It is very clear in this bill. It is something that I have said repeatedly over and over and over again over the last year.

I think the member opposite, if she spends a little bit more time reading the bill—and I can appreciate it; it was only released yesterday. I know that she has a special focus on that, but I

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think she will find that this bill protects French language in a way that has never been done before.

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

**M<sup>me</sup> Lucille Collard:** That's fine, but if that's really the case, put a provision in there that says the bill doesn't apply to those French school boards.

Madame la Présidente, le ministre dit qu'il protège les conseils scolaires francophones, mais son projet de loi fait exactement le contraire. Il retire des mécanismes indépendants, concentre les pouvoirs à Queen's Park et se donne le dernier mot sur les décisions qui devraient appartenir aux communautés.

Exempter les conseils francophones du modèle de PDG, ce n'est pas une protection, c'est un écran de fumée. Alors la question est simple : comment peut-il prétendre respecter la Constitution, alors que son projet de loi affaiblit concrètement le pouvoir des francophones sur leur propre système scolaire?

**L'hon. Paul Calandra:** Madame la Présidente, comme vous savez, nous avons fait beaucoup d'investissements dans le système francophone. Je suis très fier. Nous sommes toujours très fiers de nos conseils scolaires francophones. Mais ce projet de loi va continuer de protéger le système dont nous sommes très fiers.

The member knows full well the bill exempts our French-language boards from the provisions. The member knows that in the bill French-language boards will not get a CEO. The member knows, in the bill, it states quite clearly that French-language trustees in both systems will continue to be at the local bargaining table. We've removed that power from the English-language boards, but the French boards will continue to do that. Why? Because there is a charter guarantee.

That is why we took the time to introduce a bill that protects the charter rights of francophone learners but also recognizes the fact that our French-language boards have done a remarkably good job and they need to continue to be supported. We will continue to do that. Bill 33 was a first step, and this is a second step in protecting those rights.

### **School boards**

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** There's a remarkable fact buried in the new education bill: The CEO of a school board will have more job requirements than the Premier of Ontario. That new school board CEO, once appointed, will be untouchable without ministry approval. A new chief education officer, hand-picked by that CEO, will oversee student achievement—not elected, not accountable to parents, only accountable to this government.

It's a pattern we know well: Weaken local voices, centralize control and leave real classroom problems untouched—the mental health crisis, special education funding declining and classes overflowing.

Madam Speaker, why is the Premier preoccupied with simply consolidating power and cutting teachers when he should be cutting class sizes?

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** What a gross party the opposite party has become. Think about this—  
Interjections.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** I'll ask the member to withdraw.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Withdraw.

This is a party now that—they get a few questions, and what do they do? They insult people. The member opposite decided he was going to call me a name that he would probably not repeat outside, and now the member opposite tries to poke fun at a Premier who has been elected three times by the people of the province of Ontario—three majority governments by the people of the province of Ontario.

You know who decides the qualifications of a Premier? The people of the province of Ontario. That's who decides the qualifications of a Premier. This is a Premier who understands what it means to make a payroll. This is a Premier who understands what it means to build. This is a Premier who, since taking office in 2018, has restored confidence to the province of Ontario, helped create a million jobs, brought back transit and transportation opportunities, rebuilt hospitals, is rebuilding our long-term-care system and pouring billions of dollars into education. You know why we're doing that? Because for 15 long, miserable years, that party failed—

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Back to the member for Don Valley East.

**Mr. Adil Shamji:** My question was on education, and the Premier's track record on education clearly speaks for itself. Look at the state that it's in right now. Certainly, after eight excruciatingly long years, this government's only solution for overflowing classes is to appoint 72 executive positions while simultaneously undermining the authority and democratic mandate of trustees. That's 72 minions of the Premier as he strengthens his authoritarian, Trumpian stranglehold over Ontario—his latest step in weakening our democracy and hiding from accountability.

The Premier's government says it needs to rein in spending and increase accountability. That's an incredible idea from an uncredible government.

Madam Speaker, why does the Premier think we should trust him to deliver fiscal responsibility and positive outcomes in education when he hasn't delivered fiscal responsibility and positive outcomes for Ontario?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** What an absolute joke that party has become, right? What an absolute joke. It is unbelievable to me. We are facing a global tariff war and the members opposite think, "Well, the best thing to do is start insulting." Do you know why they insult? It's because they have nothing to offer the people of the province of Ontario.

Obviously, they haven't read the bill, because do you know who's going to be appointing CEOs? Trustees will be appointing CEOs—not the Premier, not me, but elected trustees will be appointing CEOs.

Do you know what we're going to do in the education system? We're going to continue to unravel the mess that they left us in. Under Conservatives—highest graduation rates ever. Under Conservatives, we have the highest scores in reading and writing. Under Conservatives, math scores are finally starting to increase. Under Liberals, their curriculum people go to jail,

their chiefs of staff go to jail. What do we do? We build a bigger, better and stronger province of Ontario. Do you know why? Because we actually care. Because when the economy goes, there's more money for health and there's more money for education.

### **School safety**

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** The question is for the Premier. I've been speaking to educators, parents and students across Ontario, and their concerns are deeply troubling. We're seeing a rise in violence in our schools, class sizes that are way too large and students with special needs aren't getting the support that they need. And now this government wants to collect less data by removing the requirement of school climate surveys where students and parents provide anonymous feedback on what's going on in schools. As a result, we'll know less about bullying, less about safety, less about student mental health and well-being. It will make it harder for school principals and superintendents to improve student achievement like the minister wants to do, and it will make our schools less safe.

Speaker, why is this government putting its head in the sand and running away from collecting the data?

