

Curriculum

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: We recently learned that 70% of high school students are now opting out of mandatory online learning. The data has shown that students and parents don't want it. Our educators know that it isn't the best for learning.

It's clear that this government is trying to save money on the backs of future generations by pushing digital materials in all forms. Meanwhile, they're shortchanging our economy instead of preparing students for the future.

Speaker, does the Premier think he knows better than students and families?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: What the member failed to also mention is that close to 50,000 students have continued to take online courses because it provides them a valuable opportunity to take courses, in many instances, that they would not have otherwise had the opportunity to take. We're hearing from students in all parts of the province, and particularly some of our northern communities, who have said that online courses have given them the opportunity to take a course that they would have never otherwise been able to take.

The whole point of it is—and he mentions it in his question—some students have decided to opt out. Do you know why they have decided to opt out, Madam Speaker? Because you are allowed to opt out. That's the whole point. Some students are in; some students are out. It's about optionality for the students so that they can decide what is best for them.

I'm very, very pleased that so many have taken up the opportunity to take online courses, because it is part of building a system that puts our students first, by listening to students, parents and teachers, and giving our kids the best opportunity to succeed.

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

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: The minister might talk about options, but at Hamilton Catholic, the mandatory grade 10 civics and careers course is only delivered online. That's the only option for students.

With this government, kids are being pushed to learn remotely, workers need to be in person, and the Premier gets to work from his cottage this summer. Maybe that's why he wanted to buy his own private jet.

Here's the reality on the ground: Online e-learning courses mean online exams where AI can be used, instead of students showing their work. There is no software provided by the ministry for secure exams and no requirement for in-person exams with pen and paper. It means that a student needs to log in just once a week for attendance purposes, while some are walking around the hallways and hanging out in the washrooms. So much for this government getting tough on attendance.

Speaker, how can our young people learn about career pathways, financial literacy and participating in our democracy only online?

Hon. Paul Calandra: I know that this member worked for the Durham District School Board, so I guess if the experience at the board that he was working for is that kids were wandering the hallways and not doing work, it speaks more to his experience at a board that he was working for than it does in the rest of the province.

This is coming from the Liberal Party, that said that kids didn't have to do exams anymore. And now he's worried about kids doing exams. This comes from a Liberal Party that said kids didn't even have to go to school anymore; that they could mail it in and still get 100% on their courses.

He voted against a bill that we put forward that said kids had to do mandatory exams, that kids had to show up to school, that kids had to participate. He voted against that and then has the nerve to get up and ask a question about kids participating in school.

So I would say this to the member opposite: I appreciate that the board that you were a high-level member of was a disaster. That's why we are fixing school boards across the province. It's too bad that you didn't support any of that.

But I'll tell you what I have faith in: I have faith in the students. I have faith in the teachers. And we are going to give them the tools that they need to give our kids the best opportunity to succeed.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Member for Ajax.

Mr. Rob Cerjanec: The minister wants to talk about attendance and exams, but it's the approach of his own government that is actually putting that entirely to the side.

You can't build a strong economy without a strong education system, without investing into our kids and the future.

This government is cutting OSAP. It's bringing down the quality of our education system. And it's making it harder for young people to get ahead. It's failing young people on all fronts.

What we're seeing at Hamilton Catholic and other boards—the push to move civics and careers entirely online, Minister—is going to make it even more difficult for young people. How does that prepare kids for the workforce or career pathways, or understanding our democracy? How does that ensure students can learn the financial literacy component that's in the curriculum?

Speaker, is the Premier trying to dumb things down and avoid teaching our kids the fundamentals?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Dumb things down? And this is coming from a member—there was no financial literacy when the Liberals were in charge of the education system.

The civics course has been modernized to ensure that our kids have every opportunity to understand parliamentary democracy and what makes it the best way of giving government to the people of this—frankly, parliamentary democracy, we should all be proud of.

Under Progressive Conservatives, we have the highest graduation rates. We have increasing standards in literacy. We are seeing our students succeed in a way that they have never done before. How are we doing that, colleagues? By looking at everything the Liberals did, throwing it

out and starting over. And what does that mean? Investing in our schools—a record level of investment in building new, modern schools. They closed 600; we're building hundreds of schools—179 projects, with over 200 currently in the pipeline.

We're updating the curriculum. And do you know what we are doing? We're listening to teachers, we're listening to students, and we're listening to parents, because they're what matters in the education system, not Liberal ideology.

Special-needs students

Ms. Lee Fairclough: My question is for the Premier.

I believe in an Ontario that works for everyone and where our schools will work for our students, our parents and our educators. But today, too many students are being left behind.

The independent Ontario Auditor General recently reviewed special education services in our schools, and the findings were shocking. To quote from the report: "The ministry did not provide clear guidance on the circumstances under which schools could refuse a student's entry.... This resulted in students with special education needs being sent home when schools could not meet their needs."

