

Education funding

Ms. Marit Stiles: My question is to the Premier. Just yesterday, we learned that the government's cuts to education funding mean that 40 more vice-principals are going to be fired in the Toronto District School Board. This is going to mean kids getting less attention, less supervision, less support. It means parents get fewer updates, less predictability, more phone calls in the middle of the day telling them to come pick up their kid. This means teachers have fewer resources, fewer options, more stress. These are the choices that this government is making.

So to the Premier: Why is this government firing these vital workers, these vice-principals, who keep our schools running?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: As you know, Madam Speaker, the board made the decision to reduce the amount of vice-principals for two reasons. First, there are 5,000 fewer students, approximately, that will be attending the Toronto District School Board come September, which requires fewer vice-principals in the system. Also, the previous board of trustees had decided to continue a program that was no longer funded. Of course, that program was additional supports during COVID, a time when there needed to be some additional supports in our schools. They chose to continue on that program that was no longer funded. The fact that COVID is now behind us and the fact that enrolment has decreased by over 5,000 students in the Toronto District School Board means that the board does not require these extra vice-principals.

There are no students that will go without proper supervision. In fact, the investments that we're making in our schools mean that there will be better outcomes for our kids. We're focused on students, parents and teachers and student achievement across not only Toronto, but across all of Ontario.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Supplementary?

Ms. Marit Stiles: I think this Premier and this Minister of Education need to get into a classroom and actually talk to kids and families, who are still struggling so much.

You know, this is this Minister of Education's hand-picked supervisor who's making this decision.

Why is it that the government has the money to pay 124 Metrolinx executive vice-presidents, but when it comes to our schools, there is no money for them to even have a vice-principal? Why is that? There's money for a broke luxury spa company, but no money for our kids.

The Premier's approach to education is a disaster, and it is Ontario's children that are being left behind. Will the Premier get up today and commit to ending these education cuts?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Look, Madam Speaker, I've said it on a number of occasions: The reality is, of course, that the budget puts additional resources into education.

But honestly, I don't think parents care about what the Leader of the Opposition says or what the Minister of Education says. You know what they care about? Are their kids succeeding? Are they getting the best out of a \$43-billion Ministry of Education budget? That is what I'm going to continue to focus on.

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Now, she talks about going into classrooms. I have been all across the province of Ontario, speaking to teachers directly. They continue to tell me, “Put the focus back on students.” A lot of teachers have said to me, “I don’t want to be a parent. I want to be an educator. Give me what I need so that we can succeed.”

That is why we announced, in this budget, 750 additional dollars for homeroom teachers across the province on top of the other resources that we’re giving for classroom education, so that teachers could make decisions for themselves as to what they need to help students succeed in their classrooms.

The results are the highest levels in literacy scores across the province of Ontario—

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

Ms. Marit Stiles: So \$750 cards—are you going to buy a vice-principal with that? No, you’re not.

You know what parents care about? They care that they can get on the phone when their kid is falling behind and find somebody to talk to. Now they’re going to have no vice-principal. They care that the teachers are overwhelmed and burning out. We can’t recruit principals into our system right now because they are so overworked and burned out.

Parents know what this means. It means fewer resources in their classrooms. It means fewer caring adults in their schools. There is money for a broke luxury spa company in downtown Toronto, there is money for 124 executive vice-presidents at Metrolinx, but you can’t fund a vice-principal in a school.

What is wrong with this government that you cannot get your priorities straight?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I guess that’s quite interesting. I know my colleagues will probably agree with me, because I know a lot of my colleagues have been in schools across the province of Ontario helping teachers understand that they’re getting an extra \$750 per homeroom to buy the types of things that they need—pencils, papers—on top of what we’re already providing to our schools.

So now you’ve heard it, colleagues: The Leader of the Opposition wants to rip that money out of the classroom, right? Because that’s what the NDP is all about. It’s not about the classroom. It is not about achievement. It’s about them and what they think is best.

So you go to the schools—I’ll come with you—and you tell teachers that you no longer want them to have access to that \$750.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Through the Speaker.