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** Actually, what we're doing no such thing, Madam Speaker. What we're doing is absolutely removing the requirement that boards have to complete a climate survey. But when asked, "What did you do with these surveys? What results have come out of them," there were very few boards that could actually highlight what the results of all of the survey work was. So boards can still do a survey—it's not mandatory anymore—but what we would rather see is results of the work and the funding that we are providing.

I want safer schools. I don't need to know if a school board itself thinks its school is safe. That's why we brought police officers back into our schools. I want better governance in our schools. That is why I brought a bill forward to include governance. I want student attendance to improve. That is why I brought a bill forward that includes student attendance as part of their final marks.

I would suggest to the member—while Liberals like to talk about things, Conservatives actually like to move forward and accomplish things. That is why our graduation rates are higher and that is why our students are moving in the right direction, and we're going to double down on that work.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Back to the member for Ajax.

**Mr. Rob Cerjanec:** It's clear that the minister is missing the mark, because that data from school climate surveys paints an important picture on what's happening in classrooms and schools. If the minister understood this, he would then know that principals and superintendents can do targeted interventions in certain schools, where they're seeing changes in behaviour or very concerning patterns.

The minister spoke about police in schools. I don't think we should be talking about, "Let's start putting kids in handcuffs in schools." Ask a lot of communities around this province: They need to invite the police into the schools, and it will work better that way because it builds trust with racialized communities and it builds trust with Black communities.

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What this Premier and this government is doing: They're not addressing the real issues in our schools, and it's quite clear that their half-baked plan was created to save face after a crisis created of their own making. It's a distraction from eight years of weakening public education.

If the minister doesn't want to collect the data, will it mean that no one will ever know how much they failed their schools? Speaker, why is the minister making our schools less safe?

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** You know what? This is a classic example of a member who will say something here but will definitely not go back to his community and say, "I want a climate survey." I can guarantee you that, because asking a child, a grade 4 student, if they identify as a man or a woman, a boy or a girl, has nothing to do with a safe school. You know what has something to do with a safe school? Acting on what we see in our school. That's what it means.

When we brought in a bill to bring police back to school, that's about a safe school. When we bring a bill forward to protect our teachers, that's about improving education. Somehow, for this member, a climate survey every two years will give the data that will fix schools. Well, how has that worked out under 15 years of Liberal governments? Lower class results and lower student achievement. Under Conservatives, we're going in the right direction—

Interjections.

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

Interjections.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The member for Ajax will come to order. The Minister of Education will come to order.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** The member for Ajax has been warned.

### **Education issues**

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** My question is to the Premier. I've spoken with many school principals across Scarborough–Guildwood, and what they're telling me is alarming. One school has over 1,500 students and only two principals. This puts the students in an unsafe learning environment—nothing new here, all across Ontario. That same school has 150 students on a wait-list, not because of space but because there are not enough teachers.

This government claims enrolment is down, but, surprisingly, in Scarborough, enrolment is rising and classrooms are beyond capacity. With 900 teaching positions cut, this forces schools to rely on non-certified emergency staff. In my riding, there are 20 schools relying on that, and in Scarborough, there are 50, because we don't matter.

To the Premier: Why does this government continue to fail parents and students in Scarborough?

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

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I don't know why the member feels that Scarborough doesn't matter; we feel just the opposite.

The member is quite correct. One of the challenges that we had with the Toronto District School Board under the previous administration of trustees was their inability to move quickly to

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address situations in different parts of the TDSB, whether it is an increase in enrolment in Scarborough while we're seeing decreases in enrolment in downtown Toronto. That is one of the fixtures that we're seeing under supervised boards, is the ability to move quickly to address challenges in different parts of the educational system.

The member hits the nail on the head. Under trustees, it was laboured and, often, decisions were made not in the best interests of students. As the member would know, a majority of trustees in the TDSB came from the old city of Toronto, sometimes disadvantaging those students in Scarborough.

Under this new model, that will no longer be the case. Academic decisions will be made via the chief education officer, and we'll ensure a consistent level and delivery of education province-wide.

**The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly):** Back to the member from Scarborough—Guildwood.

**MPP Andrea Hazell:** Let's dig a little bit deeper, let's peel away the onion here, let's talk about who's paying the price: The parents, the students, the teachers are all paying the price for this reckless decision of this government.

A mom in my riding of Scarborough—Guildwood raising four children with special needs—there are almost no specialized teachers and critical supports like intervenors in her school in Scarborough. In Scarborough, families are still being told there are no spaces for children with special needs. It gets worse: A father in my riding travels out of Scarborough 50 minutes and comes back into Scarborough to his work. That is atrocious.

Madam Speaker, through you, I ask the Premier: Why does this government continue to fail parents and students with special needs? Scarborough is listening, Scarborough is watching—there will be another election.

**Hon. Paul Calandra:** I know there will be another election. I've just run in three and we've done very well, in part because of the work that we're doing in Scarborough.

It is always interesting to see a Scarborough member from the Liberal Party get up and start talking about it. I know that member is the only one who remains from her caucus from Scarborough. This is a Liberal team that just completely ignored Scarborough. Under Liberals, schools were closed in Scarborough. Under Liberals, transit, transportation—forget about it. Under the Liberals—never made any investments in health care. Under Liberals, they didn't build long-term-care homes—none of that, none of that.

Now, what remains consistent about the Liberals and this member in particular is that, when the Minister of Finance brings forward investments in Scarborough, they still vote against those investments for Scarborough.

So nothing has changed. In 15 years of governance, they didn't change. Eight years where we're bringing things, they still vote against Scarborough. But people in Scarborough know they can count on us to deliver for them.