Speaker, does the Premier believe it's acceptable in Ontario for students with special education needs to be sent home from school instead of being taught in class?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: I guess it's Liberal leadership day today, colleagues. I guess that's what we're going to see.

Do you know what, Madam Speaker? Here's the difference between Conservatives and Liberals: We see a problem, and we're fixing that problem.

As I've said in the House a number of times, I don't think parents care that the Minister of Education gets up and talks about the record levels of investment in special education, the record levels of investment in education. Do you know what they care about? I think what they care about are the results and the things that we have put in place. Whether it's special education, whether it's the courses, are they giving our students the best opportunity to succeed?

Yes, special education is working better in some boards than other boards. Well, what is it that is making some boards more successful than other boards? That's what we want to know. If it means more money, that's okay, but if it means that we have to change the system so that all students have the opportunity to succeed better, we're actually going to do that as well.

I know the Liberals and the NDP—the only solution that they ever have is to put more money in the system regardless of the outcomes.

For Progressive Conservatives, it's about outcomes and how you can make sure that people succeed.

Hansard Wednesday, May 27, 2026
(Curriculum, Special Education, Supervised School Boards, Education Funding)

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: I checked the Hansard, and the last time the Premier said “special education” in this House was in March 2020, six long years ago. Back then, he said Ontario was turning the corner in education, and he trumpeted billions being invested in special education. That was six years ago.

Today, students with special education needs are being sent home from school instead of being taught in class. It’s wrong, and it’s embarrassing. Imagine the heartbreak of a parent hearing time and again that their school can’t teach their child.

Speaker, what is the Premier going to do to stop the shameful practice in Ontario of students with special education needs being sent home instead of being taught?

Hon. Paul Calandra: To the member opposite: It will take a little bit more than that to be successful in your leadership.

This is a member who has not talked about special education the entire time—colleagues, this is literally only the third time I have got up to answer a question on education.

Now, all of a sudden, the Liberals care about education? Nobody believes that for a second—not for a second—because when we came to office in 2018, the Ministers of Education who preceded me had to increase funding to special education by over 36%. Do you know why? Because the previous Liberal government starved special education. Do you know what else they did? They closed schools. We had to invest record levels to build new schools across the province of Ontario.

So while they were closing schools, firing teachers, starving the system, we are reinvesting. And do you know why we’re doing that? Because we understand that what matters in the education system is outcomes, and the only way you can have positive outcomes is by ensuring that students have the resources, that teachers have the resources, and that it’s a system built on listening to parents, students—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Etobicoke–Lakeshore.

Ms. Lee Fairclough: The Auditor General found that in 2023-24, 46 school boards collectively spent \$398 million more than they were funded for by the province to support special education needs in the classroom. She cited that the need for special education support for kids had grown faster than what was funded.

The Minister of Education just blamed school boards and trustees.

Speaker, this is not a governance issue. This is a funding issue. And it will only get worse.

Yesterday, we learned that the TDSB will see another \$6.4-million drop in special education funding next year. Yet, of course, when the Premier needed a private jet, \$29 million was easily available. It’s about priorities.

Will the Premier do the right thing by parents and children and fund special education in Ontario’s classrooms?

Hansard Wednesday, May 27, 2026
(Curriculum, Special Education, Supervised School Boards, Education Funding)

Hon. Paul Calandra: We've done just that—an over \$3.85-billion increase to special education since we got here.

But this comes from a Liberal Party that spent a billion dollars to try to save two seats, right? That's this Liberal Party.

I don't blame school trustees and school boards for what is happening in special education and what's happening in the education system. I actually blame the previous Liberal government that, for 15 years, ignored education entirely. Do you know what they did? They put a little extra money here; they put a little pet project here. They didn't care about student outcomes. While math scores were plummeting, the Liberals said, "It's okay. Let's keep going."

What we're doing is saying this: Let's bring a more consistent level of education across the province. The Ministry of Education has to step up and support that consistent level of education. We want our students to succeed. We want the curriculum to match the jobs of tomorrow. And the investments that we are making have to show results, because that's what parents care about, that's what our teachers care about and, ultimately, that's what students need—a system that supports—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): I recognize the member for Kiiwetinoong.

School boards / Conseils scolaires

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Speaker, the supervisor appointed by the government to the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board is forcing the board to cut 83 teaching positions and two principal and vice-principal positions for the next school year. Those are not just numbers on a spreadsheet; those are adults who could help reduce class sizes, support students who are struggling and make schools safer.

Parents, educators and students have been clear: Our schools need more adults, not less. Yet, after years of underfunding, this government continues to shift the blame instead of taking responsibility for the growing pressures facing our education system.