Hon. Paul Calandra: You tell teachers that what they’re doing isn’t enough—because do you know what I think, Madam Speaker? Our teachers are the lifeblood of the education system. Our teachers work hard every single day to give our students the best opportunity to succeed, and I won’t listen to the Leader of the Opposition. What I will do is plow more money back into the classrooms and less into administration.

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Mr. John Fraser: My question is for the Minister of Education. After eight long years, this Ford government is tired, out of touch and out of ideas. Their latest budget tells that story, because there's nothing in that budget for families and their budgets.

You know, Speaker, families depend on great schools. But right now, their schools aren't safe places to learn or to work. That's because class sizes are too big; they've grown. That's because special education has been starved, and there's a mental health crisis in our schools that's not being addressed.

My question is simple: Why is the Minister of Education cutting funding to our kids' schools?

Hon. Paul Calandra: In fact, the leader of the third party would know that we're doing no such thing. The only person that is advocating for less resources in our schools is actually the opposition, because they will have an opportunity in this budget to vote for additional resources for schools. They'll have an opportunity in this budget to support the highest level of education funding in the province's history. They will have an opportunity in this budget to vote in favour of additional supports for math. They'll have an opportunity in this budget to confirm that they believe that teachers are the lifeblood of the education system and they deserve more money to make choices on their own of how they can best support their students. They'll have that opportunity. They'll have the opportunity to vote in favour of billions of dollars' worth of capital improvements across the system.

I ask the member opposite: Will he do the right thing and vote in favour of teachers? Will he vote in favour of students? Will he vote in favour of parents? Because what we're seeing is the highest graduation rates in the history of the province, literacy scores at the highest they've ever been, and after 15 long years of Liberals, who failed our students, we're going in the right direction, and we won't look back.

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

Mr. John Fraser: The minister spent three months looking at EQAO results, and, obviously, he probably needs some help in reading and help in math, because if you go to page 185 of the 2025 budget and then go to page 192 of the 2026 budget, you'll notice that it's \$170 million less. Even by Conservative math, that's a cut. So we know that boards are having to find \$800 million a year just to fund special education and they're not meeting the need.

Last week, I told a story about Marigold, a six-year-old girl who's been waiting two years to get the help that she needs. My colleague from Orléans told a story about Juliet, who was thriving one year and the next year she got nothing.

So, Speaker, why is there nothing in this budget to help children like Marigold and Juliet get the help that they deserve?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, Madam Speaker, we're at the highest level of education spending in the province's history, but it's of no consequence unless you start to see the results of those investments.

The member talks about the EQAO results. I love to talk about the EQAO results. You know why? Because when I look at it, I see literacy scores at the highest level in the province's history.

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Now, unlike the Liberals, colleagues—you will all remember this. You remember discovery math, right? Nobody could understand discovery math. Under Liberals, literacy scores plummeted. Under Liberals, math scores plummeted. Under Liberals, graduation rates were lower.

Under Conservatives, literacy scores: the highest ever. Graduation rates: the highest ever. Math scores: starting to increase. But you know what? Conservatives aren't happy with where they are. That's why we're doubling down, putting more investments in it, because we want our students to have the exact same success as they're having in literacy. We will get the job done, unlike the failed Liberal Party who failed students, parents and teachers every day.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, children like Marigold and Juliet are not just bums in seats. They're not just heads to be counted. It's critical for their development as a child that they get the help that they need. Right now, in nine boards, there's no one left to call.

Speaker, what do you do when your child needs a speech pathologist? I guess—

Interjections: Better call Paul.

Mr. John Fraser: Speaker, what do you do as a parent when your child needs help with reading?

Interjections: Better call Paul.

Mr. John Fraser: And what do you do when you need an EA for your child because they need educational support?

Interjections: Better call Paul.

Mr. John Fraser: So in nine boards: Who does the minister think parents should call?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Just when you thought the Liberals could not get more pathetic you see that. My God. No wonder he's the leader of the Liberal Party for the third time, the third-time leader of the Liberal Party. That's right.

You know who parents, teachers and students want to call? They call the Progressive Conservative government when they have been left in shambles by a previous Liberal government. That's who they're going to call.

But the funny thing is that, in those boards where we have supervision, we also have student and family offices. In Ottawa, in his board, you know what's happening—

Interjection.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The member for Don Valley North will come to order.

Hon. Paul Calandra: —family helpline are responded to within two days, and 88% of the problems that they raise are addressed within five days. The results are even better in Toronto. But ultimately, what matters is that students, parents and teachers have better outcomes, and they know that when Conservatives are in charge, the outcomes are better. When Liberals are in charge, you can discover things but never—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Question?

Subventions destinées à l'éducation / Education funding

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Après huit ans de ce gouvernement, la vie est plus difficile pour nos éducateurs et nos éducatrices, qui sont épuisés, démoralisés et vraiment à bout de souffle. Les classes débordent, la violence en milieu scolaire augmente et trop d'élèves perdent l'intérêt d'aller à l'école.

Pourtant, dans son budget, le gouvernement n'offre aucun investissement significatif pour répondre à ces défis parce qu'il est clairement déconnecté de la réalité. À la place, ce qu'il propose, c'est une carte-cadeau de 750 \$ pour certains enseignants du primaire.

Est-ce vraiment la valeur que le gouvernement accorde à l'éducation de nos enfants?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Now I've actually heard it all. I've actually heard it all. The Liberals now, with the NDP, are saying that the additional resources that we're giving directly to teachers—an extra \$750—the translation came across to me as a “gift card.” The Liberals are now claiming that teachers who get additional resources to help students in their classrooms, that's a gift card, a nice-to-have. But under 15 years of Liberals, they starved our teachers, forcing them to go to Dollarama, forcing them to buy resources on their own.

We've said, “Enough. That's enough.” We want to support our homeroom teachers. It's not a gift card. It's not a “nice-to-have.” Our teachers have told us that it is a must-have. That is why, under Conservatives, you're seeing things like literacy rates, the highest levels ever, and graduation rates, the highest levels ever.

And do you know what? We aren't satisfied with just meeting the averages; we want to go above and beyond. We will not stop until our kids have the best opportunity—

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Yes, it is a must-have, because they should never have had to pay for that kind of stuff in the first place. So thanks for fixing that, eight years later.

Our education system depends on qualified, supported teachers. But more and more, we see these valued teachers leaving the profession within the first five years. In the francophone system, the unresolved teacher shortage crisis is increasing the pressure in the classroom—classrooms that are overcrowded, with too many kids with special needs that are not met and increased violence among children and against teachers.

How does the minister expect the next generation to choose teaching when these are the working conditions they are walking into?

Hon. Paul Calandra: That is why we are making so many changes across the system. It's not just about what the member raises, right? That is why, when we decided to reverse the decisions of the previous Liberal governments to remove community resource officers or take police out of our schools, we said that's no longer good enough. We saw what happened when that decision was made—an ideological decision by the Liberals. We're bringing our police back into our schools to make them safer.

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But you know what? It's not just about that either. They let schools crumble. How do you turn to an education professional and say, "Go teach in a school that is old and outdated?" I have had to take over a school board in the Near North District School Board that allowed their kids to be taught in a half-demolished high school. That's the legacy of the Liberal government.

So it's not good enough for us. And we are going to step in, put things back on track when they fall off the rails.

Hon. Paul Calandra: The three-time leader of the opposition says, "Oh, it's been eight years"—eight years where we fought a pandemic and came out stronger than anybody before, eight years where we're struggling with tariffs. Ontario's on—

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

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Speaker, not only are teachers exhausted, our school infrastructure is too—and I think you've just pointed to crumbling infrastructure, so what have you done after eight years?

In my riding of Ottawa–Vanier, Manor Park Public School was ranked in the top 10 in Ontario in a recent report by the Canadian Environmental Law Association—guess what—for exceeding provincial limits for lead in water. While it might be okay to have politicians work in a building with contaminated water, no one here and no parent in Ontario should be comfortable exposing our children to this.

What is the minister's plan to protect the health of our kids from lead exposure, unless government considers that there is a level of contamination that is acceptable for children in Ontario schools?

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): The Minister of the Environment.

Hon. Todd J. McCarthy: We are proud of the fact, under our government's watch, that Ontario's drinking water is among the safest and most well protected in the world. Our comprehensive legislation and our strong monitoring, reporting and enforcement systems ensure that our drinking water is always held to Ontario's high safety standards.