So my question to the Minister of Education: Now that Bill 101 gives the government even greater control over all school boards, can parents expect more cuts to classrooms and fewer supports for their children?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Actually, the member will know that the problem in the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board was the fact that trustees were so dysfunctional, that many of the parents in that board decided to send their kids to different school boards.

We saw a significant increase in the Ottawa Catholic system while the Ottawa-Carleton system decreased. So some of the challenges that the member opposite mentions is that there are just fewer students who will be in the schools, so that means that there will be reduction in some of the staffing for sure. Having said that, most of the reductions in staff, as the member will know, happens through attrition. So there will be nobody, ultimately, in the final analysis, who will lose their job.

Hansard Wednesday, May 27, 2026
(Curriculum, Special Education, Supervised School Boards, Education Funding)

Now, what the supervisor did do was cut executive positions at the Ottawa board itself in the administration offices. That's over a million dollars' worth of savings that are at the administration office that will be put right back into the classroom, coming in September.

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Member for Ottawa–Vanier.

M^{me} Lucille Collard: Madame la Présidente, le ministre a promis que les conseils scolaires francophones seraient épargnés par sa réforme afin de protéger les droits des conseils francophones à se gouverner—une gouvernance par et pour les francophones.

Or, la directive qu'il vient d'envoyer aux conseils scolaires empêche maintenant tous les conseillers scolaires de participer à des événements, à des formations et à des conférences pourtant essentielles à leur rôle. C'est assez ironique venant d'un ministre qui, lui, voyage à l'international pour assister à des conférences sur l'éducation.

Le ministre argumente que les conseils scolaires dépensent de façon exagérée. Pourtant, je le mets au défi de démontrer de tels abus au sein de nos conseils scolaires francophones.

Alors, je demande au ministre : va-t-il revoir sa position et permettre aux conseils scolaires francophones de se gouverner en donnant aux conseillers scolaires les moyens de faire leur travail pour assurer la survie de l'éducation en français en Ontario?

Hon. Paul Calandra: Again, I think that question itself speaks to the difference between Conservatives and Liberals. What the member is asking me to do is restore funding to trustees so that they can go to conferences and they can go to other events. The answer to that is absolutely not; I'm not going to do that. The boards themselves and the professionals who work in the boards themselves can continue to do that because that's an important part of the work that they will do to help build their system. They're going to continue to do that.

But a direct answer to the member: No, I will not allow a trustee to expense conferences and association memberships.

The job of the trustee is to represent parents—to represent and ensure that the funding that is being sent to them is being used in an appropriate fashion. That is what a trustee does.

To compare the work of a trustee to a minister of the crown or to an MPP shows a complete lack of understanding of the role of a trustee.

Education funding

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: My question today is from a Don Valley West constituent, Vivian, who is concerned about this government's cuts to education. She wrote: "Since the province suspended the elected" Toronto District School Board "trustees in 2025 and installed a supervisor, the scope of what's being eliminated has been staggering. More than 600 teaching positions ... cut for the" next "school year. That includes 175 teachers in schools serving students with the greatest needs, and 95 ESL teachers who work with children still learning English. Fifteen specialized kindergarten classrooms designed for children with complex disabilities are being closed ... outdoor education programming is ending. The class size cap to

Hansard Wednesday, May 27, 2026
(Curriculum, Special Education, Supervised School Boards, Education Funding)

protect for grades 4 through 8 has now been overturned by the provincially appointed supervisor.”

Speaker, through you to the education minister: What about these cuts is good for our kids?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member mentions ESL cuts. The member will know, of course, that ESL funding was cut by the federal government, not by the provincial government.

The member mentioned the outdoor education centres. The member will also know that outdoor education still exists in the city of Toronto. What we have done is moved away from facilities that were owned by the city of Toronto that required millions upon millions of dollars worth of upgrades and renovations to make them safe for the kids to attend. That’s not something that I think the Toronto board of education should pay for. That’s why we’re ensuring that other opportunities for outdoor education still exist.

The member mentioned there may be some fewer teachers in the system. That’s as a result of 5,000 fewer students going to the Toronto District School Board. None of those reductions will mean teachers losing their jobs. As a matter of fact, there are far more retirements coming in the TDSB than there are surplus notices.

In the supplementary, if she would like to talk a little bit more about some of the additional investments that we are making in the TDSB to put money back in the classroom, I’d be delighted to do that.

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

Ms. Stephanie Bowman: The minister’s ideological talk about consistency is harming our kids. Robots are consistent; kids’ learning needs are not.