Now, when it comes to protecting our children in schools, those strong standards are applied across the board in every way. We have the testing, the monitoring, and in those rare occasions when there is any issue whatsoever, strong, decisive action is taken.

Teachers

Mr. John Fraser: To the Minister of Education: Yesterday, more than 100 students in the Minister of Transportation's riding walked out of school to protest the firing of their favourite teachers. They're part of the more than 300 teachers in Peel who are on the chopping block.

And don't take it from me; take it from Arshiya Ohri, a grade 12 student organizer at Brampton Centennial. Here's what she had to say: "I was pretty angry about it. These people are more than just numbers. They're beloved teachers within the school."

Madam Speaker, Brampton students shouldn't have to hold up signs that say, "Hands off our education" or "Protect our teachers." Can the Minister of Education tell these students why they're doing a better job of protecting their schools than he is?

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Hon. Paul Calandra: The member opposite will know the reason I assumed responsibility for supervision of the Peel board was because they actually wanted to fire teachers in February, pull them out of the classroom and give students a new teacher in the middle of the year. I don't know about the Liberals, but I don't think that is in the best interests of students. I don't think it's in the best interests of parents, and it's certainly not in the best interests of our teachers. Consistency in the classroom throughout the school year I think is very, very important, and that's in part why I stepped in.

Now, as we looked a little bit further into Peel, there were so many different challenges there that the previous school board was not addressing. Of course, there were challenges with respect to the numbers that were starting to decrease. A lot of parents were choosing to take their kids out of the Peel system and for other opportunities. That is something that we are addressing.

These notices that are going out now are part of a yearly challenge that happens across school boards in Ontario when they look at the numbers that they're expecting in September and they match that with the amount of teachers they'll need in the next school year.

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

Mr. John Fraser: Respectfully, I think we need more "we" than "I" when we're talking about education.

Madam Speaker, let's talk about another Brampton school that has more than 1,700 students; they're letting 18 teachers go. In Mississauga, West Credit, a school with a high population of special-needs students, is losing eight teachers that students rely on. At a time when we know class sizes are too big, special education is being starved and the mental health crisis in our schools is not being addressed, this minister is firing teachers.

Speaker, Brampton, if I can recall, I think has three cabinet ministers, but if you had a kid in one of these schools, you'd never know it. Can the members across the aisle, or the minister, tell us what they're doing to protect the schools or the kids in Brampton?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The leader of the Liberal Party, colleagues—let's hear what he says. They want to take \$750 out of the classroom. He just said there's not enough "we" and too much "I." Well, for 15 years, the Liberals were all about "we" and not about "I," and who is the "I"? The "I" is the student. The "I" is the teacher. The "I" is the parent. That's who the "I" is, and that is who this entire caucus fights for. It fights for the teachers, the students and the parents, because you know what happens when you do? You put more resources into the classroom. You give our students the opportunity to succeed. Under Liberals, all of the results were crashing—

Interjections.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Under Conservatives, we're starting to see the highest education supports ever, the highest budget for education—

Interjections.

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Hon. Paul Calandra: You gotta love the Liberals. You hear? I wish the people at home could hear the Liberal leader right now. I wish they could hear him right now. He's sour. He's sour because you know what he knows? Parents, students and teachers support what we're doing.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order. We are not in school. Order.

Interjections.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Order.

Better Regional Governance Act, 2026

Mr. Flack moved first reading of the following bill:

Bill 100, An Act to amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996

Hon. Rob Flack: I move that leave be given to introduce a bill entitled An Act to Amend the Municipal Act, 2001 and the Municipal Elections Act, 1996, and that it be now read for the first time.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Is it the pleasure of the House that the motion carry?
Carried.

First reading agreed to.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Minister, do you wish to explain the bill?

Hon. Rob Flack: The proposed legislation, the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026, will strengthen leadership and improve efficiency in regional and county governments.

It would allow the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to appoint regional chairs and streamline council structures in Simcoe county and Niagara. These changes will help local governments respond faster to economic and housing challenges, strengthening decision-making and supporting Ontario's continued growth.