The education minister and his highly paid supervisor are cancelling the model schools program at TDSB, which supports kids, like children in my riding in Thorncliffe Park, who come from higher-needs areas. He seems to believe the fiction that every student starts from the same place. That is just simply not the case. Think of an Afghani refugee child in Thorncliffe Park starting her first day of kindergarten at Fraser Mustard—very different from children born to English-speaking parents in a wealthy neighbourhood in Toronto. Schools like Thorncliffe Park Public School, Fraser Mustard, and Sunny View and Park Lane schools for children with complex disabilities benefited from having more staff through that model schools program.

Through you, Speaker, to the education minister: Will you reverse your harmful cuts so you don’t harm these kids?

Hon. Paul Calandra: The member mentions the model schools. Of course, the challenge we’re having and the TDSB was having with some of the model schools was that enrolment was absolutely cratering in these model schools—there were simply not enough people to go.

What we know from education professionals is that when there are not enough students in a school, the educational experience and opportunities for those students greatly diminish.

Hansard Wednesday, May 27, 2026
(Curriculum, Special Education, Supervised School Boards, Education Funding)

What we're doing is ensuring that all students have the opportunity to succeed in the school that is closest to their home, and that they have the resources they need.

I don't need to take any lessons from the member opposite. When I started school—a long time ago, granted—I didn't speak a word of English. I only spoke Italian. But I made it through by the support of educators who helped me better understand English, and my parents also—so we understand this.

The best way to help a child to succeed is by delivering for them the tools and resources that educators need so that they can succeed, giving the parents an understanding of what it is that they can expect for their kids.

What we want is for all kids to succeed—not specific targeting of specific communities just for specific electoral purposes.

I want all kids to have the understanding that Ontario is behind them and that we will give them the best opportunity for the best future possible.

Education funding

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Speaker, May is Get Outside Month, and what better way to celebrate than by announcing a plan to shut down five outdoor education centres in the TDSB? It's not the typical way to promote nature and health, but alas, the Ontario government plans to do just that. These facilities provide unparalleled opportunities for students and teachers to establish valuable relationships and to develop hands-on, vital skills, to practise land-based learning, and to improve overall physical and mental health.

For many students, outdoor education centres present an incredible opportunity to explore the natural world in ways they have never done before—especially new Canadians and marginalized populations. Nurturing resilience, independence and confidence throughout the entire stay, children often return home flourished.

Speaker, my question to the Premier: Why deprive generations of children of the sheer joy of learning at outdoor education centres?

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: This is going to surprise you, Madam Speaker, but I agree with the member opposite.

Outdoor education opportunities are very important across the province of Ontario, especially in the city of Toronto. That is why we are ensuring that that opportunity still exists for the students at the TDSB.

What we're not doing is we're not going to be spending millions upon millions of dollars upgrading city-owned facilities that, over the years, the trustees neither invested in nor the city invested in.

Hansard Wednesday, May 27, 2026
(Curriculum, Special Education, Supervised School Boards, Education Funding)

I think the people of the province of Ontario and the city of Toronto would rather us invest in those facilities that are working well and giving those students the opportunity to get out and enjoy outdoor learning activities. That is why centres will still stay open.

Those centres that are working, that are modern and give the students the best opportunity will stay open. Those facilities that had been neglected, that should have been closed some time ago—well, those will be closed. I'm sure the member opposite, from her time on council, would know that some of them needed a lot of repair. I wish she would have put—

The Speaker (Hon. Donna Skelly): Back to the member for Beaches—East York.

Ms. Mary-Margaret McMahon: Well, I was on council with the Premier, so he should have done the same, I guess.

Speaker, when education is treated like a business, teachers become dollar amounts and students are seen as nothing more than test scores.

This government fails to see the real value of education: putting children first and ensuring we are providing the best possible learning environments, and that absolutely includes outdoor experiential learning. The skills being developed are endless—survival, sense-of-place awareness, systems thinking, ecological literacy—and cannot be duplicated inside a classroom. Looking at the cost-benefit analysis, the worth of outdoor education centres is priceless.

Speaker, my question to the Premier: Why not focus on solutions to keep outdoor education centres open, like partnerships and other shared uses?

Hon. Paul Calandra: It's music to my ears, colleagues—partnerships. Partnerships are a very important part of giving a fulsome educational experience. The member opposite will know very soon—we will announce some additional partnerships to actually expand opportunities for kids to get that outdoor education that is so important. So I look forward to the member's support on these partnerships that we will be announcing very soon.

She talks about the Premier. Well, the Premier actually did make those investments when he was on council. That is why Hillside and Mono Cliffs will remain open. Unfortunately, those facilities that were outside of the Premier's area and where Conservatives were—

Interjection.

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

Hon. Paul Calandra: Those facilities were deemed to be old, outdated and not the best opportunities for students to succeed.

I see what the Liberals would want. They would want us spending money upgrading old, outdated facilities, as opposed to putting more money into the classroom and giving the students the best opportunity to succeed—